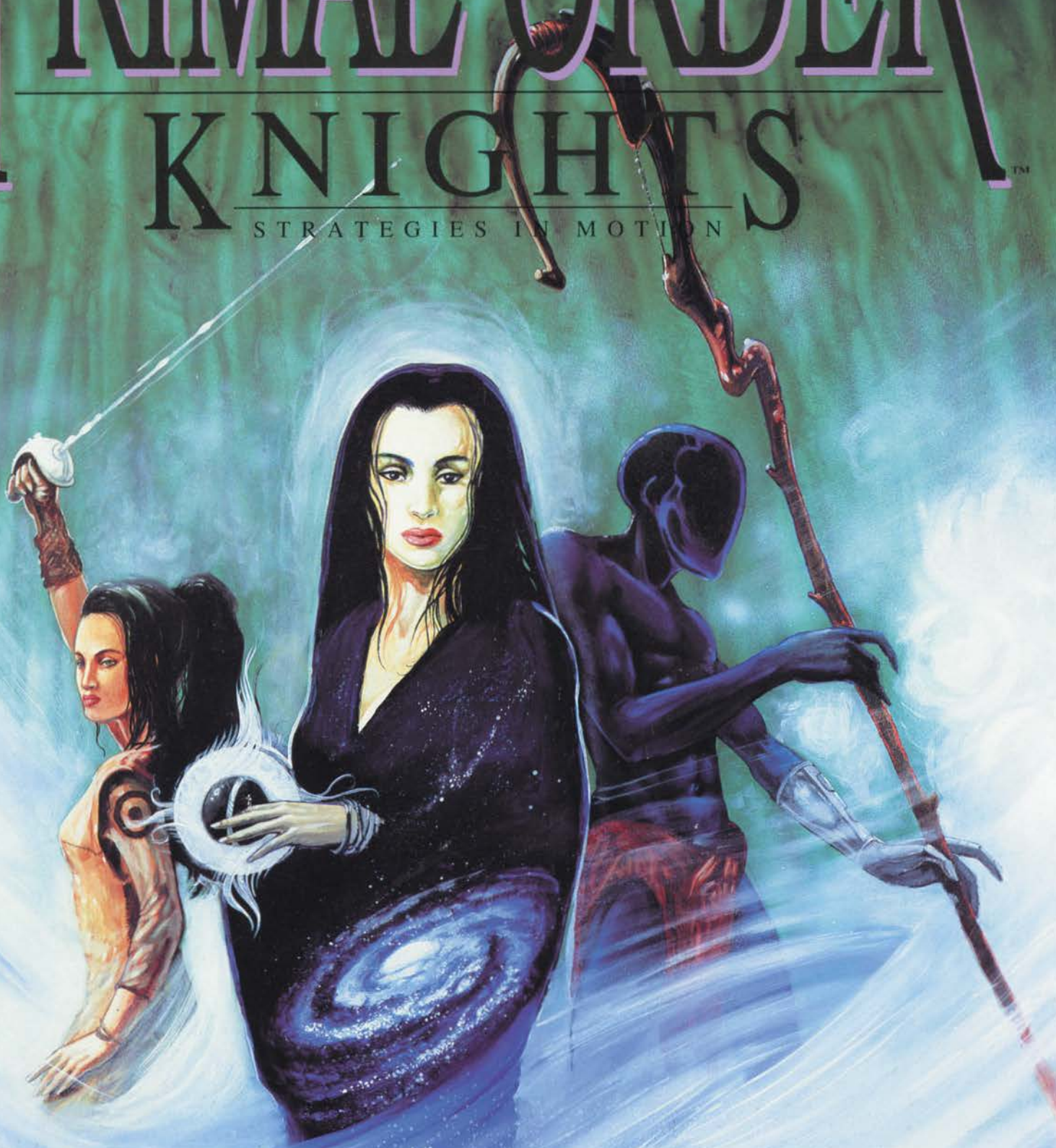


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PRIMAL ORDER

KNIGHTS

STRATEGIES IN MOTION



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BY NIGEL FINDLEY

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P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057 (206) 624-0933

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CREDITS

Author: Nigel Findley

Design: Nigel Findley, James E. Hays, Jr.

Research and Development Director: James E. Hays, Jr.

Editing: Beverly Marshall Saling

Layout and Typesetting: Dave Howell

Production Director: Jesper Myrfors

Front Cover Art: Anson Maddocks

Front Cover Logo: Rich Kaalaas

Back Cover Logo: Christopher Rush

Back Cover Art: Ron Spencer

Interior Illustrations: Anson Maddocks, Ron Spencer, Ruth Thompson

Foreword: Peter D. Adkison

Primal Breakdown Tables: James E. Hays, Jr.

Experts: Peter Adkison, John R. Cooper, Tom Da Mao, Brian Hixon, Dave Howell, George Huber, Craig Janssen, Darrell Judd, Jeremy Lakatos, George Lowe, Lisa Lowe, Brian Maloney, John McCarrick, Ismo Peltonen, Anthony Ragan, Max Rible, Merwin Shanmugasundaram, Curtis Shenton, Ryk Eric Spoor, Richard Tomasso, Paul Williams, Jeff Williamson, Tom Wylie.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Born in Venezuela and raised throughout the western hemisphere, Nigel Findley moved to Vancouver, B.C. in 1969. He graduated from the University of British Columbia with degrees in genetics and creative writing, so logically his career path took him into the computer industry. After several years as a technical writer, department manager, and finally marketing executive, he went out on his own as a freelance writer in 1989. In the years since his first game-related piece was published in an early issue of *Dragon Adventures*, he has written material for most major game systems. He is also becoming a prolific novelist with several books in print, including the popular *Shadowplay*.

FOREWORD

Welcome to the third book in Wizards of the Coast's **Primal** line. The first book, *The Primal Order* (TPO), introduced to the roleplaying community a fresh, cohesive treatment of the role of deities in a roleplaying campaign. The response, both in terms of sales and critical acclaim, has exceeded our expectations. Thank you.

The second book in the **Primal** line, *Pawns: The Opening Move*, was essentially a divine-level bestiary. Whereas TPO was equally appropriate to both power gamers and world builders, *Pawns* was admittedly designed pretty much for the former.

This book, on the other hand, I think will again appeal equally to both crowds. It takes three deities, all fictional deities who could be plugged into nearly any ongoing fantasy campaign, and develops them and their organizations in detail. The world builders will appreciate the ideas on religious organizations, rituals, rites of priesthood, and so forth. Power gamers will enjoy the detail on what I call "the hidden spectrum," that array of power between the mortal and the divine.

Once again we've invited Nigel Findley to grace these pages. This time we gave Nigel much more room to maneuver and I think he did an excellent job.

Current plans for the future include *Chessboards: Planes of Possibility*, to be written by Dave Howell. Dave was a co-author of *The Primal Order* and was responsible for much of the material on planes—and most of the humor. Those of you who liked the chapter on planes in TPO will rejoice to see the many new ideas and additional details on planar energy Dave has come up with. And those who enjoyed the humor will be pleased to meet Joey's sister Judy, Goddess of Macrame; the religious chant Dave wrote for her is guaranteed to keep you in stitches. Expect to see *Chessboards* sometime in July.

Later this year or early in 1994 we hope to release *Bishops: The Eternal Crusade*. Authored by Loren Miller, someone whose insight into religions and mythology I've learned to highly respect, this book will focus more on the mortal side of this fascinating topic.

As always, we appreciate your comments. Feel free to write in with your questions, personal insights, or suggestions for future books.

PETER D. ADKISON APRIL 3, 1993

INTRODUCTION

Knights: Strategies in Motion is designed both to demonstrate the diverse, complex nature of divine organizations and to show by example how these complex orders can be dealt with in a playable, plausible manner. While you can simply place these divine structures directly into your campaign or cannibalize and modify the ideas provided, you can also use this book to get a sense of how to develop your own divine organizations.

If you haven't already read *The Primal Order*, many of the terms and concepts in this book aren't going to make much sense to you. If you're exceptionally creative you might be able to use some of the ideas anyway, but you'll probably get a lot more out of the book if you use *The Primal Order* as well.

Just like *The Primal Order*, this book is designed to work well with virtually any roleplaying game system, whether skill-based, level-based, or something entirely different. Because of the profound differences in existing systems, certain facets of the descriptions in this book are necessarily flexible. To circumvent this problem, we have chosen to use various non-specific terms to describe such factors as competence at skills and damage inflicted.

This is the system by which most numeric attributes such as strength and points of damage are calculated. The attribute scale is divided into two ranges: the human range (0–20) and the superhuman range (21 and up).

Within the human range, 0 is the minimum ability level a human could reasonably have. The average ability level for humans is 10. The maximum ability level a professional-level adventurer could reasonably have without magical assistance is 20. Between 0 and 20, the scale is linear, so 15 is an ability level halfway between 10 and 20.

Beyond 20, the scale becomes exponential. For each 5-point increase in the attribute, ability doubles. Thus 25 is twice as good as the human maximum of 20, 30 is four times as good as 20, and so on. The scale is open-ended, with no ultimate maximum.

All attributes are based on this scale. The following subsections discuss specifics of how this scale is applied to certain attributes, and other considerations within the system.

All attributes use the 0–10–20 scale. The general definitions of the attributes are listed below. Your game system may use fewer attributes than this, requiring you to combine several of these attributes into one single number.

Strength reflects pure physical power, lifting capacity, and so on.

Health reflects the ability to withstand physical damage, poison, exposure, and so on.

Reaction reflects the ability to think quickly, react, coordinate, and maneuver.

Intelligence reflects memory, logic, and reasoning. The vast majority of the deities in this book are considerably more intelligent than humans, making them difficult for the gamemaster to roleplay. In general if you, as the GM, can see that your players are running some kind of ploy to deceive a deity, the deity will realize it too and act accordingly.

Destiny reflects luck-related attributes and bonuses to resistance rolls.

Presence reflects the ability to inspire awe, whether overwhelming admiration or stupefying terror, and the ability to convince people to follow orders. It does not necessarily reflect the ability to give good orders.

TERMINOLOGY AND RULES SYSTEMS

The 0–10–20 System

Attributes

	<p><i>Willpower</i> reflects the ability to concentrate, to resist domination and pain, and so on.</p> <p><i>Speed</i> reflects the deity's maximum rate of movement unassisted by any extraneous effects or powers.</p>
Ability Rank	Ability rank is a measure of how skillful an individual is in various areas such as combat skills, magic aptitude, and mentalic abilities. In this book, we have used the same ability ranks that were given in <i>Pawns: The Opening Move</i> ; all but the numbered legendary ranks were also given in <i>The Primal Order</i> .
Defense Strength	Defense strength reflects the protection afforded due to skin, scales, armor, or other protective abilities or magic. On the 0–10–20 scale, 0 is equivalent to normal human skin, 10 is equivalent to standard leather armor, and 20 is equivalent to standard full plate armor that does not use exotic or magical materials. Extremely high defense strengths usually indicate powerful magical or mentalic defenses.
Damage Rank	Different games systematize damage differently; damage rank is a somewhat generic way of measuring the level of damage that an attack can inflict. Using the 0–10–20 scale, 0 is no damage. An amateur fighter with strength 10 on the 0–10–20 scale wielding a short sword or equivalent weapon would do 10 damage; 20 is the damage done by a professional fighter with strength 20, wielding a two-handed sword or equivalent weapon. In the deity descriptions, damage rank is listed directly following the form of attack.
Attack Speed	Attack speed reflects how quickly a deity can use each of his or her attack forms. It does not use the 0–10–20 scale. Instead, 1x means the deity can attack at the same speed as the average amateur fighter in the game system; 2x means the deity can attack twice as fast or often, and so on. Deities often have different attack speeds for different types of attacks. In the deity descriptions, the attack speed is listed in parentheses following the damage rank.
Power Ratings	Many of the deities in this book have artifacts or special abilities that could come up against conflicts of intent or conflicts of power as described in <i>The Primal Order</i> . To help you resolve these conflicts, we have provided sample power ratings for these items and abilities. The power ratings listed are all based on the example power rating scale given on page 83 of <i>The Primal Order</i> ; if you don't want to use that scale, feel free to make up your own and revise these power ratings as necessary.
Specific Applications	<p>If you already own a copy of <i>Pawns: The Opening Move</i>, you've probably noticed that this is the same system we used in that book. In <i>Pawns</i> we not only included a description of the scales and terms used, but we also included integration notes on how to convert that information into several popular game systems. Because of the expense involved in printing those extra forty pages again, we elected not to include that information in this book.</p> <p>If you don't have a copy of <i>Pawns</i> and would like a copy of the integration notes for your favorite game systems, send us a self-addressed stamped envelope and a letter telling us which systems you use, and we'll send you the integration notes for those systems. Integration notes are available for: <i>Ars Magica</i>™, <i>GURPS</i>®, <i>Harnmaster</i>™, <i>Hero</i>™, <i>Rolemaster</i>™, <i>RuneQuest</i>®, <i>Shadowrun</i>™, <i>Talisanta</i>™, <i>TORG</i>®, <i>Warhammer Fantasy RolePlay</i>™, and <i>WarpWorld</i>™. If your game system isn't listed here, request it anyway and we'll see what we can do for you, though we can't make any promises.</p>

Combat

Introduction

Virtually any race with a military tradition will have a deity who presides over combat or warfare. This military tradition can arise from the territorial ambition of a growing, aggressive empire or from a desire for peace and autonomy in the case of a frequently invaded nation.

The divine structure described below is more appropriate for the second type of military culture. The precepts of the patron deity, Toshi Yamatetsu, don't glorify war for the sake of war itself, but only war in a just cause. Toshi has been a lesser deity for roughly two thousand years, giving him time to build up an efficient and well-planned divine organization.

Religions based on war are usually viewed—by outsiders, at least—as brutal and cruel, often repressive, and with no concern for simple human rights. This isn't the case in the religion of Toshi Yamatetsu, although it may seem so to the casual observer. While other combat-based religions tend to promote violence for its own sake or for the sake of personal glory, Toshi is the god of righteous combat, in which the cause is as much or more important than the battle. In the Toshite religion, killing without good cause is murder whether or not the killing takes place on a battlefield. A commander who starts a war without just cause is a mass-murderer and should be treated as such.

The precepts of Toshi Yamatetsu spend much time defining what is and isn't sufficient cause for war. In general, when one has been invaded or otherwise wronged it is appropriate to fight back, right the wrong, and punish the wrongdoer. It's also right to go to war in defense of another who is threatened by an unjust aggressor. Thus it's unacceptable to march halfway across the world to obliterate another society, however unrighteous. But war would be called for if that society invaded a nearby Toshite nation, or even a nation that merely shared a belief in the basics of Toshite philosophy.

According to the teachings of Toshi, it's as wrong to turn aside from a just war as it is to wage an unjust one. One of the central precepts of Toshism holds that the courage to take up arms and defend the truth is the most important attribute of a sentient. It follows, then, that Toshites have nothing but scorn for those who refuse to fight for a cause in which they profess belief. Able-bodied individuals who won't fight for what they believe in are considered less than vermin, since even vermin fight to protect themselves and their territory. Toshites have no problem with people who don't fight for a cause they don't agree with, of course; in such cases, the only right course of action is to refuse to fight. Neither do Toshites have a problem with people who can't fight due to physical or mental disabilities. But, by the gods, those people had better do whatever they can to support those who do fight for just cause.

Religious Philosophy

In general, Toshism teaches that foes on the field of battle are to be treated with respect as worthy adversaries. If the Toshites believe their opponents are merely mistaken rather than deliberately unjust, Toshite combatants are expected to spare their foes' lives if at all possible, so long as they emerge victorious. If the enemy is clearly fighting an unjust war, then no prisoners are to be taken; Toshites must put all enemy combatants to the sword. Regardless of the cause of the battle, noncombatants should be protected and respected.

Because of its strict military hierarchy, it's easy for outsiders to misunderstand a Toshite society, seeing it as jingoistic, aggressive, and oppressive to its own members. Faithful Toshites would argue strenuously against this conclusion, however. A Toshite society reveres individual freedoms, allowing members to live however they want as long as they don't harm another person or society as a whole. A true Toshite would agree with the sentiment "Your right to throw a punch stops where my nose begins."

The definition of "harm to society as a whole" varies as circumstances change, however. During wartime, lack of obedience to orders can cause massive harm to the cause. When a Toshite worshiper is serving in the army or at some other important task, total and utter obedience to superiors is expected. Failure to give this obedience is harmful to society and thus criminal.

Obedience is not coerced, however, and must be given voluntarily. Anyone who joins a Toshite society, or remains in one, understands what's required. Those who are unable to give this kind of obedience are totally free to leave the society and move somewhere less demanding. Those who choose to remain within a Toshite society are considered volunteers to the cause.

It follows, then, that a Toshite won't consider using force to spread the gospel since forcibly "converting" others obviously infringes on their personal rights. While it may be necessary at times to kill a foe, conversion is not sufficient cause for doing so. Toshites can be quite outspoken in explaining the benefits of their faith to unbelievers, but the final decision to follow Toshi must be a free one.

Another of Toshism's central precepts is that life is for living. One who isn't fully "engaged" with life isn't truly alive, the religion teaches, and a life not lived fully is a life wasted. A purely Toshite society is usually rollicking and vigorous, at least during off-hours. Everyone takes big bites of life and considers moderation a thing for monks. It's better to die in the pursuit of what you enjoy than to live as a shadow of a person.

Many outside observers find it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this uninhibited world view with the strictly codified church structure. But followers of Toshi Yamatetsu believe there is a fundamental difference between service and personal life, whether that service is to the church or to the army. Service is characterized by strict discipline and unshakable obedience; personal life is characterized by freewheeling liberty.

Almost half of the societies in which Toshism is widely practiced are theocracies; the Toshite church either is very closely linked to the lay government or simply is the government. In other societies, the relationship between the government and the Toshite church varies widely.

In generally liberal and libertarian societies, with traditions of personal freedom like those in Toshism, there's very little conflict; secular government and church respect each other and work toward the same goals. Where the government restricts personal rights and uses coercion and terror to keep the populace in line, Toshites are invariably at the core of every resistance network opposed to the repression. If the government is forced to go to war or chooses to enter just combat, Toshites will jump up and volunteer for the army, gladly giving their lives for the cause. If the government declares a war that the Toshites

consider unjust, they simply won't take part; if civilians, they won't volunteer, and if already in the army, they'll desert or just refuse to follow orders.

Toshism doesn't thrive as a secret or hidden faith. In the vast majority of societies that include worshipers of Toshi, the faith's churches are openly identified as such and the priests and faithful go about their business openly. This is true even if there's conflict between the church and the secular government. The precepts of Toshism praise fighting proudly for a cause, which doesn't reconcile well with keeping a low profile and not irritating the powers that be. It's not surprising, then, that most Toshite groups either carve themselves out some kind of defensible niche in the culture or get themselves exterminated.

According to the precepts of Toshism, there's only one sin: causing unjustified harm to another or to society. To a Toshite, there's no difference in kind between stealing and murder; the difference lies merely in degree, in the magnitude of the harm inflicted.

Not only is this the only sin, it's also the only law; the church considers itself the sole arbiter of justice for all Toshites. A single priest can determine the guilt or innocence and subsequent punishment of a Toshite accused of minor infractions, while a judiciary council of three, five, or even seven priests handles those accused of major crimes. This kind of arbitration doesn't follow the adversarial process used in British and North American courts; there are no lawyers for either prosecution or defense, and the presiding priest or council isn't considered an objective observer. Instead, the priest or council is responsible for getting to the truth of the matter, using any appropriate means. Since the goal is to find the truth, there's no presumption of innocence or guilt. If the priest or council decides the accused is guilty of the crime, an appropriate punishment is then determined. The holy writings of Toshism, especially the Roll of the Just, contain many guidelines useful for determining the right penalty. The severity of the sentence depends on the degree of harm inflicted on the victim.

The primary principle used to determine penalties is recompense. If the harm inflicted on the victim is some kind of physical loss, the most common punishment will be for the guilty party to replace what she stole or destroyed, usually with an additional payment to make up for the aggravation involved. If the victim lost something that can't be replaced—his life, for example—the punishment becomes more severe. The guilty party can be ostracized within the community for a certain period of time, during which none of the faithful will talk to the criminal or even acknowledge her existence. The criminal might also be banished. Note that neither imprisonment nor execution is an option, since both so obviously contradict the Toshite principle of freedom. The most heinous crimes are punished by the infliction of a curse known as the *Despite* [see pp. 14].

In theocratic Toshite societies, the church law discussed above is the only justice necessary. In other societies, however, the secular governments will certainly have their own bodies of law. Unless these perfectly match the canons described above, which isn't very likely, the Toshite church considers secular law totally irrelevant. Criminals haven't been brought to justice until a Toshite priest or judiciary council has decided their fate. Conversely, as long as the church has ruled on the issue, it doesn't matter how the secular justice system handles things, or even if it does so at all. Obviously this can lead to conflict between the Toshite subculture and the secular government, particularly in a society with a well-developed, strict system of justice.

The holy writings of Toshism have little to say on the subject of material wealth. The general attitude is one of "To the winner go the spoils." In other words, wealth comes to those who succeed in their chosen endeavors. Wealth, in and of itself, is neither bad nor good; poverty is neither noble nor ignoble.

Toshism isn't an exclusive faith. A worshiper of Toshi Yamatetsu can worship any other god or gods as well, as long as there's no conflict in world view and required behavior.

Church Structure

The Church of Toshi Yamatetsu, Lion of Heaven, has a very well-organized structure that includes strictly defined chains of command and strongly delineated ranks. All in all, the church hierarchy resembles a military organization—which, of course, is quite fitting.

Nearly all worshipers of Toshi fit into this hierarchy somewhere; Toshites rarely live in isolation. The religion centers around service, so Toshites naturally seek something to serve; the church and the overall structure of the religious system provide this. Solitary Toshites can certainly reflect on the teachings of the Lion of Heaven wherever they happen to be, but the value of Toshism isn't in the understanding of its precepts; it's in their practice. Thus Toshites almost always organize and found official churches regardless of the society in which they find themselves.

The Hierarchy

Each nation or distinct society in which the Church of Toshi exists has its own independent church hierarchy. All follow the same basic structure, although some make minor modifications to fit in better with the "host" culture. Each church hierarchy is autonomous with respect to mortal authorities, though they all defer to Toshi and his divine subordinates. For the purposes of this discussion, the word "church" will refer to one of these autonomous hierarchies or structures; the word "temple" will denote individual buildings.

Each church is led by a bishop-general; the combination of religious and military titles reflects the two duties a priest owes to Toshi. This bishop-general, like all other priests of Toshi, can be either male or female; the religion itself contains no gender bias. Certain societies in which Toshi is worshipped may have gender or other biases, however, and these will probably extend into the structure of the Toshite church. While Toshism doesn't promote any kind of bias among its priests, neither does it attempt to eliminate any biases that exist in the "host" culture.

The bishop-general has the most authority within the church, and all believers must obey her slightest order. She also has the ultimate responsibility for the continued existence and success of the church, and if anything goes wrong she must hold herself personally accountable. The bishop-general holds this position for life or until he voluntarily steps down, which generally occurs only in cases of disability. The new bishop-general is then selected directly by a subordinate or minion of Toshi, though in some churches there may be attempts to influence this decision through secret politicking.

The bishop-general is assisted by a seven-person Council of Advisors. These advisors have no line authority within the church; in other words, no one reports directly to them. Instead, they must provide the bishop-general with suggestions, opinions, analyses of information, and so forth. Advisors hold their positions for life or until they voluntarily step down. When a chair on the council is left open, the other advisors and the bishop-general together select a replacement from elsewhere in the church hierarchy. Only the most faithful, competent, and experienced priests ever hold the position of advisor. A new bishop-general is usually selected from among the advisors, but this isn't always the case.

Below the level of the bishop-general, the church of Toshi is divided into two distinct branches or "arms." The Sword is the operational arm. It runs the army, if the church has one of its own, and also trains warriors and sees to the physical defense of the church's facilities and worshipers. The Shield is the arm responsible for administrative functions: for ordaining and training priests, building and maintaining new temples and other facilities, educating the masses, and generally seeing to the spiritual well-being of the worshipers.

The relative sizes of the two arms vary widely depending on the circumstances under which the church operates. In a theocratic Toshite nation, the Sword will be large since it provides all or at least most of the nation's army. In contrast, if the church is a minor element in a libertarian, peaceful nation, the Shield will be predominant. Regardless of the absolute size of the church, both arms are always present, however. Even if there's only one Toshite priest in a particular society, that priest is responsible for preserving the traditions and providing the services of both arms.

Each arm is headed by a curate-colonel, who is selected by the Council of Advisors and the bishop-general and reports directly to the bishop-general. Below each curate-colonel is a strictly defined hierarchy of lesser curates. Although these lesser curates are all referred to by the same title, fine gradations of rank are established by the reporting structure. This reporting structure is designed by the curate-colonel and reflects both the circumstances under which the arm is operating and the individual commander's personal biases. Some arms have a simple, straightforward reporting structure, with most of the lesser curates reporting directly to the curate-colonel; others use more complex arrangements. Once the reporting structure has been established, any higher-ranking lesser curate can promote a priest of lower rank, but this decision must be ratified by the curate-colonel.

Forming the lowest rank of the Shield are the parish priests, the people who deal with the worshipers on a day-to-day basis. These parish priests guide the worshipers, help them understand and keep the precepts of Toshism, and, if necessary, punish them for their transgressions. Parish priests try not to use punishment vengefully, but rather as a reminder that the precepts are important, and as a challenge for the transgressors to overcome.

The lowest rank within the Sword is made up of chaplains, warrior-priests well trained to lead troops into battle. The troops who follow the chaplains aren't strictly part of the Sword, although they're under the arm's orders. These troops are often referred to as "the tip of the Sword."

The reporting structure and line of command in each arm is used not only to issue orders, but also to disseminate information throughout the church. In most cases, subordinates understand the reasons for their superiors' orders and thus obey them without reservation or hesitation. The only time that this free flow of information is limited is in the case of sensitive military intelligence that could compromise the church in some way. This dissemination of information stimulates personal initiative throughout the ranks; once people know what's going on, they can volunteer ideas and extra support. This single fact saves the Toshite church from becoming as stultified and inflexible as many other strictly organized hierarchies. In fact, a typical Toshite church is hugely efficient and can react and adapt to changing conditions with astonishing rapidity.

For several reasons, Toshite churches are remarkably free of the politics and infighting that plague most other organizations. First, most of the priests in the hierarchy put their loyalty to their deity and to the cause above their own personal ambitions and desires. Second, church rules are strict, punishing harmful political maneuvering with expulsion from the hierarchy and possible ostracism, banishment, or even *Despise*. Third, it's widely believed that cer-

tain of Toshi's subordinates, particularly the minion Rath, constantly scour the structure of the church to root out priests who aren't true in their faith.

All members of the hierarchy must work their way up from positions as parish priests. After ordination, a priest must work with the general populace for at least two years before requesting a higher posting in either the Shield or the Sword. Priests seeking advancement must present themselves before a lesser curate of the appropriate arm and must abide by that individual's decision. Some priests believe that they can aid the church the most by remaining as parish priests and helping the faithful laity directly; others see their greatest potential contribution in other areas.

The Shieldbearers

The Shieldbearers are a unit of highly trained and well-equipped holy warriors sometimes created to support the Sword in its work. Shieldbearers are selected from the faithful populace at the age of consent, and then spend the rest of their lives living with and as priests of the Sword, although they're not ordained. The Shieldbearers are trained in every aspect of single and mass combat as well as other relevant skills such as weaponsmithing.

When a youth joins the Shieldbearers, he or she undergoes a stringent initiation, the details of which are kept inviolably secret. All that is generally known is that the initiation process includes the death sacrament—the Laying Down of Arms. The sacrament symbolizes that Shieldbearers' lives are no longer strictly their own, but are consecrated to Toshi. While they will still have to undergo the death sacrament again immediately before death in order for their souls to travel to Toshi's plane, the use of this sacrament in the initiation rites ensures that the new Shieldbearers understand the lifelong nature of their commitment.

Throughout their lives, the Shieldbearers enjoy the best of everything that the church can provide for them: good food, whatever luxuries are available, and the respect and love of the worshipers. In return, they are sworn to give their all in battle whenever it may be required of them. Shieldbearers are always better trained, better armed, and better equipped than any other group in the Toshite forces. They usually serve as officers, but sometimes are reserved as shock troops.

Not all churches have a unit of Shieldbearers. If the church is very small or its society very peaceful, these elite holy warriors won't be necessary.

Priests

Candidates

Most candidates for ordination volunteer. They approach an ordained parish priest and request the honor of apprenticing themselves. Apprentices effectively become the personal servants, aides, and bodyguards of the priests they select as mentors. There are no official guidelines regarding the length of apprenticeship, but the period rarely lasts less than a year and can last much longer. The decision to ordain a candidate or continue the apprenticeship lies entirely with the mentor priest; the apprentice cannot appeal to another priest, even one of higher rank. Either the apprentice or the priest can unilaterally terminate the apprenticeship period, though candidates who terminate their own apprenticeships will never be accepted as apprentices by any other priests. If the mentor priest terminates the apprenticeship, another priest is free to accept the candidate, but will usually discuss the matter first with the original priest.

Sometimes priests will approach lay worshipers and ask them to become their apprentices. It's perfectly acceptable for a worshiper to refuse the request, although this rarely happens; the honor of being asked is too great to be lightly refused.

To qualify for ordination an apprentice must be older than the age of consent, though candidates can start their apprenticeships at younger ages. Although it's

not an official rule, most Toshite churches require a lay worshiper to undergo some warrior training before becoming an apprentice.

A would-be priest's apprenticeship includes advanced education in the doctrines of Toshism and in the structure of the church hierarchy. Usually, mentors will also further their apprentices' instruction in weapon skills, strategy, and tactics. Most lay worshipers will already understand the code of honor required by Toshi—if not, they probably wouldn't be accepted as apprentices—but in certain cases mentors will educate their apprentices in these areas as well.

In most cases, this training eventually leads to the ceremony of ordination. This ceremony takes place within the largest local temple and is conducted by the bishop-general or his personal designate; in large churches, many candidates may undergo ordination at once. The ceremony starts when the blindfolded candidate is led into the temple by her mentor. The bishop-general then puts severe questions to the candidate, which the mentor answers for her. At the midpoint of the ceremony, the mentor removes the candidate's blindfold and withdraws. Up to this point, the mentor was officially responsible for the candidate's actions. Now that responsibility is transferred to the candidate herself, and she is hereafter responsible for her own conduct and adherence to the precepts of Toshism.

After some symbolic teaching and certain oaths stringent enough to freeze the blood of anyone taking them in bad faith, the bishop-general provides the priest with the symbol of his new office: a small silver representation of Toshi's sigil, a broadsword. This symbol is about six inches long; most priests wear theirs on a slender chain around their necks. The bishop-general then declares the ordination complete, and the new priest is welcomed by the other priests attending the ceremony. Ordination ceremonies are open only to priests; while the new priests must keep certain details, such as the exact wording of the oath, secret for the rest of their lives, the other features of the ceremony are open knowledge within the faith.

Ordination is for life. Once a priest has dedicated his life to Toshi, there's no going back. Any priest who breaks this vow is automatically banished from the body of the church and put under *Despite*. An apostate priest can atone for this sin in only one way: by ritually taking her own life.

All Toshite priests must obey certain commandments regardless of their rank. The first is to keep in top physical shape and to hone single combat and military skills to the highest possible degree. Even those in the Shield must model themselves on the image of the warrior-priest. All priests are expected to supply themselves with all personal weapons and at least one suit of armor; all equipment must be the best they can acquire.

A priest of Toshi must never be unarmed. At every moment of the day or night, the priest must have a weapon to hand. This weapon can be symbolic, in the form of the holy symbol of the deity, if nothing else is available. The weapon symbolizes readiness to defend the faith from all threats.

Priests must remain unmarried; all married candidates for ordination must terminate their unions before becoming priests. This is because priests must be responsible to their parishioners equally, without the favor and special attention that marriage necessitates. Toshite priests don't have to remain celibate, however, and can even have children. But these children are not officially "theirs;" the other parent will have total custody of the child, and the child can never inherit the priest's name or temporal holdings. If a liaison between two priests yields a child, that child is considered an orphan and raised by the whole society. Officially, children of priests are to be given no special benefits. In practice,

Training and Ordination

Lifestyle

Worshippers

however, the offspring of priests rarely have any difficulty whatsoever in finding mentors, should they eventually desire to become priests themselves.

Priests of Toshi can be identified by their hairstyle, a cropped, ear-length cut worn by both men and women. There are no restrictions or guidelines relating to garb, although most priests favor simple clothes with a military cut.

The faith of Toshism is theoretically open to all sentients, though prejudices in the host society may lead some Toshite priests and worshippers to discourage or even exclude others from joining. It's also a strict faith, almost harsh at times, and thus holds little attraction for those who have always lived peaceful, secure lives. The faith has little to say about fertility, less about magic, and nothing whatsoever about purely intellectual or artistic pursuits, and so doesn't speak to those who find these topics paramount.

Toshism does speak to those who have suffered at the hands of foreign invaders or internal insurgents; it thrives in areas of conflict, strife, and ongoing hardship. Even in a peaceful society, warriors are likely to consider Toshism since the faith ennobles them and gives them value as defenders of the entire society. Those who are dissatisfied with an overly oppressive society might also turn to this religion, even if this would make them likely targets of oppression.

A Toshite society reveres its warriors second only to the ordained priests, and those who wish to be warriors come close behind. Most followers of Toshism will have at least some training in the combat arts, if only a smattering of knife techniques, and will carry a weapon at all times. At the very least, most Toshites carry a largely symbolic knife called a *kleklath*, a short, narrow-bladed weapon with a carved grip, often worn in a sock or stocking like a Scottish *skene dhu*. Although a faithful Toshite would argue the point, the *kleklath* is virtually useless in any kind of real combat against a conscious opponent.

Toshism has no quarrel with wizardry or spellcasting of any kind, so long as the spell-wielders are willing to bring their powers to bear against the church's foes. Cowardly wizards who won't go near a battlefield are contemptible; those who wade into the fray, tossing mighty killing spells, are revered among the mightiest of warriors.

Worship

Places of Public Worship

As a religion, Toshism is much given to temples and chapels, but these buildings serve multiple purposes. All religious structures are built of stone or using the strongest alternative construction technique available. As well as providing space for public worship and living accommodations for the priests, Toshite temples serve as storage areas, training halls, armories, and, in time of trouble, shelters for the faithful. Many travelers, seeing a Toshite temple for the first time, mistake it for a fortress—an easy error to make.

Each temple has a large central worship area, in the center of which is the altar. This is traditionally a cube of black basalt about four feet on a side. Mounted on each of the four vertical faces of the cube is a polished shield bearing the sigil of Toshi, Sword of Righteousness. The top of the altar is empty except during ceremonies, when the presiding priest's holy symbol or a real broadsword is laid diagonally across it. The altar is consecrated with elaborate prayers and ceremonies when it's first installed, and is finally blessed with a drop of blood from the presiding priest's finger. If any other blood falls on the altar and isn't immediately washed away with blood from the same presiding priest who consecrated it, the altar is considered desecrated. A desecrated altar can

never again be used in any ceremony; it must be removed, reduced to rubble, and replaced before the temple can again be used. The desecration of an altar is considered a gross insult to Toshi Yamatetsu, and priests will often sacrifice their own lives to protect a consecrated altar from such dishonor.

Worshippers form concentric circles around the altar during ceremonies. There are no chairs or pews; everyone present must remain standing throughout the rites.

In addition to temples, Toshite societies build barracks for warriors and members of the Sword, administrative buildings, and even temple-palaces for the bishop-general and Council of Advisors. All are traditionally designed to be defensible and thus look like fortresses.

Worship in the Toshite tradition is a public event. Certainly the faithful are expected to keep the precepts of Toshism in their hearts and minds at all times, and to obey them without faltering. Actual worship, however, must be conducted by an ordained priest and should take place in a temple around a consecrated altar. It follows, then, that the Toshite religion doesn't put any stock in shrines, icons, or other personal items of worship in individual homes.

If there's no temple nearby, and even no priest, faithful Toshites are expected to improvise. Even if a worshiper is locked alone inside a bare jail cell, whatever portions of the standard ceremonies he or she can perform are better than nothing. The more traditional elements that are present, the better, but there is no excuse for failure to attempt the necessary rituals.

Toshism has a large body of holy writings, the most important of which are known as the Roll of the Just and the Chronicles of the Sword. These two books, which vary in form from plane to plane, are said to have been brought down from Toshi Yamatetsu's home plane by one of his servitors. Certainly, there's no difference whatsoever in content between different "editions" of these books, which definitely hints at some kind of central distribution.

The dozen or so secondary works weren't delivered by divine messengers, but church doctrine teaches that they were divinely inspired. On each plane where Toshism thrives, the contents of the dozen or so secondary scriptures were dictated to various chosen mortals, who wrote them down and disseminated them in their current forms. Thus the conceptual contents of the secondary works are pretty consistent from plane to plane, although language, style, and physical form are very different.

The peripheral works vary much more. Two works with the same title on different planes might contain ideas that are totally unrelated, or even mutually contradictory. Further, certain of the works appear only on some planes and not others. Due to these inconsistencies, the significance of these writings is hotly debated by theologians. Certain sects within Toshism hold that some or all of these peripheral works are divinely inspired, while other groups believe that some or all are fallacious in some way.

Predictably, most prayers directed to Toshi Yamatetsu revolve largely around combat. Warriors may pray for victory in an upcoming battle, or request at least the ability to conduct themselves with honor. Noncombatants may pray that the Toshite forces be victorious. It is unacceptable, however, for either warrior or noncombatant to pray that an individual's life be spared. Toshites believe this kind of request reflects a lack of willingness to serve the cause whatever the cost. Instead, the family and friends of a warrior going into combat will pray that their loved one might embody the virtues of the warrior—honor, strength, resilience, determination, courage, and so on. A Toshite would understand the Roman mother's injunction, "Come home *with* your shield or *on* it."

Places of Private Worship

Holy Writings

Prayers

Holy Days

The Four Victories

Those petitioning Toshi for a particular boon will often inflict a small wound on themselves, allowing a drop of blood to fall on the ground as they speak the prayer. If the issue is particularly important, a worshiper might sacrifice something of personal value by destroying it in an appropriate manner. A Toshite will *never* sacrifice a weapon, no matter what its value or how important the prayer; useful weapons simply aren't treated that way.

Worshippers don't petition Toshi for personal wealth, mortal comforts, or happiness. The religion teaches that such things come through personal achievement, and the deity would never do his worshipers such disservice as to grant success without the lessons of travail and challenge. Anyone who wants free gifts must beg them from some other deity.

The four major holy days in the Toshite calendar are known as the Four Victories. The first two, called the Greater Victories, commemorate specific events in the church's mythology. The First Victory celebrates Toshi Yamatetsu's defeat of Alavaern the Acquisitor (see p. 19). The plane on which this event occurred has a calendar very different from that of most main planes; for this reason, the First Victory is celebrated on different days in different nations, but normally within a few weeks of the fall equinox.

The Second Victory involves Rekeath the Base, a recurring nemesis with great importance in Toshite mythology. This holy day celebrates the time that Marcrast Bloodbearer, Toshi's second-in-command, took a grievous, treacherous wound from Rekeath but managed to conquer his own pain and weakness sufficiently to discharge his duty (see p. 26). Again, the actual date of this ceremony varies from plane to plane, but it is usually tied to some easily identifiable event like the summer solstice.

