

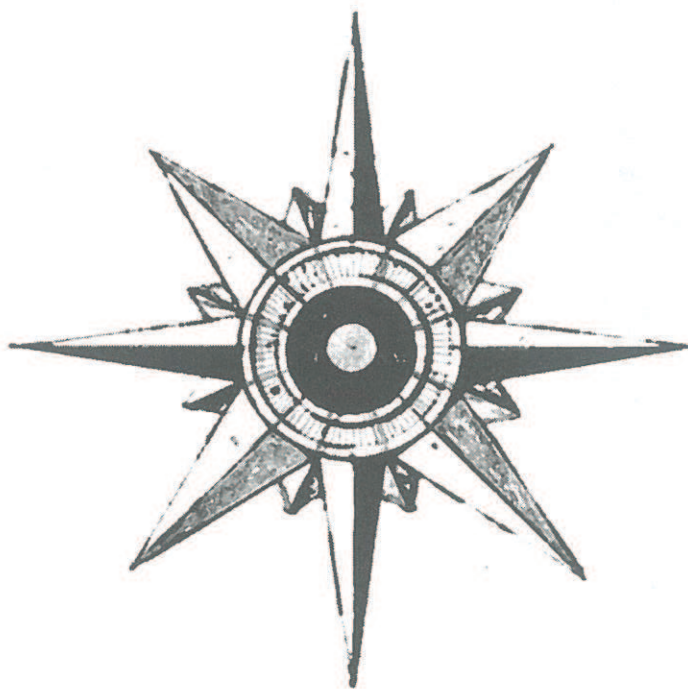
Into the OUTLANDS



A Tribe & Sourcebook



Dream Pod 9



Children of Prophecy



Sixth Interlude

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Chapter one: Introduction

Vimary is where we came to you and freed you, and the land was blessed with the blood of sacrifice. On this sacred land the Goddess walks among you, your ancestors watch you and our blessings will be upon you. Leave Vimary's shores and you wander in darkness, beyond our grace, beyond our protection. Die in the Outlands and your soul is lost, for we cannot come to you. Heed me, my children, and stray not from our home, for Vimary is the light and all else is darkness.

— From the Rulings of Tera Sheba the Wise



Destiny calls with many voices

Mek the Jacker, talking to some newly Fallen:

I like sitting up here on the Wheel. The wind sings to you, and Vimary lies below like a tiny boat on a great green lake. I mean, look around you, beyond Bazaar, beyond Hom, beyond the Beasts and their Ziggurat: forest as far as the eye can see. Yet all we have are the tales the wind tells as it travels by, tales of the places our ancestors left, of treasures unfound and paths not yet walked. In the years since the camps, the Fatimas have kept us as penned on Vimary as the Z'bri kept our ancestors penned in their stinking brothels.

Out there, beyond the past, lies our true destiny. What does it matter if the Seven Deaths and their fools hold this one little island when everything beyond it is to be ours? Listen to the wind! It speaks of distances beyond measure, of lands rich with game and the beauty of the world beyond Vimary's shores. Even the Tribes, despite their denial, can't ignore the Outlands. They leave Vimary as each season dictates, hearing the wind but learning nothing. They do not explore, they do not settle, they scuttle out like rabbits only to hurry back and huddle under the Fatimas' skirts. The lands beyond Vimary scare the Tribes, scare their mistresses, for beyond Vimary we are free. Free of the past, free of the Fatimas, and free to remake that which our ancestors lost.

Then there are the Beasts. Our ancestors were many and not all went to the camps; look at the Squats. How many more escaped? Are these the only Z'bri? If we remain trapped in Vimary we are easy prey. If we spread, take new lands far from their eyes, we can grow strong and sweep the Beasts away. Yet when we exterminate these vermin are we free of their horror? So many questions unanswered after so many years.

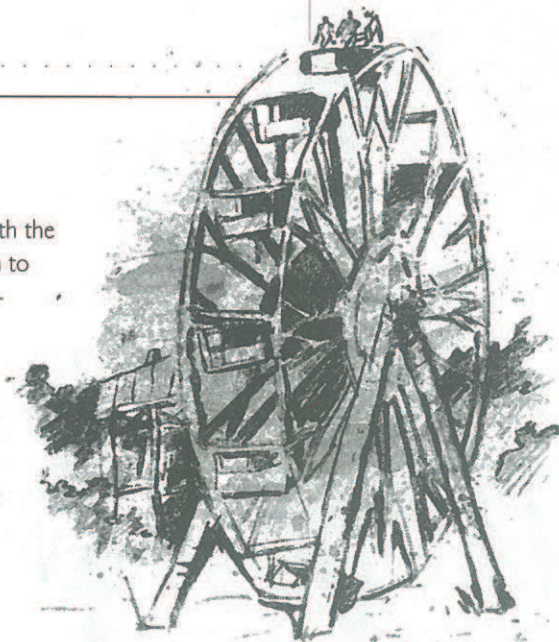
Of course, if you ask those questions among the Tribes you'll find yourself living in the Wheel's shadow, here on Hom. After all, Vimary is the chosen place of the Fatimas. That's why the Tribes call everything beyond Vimary the Outlands, outside their little world, outside the blessing of the Seven Deaths. If they came up here I wonder if the Tribes could deny the vision the Wheel holds. We, the Eighth Tribe, are different. We have broken with the Fatimas, defied them and the Beasts. We will take back all the lands that were our ancestors'. This is our destiny, to explore, to discover, to conquer, to reclaim our birthright.

So sit here with me, friends, and listen, for the winds speak in many voices. Visions come unbidden, many stories are told, from places beyond our knowledge, speaking to us of all that is ours. Not all the voices are friendly, not all are hopeful, but they all speak of the same thing, freedom and destiny. We are the Eighth Tribe, we will listen to the winds, and we will howl with them and walk those distant paths.

A Bitter Task

From the diary of Hombor Champlain, Yagan Mapmaker:

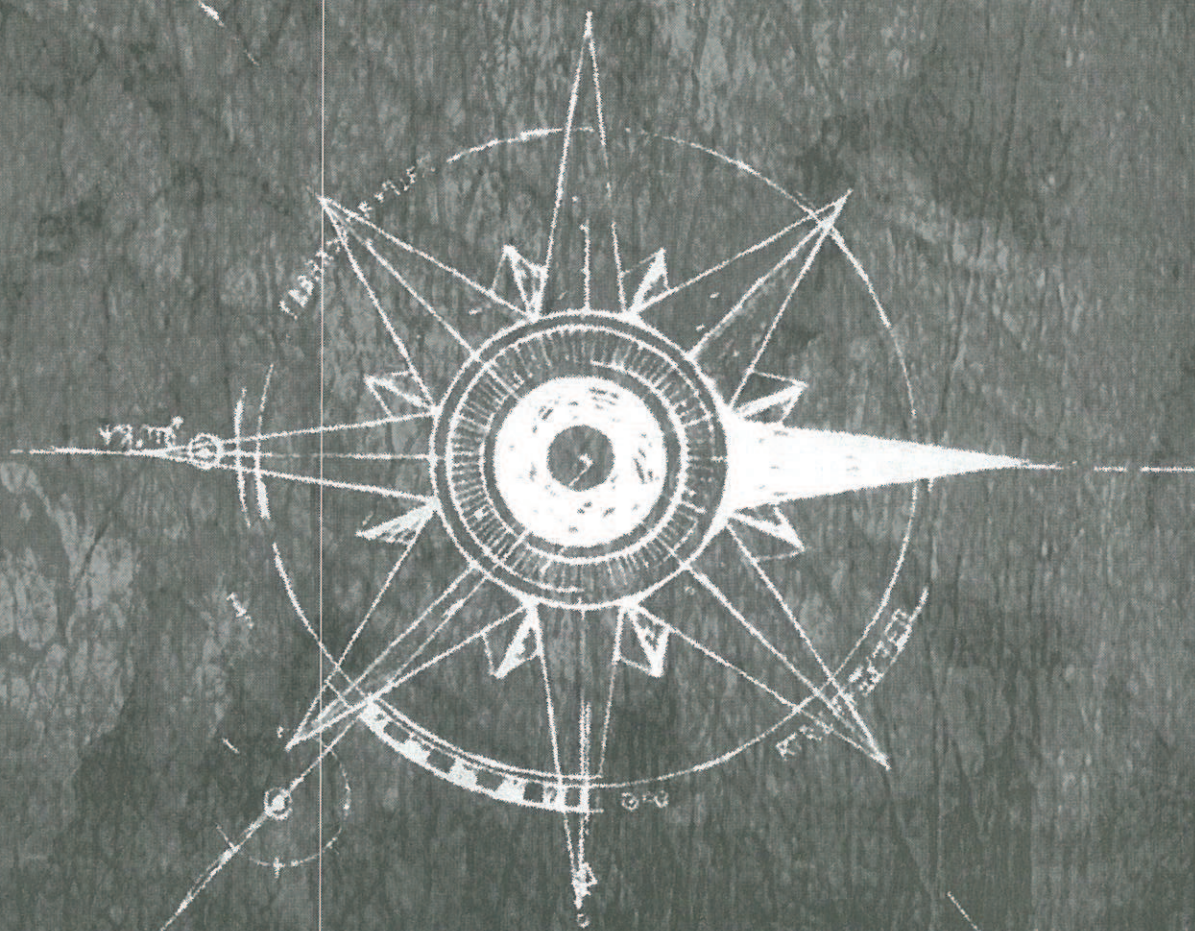
Well, I've opened my mouth once too often to argue with the elders. Rubi just came to tell me that I have been chosen to record the activities of the Tribes in the Outlands. The Outlands! I started to cry even before I thought of how much satisfaction it would give her, seeing me reduced to hysterics. Even now, as I pack my quills and inks, ready to seek out those who have left the home of our Nation, I tremble inside and tears hover behind my eyes. May Baba Yaga protect me from the terrors of the Outlands, so that I may return to her.



Chapter Two: Welcome of the East Wind

Every spring new life comes, and I wonder why I remain. It comes upon the East Wind, from the rising sun, a fresh wind, lifting death's icy fingers from the land. The wind's song is of joy and bounty, telling tales of mountain streams far from Vimary. It sings of new hope, but also of mystery. Listen, rejoice and beware, for the sweetest spring flower can hide the deadliest thorns.