The Lesser Victories have only symbolic significance and nothing at all to do with mythic events. The Third Victory is Midwinter's Day, when light is victorious over darkness and the days begin to grow longer. The Fourth Victory is the spring equinox, when summer is victorious over winter.

The Mastery

This elaborate and dignified ceremony is held in every temple of Toshism throughout the multiverse during each of the Four Victories. All able-bodied Toshites are expected to attend, and even faithful on their deathbeds frequently ask to be carried to the temple so they can experience the service.

The ceremony starts with a dignified procession as the presiding priests file into the temple, led by battle-banners depicting the symbol of Toshi. The priests wear full armor throughout this service, and witnesses report that the opening procession, with banners flying and armor catching the torchlight, is a brutally beautiful spectacle.

The Mastery service lasts about one hour. At its center is a recitation of the myth or symbolic significance associated with the appropriate victory. Further details are unknown, since only the faithful are allowed into the temple during this service, and it's considered a breach of honor to talk about it to unbelievers. Any would-be participant not known to be a true believer by at least three other worshipers is physically expelled from the temple.

Other Services

In addition, Toshite priests hold short, simple ceremonies once every nine days. While all able-bodied worshipers are expected to attend each Mastery, it's acceptable to miss one of these other, lesser services with a good enough reason. Interested unbelievers may attend these services as spectators, as long as they remain totally silent, of course.

If at any time a new star appears in the heavens, each Toshite church will hold a special service on the first night following the priesthood's discovery of

the celestial event. This ceremony springs from a minor passage in the Roll of the Just, in which the soul of a particularly impassioned holy warrior was allowed to become a star as reward for loyal service. The Ceremony of Passage, then, reveres the soul of the whichever warrior has just been installed in the firmament.

The major sacrifice the Toshite religion requires of its followers is their service. Most faithful Toshites also give one-tenth of their income to the church to maintain its infrastructure and support it in its good works. While the church teaches that tithing is completely voluntary, peer pressure ensures that most people make the offering every year. Further, individuals frequently give special offerings to the church on important occasions, such as when a child undergoes the Acceptance or the Consent (see below). In theocratic Toshite societies, some of the government's tax revenue will go toward maintaining church facilities.

Toshism has four major sacraments to commemorate key events in the life of a worshiper: the Acceptance for birth, the Consent at the time of passage from childhood to adulthood, the Union for marriage, and the Laying Down of Arms for death. There are two further sacraments associated with disciplinary matters: the Despite, which severs an evildoer from the body of the church, and the Atonement, through which a sinner makes peace with the church and with Toshi.

Within eighteen days of a baby's birth, the parents must take the newborn to the nearest Toshite temple and present it to the presiding priest for the Acceptance, a short, dignified ceremony through which the child is accepted into the body of the church. The child, resting naked on a plain iron shield, is anointed with water and oil to bind its soul to Toshi Yamatetsu until the time of the child's Consent. During the service, the parents name one or more guardians, adults who are responsible for protecting the child and instilling it with an understanding of the Toshite faith and precepts. The parents can name themselves as guardians, but this happens rarely and is considered something of a breach of good manners. To end the ceremony, one of the guardians picks up the baby and holds both it and the ceremonial shield. The priest then strikes a symbolic blow at the child, which the guardian deflects with the shield. The ceremony is usually followed by a private family celebration to which the priest is always invited.

Although the Acceptance should take place within eighteen days of birth, circumstances can delay this. The sacrament can be performed on a child of up to sixteen years old. If an individual of sixteen or more wants to enter the Toshite church, she must undergo the Consent but not the Acceptance. Before receiving the sacrament of Consent, however, the would-be Toshite must find one or more adults who will stand for him as guardians, since at least one guardian is necessary for the rite of passage.

The Consent is a symbolic rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, with all its responsibilities and duties. Although the actual mechanism of the rite may seem simplistic, it carries with it an incredible amount of symbolic and emotional meaning. Most Toshites report that their Consent was the most significant moment of their lives.

The ceremony, which takes place shortly after the candidate's sixteenth birthday, begins when one of the candidate's guardians leads him into the church. The guardian carries a plain iron shield, preferably the same one used in the candidate's Acceptance. As the priest speaks a few simple words, the candidate steps forward and takes the shield from the guardian, placing it on his own arm. The priest then steps forward with a bared *kleklath*, appearing ready to strike at the candidate. Instead, the priest drops to one knee, offering the hilt

Offerings and Sacrifices

Sacraments

The Acceptance

The Consent

of the knife to the candidate, who takes it and keeps it forever in remembrance of the sacrament. To complete the ceremony, the candidate hands the shield to the still-kneeling priest, then turns and walks out of the temple, his guardians following behind him.

The symbolism of the service is simple. Throughout the candidate's childhood, her guardians are responsible for protecting her both physically and spiritually, which is represented by the shield. At the age of sixteen, however, the candidate takes responsibility for her own life when she takes the shield from the guardian. Finally, the candidate hands the shield—which was, after all, borrowed from the church—back to the priest, symbolically freeing everyone else from responsibility for her well-being. The new adult then ends the ceremony by striding proudly from the temple. Consent ceremonies are usually excuses for wild family parties.

While those who have undergone the Acceptance usually receive the Consent at sixteen, people who come to Toshism later in life can undergo the sacrament at any age. The Consent is required of all who wish to be true Toshites.

The Union

The Union is a simple and straightforward marriage service, generally lacking in pomp and ceremony. Both partners simply present themselves before the presiding priest, vow to love and support each other, declare their mutual desire to live as a couple, and receive the blessing of the church. No other witnesses are necessary, though the couple's families and close friends are usually invited and often throw a small party for the newlyweds after the ceremony.

While Toshites take the vows of the Union seriously, Toshite marriages aren't necessarily for life. If both partners agree and there are no children younger than the Age of Consent, the Union can be terminated merely by approaching a priest and asking for dissolution. The priest will grant the dissolution only if he or she is certain that both parties really want to end the marriage; otherwise, they'll be sent away to consider their options more fully. Dissolution is never granted if there are young children involved.

In Toshite societies, there's no such thing as a contested divorce, strictly speaking; either both individuals agree to a dissolution or the marriage continues. There is a way around this, however. If an individual is put under *Despite*, all oaths and duties owed to her, including the vows of Union, are considered terminated. Thus if one partner of a Union is put under *Despite*, the marriage instantly terminates. Even if the *Despite* is later lifted through *Atonement*, the Union is no longer in force; if the parties so desire they can undergo the Union sacrament again, but both must agree. This loophole allows an individual to leave a Union unilaterally, if he can find a priest willing to help him. The person voluntarily accepts *Despite*, terminating the marriage, and then undergoes *Atonement* immediately. Although this is strictly legal, some priests frown on the practice. No Toshite priest will allow this voluntary acceptance of *Despite* if young children are involved in the Union.

The Laying Down of Arms

The Laying Down of Arms is the Toshite version of last rites, performed on a faithful worshiper immediately before death. It's a quick ceremony, no doubt designed to be used on a battlefield in the chaos of combat. The priest simply lays one hand over the heart of the dying worshiper and recites a short phrase from the Roll of the Just. The worshiper's soul is then bound once more to Toshi, and thus will travel to the god's plane after death.

The Despite

This sacrament is unique in that the subject of the ceremony isn't present. Should *Despite* be required, the priest conducting the ceremony retreats into isolation and meditation for several hours, reflecting for one final time on the justice of banishing the subject. If this period of meditation doesn't change the priest's mind, she performs a brief but symbolically complex ceremony in

the privacy of her chambers. The details of this ceremony are known only to ordained priests, and they won't discuss the matter with those outside the faith. With the conclusion of the ceremony, the subject is officially under *Despite*. It's then up to the priest to spread the word that this person is anathema—not to be spoken to, acknowledged, or dealt with in any manner. The priest must also communicate to the subject that he or she is under *Despite*.

By sacred law, a *Toshite* who is under *Despite* must wear a broad headband of white fabric at all times, even while bathing or sleeping. If one who is known to be under *Despite* is found without this headband, he is forcibly driven from the area at swordpoint, and all his worldly goods are confiscated by the church. It's very rare that these provisions of the law must be enforced.

There are two schools of thought within *Toshite* society on what happens to the soul of a person who dies under *Despite*. One holds that the soul still travels to the plane of *Toshi*, but that it undergoes eternal torment rather than living in peace and security. The other holds that *Despite* prevents the soul from ever reaching *Toshi's* plane; instead, the soul floats aimlessly forever, or is scooped up by some other deity or demon. Either fate is, to the faithful *Toshite*, too horrible to contemplate. Thus, virtually all those put under *Despite* immediately try to find out how they can receive the sacrament of Atonement.

This sacrament reverses the sacrament of *Despite* and returns the offender to the body of the church.

First, the malefactor must persuade a priest that she should be given a second chance and allowed to atone for her sins. The likelihood that the priest will agree depends on the severity of the original infraction. For a relatively minor transgression, the priest may allow Atonement almost immediately after the *Despite*. For something more serious, the malefactor might have to suffer *Despite* for a longer period of time, risking throughout the chance of dying under *Despite*. If the original crime is something truly heinous, like betraying the faith to an enemy, the priest might declare that Atonement is totally impossible. Note that a priest won't perform the Atonement without making very sure he knows exactly why the *Despite* was originally enacted and how long it has been in force.

The ceremony of the Atonement is a very private one, involving only the presiding priest and the candidate. As with other *Toshite* ceremonies, nothing is known of the details, since neither priest nor candidate will ever discuss the matter.

The sacrament takes place in two parts, which may be separated by hours, days, or possibly years. In the first portion, the priest grants the candidate the possibility of Atonement and explains the penance the candidate must perform before the sacrament is completed. This penance can range from a dozen hours of volunteer labor to an epic quest. In extreme situations, the only acceptable penance will be ritual suicide, performed in private or in public. If this is the case, the priest granting the Atonement will preside over the suicide, which must be performed using a knife, sword, or other bladed weapon; poison and other less active methods aren't acceptable.

During the second portion the priest actually grants Atonement, freeing the subject from the strictures of *Despite*. This involves a brief, dignified ceremony attended by the priest and subject alone. The priest will only perform this ceremony and lift the *Despite* if the subject has performed the penance described in the first portion of the sacrament. If ritual suicide is required, the second part of the Atonement sacrament is timed to coincide with the mortal stroke.

An individual under *Despite* always has the option of offering ritual suicide for Atonement instead of the penance specified by the priest. The priest involved can choose to accept the offer or not, based on the details of the case.

The Atonement

Toshi Yamatetsu

Lesser God of Combat

Strength	51	Combat	
Health	33	Defense Strength	53
Reaction	39	Unarmed	Legendary 4; 35 (4X)
Intelligence	32	Melee Weapons	
Destiny	46		Legendary 5; by weapon+STR (4X)
Presence	47	Missile Weapons	Legendary 4; by weapon (3X)
Willpower	42	Aptitude	
Size	3.5 yards	Magical Aptitude	Master
Speed	7 yards/second	Mentalic Aptitude	Veteran
Primal Base	20,200		
Primal Flux	13,834		

Usually Toshi Yamatetsu, Lion of Heaven, Sword of Righteousness, appears as a hugely muscled human male with shoulders two axe-handles wide and forearms thicker than most people's thighs. His straight, black hair is cropped short to his head. He wears a simple suit of ring mail with elaborate shoulder protectors worked into the heads of lions. His face and expression show a grave mien coupled with extreme intelligence. His skin is dark bronze in color, but doesn't appear natural for any known human race; in certain lighting conditions, it seems to have a faint, almost metallic sheen to it. To the touch Toshi's skin is cool like metal, but soft and flexible as normal human skin. His eyes have pronounced epicanthic folds. Their color varies with the light, ranging from blue-gray to green or even light brown.

Toshi Yamatetsu is said to emanate an aura of tense anticipation, a sense of boundless, controlled energy about to be released. Animals seem edgy in the deity's presence, but they aren't spooked; they simply seem to have so much energy they can barely remain in check. Humans who have met Toshi face to face report feeling as though they might scream with exultation at any moment. When Toshi is angry, his eyes flash with dark green fire and his aura changes. His enemies feel a sense of impending cataclysm, while his faithful warriors feel battle-lust burning within them.

Toshi moves with control and grace like an athlete, or like an exceptionally well-trained weaponmaster. Every movement is economical and highly efficient. When Toshi moves, he gives the impression of being totally unstoppable, like a force of nature. He can move amazingly fast, particularly in combat, but rarely does so.

His voice matches his appearance: powerful and forceful, backed with huge resonance, yet never louder than it needs to be. He is said to speak and understand all human tongues and those of many other sentient races.

Personality

The key facets of Toshi Yamatetsu's personality are an unbendable sense of honor and unshakable dedication to a cause once he's decided it's a just and noble one. He believes that every sentient creature in the universe has a right to choose its own destiny, but that it is then totally and utterly responsible for the consequences of its choice. When evaluating others, Toshi tries to make a distinction between those who choose an unjust course after consideration of alternatives and those who were unaware that there were alternatives. In

Primal Attributes

Primal Base	20,200
Typical Primal Flux	13,834
Planes	4
Supported Demigods	2
Demigods	0
Godlings	2
Chancellors	1
Artifacts	9
Servitors	5 greater, 10 major, 50 minor

Primal Base Calculations

Four Solely Controlled Planes (4 x 2,000)	8,000
Rank Bonuses Through Lesser Deity (100 + 200 + 300 + 5,000)	5,600
Creation of Artifacts	-21,500
Creation of Servitors	-2,000
Ascensions	-4,000
Sphere of Influence Cost	-400
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-500
Evolutionary Gains	35,000
Total Primal Base	20,200

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (20,200 / 10)	2,020
Consecrated Ground (300 x 2)	600
Sanctuaries (450 x 5)	2,250
Temples (200 x 10)	2,000
Cathedrals (10 x 25)	250
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (10 x 1)	10
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (12 x 2)	24
Holding of Rival Temples (6 x 5)	30
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (4 x 1,000)	4,000
Worshipers by Plane (20,000, 10,000, 800,000, 3,000, 13,000, 95,000, 14,000, 1,800, 50,000, 10 x 1,000, 20 x 500, 50 x 100; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	2,150
Captured Primal Base (20,000 x 5%)	500
Total Primal Flux	13,834

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



practice, however, he has found very few people actually fit into the second category.

Toshi is careful to think through the consequences of every action as thoroughly as he is able. He recognizes that sometimes it's necessary to make a decision based on inadequate information; when that's the case, Toshi will decide, and deal with the consequences of a potential error later. Particularly in battle, any decision made and followed through is all too often better than no decision or a decision made too late.

Discipline within his army and within the structure of his church is of paramount importance to Toshi. Where possible, he ensures that everyone below him in the hierarchy understands the reasoning behind every decision he makes. But because this isn't always possible, he requires blind obedience to superiors from all his followers. If he finds someone in his church abusing a position of authority, however, his justice will be swift and implacable.

History

A little over two thousand years ago, Toshi Yamatetsu was a mortal human living on a far distant main plane. He was born to a poor family, working the land of a cruel feudal lord who treated his serfs worse than slaves. Toshi had another birth name at the time, but it has been lost in history.

The youth who would be known as Toshi was destined from his early childhood to be a great warrior. The most widely known tale of Toshi's youth describes the boy, no older than eight summers, walking through the wilderness with his father, seeking out some sheep that had become lost. Without any warning, a lion burst out of the undergrowth and leaped at the father. Reacting instantly, the boy drew the small knife his father had given him and struck three blows before the lion could turn toward him. According to the tale, the three cuts proved instantly fatal and the lion collapsed.

The father was amazed at the proficiency of his son, dispatching a mighty lion with a tiny knife. He was even more astonished, according to the legend, when he began to gut the lion and found that it had no heart. In place of the organ was an empty space. Shocked, the father turned to his son and looked in his eyes. There he saw something new, a courage and strength of spirit that had never been there before. Toshi's father decided then and there that his son had somehow incorporated the heart of the lion into his own soul. From that day forward, the youth was known as the Lion, eventually to become Lion of Heaven.

This is a classic folk tale, incorporating all the standard elements of folk myth. For that reason, few sages put any credence in it whatsoever. The next story, however, is widely accepted as historically accurate.

While the young man nicknamed the Lion was growing up, the old liege-lord died and was replaced by his son. This son, the same age as Toshi, was even more cruel than his father and proceeded to work many of his serfs to death. Several resistance movements emerged among the serfs, but none were sufficiently organized and all were stamped out.

On his sixteenth birthday, the Lion decided he had to do something. He faked his own death and vanished from human ken. When he reappeared, it was under another name—Toshi, the Bringer of War. Like Spartacus in Earth history, he led a slave rebellion. Unlike Spartacus, he succeeded in overthrowing the cruel lord and freeing the serfs.

Scholars from various planes have confirmed the historical events described in this story. Toshite faithful add one detail that is virtually impossible for secular historians to confirm, however. According to Toshite teachings, between the time of his faked death and his reappearance as a rebel leader Toshi gave his allegiance to a warrior-deity known as Nilos, the patron of just and righteous causes. It was Nilos, the Toshite legends stress, who gave Toshi Yamatetsu the determination, courage, and decisiveness he needed to successfully overthrow the tyrant.

While Toshi disappears from secular history after the overthrow of the tyrannical feudal lord, Toshite teachings describe the remainder of his mortal life. As a devoted follower of Nilos and a tireless proselytizer, Toshi spread Nilosite gospel throughout his plane, constantly fighting against those who would constrain human freedoms. Toshi gained such honor as a holy warrior that Nilos eventually made him a minion, supported him with primal flux, and finally ascended him to the divine status of godling.

Over the next several decades, with Nilos's encouragement, Toshi researched combat as a sphere of influence. Throughout this period Nilos supported him, even "loaning" him primal flux to continue his research. Soon, Toshi was positioned to assume his new sphere of influence, but he didn't consider himself worthy. Nilos repeatedly tried to persuade him to take the next logical step, but the godling simply didn't feel ready.

During this period, Nilos had founded a council of deities known as the Union of the Balance. Among the enemies of this group was Alavaern the Acquisitor, a rapacious and cruel humanoid deity who decided to eliminate Nilos, thereby weakening and possibly disintegrating the union. Toshite teachings give no details about how Alavaern assassinated Nilos, simply stating that it came to pass. For a brief period it seemed as though the surviving members of the Union of the Balance might collaborate in hunting down and destroying Alavaern. Eventually, however, infighting, fear, and personal interest ruled. No mission of revenge was planned, and the union began to fade from the divine stage—until Toshi Yamatetsu took a hand.

After a debate that lasted for over a week without a break, Toshi convinced the members of the union that his plan for a retaliatory strike would work. The union fielded a mighty army and named Toshi as its commander. With banners flying, the strike force headed for Alavaern's home plane.

Alavaern wasn't taken entirely by surprise, though he had assumed that retaliation was extremely unlikely. He knew what was coming as soon as he saw the forces massing, and so he fled, leaving his own minions and servitors behind to fight a doomed delaying action. Thanks to Toshi's innovative tactics, the union forces ripped their way through the defending troops, inflicting hideous losses while suffering only the most insignificant casualties themselves. Halfway through the campaign, however, Toshi realized from the way the defending forces were fighting that they had no central leadership. That meant that Alavaern, the true target of the raid, wasn't present on the plane. Leaving the union forces under the command of a subordinate, the godling took to the planes again in search of the enemy.

If Alavaern had stopped to fight Toshi early on, he would almost certainly have beaten him. Alavaern, after all, was a lesser deity, normally more than a match for a jumped-up godling. But Alavaern was cocky; he believed the young godling would soon grow discouraged and break off pursuit, allowing him to escape without a fight. As the chase wore on, Alavaern tried every trick in the book, spending his flux profligately as he tried to elude his pursuer.

Finally, however, hunter and quarry met face to face. By this time, the union forces had conquered Alavaern's home plane, demoting him to demigod status

and eliminating the possibility of regeneration. Alavaern had also used most of his primal energy trying to avoid the confrontation, and so was forced to spend some of his now-reduced supply of base in order to fight Toshi. In the end, Alavaern had insufficient primal remaining to survive the encounter.

When he returned to the battle, Toshi found the union forces victorious. The tale of Toshi Yamatetsu's victory was spread throughout the planes, to all mortals who revered members of the union or Toshi himself. His defeat of Alavaern proved the epic quest that finally allowed him to take combat as his sphere of influence. With the acquisition of his sphere, Toshi Yamatetsu, Lion of Heaven, became a demigod.

Because Toshi had destroyed their greatest enemy, the deities in the Union of the Balance offered to allow him to remain on the plane he helped wrest from Alavaern and see if he could hold it for himself. Although this would have given him a foundation from which to build his own power, Toshi chose instead to spend the next hundred years defending Nilos's home plane so that his mentor could regenerate from Alavaern's treacherous assassination. When Nilos finally reappeared, his first act was to release Toshi from all future duties, allowing him to begin freely developing his own church.

Nilos also supported Toshi until he took his first plane, rewarding him for his extreme loyalty. Eventually, Toshi converted it into a home plane. As a new lesser deity, Toshi began to expand his influence and build his divine structure. Soon thereafter, he ascended his first two subordinates, Marcrast Bloodbearer and Cerevan Shieldmaiden. Currently he directly controls four planes and may soon control a fifth, making him a greater deity.

About two centuries ago, soon after Toshi had taken control of his second plane, another deity appeared on the scene, one who would become the Lion of Heaven's long-term nemesis. His name was Rekeath the Base, a deity of treachery and foul dealings. Through deceit and low cunning, Rekeath managed to imprison Toshi on a distant miniplane that the God of Treachery had altered into a perfect cell. Toshi remained imprisoned there for more than forty years until his subordinate Marcrast Bloodbearer, demigod of personal combat, managed to free his patron.

During the four decades of his imprisonment, Toshi's absence had a great impact on the planes he controlled and on those where his influence was strong. According to the *Chronicles of the Sword*, wars raged throughout the planes—wars that lasted much longer than they needed to, since their commanders became inflamed with battle-lust without Toshi's influence to keep them focused on the justice of their cause. When Toshi was freed from his imprisonment, he personally travelled the planes, bringing wisdom to his commanders and ending the unnecessarily protracted wars.

Rekeath the Base still exists, however, hiding out on his distant home plane. The *Chronicles of the Sword* claim that the struggle between the God of Treachery and the Lion of Heaven continues unabated.

Symbols

The primary symbol of Toshi Yamatetsu is the broadsword. This appears in many different forms throughout the religion and the societies associated with it. Toshite priests carry or wear small, six-inch representations of broadswords as their emblems of office. Simplified to a sigil, the symbol of the broadsword appears on the covers of all holy writings, rolls of worshipers, and other church

documents. Stylized versions emblazon the surcoats of Shieldbearers and decorate battle flags and pennants. Broadwords also appear in friezes and carvings that embellish Toshite temples and other buildings. From a particular vantage point, the central spire of the great temple in the city of Starfell resembles a fifty-foot broadsword.

A much less frequently used symbol of Toshi is the shield. The most common representation is the Norman-style shield familiar to most people from coats of arms, although a Saxon-style “kite” shield is sometimes used. The shield is usually plain iron, although sometimes a representation of the broadsword appears on its face.

Occasionally, particularly when it's displayed prominently, the Toshite shield is embellished by two silver chains. Each is attached at one end to the bottom point of the Norman shield, and at the other to one of the top corners. The slender chains are long enough so that they hang across the face of the shield in graceful hyperbolae. Symbolically, these chains represent the double bonds of duty: first to your superiors, and second to those who follow you as their superior. These chains are a very recent addition to the symbology of Toshism, appearing for the first time no more than a decade ago.

Red and black are the colors most often associated with Toshi. Red is, of course, symbolic of blood, anger, and battle-lust. In many societies, the color also evokes thoughts of sacrifice and glory. Black is used less for its symbolic meaning than because it causes the brilliant red to stand out in even starker relief.

As the Lion of Heaven, Toshi is frequently associated with lions, which are symbolic of ferocity, power, nobility, and honor. On some planes, he is also associated with the eagle or hawk, which exemplifies wisdom, determination, freedom, and lofty aspirations.

Sphere of Influence

Toshi Yamatetsu, Lion of Heaven, is the God of Combat, specifically combat for honorable reasons. Whether the combat is personal or involves massive armies makes no difference so long as the cause is just. Combat or warfare for personal glory or just for the sheer joy of battle he leaves to other deities.

Research Cost: 400 flux per day. Research Time: 30 years. Backing Cost: 400 base. Total Flux Cost: 4,380,000.

Toshi can instill a holy fervor in any mortal warrior within the deity's range of vision, turning the individual into a berserker for a period of up to one hour. A berserker's damage rank is increased by 2 for the duration of the fervor, and his or her attack speed is increased by 1 (e.g., from 1x to 2x), but the berserker's defense strength is reduced by 4.

This sphere includes all the abilities described on page 104 of *The Primal Order* under the “War” sphere of influence, plus the following abilities:

Soul Sight: Research Cost: 50 flux per day. Research Time: 2 years. Backing Cost: 65 base. Activation Cost: 15 flux. This ability allows the deity to see into the soul of any mortal warrior and determine his basic reason for fighting. This ability doesn't provide any fine details of motivation; it merely tells the deity whether the individual is fighting for a cause that she considers just, and whether or not Toshi would consider it just as well.

Increase Puissance: Research Cost: 50 flux per day. Research Time: 4 years. Backing Cost: 60 base. Activation Cost: 60 flux. This ability allows the deity to

Statistics

Advantages

Sphere Abilities

increase a mortal's skill with any single class of weapons (e.g., swords, bows, axes, crossbows) by two ranks (e.g., from Amateur to Master) for a period of one hour. One use of this ability can affect either a single individual or all mortals within a 20-yard radius of any target point within the deity's field of view.

Planes

Lionhome

Lionhome is Toshi's home plane, where he dwells with his subordinates. It's a place of harsh beauty, with massive, jagged mountain ranges soaring above mighty oceans that are always whipped into whitecaps by powerful winds. The deity's official residence is a mighty stone fortress known as the Hall of Heroes.

Lionhome is removed from every plane in existence with the following exceptions: it's connected to Arena, another of Toshi's planes described below, and it's adjacent to the home planes of the deities of the Union of the Balance, including Nilos's home plane.

Planar constants: No mortals are able to create, summon, or manipulate magical energy. Undead or antilife creatures cannot survive on this plane. No magical forms of transportation will function.

Arena

Arena is a bare, virtually featureless plane that Toshi uses as a training ground for his subordinates and sometimes for mortal armies in his service. In past campaigns, Toshi has used Arena as a staging area for his hosts.

Planar constants: No mortals are able to create, summon, or manipulate magical energy. Undead or antilife creatures cannot survive on this plane.

Guard

A plane with varied geography very similar to Earth's, Guard is home to a nonhuman but vaguely humanoid race that is totally and utterly devoted to Toshi. This race lives under a theocracy and provides the Sword of Righteousness with an excellent source of warriors.

Guard is totally removed from every plane in existence except for Arena, to which it is adjacent.

Planar constant: Undead or antilife creatures cannot survive on this plane.

Haven

Similar in appearance to Lionhome, Haven is the destination of the souls of all Toshite worshipers. It is adjacent to many main planes, primarily those with large populations of faithful Toshites.

Planar constants: Undead or antilife creatures cannot survive on this plane. The bodies of living, sentient mortals are barred from entering this plane.

Combat

Toshi is, first and foremost, a warrior. Highly skilled in all the military arts, he will never shrink from a fight that he considers just and noble. He loves a fair fight, eschewing deceit and dirty tricks. Cunning is acceptable, but only within the purview of normal combat; ambushes, feints, and the like are fine, but assassination most definitely isn't.

The Lion of Heaven will never turn away from a fair, open challenge to personal combat as long as it's against a foe of equivalent power. There's no glory in defeating an obvious inferior in single combat, and accepting a challenge from an obviously superior individual is pure stupidity.

Special Equipment

The Sword of the Just is a powerful artifact in the form of a broadsword. To all mortal senses, and even to magical investigation, it appears to be a nonmagical broadsword of cold-forged iron. Its quillions are straight and unadorned, and its hilt is wrapped in plain gray sharkskin. Its pommel is in the form of a dodecahedron.

In the hands of a mortal, the Sword of the Just evidences no special powers at all; it's just another broadsword. When wielded by a deity, however, it becomes a lethal weapon. It never misses its mark and penetrates all armor that is not primally reinforced. A single blow will instantly kill any mortal creature; against divine foes, it inflicts damage of rank 40 and always inflicts maximum damage. All of these powers can, of course, lead to power checks (see TPO pp. 84–87).

When wielded by a divine being, the Sword of the Just “sings” as it cleaves the air, giving off a high-pitched, metallic keening.

Toshi's mightiest defensive artifact, the Shield of the Lion is a human-sized normal shield, enamelled black on its face with the Toshi's sigil in red in its center. When used in battle it seems to be totally without mass, having no effect whatsoever on reaction or encumbrance. The shield will block all frontal attacks coming at a combined speed of up to 5x. The shield, enchanted with a primally laced defensive aura, blocks all physical, magical, and mentalic attacks unless superseded by a power check (see TPO pp. 84–87). The shield itself is totally resistant to damage; it's impossible to destroy or even chip it.

These basic abilities will benefit any wielder, even a mortal. If the user is divine, however, additional effects come into play. Once per day, the user can release the shield and it will operate on its own, blocking frontal attacks exactly as if the user were still controlling it. This allows the user to use both hands for weapons while still benefitting from the protection of the shield. The shield will operate like this for up to one hour; the power can't be triggered more than once per day.

When Rekeath the Base imprisoned Toshi, he stole the Shield of the Lion; Toshi suspects he still has it, no doubt concealed somewhere on his home plane. Marcrast Bloodbearer has taken it as a personal quest to retrieve the shield, but he has yet to succeed.

Sword of the Just
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 94

Shield of the Lion
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 98

Marcrast Bloodbearer

Supported Demigod of Personal Combat

Strength	35	Combat	
Health	32	Defense Strength	48
Reaction	41	Unarmed	Legendary 2; 40 (3x)
Intelligence	23	Melee Weapons	
Destiny	44		Legendary 3; by weapon+STR (3x)
Presence	40	Missile Weapons . .	Legendary 3; by weapon (3x)
Willpower	26	Aptitude	
Size	3 yards	Magical Aptitude	Veteran
Speed . .	8 yards/second	Mentalic Aptitude	Amateur
Primal Base	3,385		
Primal Flux	1,128		

Usually, Marcrast appears as a tall, slender male with shoulder-length blond hair tied back from his face. His face is long and thin, his finely chiseled features not quite human and not quite elvish. He is ageless, with a proud and aloof, almost arrogant expression. His eyes are piercing and intelligent. He wears a simple white robe belted with a gold-scaled belt. He carries a rapier, the blade of which seems to run with liquid silver. In his right side, a sword has slashed his robe and wounded him grievously. The wound constantly bleeds, yet he pays no attention to it.

Marcrast emanates an aura of constant awareness. He seems to perceive everything around him and is ready at any moment to act on what he perceives. Those who have met the demigod face to face report the unsettling feeling that he knows everything about them, even motives and intentions they'd desperately like to keep secret. Animals trained for battle seem to love and trust Marcrast on sight, even if their supposed masters are opposed to the demigod. Unless physically prevented, such battle-trained animals will draw near the divine figure and show their respect in the manner of their species. Animals that haven't been trained for war become skittish in his vicinity.

Marcrast Bloodbearer moves with a controlled grace like that of a master fencer or martial arts expert. He can move inhumanly fast when necessary, but never does so without cause. He can stand totally still for hours, never blinking, his gaze steady and penetrating. This quiet observation is apparently exceedingly disconcerting to his foes.

He never draws his rapier unless he is about to use it. Former foes report that it was very upsetting to see Marcrast facing their charge with his sword still undrawn, as though he didn't need a weapon to deal with such a trifling challenge as they presented.

The demigod's voice is never louder than normal conversational volume, yet it can carry clearly for miles, even over the background din of battle. He speaks fluently all the languages used by faithful Toshites of all planes.

Personality

Marcrast reveres honor above all. Without honor, he believes, nothing else is worthwhile. His word is his bond, and he'll willingly sacrifice his life to discharge a duty he has undertaken, though he's intelligent enough to realize that often the best way to keep his word is not to give it. Once sworn to Toshi's service, Marcrast became totally devoted to him and will follow the lesser deity's orders without question.

Primal Attributes

Primal Base	3,185
Typical Primal Flux	1,107
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	1
Artifacts	0
Servitors	25 minor

Primal Base Calculations

One Solely Controlled Miniplane	200
Rank Bonuses Through Supported	
Demigod (100 + 200 + 300)	600
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	-200
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-215
Evolutionary Gains	3,000
Total Primal Base	3,385

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (3,185 / 10)	339
Consecrated Ground (15 x 2)	30
Sanctuaries (12 x 5)	60
Temples (7 x 10)	70
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (1 x 1)	1
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (3 x 2)	6
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshippers by Plane (1,000, 3,000, 200, 1,000, 13,000, 5,000, 1,000, 1,800, 7,500, 3 x 1,000; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	572
Captured Primal Base (1,000 x 5%)	50
Total Primal Flux	1,128

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



Marcrast Bloodbearer is very difficult to anger, since he believes that strong emotions often interfere with right action. Once someone or something has earned his hatred, however, that hatred will be everlasting. In the same way, the demigod is careful to consider the consequences of his decisions. While he shares Toshi's belief that sometimes any action is better than no action, he is also determined to follow through on any decision he has made, whatever the cost. This leads many to consider him very rigid and unreasonable.

History

Marcrast was born a human, but was raised by elvish foster parents; if your game world doesn't include elves, choose another similar race. As a youth, he was almost as great a warrior as Toshi himself. He fought to protect his family and his nation from invaders, personally killing more than threescore foes before his sixteenth birthday.

Leaving his foster parents and home behind him, Marcrast became a mercenary, fighting for any commander who could pay him regardless of the cause. After a decade of this life, during which he became highly skilled with all personal weapons, he realized that his chosen career was empty and philosophically unrewarding. He set aside war as a vocation, and wandered the plane for many years seeking some spiritual core around which to base his life.

When he was about thirty years old, Marcrast came upon a Toshite nation. For another five years or so he lived among them, but not of them. The Toshite priests understood, allowing him to stay among them and respecting him for the dedication with which he clung to his chosen path of nonviolence. The priests believed that all Marcrast needed was a noble cause to galvanize him back into action.

This proved true when the Toshite nation was attacked by a rapacious neighbor. During the early phases of the war, Marcrast refused to take up arms. Finally, when he realized that his adoptive nation might be overwhelmed, he unwillingly entered the fray. To his great surprise, he realized that he'd been making a great mistake over the past years. It wasn't combat he hated; it was combat without an underlying cause. Now that he had a cause to defend, the freedom of a society he admired, he could wield his weapons with pride once more. He deported himself admirably, eventually defeating the leader of the invaders in single combat.

With his new philosophy firmly in place, Marcrast sought out a Toshite priest to be his mentor and was soon ordained himself. He opted for the Sword arm of the Toshite church and quickly climbed to the pinnacle of the hierarchy. Toshi Yamatetsu himself selected Marcrast to be the bishop-general of the local church, a position in which he served until the age of seventy-five. Marcrast's dedication and loyalty so impressed Toshi that rather than let him die of old age, he ascended him to the rank of godling. Allowed to choose his divine appearance, Marcrast selected features that would reflect the races of both his birth parents and his foster parents.

Marcrast spent the next few decades under Toshi's personal tutelage, researching personal combat as his sphere of influence. So devoted was he to his research and experimentation that he quickly became ready to assume the sphere as his own. Yet despite his competence, he didn't consider himself worthy to become a demigod, so he didn't seek out an epic quest.

Then Rekeath the Base arose and imprisoned Toshi. Here was a true epic quest Marcrast couldn't deny: to save the deity to whom he'd sworn eternal

allegiance. It took the godling decades to locate the miniplane on which Toshi was imprisoned, but at last he did so. As soon as he arrived, he challenged the God of Treachery to single combat with weapons alone; no magic or primal energy would be used.

The details on this battle are sketchy, with the most widely accepted account coming from the *Chronicles of the Sword*. According to this holy writing, Rekeath fought honorably until he realized he might be defeated by a mere godling. Then, using a quick primal blast in addition to his sword, he struck a telling blow against Marcrast, wounding the demigod sorely in the side. Enraged by this dishonorable act, Marcrast doubled and redoubled his ferocity, driving Rekeath to his knees. Rekeath the Base then committed further treachery, switching bodies with a godling on his staff just as Marcrast struck the killing blow. While Marcrast still believed the god he had killed was Rekeath, the true God of Treachery made his escape, taking with him the Shield of the Lion he had previously stolen from the imprisoned Toshi.

When he realized he had slain the wrong opponent, Marcrast was furious. But he decided against pursuing Rekeath, realizing that his first duty was to free his patron. By the time he'd broken through the wards that guarded Toshi's cell, Rekeath's trail was cold. Freeing his mentor proved sufficient as an epic quest, however, so Marcrast became a demigod.

So treacherous was the blow that wounded Marcrast that the demigod decided not to heal the damage to his physical form. Instead he kept the wound open to remind himself of a sour truth: that his own honorable action doesn't prevent the possibility of treachery on the part of a foe.

Currently Marcrast, widely known as Bloodbearer to commemorate his wound, is being supported by Toshi. He has sworn an eternal oath to track down Rekeath and destroy him, and to return the Shield of the Lion to Lionhome. Unfortunately this hasn't proven easy, largely because his other duties to Toshi take up much of his time and energy.

Symbols

Although he frequently uses the broadsword sigil of Toshi, Marcrast has his own symbol as well: a stylized rapier with a rippling blade. His personal sigil is usually rendered in gold against a black background, although sometimes it appears in the bright red of his patron.

On some planes, a rare flower known as the bloodrose is associated with Marcrast Bloodbearer.

Sphere of Influence

Marcrast's sphere of influence is personal combat, specifically the honorable discharge of personal duty and the defeat of a foe in a fair fight.

Research Cost: 270 flux per day. Research Time: 30 years. Backing Cost: 200 base. Total Flux Cost: 2,956,500.

Marcrast automatically knows the true identity, basic history, and divine allegiance of any entity he faces in single combat. Of course this ability, like any other use of primal, cannot pass through an active primal shield.

Statistics

Advantages

Sphere Abilities

This sphere includes the following abilities:

Locate Foe: Research Cost: 5 flux per day. Research Time: 20 years. Backing Cost: 25 base. Activation Cost: 50 flux. This ability allows the deity to determine the exact location of any individual foe. The deity must know the true identity of the foe, either her given name or her true appearance. This ability isn't hindered by interplanar barriers.

Puissance Sense: Research Cost: 20 flux per day. Research Time: 2 years. Backing Cost: 75 Base. Activation Cost: 25 flux. This ability allows the deity to determine a single foe's ability rank with his primary weapon and what that primary weapon is.

Weapon Sense: Research Cost: 50 flux per day. Research Time: 1 year. Backing Cost: 50 base. Activation Cost: 20 flux. This ability allows the deity to determine the powers and damage rank of a single weapon wielded by a foe in personal combat. It will not work on either primal or planar artifacts.

Motive Sense: Research Cost: 40 flux per day. Research Time: 2 years. Backing Cost: 65 base. Activation Cost: 50 flux. This ability allows the deity to determine the general prevailing motive in the mind of a foe faced in personal combat, such as survival, personal gain, a cause the foe considers noble, and so on. It will not reveal the foe's specific plans, such as "I'm fighting you so you won't see what my friend is doing."

Planes

Marcrast's official residence is on his mentor's plane of Lionhome. He's rarely found there, however, since he spends most of his time scouring the multiverse for enemies of Toshism. He directly controls a miniplane known as Oathkeep, which is adjacent to Haven. Currently it has no planar constants.