— Veruka the Wraith



Sweet Blood

Tania Berlkin, Magdalite herbalist, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

When the rising sun burns hotter and the East Wind blows, we all rejoice at the end of winter. Yet it is also a hard time, for food stores are exhausted and hunger is common. Magdalen teaches that what is most desired is always better when the anticipation is drawn out. So it is with spring. Even though life has returned to the land, its bounty is not yet ours to reap, and in the worst years we must brave the Outlands or face starvation. When the snow flees all but the deepest hollows, and flowers bloom in the Eastern Hills, then we make ready to take our first bite of this bitter fruit.

Expeditions are organized to trek into the Hills, and return the bounty of spring to the hungry mouths of Vimary. Magdalites and Agnites perform this duty with just enough Joanites to guard our far-ranging foragers. It is hard to leave our Lover; tears and grief mark our departure, and remain with us while we are gone, yet food is desperately needed to replenish our stores, and we are short of herbs after winter's illnesses. In the forested meadows and vales of the Eastern Hills we find all we need. The rascal Agnites do their bit too, their scouts scouring the valleys and fields till not a berry remains unpicked nor hive untouched. Yet ours is an unhappy duty, for we have left our Fatimas, our names are forgotten, and the River of Dreams is denied us.

We try to make light of our separation, decking our camps with newly-picked flowers, singing and dancing in green glades beneath the bright moon, and finding love's grace in the pools of Jardin. The Agnites sing and dance with us, or run wild through the fields, gorging themselves on the sweet fruits of their labors, loosing their wide-eyed grief for Agnes in manic play. Not all the Agnites lose themselves this way, of course. The Barrens work endlessly, cutting lumber and dragging it, and all the supplies we collect, to the Riche River, seemingly less affected by their distance from Agnes than the younger ones. The brave and handsome Joanite Rangers neither sing nor dance, no matter how hard we entice them, remaining laconic in their grief. Yet I do not begrudge them their sternness. They protect us from the Squats who pollute the Hills like lice, and the Beasts that lurk around the Grand Bee.

Of course, the richest treasure is the blood of the Maple tree. Rich and golden it is, sweeter than a lovers' kiss and as luxuriant as a caress. Every spring we return to the same stands of trees, and tap their life to return it to Vimary. Years now we have harvested their blood, and still the trees welcome us back every spring, willing to share their life with us, the wind singing in their boughs. The sweet blood keeps for many months, crystallizing into precious food for the winter and making many an otherwise unappealing meal edible.



**Tania Berlkin,
Magdalite herbalist**

Beautiful and tempting, Tania stole many hearts, but chose plants over lovers and a life of luxury and ease.

Due to her great skills, she quickly rose to head the Guild of Herbalists and Apothecaries. Her knowledge of herbs, drugs, and, it is said, poisons, is unequaled on Vimary.

When required, she accepts the Magdalites' duty and leads the expedition into the Eastern Hills, gaining respect within her tribe for the herbal secrets she gathers there.

Despite her thirty years Tania's beauty has not faded and she remains one of the few not of the Concubines to share Magdalen's favor. The rumor though, is that her heart belongs to the Joanite Ranger Gi Jess'on.

Highlights: Beautiful, fiery, intelligent and strong.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +2, BLD -1, CRE +1, FIT 0, INF 0, KNO +2, PER 0, PSY -1, WIL +2, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, ULD 3, AD 4

Skills: Agriculture 1/+2, Cooking 1/+1, Dreaming 2/-1, Healing 2/+2, Herbalism 3/+2, Lore (Herbs) 2/+2, Melee 1/+1, Mythology 2/+2, Seduction 2/+2, Survival 1/+1.

Tears of Spring



Mika Guri'on, Fallen Joanite Swordsmith

Scrawny and one-handed, few remember that Mika the beggar was once a Joanite Swordsmith. Despite having little skill as a smith, Mika became rich by dealing with Squats and Keepers for scrap metal to feed the forges. Other deals with Dahlians to control the supply of certain tools, driving up their value in Bazaar, brought him further riches and more than a few enemies. Eventually Mika's greed was his doom; he tried to locate a source of silver wire in the Outlands, and got many of his companions killed. Mika was exiled for his crimes, and mutilated in revenge by his dead comrades' relatives.

Highlights: Bitter, greedy and shifty

Attributes: AGI 0, APP -1, BLD -1, CRE +1, FIT -1, INF +1, KNO 0, PER +1, PSY 0, WIL +1, STR -1, HEA 0, STA 20, UD 1, AD 2

Skills: Craft (Weaponsmith) 1/+1, Hagglng 2/+1, Human Perception 1/0, Melee 1/0, Notice 1/+1, Sleight-of-hand 1/0, Sneak 1/0, Streetwise 2/+1, Survival 1/+1, Trade 2/0.