Combat

As befits his personality and sphere of influence, Marcrast loves a fair fight and prefers a challenge to single combat above all else. His favored weapon is his rapier, Heartlance, though he's also highly skilled with all other personal weapons. He has some skill in magical and mentalic powers, but will never use these against a foe not similarly adept.

Marcrast considers harm to noncombatants totally unacceptable. Against willing opponents, however, he gives no quarter and expects none in return.

Special Equipment

Heartlance
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 90

Heartlance is a rapier, light and responsive in the hand of a skilled wielder. Its long, slender blade appears to ripple with liquid light, glowing a brilliant silver. A sentient artifact, it will not allow itself to be used against an enemy unaware of the attack; such a thrust will automatically miss.

The wielder of Heartlance will always strike first in any combat exchange, and the weapon will automatically circumvent any shield, armor, or magical defense that is not primally reinforced. Further, it will always pierce the heart of any foe it strikes.

Toshi forged Heartlance on his plane of Lionhome. On that plane, the only special ability that functions is the ability to inflict heart-piercing damage with any successful hit.

Cerevan Shieldmaiden

Strength	16	Combat	
Health	18	Defense Strength	29
Reaction	28	Unarmed	Legendary 1; 20 (2x)
Intelligence	22	Melee Weapons	
Destiny	31		Legendary 3; by weapon+STR (2x)
Presence	43	Missile Weapons	Legendary 3; by weapon (2x)
Willpower	21	Aptitude	
Size	2.75 yards	Magical Aptitude	Master
Speed	5 yards/second	Mentalic Aptitude	Master
Primal Base	3,670		
Primal Flux	591		

Supported
Demigoddess of
Mass Combat

In her usual form, Cerevan appears as a large, well-muscled, vigorous woman with black, tightly curled hair and dark brown skin. Her face is wide, though her features are finely chiseled; her eyes are brilliant green, flashing with a bright, unnatural light of their own. She always seems to be smiling broadly—sometimes wolfishly, sometimes with pure pleasure. Her expression indicates her approval of the Toshite view that life is best at its fullest. She wears an elaborate suit of platemail graven with the sigil of a stylized sword, but carries no personal weapons.

Cerevan emanates a sense of complete engagement. Whatever she happens to be doing, she's totally involved in it, focusing all of her attention and effort on the present and the task at hand. This isn't to say that she doesn't look ahead at the future or remember the past. She simply always appreciates the present for what it is. This focus on the present makes her a terrifying foe in combat; opponents can clearly see that every fiber of her being is dedicated to their defeat.

Battle-trained animals seem to sense a kindred spirit in Cerevan. Even if their trainers abhor Cerevan and all she represents, these animals want to be near her and demonstrate their respect in the manner of their species. Even untrained animals feel unaccountably friendly toward the demigoddess, though the more timid may find their attraction overcome with fear of her obviously divine nature.

Cerevan is always totally aware of her entire body and revels in the sensations it brings. This gives her a special sort of joyous grace that shows in every movement. Depending on circumstances, she can fluctuate from frenetic motion to total immobility and back again in a matter of moments.

Her voice is rich, resonant, and full, with a versatile tone that accurately communicates the subtlest shades of meaning. Cerevan speaks fluently all languages used by Toshite worshipers on any plane. If speaking out loud isn't appropriate for some reason, she uses her mentalic abilities to communicate telepathically.

Personality

Cerevan Shieldmaiden's dominant personality trait is her focused nature. Refusing to be distracted by worries or regrets, she considers her options, chooses a course of action, and commits all her energy to the task until it's completed. While she can handle multiple duties at once, she manages this by prioritizing the necessary steps and focusing intently on each one in turn.



Primal Attributes

Primal Base	3,670
Typical Primal Flux	591
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	0
Servitors	1 minor

Primal Base Calculations

No Solely Controlled Planes	0
Rank Bonuses Through Supported Demigod (100 + 200 + 300)	600
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	-350
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-230
Evolutionary Gains	3,650
Total Primal Base	3,670

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (3,670 / 10)	367
Consecrated Ground (3 x 2)	6
Sanctuaries (15 x 5)	60
Temples (0 x 10)	0
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (3 x 1)	3
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (1 x 2)	2
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshippers by Plane (3,500, 1,250, 1,150, 5 x 200; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	198
Captured Primal Base (500 x 5%)	25
Total Primal Flux	661

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.

Cerevan also radiates great joy in living. She can find some pleasure in almost anything, and tries to plan her days so they encompass a wide variety of activities. She especially enjoys problems of strategy and tactics, treating them as intellectual puzzles to be solved. The Shieldmaiden also enjoys discussing matters military with anyone who has even a fraction of her grasp of the subject.

Although she enjoys the intellectual challenges of battle, Cerevan doesn't relish the pain, bloodshed, and destruction that come with war. This makes her especially intolerant of war for an unworthy, unnecessary cause; she considers such combat obscene. Her understanding of strategy extends far beyond the venue of the battlefield, and she would agree with Sun Tzu that to defeat the enemy without fighting is the greatest of victories.

History

Cerevan was born and raised on a main plane where the religion of Toshism had gained only a small foothold. Toshite worshipers were limited almost exclusively to one nation, and were uncommon even there. This nation was almost constantly at war with its neighbors, and the dominant religion revered a different war god, one whose social views were profoundly different from Toshi's.

The society in which Cerevan grew up was highly patriarchal, with all authority held by males. Females weren't permitted to own property, to hold governmental or religious office, or to own, carry, or use weapons, even in direct defense of their lives. This didn't sit very well with the young Cerevan. Raised in a Toshite family, she believed it was her right and responsibility to do what she could to protect her nation from rapacious invaders—and then unseat the repressive patriarchal government.

Throughout Cerevan's adolescence, her home country suffered terribly from repeated attacks by aggressive neighbors. Slowly, the country's army was whittled away until, just before her nineteenth birthday, the capital was about to be occupied by a cruel army from across a nearby mountain range. The country's leaders fled, saving their own lives instead of continuing the fight to save their citizens. Without any leadership, the army fell without even inflicting significant damage on the attackers.

To the surviving Toshites, this was the final straw. All of the able-bodied males had already joined the army, and most, including Cerevan's father and brothers, had fallen in the futile defense of the nation's borders. The only Toshites left behind were the infirm, those too young or too aged to effectively take up arms, and the women, who had been prohibited by law from joining the armed forces. When the government fled, Cerevan decided that prohibition was lifted.

Working secretly while the invaders looted the city, Cerevan recruited an underground resistance force of women such as herself whose male kinfolk had illegally taught them various combat skills. She kept her identity secret to prevent reprisals against what was left of her family, taking the code name Shieldmaiden.

Those interested in the details of Cerevan's resistance movement can find a lengthy account in the *Chronicles of the Sword*. In the end, Shieldmaiden's forces galvanized the other inhabitants into action and quickly drove the invaders back into their mountains. During the campaign, Cerevan proved herself many times over, exhibiting an astounding grasp of strategy and tactics, excellent leadership skills, and personal feats of arms worthy of epic sagas. With the

invaders repulsed, the original government tried to return from its self-imposed exile, but its erstwhile subjects had found new leaders more to their liking. The Toshite community within the nation had moved into a position of government, which it holds to the present day.

As soon as peace broke out, Cerevan had to choose another career. She decided to join the Sword arm of the Toshite church, and started seeking a priest to be her mentor. But even though the Toshite church had repudiated the previous government's edicts, most of the priests had unwittingly adopted its social mores, including the belief that women were second-class citizens. For this reason, Cerevan couldn't find the mentor she needed, but Toshi was unwilling to let her talents go to waste. Just as she was about to give up in bitterness, Toshi dispatched Marcrast Bloodbearer, then a godling, to be her mentor. Cerevan was duly ordained and joined the Sword.

Marcrast's patronage didn't end there. The godling followed the details of Cerevan's career closely, noticing when sexist superiors tried to put roadblocks in her way. Eventually, he reported to Toshi that Cerevan had climbed as high as she could in this hidebound hierarchy, and Toshi sent her to a smaller church on another plane.

The Toshite society on this plane was threatened with invasion, much as Cerevan's own nation had been decades before. This time, however, the government had no problem with women in leadership positions. Based on Cerevan's background, they quickly named her commander-in-chief of the army, granting her responsibility for national defense.

The defenders were outnumbered, and by all normal measures seemed destined for rapid destruction. But Cerevan's strategic and tactical acumen was so great that her new nation eventually emerged victorious. As a reward for this triumph, Toshi elevated Cerevan Shieldmaiden to the status of minion, and eventually to godling.

At Toshi's urging, Cerevan began to study mass combat as her sphere of influence. During this period, her patron deity sent her to many different planes to serve with and lead Toshite forces in all kinds of campaigns under all kinds of different conditions. These field tests of her research vastly improved her already-immense tactical and strategic understanding; they also spread her fame as an unbeatable commander throughout the multiverse. Because of this widespread fame, Cerevan didn't have to perform a specific epic quest to assume her sphere of influence; her ongoing campaigns did this for her over a period of years.

Cerevan Shieldmaiden remains a supported demigoddess and has no real ambition to set out on her own as a lesser deity. While she loves acting as a military commander, she hates the thought of handling all the administrative details necessary to build her own church. Some theologians believe that the Lion of Heaven is grooming Cerevan for independence and will eventually persuade her to create her own divine structure. Neither Toshi nor Cerevan chooses to comment on this, however.

Symbols

The stylized broadsword of Toshi is the symbol most commonly associated with Cerevan Shieldmaiden. It appears as embellishment on her platemail and is incorporated into every work of art related to her. When a separate symbol is needed, many Toshite societies use a black Norman-style shield, with or without a red broadsword sigil, to represent the demigoddess.

On certain planes on which Cerevan served as a godling, she has her own set of symbols. First among these is the Norman shield, but unembellished and rendered in green instead of black. Second is a stylized halberd that commemorates a local myth in which Cerevan dispatched a foe with such a weapon. Third and least common is a five-pointed star rendered in green. Nobody alive today knows the origin of this symbol, and arguments rage among sages as to what it may mean.

Sphere of Influence

Cerevan's sphere of influence is mass combat, specifically the combination of strategic and tactical thinking with leadership in order to reach a well-defined and nobly motivated goal.

Research Cost: 85 flux per day. Research Time: 15 years. Backing Cost: 350 base. Total Flux Cost: 465,375.

Cerevan automatically knows the overall morale of any military force or unit she observes, whether allied with or opposed to her. This knowledge will be general rather than complex, something that can be encapsulated in one word or short phrase. Further, she can alter the morale of any military unit within her line of sight by a factor of 15% in either direction.

This sphere includes the following abilities:

Strategic Anticipation: Research Cost: 45 flux per day. Research Time: 1 year. Backing Cost: 50 base. Activation Cost: 25 flux. This ability allows the deity to accurately anticipate the imminent actions of any single military commander. The deity must know the correct, given name of the commander and at least one or two other identifying characteristics. In general, the information provided by this ability will focus on key strategies, not unit-by-unit tactics. For example, this ability might tell the deity that an enemy commander intends to push forward with the infantry-heavy center, fake a retreat when counter-attacked, and then instigate a pincer movement with the cavalry in the wings. There are no range limits on this ability, and it's not blocked by interplanar barriers.

Oversight: Research Cost: 40 flux per day. Research Time: 2 years. Backing Cost: 65 base. Activation Cost: 40 flux. This ability allows the deity to track the location and general condition of all major units under her command. Units can only be tracked so long as they remain cohesive; if the troops scatter over a large area, the deity will receive no further information about them unless the majority of the surviving members of the unit eventually regroup. Information on a unit's condition will be general, something that can be expressed in a single word or phrase. This ability can only focus on one plane at a time.

Break: Research Cost: 40 flux per day. Research Time: 2 years. Backing Cost: 60 base. Activation Cost: 45 flux. This ability allows the deity to cause any unit within line of sight to rout immediately, no matter how high its previous morale. This change in morale is instantaneous but not permanent; the unit can be rallied as normal. The unit need not be opposed to the deity, although this will usually be the case. The members of the unit won't know why they're suddenly routing; they simply feel an overwhelming sense of panic.

Personal Dispatch: Research Cost: 50 flux per day. Research Time: 1 year. Backing Cost: 55 base. Activation Cost: 40 flux. This ability allows the deity to send a short verbal message simultaneously to every member of a single military unit within the deity's line of sight. This allows for an unsurpassed level of coordination, especially in low-technology battles.

Statistics

Advantages

Sphere Abilities

Planes

Cerevan Shieldmaiden controls no planes of her own. Her official residence is on Lionhome with Toshi, although she spends much of her time on far-distant planes, overseeing wars and battles involving Toshite forces or issues.

Combat

Since she became a demigoddess, there have been no substantiated reports of Cerevan Shieldmaiden ever personally entering combat, either alone or at the head of her troops. This isn't from any personal fear or revulsion, however. Cerevan believes that the greatest gift she can give her troops is her strategic and tactical acumen, which requires an objective, uninvolved point of view. No matter how much she tried to keep her mind on the overall battle, if she were to enter combat herself the events happening in her personal vicinity would take on an artificial degree of importance. In such a situation, Cerevan would be just one more warrior, albeit a divinely powerful one; if she remains withdrawn from the battle, however, she believes she can aid her side more efficiently.

Nobody has ever challenged Cerevan directly to single combat—at least no one who has been in any shape to discuss it afterward—so her reaction to such a situation remains unpredictable.

Special Equipment

Cerevan Shieldmaiden's armor, elaborately worked from precious metals, is highly enchanted but with magic rather than primal energy. Consider it among the top 20% of magically protective armor available in your game world.

In addition, she wields the following primal artifact:

Terellia
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 87

Terellia is a slender scepter about as long as Cerevan's forearm, made of a metal alloy with a finish like fine brushed silver. In fact, this metal is much stronger and much lighter than either silver or steel; the entire scepter, which looks as though it should weigh six or seven pounds, weighs no more than one. Its surface is graven with fine scrollwork. Lalabolus, a godling in Toshi's service, made this scepter for Cerevan at Toshi's request, in recognition for her outstanding loyalty and service. Toshi allowed Cerevan to name the item herself, which she did in honor of her mother.

Terellia has the ability to scramble all forms of magical communication within a two-mile radius. When this power is activated, no magical means of communication will function except those instigated by the wielder. Communications backed by primal are entitled to a power rating roll.

The scepter can only be activated by a one-point flux mental link, so mortals cannot use it.

Maros

Godling

Strength	25	Combat	
Health	27	Defense Strength	44
Reaction	45	Unarmed	Legendary 1; 30 (2X)
Intelligence	22	Melee Weapons	
Destiny	26		Legendary 1; by weapon+STR (2X)
Presence	25	Missile Weapons	Legendary 1; by weapon (2X)
Willpower	7	Aptitude	
Size	2 yards	Magical Aptitude	Amateur
Speed	9 yards/second	Mentalic Aptitude	Legendary 2
Primal Base	770		
Primal Flux	84		

In his usual form, Maros resembles a tall, slender human male, although subtle differences in his musculature point out that he's not strictly human. His limbs are slim, without much muscle mass, although he has the same combination of strength, agility, and speed found in Olympic-class gymnasts and fencers. On his body he wears nothing but a blood-red loincloth. His face is concealed by a full-face helmet of polished, black-enameled metal. It's elaborately worked into the shape of a stylized eagle's head, complete with long, sharp beak. Maros always carries a short spear with a broad head of highly unusual shape.

Maros emanates an aura of edginess, of pent-up energy. Even when he's totally motionless, the godling appears ready to move with blinding speed. When he does move, his motions are quick, almost jerky. Mortals in the presence of the godling find themselves preternaturally alert, aware of everything impinging on their senses. While some people report this makes them feel slightly paranoid and on edge, most claim that they feel more in command of their own faculties when in this state.

Maros never speaks, preferring to use his extensive mentalic abilities to communicate telepathically. His telepathic "voice" is usually brusque, often to the point of rudeness, and he uses no unnecessary words.

Personality

Maros is by far the most impulsive of Toshi Yamatetsu's subordinates, and quite possibly the most dynamic as well. Maros is the most outspoken supporter of Toshi and his interests throughout the divine realms, yet also the first to hinder those interests by acting without sufficient forethought. He considers himself the best candidate for advancement among Toshi's subordinates, but is the one who least merits that advancement due to his impulsive behavior. In many ways, his personality is similar to that of some teenagers.

This wasn't always the case, however. The less attractive facets of Maros's personality have only begun to manifest since his elevation to godling. In fact, Toshi and others are coming to the conclusion that the power has gone to Maros's head.

It's important to point out that Maros's intentions are all in the right place. There's no malice in his soul, and anyone who tried to convince him to betray his patron's trust in even the smallest way would have a major fight to contend with. Maros simply lets his desire to do great things for Toshism get in the way of his better judgment.



Primal Attributes

Primal Base	770
Typical Primal Flux	84
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	0
Servitors	0

Primal Base Calculations

No Solely Controlled Planes	0
Rank Bonuses Through Godling	100
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Base Grants	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	0
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	0
Evolutionary Gains	670
Total Primal Base	770

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (770 / 10)	77
Consecrated Ground (0 x 2)	0
Sanctuaries (0 x 5)	0
Temples (0 x 10)	0
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (3 x 1)	3
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (2 x 2)	4
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshippers by Plane	0
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
Total Primal Flux	84

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.

Maros is considerably more capricious when dealing with mortals than others in this divine structure. Mortals who don't treat him and his patron with the respect he thinks warranted will be snuffed out of existence without a second thought.

History

Maros was born a member of a humanoid but nonhuman race. His birth family was part of a small Toshite society, tolerated but shunned by its neighbors. Most people of Maros's race followed a philosophy of peace, one whose insistence on nonviolence was absolute—even above survival, if it came to that.

Unfortunately for Maros's race, it did come to that. Their world was invaded by rapacious creatures from a distant world in the same metaplane. Most of Maros's race wouldn't set aside the precepts of their peaceable philosophy even to defend themselves, and fell by the millions before the rampaging invaders. Maros and the other Toshites, however, did fight back. Although outnumbered thousands to one, they inflicted serious damage on the invaders, using guerrilla tactics to strike at underprotected targets and then melt back into the surrounding countryside to avoid counterattack.

During this doomed campaign, Maros proved himself a leader of incredible cunning and fortitude, again and again rallying his outnumbered forces to continue the fray. Throughout, he repeatedly reminded his followers that they weren't fighting only to protect their land, but also to further the glory of Toshi, in whose name the young leader dedicated all his victories.

For several years, Maros continued his hit-and-run campaign against the invaders, keeping his troops going with weapons and supplies stolen from their opponents. Eventually, however, mounting losses put an end to the effectiveness of his force. As a final gesture, the young Maros decided to sacrifice his own life in a suicide mission to assassinate the leader of the invading forces. Although he knew he had no real chance of success, he chose this route over having to live with his defeat.

The inevitable happened. Maros penetrated several layers of security surrounding the invading commander before being detected. He slew many of those who would capture him, but was herded into a dead end from which there was no escape. With defiance, Maros awaited his imminent death.

Throughout the campaign, the demigod Marcrast Bloodbearer had been watching Maros with interest and growing respect. Now he stepped in unilaterally, without Toshi Yamatetsu's expressed approval, and whisked Maros from the midst of the swordsmen about to cut him down. So impressed was Marcrast with the way Maros handled himself that he petitioned Toshi to make the young man a minion. More as a favor to Marcrast than anything else, Toshi did so. The new minion served Toshi in several capacities, eventually earning elevation to godling.

During this period, Toshi Yamatetsu realized that he needed a demigod to handle issues of logistical command and control. Although Cerevan's mass combat sphere of influence touched on this area, the deity felt he should have another demigod fully dedicated to the matter. Based on Maros's experience as leader of his guerrilla force, Toshi thought his new godling might be a good candidate. Accordingly, he ordered Maros to research logistics as his sphere of influence.

This happened almost a decade ago. At first, Maros dedicated himself to his deity's orders with a will. But slowly he came to realize his personal

interests lay in other areas. Although he had of necessity become an expert at commandeering and distributing limited supplies where they could do the most good, he considered logistics an insufficiently glorious and important field of study. He petitioned Toshi for permission to study a different sphere of influence—something closer to his own interests, like guerrilla warfare or even military assassination—but the senior deity refused his request. Maros returned to his assigned studies, but with considerably less enthusiasm than Toshi considers appropriate.

At the moment, Toshi is coming to admit that he may have made a mistake elevating Maros to godling. Although Maros is still totally devoted to the precepts of Toshism, the Lion of Heaven is starting to doubt the new godling has what it takes to cut it in the higher divine ranks. Toshi is scrupulously fair, however, and is willing to give Maros more time to mature and prove himself. Maybe the godling will demonstrate unnoticed gifts or decide to devote his full efforts to his assigned tasks. In the interim, however, Toshi is watching the new godling closely through Soulpiercer, the spear he gave his subordinate. Although he doesn't know it, Maros is on "show cause;" if he doesn't clean up his act soon, his patron will cast him out to sink or swim on his own.

Symbols

On some planes, the stylized broadsword sigil of Toshi is associated with the godling Maros as well. In most Toshite societies, however, Maros has his own symbol: a stylized representation of the head of his spear. This sigil is usually rendered in brilliant scarlet or pitch black.

Planes

Maros currently controls no planes. Some years ago he cast interested eyes on a miniplane that was currently uncontrolled, but Toshi quickly persuaded him to keep his mind on other things. His official residence is on Lionhome, although he's frequently found on Toshi's other planes and elsewhere throughout the multiverse on official duties.

Combat

Maros is the easiest of Toshi's subordinates to goad into combat. Unfortunately for any mortal who earns his ire, the godling is a more lethal warrior than many demigods.

Maros prefers direct action to guile, but unlike his patron he isn't above using cunning tricks to aid a higher cause. He always tries to choose the time and place of a conflict so both benefit him the most. If he can get away with it, he'll use the hit-and-run guerrilla-style tactics he learned as a mortal.

Unless it's wildly inappropriate, he'll use his spear in any combat. Not only is it a powerful weapon in its own right, but the fact that it was granted to him by his deity constantly bolsters his morale. He's unaware, of course, that the weapon allows Toshi to monitor his every action (see below).

Special Equipment

Soulpiercer is a short spear, suitable for throwing and thrusting. It has a broad head similar to that of a Zulu *assegai* and worked into a complex shape. The weapon looks as though it should weigh a couple of pounds; when wielded, however, it's almost weightless.

Soulpiercer will penetrate any physical shield or armor, and will always inflict maximum damage on a successful hit. If thrown, it will always hit its target, regardless of range, as long as that target is in sight of the thrower. It will also return to the thrower's hand automatically. To thrust it successfully, the user must make a normal attack roll. Further, if the victim fails a resistance roll, his soul is "pierced" by the weapon; for the duration of the combat, his highest possible morale will remain just above outright rout. If Soulpiercer strikes a victim twice, she will immediately and automatically rout.

The spear was forged by Lalabolus, now a godling in Toshi's service, when she was still a mortal weaponsmith. Toshi then enchanted it himself, imbuing it with two powers in addition to those described above: Toshi is always instinctively aware of where the weapon is, who's wielding it, and roughly what's going on in the immediate vicinity, and he can summon Soulpiercer to his hand at any time. Toshi bestowed the spear upon Maros when he first started having doubts about the godling's fitness. Presumably, if or when Toshi dismisses Maros he'll repossess the spear, perhaps bestowing it on another godling.

Soulpiercer
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 70

Lalabolus

Godling

Strength	40	<i>Combat</i>	
Health	33	Defense Strength	21
Reaction	22	Unarmed	Master; 20 (1x)
Intelligence	27	Melee Weapons	Veteran; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	36	Missile Weapons	Veteran; by weapon (1x)
Presence	18	<i>Aptitude</i>	
Willpower	26	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 1
Size	2.75 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	4 yards/second		
Primal Base	350		
Primal Flux	104		

Lalabolus, called Weaponmaster, appears as a humanoid but definitely non-human female. She's abnormally tall and slender, standing slightly over seven feet, with disproportionately long arms. Her hands are slender but inordinately strong; each hand has six overly long fingers. Her shoulders and arms are surprisingly muscular compared to the rest of her body, but as with Maros the musculature is subtly wrong, clearly marking her as inhuman.

The Weaponmaster's face almost always reflects an intense concentration. Her pure white hair is waist-length down her back, yet short enough on the top to keep well out of her dark eyes. The only jewelry or ornamentation she wears is a simple ring of cold gray iron in her left ear. She wears a simple blacksmith's apron of leather over a loose, comfortable white cotton shift.

Lalabolus is thoughtful in all things, even if this slows her down. Sometimes she might achieve a goal faster if she just acted without thinking out all the permutations beforehand, but that simply wouldn't be her way. She keeps her immense strength under total control at all times, moving precisely but effortlessly.

The godling rarely speaks, but when she does what she says is always worth hearing. She is fluent or at least competent in many languages; in fact, no one has ever addressed her in any language in which she couldn't carry on at least a halting conversation. Her voice is deep and rough, so deep that some who have heard it without seeing her have mistaken her for a man, and seems to echo from the inside of a massive cavern.

Personality

Lalabolus's personality is as carefully considered as her movements would imply. She's not slow-witted—far from it—but is often slow to make decisions because she wants to think through all possible courses of action before committing to one. She understands that this is her way and not a law of nature that everyone should follow; she also understands that her manner will probably irritate the less patient, but doesn't let it worry her.

She has a strong and sophisticated sense of humor, although few realize it. Her own jokes and wordplays are very complicated—baroque, multilevel things that are almost impossible to fully understand on first hearing. When she hears a jest told by another, she sometimes doesn't laugh for long minutes while she examines it for multiple layers of whimsy. Frequently she finds such secondary levels of humor, even if the joker didn't intend them. This gets on the nerves of many would-be jokers.

Primal Attributes

Primal Base	850
Typical Primal Flux	104
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	0
Servitors	0

Primal Base Calculations

No Solely Controlled Planes	0
Rank Bonuses Through Godling	100
Creation of Artifacts (see below)	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	0
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	0
Evolutionary Gains	750
Total Primal Base	850

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (850 / 10)	85
Consecrated Ground (3 x 2)	6
Sanctuaries (0 x 5)	0
Temples (0 x 10)	0
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (0 x 1)	0
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (0 x 2)	0
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshippers by Plane (1,000; taking the square root)	10
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
Total Primal Flux	104

Though Lalabolus has created many artifacts, the primal base used to power them was invested by Toshi. Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



Lalabolus is a master artisan. She recognizes her own mastery, but is also quick to praise what mastery she finds in the work of others. Although she is predominately a weaponsmith, she has immense skill in other artistic disciplines as well; she can succeed at virtually anything that relies on hand-eye coordination and strong creative visualization skills.

The godling has no personal ambition whatsoever with regard to divine rank. She enjoys making weapons, not building churches. Toshi Yamatetsu, on the other hand, has big plans for his newest godling. He seems to envision her as a patron deity of weaponsmiths, with a divine structure in her own right. Already many weaponsmiths throughout the multiverse are beginning to revere her, so this shouldn't require much promotion.

Lalabolus gets on well with all of Toshi's subordinates except for Maros. The two godlings have diametrically opposed styles and personalities; when they're together, their differences in outlook are blatantly obvious. Some commentators have even suggested that Toshi's dissatisfaction with Maros came to a head only after he ascended Lalabolus.

History

Lalabolus was born as a mortal of a race not strictly human. At an early age, she decided to follow in the footsteps of her mother, an artisan with a planewide reputation as a weaponsmith, blacksmith, and whitesmith. It soon became apparent to everyone involved that Lalabolus was a natural, with more innate talent for the craft than her mother. The mother, of course, had more hands-on experience, but the daughter quickly closed the gap. By the age of thirteen, Lalabolus had outstripped her mother and mentor.

Proud of her daughter's exceptional skill, Lalabolus's mother searched throughout the land for another, more highly skilled mentor who could help her daughter achieve her true potential. She eventually found such a smith on a distant island, and paid both the huge cost of travel and the excessive apprentice fee the master smith required. As soon as he'd actually seen Lalabolus's competence as a smith, however, her new teacher returned the apprentice fee to the young woman's mother and trained her at his own expense.

At this time, Lalabolus had received no exposure to the art of magic. It was her new master who realized she would only reach her full potential if she could apply magical talent to the weapons and other artifacts she forged. Although the details of the arrangement are vague, all versions of the legend agree that Lalabolus's new master located an interplanar visitor who agreed to train her in the magical arts.

Lalabolus took to the arts of both smith and mage as though she'd been born to them. By the time she was nineteen, she had forged and enchanted several magical items almost powerful enough to be considered artifacts.

At this point Toshi Yamatetsu started to take an interest in the young woman's career. The lesser deity had long recognized that he needed a member of his divine structure who could forge powerful magical weapons and armor, and had spent much time scouring the multiverse for someone who would meet his needs. So perfectly did Lalabolus meet his requirements that the deity ascended her directly to the status of godling.

It's been less than a decade since Lalabolus's ascension. Under Toshi's direct instructions, she is happily researching weaponsmithing as her sphere of influence and is well on the way to making it hers. So far, only weaponsmiths who are already Toshites revere her, but this is quite likely to change in the near

future as she attracts her own worshipers. Toshi Yamatetsu isn't threatened by the fact that his godling might attract a following of her own. In fact, he welcomes it, for it fits nicely into his plan to "fast-track" her toward becoming a lesser deity in her own right, assuming he continues to be pleased with her progress. Toshi also realizes he'll probably gain new followers himself as weaponsmiths begin to worship Lalabolus and extend their reverence to her patron.

Symbols

Originally, Lalabolus was associated only with the stylized broadsword sigil of her patron. Almost immediately, however, various Toshite societies on different planes began creating symbols specific to the godling, all items related to her weaponsmith's art. The most common symbol, however, is an incomplete circle with a small gap at the top, representing the iron ring the godling wears in her left ear. This broken-ring symbol is starting to proliferate throughout the planes.

Planes

Lalabolus has a large, well-equipped smithy on Toshi's home plane of Lionhome. Occasionally she travels to other planes at the behest of her patron, but she spends most of her time happily working away on new and ever more powerful weapons and artifacts.

Combat

It's almost impossible to anger Lalabolus or goad her into hasty action. She's thoughtful enough to figure innovative ways out of most confrontations, and powerful enough magically that toe-to-toe combat is seldom necessary. If personal combat were unavoidable, the godling would certainly pull out some weapon she had recently finished, possibly a hideously powerful artifact, and use that.

Special Equipment

As a creator of magical weapons, many considered artifact-class, Lalabolus would logically have access to just about any item you see fit. In addition to any such miscellaneous items, Lalabolus possess the following:

The Orb of the Ages is a simple black sphere about the size of a clenched fist, encircled by a slender band of woven silver wires. The sphere itself seems to be made of obsidian or some similar glasslike substance.

The orb has only a single power, but it's a very potent one. At the bearer's will, the orb attempts to dominate any sentient magical item, artifact or no, within 100 feet. This attempt is resolved with a power rating roll. If the orb succeeds, its bearer can totally control all powers of the dominated item. Once established, this domination lasts as long as the orb and the dominated item are on the same plane.

Orb of the Ages
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 87

Hammer of Lalabolus
Planar Artifact
Power Rating: 73

The orb can dominate up to three items at a time. If the orb's bearer wants to dominate a fourth item, she must release one of the others.

The Orb of the Ages cannot command another item to self-destruct.

To all nonmagical senses, this artifact seems a simple blacksmith's hammer with a wooden handle and an iron head. Lalabolus created it to increase the speed with which she can make swords and suits of armor. Any skilled weaponsmith using this hammer can reduce the forging and artificing time for any metal weapon, shield, or piece of armor by 25%.

In addition, Lalabolus can use the item as a weapon, inflicting damage of rank 55 with a successful blow. The hammer is intelligent and will attack any mortal who tries to touch it.

Rath

Minion

Strength	27	Combat	
Health	25	Defense Strength	30
Reaction	49	Unarmed	Master; 25 (5x)
Intelligence	20	Melee Weapons	
Destiny	23		Legendary 1; by weapon+STR (6x)
Presence	21	Missile Weapons	Master; by weapon (3x)
Willpower	18	Aptitude	
Size	3 yards	Magical Aptitude	n/a
Speed	25 yards/second	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a

Rath has the body of a large human male and the head of a crocodilelike reptile. He has a long snout filled with wicked-looking teeth. His eyes are small, well protected by ridges of bone, yet undeniably intelligent. His body is heavily muscled, looking incredibly powerful. He wears leather breeches and two crossed swordbelts but disdains the use of armor on his chest and arms. On the left side of his bare chest is a tattooed representation of the stylized broadsword sigil of Toshi. The minion usually wields a bastard sword in each hand.

The combination of human and inhuman elements in Rath's appearance, particularly coupled with the obvious intelligence in his eyes, makes the minion a sight to inspire fear in the doughtiest of foes. This is only increased by the controlled way he moves, hinting at vast physical power kept barely in check. When need arises he moves nearly so fast as to become a blur, turning his two swords into an almost impenetrable screen of steel.

Rath can understand all of the languages used by Toshite worshipers on all the planes where they can be found. His anatomy makes it impossible for him to speak human languages, however. He can speak only the language of his own race, a harsh tongue composed of coughs, hisses, and belches. If he anticipates having to speak to others not of his race, he carries a nonprimal magic amulet that translates his language into something understandable by his audience.

Personality

The key element of Rath's personality is unbounded curiosity; he wants to know everything about everything. This makes him slower than other subordinates of Toshi to kill foes of the faith, since he prefers to learn all he can about people and things before destroying them. If necessary, he will destroy a foe of Toshism without investigating it first, but he'll probably feel disappointed about it afterward.

Rath is totally dedicated to the precepts of Toshism and will do whatever it takes to protect the faithful. If he knows someone or something is a threat to the faith, he'll be totally unshakable in tracking it down and eradicating it.

History

Rath was born on a mysterious plane so far removed from the “known” planes that no sage has ever been able to locate it. Using an ability innate to his race, Rath traveled the planes as an explorer, apparently with no goal beyond satisfying his boundless curiosity. He first encountered humans on a plane where Toshism was the dominant faith, and soon became fascinated and inspired by the precepts of the religion. From that point forward, he continued his travels but limited his destinations to Toshite settlements. He provided whatever help he could to the Toshites he met, sometimes aiding them in combat against oppressors or invaders. His fame spread throughout the planes, and Toshites virtually everywhere came to know his name and revere him as one of the most steadfast proponents of Toshism.

It wasn't long before Toshi himself became aware of Rath and the help he had provided to many of the faithful. The deity had already decided that he needed a minion, someone he could send to different planes as a troubleshooter in response to prayers from the faithful. Considering his widespread notoriety and the reverence in which Toshites already held him, Rath seemed a perfect candidate for the role.

The deity spoke directly with the mortal, offering him the status of minion and the ability to regenerate damage (see *Combat*, p. 47). Rath thought long and hard, balancing off in his mind the advantages of new abilities with the loss of his independence. Eventually, however, he decided that serving Toshi was as important to him as the freedom to satisfy his curiosity, so he accepted.

As a minion, Rath does largely what he did before; he travels to Toshite communities on different planes, keeping an eye on things and providing whatever help is required. Toshi Yamatetsu will sometimes dispatch his minion to specific locations in dire need, but this doesn't happen often.

Rath maintains his ability to travel between planes once per day. This power is innate and so does not require Toshi to support it with primal.

Symbols

Rath has no symbols of his own, but is associated with the broadsword sigil of his patron Toshi.

Planes

Rath has no official residence, spending most of his time traveling the planes.

Combat

In battle, Rath wields one artifact bastard sword in each hand with no penalty. He has no magical or mental abilities and so is frequently limited to toe-to-toe personal combat.

Rath regenerates normal and magical damage inflicted upon him. At the end of each round, he heals damage equal to a wound of damage rank 20. He cannot regenerate damage inflicted by primal or primally reinforced attacks, however.

Special Equipment

These twin bastard swords are a mighty team in the hands of a skilled wielder. They are immune to the effects of magic and therefore penetrate all nonprimal magical shields and barriers. The swords are identical, and only Rath and Lalabolus can tell them apart.

Brodok, the Aggressor. Brodok was created as an implement of destruction. The wielder of this sword becomes 40% more likely to hit his target, and Brodok inflicts damage of rank 30 on a successful hit.

Crydos, the Shielder. Crydos is the defensive half of the team. The wielder is automatically able to parry with Crydos as many times per exchange as he can attack with Brodok. A successful parry blocks one attack completely. Against weapons that always hit their target or otherwise avoid parries, a power rating roll is required.

**The Bastards of
Neutralization
Relics,
Power Rating: 79**



Nex

Servitor

Strength	20	Combat	
Health	26	Defense Strength	31
Reaction	56	Unarmed	Veteran; 20 (10x)
Intelligence	21	Melee Weapons	Master; by weapon+STR (10x)
Destiny	20	Missile Weapons	n/a
Presence	40	Aptitude	
Willpower	18	Magical Aptitude	n/a
Size	3.25 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	Amateur
Speed	3.5 yards/second		
Primal Base	60		
Primal Flux	6		

Nex (“violent death” in Latin) is an amorphous mass of reddish black, curdled-looking liquid hovering a few feet off the ground. The creature’s central body is perhaps ten feet in diameter, with a dozen or more pseudopods extruded from this central mass. It can wield a melee weapon in each of up to ten of these pseudopods; it might extrude more under certain circumstances, but it can’t simultaneously coordinate more than ten in combat. The servitor has no obvious sensory organs. It is totally silent; in fact, it’s incapable of making sound. If it must communicate with anyone or anything it does so mentalically.

Nex hovers slowly above the ground and is incapable of achieving an altitude of greater than fifteen feet. It can hover just as effectively over liquid as it can over solid ground. Although it covers distance slowly, its pseudopods are blindingly fast.

Nex’s nature and its slow, churning appearance are capable of striking fear into the heart of virtually any observer. The servitor exudes a strong odor of vinegar mixed with sulfur; while definitely disgusting, this smell isn’t strong enough to cause physical effects like nausea.

Personality

As a servitor, Nex has virtually nothing in the way of personality. It’s effectively a mindless tool—intelligent enough to understand and discharge its master’s orders, but incapable of any initiative or innovation of its own. Subtlety is totally beyond its ken.

The servitor will unswervingly follow the orders of every divine subordinate of Toshi except for Maros. Nex feels no antipathy toward the godling—in fact, the servitor seems to have no emotions whatsoever—but has been ordered by Toshi to ignore any orders issued by Maros. Since Maros feels uncomfortable in Nex’s presence, it’s not likely that the godling has ever tried issuing the servitor any orders.

History

No sages know on what plane Toshi managed to find a mortal soul willing to become Nex. Whatever its origin, Nex has been in the deity's service for only a few years. During that time, the servitor has served largely as an enforcer, a kind of blunt object used to dissuade enemies of the church from making trouble for the faithful. When he thinks the creature's appearance might be to his advantage in negotiations, Toshi may use Nex as a bodyguard.

Symbols

There is no symbol associated specifically with Nex.

Planes

When not on a specific mission, Nex can usually be found on Arena. Occasionally the servitor acts as bodyguard to Toshi on Lionhome.

Combat

Nex is a killing machine, capable of very little else. It is proficient with any and all melee weapons but is totally incapable of using missile weapons of any form; it can't even throw a knife accurately, although it can thrust, cut, and parry like a master. The servitor has no facing side, so it can attack and defend equally well from any direction and has no blind spots. It can target up to ten opponents simultaneously or concentrate all ten attacks against a single human-sized foe. It can extend pseudopods out to a range of ten feet.

Although it has no obvious sensory organs, Nex has normal human daylight vision no matter what the lighting conditions. Its senses of touch, smell, and hearing are many times more sensitive than those of humans. Further, it can detect the slight changes in air pressure caused by moving objects, allowing it to sense the presence and location of invisible creatures and objects that are in motion.

Bludgeoning weapons do half normal damage against Nex; piercing and cutting weapons inflict normal damage. Nex suffers half damage from heat- and cold-based attack forms but sustains double damage from electricity-based attacks. At the end of each round, the servitor heals damage equal to a wound of damage rank 15. If Nex is killed, its body will explode, detonating all its primal base.

Special Equipment

Nex has no special equipment.

Gorn Ironfist

Champion

Strength	40	Combat	
Health	23	Defense Strength	26
Reaction	32	Unarmed	Master; 15 (2x)
Intelligence	19	Melee Weapons	Master; by weapon+STR (2x)
Destiny	22	Missile Weapons	Master; by weapon (1x)
Presence	20	Aptitude	
Willpower	19	Magical Aptitude	n/a
Size	3 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	6.5 yards/second		

Gorn Ironfist is a huge human male, muscular yet not musclebound, combining crushing strength with the flexibility, dexterity, and speed of a gymnast. He stands almost seven feet tall. His skin is jet black, his hair close-cropped and tightly curled. His face is broad, but his nose is aquiline.

Gorn wears a red-trimmed black hauberk under which can be seen supple and finely wrought chainmail. On the chest of his hauberk is a large red stylized sword sigil. His long gauntlets are black with silver knuckle-studs. He typically wields a flail, his characteristic weapon.

Toshi's primary mortal champion, Gorn moves lithely like a huge jungle cat, with a grace that belies his size. He's always watchful, seemingly aware of everything going on around him. He's clearly a mortal; though he's still impressive, this fact sets him apart from most of the other individuals described in this book.

Gorn Ironfist has a deep, melodious voice. Although he can bellow loudly enough to cause pain, he prefers to keep his voice to little more than a whisper since this forces people to pay closer attention to him. He speaks the language of his native land fluently. He can struggle along in two or three other languages from the same plane, but that's it.

Personality

Gorn Ironfist is a dedicated, almost fanatical follower of Toshism. He believes wholeheartedly in all the precepts of this faith and will do whatever it takes, even sacrifice his life, to protect or further those precepts.

His task, to travel the length and breadth of his plane spreading the word of Toshi, is a hard one. Many of the people he meets have no interest in his teachings; all too many are actively opposed to his talk about individual freedom and would like to see him silenced. Sometimes the burden seems so great that he wonders how he'll ever see it through. Setting down the burden isn't an option, however; he's been chosen by his deity to discharge this duty, and he refuses to let himself weaken or fail.

Gorn has a strong appreciation of beauty in all its forms. He feels a deep personal joy when others recognize the truth of Toshite precepts. He has a strong sense of humor, but it has bounds; there are certain topics, such as religion and personal freedom, that are *not* laughing matters. The champion has a strong sense of personal honor; while he worships Toshi, he personally attempts to emulate the example of Marcrast Bloodbearer.

History

Gorn's personal history isn't far different from that of Toshi's other subordinates. Raised in a society in which Toshism was the dominant religion, Gorn Ironfist decided at an early age that his destiny was linked with that of his god and his church. The young man considered himself destined for the priesthood and eventual membership in the hierarchy of the Sword. The night before his sacrament of Consent, however, Toshi appeared to him in a dream and told him his destiny lay outside the organized priesthood.

Understandably, Gorn changed his plans. He traveled from his home country to another Toshite nation with a unit of Shieldbearers. The young man underwent induction into this august body of holy warriors and benefitted from their training and comradeship. He fought in several campaigns and garnered much honor for himself and his colleagues.

At the height of his career as a Shieldbearer, Gorn experienced another strange dream. In this one, the demigod Marcrast Bloodbearer instructed him to leave his unit and travel across the plane spreading the tenets of Toshism. While Gorn accepted this new duty without question, his reassignment could have caused problems with his superiors, particularly since the Shieldbearers do not allow resignations. As it turned out, however, Marcrast had handled this problem as well; Gorn's commanding officer had experienced a similar dream and allowed the warrior to leave the force without hindrance.

Today Gorn Ironfist is a solitary, itinerant champion of Toshism. Like a knight errant, he travels the world seeking injustice and those who act against the precepts of the Toshite faith. He then either eliminates these problems or teaches the perpetrators the error of their ways. Although he's not egotistical enough to seriously consider the possibility, Gorn is actually being groomed to become a minion and eventually a godling.

Symbols

Gorn uses the stylized sword sigil of Toshi. As a mortal champion, he doesn't have a religious symbol of his own.

Planes

Gorn has never traveled from the main plane on which he was born.



Combat

Gorn is a master at personal combat but also has an inborn knack for commanding larger forces. His tactical and strategic senses are exceptional for a mortal. Although Gorn's favorite weapon is a flail, he's highly skilled with all personal melee and missile weapons.

Special Equipment

Gorn has no primally powered special equipment. His flail and chainmail armor are both magically enchanted; consider them slightly above average for enchanted items available in your game world. His gauntlets are also magically enchanted, with a power rating of 54. For a period of one hour each day, they will double his already considerable strength.

Death

Introduction

Virtually every mythic structure in human history has at least one deity of death or the dead. Netheron Soulbearer is one of the newest; as a lesser deity for less than a millennium, she has held significant influence in the realm of the gods for only a handful of centuries.

In many religious structures death is seen as evil, as the end of happiness, light, friendship, togetherness, and life itself. Death sunders individuals from one another, thwarts dreams and ambitions, tears families apart, and fragments the ties of friendship, duty, and oath. Death is the thief of life, the destroyer, the warrior who eventually slays even the mightiest. As John Donne said in his *Devotions*, "Any man's death diminishes me." How, then, can death not be evil?

The worshipers of Netheron Soulbearer see things quite differently. For them, death is a part of nature and reality, a stage in the Great Cycle, a necessary ending to the Grand Play that is life. "Is nightfall evil because it quenches the light of day?" they would ask. Those who revere Netheron Soulbearer would agree with Edmund Spenser's words in *The Faerie Queen*: "Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas, Ease after war, death after life, does greatly please."

Netheronites don't see worship of a death deity as morbid or depressing. The attitude that death is morbid can come, they believe, only from denying death, hoping that death can somehow be avoided. Netheronites believe that only an incredibly immature culture can fail to accept that death is as much part of life as birth, and worthy of as much reverence.

Netheronites also believe that very few deaths are truly untimely. According to Netheronite teachings, the time at which an individual must die is decided upon by a council of deities known as the Weavers. Netheron Soulbearer is a relatively junior member of this council; she, through her subordinate T'sele, brings death to those whose time has come. Thus when a village wisewoman dies of old age, it's because the Weavers decreed that her natural span would end at that moment. When a warrior is slain in the heat of battle or a mountaineer killed in a fall, it's because the Weavers decided it would be so. When a babe dies in the cradle, it's because the Weavers decreed that its soul would enjoy only the briefest taste of mortal life.

According to the Netheronites, the only way a death could actually be untimely is if another deity or divine-level creature were to slay someone before the proper instant decreed by the Weavers. The Weavers don't take kindly to such behavior, frequently going to great lengths to chastise this kind of infringement. Even greater punishment is reserved for those who would prevent a death from taking place at the appointed time.

This doesn't mean that the Netheronites don't sometimes consider death a tragedy, of course. They recognize that the sadness associated with death is

Religious Philosophy

natural for all intelligent races. But this sadness is a personal thing, a sense of loss, not an excuse to rail against the "unfairness" of death or accuse death of cruelty.

Netheronites also accept death more easily than other religious groups because they share a belief in reincarnation. Those who live their lives well and faithfully may find themselves reborn, with a second opportunity to enjoy life. Most Netheronites don't stress this belief, however. True Netheronites don't worship the Soulbearer as a way of gaining themselves another life; if they are reborn it will be wonderful, but if not they'll still be able to spend eternity on Netheron's plane with their goddess. Some new worshipers are drawn to Netheronism by the concept of guaranteed reincarnation, but quickly learn that true Netheronism makes no such promises. While some leave the fold in disillusion, many others find themselves attracted to the real precepts of the faith and stay on as true believers.

The church of Netheron Soulbearer doesn't spread its gospel by force. Netheronites find solace and comfort in their view of death and are glad to share that solace with others. If they see unbelievers traumatized by the death of a loved one or by fear of death, Netheronites will try to gently, sensitively counsel them into accepting death as a part of the Great Cycle. But if such people aren't ready to accept this truth, so be it; Netheronites don't believe in cajoling or browbeating others into agreement.

Not even Netheronite priests will argue the faith's blessings with unbelievers. But priests of Netheron Soulbearer are extensively trained in what we would call grief counseling. While helping unbelievers accept the necessity of death, they'll gently try to sway them into accepting the other teachings of Netheron as well. Because they make most of their conversion attempts when the subjects are emotionally vulnerable, and because they are incredibly perceptive and sensitive individuals, the priests of Netheron Soulbearer have an admirable success rate.

The precepts of the Netheronite religion revolve mainly around death and thus have little to say on matters of day-to-day life and survival except as they relate to death. Willful, unnecessary killing of any living creature is anathema to Netheronites; they consider murder one of the greatest crimes anyone can commit. This isn't because murder ends a life, since Netheronites believe that a murder attempt cannot succeed unless it was the victim's time. Instead, the crime is in the murderer's pride, in the usurpation of a right that lies only with Netheron Soulbearer and her subordinate deities. Even suicide is unacceptable to a true follower of Netheron, since taking your own life is viewed as taking on yourself the prerogative of the deity.

Killing in self-defense is totally acceptable, however, as is killing to provide the necessities of life. To a Netheronite, killing is only sin if there is a viable alternative the perpetrator chooses not to follow. Otherwise, a killer is simply forced by circumstances to act as a tool of the Weavers, and of Netheron.

Because of the faith's relatively minor impact on everyday life, there's little conflict between Netheronites and the governments of the various nations in which the religion can be found. The only time some friction arises is if the government kills its citizens or others with no valid reason, such as in a genocidal war. The church of Netheron Soulbearer has no quarrel with capital punishment, so long as the "universal" precepts of justice are upheld. During wartime, the priests of Netheron are kept busy counseling the families of the slain and those suffering from crises of faith about going into battle.

Netheronism attaches no importance to material wealth. Netheronite temples are functional, but generally very plain. The ceremonies involve no expensive regalia, and the church has no treasure house. All monies it receives are

put into maintaining the existing structures and expanding into other nations and planes.

The Netheronite church has only one punishment for those who fail to live up to the religion's precepts: shunning. An individual priest of Netheron can dictate that a lay worshiper be shunned for any period of time. For minor infractions, such as failing to give comfort to another who is suffering a loss, the period of shunning can be a few days or weeks. For major infractions, such as murder or attempted murder, shunning can last for life, or until the individual has suitably atoned for the crime. Priests themselves can be shunned, but such punishment requires the unanimous judgment of a council of at least three higher-ranking priests. Netheron Soulbearer or any of her godlings, minions, or servitors can unilaterally decree that any worshiper be shunned for any period of time. One who is permanently shunned by a divine member of the order can only be accepted back into the body of the church if the same divine being or one higher in the structure personally rescinds the punishment.

While shunned, an individual can receive none of the church's sacraments. No one within the religion can speak with the shunned individual, eat with him, do business with him, acknowledge him, or even meet his gaze eye-to-eye. His name cannot be spoken aloud by either lay worshipers or ordained priests. The shunned individual ceases to exist, as far as the faithful are concerned. Someone who is officially shunned can attend ceremonies if he so wishes, but can't participate directly. Few who have been shunned do so, however, since seeing the ceremonies taking place and not being able to participate in the sacraments is generally too painful. Most people who have been permanently shunned and can't find it in their hearts to atone leave the society and move elsewhere.

It's important to note that a shunned individual does not have to wear any symbol of her disgrace. Within her own community, everyone will know that she has been shunned, so there is no need. If Netheronites from another community come into town and try to interact with the shunned individual, it is her responsibility to explain to them that they must not speak to her. If the individual moves to another community while shunned, she must do the same thing.

To people outside the faith, this frequently seems totally ridiculous. It's difficult for outsiders to understand why any shunned Netheronite wouldn't simply avoid telling anyone of his punishment. The only thing that prevents this kind of behavior is the shunned individual's knowledge that doing so is a major sin, and that if he should die in this state his soul will never travel to Netheron's home plane. After all, Netheron herself will always know the truth. Faithful Netheronites need no further impetus to keep them on the righteous path.

A shunned lay individual can approach any priest of Netheron and ask for the right to atone for her crime. The priest isn't obligated to accede to the request, and won't do so unless convinced the sinner is sincere in her repentance. The details of the various atonement ceremonies are described in the section on sacraments.

A priest who has been shunned can plead repentance only before a senior member of the church hierarchy. Such a superior will be even more stringent when deciding whether or not to grant atonement. The degree of repentance required depends on the magnitude of the original crime, of course.

If a shunned individual dies without atoning for a crime, the Netheronite priests must decide whether or not to perform the death sacraments. Only in the unlikely case of total unrepentance will these sacraments be withheld. In the vast majority of cases, the priests decide that only Netheron Soulbearer has

the right to decide the ultimate fate of the transgressor's soul. Better to send it on its way properly and let the deity inflict a suitable punishment than to deny Netheron the opportunity to forgive.

The Netheronite church will allow anyone to join, so long as the applicant sincerely desires to follow the precepts of the Goddess of Death. Concurrent membership in another church is no barrier. The Netheronites don't see their religion as competing with any other faith; believers are free to join other churches and worship other deities as they see fit, as long as they still follow the precepts of Netheronism. People who actively oppose Netheron are viewed by the faithful as deluded and benighted, worthy more of pity than hatred. The church has never called a jihad against any other faith and will never do so. If attacked, Netheronites will fight to protect their way of life and their right to believe what they wish, but the campaign will never become anything but defensive.

This enlightened attitude isn't particularly common in the universe, however. Many faiths view Netheronism as a rival. Even in societies dominated by such "jealous" official faiths, Netheronism can still gain quite a foothold. This is because Netheronites feel no need to proclaim their faith publicly. A Netheronite is always a Netheronite, since belief is in the heart. If circumstances make it impossible to hold public services, so be it. In the absence of ordained priests, worshipers can perform their own simplified forms of the sacraments and Netheron Soulbearer will still cherish them.

Church Structure

The Church of Netheron Soulbearer has a very limited hierarchy. The entire religion of Netheronism is based on personal gnosis, a very personal experience of the truth of Netheronite teachings. While actual worship is a public affair, individual Netheronites are also encouraged to reverence their deity in their own hearts simply by following her precepts and accepting her view of reality.

There is a hierarchy and a church administration, of course, but this shouldn't be confused with the religion itself. If the hierarchy were to vanish tomorrow, the religion of Netheronism would continue with little changed.

The Hierarchy

On each plane, the church of Netheron Soulbearer has one primate, or senior priest, who is the shepherd of all Netheronites on that plane. His duty is to protect and guide his flock. Without his intercession, they might suffer more than they need to or wander further afield than is strictly necessary. But the position of primate is one more of duty and responsibility than authority and rulership.

The primate takes her position for life. On the death of the previous primate, a replacement is chosen directly by divine intercession. The divine servitor known as Vista visits one of the priests of Netheron and names her as the next primate. This celestial nomination involves some kind of private ceremony of which the new primate will never speak. As a result of this ceremony, the newly named primate's hair turns purest white regardless of her race.

Netheronites believe that their deity knows what travails the new primate will have to face and are confident that the Soulbearer always selects the individual who can best handle these requirements. While most primates are selected from among the senior, more experienced priests, the Rolls of the Chosen include several primates who were young and relatively inexperienced at the time of nomination. The church of Netheron isn't totally free of ambition, rivalry, and

competition, but the very fact that the primate is chosen by a divine individual does much to eliminate disruptive infighting.

The primate of each plane is supported by a Council of Guides as advisors. These individuals are selected cooperatively by the primate and the entire priesthood of the plane. Priests may volunteer to become guides or nominate others for the position. The primate selects a council of between six and twelve and then circulates the list to all other Netheronite priests on the plane. If there is significant objection to any of the names on the list, that individual is dropped with no replacement. Sometimes Netheron, through her servitor Vista, will select an individual not on the list or object to one of the selected guides; understandably, the primate will always follow the deity's will in these matters.

The primate and guides will usually live in or near the largest Netheronite temple on the plane. There is no pomp and circumstance around these individuals; outside observers may be hard pressed to tell the difference between them and any other priests of Netheron. The primate and guides share all the responsibilities and duties of lower-ranking Netheronite priests, but also must be available to counsel and guide priests who come to them for advice. The position of primate is entirely advisory, not supervisory. The primate makes no policy; policy is set exclusively by the deity herself. The primate's duty is merely to help other worshipers understand and practice the policy sent down from above.

Apart from the primate and the Council of Guides, there are no positions of rank within the Netheronite hierarchy. All other priests are considered completely and utterly equal. Certainly, young priests with little experience will usually defer to older, more experienced individuals, but this is a personal issue unrelated to official authority.

The church of Netheron has little in the way of administration and little need for it. There are no great stacks of church records, no lists of worshipers in good standing or of those who haven't paid their tithes. Since the priests of Netheron don't perform marriages, which they consider outside their purview, they don't have to keep records of such events. Certainly, individual priests do keep records regarding their activities—details on the costs of building a new church, for example—but these are related to specific tasks and enterprises, not to the church structure as a whole.

Individuals of any sentient race, of any sex, and of virtually any age can become priests of the Soulbearer. There are only two categorical restrictions. First, the would-be priest must be at least fifteen, the Netheronite age of majority. Second, she must have suffered the death of someone very close to her: a parent, a spouse, an offspring, or a very close friend.

To members of other faiths, this second requirement might sound unusual. But since Netheronite priests are supposed to counsel the bereaved, it does make sense. After all, it would be difficult for a counselor to truly aid another in time of loss if he had never been through a similar experience. Netheronites also believe it is difficult to be certain that a person has completely accepted death as a normal fact of life until he has faced such a loss. Only those who can maintain their faith in Netheron Soulbearer even after losing someone close to them are likely to display the emotional fortitude needed to be good Netheronite priests.

A would-be priest must first find a fully ordained Netheronite priest who will agree to be her teacher. Priests gain status when they take on an apprentice, but only if that apprentice later becomes a good priest. Thus, priests are very selective about which applicants they choose to train. Tradition dictates that no priest can train a member of her own immediate family or a close personal

Priests

Candidates

Training and Ordination

friend. Although not strictly a rule, this tradition has a force almost that of law in Netheronite communities.

While mentors and candidates often engage in highly educational, spontaneous discussions of Netheronite beliefs, most of the candidate's training comes from watching the priest in action: dispensing advice, performing the sacraments, and most importantly counseling those who have suffered a loss. During the first portion of the training period, the candidate does nothing but observe and listen while the priest handles these tasks. Later the priest will allow the candidate to assist directly, working as more or less an equal partner. After the candidate has shown that he's learned the necessary lessons, the priest will let him perform some of these functions—with the exception of administering the sacraments, of course—on his own, while the priest looks on ready to give advice if necessary. Depending on the priest and on the individual candidate's outlook, attributes, and capacity, this training period can last anywhere from a year or so to over a decade.

A candidate can resign from training at any time, but can't then apply to another priest for training. The only exception to this is if both priest and candidate agree that there's a personality mismatch between them and that the candidate might benefit more from the teachings of another. In this case, the priest will help the candidate find another trainer who's better suited. By unshakable tradition a priest can't unilaterally terminate the training process, but since the candidate will never be ordained without the priest's permission, it's usually easy to convince a poor candidate to give up or at least change teachers.

Ordination takes place when the training priest decides the candidate is ready. The ceremony of ordination is a very simple, very private one. As is appropriate in a gnostic religion—one based on personal gnosis, or revelation—the candidate herself performs the ordination. The training priest and any other priests who can attend merely act as a recorder and witnesses for the process.

Priests of Netheron consider their ordination the greatest and most important moment of their lives. Since it's so important and so personal, however, they never talk about it to anyone who hasn't already undergone it. Sages believe that the ceremony involves reciting a strict oath and then embellishing it with whatever heartfelt additions the candidate sees fit. At some time during the ceremony, the new priest receives what's known symbolically as the Kiss, a spiritual touch from the servitor Farranger. Only priests of the Soulbearer know what form this spiritual touch takes and what its consequences may be. Certainly, it's at this time that the new priest receives any holy powers he is fated to possess.

Upon ordination, the priest takes a new name, symbolizing her ritual death and rebirth. The new priest is then free to follow her own path in the world. If this eventually leads her back to her trainer, so be it, but traditionally trainer and newly ordained priest separate for a period of several years at the very least.

Ordination is for life. Once a priest has dedicated his life to Netheron Soulbearer, he cannot officially take it back. There have been a few cases of Netheronite priests renouncing their faith and abrogating their vows, but these are exceptionally rare.

Lifestyle

Netheronite priests can be recognized by their simple black and gray robes. They wear no distinctive jewelry or other ornamentation specific to Netheronism, though they may wear personal adornments if they choose. They have no distinctive hairstyle, tattoos, or other identifying marks.

Priests of Netheron are free to marry, have children, and in most other ways be normal members of their society. There is only one restriction on their recreational activities: while a Netheronite priest may take a drink from time

to time, drunkenness is severely frowned upon. This is because an intoxicated person can't provide the counsel and solace that may be expected of Netheronite priests at any time.

When a Netheronite priest meets another, both salute each other by placing the palms of their right hands against their own foreheads. Not to give this sign of recognition to an obvious fellow priest is a high insult.

Netheronite priests are free to use all forms of magic except for those that raise or animate the dead. These necromantic arts are considered totally anathema. Once a soul has passed into the realm of the Soulbearer, it's the ultimate sacrilege to call it back or otherwise interfere with its journey. Even though corpses are soulless husks, animating them magically is also sacrilegious because it mimics and thus cheapens true life. For similar reasons, Netheronite priests believe that undead are the ultimate abomination, to be hunted down and destroyed no matter what the cost.

As the Netheronite priesthood is open to all races and genders, so is the body of the faith. The Soulbearer welcomes the worship of any sentient individual regardless of any possible additional commitments to other deities, as long as the individual shows full reverence to the teachings of Netheron and practices the faith in daily life.

Netheronism is frequently portrayed as a rural religion since it's more common in rural, agricultural areas than in large cities. This is because farmers and others close to the land see the cycle of death and rebirth in their crops and farm animals and are thus more likely to accept that death, even their own death, is necessary and natural. Urban populations, centered more around technology and magic, tend to lose this personal connection with the Great Cycle and see death as something to fight as long as possible in the doomed hope of avoiding it forever. People with this world view find Netheronism profoundly disturbing since it reminds them of truths they would prefer to avoid.

Somewhat predictably, there are more old than young Netheronites. Netheronism isn't really a religion for the young, who often believe themselves virtually immortal. What few young Netheronites there are have usually joined the flock due to the loss of a parent. The older worshipers, in contrast, may have weathered several losses in their lives without turning to Netheronism, but eventually join the fold when they feel the chill winds of mortality blowing through their own souls.

Worshipers

Worship

The Netheronite religion builds temples when and where it can, but these aren't as vital to the practice of the faith as they are in other sects. The sacraments can be performed anywhere—in a private home, in a stable, or in an empty field—with no less efficacy than if performed in the grandest Netheronite temple in the universe.

Netheronite temples tend to be fairly simple in design, without much ornamentation. Their interiors frequently have many small rooms as well as a spacious central worship area. In addition to providing space for worship, they also serve as hospices where the terminally ill can die with dignity, shelters for the sick and wounded, places where the bereaved can seek solace, and often simple meeting places where followers of the Soulbearer can come and talk to others who share the same philosophy.

Places of Public Worship

Places of Private Worship

It's almost impossible to desecrate a temple of Netheron, since Netheronites believe there's nothing important about the building or the site itself. A temple is just a convenient structure that offers comfortable space and an identifiable meeting point, nothing more.

Worshippers of Netheron Soulbearer typically don't create shrines or display icons within their houses; such visible displays of worship are generally foreign to the religion. Still, the majority of Netheronites reserve a quiet, comfortable corner of their homes for contemplation and prayer; this spot is known as a haven. In larger homes, the haven can be an entire room, but even a particular chair or spot by the hearth will do. If circumstances rule out even this simple kind of haven, the deity won't care; havens exist to aid the worshippers in meditation, not to please Netheron.

Holy Writings

The holy document of Netheronism is called the Passion. There's a different version of the Passion on each plane where Netheron Soulbearer is worshiped, but the differences are superficial, mainly physical form, language, and style. The actual content of the Passion is identical from plane to plane.

Each version of the Passion dates back to the earliest days of Netheronite worship on its plane. As soon as Netheronism gains a minimum degree of strength on a new plane, the deity selects a mortal worshiper to be her mouthpiece. One of Netheron's subordinates, usually the servitor Vista, visits this individual and reveals the precepts that should be included in the Passion. The chosen one then records this gnosis in his or her own words. Theoretically, the chosen one could adulterate the record with idiosyncratic personal beliefs, but this has never happened; perhaps Vista supervises the writing and corrects any errors, or maybe the chosen one is selected for purity of belief and wouldn't presume to change the slightest detail of the revelation.

In Netheronism, the Passion is viewed as a guide; personal gnosis always takes precedence over any recorded wisdom. This sets the faith apart from most other religions.

Prayers

Most prayers to Netheron Soulbearer request that the deity grant peace to one who has died or take the petitioner's own soul to her bosom when the moment of death arrives. It's unacceptable to ask Netheron to spare the life of a loved one or slay an enemy; the whole focus of Netheronism is on accepting timely death, and asking the Soulbearer to change the Great Cycle and alter the length of a life is bordering on sacrilege. Netheronites can request that their deity allow their deaths or another's to serve some greater purpose, or even ask that death occur in a particular setting or in the midst of some favored activity, so long as this is not used as a delaying tactic.

Netheronites don't petition their deity with other requests, such as for mortal comforts, wealth, or happiness. Such things don't fall within the mandate of the Soulbearer.

Holy Days

There are only two major holy days in the Netheronite calendar: the spring and fall equinoxes, when day and night are exactly the same length. Each of these two days is a day of fasting for devout Netheronites; between sunrise on the solstice and sunrise the next day, worshippers eat no solid food. This daylong fast represents death and the acceptance of it as part of life. On each solstice, at sunset, the priests of Netheron perform the ceremony called the Rebirth.

This ceremony is symbolic of the Great Cycle, the circle of death and rebirth that can be seen throughout the natural world. It's a very simple, very heartfelt ceremony, without the pomp and circumstance that surrounds ceremonies in

other religious traditions. It can be performed anywhere, with any number of worshipers participating.

To open the ceremony, the presiding priest repeats the central stanzas of the poetic oath used in the sacrament of the Assumption (see pp. 64). Then the priest, followed by each of the other worshipers present, recounts aloud an event since the last Rebirth that clearly exemplifies the truth of the Great Cycle. If individuals feel moved to offer some kind of recognition after a particular tale—perhaps a gentle touch or approving glance—they can do so, but the major “work” of the Rebirth takes place within the heart of each participant, so no outside recognition is required. When the last tale has been told, the ceremony of the Rebirth is over. The priest traditionally remains available to the worshipers for private counseling or discussion, but it’s entirely up to each individual whether or not to take advantage of this.

Wherever a priest happens to be at the solstice, he will perform the Rebirth ceremony, inviting all faithful Netheronites in the vicinity to take part. Even priests who find themselves entirely alone still perform the ceremony. If there aren’t any priests in the area, lay Netheronites can perform the ceremony themselves, or as much of it as they can remember. Even a solitary lay Netheronite is expected to reflect on the importance of the Rebirth ceremony in her heart, at the very least.

The night of the new moon also has symbolic importance to the Netheronite religion, since it represents death and rebirth and is bound up with the cycle of a woman’s body that leads to new life. Although there are no official ceremonies performed by the priests at these times, faithful Netheronites are expected to retreat to their havens, whether physically or mentally, and reflect on the teachings of the Soulbearer. This reflection can range from a few moments of silence to a night-long vigil, depending on the personality of the individual worshiper.

Unlike many religious structures, the Netheronite church demands no sacrifices or offerings from its members. Many followers of Netheronism voluntarily tithe to the church, however, to support it in its good works, and some offer personal sacrifices to demonstrate the sincerity of their devotion. Often the friends and family of one who has died make some kind of offering to the church, along with a sacrifice known as the Gift of Love (see p. 65), but this is not required. Still, the Netheronite church has no money troubles; worshipers value the counseling and solace the religion contributes to their lives and therefore willingly support it.

Netheronism has three major sacraments to commemorate key events in the life of a worshiper: the Binding for birth, the Assumption at the time of passage from childhood to adulthood, and the Passing for death. There’s one additional private sacrament, the Atonement, that only takes place when a priest grants a worshiper who has been shunned a way to reenter the body of the church.

Within a fortnight of a child’s birth, the parents are expected to seek out a priest and request the sacrament of Binding for their newborn. If the parents wish, this sacrament can be entirely private, with only the priest, the parents, and the child present. Alternatively, the parents can invite anyone and everyone they know to witness the sacrament and participate.

The Binding opens with the presiding priest reciting a passage from the Passion over the newborn. The priest is free to select any appropriate passage, considering the circumstances and the personality of the parents. When this is complete, the priest anoints the newborn with a drop of pure spring water, symbolizing life, and ashes, symbolizing death. The combination of water

Offerings and Sacrifices

Ceremonies

The Binding

and ashes symbolizes the Great Cycle. Afterward, the parents and any other participants pass by the newborn, still in the arms of the priest, and lay their hands upon it, symbolically reaffirming their own part in the Grand Play. At this time, any participants can add to the ceremony by reciting additional passages from the Passion, telling tales that illustrate the Great Cycle, or anything else they consider appropriate. When this is complete, the sacrament ends. The parents save the swaddling clothes in which the newborn was wrapped during the Binding, since these will be significant in the child's Assumption.

Traditionally, priests of Netheron don't perform the Binding on their own offspring unless no other officiant is available. If no ordained priests are available, lay parents can perform the Binding for their own children, following the same process.

Normally the Binding is performed within fourteen days of birth, but an individual who accepts the precepts of Netheronism later in life can elect to undergo the Binding at any time, followed immediately by the Assumption.

The Assumption

According to Netheronite tradition, the transition between childhood and full adulthood occurs at the age of fifteen. On or soon after her fifteenth birthday a follower of Netheronism, or one of her parents, seeks out a priest to perform the sacrament of the Assumption. Following tradition, the parents of the new adult can participate in the sacrament if they wish. The rest of the guest list is left up to the new adult to decide for herself.

To start the ceremony, the parents pass to the presiding priest the swaddling clothes in which the candidate was wrapped during his Binding. If the candidate was no longer an infant at the time of his Binding, the swaddling clothes are replaced with whatever the candidate was wearing during the earlier ceremony. If the swaddling clothes or other clothes were lost or are otherwise unavailable, the candidate selects an outfit that he considers representative of his childhood.

The priest then builds a funeral pyre on which the clothes are burned. This symbolic cremation represents the death of the child and her rebirth as an adult. The priest then recites a passage from the Passion that symbolically describes the Grand Play and the symmetry of life and death. When this is complete, the priest recites another passage, an oath to respect and honor the Great Cycle and revere the place of Netheron Soulbearer in the fabric of reality. The candidate then repeats the oath from memory if possible, otherwise reading it from a copy of the Passion. This oath demonstrates that the new adult has accepted her own mortality and recognizes that her own death is certain and nothing to be feared. This recognition truly marks the transition between childhood and maturity in the eyes of Netheronites.

The ceremony ends when the candidate anoints himself with pure water and the ashes from the symbolic funeral pyre. He's then free to say a few words if his heart moves him. If he wishes, he can select a new name at this point; within the Netheronite tradition, the highest compliment a new adult can pay his or her parents is to select the same name they originally gave.

The Assumption is a beautiful and dignified ceremony, often followed by a wild party during which all the guests pretend to be meeting the new adult for the very first time. During this party, it's forbidden to speak of any events that happened during the candidate's childhood. All those things are past; in fact, they happened to a different person.

As with the Binding, priests don't perform the Assumption for their own children unless no other priests are available. The parents, or any adult the candidate selects as a mentor, can perform the Assumption in the absence of a priest.

The Passing is the sacrament of death, which marks the soul's journey to the Spirit World, the realm of Netheron Soulbearer. It's the very most private, personal experience of a Netheronite's life and is attended only by the dying believer and a priest.

When a true believer is on his deathbed, he calls for a priest to attend him. If the individual isn't conscious or rational, friends or family can request the priest on his behalf. When it's apparent that death is imminent, the priest clears everyone else out of the sickroom or otherwise arranges privacy for herself and the dying one. She then performs the sacrament of the Passing.

Since the Passing is only performed right before death, the subjects of the sacrament have neither opportunity nor inclination to describe it to others, and the priest is honor-bound not to reveal its details to anyone not ordained. It's thought to be a quietly joyful and highly dignified ceremony, however. Once the sacrament has been performed, the friends and family are invited back to attend the dying person's final moments.

While the last rites of most other religions serve mainly to ensure that the dying one's soul passes swiftly and surely to the deity, a Netheronite Passing is as much for the comfort and reassurance of the dying person and his or her loved ones as it is for Netheron's benefit. Many who believe they have fully accepted death find last-minute fears when it becomes personal, so the priests of Netheron take special care to ease the grief of death and practice what they preach.

After the sacrament, the priest acts as a counselor and friend to those left behind. Although it's not officially part of the sacrament, many friends of the deceased take this time to make donations to the church of Netheron in the name of the one who died. These donations, whether money or something else, are given to the priest, who is honor-bound to use them in the way that most benefits Netheronite society. This might be building or maintaining a church, taking on and supporting a candidate-priest, or something very different.

In addition, the bereaved will often make sacrifices directly to the Soulbearer, choosing items that represent their relationships with the deceased and burning them to signify how their loved one's passing has left a hole in their lives. The ash from this burned sacrifice is then used to fertilize some growing thing that was significant to the deceased. If the deceased was a farmer, the ash would be sprinkled on her fields; if he was a lutist, the ash would be used to fertilize a tree whose wood could be used to make lutes. The monetary value of the sacrifice is traditionally kept low to exemplify the concept that death shouldn't impoverish others. In sentimental and emotional terms, however, the significance of the item should match the significance the deceased held in the bereaved's life. Many of the bereaved will ask the priest who performed the Passing to help them select suitable sacrifices that truly symbolize their relationships with the deceased. In most Netheronite societies, this sacrifice is referred to as the Gift of Love.

Interestingly enough, Netheronism has no rules regarding the disposal of the body after death. It's entirely up to the wishes of the survivors or the exigencies of the situation. In the Netheronite view, the bodies of the dead are empty husks with no more connection to the souls that inhabited them than a tunic has to the living person it clothes. However the body is handled, its elements will return to the earth and complete the Great Cycle, and that's all that matters.

The Passing

Netheron Soulbearer

Lesser Goddess of Death

Strength	19	<i>Combat</i>	
Health	37	Defense Strength	25
Reaction	26	Unarmed	Master; 40 (1x)
Intelligence	39	Melee Weapons	Master; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	55	Missile Weapons	Veteran; by weapon (1x)
Presence	35	<i>Aptitude</i>	
Willpower	52	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 5
Size	2 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	5 yards/second		
Primal Base	22,075		
Primal Flux	15,032		

In her usual form, Netheron appears as a pale-skinned human female of unearthly beauty. She has shoulder-length tresses made of pure darkness, not physical matter at all. On close inspection, her eyes are star-filled pits, infinite in depth. She wears a simple, ankle-length robe formed of night: stars moving in unfamiliar constellations appear in it.

At all times, Netheron is surrounded by an aura of silence and peace. When she's present on a plane, no birds or animals make any sound within miles of her; they become so calm that they lack reason to make any noise. When she manifests, storms subside, rains moderate, and winds die down to nothing. Even the temperature seems to moderate: arctic conditions become almost balmy, and the blast-furnace heat of the desert becomes more comfortable. She always emanates a sense of anticipation, the feeling that some vitally important event is imminent.

Netheron's physical movements are always slow and measured, as though she has all the time in the world. Even when fast action is called for, she "makes haste slowly," never appearing rushed no matter how fast she's actually moving. Her speech, too, is quite deliberate; when she talks, a listener feels that every word has been carefully and precisely selected. Netheron's voice is deep and rich with immense resonance, as if she were speaking in a huge cathedral. She can fluently speak all the tongues used by her worshipers on all planes.

Personality

As a lesser deity, Netheron maintains much the same personality she had while mortal many centuries ago. She's introspective and intellectual, enjoying the process of thinking things through and contemplating possible consequences. Still, when action is absolutely required, she acts decisively and effectively.

Netheron enjoys philosophical conversation above just about all other pastimes, and holds in great respect anyone who can come up with—and defend—a view of reality she hasn't considered yet. It's said that she and Thoth are quite close and frequently get together for a good, friendly argument. She tends to be taciturn and only speaks when she's got something important to say.

Netheron honestly loves and cherishes both those who revere her and others who share her outlook on the universe. She empathizes with the pain of mortals and will never cause suffering if there's a viable alternative.

Netheron is a fair and just leader, judging her subordinates' strengths and weaknesses impartially. She doesn't enjoy ordering anyone around, preferring to explain to her subordinates why a particular action is necessary so that they

Primal Attributes

Primal Base	22,075
Typical Primal Flux	15,032
Planes	3, plus 1 miniplane
Supported Demigods	3
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	2
Artifacts	12
Servitors	4 greater, 22 major, 28 minor

Primal Base Calculations

Three Solely Controlled Planes Plus One Miniplane (3 x 2,000, + 650)	6,650
Rank Bonuses Through Lesser Deity (100 + 200 + 300 + 5,000)	5,600
Creation of Artifacts	-24,500
Creation of Servitors	-3,800
Ascensions	-3,000
Sphere of Influence Cost	-1,000
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-375
Evolutionary Gains	42,500
<hr/> Total Primal Base	22,075

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (22,075 / 10)	2,208
Consecrated Ground (1,000 x 2)	2,000
Sanctuaries (850 x 5)	4,250
Temples (28 x 10)	280
Cathedrals (4 x 25)	100
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (20 x 1)	20
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (0 x 2)	0
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (3 x 1,000 + 1 x 325)	3,325
Worshippers by Plane (51,000, 23,000, 13,000, 23,000, 75,000, 14,500, 1,800, 450,000, 10 x 1,000, 10 x 500, 10 x 100; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	2,389
Captured Primal Base (9,200 x 5%)	460
<hr/> Total Primal Flux	15,032

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



perform her will of their own volition. She supports her subordinates to the best of her abilities, nurturing them so they can fulfill their own potentials. She believes her second-in-command, the demigod Sisehan, has real potential and is "fast-tracking" him through the divine ranks.

Netheron gives subordinates the benefit of the doubt when she can, but she isn't naive or gullible. If a subordinate deity, a minion, or a priest isn't working out, she'll terminate the relationship between them by withdrawing her support and letting the subordinate sink or swim alone.

The Soulbearer has had to act directly against a divine subordinate only once. Early in her career as a lesser deity, Netheron was aided by a demigod known as Berenth the Guardian. Berenth was the Soulbearer's second-in-command, and Netheron was primally supporting him. Although Berenth outwardly revered and supported Netheron, he secretly maneuvered to weaken the Soulbearer so that he could eventually overthrow her and take her place. To this end, he was making deals with various of the more baneful death deities. When Netheron found out about this and confronted him, Berenth thought he'd be destroyed. Instead, the Soulbearer simply withdrew her primal support from the demigod and cast him out from the planes he controlled. Without his former patron's backing, Berenth had no protection when his erstwhile allies decided to punish him for his failure, and so was utterly destroyed.