From the diary of Hombor Champlain, Yagan Mapmaker:

It is interesting how the seasons mirror our own lives. As we are born crying, so is nature reborn every spring in torrents of water. In the first weeks of the thaw the Great River overflows, flooding much of Vimary and the lands around. It runs dangerously fast and is filled with debris. Now that the River has calmed, foraging parties are crossing to the Eastern Hills, and, for the first time, I've experienced the painful tearing from my Fatima, Baba Yaga, that all travelers feel as they leave Vimary.

The river plains remain a vast marsh until high summer; a mire of mud, mosquitoes, reeds and ruins. Only the lightly equipped can move through these swamps, travelling no more than a few klicks in a day. The remains of three ancient blacktops and the Riche River provide our passage. The Riche runs fast, but is navigable up to Lac-Ampan, except for nine ancient dams, which are surrounded by easy portage trails.

The Eastern Hills is an easy land, rolling rather than rugged, and covered with breezy woods. Water is everywhere, especially in spring when most of the many streams burst their banks to create treacherous swamps. The countless lakes also flood, forming vast shallows that fill with insects, lilies and birds. The overgrown rubble of many small villages lies scattered through the Hills, but what remains is only good for Squat hovels. The rubble of smaller blacktops wind amongst the Hills, a blessing from our ancestors, as other trails are mud-clogged and impassable to our heavy-laden porters.

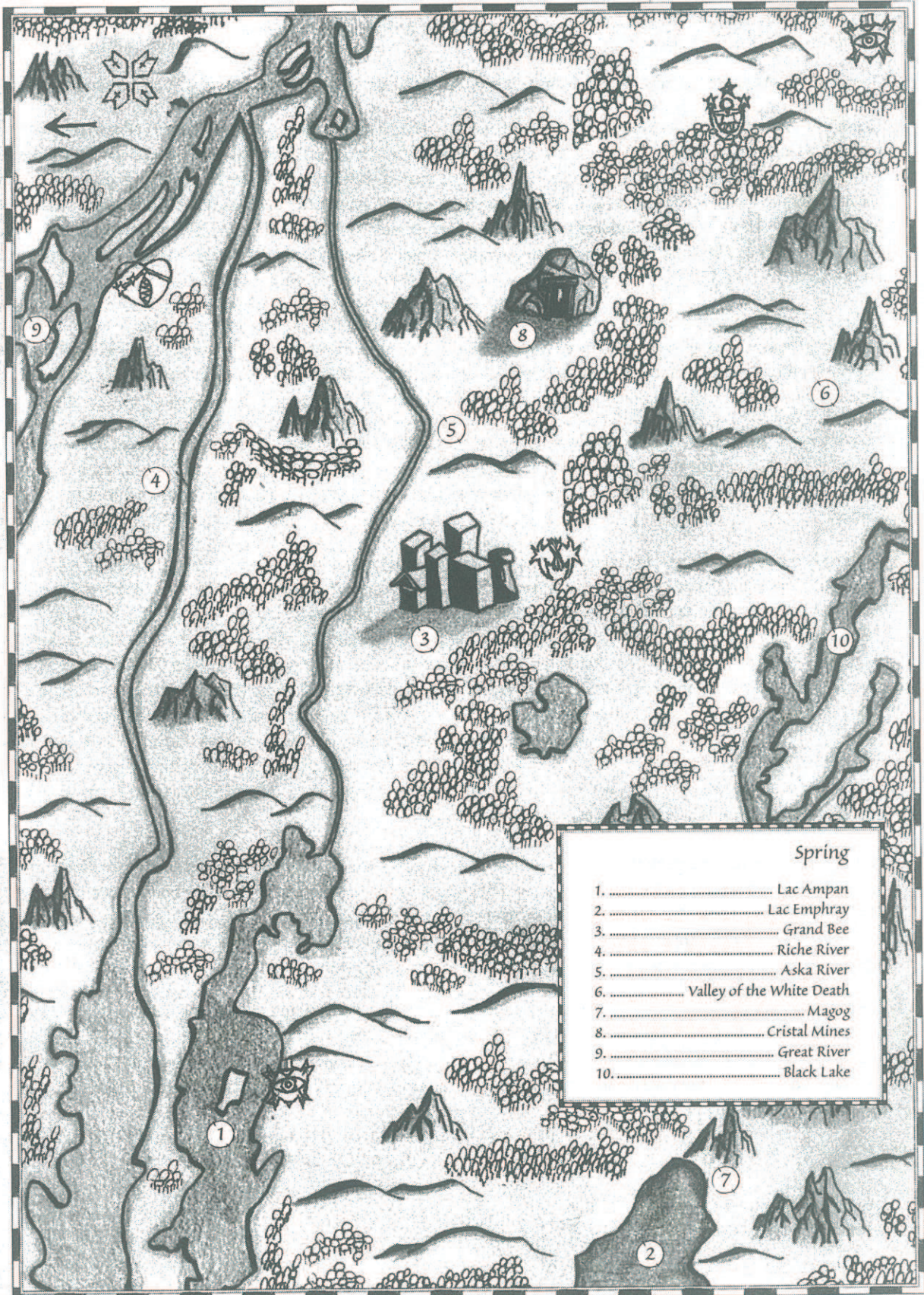
Further to the east the Hills rise into harsher slopes, but we stop at Lac-Emfray, for if we venture further we cannot easily return our forage to Vimary. Vicious squats to the south deter us from going farther than Lac-Ampan and the Squoi River. To the north we heed the wise words of Tera Sheba and go no further than the Valley of White Death, as the very land there is tainted. Nor are the Hills free of the Beasts' taint; a Joh'an-built Ziggurat lies across the Aska river, and the Gek'roh are a grave problem, plaguing the forests around the Grand Bee.