Understandably, Netheron hates anything that restricts the freedom of the soul. Deities who destroy or imprison the souls of the dead are totally and utterly evil in her eyes, and she'll do whatever it takes to stop their plans short of out-and-out war. As befits a philosopher, she believes brain is more powerful than brawn, and blocks the plans of rapacious soul-destroyers through guile rather than through strength of arms.

Although deities don't die as mortals do, Netheron still believes they are part of the Great Play. Eventually, she believes, deities too pass into nothingness, closing the Great Cycle. The only difference, she thinks, is that the cycle for deities is many millennia in length.

History

Netheron was once a mortal, a philosopher-priest who worshiped the Weavers. In life, she tirelessly spread the gospel of the Weavers throughout her plane and wrote many great treatises propounding their philosophy and view of the universe. So great was her service to these mysterious deities that on the eve of her physical death they ascended her to the status of godling. Netheron became the Guardian of the Flame, a godling whose duty was to protect and spread the philosophy of the Weavers.

For several centuries, Netheron worked tirelessly and faithfully at her task. Most of her time was spent traveling the many main planes, supporting and nurturing those who worshiped the Weavers. During this period, even though she was inhumanly busy, Netheron had time to reflect on her own personal philosophy. She had always believed that death shouldn't be something to fear, that it was one of the most important and beneficial aspects of the Great Cycle. This fit well with the overall philosophy of the Weavers, although none of these deities actually focused on the topic.

In what spare time she had, Netheron studied death, investing considerable primal resources in her research. She came to know death in all its forms, to understand the processes through which souls are bound to mortal bodies and eventually severed from them. Throughout this process, the Weavers supported

her, recognizing that Netheron was destined for greater things. Within half a millennium, she was well on her way to developing death as her sphere of influence.

At this time, a divine reaver known only as the Souleater arose. This demigod chose to increase its power not by attracting worshipers but by capturing the souls of nonworshipers, storing them on a plane it controlled, and then bleeding them for primal energy. Naturally, this wreaked pure havoc with the orderly management of souls, but the Souleater was careful not to steal too many souls from any one deity or group of deities lest it gain some powerful enemies.

But the Souleater didn't realize that Netheron already hated it with a burning passion. By this time, she saw herself as unofficial guardian and protector of the souls of the dead, and despised the cruelty and rapaciousness with which the Souleater tortured them. The Weavers didn't share her hatred, however. Although they frowned on the Souleater's activities, they viewed the whole thing quite philosophically, postulating that perhaps the Souleater was part of the Great Cycle, an actor in the Grand Play as they themselves were. When Netheron begged them for permission to destroy the Souleater, they refused her.

This threw Netheron into an ethical conflict that almost destroyed her. She knew in her heart of hearts that the Souleater was the absolute antithesis of everything she believed in, and she couldn't understand why the Weavers didn't recognize it as an enemy. She was convinced that the Souleater was growing in power and that the Weavers' philosophical detachment prevented them from seeing that it would eventually threaten them directly. Yet the deities to whose service she was pledged had explicitly refused her permission to deal with the Souleater herself.

Eventually Netheron's decision was made for her. In its search for more souls, the Souleater came to one of the planes Netheron was overseeing. Slaying and destroying, the demigod rampaged throughout the plane, capturing the souls of worshipers Netheron had vowed to protect. Difficult and traumatic though it was, Netheron decided that her duty to the Weavers' worshipers outweighed her direct allegiance to the Weavers themselves. Ignoring the direct instructions of her superiors, she manifested on the plane and engaged the Souleater in direct combat.

Few details are known of the epic battle between Netheron and the Souleater. Although still only a godling, Netheron turned out to be a sly and cunning warrior, expert at discerning her foe's weaknesses and focusing her attacks on the chinks in its armor. Eventually, at great cost, Netheron managed to destroy the Souleater, freeing the souls it had trapped and collecting as many as she could herself. Exhausted to her very soul, Netheron made several trips between that plane and one of the Weavers' planes until she had ferried the last worshiper's soul to its proper destination. Then she returned to the plane of the Weavers to accept whatever punishment they would mete out to one who disobeyed their orders.

Netheron was shocked when she was met not with discipline but with overwhelming approval. Although one or two of the Weavers were irked that their godling had gone against their instructions, the majority were vastly pleased with her motives and with her courage, determination, and ability.

The Weavers' mortal worshipers hadn't overlooked Netheron's great deed either. They saw her defeat of the evil Souleater as a heroic quest, and so began revering the godling as Protector of the Dead, the Soulbearer. Soon thereafter, Netheron officially acquired death as her sphere of influence and advanced to the rank of demigod.

From this point on, one or another of the Weavers always primally supported Netheron. The council of deities apparently decided to put her on the fast track, giving her considerable freedom to research sphere of influence abilities. They also authorized her to take the plane once controlled by the destroyed Souleater for her own. Although they still assigned her duties from time to time, they largely left her to her own devices. When, a century or so later, she transformed the plane she controlled into her home plane, they rejoiced for her and welcomed her into the ranks of the lesser deities.

At this point, the Weavers officially dissolved the bonds of duty and responsibility between themselves and Netheron Soulbearer. No longer would they give her orders or expect obedience from her. Netheron, however, still respected the Weavers, so she pledged to seek their suggestions and guidance always, though she would follow their advice only as long as she agreed with them. Netheron's relationship with the Weavers remains the same to this day.

At this time, Netheron remains a lesser deity; she directly controls only three planes and one miniplane. Certain members of the Weavers have been counseling the Soulbearer to extend her control to other planes so she can become a greater deity like themselves. While she is currently happy merely to solidify the power she has, Netheron may soon take them up on this advice.

Netheron has few direct enemies in the divine sphere. Certainly, there are several deities who would like to see her removed from the stage, particularly those with similar spheres of influence and dissimilar philosophies. These rivals, however, well know that the Soulbearer is under the unofficial protection of the Weavers. Although they wouldn't directly support any effort by Netheron to increase her power, the Weavers would throw many of their considerable resources to bear in her defense. Even those greater deities who believe they could make short work of Netheron herself don't relish that kind of fight.

Symbols

The central symbol of Netheron Soulbearer is a circle with a dot at its center. The circle symbolizes the Great Cycle of life and death, while the central dot represents Netheron herself and the Spirit World. This symbol arose several centuries ago in a nation where Netheronism was ruthlessly repressed. The leader of a group of Netheronites devised the circle-and-dot symbol as a secret recognition sign, something simple that could quickly be drawn in the sand and then erased, or that could be "drawn" with a finger on the palm of another as identification. Eventually it spread to other nations and other planes until today it represents Netheronism on every plane, and even appears in architecture and artwork on the Soulbearer's home plane.

Black and gold are the colors most often associated with Netheron. Black symbolizes night and the absence of life. Gold, many sages believe, symbolizes the continued existence of the soul after death and the great value that Netheronite tradition associates with death as rest after toil. In Netheronite art, the circle and dot in the Netheronite symbol are commonly rendered in yellow or gold while the circle is filled with black.

There is no animal associated with Netheron, although she is frequently represented as a flower—always a perennial species, one that lives for many seasons and blooms each year.

Sphere of Influence

Netheron's sphere of influence is death, specifically guarding the immortal soul and nurturing this precious spark of eternity.

Research Cost: 350 flux per day. Research Time: 50 years. Backing Cost: 1,000 base. Total Flux Cost: 6,387,500.

Netheron draws souls at double normal effectiveness. Thus, a competing deity must spend two points of flux to counter each one point Netheron spends.

Netheron automatically knows the true identity, history, and divine rank of any entity she sees. This, like any other use of primal, will not pass through an active primal shield.

Further, no soul-affecting spells or abilities possessed by another will function in Netheron's presence without her permission.

This sphere includes the Retain Soul ability on pages 104–105 of *The Primal Order*, plus the following abilities:

Sever Undead: Research Cost: 75 flux per day. Research Time: 6 months. Backing Cost: 85 base. Activation Cost: 15 flux. This ability allows the deity to sever the connection between any undead or antilife creature and the source of its animating energy. The target receives no resistance roll; it crumbles into dust and cannot be reanimated. If a soul was trapped inside the animated body, it becomes free to pass on to its ultimate destination.

Conceal Soul: Research Cost: 80 flux per day. Research Time: 4 years. Backing Cost: 85 base. Activation Cost: 25 flux. This ability allows the deity to hide a soul from the perception of other deities who might try to pull it. The subject of the ability must be the floating soul of a mortal who has just died. This allows Netheron to avoid having to “scrap it out” with other deities who might want to contest with her for possession of a particular soul.

Quietus: Research Cost: 35 flux per day. Research Time: 2 months. Backing Cost: 35 base. Activation Cost: 1 flux. This ability allows the deity to ease the separation of a soul from a dying body. Normally, even a peaceful death is traumatic for a soul as it feels itself slipping away from its mortal body and the world that it knew. This ability totally suppresses the normal fear and anxiety associated with dying, so a mortal can cherish or even revel in the experience and pass on undismayed.

Soul Watch: Research Cost: 50 flux per day. Research Time: 8 years. Backing Cost: 70 base. Activation Cost: 20 flux. This ability allows the deity to tap into the mind of a mortal soul. The deity experiences all sensory input that the mortal experiences and can eavesdrop on every thought, but cannot influence the mortal's thoughts or actions. The mortal is not even aware of Netheron's mental presence. By choice, Netheron only uses this ability on faithful worshipers who, she believes, would not be upset by her desire to see things from their perspectives.

Statistics

Advantages

Sphere Abilities

Planes

This is Netheron's home plane—a peaceful place, a calm, idyllic sylvan environment of transcendent beauty. Netheron draws the souls of her most fervent worshipers here, to exist in eternal, calm contemplation with nothing to threaten them. The Soulbearer dwells in a huge structure known as the Sedare, a massive,

Pacinor

Ralliane

sprawling building said to contain many doors that lead to other planes. Sages believe that Pacinor is adjacent to dozens, perhaps scores of other planes.

Planar constants: No form of divination will work on this plane. No necromantic magic, including the animation of undead or antilife creatures, will function. Non-divine creatures cannot use any form of magical transportation.

Similar in appearance to Pacinor, Ralliane is the plane to which most faithful Netheronite souls come after death. After a sojourn on Ralliane, some of Netheron's more fervent worshipers find themselves called to Pacinor.

Ralliane is adjacent to Pacinor and to most planes on which there are large Netheronite communities.

Planar Constants: No necromantic magic, including the animation of undead or antilife creatures, will function. Non-divine creatures cannot use any form of magical transportation. All summoning magic will fail. Furthermore, any attempted use of such magic will transport the caster, alone, into Netheron's presence. Like any deity, Netheron will always have a suitable entourage surrounding

Traele

Rugged and beautiful, Traele is a miniplane that is adjacent only to Pacinor. No intelligent life ever arose naturally on Traele, and few deities beside Netheron herself even know of its location.

Netheron uses Traele as a kind of retreat, a place to go and contemplate questions that trouble her. By tradition, none of her subordinates will ever disturb her while she's on Traele.

Planar constants: Non-divine creatures cannot use any form of magical transportation. No magical form of communication will function. Mentalic powers will not function.

Roane

This is the most recent plane to come under Netheron's control. It is currently under "remodeling," as the Soulbearer modifies its planar constants to better suit her needs.

Roane is adjacent to Pacinor and to many planes that can't easily be reached from Netheron's other planes. The Soulbearer uses it as a way station to parts of the multiverse not otherwise easily accessible.

Planar constants: No necromantic magic, including the animation of undead or antilife creatures, will function. No mortals are able to create, summon, or manipulate magical energy. This constant will probably soon be eliminated.

Combat

Netheron believes that physical combat is the last resort of the brutish, and thus shuns it whenever possible. Three of Netheron's subordinates—the demigoddess T'sele and the servitors Farranger and Vista—are much more skilled at physical combat than she is and will fight to defend her if it becomes necessary. As mentioned earlier, Netheron is also under the unofficial protection of the Weavers.

Special Equipment

The Sphere of Souls is a powerful artifact Netheron created early in her career as a lesser deity. It resembles a black pearl almost five inches in diameter, shimmering with an unnatural iridescence as it catches the light. Around the circumference of the sphere is a woven band of fine platinum wires. The whole item masses about three pounds and feels cool to the touch. It emits a soft hum so high-pitched that humans with less than perfect hearing wouldn't be able to detect it. The timbre of the sound is such that it's calming and peaceful rather than irritating.

The sphere can absorb and contain the souls of up to ten mortal entities. While a soul is within the sphere, it's completely unconscious, and there's no limit on how long it can remain there. A stored soul is protected from tampering of any kind and is completely undetectable, at least to the limits of the sphere's power rating. To absorb a soul, the sphere must be touched to a willing subject's body; souls cannot be removed from living bodies without their consent. Once the soul is absorbed, the body dies and will begin to decay just like any other corpse.

At will, the wielder of the sphere can transfer any soul it contains into another vessel—a soulless body of any shape, species, or nature. To adapt to the new body, however, the soul must make a successful destiny roll; you may want to apply some penalty to this roll if the new body is significantly different from the soul's original body. If the soul fails the destiny roll, the newly formed being will suffer some degree of insanity; in extreme cases it can simply die, returning the soul to a floating state.

If the transfer is made successfully, the soul and body become a new living thing. Now that it is alive again, the soul can access its memories and all of its former mental attributes and skills. The new being's physical characteristics, however, are determined by the new body. The soul of a human mentalist transferred into the body of a dog will create a canine mentalist; the soul of a wizard and the body of a dog will create a dog that knows spells but can't manage to say the words of power or make the appropriate gestures. Since the soul is still "dead" and unaware at the moment of transfer from the sphere, it can't resist the process in any way.

Netheron usually keeps the Sphere of Souls in the throne room of her palace, the Sedare. Nobody knows whether a mortal can use the artifact, or if there are any consequences to trying.

Sphere of Souls
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 94

Sisehan

**Supported
Demigod of
Reincarnation;
Creator Deity**

Strength	18	<i>Combat</i>	
Health	22	Defense Strength	23
Reaction	22	Unarmed	Amateur; 20 (1x)
Intelligence	31	Melee Weapons	Master; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	45	Missile Weapons	Veteran; by weapon (2x)
Presence	19	<i>Aptitude</i>	
Willpower	31	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 3
Size	2 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	Legendary 1
Speed	4 yards/second		

Primal Base 3,670

Primal Flux 1,064

Sisehan, also known as the Shepherd, appears as a tall, slender human male. His skin is jet black, smooth, and hairless. In his left hand he typically carries a shepherd's crook roughly carved from the branch of an alder tree. His feet are bare. His head is nearly featureless, with no real facial features, hair, or other details. It vaguely retains the contours of a human skull, but without reference to his body it would be hard to tell if his head is seen in profile or straight on.

While Netheron is surrounded by an aura of quiet, peace, and calm, Sisehan exudes a sense of longing, a sharp, bittersweet emotion that combines sadness and anticipation. This aura has much the same effect on animals as Netheron's; birds stop singing and animals make no sound while in the presence of Sisehan. Sentient creatures feel the desire to draw closer to the Shepherd and physically follow him if they can. Since he's a deity, however, most also feel a conflicting desire to keep their distance from him lest something dreadful happen.

Those who have met the Shepherd face to face report that the level of illumination tends to decrease slightly in his presence. By daylight, it seems as if a dark cloud had passed in front of the sun, and at night, the moon and stars seem to shine less brightly. Sentient creatures within a few hundred yards of Sisehan will also feel slightly warmer, though the temperature around them doesn't actually rise.

Sisehan is said to be able to speak and understand all tongues used by humanoid creatures on any plane in the multiverse. His voice is clearly understandable, but it definitely could never be mistaken for human. Those who have heard it describe it as if the music of a chamber orchestra were somehow shaped into words. The sound of his voice has the same emotional effect as the Shepherd's physical presence, and is said to have a calming effect on the dying.

Personality

In general terms, Sisehan's personality is similar to Netheron's, which isn't overly surprising. He thinks through possible consequences before he acts, and enjoys the cerebral exercise of debating philosophical matters. He's a little less open than his patron to questions of doctrine, however, believing that some things are just right or wrong and not matters for discussion.

Occasionally, Sisehan thinks that Netheron gets a little too intellectual, and he is slightly quicker to act than the lesser deity. While he generally believes that direct conflict and violence are to be avoided, he sometimes sets this principle aside and acts proactively to send a message. Netheron thinks that eventually this might get the Shepherd into trouble, but believes that Sisehan must work

Primal Base	3,670
Typical Primal Flux	1,064
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	1
Artifacts	0
Servitors	2 major, 8 minor

Primal Base Calculations

No Solely Controlled Planes	0
Rank Bonuses Through Supported	
Demigod (100 + 200 + 300)	600
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	160
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	-450
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-130
Evolutionary Gains	3,810
<hr/>	
Total Primal Base	3,670

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (3,670 / 10)	367
Consecrated Ground (25 x 2)	50
Sanctuaries (25 x 5)	125
Temples (4 x 10)	40
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground	
(0 x 1)	0
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (5 x 2)	10
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshippers by Plane (10,000, 3,000,	
13,000, 14,000, 1,800); taking the square	
root of each separately and then adding)	472
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
<hr/>	
Total Primal Flux	1,064

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



through this "phase" on his own. Actually, Sisehan is already starting to mellow with time; he's less impulsive than he used to be, and less impulsive than most deities aside from Netheron.

Even though he's in the divine ranks himself, Sisehan still worships Netheron and will never even contemplate anything that would harm or hinder his patron. He might disagree with the Soulbearer's approach from time to time, but he'll never go against his patron's expressed wishes in even the smallest thing.

The race Sisehan belonged to as a mortal is very empathic, much more so than humans. He feels the anguish and fear of every dying Netheronite, and would grant them all peace if he could. If he can, he uses his musical voice to ease the passing of a faithful Netheronite; on many planes, when a Netheronite dies peacefully, it's said he or she "heard the voice of the Shepherd."

Sisehan is on good terms with the other members of Netheron's divine structure. He feels closest to the godling Lael and the servitor Vista. He feels personally uncomfortable in the presence of Farranger, but there's no antipathy between them.

History

Sisehan was once mortal, a member of humanoid but nonhuman race from a distant, mysterious plane. Sages and explorers have been unable to identify this plane, and some speculate that it may no longer exist. He was a faithful, loyal worshiper of Netheron, one of the few on the plane of his birth, and eventually became the primate of the small Netheronite church there.

As a mortal, Sisehan enjoyed extensive magical and mentalic powers, many of which were innate to his race. Through vigorous research and training, he extended these to include limited abilities to cross interplanar barriers and assist others in crossing, allowing him to send small but very determined groups of missionaries to nearby planes. Although he was unable to convert many of his own race or other races native to his plane, he did manage to spread the precepts of Netheronism to at least four other planes. In return for Sisehan's tireless proselytizing, Netheron ascended him to the rank of godling.

When Netheron ascended Sisehan she got more out of the bargain than she anticipated, for Sisehan turned out to be a creator deity, one of the very few blessed with the ability to create new, self-reproducing life. As soon as she realized Sisehan's potential, Netheron decided he would be perfect to handle the reincarnation of those of her worshipers who deserved it. Sisehan gladly agreed to research reincarnation as his sphere of influence, spending twenty-five years researching the matter before he considered himself ready to take on this sphere. With such an exciting sphere of influence, he didn't need to undertake a heroic quest; word soon spread far and wide among the Netheronites that Sisehan could create life itself, and would use this ability to reincarnate the most faithful. In less than a decade Sisehan had assumed his sphere of influence and become a demigod.

At first Netheron didn't support him. She was already supporting a demigod called Berenth the Guardian as her second-in-command. It was Sisehan the Shepherd who discovered Berenth's plot to overthrow the Soulbearer and alerted the lesser deity to the Guardian's treachery. After she had dealt with Berenth, Netheron threw her primal support behind Sisehan and named him her second-in-command, a position he still holds.

Symbols

Along with the circle-and-dot symbol used by all the Soulbearer's subordinates, the Shepherd has his own symbol: a stylized shepherd's crook. This is usually rendered in gold on a field of black, often surrounded by a larger gold circle. The color red is never found in association with Sisehan—not on the person of those who primarily worship him, nor on any religious item associated with him. This seems to be an attempt to divorce the Shepherd from any association with blood, a connection more appropriate to other death-related deities.

Some of the earliest Netheronite cultures also associate the sun with Sisehan as an obvious symbol of rebirth.

Sphere of Influence

Sisehan's sphere of influence is reincarnation, specifically the transformation of an absorbed soul into a new life form. Note that only a creator deity can select this sphere of influence.

Research Cost: 90 flux per day. Research Time: 25 years. Backing Cost: 450 base. Total Flux Cost: 4,927,500.

Sisehan can direct a soul into a newly born body. Normally, when a new sentient creature is born, a soul is spontaneously created to occupy it. Sisehan can interrupt this process, preventing the new soul from forming so he can funnel an existing soul into the body. As he does so, Sisehan mindwipes the existing soul so that it retains only its essential personality and, if he chooses, a few vague memories of its previous life.

This sphere includes the following abilities:

Quicken: Research Cost: 65 flux per day. Research Time: 1 year. Backing Cost: 60 base. Activation Cost: 20 flux. This ability allows the deity to channel an existing soul into any lifeless body, whether an artificial creation or the corpse of a once-living creature. If a corpse is used, the deity must first eliminate the original cause of death or the soul will not be able to animate it. Once the soul enters the body, the two will form a new living creature with the body's physical characteristics and the mental characteristics of the soul, including memories.

Form Life: Research Cost: 80 flux per day. Research Time: 1 year. Backing Cost: 70 base. Activation Cost: Varies; 80 flux initial cost. This ability allows the deity to create a new sentient, living creature from scratch. The creature's body can be of any existing race or a totally new race; the initial cost given is for a humanoid body of average attributes. If the deity chooses to create something more or less powerful, use the costs given for altering attributes on page 176 of *The Primal Order*; if the deity wishes to grant the new creature one or more special abilities, use the costs for granting abilities to minions. When the creature is created, the deity can choose to transfer an existing soul into the body or allow a soul to spontaneously generate to fill it. The creature created will be mortal, and able to reproduce naturally with others of its race and of the appropriate gender. All of the characteristics the deity built into the original creatures will breed true in all of their offspring. The creatures will also have free will, so they won't necessarily worship their creator, though the chances are good that they will do so out of gratitude.

Statistics

Advantages

Sphere Abilities

Planes

Sisehan personally controls no planes; he has little ambition to do so, and his duties leave him little time for such extracurricular activities. His official residence is in the Sedare with Netheron. He actually spends little time there, however, ranging the multiverse to shelter and guide the souls of the faithful.

Combat

The Shepherd isn't overly skilled in physical combat. Against mortal creatures, this is rarely an issue. Against other divine-level foes, however, he would probably be forced to use guile rather than direct force. In any case, few would threaten or interfere with the Shepherd in any way for fear of involving the Soulbearer, and through her the Weavers.

Special Equipment

Gauntlet of Netheron
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 84

The Gauntlet of Netheron is a human-sized glove of fine and supple chainmail, burnished to a brilliant silver. It will magically adjust in size and shape to fit perfectly over the hand and half the forearm of any humanoid creature who tries to don it. There is a small, circular plate of mirrored silver in the center of the back of the hand. In this is graven the circle-and-dot sigil of Netheron.

When held, the gauntlet seems to mass about three pounds; when worn, however, it seems totally weightless and doesn't interfere in the slightest with movement. The gauntlet doesn't impair tactile sense at all, though it does block all effects of temperature. The wearer could reach into a shallow vat of molten lead without pain or damage, yet still be able to feel the texture of the vat's bottom.

A single touch of the Gauntlet of Netheron causes the death or decay of any entity or substance, with no resistance roll allowed. Inanimate objects disintegrate as though they were instantaneously aged by several millennia. Normally, a touch from the gauntlet kills a living creature but doesn't prevent its soul from going to its normal destination. If the user wills it, however, the gauntlet can not only kill the body but also absorb the soul. The gauntlet can hold up to ten souls at any one time, but when Sisehan uses this property of the item he usually has a destination in mind for the soul he absorbs.

Netheron has instructed the Shepherd to use the gauntlet only as a last resort. While she does not approve of killing a sentient being before its appointed time, she recognizes that sometimes there is need and wishes her demigod to be prepared.

The Gauntlet of Netheron Sisehan possesses is actually the second device of its kind created by the Soulbearer. The first was created for and given to Berenth the Guardian. When Netheron discovered her demigod's treachery, she took the original gauntlet back and destroyed it. After Sisehan replaced Berenth as her second-in-command, Netheron created a similar gauntlet for him to use.

Remembering Berenth's treachery, Netheron imbued Sisehan's gauntlet with one power of which the Shepherd is ignorant. When Netheron created the second gauntlet, she included a one-way mental link that allows her to read the mind of whoever is currently wearing it. Every time she wants to use this

channel, the Soulbearer must spend one point of primal flux; for the next hour, she can sense every thought and subconscious motivation of the gauntlet's wearer.

When she first began to support Sisehan, Netheron used the gauntlet to monitor her new second-in-command on a fairly regular basis. Over the decades, however, the Soulbearer has decided that she can trust the Shepherd and feels considerable guilt that she ever doubted him. Currently, it would take a major crisis of faith to motivate Netheron to monitor her aide again.

T'sele

Supported Demigoddess of Soul Collection

Strength	17	Combat	
Health	27	Defense Strength	20
Reaction	31	Unarmed	Legendary 1; 10 (3x)
Intelligence	34	Melee Weapons	
Destiny	45		Legendary 2; by weapon+STR (3x)
Presence	28	Missile Weapons	Master; by weapon (2x)
Willpower	30	Aptitude	
Size	1.75 yards	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 1
Speed	6 yards/second	Mentalic Aptitude	Legendary 1
Primal Base	4,835		
Primal Flux	1,863		

T'sele, nicknamed Quicksilver on some planes, appears as a young, laughing woman with long, black hair and mid-brown skin. Her eyes flash with light and intelligence; the left is gray, the right blue. She is petite in stature and always seems to be dancing. She wears a bead-trimmed, ankle-length robe of soft deerskin and has bare feet.

T'sele emanates a strong aura of brightness and joy. When she's present, birds sing more loudly and flowers frequently seem to bloom prematurely. It's almost impossible to be sad near T'sele; her presence makes sentient creatures want to sing or dance. While most people wouldn't associate a death-related deity with such intense happiness, Netheronites find this appropriate. Those unbelievers who have encountered T'sele face to face report a fear of death, and an even greater fear that they'll advance toward that death with a heart full of joy!

T'sele's movements are quick and light, extremely graceful. Every move she makes looks like a step in a beautiful, complex dance. She can move inhumanly fast, but even at full speed she never looks as though she's hurrying.

T'sele is always surrounded by gentle, ever-changing breezes, regardless of the ambient weather conditions. The air around her always smells fresh and clean, with the faintest hint of wildflowers. T'sele also sheds a bright, sourceless light. Looking directly at her doesn't dazzle or blind, yet the area around her is always as bright as noonday sunlight. When she's angry her eyes blaze with a blinding glow. Everything she looks at is illuminated brightly as if in the beam of powerful spotlights.

T'sele speaks few human or humanoid languages, but she doesn't need to speak to be understood. Her extensive mentalic abilities allow her to communicate telepathically with any sentient creature. Although she's not innately able to communicate with animals and plants, she can do so if she wishes through magic spells. When she does speak, her voice sounds light and joyous, mixed with the chuckling of mountain streams and the ringing of distant, high-pitched bells.

Personality

T'sele's personality is always bright and cheery. She empathizes with the pain of others, but doesn't let such emotions sadden her unduly. Regardless of individual pain, she considers the multiverse a wonderful place, and she will joyfully try to share her sense of wonder with anyone she encounters.

Primal Attributes

Primal Base	4,660
Typical Primal Flux	1,845
Planes	1 miniplane
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	2
Artifacts	0
Servitors	0

Primal Base Calculations

One Solely Controlled Miniplane	400
Rank Bonuses Through Supported	
Demigod (100 + 200 + 300)	600
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	-300
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-115
Evolutionary Gains	4,250
<hr/> Total Primal Base	<hr/> 4,835

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (4,835 / 10)	484
Consecrated Ground (10 x 2)	20
Sanctuaries (110 x 5)	550
Temples (1 x 10)	10
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground	
(0 x 1)	0
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (7 x 2)	14
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (1 x 200)	200
Worshippers by Plane (30,000, 3,000,	
17,000, 14,000, 11,800; taking the square	
root of each separately and then adding)	585
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
<hr/> Total Primal Flux	<hr/> 1,863

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



She seems to be an individual of sudden, shifting enthusiasms, constantly intrigued by the way the multiverse is unfolding. Some believe her flighty and immature, but at the core of her being is a strong belief in the importance of the Great Cycle and of free will. She'll do nothing to interfere with the Grand Play, and considers those who would worthy of nothing but utmost contempt.

It might seem that dark emotions like anger and hatred are totally foreign to T'sele, but this isn't so. She's slow to anger, but when it is aroused, her hatred makes the blackest of human animosity seem like mild irritation. Her anger and hatred are reserved for those who would interfere with the Great Cycle, and those who oppose individual freedom of choice. She prefers to deal with the object of her anger or hatred by herself, but she's definitely intelligent enough to know if she's out of her depth. So far she has never failed to receive help she requested from her patron.

T'sele loves Netheron as a patron and a close friend, but considers her a little too introspective sometimes, not taking the time to enjoy the wonder of existence. She'll always obey even the Soulbearer's smallest suggestions, however, and has little ambition to become a lesser deity because she fears this would mean breaking her close ties with Netheron. She continues to increase her power as a demigod, however, constantly adding new sphere of influence abilities to her repertoire.

There are some groups on various planes who worship T'sele directly and don't revere Netheron at all. This troubles T'sele, and she is currently attempting to convert these people. On most planes, however, T'sele is worshiped only in association with Netheron.

History

Nobody knows T'sele's true history. There are several recurring tales describing her origin, but most of these are mutually contradictory. One of the most common is described below.

In this tale of her origin, T'sele is said to have lived as a mortal in the same time and place as Netheron herself. In some versions of this tale, she's described as Netheron's closest friend and a partner in her work. When Netheron passed from the mortal sphere and was ascended as a godling, T'sele remained alive, mourning for her. Even though she knew Netheron's death was a necessary part of the Great Cycle and that her friend had passed into a greater existence, her personal sense of loss was overwhelming.

Netheron felt T'sele's pain and cherished her for it, so much so that she importuned the Weavers to ascend her friend as well. The greater deities of the council debated long and hard, frowning on this presumption and fearing that their new godling's personal feelings were overwhelming her judgment. Eventually, however, they recognized T'sele's innate worth and faith, and raised her to the rank of godling.

To ensure that the two godlings' friendship wouldn't interfere with their loyalty to their patrons, the Weavers chose to assign Netheron and T'sele to entirely different duties that would take them far away from each other. For centuries they toiled in different parts of the multiverse, proving their ability to work as well separately as together. The Weavers waited for either one to attempt to contact the other, which would indicate that their fears for the godlings' loyalty had been correct. Neither made any such effort, however. The knowledge that they were both godlings serving a common cause was enough. According to this tale, the two had no contact with each other until well after

Netheron had completed her quest against the Souleater and risen to the rank of lesser deity.

During this time, T'sele had performed her own duties admirably and had researched and assumed Soul Collection as her sphere of influence; regrettably, the tale does not specify how she accomplished this. The Weavers now decided that it made sense for the two to be reunited. The Weaver who had been supporting T'sele withdrew his support and invited Netheron to take over. She did this gladly, and her former partner joined her divine structure.

Symbols

If asked, a Netheronite priest would say the absence of symbols is T'sele's symbol. If a sigil is necessary, as in the symbolic language of art, the circle-and-dot symbol of Netheron is used. In societies that worship T'sele only, a gold circle filled with white is sometimes used to represent the demigoddess.

Sphere of Influence

T'sele's sphere of influence is Soul Collection, specifically locating floating souls and guiding them to their final resting place.

Research Cost: 200 flux per day. Research Time: 5 years. Backing Cost: 300 base. Total Flux Cost: 365,000.

T'sele automatically knows the true identity, history, and divine rank of any entity she sees. She can also sense, merely by looking at a creature, when the Weavers have decided is the appropriate time for it to die. This, like any other primal ability, cannot pass through an active primal shield.

This sphere includes the following abilities:

Quietus: This is the same ability Netheron possesses; see pages 71.

Soulbind: Research Cost: 40 flux per day. Research Time: 2 years. Backing Cost: 30 base. Activation Cost: 15 flux. This ability, activated at the moment of a mortal's death, allows the deity to bind that person's soul to her as if it had received last rites dedicating it to her care. This ability will not work on souls that have already received last rites for another deity, though it will work on anyone else no matter what the individual's religious beliefs. Since she believes in the autonomy of souls, however, T'sele seldom uses this ability on anyone but faithful Netheronites.

Soul Lock: Research Cost: 60 flux per day. Research Time: 6 months. Backing Cost: 50 base. Activation Cost: 10 flux. This ability allows the deity to transfer a willing floating soul into any inanimate object or vessel. While the soul is within the vessel, it's shielded from detection by other deities; this shield ability, like all sphere of influence abilities, has a base power rating of 100. When the deity reaches the soul's destination, she can release it from the vessel with no further primal expenditure. T'sele usually reserves this ability to sneak souls to Netheron's plane without being noticed by other deities who might have malign interest in them.

Statistics

Advantages

Sphere Abilities

Planes

T'sele's official home is Netheron's Sedare, but she spends little time there. She directly controls a small miniplane close to Netheron's home plane. This miniplane has few native life forms and is generally unshaped; T'sele intends to alter it to suit her when she gets the time. She occasionally spends a little time there, mostly in the company of the godling Lael.

Combat

When angered, T'sele is much quicker to use physical force than is her patron deity. She usually fights with a unique artifact known as the Sword of Light, preferring it even to magical and mentalic attacks, though she's proficient with most other weapon types as well. As suits her personality, T'sele prefers fast hit-and-run tactics, using her speed and maneuverability to her best advantage. She's an innovative warrior, able to devise new tactics on the spur of the moment. Her fighting style is totally unpredictable, another trait she uses to her advantage.

While killing mortals before their appointed times is to be avoided whenever possible, T'sele has no such qualms about destroying minions or other divine-level opponents. Netheron disagrees with this philosophy, but usually leaves T'sele to her own devices.

Special Equipment

Sword of Light
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 85

The Sword of Light resembles a slender longsword with a flexible blade almost like that of a fencing foil. It has a bell guard made of polished, silvery metal, a plain, spherical pommel of the same material, and a grip of snow-white sharkskin ribbed with fine gold wire. The blade itself seems to be composed entirely of brilliant blue-white light. If a mortal attempts to grasp the weapon, it seems infinitely heavy, totally impossible to lift regardless of the mortal's strength or magical effects. T'sele and other divine-level creatures can wield it with ease, as if it weighed no more than a few ounces.

The Sword of Light does not recognize any non-primal shields, armor, or barriers; it automatically passes through physical and magical defenses as if they didn't exist. Each successful hit does damage of rank 40, enough to slay a mortal outright.

Netheron created the Sword of Light and bestowed it upon T'sele as a reward for faithful service. T'sele has sworn that she'll return it to the Soulbearer should she ever ask for it, though given the close friendship of the two deities this is extremely unlikely.

Lael

Godling

Strength	16	Combat	
Health	25	Unarmed	Amateur; 10 (1x)
Reaction	20	Melee Weapons	Amateur; by weapon+STR (1x)
Intelligence	36	Missile Weapons	Veteran; by weapon (2x)
Destiny	42	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 1
Presence	25	Mentalic Aptitude	Master
Willpower	38		
Size	1.75 yards		
Speed	5 yards/second		
Primal Base	172		
Primal Flux	147		

Lael appears as a young human woman of moderate height and ample figure. While T'sele is classically beautiful, Lael is more attractive, and she seems to have more character in her broad face. She is usually half-smiling, with one corner of her small mouth quirked up. She has rich auburn hair that falls to her shoulders in loose waves. Her complexion is pale and warm, with freckles around her nose and on her forehead. Her eyes are a deep sea-green and sparkle with obvious intelligence and good humor. There's often a sense of concern in her eyes and expression as well. Lael wears a simple robe of white trimmed with green, and has bare feet.

Lael doesn't normally exude any strong aura; songbirds and wild animals are unaffected by her presence. Intelligent creatures immediately recognize that she's something considerably more than human, however. Those who have met Lael face to face don't know exactly how they knew she was of divine rank, but the very fact the conclusion was reached subconsciously made it even more persuasive.

When Lael speaks, a gentle breeze blows around her, strong enough to stir her hair but no stronger. This breeze seems to carry the sound of great waves crashing against a distant shore as a distinct undertone to her words. Her voice itself sounds totally human. Anyone to whom Lael speaks directly feels a joyous leaping sensation at the sound of the godling's voice. Lael is thought to speak all human languages fluently; she has never failed to understand or speak the tongue of a worshiper, but theoretically this could be a consequence of her magical or mentalic abilities.

Lael moves lightly and gracefully, although her movements appear more grounded than those of T'sele. She can move extremely swiftly if she has to, but this is rarely necessary.

Personality

Lael is calm and very centered; it's almost impossible to disrupt her self-control and peace of mind. She's totally dedicated to the philosophy of Netheronism, nearly to the point of obsession. She reveres and cherishes true believers and will do whatever she can to grant their prayers, so long as those prayers don't make any questionable requests.

Lael is puzzled more than angered by those who refuse to follow the precepts of Netheronism. To her mind, those who opposes Netheron's cause aren't evil, but rather deluded or ignorant of the truth. Lael will give an unbeliever the benefit of the doubt, and finds it almost impossible to accept that anyone can



Primal Attributes

Primal Base	172
Typical Primal Flux	147
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	0
Servitors	0

Primal Base Calculations

No Solely Controlled Planes	0
Rank Bonuses Through Godling	100
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	0
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	0
Evolutionary Gains	72
<hr/> Total Primal Base	<hr/> 172

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (172 / 10)	17
Consecrated Ground (10 x 2)	10
Sanctuaries (0 x 5)	0
Temples (0 x 10)	0
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (0 x 1)	0
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (0 x 2)	0
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshipers by Plane (1,000, 4 x 500; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	120
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
<hr/> Total Primal Flux	<hr/> 147

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.

truly understand the philosophy of Netheronism and still disagree with it or even oppose it.

The godling reveres Netheron greatly, and worships her fervently. She's so overawed by her patron, however, that she doesn't have a true personal relationship with her. Netheron is trying to overcome this, but it's slow work. Lael feels personally closest to T'sele, and the two spend much of their limited free time on the demigoddess's miniplane.

History

Lael was never a human being, though she was born mortal, a member of a little-known race of marine shapeshifters from a distant plane. This race, known in their own tongue as "the People," had their own set of deities whose spheres of influence related almost exclusively to their marine environment. Perhaps surprisingly, the People's pantheon included no deity of death, and their philosophy did not include the concept of the Great Cycle as such.

On her own, Lael changed this. A philosopher of great repute in her society, she felt that there was a significant gap in the People's world view. Without knowing anything about Netheron, the Weavers, or indeed any deity outside the People's pantheon, Lael formulated the belief that death wasn't just the cessation of life, but rather a turning point in what she called the Circle of Life. For decades and against considerable opposition, she promoted the view that death was both a beginning and an end, a necessary transition to be welcomed, not feared.