Earth Marrow

Mika Guri'on, Joanite Outcast, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Mark my words, young'un, the Valley of White Death is the work of man. If it were natural it would not lie blighted and dead, nor would those who go too near die in slow, wasting agony. Once some Squats from beyond the Valley brought silver wire to Bazaar and, desiring their riches, I led a party north. The blight lies on much of the land for many days' travel northwards, and more than a few of our party died. I am still haunted by their screams. Yes, I know our trip was against Tera Sheba's laws, boy, which is why I'm an outcast begging in Bazaar.

Where was I? Oh yes. Eventually we came across a vast lake, black as night, cold as steel and twice as deadly. No animal went near it, and its smell turned the stomachs of strong warriors. Unwilling to cross the deadly stream issuing from the lake, my cowardly comrades forced me to turn back. We were so close, for north of the lake I could see a plateau so thick in Maples it was like green fire. Rich land lies beyond that Black Lake, very rich land indeed, enough to make me wealthy and powerful again.



Gifts from the Mother

Tania Berkin, Magdalite Herbalist, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Unlike Eva's gifts, the Eastern Hill's bounty is not a certain one. If the snows stay late, then what we can take is much reduced, though we stay well into summer. Corn, beans, peas, rhubarb and spinach are always to be found in the glades and meadows, unless the East Wind is very weak. Raspberries and strawberries are more temperamental, and late snows will much reduce them, no matter how rich summer may have become. When the snows have stayed late we can often find patches of late potatoes, the Goddess's consolation to her people. When the East Wind blows particularly strong, the Goddess rewards us with great riches. Blackberries, cabbage, cherries, cucumber and squash are then harvested in great numbers.

In these years there is much rejoicing on Vimary, and we make great sacrifices to the Lover and the Child. In truly exceptional years we can even gather a few early blueberries, but such a season has only come once in all my trips to the Hills. Never forget, Mapmaker, that there the Fatimas do not rule, and for all my study I still cannot divine why some years the East Wind is strong, while in others it is as weak as souls lost in the Outlands.

No matter what the weather, the Maples always give forth their blood. It is not the easiest bounty to harvest, for every ten liters of blood that we take, only a liter of will remain after it has been cooked. Often we do this near the richest groves of trees, so we do not have to cart so much, but in groves near rivers we fill great casks which the Agnites raft back to Vimary.

In the early morning, at the time the Lover has ordained for such tasks, my people and I go forth and harvest the most important crops in the Eastern Hills. Few understand why we choose what we do. Witch-Hazel to stop bleeding, lichen for raw throats, Violets for horse birth, Bur Cucumber for venereal disease, Waterleaf to cure snake bite, Black Ash bark for rheumatism, Man-Root for internal bleeding, and many others. We send bales and bales of herbs, flowers, roots, bark, twigs and weeds back to Vimary. Of course some plants, like Spring Cress, can be used to cure more human problems, permanently. Don't act so shocked, Mapmaker; Vimary is not so pretty as it may look from your Mortuary.

Tree Brothers

Pali, Agnite Lumberjack, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

To kill a tree is a terrible thing, for they grow close to the Goddess, and we are careful to take only a few from any stand. This is sometimes a problem, for our sisters in other tribes have taken trees without thought to the consequences, except where Eva has forbidden it. Agnes says we can only take what we must, and so we do, ignoring the Dahlians who want more and more wood to supply their turners and carpenters. This is good because at night, when we are alone, without Agnes, we can hear the trees around us grieving for their dead.

The Eastern Hills have many good trees; Hickory for tools and arrow shafts, Ironwood for axles, plow shafts, center beams and spear staves. Yellow birch for furniture, wagons, boxes and planks. White Oak for barrels, casks, and canoe ribs. The best of all is White Pine, soft and beautiful like Agnes when She's happy, and Maples, whose wood is prized for beauty, durability and strength. I don't like cutting Maples though; it seems wrong to kill the trees that give us their sweet blood so some elder can have a nice chair.

Bountiful Peace

Guilbert, Agnite Scout, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Hunting the Eastern Hills makes Vimary look boring. Every spring we bring back lots of meat, and even the Joanites admit we're as good hunters as them. We do a lot of fishing up on the Sant River, for the Silver Lamprey spawns there. It's the only place it does, and our fish traps overflow. What we catch the Barrens pickle and barrel, but we always keep some to eat fresh, our due rewards for being forced to leave Agnes. Many other fish are about, but they're too much effort to catch, so we don't bother. That upsets the Magdalites, but I don't see them getting their lily-white hands dirty trying to catch fish. If it doesn't swim into our traps I, for one, am not interested.