About the time Lael's advancing age was beginning to limit her activities, T'sele discovered her plane and reported to Netheron that a mortal had discerned the truth about the Great Cycle without benefit of divine revelation, and had even converted many of her people to this belief. Duly impressed, Netheron traveled to Lael's plane and appeared to her in a vision. Lael was amazed at the goddess's existence, shocked but overjoyed that her view of death and the Great Cycle was proven valid. When the Soulbearer offered her the opportunity to become a godling and continue spreading the philosophy of the Great Cycle, Lael accepted with profuse gratitude. Netheron offered to give Lael whatever physical form she wanted; after long consideration, she chose the human form since the vast majority of the Soulbearer's worshipers are human or at least humanoid. As a reminder of her origin, Netheron arranged it so that whenever the new godling spoke, the mighty surf of her home world would sound as a background to her voice.

In her first years as a godling, Lael's main task was to spread the word of Netheron to other planes. Soon, however, the Soulbearer realized that her other subordinates and even her mortal worshipers were doing an admirable enough job of that. What she really needed was an intercessionary, someone who would hear the prayers of the faithful and answer their petitions appropriately. Lael, she decided, was the perfect one for the job.

Symbols

As Netheron's representative to her worshipers, Lael shares the Soulbearer's central symbol, the circle and dot. When this sigil is drawn to symbolize Lael, the dot and circle are usually emerald green on a field of white.

Lael has her own symbol as well: three wavy lines on top of each other, representing the ocean, with which she is associated. Worshipers frequently draw this quick sigil, often in water, when directing prayers to Netheron on behalf of a dying friend. The association of the symbol with the prayer is said to increase the likelihood that Lael will intercede.

In some societies, Lael is associated with an aquatic plant known as the seadagger, a seaweed with a single blade-shaped leaf.

Combat

Lael is ill-equipped for physical combat and thus avoids it if she can. If push comes to shove, she can hold her own in a magical battle, but in a divine-level conflict she'd have to depend on the direct primal support of Netheron. Fortunately, Lael almost never has to face combat since she, like the rest of the Soulbearer's subordinates, is under the protection of both Netheron and the Weavers. Occasionally a deity opposed to Netheron will send out a godling to interfere with Lael's duties in a kind of probing raid, but this is rare and never escalates.

Special Equipment

Calmbringer
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 77

Calmbringer is an exquisitely beautiful tiara, a delicately wrought band of platinum with three ornate spires in the center. It instantly changes its size to fit the head of any human or humanoid who tries to wear it.

Calmbringer is a communication device of great efficacy. It empowers its wearer to establish a complex mental link with up to ten individuals simultaneously. There is no range limit, and the participants in this link can be on multiple planes. The link acts in many ways like a modern conference call, except that any two or more of the linked minds can establish a temporary secondary link as well to exchange private comments. The wearer of the tiara will hear all such sub-conversations, but no others will unless invited. The wearer cannot initiate the original link with an unwilling participant; once included in the link, a participant can drop out at will or be ejected by Calmbringer's wearer.

Any conversations held through a link established by Calmbringer cannot be overheard or tapped into via any non-primal means. There is no limit to how long a link can be maintained, and participating requires no greater level of concentration than a normal verbal conversation. The profoundly personal level of the link circumvents normal barriers against mental control as well, so any participant will be able to use magic or mentalics to influence any other participant except the wearer without interference.

Anyone with an intelligence of 34 or less who activates Calmbringer immediately falls into a coma from the onslaught of mental information flowing through the tiara. This coma cannot be reversed while the victim continues to

wear the tiara, though it will subside on its own within sixty days after the tiara is removed, or sooner if mind-affecting cures are applied.

Netheron commissioned this item for Lael in order to help her answer the many prayers directed at her each day. It also gives Lael the ability to contact a large number of people efficiently and quickly in time of crisis. The godling does not always wear the tiara, however, donning it only when she anticipates immediate use.

Quies

Avatar of Netheron

Strength	16	<i>Combat</i>	
Health	22	Defense Strength	25
Reaction	19	Unarmed	Master; 40 (1x)
Intelligence	39	Melee Weapons	Master; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	55	Missile Weapons	Veteran; by weapon (1x)
Presence	30	<i>Aptitude</i>	
Willpower	52	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 5
Size	2 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	4 yards/second		

When she wants to appear as a mortal, Netheron uses the avatar Quies, a human female body with parchment-white skin and shoulder-length straight black hair. She stands an inch or two below six feet tall, with a slender, athletic build. Her face is ageless, and her eyes are so dark as to appear black. Quies is attractive, with a very serious, intense mien; she looks like someone worthy of trust. She wears a simple black robe, belted at the waist with rope of purest white. She is barefoot, and she typically carries a staff of brilliant white—perhaps enamelled and polished wood, perhaps another material altogether.

Since as an avatar she has no primal power, there's no aura of divinity around Quies. Still, the mind of the Soulbearer is clear in her behavior, which always indicates deliberation, intelligence, and wisdom.

Quies always moves with deliberation, as if she knows exactly where she's going and what she's doing. Even when she's moving as fast as she can, her motions are graceful and efficient.

When inhabited by the mind of the Soulbearer, Quies can of course speak all languages Netheron can. She usually conceals this fact, however, admitting a familiarity with only the most common language in the region where she's operating. She finds that she can learn much when people converse in a language they don't think she understands.

Personality

Since Quies is merely a body inhabited by Netheron's mind, her basic personality and that of Netheron are identical. But when Netheron sets aside the mantle of divinity and enters into her avatar, she also tends to set aside some of the responsibilities that normally weigh her down. As Quies, Netheron apparently feels that the consequences of a bad decision won't be so wide-ranging; this frees her to relax more and make decisions based on less information.

History

Netheron created her first avatar soon after becoming a lesser deity, using the figure of Quies to investigate firsthand exactly how her churches were functioning on a day-to-day basis. It was as Quies that she discovered the primate of a local Netheronite church had turned the religious community into a strictly codified hierarchy, with himself as the head. Quies identified herself to the primate as the avatar of Netheron and demanded that he return the religious structure to its true form. The primate refused, apparently not believing that Quies was actually Netheron's avatar. Netheron could simply have transferred

her primal abilities into Quies's body, but instead she chose to punish his lack of faith by sending T'sele to "collect" the primate and those who collaborated with him in perverting the church.

After this event, Netheron has had a great deal of trouble trying to suppress stories of Quies's true nature. Today, many Netheronite societies know that Quies is Netheron's avatar, though those on planes distant from the one where this tale began are still unaware of this fact.

Symbols

Since she typically identifies herself as a simple wandering priest of Netheron, Quies usually doesn't have a symbol of her own. Yet in some Netheronite cultures that know the truth about Quies, the worshipers do make a symbolic distinction between the avatar and the deity. In these societies, Quies's personal sigil is the Netheronite circle-and-dot with a white diagonal stripe running across it from the top right to the bottom left. This stripe represents the white staff the avatar frequently bears.

Planes

Quies has appeared on many main planes, primarily those on which Netheron has a large number of worshipers. When Netheron's mental focus is in her own form and the avatar is a mindless husk, it's thought that Quies resides somewhere in the Soulbearer's Sedare, but nobody knows for sure.

Combat

Quies has never entered a situation in which she couldn't somehow avoid combat. If she were to enter combat on a nonintervention plane, she'd probably use her magical abilities from extended range rather than risking her body in melee. Her white staff is a powerful weapon against mortals.

Special Equipment

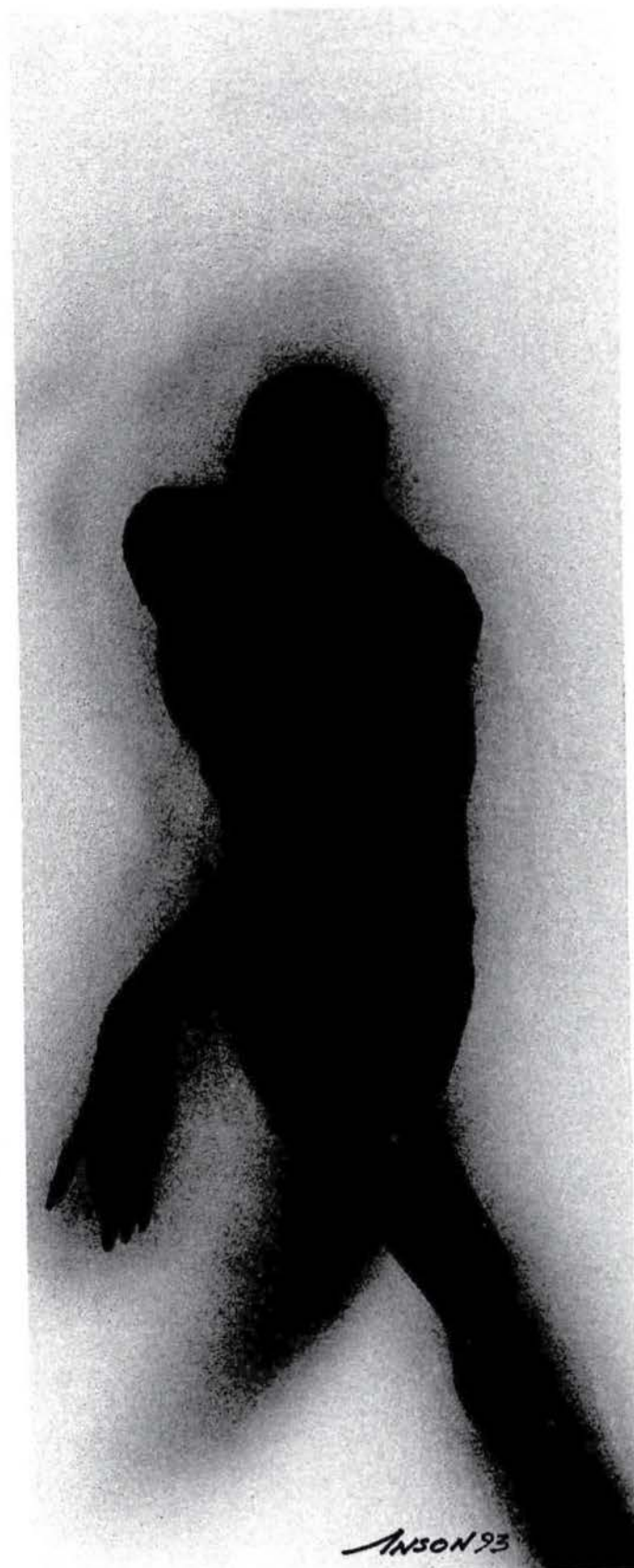
The Staff of the Avatar resembles a common walking staff about five feet long with a diameter of around an inch, made of smoothly sanded wood coated with white enamel and polished to a brilliant sheen. The mass of the item is about right for something of that construction, but it feels unnaturally cool to the touch, implying that it may be composed of something very different.

Also known as Shieldreaver, the staff will instantly and automatically destroy any shield or piece of armor it strikes. The shield or armor will bestow its normal protection against that blow, but will be burst asunder in the process, leaving the target unarmored to face the next strike. Artifacts and primally reinforced armor and shields are allowed a power rating roll to resist this power.

Any unarmored mortal struck by the staff instantly falls into a coma that lasts a full day; alternatively, if the wielder wishes, the mortal struck is instantly slain. In both cases, resistance rolls apply.

Staff of the Avatar
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 78

Netheron always knows the exact location of the Staff of the Avatar, and can sense the true identity and divine rank of the person currently holding it. As an artifact, the staff can act as a focus for primal effects, which means that a thief who has somehow managed to get it away from Quies might be in for an unpleasant surprise when the deity's mental focus returns to her own body and primal base.



Farranger

Supported Servitor

Strength	20	Combat	
Health	20	Defense Strength	40
Reaction	35	Unarmed	Legendary 1; 50 (6x)
Intelligence	19	Melee Weapons	
Destiny	30		Legendary 2; by weapon+STR (4x)
Presence	33	Missile Weapons	Master; by weapon (2x)
Willpower	19	Special Abilities	
Size	2 yards	Undetectable; Molecular disruption, 45 (2x)	
Speed		Aptitude	
	10+ yards/second	Magical Aptitude	Veteran
		Mentalic Aptitude	Master
Primal Base	65		
Primal Flux	6		

Farranger is a featureless humanoid form of impenetrable black, a six-foot shadow somehow possessed of three dimensions. The genderless minion is totally featureless and seems to radiate darkness like a lightbulb radiates light.

Farranger moves blindingly fast, so fast that it seems to flicker from one location or posture to another. So great is Farranger's speed that the servitor nearly always strikes first in combat and is extremely difficult to surprise. At will, it can become totally undetectable to all non-primal senses; this ability has a power rating of 65.

Farranger never speaks and rarely deigns to communicate with anyone outside Netheron's divine structure. When necessary, the servitor communicates telepathically.

Personality

As a servitor, Farranger doesn't have much of a personality. It rarely communicates with anyone or anything other than Netheron, and even then it is terse and to the point. It's stolid, determined, and unshakable, utterly dedicated to following the orders of the Soulbearer in the most effective and efficient manner.

An unsubstantiated folk tale perfectly encapsulates Farranger's approach to conflict. The servitor was observing a Netheronite church on a distant plane when an minor demon of small power but large ego encountered it. The demon did everything in its power to goad Farranger into a fight; it insulted the servitor and its creator, made foul comments about everything that Netheron held holy, and terrorized the local worshipers. Throughout, Farranger just looked on, apparently unmoved. When the demon began harming her worshipers, Netheron, who had been observing events through Farranger's perceptions, ordered her servitor to chase the creature off. Farranger attacked the demon with incredible ferocity, nearly tearing it to shreds before Netheron called it off. The instant it received the order, the servitor returned to its stolid, silent observation of the demon, apparently totally unmoved by the whole thing. The demon, needless to say, made itself scarce and never troubled anything or anyone related to Netheronism again.

History

Farranger is a unique servitor, created directly by Netheron a century or so ago. No one knows where she got the willing mortal soul needed to form it, though some say it was the soul of a faithful Netheronite warrior.

Initially, it's thought, Netheron created Farranger as a fast-moving troubleshooter to keep an eye on things on the many planes where Netheronite worshipers can be found. It seems that Farranger had little to do on this score, however, since the Netheronite church and its associated religious structure is generally stable and self-correcting. Eventually accepting this fact, Netheron began to assign other duties to her dark servitor. The most commonly known such duty is to deliver the Kiss, the spiritual touch that is a major part in the ordination of a Netheronite priest. Since Farranger is also very lethal in combat, it's quite likely that Netheron is keeping the servitor on staff as a potential shock-trooper, should such ever be necessary.

Symbols

Farranger has no signs or symbols associated solely with itself. If sigils are necessary, the circle-and-dot symbol for Netheron is used.

Planes

Early in its career as a servitor, Farranger could often be found on Netheron's home plane, patrolling the Sedare and the surrounding territory. With its new duties and the rapid growth of Netheronism, it now spends much of its time traveling the planes to bestow the Kiss on newly ordained priests.

Combat

Because of the connection between Netheron and the Weavers, Farranger rarely has to fight, though it's well equipped to handle combat. Farranger never carries its own equipment or weapons, but is proficient in the use of any weapon it encounters on its travels. Even if there's no weapon for it to snatch up, it's highly lethal with its bare fists, perhaps even more lethal.

At will, at an attack speed of 2x, Farranger can disrupt the molecular structure of any one distinct item or individual within a range of fifty yards. This attack can be blocked only with primal or primally reinforced barriers. Inanimate objects are reduced to dust; living creatures suffer damage of rank 45.

Farranger has an innate sense of good strategy and tactics and will use its strengths, the situation, and its foe's weaknesses to best advantage. It never lets emotions like pity or fear interfere with its task.

Special Equipment

Farranger has no special equipment.

Vista

Supported Servitor

Strength	19	<i>Combat:</i>	
Health	18	Defense Strength	30
Reaction	25	Unarmed	Master; 20 (2x)
Intelligence	18	Melee Weapons	Master; by weapon+STR (2x)
Destiny	28	Missile Weapons	Master; by weapon (2x)
Presence	30	Special Abilities	
Willpower	20		Undetectable; Heat blast, 30 (1x)
Size	2 yards	<i>Aptitude</i>	
Speed	5 yards/second	Magical Aptitude	Master
		Mentalic Aptitude	Legendary 1
Primal Base	65		
Primal Flux	6		

Vista most resembles a photographic negative of Farranger, a featureless humanoid form of brilliant white light standing six feet tall. Like Farranger, the servitor is genderless, wearing no clothes and carrying no equipment.

The light shed by Vista is usually just short of uncomfortably bright, though it can grow blinding quickly if the servitor becomes angered. Vista does not radiate heat, however, regardless of its emotional state.

Vista can move faster than a normal human, but nowhere near as fast as Farranger. Most of the time, it moves slowly and gracefully, as if there's no reason in the universe to hurry. At will, it can become totally undetectable to all non-primal senses; this ability has a power rating of 60.

Vista seems as incapable of speech as Farranger and communicates telepathically.

Personality

Vista is much more emotional and "human" than Farranger, though since it's a servitor it is incapable of acting on its emotions. The servitor empathizes with pain and suffering, and is happy when Netheron's orders allow it to alleviate them. It is quick to anger if it senses injustice, but with Netheron in control it will never act impulsively.

Vista will follow the orders of any of Netheron's subordinates, though it will prioritize those given by Sisehan over the rest if given a choice. If at all possible within the scope of its duties, Vista will avoid Farranger; the servitor respects its dark counterpart, but doesn't like its personality.

History

As with Farranger, no one knows the origin of the mortal soul that helped to form Vista. Sisehan the Shepherd created the servitor, so nearly any story imaginable may be true. Some say that Sisehan had really wanted to create a minion using his Form Life ability (see p. 77), but that Netheron insisted that minion status be reserved for those who earn it. If true, perhaps this tale explains why Sisehan created Vista with more personality than most servitors.

The task for which Vista was originally created, one it still performs, is to encourage Netheronite societies that are struggling through hard times. When



a Netheronite church is suffering from government persecution or natural disasters and the faith of the worshipers is starting to waver, it's possible that Vista will appear on the scene to remind them by its very presence that Netheron is concerned about their travails. The servitor will rarely intervene directly—that's not Netheron's way—unless the troubles are being caused by one opposed to the Weavers.

Vista is usually nearby when the faith of Netheronism begins to establish itself on a new plane. When the time is right, the servitor selects an influential worshiper to whom it telepathically dictates the precepts of Netheronism that make up the Passion.

Vista has, on a few occasions, been seconded to serve the Weavers in some capacity. The details of this detached duty are uncertain.

Symbols

Vista has no signs or symbols associated solely with itself. If sigils are necessary, the circle-and-dot symbol of Netheron is used.

Planes

When it's not traveling the multiverse supporting Netheron's worshipers, Vista can be found in the Sedare on the Soulbearer's home plane of Pacinor. On rare ceremonial occasions, such as when Netheron appears at meetings with other deities, Vista usually attends its master as personal servant and bodyguard.

Combat

Although nowhere near as lethal as Farranger, Vista can definitely hold its own in combat against mortals, other servitors, and many minions. It much prefers using spells or mentalic abilities from a safe distance to mixing it up toe-to-toe, however.

The servitor can generate a concentrated blast of radiant heat with a range of 100 yards. This blast is not inherently primally powered, but Netheron frequently primally laces the attack.

Should Vista become embroiled in a fight Netheron thinks is important, the Soulbearer is quite likely to dispatch Farranger to the scene to settle matters.

Special Equipment

Vista has no special equipment.

Magic

Introduction

Most races, civilizations, or even small societies have idiosyncratic deities of magic, each with his or her own divine structure. The structure and church described here is perhaps one of the smaller ones, definitely not as powerful as the one following Hecate, for example. Still, Nimboal Mana-Shaper is a lesser deity, and thus most definitely someone to be taken seriously. The genderless Nimboal has only been a major player on the divine scene for three or four centuries, but the deity's power is rapidly expanding and its influence spreading.

Nimboalism is a mystery cult based on multiple initiations and what the faithful call "stepwise illumination." The church hierarchy is divided into many different ranks or orders of initiation, each of which knows a little more about the central mysteries and occult truths than the order immediately below. Only the occult masters, the highest-ranking priests, know everything the religion can teach them. This structure is symbolic of the way Nimboalism views life, the universe, and reality.

Nimboalism teaches that knowledge comes only to those who actively seek it. True enlightenment must come slowly, one step at a time, as the seeker becomes worthy of each unveiling. If the occult truths were revealed all at once, the seeker would be totally overwhelmed; instead of granting enlightenment, the premature and total unveiling of truth would confuse the seeker's untutored mind. Only through an orderly, stepwise progression can a worshiper truly and fully understand the central mysteries and incorporate them into his or her life.

Nimboalism doesn't use force or any other form of active persuasion to spread its gospel; in fact, Nimboalite priests actively discourage people who are interested in learning more about the faith. At the moment, the Nimboalite faith flourishes only in urban, peaceful, relatively wealthy locales on a handful of planes. Where day-to-day needs are largely satisfied, much of the population has freedom to think, to wonder about reality and the universe as a whole. To people with this freedom, the purposefully cultivated aura of mystery and occult secrets surrounding Nimboalism is a great attraction.

The church of Nimboal has little to say about the day-to-day life of its lay members, apart from strict edicts about attendance at services, tithes, and special offerings and sacrifices. As long as they support the church with their presence and their money, the church cares little how its worshipers lead their lives.

That definitely can't be said for the ordained priests, however. Members of each different order must operate under a different body of strict and extensive

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rules that might cover everything from food eaten to reproductive behavior to style of haircut. The only rules that remain unchanged from order to order are those that demand unquestioning obedience to those of higher order and to Nimboal Mana-Shaper itself. Since the senior priests almost always speak for Nimboal, obedience to them is stressed as strongly as obedience to the deity.

The Nimboalite church strongly approves of material wealth. In the early days of the church, before the current hierarchy had developed, the faith was propounded only by itinerant mage-priests who had come to worship Nimboal through personal enlightenment. These early Nimboalites eschewed personal wealth because they believed it would come between them and their understanding of their deity.

As the hierarchy began to develop, this swiftly changed, however. The lay worshipers who flocked to the faith were used to paying tithes and making offerings to other religions, and they expected to do the same for their new faith. The priests in the newly formed hierarchy didn't act decisively to discourage this behavior, and soon became quite habituated to the comfortable lifestyle they experienced with no cost to themselves. The senior priests soon dropped all negative statements about material wealth from the catechism; after all, how could they preach against wealth when they themselves were becoming ever more comfortably wealthy? According to the contemporary teachings of Nimboalism, personal wealth is the reward of competence and achievement.

Predictably, the Nimboalite faith isn't a religion of rebellion or struggle against the status quo. It coexists very smoothly with the secular government, and in fact overlaps the secular government in many areas. Senior priests in the Nimboalite hierarchy are often also influential figures in the government, military, and business community, so the chances of church and state ever coming into conflict are slim in the extreme.

According to religious law and statutes, the church has the right to levy a sliding scale of fines against lay worshipers who defame the religion, behave disrespectfully toward the priests, scorn feasts, fasts, and holy days, fail to make sufficient donations to the church coffers, or otherwise transgress the unwritten laws of correct behavior. Most of these fines can be levied at the whim of any ordained priests. The highest category of fines, equal to half or more of a sinner's net worth, can only be levied by at least three priests.

Secularly and legally speaking, the church has no authority to enforce any of these fines. As far as faithful worshipers are concerned, however, the priests have all the authority they could ever need. According to church precepts, anyone in default of a legally levied fine will no longer be acknowledged by Nimboal Mana-Shaper or any member of the divine structure. The miscreant can't receive any sacrament, including last rites, although she can attend normal services without actively participating. Should a worshiper die while in default on a fine, his soul won't be drawn to Nimboal's home plane but will be left floating aimlessly, subject to capture by any evil deity or demon who happens upon it. This threat of eternal punishment is enough to motivate most miscreants to pay up and get off the church's bad books as soon as humanly possible.

According to church law, miscreants are allowed to appeal a fine to a priest of a higher order than the priest who initially levied it, unless the fine was levied by three priests in conjunction. If the senior priest agrees the fine was levied in error, the punishment is waived and the miscreant is immediately welcomed back into the bosom of the church. It's very rare for appeals to be granted, however. In most cases, the senior priest confirms the judgment of the lesser priest, ending the appeal process right there. If the appeal is obviously groundless, the senior priest can increase the fine as punishment for wasting a superior's time.

Although there are historical precedents, no priest of Nimboal has totally and irrevocably excommunicated or banished a criminal in the last couple of decades. Instead, in cases of really heinous crimes, they levy a fine sufficiently high that the malefactor isn't likely ever to be able to pay it back. This generally has the same effect as lifetime banishment, and if the sinner does manage to come up with the money, the church will benefit from the added weight in its coffers.

The Nimboalite church will allow all those of human or humanoid extraction to join, as long as they agree to follow the precepts of the religion. Unsubstantiated stories tell of totally inhuman sentients being gladly accepted into the bosom of the church; some cynics claim that the Nimboalite church would accept a rock for membership if it had a vein of gold in it. Membership in another church isn't seen as a roadblock as long as there's no direct conflict between the precepts of the two faiths or the requirements of the two churches.

No Nimboalite church exists in any nation or society threatened by outside invaders or rocked by internal turmoil. Thus, discussion of how Nimboalism would react to direct threat remains purely speculative. Unlike some other religions, Nimboalism is strongly tied up with public display and open services. Obviously, then, the religion wouldn't fare well in a theocratic environment where "pagan" faiths are repressed.

Church Structure

As mentioned earlier, the church of Nimboal Mana-Shaper has a very complex, multilevel hierarchy based around the concept of the mystery school. While early Nimboalism was based on personal enlightenment, the current incarnation of the church teaches that enlightenment comes only from direct instruction by those who have achieved a higher level of initiation. At the bottom of this gradation of enlightenment are the lay worshipers. Above them are various ranks of ordained priests, and at the top are the occult masters, led by the master of the mysteries. Presiding over all of the masters of the mysteries on a given plane is a chancellor.

There can be any number of distinct, virtually autonomous churches of Nimboal on a given plane. The size of each distinct church depends on a number of factors: the local population, the ease of communication, and the organizational competence and ambition of individual masters of the mysteries. All Nimboalite churches on a single plane are officially under the authority of a single figure, the planar chancellor. What this actually means depends on the competence of the chancellor, of course. An ineffective chancellor coupled with powerful and ambitious masters of the mysteries, for example, will lead to virtually autonomous churches.

The Nimboalite church hierarchy is based upon eleven major orders of initiation. In order of increasing enlightenment, responsibility, and authority, these major rankings are Sodalis, Praepositus, Illuminatus, Sapiens, Humanitas, Herus, Praeceptor, Magister, Magister Magnus, Magister Arcanus, and Magister Rei Occultissimae.

The progression from one order to another is strictly defined; it's impossible to skip an order or to enter the hierarchy at an order higher than Sodalis. To progress to a new order, a candidate must undergo rigorous training in the mysteries associated with the next order. These include new sets of symbols,

Hierarchy

mystical and symbolic tracts that the candidate must memorize and recite, new ways of interpreting the standard fables and parables of the faith, new responsibilities, and new modes of address for equals and superiors. The candidate gets no time off from her normal duties to learn this new material, but must somehow fit it into her limited free time.

When the candidate is confident that he has learned and incorporated the necessary material, he can approach the leader of the order to which he aspires and ask for examination. The details of order examinations are kept inviolably secret; what little is known about them hints that they're incredibly harrowing experiences and that many candidates fail them several times before finally succeeding.

Of course, it's not solely up to the candidate to decide when an order examination will take place. A priest must prove herself through the duties of her current order, attracting the attention of her superiors. An average priest may spend many years in one order before his superiors consider him worthy of attempting to progress. Of course, highly competent priests can be fast-tracked, progressing to a new order every year or so.

Priests can fraternize openly with members of other orders, but there are certain things they simply can't talk about with people of lower rank than themselves. To help keep track of who's at which level in the hierarchy, each order has its own set of recognition signs, symbols, code phrases, and responses.

Progression from order to order isn't guaranteed. Many priests climb to a certain rank in the hierarchy and then simply stall, spending the rest of their lives at that level. It's impossible to "devolve" to a lower order or degree, however. When a priest reaches the upper echelons, the order of Magister and above, the number of priests in each order becomes smaller and smaller and those within them cling to their privileges more and more jealously. For example, a certain church might have only eight members in the Magister Arcanus order. These senior priests will be very careful about who they admit to their rarified heights, promoting only those priests who are letter-perfect in their studies—and who they don't think will cause trouble for them in any way.

By tradition, there can be no more than six members in the Magister Rei Occultissimae (occult master) order, but there must be at least three. The occult masters select the master of the mysteries from among their number. The process used for this selection is kept utterly secret. The masters claim that Nimboal Mana-Shaper itself participates in the procedure, but cynics maintain that the selection comes down to influence peddling, horse-trading, and good, old-fashioned browbeating and intimidation. Whatever the case, once selected the master of the mysteries retains this post for life.

The elevation of a new master of the mysteries leaves a vacancy in the Magister Rei Occultissimae order, of course, as does the death of one of its members. To fill this gap, the occult masters select a suitable candidate from the order directly below them, the Magister Arcanus. Traditionally this candidate must be elevated within one year of the time the position becomes open.

All the masters of the mysteries on a plane choose the chancellor from among their number. Again, the priests claim that Nimboal Mana-Shaper participates in the selection. Since the process is cloaked in impenetrable secrecy, it's impossible to confirm or deny the assertion. The chancellor stands apart from and above the individual masters of the mysteries and holds this position for life. The selection of a new chancellor leaves one church without a master of the mysteries, requiring the occult masters to promote a replacement and then perhaps refill their own numbers. The death of a chancellor can thus trickle down to affect the Magister Arcanus order.

GM's Note: Some class-based game systems consider priest and mage mutually exclusive classes. In these game systems, the mage-priests in the Nimboalite hierarchy are actually only honorary priests, mages who serve administrative functions in the church without wielding priestly powers. The scholar-priests, those who don't use wizardly magic, are the true priests who channel the power of the deity in spell form.

Although the precepts of Nimboalism say nothing about racial superiority or discrimination, almost all candidates for the priesthood are humans, regardless of the racial mix in the region. There's no gender discrimination in the priesthood, however. Even in nations in which the secular society is either patriarchal or matriarchal, the balance of males to females in the Nimboalite hierarchy is usually close to one-to-one.

Candidates for the priesthood are selected by the ordained priests; would-be candidates can make their desires known, but this will have little bearing on whether or not they're selected. All candidates must be above the age of majority, sixteen in Nimboalite societies, and must be faithful members of the church. They must also have displayed either a talent for or an abiding interest in the practice of magic. Most priest candidates are practicing mages with some degree of talent and training.

Candidates for the Nimboalite priesthood don't have to go through an apprenticeship period as in many other faiths. They simply have to prepare for their ordination and initiation into the Sodalis order. This preparation takes the same form as the training for promotion to any other order: memorizing symbols, signs, tracts, interpretations, and other texts. After at least six months of hard studying, candidates can present themselves to the church for examination. If they pass the examination, proving their mastery of the required material, they then undergo the ordination process.

As with initiation into any other order of the church, a new priest's ordination and initiation into Sodalis is performed in secret, deep in the bowels of the church. No details are known about the service, only that it's a ritual of high symbolism and deep solemnity. Nimboalite priests frequently claim their ordination was the most beautiful and spiritually uplifting experience of their lives, though they are also prone to go on at length about the inspiration and wonder of subsequent initiations.

Only priests who have been officially ordained can minister to the flock. Most of the duties of those in the Sodalis order are actually to serve, assist, and generally act as flunkies for priests of higher orders.

Most Nimboalite priests are also practicing mages. The hierarchy of orders described above is specifically designed for these mage-priests. Some priests, however, simply don't have the talent; they can study the philosophy and theory of the magical arts, but they can't wield magical powers. These scholar-priests follow their own progression of orders. The order names are the same, but are distinguished from the main sequence by the addition of the word *Literatus*. Thus, a newly ordained scholar-priest is a member of the Sodalis Literatus order. A scholar-priest can't progress beyond Magister Arcanus Literatus, and thus is ineligible to become master of the mysteries or chancellor.

The basic garb of a Nimboalite priest is a simple robe of black cloth belted with a silver cord. This robe may bear many different embellishments, including embroidered runes and symbols of power, silver buttons, extended epaulets, elaborate cuffs, hems, and collars, and so on. These embellishments show the order held by the priest. There's no simple rule for distinguishing the order; a priest with many embellishments may actually rank lower than one with almost none. The significance of the different types of embellishments is one of the first things a priest candidate learns. Priestly hairstyles serve to further distinguish one order from the next.

As discussed earlier, Nimboalite priests must obey strict sets of rules that vary depending on their order of initiation. These rules can cover virtually every aspect of life. Below are two sample rule sets:

*P*riests Candidates

Training and Ordination

Lifestyle

Humanitas: Eat no meat. Head must be shaven except for a short ponytail growing from the crown. Remain totally celibate. Travel abroad from the church only at night.

Praeceptor: Eat only white meats. Hair is shoulder length, pulled back in a braid. Never step on the shadow of a higher-order priest. Drink no spirits. Tell no jokes and engage in no jocular behavior. Conduct sexual liaisons only with other ordained priests.

As with the embellishment on a priest's robe, there's no simple rule linking the number or stringency of the rules with a priest's order.

The punishments for breaking these rules are as varied as the rules themselves. Penalties for infractions range from fines to indentured labor to corporal punishments such as flogging. More intellectual punishments are also frequently levied; for example, a malefactor may be denied the sacraments until he or she memorizes and recites, word-perfect, a long and mind-numbingly confusing passage from some holy book.

Nimboalite priests are free to use any priestly or wizardly magic, so long as they avoid harming other members of the church. The religion places no restrictions on schools of magic, such as necromancy, that other faiths consider doubtful.

Worshippers

Nimboalism is largely an urban religion, one that springs up only in peaceful, relatively wealthy nations. Mages, and those who are intellectually but not practically interested in the magical arts, will obviously be drawn to the church.

Individualists and extreme free-thinkers aren't going to find Nimboalism attractive at all. The hidebound hierarchy and mystery-within-a-mystery structure will generally alienate these people. Neither will the faith appeal to those who favor personal gnosis as the path to enlightenment. People who have an innate respect and desire for authority are more likely to find that Nimboalism fits their world view.

Worship

Places of Public Worship

The Nimboalite faith invests a lot of money and effort into building temples, chapels, and other places of worship. The structures are always complex and baroque in architecture, designed expressly to create a sense of mystery and complexity in the mind of the observer. The interiors are dimly lit at best, with many narrow passageways and doorways leading to small rooms. Portals are usually covered with curtains of purple or black cloth or secured by concealed doors. In a large Nimboalite church, it would take an explorer days to explore all of its intricacies and many ounces of ink to map it out.

A Nimboalite temple contains only a few areas open to the public, usually the main hall of worship plus possibly an atrium or lobby. These public areas frequently boast flashy but basically minor displays of magical prowess: lanterns "burning" with magical fire, statues that address worshippers, objects hovering in midair, animated furniture, and so on. Access to the rest of the temple is restricted to ordained priests. In these private areas, the priests have their quarters, refectories, and private worship rooms. Major temples also have extensive laboratories and workrooms in which mage-priests can hone their skills.

According to Nimboalite doctrine, all religious services and sacraments must be performed in a consecrated temple and officiated by an ordained priest. Certain sects within the church further claim that Nimboal will only hear the prayers of the faithful if they're offered in a consecrated church. Most faithful Nimboalites want to hedge their bets, however, assuming it's better to pray when Nimboal isn't listening than not to pray when the deity is paying attention. Based on this logic, many Nimboalites set up small shrines to the deity in their homes.

A Nimboalite shrine is usually little more than a table draped in black or deep purple cloth on which rests a slender wand of alderwood. Richer worshipers, or those who are capable of magic, will make sure this wand is enchanted in some way.

Predictably, Nimboalism has many holy writings. Most are kept secret from lay worshipers and shown only to members of the priesthood who have achieved a certain order of initiation. Many of these holy documents are mutually contradictory. For example, a short document known as the *Memori* is revealed to priests when they achieve the order of *Sapiens*, and they're told it reveals a major truth of Nimboalism. When those same priests achieve the order of *Herus*, however, they get to see another document, the *Prudenti*, which categorically contradicts much of which appeared in the *Memori*. The *Memori*, they are now told, is to be understood symbolically and allegorically, not literally; the *Prudenti* is to be taken literally. Similar situations occur several times throughout a priest's progression through the hierarchy.

The primary holy writing of Nimboalism is a folio known as the *Patefactio*. This is the only holy book accessible to lay worshipers, and indeed the only one whose existence is known to them. According to Nimboalite doctrine, it was dictated personally by the godling Xanthine to Tenmace, the first chancellor of Nimboalism, after whom one of the religion's holy days was named. Copies of the *Patefactio* were then magically transported to other nations and other planes.

The *Patefactio* is unremarkable as holy writings go. It contains the usual combination of myth, complex allegory, and injunctions to be true to the faith. Its central tenet is the importance of eternally following the path of wisdom, never stopping in the quest to "peel away another layer of the onion" and find the "greater truths hidden at the heart of the lesser."

The other two dozen or so holy writings are also said to have been dictated by Xanthine to various church dignitaries. Objective analysis generally concludes some of these writings were probably divinely inspired. Others, however, were quite obviously cobbled together by very mortal agencies, presumably higher-order priests who needed some new "truths" to feed to their subordinates.

According to Nimboalite doctrine, the faithful can petition their deity for any boon they like—personal wealth, success, health, enlightenment—except misfortune to another. Prayers for knowledge and enlightenment are said to be the most willingly accepted and granted.

Church doctrine encourages all faithful Nimboalites to offer their prayers to Nimboal only in a consecrated church, preferably during a ceremony. Most priests hint, unofficially of course, that a particular prayer has a better chance of being granted if it's accompanied by an offering to the church.

Places of Private Worship

Holy Writings

Prayers

Holy Days

There are many holy days and festivals in the Nimboalite calendar, roughly one per month: the birthdays of major figures from Nimboalite history, celebrations of significant historical events, and observations of celestial phenomena. The following is a partial list:

- Day of Enlightenment (New Year): festival
- Belthene's Day (birthday of saint): fast
- Day of the Inner Secrets (spring equinox): festival
- Day of Ineffable Order (summer solstice): festival
- Tenmace's Day (birthday of saint): fast
- Day of the Chancellor (official birthday of chancellor): festival
- Day of the Revelation (fall equinox): festival
- Day of the Occult Wonders (winter solstice): fast

On each holy day, the faithful do no work, spending all their waking hours attending services and rituals in the nearest Nimboalite church. The richer members of the congregation vie with each other for the honor and privilege of supplying food and drink for the festivals.

The central ritual of observance is a ceremony called the Gathering, which takes place twice on every holy day. The Gathering is a complex service of great dignity and pomp, and all faithful Nimboalites are expected to attend and participate. The service, conducted by the highest-ranking priest in the vicinity, involves complex statements and responses, all performed in a ritualistic manner. At the climax of the ceremony, a large metal cup of water is passed throughout the congregation. As it reaches the worshipers, they dip their fingers into it and trace diagonal lines on their foreheads to represent the alder wand symbol of Nimboal Mana-Shaper.

Non-Nimboalites, and those of the faithful currently suffering punishment for not paying fines, are allowed to attend the Gathering but may not participate.