Hunting birds is more interesting, especially in the lakes. Lots of birds fly up here in spring. I don't know why they go away and then come back. . . they just do. The best of all are the geese; the huge Blacknecks especially. They're hard to hunt and only the older slingers have a chance of bringing one down, but they're great to eat. The younger children have to content themselves with hunting the many ducks and rock doves that feast on the flowers and new shoots.

Hares and rabbits are always abundant in spring, breeding like fire in autumn grass. In fact, some seasons there are so many that we can catch them by beating the meadows and driving them into ponds. That's great fun, but the next year we always find that there are very few of them. The boar and deer are also about but we can't hunt them; they're too big for us, so we leave them to the Joanites, who always get lots.

Perhaps the strangest thing is that you never find any dead animals in the Eastern Hills, none at all. I mean with all the food about the animals don't have to fight much to get their fill, and even the bobcats and foxes seem to be relaxed, but you would think you'd at least come across remains of some animals. Sometimes the hunting rituals don't work either, I don't know why, but you can feel the animal's spirit glaring at you. It's a bit eerie out here at times like that, and I wish that Agnes were with us.



Guilbert, Agnite Scout

Guilbert has been exploring things ever since he was old enough to walk. His knack for finding great toys made him one of Agnes's favorites, but he fell from grace when he crossed Hesperrin, and her anger was enough to see him assigned to the Spring Expedition. The terror of losing contact with Agnes forced Guilbert to grow up very quickly, and he has become cynical beyond his years. Knowing he can never return to Agnes's favor, not now that he has been to the Outlands, he is plotting to kidnap Hesperrin and leave her for Boarhead's warriors to find, a fate he expects to be worse than death.

Highlights: Devious, disobedient, and malicious.

Attributes: AGI +2, APP 0, BLD -1, CRE +1, FIT +1, INF +1, KNO -1, PER +1, PSY -2, WIL 0, STR 0, HEA -1, STA 20, UD 3, AD 3

Skills: Animal Handling 1/0, Athletics 2/+1, Combat Sense 1/+1, Dodge 2/+2, Human Perception 1/-2, Melee 1/+2, Navigation (land) 1/0, Notice 2/+1, Sneak 2/+2, Survival 2/+1, Throwing 2/+2.

Beasts in Paradise

Gi Jess'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The bloody Agnites never see the problems they cause. They run around the Hills like idiots, and then come back and prattle about how safe it is whenever we try to reign them in. They didn't see us send half a dozen bodies back to Vimary last season, all souls lost to Joan. The black bears are a small problem, and if the Agnites didn't torment them they wouldn't be a problem at all. There is enough honey and berries to let the bears eat their fill, but the greedy little fools never think things through that far.

My greatest fear are the Ontos, huge cats who run in packs, following the melting snows, according to the Squats. They are a dusky yellow, larger than a man, with thick collars of fur and the claws to gut a moose. They are more interested in aurochs and deer than humans, but every so often they will attack a foraging party. If this happens, people die, for only a sure spear thrust will kill an Ontos. I never have enough men to protect every foraging party, and half my warriors are fools or cripples. Who'd you think gets sent here, to fight beyond Joan's grace?

Bitter Eyes

Gi Jess'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The East Wind's call brings Squats to the Hills. Most are nomadic, spending spring and summer in the Hills, before returning to the Great River lowlands in autumn. The Squats winter as close to Vimary as they can, as it makes their cursed raiding easier. You can tell their camps by the stink of death. Some of these animals even eat their own children to survive. A few clans do winter in the Hills, most near Lac-Ampan, and a few on Lac-Emfray. These clans are larger, better organized, and more dangerous. They have permanent villages and store grain for the winter, but the North Wind still takes its toll, so, come spring, the Hills are filled with ravenous, scavenging hordes.

Joanite Rangers

The Joanites who protect the expeditions into the Outlands are their Tribe's lowest of the low, forming the unofficial guild of Rangers. They are accorded no honor, no voice in council, and receive the poorest weapons. Corruption, cowardice, failure in weapons drills, refusal to obey an order, all these crimes will send a Joanite to the Outlands. Those who survive the first few seasons grow to be their Tribe's most dangerous fighters. They stand against unknown dangers, always outnumbered, surviving by cunning, iron will, and lethal skill. Rugged survivalists, their loyalty to Joan remains strong, and their knowledge of the wilderness is unparalleled.

Highlights: Brave, individual, veteran, wary.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -2, BLD 0, CRE +1, FIT +2, INF -1, KNO 0, PER +1, PSY -2, WIL 0, STR +1, HEA 0, STA 30, UD 5, AD 6

Skills: Archery 2/+1, Combat Sense 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Melee 2/+1, Notice 2/+1, Riding 1/+1, Survival 3/+2.

The Squats don't just attack our foraging parties; they strip entire areas clean of food. They may once have been human, but no longer. They're worse than animals; they strip the bark from Maples, eat green berries and pollute pools with their filth. They never attack my warriors, cowards one and all, but you can feel their eyes watching you from hiding. They hate us, claiming we are stealing their plants and game. Joan give me strength to force such lies back down their throats! This land is accursed, like all who live in it, and if we can take from it enough to save even one Tribal life, then our sacrifice here is honorable. Their hatred is of little consequence, for they are a disorganized rabble, and every spring we burn out a few camps to keep them terrified.