Offerings and Sacrifices

The Nimboalite church expects its lay members to tithe, paying one-tenth of their annual income to the church. Those who can afford to pay more are advised to do so; those who can't pay that much frequently come under considerable peer pressure to do their bit for the church. Further, the church recommends additional special offerings on the many holy days, at important ceremonies, and during or after the receipt of significant sacraments. Most worshipers make their offerings privately; some, however, seize the opportunity to raise their own status in the community by publicly making large donations to the church.

Hard currency is the preferred form of offering, although foodstuffs, works of art, artifacts, and even farm animals are accepted, albeit less willingly. Sacrifices, in which something of value is destroyed or killed, are frowned on by the Nimboalite hierarchy. Most priests encourage the faithful to donate items rather than destroying them.

Sacraments

Nimboalism has two sacraments to commemorate the two major events in a worshiper's life: the Ortus for birth and the Primae Tenebrae for death. Marriage is considered a secular issue in the Nimboalite church, something to be handled according to local civil laws. There is a third sacrament, the Approbatio, which

is used only to welcome a repentant malefactor back into the body of the church after the appropriate fine or penance has been paid.

This sacrament is traditionally performed on a newborn within its first three weeks of life. Like all Nimboalite rituals and sacraments, the ceremony must take place in a consecrated church and be performed by an ordained priest. The Ortus is a brief, simple ritual in which the newborn's parents serve as witnesses without actually participating.

The priest recites several passages from Nimboalite holy writings, then touches the newborn on the forehead with a simple wand of alderwood. To conclude the service, the priest drapes a soft black cloth across the child's shoulders, like a shawl. Most parents hold this cloth in safekeeping, giving it to the child when he or she reaches the age of majority.

A person can be considered a true and faithful member of the Nimboalite church only after undergoing the Ortus. Although the ritual is usually performed within three weeks of birth, sometimes this isn't possible. When performed on an adult, the ceremony is identical, right down to the requirement for two witnesses. The new convert's parents or other blood kin are preferred; failing that, any two people the convert respects and trusts can serve.

The two witnesses are expected to make some significant offering to the priest in thanks for conducting the ceremony. If the subject of the sacrament is an adult who has asked friends to be witnesses, he or she usually gives the offering money to the witnesses for them to present to the priest.

The Primae Tenebrae is the Nimboalite version of last rites, performed on a faithful worshiper to bind his soul once more to the deity and prepare him for death. In its full form, it requires the priest to recite several holy passages, then anoint the subject's forehead and hands with pure rainwater. It can be abbreviated considerably in time of crisis, when a priest has many people to deal with or when the subject's death is imminent. The short form omits most of the longer recitations and can even omit the anointing with water. Note that this ceremony too must be performed by an ordained priest, and a dying priest can't grant himself the Primae Tenebrae, no matter how much he might want to.

If the subject has already died before the priest can attend to her, the sacrament is still performed, even though it might not have any effect on the soul. Obviously, it's preferable to perform the sacrament before death. If a dying worshiper is in default on any penalty levied by the church, it's entirely up to the individual priest whether or not to grant her the sacrament. Most priests will give a dying worshiper the benefit of the doubt, especially if her family can be prevailed upon to make good on her debt.

The body of a lay worshiper is cremated as soon as possible. If it's an ordained priest who dies, the body is magically preserved and lies in state for two days in the church with which the priest was associated. His colleagues in the church and the worshipers to whom he ministered are free to visit the body and pay their respects.

Although it's not required by doctrine, most bereaved family members or friends will make some kind of concrete offering to the priest who granted last rites to a loved one.

The Ortus

The Primae Tenebrae

Nimboal Mana-Shaper

Lesser Deity of Magic

Strength	15	Combat	
Health	38	Defense Strength . .	19 if solidified, 30 if gaseous
Reaction	28	Unarmed	Amateur; 15 (1x)
Intelligence	53	Melee Weapons . .	Amateur; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	51	Missile Weapons	n/a
Presence	39	Special Abilities	Electrical attack, 35 (1x)
Willpower	47	Aptitude	
Size		Magical Aptitude	Legendary 6
about 3 yards (varies)		Mentalic Aptitude	Legendary 1
Speed	3 yards/second		
Primal Base	19,575		
Primal Flux	16,746		

One of the few non-anthropomorphic lesser deities, Nimboal is a shifting, amorphous cloud of silvery vapor shot through with tiny bolts and coruscations of brilliant colors. The center of the cloud is opaque, while the peripheries become more and more translucent. The entire cloud is very mutable in shape; if it formed a sphere, it would be about eight feet in diameter. The surface of the cloud sometimes forms shapes that hint at the presence of eyes or even of whole faces. There's never much detail, however; these eyes and faces are very reminiscent of the "faces" and other shapes people see in natural clouds.

The deity can drift along quite slowly over the ground. Depending on its wishes, Nimboal can brush the ground or rise to an altitude of several tens of feet above a land or water surface. It can't naturally fly as such, although it can certainly use magical spells to do so.

Although it appears immaterial, Nimboal shows considerable internal cohesion. Even the strongest wind doesn't dissipate it or even move it; breezes just pass right through its gaseous body without creating any "wind shadow" behind it. Physical objects such as weapons will normally pass right through Nimboal's body. If it actively wills, it can solidify its body enough to block a moving object, pick up an item, or so on; this solidification can be total or selective. If Nimboal solidifies a pseudopod enough to pick up a wand, the rest of its body can remain totally insubstantial and thus invulnerable to nonmagical weapons.

Nimboal can't change the total volume of its gaseous body; it's always about 270 cubic feet. There are no limits on the shape of that body, however. For example, the deity could stretch itself out into a tendril of gas one inch in diameter but well over two miles long.

Nimboal Mana-Shaper moves in total silence. Further, its very presence seems to absorb ambient sound; all normal noises sound somewhat hushed and softened. Any natural lightning in the area will, if possible, strike the gaseous body of the Mana-Shaper. Nimboal is totally unharmed by all such electricity-based attacks, though a lightning strike does surround it with a flickering glow like St. Elmo's fire.

Nimboal has no natural mechanism for speaking or making any other sound. It communicates with others telepathically or via magic.

Primal Attributes

Primal Base	19,575
Typical Primal Flux	16,746
Planes	3, plus 1 miniplane
Supported Demigods	3
Demigods	0
Godlings	2
Chancellors	3
Artifacts	7
Servitors	2 greater, 10 major, 22 minor

Primal Base Calculations

Three Solely Controlled Planes Plus One	
Miniplane (3 x 2,000, + 600)	6,600
Rank Bonuses Through Lesser Deity (100	
+ 200 + 300 + 5,000)	5,600
Creation of Artifacts	-24,650
Creation of Servitors	-2,450
Ascensions	-4,000
Sphere of Influence Cost	-1,000
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-775
Evolutionary Gains	40,250
Total Primal Base	19,575

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (19,575 / 10)	1,957
Consecrated Ground (400 x 2)	800
Sanctuaries (1,150 x 5)	5,750
Temples (51 x 10)	510
Cathedrals (7 x 25)	175
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground	
(10 x 1)	10
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (25 x 2)	50
Holding of Rival Temples (15 x 5)	75
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (2 x 12)	24
Planes (3 x 1,000 + 1 x 300)	3,300
Worshippers by Plane (10,000, 20,000,	
475,000, 3,000, 17,000, 84,000, 11,000,	
1,500, 350,000, 5x1000, 17 x 500, 7 x 100;	
taking the square root of each separately	
and then adding)	2,845
Captured Primal Base (25,000 x 5%)	1,250
Total Primal Flux	16,746

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



Personality

Nimboal Mana-Shaper cares for little apart from Nimboal Mana-Shaper. Its sole purpose as a deity is to maintain its position and preferably reinforce it as much as possible. It cares little for the needs, fears, or interests of its worshipers, though it conceals its apathy because it knows how valuable a steady base of worshipers is to an up-and-coming deity.

Nimboal extends this philosophy to the other members of its divine structure; they're important in that they shore up its position, but it has little interest in their personal needs. Of its three demigods, Travente and Vorth recognize their patron's self-centered, cynical outlook and have even come to share it. The third, Morgose, has yet to understand just how detached Nimboal actually is.

The Mana-Shaper is pragmatic in all things. All its actions and decisions are designed to do whatever benefits it most. It's not actively malevolent or hostile toward others; that would require an outward-directed focus that Nimboal simply doesn't have, and would waste resources better spent elsewhere. The Mana-Shaper may treat a given individual kindly, cruelly, or not at all, whichever best serves its interests.

Nimboal recognizes that its view of reality isn't popular, and it's well aware that it'll lose worshipers and probably gain divine enemies if word gets out about how it truly feels. Thus it's very careful to put a good face on everything it does. It's a masterful liar, bound by neither respect for the truth nor love of lies, and a skillful actor as well.

The deity seems to have an innate grasp of marketing, as evidenced by the highly effective structure of its church. It seems to know instinctively what others want and how to give it to them. So far this ability has proven extremely valuable, and Nimboal hopes this will soon put it in position to become a greater deity, and from there possibly to head a pantheon.

History

Despite its current appearance, Nimboal Mana-Shaper was once both mortal and human, growing up as a male. At a very young age, he discovered he was highly gifted at the art of magic and quickly apprenticed himself to the greatest of the local wizards. Within a few years, however, he outstripped his master and needed a new mentor.

Over the next decade, Nimboal wandered the face of his world, apprenticing himself to wizard after wizard, working his way up the scale of power. Every time, he soon exceeded the capabilities of his mentor. By the age of thirty, he had run out of wizards competent to teach him. This meant, of course, that he was the most capable mage on his world, but this was not enough for the ambitious Nimboal. At this point, Nimboal began to think he was limiting himself by thinking only of mortals as prospective mentors.

Nimboal had never paid much attention to religion. The magical art was all that interested him, and it encompassed all the power he considered important. The idea that he might find an immortal mentor made him re-examine his beliefs, however. If deities sometimes helped mortals, he reasoned, might one not agree to help him?

Nimboal quickly found the deity who best matched his outlook and world view: Nioye the Unfathomable, whose sphere of influence was mysteries and hidden secrets. Although Nioye didn't specifically concentrate on magic, Nimboal figured that hidden secrets were what he was after. With the same determination he had shown in his magical studies, the wizard devoted himself to Nioye the Unfathomable.

Nioye, for her part, was currently looking to expand her own divine structure. Mysteries was a large sphere of influence, and she needed subordinates to handle some of its lesser facets. One of those facets was magic, and Nimboal seemed a good candidate to help out in that area. The Unfathomable took Nimboal under her wing and continued the young mortal's training.

Soon thereafter, Nimboal was forced to assume the form he holds today. Using some of the abilities Nioye taught him and some he'd unearthed himself without his mentor's knowledge, he tried to create an incorporeal form of life in the shape of an amorphous cloud of gas. He had created the living gas-cloud without incident and was trying to drain the mind of one of his manservants into it when he lost control of the titanic forces with which he was playing. The backlash of energy struck Nimboal's physical body, incinerating it.

In the instant between realizing what was happening and being totally destroyed, Nimboal acted. The gas-cloud was complete, needing only a mind to direct its actions. As his physical body was burned to atoms, Nimboal managed to transfer his mind into the gas-cloud. Almost from that moment, Nimboal found it impossible to think of himself as male anymore, and so became the genderless individual it is today.

Nioye, when she learned what had happened, was amazed; at its current skill level, Nimboal simply shouldn't have been able to do what it did. Obviously the deity's apprentice was even more of a genius than she had thought. Soon thereafter, Nioye elevated Nimboal to the status of minion, and eventually ascended it to godling.

Nimboal immediately began the studies necessary to take magic as its sphere of influence. Nioye aided it throughout, helping the godling associate its name with the concept of magic in the minds of all her worshipers. Through this direct aid, Nimboal was eventually able to assume magic as its sphere of influence without the necessity of an epic quest; all worshipers of Nioye already accepted it as a patron of magic, and it was starting to attract worshipers in its own right. Those worshipers dubbed it Mana-Shaper.

The new demigod soon began to chafe under Nioye's authority. The goddess wasn't particularly restrictive, but Nimboal's ambitions were blocked by the very knowledge that another deity could choose on a whim to flout its will. Secretly, Nimboal began to plot Nioye's downfall.

Destiny took a hand before those plots came to fruition. Nioye had her own enemies in the divine sphere, and one of these, known as Avanteas, staged an assault on Nioye's home plane. Despite Nioye's demands that it join the defense, Nimboal didn't come to protect its master. Instead, it hung around the sidelines waiting for the outcome.

After a long, fierce battle, Nioye managed to defeat and destroy Avanteas. In the process, however, the deity drained her reservoir of primal dangerously low, so low that the demigod Nimboal, who had lost no energy in the battle, was able to drive its one-time master from her home plane. With the loss of her home plane, Nioye reverted to the rank of demigoddess, and the resulting loss of primal base was enough to destroy her entirely.

The story of Nimboal's betrayal soon spread throughout the divine ranks, and some deities treat the Mana-Shaper with suspicion because of it. Nimboal has done what it can to salvage its reputation, however, and many deities have

become less wary as a result. Still, Nimboal has rivals and enemies like any deity, and it realizes that its best defense against them is a strong divine structure and as much primal as it can obtain. Both its divine structure and its church are designed to give it the best possible protection against those who would like to see it go the way of Nioye.

Symbols

The most common symbol associated with Nimboal, and the only one known to its lay worshipers, is a simple wand of alderwood: a smooth, sanded shaft of wood a foot or so long and about as thick as a man's thumb. The wand isn't painted or embellished in any way. In two-dimensional art it appears as a pale yellow bar about sixteen times longer than it is wide, on a plain background, inclined at a 45-degree angle with the left end high and the right end low. Simplified even further, it becomes a simple oblique line descending to the right. This oblique line, sometimes contained within a circle, is the most common sigil of Nimboal Mana-Shaper.

Silver and gold are the colors most commonly associated with Nimboal. The deity is also directly associated with mercury or quicksilver, both because its silvery, amorphous appearance matches that of the deity and because of the element's importance in magical theory.

Within the church, Nimboal is sometimes symbolically represented by or referred to as a snake. In Nimboalite culture, the snake represents agelessness and inhuman wisdom, though some of Nimboal's rivals believe the connotations of deceit and slyness are more appropriate.

Sphere of Influence

Nimboal's sphere of influence is magic, specifically the bending of magical energy to the caster's will.

Statistics

Research Cost: 500 flux per day. Research Time: 50 years. Backing Cost: 1,000 base. Total Flux Cost: 9,125,000.

Advantages

Nimboal Mana-Shaper is totally immune to all magical spells unless they are primally laced. Further, it can instantly recognize the intent and function of any spell simply by noticing a wizard begin to cast it; if it watches the casting of the spell to its conclusion, it can thereafter cast the spell itself.

Sphere Abilities

This sphere includes the following abilities:

Severance: Research Cost: 250 flux per day. Research Time: 10 years. Backing Cost: 325 base. Activation Cost: 75 flux. This ability allows the deity to sever any mortal wizard from contact with magical energy. The deity must be able to see the target wizard, and may continue the severance for as long as she remains in sight. While severed, the target wizard can cast no magical spells. He can learn, memorize, and prepare spells as normal, but can't summon the magical energy to actually cast them. Severance has no effect on autonomous magical items—those that require no magical energy manipulation by the user—or on mental abilities.

Empowerment: Research Cost: 250 flux per day. Research Time: 10 years. Backing Cost: 300 base. Activation Cost: 100 flux. This ability allows the deity to imbue a mortal in line of sight with spellcasting ability. It effectively grants the target magical aptitude of amateur rank; the target will be bound by all normal restrictions for wizards and will have to learn specific spells as normal. If desired, the deity can sweeten the pot by including knowledge of specific spells in this gift, although they cannot be more powerful than the average amateur spellcaster can handle. The deity can terminate the effect at will without any cost in flux; otherwise the bestowed abilities are permanent and the subject can progress in abilities and knowledge as a normal wizard would.

Quenching: Research Cost: 50 flux per day. Research Time: 1 month. Backing Cost: 50 base. Activation Cost: 10 flux. This ability allows the deity to cause a magical spell to fail completely. The deity must be able to see the wizard begin to cast the spell, and must act before the casting process is complete. A quenched spell has absolutely no effect on the outside world, though the depleting effect on the wizard is as if the spell had functioned normally. The subject wizard doesn't automatically know why the spell failed; in the case of invisible spell effects, such as detections, he or she won't necessarily know that it failed at all.

Amplification: Research Cost: 75 flux per day. Research Time: 2 years. Backing Cost: 100 base. Activation Cost: 15 flux. This ability allows the deity to double the effectiveness of a magical spell cast by the deity itself or by another wizard. Amplification lets the deity double one aspect of a spell—the amount of damage it inflicts, or its duration, or its range, or some other characteristic. The deity can use this ability multiple times on the same spell, doubling several aspects. If this ability is used on another wizard's spell, the deity must be able to see the subject.

Planes

This is the Mana-Shaper's home plane, the one it wrested from its erstwhile mentor Nioye. Nimboal has altered the environment to better suit itself, turning it into a plane of shimmering moonlight and stygian shadows. Its palace, in the center of the plane, is known as the Specus Atrox.

Obscura is removed from every plane in existence except for Umbra, to which it is adjacent.

Planar constants: Any divine creature in the Specus Atrox can sense the use of magical energy anywhere on the plane. Any flow of magical energy is visible as a shimmering, multicolored light around the person directing the flow. Mortal creatures cannot use any mentalic powers while on Obscura.

This is a ruggedly beautiful plane to which the souls of Nimboal's worshipers are drawn after they die. Most of the Mana-Shaper's subordinate deities can be found here.

Umbra is adjacent to most main planes.

Planar constants: Any flow of magical energy is visible as a shimmering, multicolored light around the person directing the flow. No form of divination will work on this plane. Devices and abilities that capture souls will not function.

A bright, sylvan plane, Abdere is inhabited by a race of creatures with an innate inability to wield magical energy. Since they have no wizards among them, they are particularly impressed by magic-wielding visitors and thus were easy converts to Nimboalism. Abdere is unique in that virtually every sentient

Obscura

Umbra

Abdere

creature on the plane worships the Mana-Shaper. Abdere is adjacent to Umbra and to many other planes.

Planar constants: All elemental-based spell effects are tripled in power when cast on this plane. Spells that attempt to control the weather always fail, but affect the caster as if they had functioned normally. Time moves at twice the standard rate on this plane.

Penumbra

Nimboal uses this barren miniplane as a laboratory in which to experiment with its more powerful magics. It's adjacent only to Umbra. Currently, Penumbra has no planar constants, but Nimboal is in the process of creating one that will take effect in approximately four years.

Upcoming planar constant: Any portion of this plane that is damaged through the use of magic will regenerate within one day.

Combat

In its usual insubstantial form, Nimboal is totally unaffected by nonmagical weapons. Even enchanted weapons inflict only one-quarter of their normal damage. If Nimboal solidifies any portion of its body, weapons that strike that portion inflict normal damage. Each round, the deity regenerates damage equal to a wound of damage rank 25.

If Nimboal touches a living creature with a pseudopod of gas, it can discharge a lethal blast of electrical energy into that creature's body. This attack form inflicts damage of rank 35 and can be used ten times per day. If it prefers, the deity can solidify a pseudopod sufficiently to strike an opponent or wield a weapon; if the weapon is metallic, the deity can deliver its electrical blast directly through the weapon into the body of anyone it strikes, though the weapon will suffer the effects as well if it is sensitive to electricity.

Nimboal is totally immune to all electricity-based attack forms and suffers only half normal damage from temperature-based attacks.

As a deity of magic, the Mana-Shaper will avoid head-to-head combat if at all possible, preferring to make distant attacks using spells. In general, it will only get into fights it thinks it can win; getting destroyed would screw up its career path. If overpowered, it will flee or surrender, planning to settle things with its foe later.

Special Equipment

Sphere of Nimboal Primal Artifact Power Rating: 93

The Sphere of Nimboal appears to be a simple crystal ball mounted on an elaborate stand of wrought iron. It possesses all the scrying functions typical of standard crystal balls, but reinforces them with primal to penetrate most anti-scrying screens and shields. Nimboal can cast spells and direct purely primal effects to any location it can see in the crystal ball. Casting primal flux through the ball costs an additional 10%; thus an effect that would normally cost 10 points of flux will cost 11 points if cast through this artifact. Primal base cannot be transmitted through the Sphere of Nimboal.

Travente

*Supported
Demigoddess of
Spell Research*

Strength	15	Combat	
Health	26	Defense Strength	15
Reaction	20	Unarmed	Amateur; 10 (1x)
Intelligence	43	Melee Weapons	Amateur; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	32	Missile Weapons	Amateur; by weapon (1x)
Presence	20	Aptitude	
Willpower	33	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 4
Size	2 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	3 yards/second		

Primal Base 4,795

Primal Flux 1,190

In her usual form, Travente resembles an aged wisewoman of mixed ancestry. Her features have elements of several nonhuman races: slightly pointed ears, slightly overhanging brow, small, puckish mouth. She is mid-height and has long, dark hair flowing to her shoulders with silver streaks at the temples. She normally wears a black robe with runes and symbols of power embroidered along the hems. She carries a short staff shod at top and foot with worked silver.

Travente emanates an aura of thoughtfulness and wisdom. It's difficult if not impossible to imagine her acting hastily or thoughtlessly, no matter what the circumstances.

Magical energy flows constantly around and through Travente, even when she's not purposefully manipulating it to cast spells. Magic-sensitive creatures can sense her presence at ranges of several miles, and spells that detect magical activity will register her presence within their area of effect. Travente can temporarily suppress this spontaneous flow of magical energy, but rarely sees the need.

Although apparently old, Travente moves smoothly and easily with no hint of arthritis or weakness.

Her voice is soft and melodious, sounding many decades younger than her apparent age. She is fluent in all of the tongues spoken by Nimboal's worshipers throughout the multiverse.

Personality

Travente is as self-absorbed and focused on her own advancement as Nimboal, if not more so. She believes working for the Mana-Shaper is in her own best interest, at least for the moment. The moment the disadvantages outweigh the benefits, she'll head off on her own or try to supplant her patron, and both of them know it. Travente would love eventually to eliminate Nimboal and take over, but considering her patron's current power level and the rate at which it is gaining power, this doesn't seem likely. The most likely outcome would be for Nimboal to squash her like a bug the moment it decided she represented the slightest real threat. To avoid this, she plans to stay with Nimboal until just before this point, gaining as much as she can from it before heading out on her own.



Primal Attributes

Primal Base	4,795
Typical Primal Flux	1,190
Planes	1 miniplane
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	0
Servitors	0

Primal Base Calculations

One Solely Controlled Miniplane	550
Rank Bonuses Through Supported	
Demigod (100 + 200 + 300)	600
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	-250
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-215
Evolutionary Gains	4,110
Total Primal Base	4,795

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (4,795 / 10)	480
Consecrated Ground (10 x 2)	20
Sanctuaries (19 x 5)	95
Temples (1 x 10)	10
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground	
(0 x 1)	0
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (0 x 2)	0
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (1 x 275)	275
Worshippers by Plane (3,000, 2 x 500,	
15 x 100; taking the square root of each	
separately and then adding)	205
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
Total Primal Flux	1,190

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.

Like Nimboal, Travente understands the importance of worshipers. She doesn't have many followers of her own, but she figures that will change with time. She also recognizes the value of good marketing, and most certainly won't let mortals know that she considers them as nothing more than sources of primal energy to drive her own plans.

Travente is willing to do whatever it takes to help her cause. While mortal, she showed a knack for associating herself with patrons who could help her, and there's no reason to think she's lost that skill as a demigoddess. If another deity comes along and offers her more than she's receiving from Nimboal, she'll switch her allegiance without a second thought.

Travente considers herself vastly superior to Nimboal's other subordinates and doesn't bother to hide this belief from them. This has earned her their hatred, but she doesn't care since she thinks there's nothing they can do to harm her.

History

Travente was born mortal on the same plane that gave rise to Nimboal Mana-Shaper itself. According to the most widely accepted tales, Travente was a young apprentice when Nimboal was reaching the peak of its mortal power. There are hints that the two met around this time, and that Nimboal was impressed with Travente's potential. Church legends confirm that the two remained in communication after Nimboal became a minion, and even after it had been ascended to godling. Shortly after Nimboal's ascension, Travente joined the church of Nioye and quickly began promoting the worship of the Mana-Shaper independent of its patron deity. When Nimboal became a demigod Travente split from the church of Nioye, taking many like-minded worshipers with her, and set up the first independent Nimboalite church. When Nimboal later destroyed Nioye, many of her worshipers joined the new Nimboalite camp.

Nimboal quickly made Travente a minion and soon thereafter ascended her to godling. At first her major task was to spread the faith of Nimboalism throughout the planes. When these new churches started to grow and proliferate on their own, the Mana-Shaper gave its godling a new assignment. Nimboal had quickly grasped the importance of building up a strong, interconnected divine structure, and saw Travente as its first member. It instructed her to study spell research as her sphere of influence, a task she took to with a will.

When it came time for Travente to assume her sphere of influence, Nimboal sent her on a mission that would turn out to be her epic quest. The Mana-Shaper had recently been challenged by Suirin Doombringer, a deity of destructive magic who claimed to have invented a mighty spell called Soulreave that could do grave damage to even the most powerful deity without requiring the use of primal. Nimboal suspected Suirin's claims were inflated, but rather than take any chances it sent Travente forth, charged with learning everything she could about the spell and bringing the information back to the plane of Obscura.

Although this was a hideously dangerous mission, Travente accepted it. Magically disguised and primally shielded, she penetrated Suirin's great magical and alchemical laboratory and read fragments of the deity's notes on the Soulreave spell. Just as she was getting an idea of the spell's basics, Suirin interrupted her surreptitious research, forcing her to flee for her life. Barely escaping with her primal base intact, Travente returned to her own laboratory to replicate the Doombringer's original research. Eventually, she discovered the complete

formula for casting Soulreave and realized that Suirin had made a technical error; the spell could never work. When she delivered the formula to Nimboal, she included a magical proof demonstrating why it was impossible to create such a spell. The Mana-Shaper, pleased to see that its instincts had been correct, was then able to deal appropriately with Suirin. With the completion of this epic quest, Travente assumed her sphere of influence and became a demigoddess.

Nimboal supports Travente primarily in an effort to retain her allegiance as long as possible. While Nimboal has no particular fondness for its demigoddess, it would be loath to lose her contributions to its structure, especially if it had to go to all the trouble of defeating an attempt to unseat it. Both Nimboal and Travente know that they can only work together so long as their individual best interests remain aligned, and this understanding has created a surprisingly effective working relationship.

Symbols

A staff of alder, shod at both ends with worked silver, is the physical symbol of Travente. In the artistic symbology of Nimboalism, she is usually represented by the oblique line sigil of the Mana-Shaper. If it's necessary to distinguish between demigoddess and lesser deity, short cross-hatches are added to the oblique line near each end, hinting at the silver caps at top and foot of Travente's staff.

Travente's colors are black and white, with black symbolizing mystery and white representing discovery.

Sphere of Influence

Travente's sphere of influence is spell research, specifically the process of devising new ways to manipulate the flow of magical energy.

Statistics

Research Cost: 250 flux per day. Research Time: 15 years. Backing Cost: 250 base. Total Flux Cost: 1,368,750.

Advantages

Like Nimboal, Travente can instantly recognize the intent and function of any spell simply by noticing a wizard begin to cast it; if she watches the casting to its conclusion, she can thereafter cast the spell herself. Further, Travente takes only half as long as normal to research any spell from scratch.

Sphere Abilities

This sphere includes the following abilities:

Subsumption: Research Cost: 50 flux per day. Research Time: 4 years. Backing Cost: 100 base. Activation Cost: 15 flux. This ability allows the deity or any single target individual to cast spells mentally without need for gestures, incantations, or special materials. These elements of the spells are subsumed into the will of the caster; the spells will function exactly as if cast normally. One use of this ability has a duration of one hour. To use this on another individual, the deity must be able to see the subject at the moment the ability is activated. The subject can then leave the deity's field of view.

Insight: Research Cost: 30 flux per day. Research Time: 2 months. Backing Cost: 50 base. Activation Cost: 25 flux. This ability allows the deity to help another individual engaged in spell research. The deity doesn't have to see the subject, but must know her name and approximate location. With each use of

this ability, the time required for the subject to complete the research is halved. Thus if the research would normally take the subject one month, one use of this ability would cut that to two weeks, another use on the same subject would cut it to one week, a third use would cut it to three and a half days, and so on. No matter how many times this ability is used, it cannot reduce the research time to less than one hour.

Flaw: Research Cost: 45 flux per day. Research Time: 6 months. Backing Cost: 65 base. Activation Cost: 5 flux. This ability allows the deity to introduce an error into an individual's spell research. This error is undetectable until the individual actually tries to use the spell, at which point the spell will fail; at the GM's option, some sort of magical backlash might occur as well. Once the individual knows the spell is flawed, he has no option but to repeat the whole research process from scratch.

Planes

Travente controls her own miniplane, which she calls Holdfast. It's a bleak, lifeless place, but the demigoddess thinks it has potential. If nothing else, it's a place she can go to avoid Nimboal should their relationship take a downturn. Travente believes that the Mana-Shaper is unaware that she controls Holdfast, but it knows all about the miniplane. It is merely saving that fact as a nasty surprise.

Combat

Travente isn't much good when it comes to personal combat, and she knows it. Her spellcasting abilities make her the equal or superior of most foes she'll likely face, however. If outmatched, she'll use her artifact Celeritas to escape from a losing position.

Special Equipment

Celeritas is the name Travente gives to the silver-shod staff of alderwood she carries with her at all times. It was created by Vorth, Nimboal's Demigod of Enchantments, at the Mana-Shaper's request. When it presented the artifact to Travente, it told her the gift was a mark of its esteem, but both Nimboal and Vorth know there was more to it than that.

Celeritas gives Travente the ability to travel instantaneously to any location she can accurately envision. Interplanar barriers aren't a problem, and the staff is designed to whisk its user through any form of magical barrier, though this could well necessitate a power rating check. There are no limits to how often the staff can function. Since it costs no primal or magical energy, it has predictably become Travente's primary means of travel, and she always carries it with her—which is just what Nimboal intended.

When the deity instructed Vorth to create the staff, it requested two additional functions it didn't reveal to Travente. First, Nimboal can see and hear everything that occurs within 50 feet of the staff any time it wills. This function

Celeritas
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 90

costs Nimboal no primal or magical energy and can be used as frequently as it likes. The deity uses this power as a convenient way of keeping a close eye on Travenite. Second, Nimboal can trigger the transportation function at will, whisking the staff's user to the throne room of its castle, Specus Atrox. Once this special power has been used, the staff becomes totally inert for a period of one day. Both of these special powers of Celeritas are keyed specifically to Nimboal's mind and can't be used by anyone else.

Morgose

Supported
Demigod of
Magical
Combat

Strength	16	Combat	
Health	31	Defense Strength	18
Reaction	26	Unarmed	Veteran; 15 (1x)
Intelligence	45	Melee Weapons	Amateur; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	41	Missile Weapons	Amateur; by weapon (1x)
Presence	23	Aptitude	
Willpower	37	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 3
Size	Varies	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	4.5 yards/second		

Primal Base 2,800
Primal Flux 944

In its usual form, Morgose is an androgynous figure of unearthly beauty. The demigod has ebony skin, burnished silver hair, and dark, piercing eyes. It wears a simple, white, knee-length jerkin belted with a gold chain, and almost always carries a slender silver wand. Its body is always surrounded by an aura of shifting gold light. Morgose has great control over its size; sometimes it manifests at about the same height as an average human, but on other occasions it's about four times that size. Regardless of its absolute size, its proportions are unchanged and it always masses about 150 pounds.

Mortals who have been in the presence of Morgose report feeling edgy and uncomfortable and experiencing a subtle tingling in their skin and scalps. This latter feeling is similar to that caused by static electricity, although no other means of detecting a static charge would register Morgose's presence. It would seem that the experience is more psychological than physical.

Morgose's gaze is steady, piercing, and very discomfiting. Potential foes who have met the eyes of the demigod report the sensation that Morgose is looking deep into their souls, cataloging their every weakness and planning infallible techniques to defeat them. Battle-trained animals frequently spook when Morgose looks their way, though untrained animals don't seem to react to the demigod at all.

The demigod has the disconcerting habit of standing utterly motionless except for its eyes, which track slowly and ceaselessly. It emanates a sense of speed and physical strength constrained, ready for the appropriate moment of release. When it does move, however, Morgose does so slowly, almost languidly.

Morgose rarely speaks. When it does so its voice is sharp, with a high-pitched metallic echo. Although not loud, its voice is incredibly piercing and carries great distances. The demigod speaks few human and humanoid languages, using magic to translate those tongues with which it's unfamiliar.

Personality

Morgose is dedicated, sincere, earnest, and totally humorless. It's very proud to serve Nimboal as demigod and protector, but this pride doesn't turn into arrogance.

The demigod is a true believer; it still accepts as gospel truth the outward precepts of Nimboalism. Since there's no hint of duplicity in its own nature,



Primal Attributes

Primal Base	2,800
Typical Primal Flux	944
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	0
Servitors	0

Primal Base Calculations

No Solely Controlled Planes	0
Rank Bonuses Through Supported Demigod (100 + 200 + 300)	600
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	-475
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-500
Evolutionary Gains	3,175
Total Primal Base	2,800

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (2,800 / 10)	280
Consecrated Ground (12 x 2)	24
Sanctuaries (11 x 5)	55
Temples (4 x 10)	40
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (2 x 1)	2
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (6 x 2)	12
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshippers by Plane (3,000, 4,000, 2,800, 7,000, 3 x 1,000, 5 x 500, 7 x 100; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	531
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
Total Primal Flux	944

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.

it's perhaps slow to detect deceit in Nimboal and its other subordinates. Still, Morgose isn't hopelessly naive. It's a demigod, after all, and can see through most mortal deceptions without effort. Perhaps it simply refuses to consider the idea that the deity in which it has invested so much faith isn't what it seems to be.

Morgose is highly skilled as a magical combatant and will use its considerable powers to their best effect. Although its mind doesn't run to trickery, it does understand the value of cunning and innovative tactics. If necessary, Morgose would give its life for Nimboal.

This may change in the not-so-distant future, however. The longer Morgose remains part of Nimboal's hierarchy, the more likely it is to realize how little Nimboal actually cares for its worshipers, and this disillusionment might lead to a profound change in the relationship between lesser deity and demigod.

History

Morgose was born into a hermaphroditic, humanoid race on a small main plane far from those frequented by humans. All members of this race were natural mages, but Morgose quickly emerged as head and shoulders above the rest. When it came of age, Morgose set forth on a voyage of discovery and encountered Travente, then a godling.

This was Morgose's first encounter with any sentient creature not of its own race, and it was fascinated. It invited the plane-hopping godling back to its home, where Travente quickly discovered that Morgose's society was a prime candidate for conversion to Nimboalism. The race had its own traditional deities, but because magic was innate to them they had not even considered the possibility that a deity would devote itself to the study of magic.

Travente was quick to point out that Nimboalism could fill this gap in the race's religious tradition. Morgose and the others accepted her words as gospel, and Morgose itself volunteered to help start the first Nimboalite church on the plane. With continued support from Travente, the church grew staggeringly fast until it virtually eclipsed the race's traditional religions. Morgose headed the church from its inception, becoming master of the mysteries and eventually chancellor. At about the same time, Nimboal realized it needed to expand its divine structure. Several of the deity's enemies were beginning to grow a bit too powerful, and it felt the need for a defender, a divine-level subordinate highly skilled at magical combat. Travente, although highly skilled, wouldn't do; if she found herself outmatched in combat she'd flee, leaving Nimboal to defend itself. It needed someone less cynical and self-motivated, a true believer who also happened to be highly lethal in magical combat.

Travente suggested that Nimboal recruit Morgose for the position, and it instantly saw this was the perfect choice. Morgose still had the zeal of the newly converted and was almost as magically adept as Travente herself. The Mana-Shaper immediately elevated Morgose to the rank of minion and soon thereafter ascended it to godling.

The mere addition of another member to Nimboal's divine structure seemed to give the deity's enemies pause. Taking advantage of their hesitation, the Mana-Shaper ordered Morgose to research and assume magical combat as its sphere of influence. The new godling agreed and began its research willingly.

The peace remained intact while Morgose completed its sphere of influence research. It proved unable to actually assume the sphere without some kind

of epic quest, however. Nimboal considered sending the godling out on some seek-and-destroy mission, but decided that wouldn't be in keeping with the Defender of the Faith concept and thus might disillusion Morgose. Instead the Mana-Shaper waited.

It didn't have to wait long. Nimboal's enemies sent forth a divine-level assassin: a magic-wielding, primally backed killer. The Mana-Shaper simply stood aside and threw Morgose into the fray.

The magical battle raged for hours, tearing up great swaths of Obscura while Nimboal remained sheltered within its castle. Morgose suffered grievous wounds, but refused to concede the field to its adversary. In the end, the godling's willpower and determination, even more than its magical abilities, won the day. The assassin, faced by a foe that seemed simply unkillable, eventually turned and fled. By this point Morgose was incapable of pursuing, so Nimboal itself caught the assassin before it could flee the plane and destroyed it.

Defeating the assassin was the epic quest Morgose needed to assume its chosen sphere of influence. As a supported demigod, Morgose serves its patron as personal defender and bodyguard and as an enforcer sent to distant planes to protect and occasionally discipline the Nimboalite churches there.

Symbols

In most Nimboalite societies, Morgose has no specific symbols of its own; instead it shares the simple, oblique line sigil of the Mana-Shaper. A handful of societies represent the demigod by reversing the direction of the oblique line, drawing it so that it descends from right to left rather than vice versa.

Sphere of Influence

Morgose's sphere of influence is magical combat, specifically the projection of force through magical aptitude.

Statistics Research Cost: 250 flux per day. Research Time: 10 years. Backing Cost: 475 base. Total Flux Cost: 912,500.

Advantages Morgose can cast all combat spells as though it had a magical aptitude four steps higher than its aptitude with other spells. Currently, this allows Morgose to cast all combat spells with a magical aptitude of Legendary 7.

Sphere Abilities This sphere includes the following abilities:
Immunity: Research Cost: 250 flux per day. Research Time: 12 years. Backing Cost: 250 base. Activation Cost: 30 flux. This ability allows the deity to render itself utterly immune to one specific class of magical attacks: elemental-based, electricity-based, temperature-based, mind-affecting, and so on. The deity can use this ability to create only one immunity at a time, and the immunity must be to a distinct attack form; the deity cannot simply render itself immune to "damage-based" attacks. This immunity lasts, with no additional primal cost, until the deity decides to terminate it or switch it to another immunity. The deity can switch immunities as often as it likes, assuming it can pay the activation cost for each new effect.

Detect Immunity: Research Cost: 100 flux per day. Research Time: 5 years. Backing Cost: 150 base. Activation Cost: 10 flux. This ability allows the deity to sense any magical immunities or resistances a single individual has. The deity must be able to see the subject. Like any use of primal, this ability cannot pass through an active primal shield.

Divert Attack: Research Cost: 115 flux per day. Research Time: 15 years. Backing Cost: 100 base. Activation Cost: 10 flux. This ability allows the deity to divert the magical energy that allows enemy wizards to cast spells. Any spell cast directly at the deity will misfire, inflicting any physical damage it would have caused on the caster instead. Spells that do no physical damage will misfire by stunning the caster for no less than one combat exchange. There are no range limits other than those associated with the spells being cast. Only spells that would directly affect the deity are diverted by this ability; an opponent could still levitate a boulder over the deity's head and drop it. Once activated, this ability remains in force for one hour.