There are two exceptions; the tribe at Lac-Ampan and those who answer to the warlord Boarhead. Calling themselves the Leox, the Squats at Ampan are strong, stronger than I care to contest. Yet they leave us alone as long as we do not trespass on their lands. Boarhead's raiding bands are a more serious threat. Fierce and violent, his warriors kill or kidnap everyone they meet. They come from the north, beyond the Sant River, with only a portion of their strength. I have tried to get permission for a large expedition, but Nostra Guy'on will not send troops beyond Joan's grace except for the tainted like me. I fear that this decision will haunt us in the seasons to come.

Joshua's Unquiet Rest

Guilbert, Agnite Scout, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I know we aren't supposed to go there, but on Lac-Emfray are some ruins, an abandoned village called Magog. It was a Joshuan village, I swear it's true! It was a Joshuan village that was inhabited until last season. If you go there you can see Joshua's symbol carved on things, and places like those fields that the Joanites have to practice on. Apparently it's a big secret, we aren't meant to know about it, but I heard Tania Berkin and Gi Jess'on talking.

I'm not sure what happened to it exactly, but whatever it was, it was violent. There are signs of fires, and bodies with shattered bones. Maybe it had to do with that false Fatima, Lilith; didn't she claim to be Joshua's daughter? Anyway, I went there as I said, and I wish I hadn't. Do you know what Zoms are? Magog was full of them; they just seemed to appear from the ground as soon as twilight started falling. I was so scared I shat myself as I ran, but they caught Jase; I heard his screaming as they eat him. Now do you see why I never leave the campfire's light at night?

The Valley of White Death

Tania Berkin, Magdalite Herbalist, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Just north of the Sant River lies a place of corruption, the Valley of White Death. The land around the Valley is bare, but for sickly seedlings and the ghosts of ancient trees. Hear me, Mapmaker, this place is the result of our ancestors' meddling, not nature's intention. The Goddess still cries in anger at what was done there. All the other vales in the Hills resound with life, the streams that run through them bringing renewal and noise. In the Valley of White Death there is no life. The water in it is as fetid as a summer latrine, and the soil is an unclean gray-white. Wind often whips it up into boiling clouds. To breathe this dust is death, for it causes the lungs to rot.

Spirits tell me that there are many places such as this further north. Tera Sheba was right to forbid travel up there. It has its uses however, for a little dust in a meal or drink and a problem is soon fixed. I have shocked you again! Mapmaker, you amuse me so. Don't look at your meal like that! You aren't nearly so important as to warrant such a drastic solution. What our ancestors sought here is beyond me, but the labor involved was huge, for the Valley is over three klicks in diameter and at least half that deep. Perhaps the greatest corruption here is the ghosts tied to the Valley by chains of anger and injustice. Any who die of lung rot join the thronging spirits, not a pleasant fate even for the Outlands.

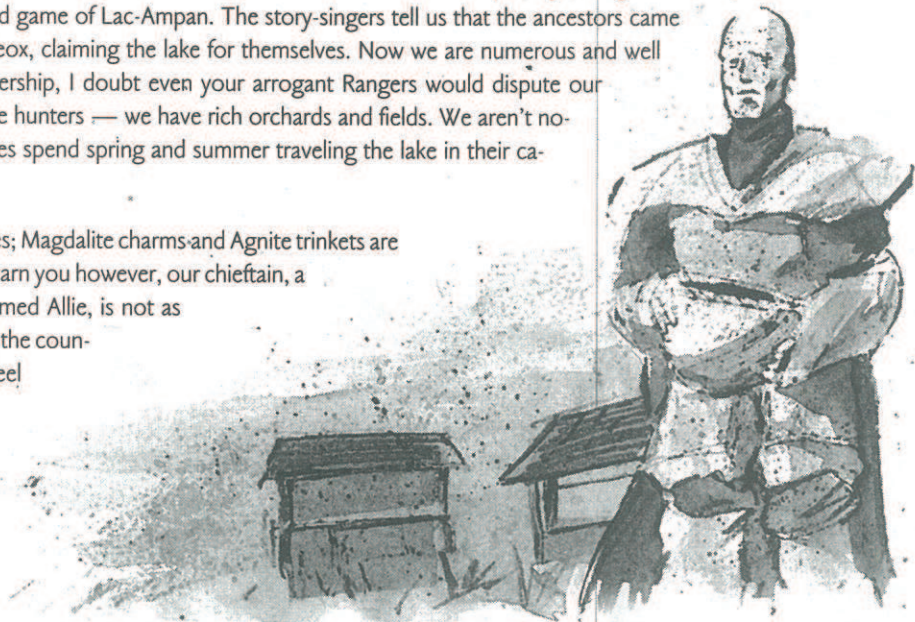
Leox, Squat-town

Piro, Leox Trader, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Our town lies on an island where the Richel meets Lac-Ampan, protected from floods by high ramparts of earth and stone. A strong fort it is, and the wooden bridge that connects it to the shore can be raised. We are the most powerful tribe in the Hills. We aren't bandits like those you call Squats, we do not live in lean-tos and flea-ridden ruins. Take my round-house for instance. It is large enough for my clan, built half in the earth and half out of it in a mixture of logs and peat, with smoke holes in the roof and cured hide doors. It is warm and dry in winter; you would be welcome to see it if you travel to Lac-Ampan.