Planes

When it's not elsewhere in the multiverse on a mission for Nimboal, Morgose resides on the plane of Umbra. At one time or another, Morgose will appear on each main plane where there are Nimboalite worshipers.

Combat

Magical combat is Morgose's specialty, and one at which it's highly skilled. The demigod has an innate grasp of tactics and can often sense a foe's weaknesses. Morgose doesn't use flashy or complex tactics for their own sake; if it can get the job done through a simple spell, it won't bother with anything more fancy.

Like most members of Nimboal's divine structure, Morgose isn't particularly competent in physical combat and thus avoids it.

Special Equipment

The Wand of the Defender is a simple, slender wand of silvery metal, unembellished with any engravings or inlays. It masses only a few ounces, less than its appearance would imply, and feels chillingly cold to the touch.

The wand will block, absorb, and then redirect back at the caster the magical energy of any spell thrown at its wielder, as long as the spell isn't primally backed. The original caster is struck by his or her own spell, suffering the appropriate damage and other effects. The wand can redirect one spell per combat exchange.

This artifact was created by Vorth, Nimboal's Demigod of Enchantments, and given to Morgose soon after it became a demigod. Like Travente's Celeritas, the Wand of the Defender has a secret power as well. At will, Nimboal can deactivate the artifact. When this command is issued, the wand is totally inert for a period of 12 hours. Predictably, this deactivation power is keyed specifically to Nimboal's mind and can't be triggered by anyone else.

Wand of the Defender
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 78

Vorth

Supported
Demigod of
Enchantments

Strength	22	Combat	
Health	30	Defense Strength	26
Reaction	25	Unarmed	Veteran; 20 (1x)
Intelligence	40	Melee Weapons	Veteran; by weapon+STR (1x)
Destiny	40	Missile Weapons	Amateur; by weapon (1x)
Presence	19	Aptitude	
Willpower	35	Magical Aptitude	Legendary 3
Size	1.75 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	4 yards/second		

Primal Base 2,950

Primal Flux 1,372

In his usual form, Vorth appears as a short, slightly hunchbacked human male apparently in his sixties. He always wears a dour expression on his weatherbeaten, leathery face. He wears a black eyepatch with a single scintillating ruby set in the middle, and his one good eye burns with brilliant green light. The demigod's short-cropped hair is iron gray. He typically wears a jerkin and breeches of rough-spun brown cloth. There is no single weapon or item he always carries, but as an enchanter of legendary status he certainly has access to an armory of magical items that would leave most mortal wizards awestruck.

Vorth seems to reek of magic. Wizards can sense the currents of magic that surround him, and spells or items that detect magical energy register his presence. Even non-wizards can sometimes sense Vorth's power as a sharpness in the air.

The demigod's voice is gruff and strong, with a rumbling undertone reminiscent of distant thunder. He understands most human languages but rarely speaks to anyone.

Vorth is an irritable individual with a short temper, and this shows in his mannerisms and movements. Wise observers quickly sense that getting him riled is both extremely easy and extremely dangerous.

Personality

Vorth is every bit as cynical as Nimboal and Travente. He's out for his own gain, and doesn't care a whit for anyone else. As with Nimboal, this doesn't mean he'll go out of his way to harm or hinder anyone, though he certainly won't stop to lend a hand either unless it would somehow benefit him.

Vorth is proud of his abilities to the point of arrogance, and he's impatient and quick to anger. Even when enraged, however, he's usually pragmatic enough not to say or do anything that will harm him in the long run.

Primal Attributes

Primal Base	2,950
Typical Primal Flux	1,372
Planes	1 miniplane
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	0
Servitors	2 major, 5 minor

Primal Base Calculations

One Solely Controlled Miniplane	500
Rank Bonuses Through Supported Demigod (100 + 200 + 300)	600
Creation of Artifacts (see note below)	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	-500
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	-700
Evolutionary Gains	3,050
Total Primal Base	2,950

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (2,950 / 10)	295
Consecrated Ground (10 x 2)	20
Sanctuaries (55 x 5)	275
Temples (4 x 10)	40
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (4 x 1)	4
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (7 x 2)	14
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (1 x 250)	250
Worshippers by Plane (5,000, 3,000, 2,000, 3,200, 1,800, 4 x 750, 3 x 100; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	474
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
Total Primal Flux	1,372

Note: While Vorth has created many artifacts, the primal base used to power them came from Nimboal rather than from Vorth himself. Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.



History

Vorth was born human in a society with a strong tradition in enchantment. As a matter of course he was trained in the magical arts, and he excelled at his lessons. He soon found that his true calling lay in enchantments, the art of incorporating magic into physical objects. As his already considerable skills increased, his fame spread far and wide, even beyond the plane of his birth. Legends tell that mages from other main planes traveled to Vorth's laboratory to learn from him or contract him for special projects.

At some point, Nimboal came to hear of Vorth's preeminence as an enchanter. The Mana-Shaper was building its divine structure and needed someone to create magic items and non-primal artifacts for itself, its divine subordinates, and its important priests. It decided that Vorth was perfectly qualified for the job, and offered the mortal the status of minion, intending eventually to ascend him to godling.

At this point, Nimboalite teachings about Vorth's history become suspicious. According to Nimboalite legend, Vorth refused Nimboal's offer. Why he did so is never explained; certainly rebuffing a deity isn't a common or wise thing to do. Rather than moving on to other candidates, Nimboal became fixated on Vorth and kept offering the mortal larger and larger rewards if he'd agree to serve. Finally Vorth agreed, but only in return for immediate ascension to godling!

One of the most questionable aspects of this story is its assertion that Nimboal agreed to Vorth's condition immediately. Such swift, generous agreement doesn't seem to match the Mana-Shaper's personality at all. But Nimboalite histories offer no other explanation of how Vorth came to be ascended to godling, and neither Vorth nor Nimboal seem likely to discuss the matter.

After Vorth's ascension, Nimboal ordered him to research enchantment as his sphere of influence. Since his fame as an enchanter was already widespread, Vorth needed only to create a few choice items for the chancellors of the more distant planes in order to associate his name closely with his sphere of influence in the minds of the Nimboalite faithful. In a very short time he assumed his sphere and became a demigod without an epic quest.

Vorth understands the personality of his patron and shares the Mana-Shaper's self-centered cynicism. The demigod doesn't share Travente's obvious ambitions, however, and so represents much less of a threat to Nimboal. This explains why the Mana-Shaper has trusted its enchanter to aid it in keeping control of its other subordinates. Vorth could conceivably abuse this trust by keying the secret powers of some artifact to his own mind as well as Nimboal's, but he hasn't seemed inclined to do so—yet. The demigod seems content to increase his skill at enchantment and build up a considerable arsenal of magic items and artifacts of his own.

Symbols

The general populace of Nimboalite worshipers represent Vorth with the oblique line sigil of the Mana-Shaper, assigning the demigod no specific symbols of his own. Certain orders of the church hierarchy, however, use stylized representations of the traditional tools used in certain enchantment rituals: the *athame*

(a specialized dagger), the cup, and the pentacle. In a handful of Nimboalite societies, Vorth is symbolized by a simple red dot, representing the ruby set into the demigod's eyepatch.

Sphere of Influence

Vorth's sphere of influence is enchantment, specifically the merging of physical and magical properties of matter to create items that can channel, direct, and manipulate the flow of magical energy.

Research Cost: 200 flux per day. Research Time: 20 years. Backing Cost: 500 base. Total Flux Cost: 1,460,000.

Vorth can instantly and infallibly determine all the powers and attributes of any enchanted item simply by touching it. He can also determine the words or phrases of power necessary to trigger its particular effects.

This sphere includes the following abilities:

Scramble: Research Cost: 100 flux per day. Research Time: 5 years. Backing Cost: 150 base. Activation Cost: 35 flux. This ability allows the deity to change any or all of the magic words or phrases used to trigger the powers of any magic item. He can either swap the triggers so that trigger A now activates power B and vice versa, or assign totally new triggers. This ability is instantaneous, but requires the deity to physically touch the item. The effect is permanent unless the deity later decides to scramble the triggers again.

Remote Control: Research Cost: 180 flux per day. Research Time: 5 years. Backing Cost: 400 base. Activation Cost: 40 flux. This ability allows the deity to trigger or temporarily suppress one power possessed by a single magic item within his range of sight. This is a one-time effect for each activation of the ability. For example, the deity could deactivate an opponent's Ring of Invulnerability for one combat exchange, or fire off a charge from his or her Wand of Blasting at a specific target.

Merge: Research Cost: 85 flux per day. Research Time: 1 year. Backing Cost: 50 base. Activation Cost: 100 flux. This ability allows the deity to transfer the powers from one magical item to a second magical item, giving the target item the combined powers of both objects. The source item is rendered inert by this process. The powers involved must be somehow compatible with each other and with the nature of the target item; it would be impossible to create an ever-sharpened crystal ball or a staff that both slays and heals whatever it touches, but the deity could transfer the powers of a Ring of Lightning into a Sword of Cleaving to create a weapon that would both pass through normal armor and discharge lightning bolts. There's no theoretical limit to the number of powers that can be added to a single target item. This ability has no effect on primally powered items.

Disenchant: Research Cost: 80 flux per day. Research Time: 5 years. Backing Cost: 100 base. Activation Cost: 80 flux. This ability allows the deity to render permanently inert any single, non-primal magical item that he can see. The item receives no resistance roll.

Statistics

Advantages

Sphere Abilities

Planes

Vorth controls a miniplane on which he has a secret magical laboratory. He hasn't bothered to name it, and hasn't invested the time and primal to give it any planar constants. In various hidden sites around the miniplane, Vorth keeps caches of magical items and artifacts that he's created for his own purposes. So far, Nimboal remains unaware of the miniplane's existence, and Vorth intends to keep it that way.

Vorth's miniplane is removed from all of Nimboal's planes and is adjacent only to the plane on which Vorth was born and raised.

Combat

Vorth stays well out of combat if he can; even against an inferior foe there's always the chance that he'll get hurt, and he doesn't want that. If combat is inevitable, he'll pound his foe with spells, magical items, and artifacts, never letting his opponent get close enough to land a telling counterblow.

The demigod doesn't consider anything worth fighting to the death for. If the only alternative is personal destruction, he'll sell out Nimboal and the other members of the divine structure, bargain with his caches of magic items, or do anything else to guarantee his continued existence.

Special Equipment

Visor of Utha
Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 86

It's certain that Vorth has created many items, both primally powered artifacts and colossally powerful enchanted objects, for his personal use. In keeping with his reticent nature, he's keeping many of them secret until he actually needs them.

The Visor of Utha is a wrap-around lens of crystalline material that covers the upper portion of the wearer's face. Attached to the lens is a band of ornately scrolled gold that slips over the wearer's head and holds the visor in place.

The Visor of Utha was created by a long-forgotten deity of knowledge. Its primary function is to warn the wearer of the presence of any intelligent creature who enters the area scanned by the visor.

The area of effect is a sphere one hundred yards in diameter centered on the wearer. If any intelligent life form enters this area, the wearer knows it immediately and perceives a three-dimensional image of the creature in his mind. The visor is capable of detecting invisible or otherwise cloaked sentients unless the concealment is primally backed; in this case, the concealment ability and the visor make a power rating roll.

The information provided by the visor is extremely intense and not overly simple to interpret. If an individual with an intelligence of 24 or less tries to wear the visor, he or she will be stunned until it is removed, with no resistance roll allowed.

Xanthine

Godling

Strength	16	Combat	
Health	23	Defense Strength	19
Reaction	18	Unarmed	n/a
Intelligence	28	Melee Weapons	n/a
Destiny	32	Missile Weapons	n/a
Presence	22	Special Abilities	Flight
Willpower	34	Aptitude	
Size	2.5 yards	Magical Aptitude	Master
Speed	4 yards/second	Mentalic Aptitude	Legendary 1
Primal Base	342		
Primal Flux	79		

In its usual form, Xanthine appears as a tall, slender humanoid figure with disproportionately long limbs. Its eyes are unnaturally large and very intelligent. It has no hair and is totally androgynous in appearance. Its fingers are abnormally long, and it has a large, humanlike eye in each palm; these eyes are totally functional. It wears an unbelted robe of shimmering purple that brushes the ground at its feet.

Xanthine's four eyes can move and focus totally independently; the godling's brain is sufficiently developed to keep track of the four independent images and synthesize them into a perception of its environment. Xanthine is as protective of the eyes in its palms as any creature is of its eyes. When the godling picks up or manipulates objects, it does so with the very tips of its long, dexterous fingers.

The godling seems to emanate a strange combination of curiosity and unearthly wisdom, as if it wants to experience everything because it always understands whatever it experiences. Its movements are quick and jerky, sometimes birdlike. It can run as fast as a cheetah and fly even faster; its flight is an innate magical ability, requiring no more concentration than walking.

Xanthine never speaks, communicating instead through telepathy. It is anatomically capable of speech and has very sensitive hearing, but as a mortal it was a member of a telepathic race and never learned quite how to manage a spoken language.

Personality

The key elements of Xanthine's personality are unbridled curiosity and a fascination with magic. The godling is quite naive for a divine being, still fired with enthusiasm over its relatively new ability to actually use magic. It's an individual of sudden enthusiasms and startling insights. It's too overwhelmed with gratitude to Nimboal to even consider that the deity isn't the beneficent and wise individual it claims to be. Xanthine is highly intelligent, however, and will eventually start to see through Nimboal's guise. This probably won't begin for several years more, however, and in the interim the godling will serve Nimboal with fierce loyalty.



Primal Attributes

Primal Base	342
Typical Primal Flux	79
Planes	0
Supported Demigods	0
Demigods	0
Godlings	0
Chancellors	0
Artifacts	20
Servitors	0

Primal Base Calculations

No Solely Controlled Planes	0
Rank Bonuses Through Godling	100
Creation of Artifacts	0
Creation of Servitors	0
Ascensions	0
Sphere of Influence Cost	0
Sphere of Influence Abilities Cost	0
Evolutionary Gains	242
Total Primal Base	342

Primal Flux Calculations

Ten Percent of Base (342 / 10)	34
Consecrated Ground (0 x 2)	0
Sanctuaries (0 x 5)	0
Temples (0 x 10)	0
Cathedrals (0 x 25)	0
Holding of Rival Consecrated Ground (3 x 1)	3
Holding of Rival Sanctuaries (1 x 2)	2
Holding of Rival Temples (0 x 5)	0
Holding of Rival Cathedrals (0 x 12)	0
Planes (0 x 1,000)	0
Worshippers by Plane (2 x 400; taking the square root of each separately and then adding)	40
Captured Primal Base (0 x 5%)	0
Total Primal Flux	79

Primal flux breakdowns do not include the cost of supporting priests, since these will vary from campaign to campaign.

Xanthine has one minor eccentricity: it's absolutely intrigued by the concept of music. It frequently finds itself enraptured by music of all kinds, even the most ill-composed, poorly rendered music.

History

Xanthine was born into a little-known, naturally mentalic race on a small and obscure plane. Like the rest of its hermaphroditic race, Xanthine was physically and mentally incapable of sensing or manipulating the flow of magical energy, and thus unable to cast any kind of magical spells. But several of its race were fascinated with the theory of magic, and Xanthine soon emerged as their leading light, obsessed with the theoretical and academic study of magic.

Xanthine first learned that there was a deity associated with magic when a Nimboalite wizard traveled to its plane. Xanthine immediately devoted its life to Nimboalism, becoming ordained as a priest and working its way up to the order of Magister Arcanus Literatus. Continuing its personal studies while also serving the church, Xanthine made a major breakthrough in the theory of divinatory magic, and practicing mages swiftly incorporated its conclusions into new divination spells.

This breakthrough brought Xanthine to the attention of Nimboal. The Mana-Shaper was receiving more and more petitions from worshipers for glimpses of the future and information on what destiny had in store. Nimboal had little time and less inclination to answer these prayers, but recognized that simply ignoring them would alienate certain worshipers it needed to maintain its power. By this time, the lesser deity had expanded its divine structure to include three demigods, so it simply decided to expand it further to include a subordinate whose sole job was to handle requests for fortunes and divination. Xanthine was the candidate who immediately sprang to mind.

Nimboal immediately used its sphere of influence ability of Empowerment (see p. 112) to grant Xanthine the ability to manipulate magical energy, a boon of incredible value to the scholar-priest. Nimboal then compounded the gift by elevating Xanthine to the rank of minion. After a probationary period during which the new minion proved its worthiness, the Mana-Shaper ascended it to the status of godling.

Nimboal instructed its new godling to research divination as its sphere of influence. Xanthine agreed willingly, glad to follow up on its earlier research. The Mana-Shaper is now increasing Xanthine's profile throughout the church, thinking ahead to when the godling will actually assume the sphere; to this end, it is introducing the new godling as Xanthine the All-Knowing.

According to Nimboalite doctrine, it's Xanthine who dictates the various holy writings to the faithful.

Symbols

As far as lay worshipers are concerned, Xanthine the All-Knowing has no specific symbols of its own. Within various orders of the Nimboalite church, however, the godling is symbolized by a brass coin of unusual design. The connection seems to be that coins are sometimes used in divination, and that's Xanthine's specialty within the divine structure.

Planes

Xanthine is usually found on one of the main planes where there are congregations of Nimboalites. Between missions, the godling resides on the plane of Umbra.

Combat

Xanthine's race has a millennia-long tradition of nonviolence, and the godling will probably always follow this philosophy. Its magical and mentalic powers give it the ability to avoid or escape from most confrontations, and Xanthine will always choose this path. Its one potential weakness is that it believes all other sentients must share its rational aversion to violence; if a sentient engages in combat, it must be feeling threatened or enraged. If faced with a confrontation in which flight is impossible, Xanthine will simply surrender and expect its foe to spare its life. When it realizes this might not happen, the godling will be horrified and outraged, and no one knows how this might affect its behavior.

Special Equipment

Palandrine Throat Crystal
Non-Primal Artifact
Power Rating: 75

This beautiful marquise crystal is a rich, royal purple in color and about the size of the first joint of a human's thumb. Very few have seen it, however, since the crystal is imbedded in Xanthine's throat where the Adam's apple would be on a human. The crystal was implanted surgically as a symbol that Xanthine had reached the age of majority on its home world. When it was first implanted, it had symbolic significance but no magical powers.

When it elevated Xanthine to the status of godling some thirty years ago, Nimboal decided to put the crystal to use. The deity ordered Vorth and Travente to enchant the crystal to augment Xanthine's divinatory abilities. After almost five years of research, Travente achieved the breakthrough that made this possible. With Vorth's help, the demigoddess removed the crystal from the godling's throat, poured magical power into it, and implanted it once more.

Now the crystal allows Xanthine to call upon the ancient prophecies of over fifty deities who have long ago vanished from the multiverse. This crystal allows Xanthine to cast all divination spells at Legendary 2 rank.

A'alance

Minion

Strength	26	Combat	
Health	31	Defense Strength	26
Reaction	26	Unarmed	Master; 25 (2x)
Intelligence	20	Melee Weapons	Amateur; by weapon+STR (2x)
Destiny	26	Missile Weapons	Amateur; by weapon (1x)
Presence	19	Aptitude	
Willpower	24	Magical Aptitude	Master
Size	3 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	6 yards/second		

A'alance is a roughly humanoid but definitely inhuman creature. He's tall and slender with a sunken chest, narrow shoulders, and long legs. His body is totally covered in a soft, gray pelt with a texture reminiscent of velvet. His hands and feet each have seven digits, with opposable "thumbs" on the feet as well. The minion's eyes are huge, with large pupils, indicative of his race's dimly lit environment.

A'alance walks upright on his hind legs, but his posture and the slow, slightly ungainly way he moves hints that his race hasn't long been bipedal. He can climb virtually anything, all but the smoothest surface. Though his walk looks uncomfortable, he is capable of breaking into a surprisingly swift run and his other movements are fluid and graceful.

A'alance has a soft, breathy, high-pitched voice. His natural language is a fast, fluid stream of vowel sounds. He speaks several human languages but not very fluently. The anatomy of his mouth and throat are such that he has difficulty with certain combinations of consonants.

A'alance smells faintly of cinnamon and iodine.

Personality

A'alance is solitary by nature; he has never felt totally comfortable around sentients not of his own race. He's highly intelligent and quite introspective. He can spend hours contemplating the ramifications of a seemingly minor decision and enjoy every moment of the process.

A'alance still hasn't quite got the hang of the concepts of deities and worship. He serves Nimboal because he respects the deity and because he has yet to see the darker, less admirable side of the Mana-Shaper. After all, Nimboal is much more knowledgeable about the different planes than is A'alance, and much more powerful in many ways. To the minion, these are good enough reasons to offer the deity his respect and service. He doesn't quite understand the emotional content that distinguishes true worship from simple respect and service, however.

The minion is loyal to Nimboal and will follow its orders, as long as he understands why they're important. A'alance's tendency to question instructions will probably lead to trouble eventually.

A'alance is particularly intrigued by planar magic.

Most of A'alance's missions include "showing the flag" at Nimboalite churches on various planes. If a particular chancellor or master of the mysteries isn't toeing the line or is exhibiting some kind of disturbing heterodoxy, the

mere appearance of such an obviously inhuman minion is usually enough to bring things back to doctrinal purity.

History

A'alance's race is known to only a handful of sages throughout the multiverse. The minion's people arose on an ancient world orbiting a dying sun. The original dominant race of this world had long since vanished from the plane, leaving the planet to the animals. Under the dim, ruddy light of the swollen sun, A'alance's people emerged from the forests. Over a period of several million years, they evolved from a nonsentient race of quasi-felines inhabiting the foliage of the jungle into an intelligent, self-aware race with strong magical capabilities.

This race, which called itself simply Those Who Think, developed a tradition around the rite of passage from childhood into adulthood. An adolescent was expected to leave his or her home and travel into the wilderness, exploring and discovering new things and then returning to the tribe to share this new knowledge with them. When it came A'alance's turn for this journey of discovery, he decided to try something very new. He was a mage of considerable power despite his youth, and had developed some spells that he thought would allow him to travel to different planes of existence. On the day of his departure from the tribe, he used those spells to go where none of his people had gone before.

As chance would have it, the plane to which A'alance first traveled was Umbra, the destination of Nimboalite souls after death. Shocked to have found a young world rather than one nearing its death like his own, he began to explore.

At about this time, roughly ten years ago, Nimboal was once more suffering the unwelcome attentions of rival deities. Certain friends of past rivals were starting to make minor probing raids against the Mana-Shaper's territory. While A'alance was wandering around Umbra in wonder, the plane was invaded by a small raiding party, minions of a minor war deity named Irzusha. To the young mage's surprise, A'alance found himself in the middle of a border skirmish.

The souls of the Nimboalite faithful had been very friendly and open to A'alance, answering all his questions about their new home. Thus it wasn't too surprising that he threw in his lot with the locals and fought to expel the invaders. The level of conflict kept escalating as Nimboal sent more of its underlings to strengthen Umbra's defense. Eventually, the Mana-Shaper sent Morgose into the fray, and the invaders were driven forth or destroyed.

Throughout the battle, the deity had heard reports of a strange mortal mage fighting alongside the Nimboalite forces. Now it decided the time was right to meet this unexpected servant.

A'alance didn't know quite what to make of the Mana-Shaper when they met. His people had no deities of their own; in fact, they didn't even comprehend the concept. A'alance didn't realize the true nature of the individual he'd met, considering Nimboal different from himself only in species and origin. Accordingly, he didn't pay the Mana-Shaper the homage the deity was used to receiving.

For a moment Nimboal considered teaching the mortal creature some respect, but then it saw the humor of the situation. It found itself impressed by the simple, straightforward self-possession of the strange catlike creature, and the willingness with which A'alance had put his own life at risk to help defend the Nimboalite souls. In an uncharacteristic twist, the deity found itself liking A'alance.

This, of course, wasn't enough motivation for the cynical Mana-Shaper to do anything out of character. It was, however, an impetus to wonder how it could put A'alance to good use. Nimboal saw how much the faithful souls respected the mysterious stranger who had fought on their behalf, and decided that rewarding A'alance for his actions would be an excellent public relations move. Therefore, the lesser deity forthwith elevated the wizard to the status of minion.

For A'alance, the whole concept was confusing in the extreme. It took the creature some time to comprehend the idea of deities and that he had met one—and even longer to understand that he might someday ascend to the divine ranks himself. Nevertheless, he accepted Nimboal's offer, and now serves the Mana-Shaper with great loyalty and dedication.

Symbols

Only the Magister Rei Occultissimae order of the Nimboalite church have a special symbol for A'alance: two circles side by side but not quite touching, representing the minion's large eyes. All other Nimboalites represent A'alance with the oblique line symbol for the Mana-Shaper.

Planes

When he's not traveling the multiverse on missions assigned by Nimboal, A'alance can be found on Umbra.

Combat

Like all wizards, A'alance prefers to face the possibility of combat with spells. Unlike many other wizards, however, A'alance can hold his own in melee if there's no way to avoid it.

A'alance's race had to deal with many natural enemies while they were climbing the evolutionary ladder to sentience, and so developed the ability to fight very competently for their lives. Despite his slender build, A'alance displays great strength. Coupled with his speed and fast reflexes, this allows the servitor to deliver crushing blows with his slender fists. The servitor is proficient with most melee weapons, but only uses them when unarmed combat isn't an option.

Special Equipment

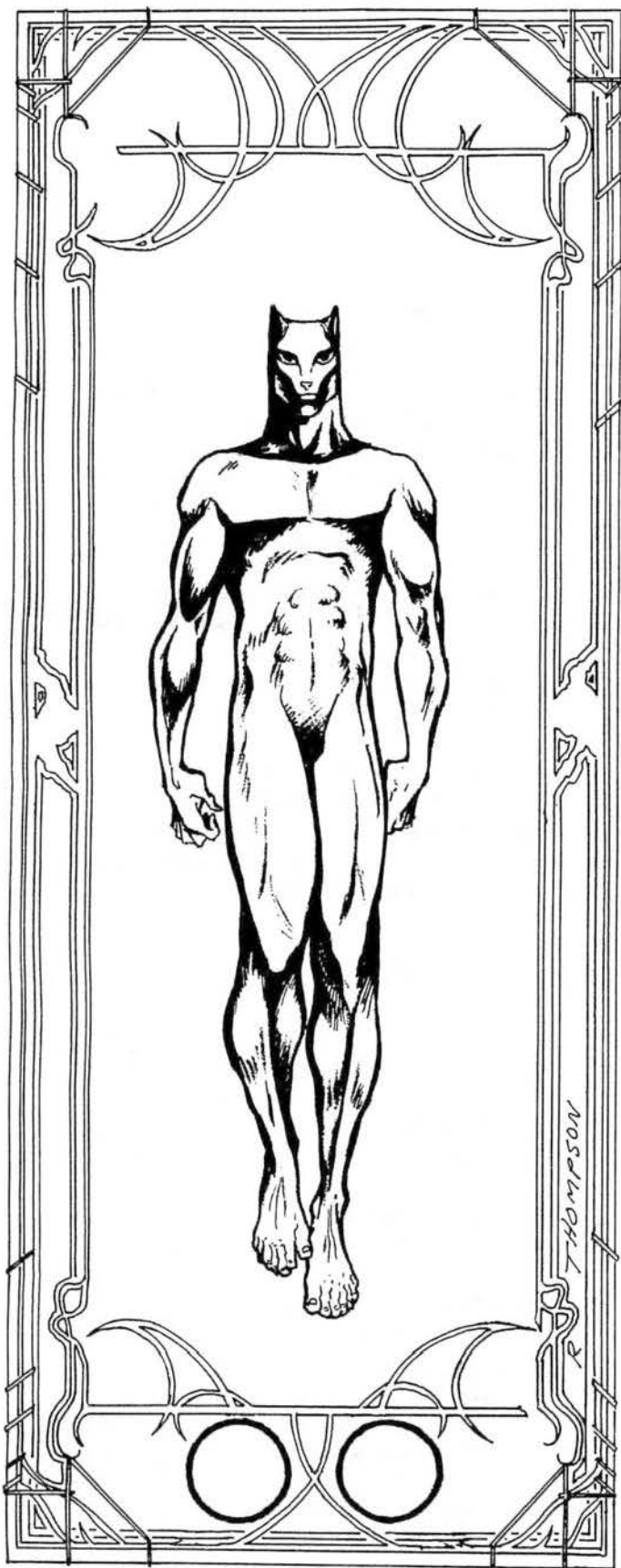
Gauntlets of the Elements

Non-Primal Artifact

Power Rating: 71

A'alance sometimes wears a pair of full-arm gauntlets made from what appears to be leather hide. In fact, they are made of black *sparflex*, a durable yet very flexible material of magical origin. Each finger of the gauntlets is tipped with a claw of great strength. These claws are razor-sharp and inflict damage of rank 30 with a successful strike. They never grow dull with age or use.

In addition to the hideous damage they inflict, the Gauntlets of the Elements have an even more significant power. Any elemental-based spells cast by the wearer can be channeled through the gauntlets, drawing on the items' internal reservoir of elemental power. This allows the caster to double one aspect of the spell effect, such as duration, range, or damage caused. This ability of the gauntlets can only be used five times per day without depleting the item's elemental reservoir.



Kileer

Chancellor

Strength	30	Combat	
Health	27	Defense Strength	25
Reaction	28	Unarmed	Master; 25 (2x)
Intelligence	20	Melee Weapons	n/a
Destiny	21	Missile Weapons	n/a
Presence	18	Aptitude	
Willpower	19	Magical Aptitude	Master
Size	2.75 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	8.5 yards/second		

Kileer is a black-furred quadruped similar in shape and size to a large panther. His face is more human than feline, however, and his eyes are undeniably intelligent. He wears an emerald stud in his right ear and a loose collar of fine silver chain.

Kileer moves with the grace and controlled power of any great hunting cat. He's capable of bursts of blinding speed rivaling those of a cheetah, can leap great distances, and is an excellent climber.

Kileer is undeniably a predator; his every move communicates that to everyone around him. Couple this with the high intelligence evidenced in his eyes, and he becomes a seriously daunting figure: a born killer with a high IQ.

The chancellor can speak most human languages plus his race's own hissing, snarling tongue. His voice is deep and rumbling, smooth but with an edge like broken glass on velvet.

Kileer has a distinct, yet not unpleasant scent reminiscent of warm machine oil with a hint of bitter almond. This scent is horribly disturbing to most animals, particularly dogs. Sometimes it sets them on edge; other times it reduces them to quivering, whimpering heaps, depending on their personalities and training. Although this effect isn't so pronounced in humans, few can face Kileer without some hint of fear—which the chancellor can smell, of course.

Personality

On the surface, Kileer seems focused and serious to the point of crushing solemnity. This is only part of his complex personality, however. Kileer is serious about things he considers important, but he has a strong sense of humor as well and a finely honed sense of the ridiculous. Unfortunately, his ideas of humor are based on those of his race, which are quite different from those of humanity. His jokes and plays on words seem totally nonsensical to humans; conversely, he rarely sees the humor in human jokes. He is learning to overcome these cultural barriers, however, as are the humans who work most closely with him.

Kileer is a true believer in the precepts of Nimboalism. He recognizes that some members of the church hierarchy are cynically manipulating it to their own ends, but he isn't one of them. As a mortal with little direct contact with the divine structure, he hasn't had the opportunity to notice that cynicism permeates the divine echelon as well.

The chancellor has, by nature, a very short temper. He controls it incredibly well, rarely letting anger sound in his voice, though observers can tell when they're walking on thin ice by the way his tail twitches.

History

Kileer is a mortal, a member of the dominant race on an alternate main plane. This race gives rise to more powerful wizards than does humanity, but mages make up a tiny minority of its population. Kileer distinguished himself early in life as a devoted student of the magical arts, one with great potential.

Kileer was approaching middle age when the faith of Nimboalism first appeared on his plane. At first, the wizard paid little attention to the new religion; his race proliferated strange new faiths at a prodigious rate without having to import any from other planes. But then, almost despite himself, he became interested in the religion's precepts. With time, his interest became fascination and the wizard underwent the sacrament of the Ortus, officially joining the religion. From there the next logical step was ordination as a priest. Kileer found he had a natural ability for negotiating the church hierarchy, and his rise through the orders was exceptionally swift. In an unprecedentedly short time, he reached the status of Magister Rei Occultissimae and was eventually selected to become master of the mysteries for his church.

Kileer proved himself a highly competent, dynamic master of the mysteries. Under other circumstances, his elevation to chancellor of his own plane would probably have been assured. The current chancellor was almost as competent as he, however, and seemed destined to hold his position for many decades. This didn't bother Kileer unduly; he'd already sated his ambitions by becoming master of the mysteries, and was satisfied with doing what he could to help his own church.

Not all Nimboalite churches were doing as well as Kileer's, however. On a distant human-dominated main plane, the Nimboalite faith was in some trouble. This plane had five semi-autonomous churches, each led by its own dynamic and very ambitious master of the mysteries. Through a complex sequence of circumstances, the person elevated to the position of chancellor was too weak to keep these ambitious individuals in check. The different masters of the mysteries spent more of their time maneuvering against each other than they did tending to their churches. This power struggle worried a lot of the faithful, and all of the churches were hemorrhaging worshipers at such a rate that Nimboal itself took serious notice.

The deity quickly recognized what was needed: a strong chancellor to keep the masters of the mysteries in line, preferably someone who'd strike fear into their hearts with his or her very presence. The Mana-Shaper scoured the planes for a candidate and almost immediately noticed Kileer. It approached the master of the mysteries and made him an offer.

Kileer had no intention of refusing. The Mana-Shaper transported him to the human plane and unilaterally installed the feline as chancellor. As Nimboal had expected, Kileer quickly brought the fractious masters of the mysteries under control, ending the power struggles and boosting the falling morale of the churches.

In fact, Kileer's very presence increased Nimboalite recruiting on that plane, a result even the Mana-Shaper itself hadn't foreseen. People who hadn't paid much attention to Nimboalism before couldn't help but hear that the faith's leader on this plane was an intelligent feline from another plane of existence. This certainly increased the religion's stature and hence its attractiveness.

Kileer has served as chancellor for several years now and thoroughly enjoys his position. Deep in his heart, he wonders whether he won't eventually be elevated to become a minion. He won't discuss these thoughts with anyone, however, and will hardly admit them to himself.

Symbols

As a chancellor of the Nimboalite church structure, Kileer has no symbols or sigils of his own.

Planes

Kileer lives on the main plane to which Nimboal transported him. He has no personal means for interplanar travel.

Combat

Evolution has made Kileer a natural killing machine, able to disembowel foes with a single swing of his front claws. He's very intelligent, however, intelligent enough to recognize that violence is often the least efficient way to solve problems. He'll usually try to "talk down" a situation, to use reason even when his instincts are screaming at him to tear his opponent to shreds.

Special Equipment

Kileer has no special equipment.

Settim Orr

Strength	13	<i>Combat</i>	
Health	14	Defense Strength	15
Reaction	11	Unarmed	Amateur; 10 (1X)
Intelligence	22	Melee Weapons	Amateur; by weapon+STR (1X)
Destiny	17	Missile Weapons	Amateur; by weapon (1X)
Presence	16	<i>Aptitude</i>	
Willpower	15	Magical Aptitude	Veteran
Size	2 yards	Mentalic Aptitude	n/a
Speed	3 yards/second		

Master of the Mysteries

Settim Orr is an aging but still vigorous human male. He's olive-skinned, with sharp features and an aquiline nose. His expression is serious but not somber, frequently showing hints of curiosity and intelligence. His tightly curled hair is black without the slightest touch of gray, falling in cascades down his back to his waist. He wears a severe black robe belted at the waist with a black rope, over which is an open white vest embellished along the hems with arcane symbols embroidered in gold thread. This is the traditional garb for masters of the mysteries.

The master of the mysteries has a vibrant voice, not loud but carrying. Usually it's very reasoned, very persuasive, but when necessary it can take on the whip-crack of command. Settim Orr speaks only the native tongue of his nation.

Personality

Settim Orr is a real take-charge type. If something's worth doing, he figures, it's worth doing right. He recognizes that some people don't share this attitude, however, and is always careful to persuade his followers of the correctness of any action—if he has the opportunity. He doesn't suffer fools gladly, but saves his special disapprobation for people who don't put their best efforts into a project. He's much more likely to forgive those who give their all yet screw up badly than those who muddle along making only half efforts.

The master of the mysteries has a much better sense of what the lay worshippers are thinking than most other members of his church. This is because too many Nimboalite priests have never been anything but priests, joining the church as soon as they reached the age of majority. Orr, in contrast, lived a full and eventful life before his conversion, which gives him more of an insight into real life than most of his subordinate priests. He's considering bringing in a rule that candidates for the priesthood must spend two years traveling the world before they can be ordained, but isn't sure how his chancellor would take to that.

Orr honestly likes people. He enjoys talking with them, laughing with them, and arguing with them. His openness is a breath of fresh air through the church hierarchy, which is all too often closed and secretive.

History

Settim Orr was a late convert to Nimboalism, joining the church when he was in his mid-forties. Up to this point he had felt no kinship with any religion, considering them highly restrictive and directly opposed to his philosophy of personal freedom.

As a youth Orr was a serious hell-raiser, spending most of his time in one kind of trouble or another. He traveled the world, frequently one short step ahead of the law, and experimented with many careers, including confidence man, mercenary, and bandit. He discovered his aptitude for magic surprisingly late—in his early thirties, as a matter of fact—but his talent was so great that he soon caught up with and passed students of the art who had started their training as young children.

For more than a decade Orr continued his travels, learning what he could about magic as he did so. He often considered apprenticing himself to a suitable master and devoting himself to the study of magic, but he couldn't find someone with whom he felt sufficient kinship.

That changed at last. Orr was forty-three when he finally encountered a master mage he actually trusted, and who was willing to work with such an old apprentice. It so happened that this master was also a lay worshiper of the Nimboalite church, a faith that was only just appearing on this plane. As well as training Orr in magic, the wizard slowly and subtly converted her apprentice to the Nimboalite creed.

To Orr's overwhelming surprise, he found that this religion filled a void in his soul he hadn't even known existed. With the fervor of the newly converted, Orr flung himself into his worship, accepting the sacrament of the Ortus and eventually petitioning the priests for ordination.

Once in the hierarchy, Orr's true skills as an organizer and bureaucrat came to the fore. He rocketed up the hierarchy, passing priests who had been ordained twenty years before he even heard of Nimboal Mana-Shaper. Such was his open, friendly personality, however, that he earned very little animosity for his overwhelming rise. By the time he was fifty-five, he had been elevated to the order of Magister Rei Occultissimae, and just after his sixtieth birthday he was selected to be master of the mysteries for his church.

Symbols

To the lay public, there are no symbols or sigils to represent the master of the mysteries. Within the church hierarchy, however, there are many; each order uses a different symbol to represent the church leader.



Planes

Settim Orr has never traveled from the plane on which he was born.

Combat

During his early life, Orr learned to handle many melee and missile weapons. He'd be the first to admit he's no trained warrior, but at least he can wield a sword without slicing his own foot off. Since joining the church, he's had no reason to fight with anyone, and he doesn't anticipate that changing.

Special Equipment

Orr has no special equipment.



"When half-gods go, the gods arrive." —Emerson

Everyone who's read *The Primal Order* knows that deities need to build strong religions. In *Knights: Strategies in Motion*, you'll see how three fictional deities approached this task. For those interested in the mortal side of things, there are notes on worshiper lifestyles, sacraments, duties of priesthood, and more. On the divine end, *Knights* explores the personality, background, abilities, and responsibilities of the various divine beings in each religious hierarchy. Whether you want some ready-made religions, a source of ideas, or just a few examples to follow, your search is over.

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