Leox has a smithy; I've some knives you may wish to see, good steel, better than that one you carry. Winter? Oh yes, winter is hard, as it is for your Tribes, I am sure, but we have silos for storing corn and grain which see us well fed for most of winter. The greatest huts are built from cut stone, the work of our ancestors. It is by their gift that we claim all the waters, fish and game of Lac-Ampan. The story-singers tell us that the ancestors came from the water and built Leox, claiming the lake for themselves. Now we are numerous and well armed, enforcing our ownership, I doubt even your arrogant Rangers would dispute our spears. Yet we are not mere hunters — we have rich orchards and fields. We aren't nomadic, though some families spend spring and summer traveling the lake in their canoes.

I like trading with your Tribes; Magdalite charms and Agnite trinkets are popular with my people. I warn you however, our chieftain, a massive warrior woman named Allie, is not as friendly as I. She answers to the council of clan heads, but many feel slighted by your elders. We are a good people. If it was not your people's arrogance we could be friends and allies.



Pool of New Love

Trisa, Magdalite Herbmistress, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I know the Shebans call it heresy, but not everything in the Outlands is lost to the Fatimas. The Lover still reaches out to us, at the Jardin. A thick ring of ancient trees, and a strangely wrought fence of iron spears and sandstone surrounds the Jardin. It doesn't seem very safe, but it never appears to have been disturbed. I think it's a miracle, but you can't tell Tania, as we're not meant to talk of it. We make love here, worshipping the Lover, but only our tribe may enter, upon pain of death.

The Jardin is so beautiful, a paradise of flowers and ponds; everything is perfect, not a single shriveled flower or unripe fruit. There are roses in huge hedges, lilies cover every pond, and jasmine hangs in the trees like snow. I know these plants are found in the rest of the Hills, but Jardin is different, it's truly alive, for the Lover is there and we aren't alone. What good is beauty without the Fatimas?

We bathe and dance naked upon the grass, lost in our Lover's blessing and the drug-like fragrance of the flowers. The nights here are always special; it's the Lover's reward for the torture of being out here in this wilderness. Our Lover's blessing may be even greater than we think, for a rumor reached me that a number of Fallen sheltered here last winter. They found the Jardin in the middle of a blizzard and it was as warm and fragrant as it was during spring.

Forbidden Fruit

Guilbert, Agnite Scout, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Old people are always saying do this, don't do that. Agnes is much more fun. Just as well too, otherwise I'd miss out on the best syrup in the Outlands. You've still got to sneak off, 'cause that spoilsport Jess'on would try and stop us if he found out. At the northern end of Lac-Emfray, amongst the Hills, is my best secret, a lost blacktop. I've told some other children, but you have to promise to keep it quiet, or something might happen. Understand? Well this blacktop I found goes north, but it never goes anywhere near the Valley of White Death. Eventually, after it passes by a lake with black water, it goes up onto this big plateau that's just full of amazing things.

Firstly there are more Maples there than anywhere else, and their sap is especially sweet. You can't collect much, 'cause it's too heavy to carry, but it's still worth it. I give mine to a Magdalite I know, for he makes the best potions. The land up there has more trees than further south, and lots of paths. It's a great place to play hide and chase with the Squats. The Squats up here are really nasty, but that makes it all the more fun to play tricks on them. They get very upset when you eat all their berries or steal their fish traps. They carry a lot of weapons too, which just slows them down, but it's fun to watch the Squats waving them in the air. You don't want to get caught by them though, not like Katrice did. I saw her again last time I went up onto the plateau. She had a child and was dressed just like a Squat. She didn't look too happy, let me tell you.



Broken Rainbow

Sama Abaskin, Magdalite Jeweler, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Near the headwaters of the Aska are ancient cristal mines that delve deep into the earth, dark and deadly. The upper works are little more than grassy mounds, but for a tower of iron standing guard over the entry to the shafts. The tunnels were propped up with stone and steel, but many have partially collapsed. Getting to the cristal would be impossible but for the Agnites. The children take small lamps and hand picks through the narrow passages, looking for rockfaces where cristal grows like vines.

It is hard and dangerous work. Suffocation, rock falls and sudden floods are a constant threat, and every year we lose many of our young helpers before we collect enough cristal to make the ornaments that the Tribes require. Last season, however, there was a strange singing heard in the mines, a choir of voices whose words echoed through the tunnels. The song terrified me. Some claim it was the dead children's spirits mourning, and out there, far from the Fatimas, any sort of abomination is possible

Stories from the Hud

Loi, Leox Elder, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

You talk of your Vimary as if it were unique to the world. I hear your people talk of it endlessly as they deal with us for squash and pumpkin. So big you make it sound, yet you are here, acting like rabbits confronted by a wolf. We Leox are not as dumb as you think we are. Let me tell you of the Hud, of the gullet that leads to hell.

From the farthest shore of Lac-Ampan, which lies a dozen days' constant rowing to the south, arises a mighty river. This is the Hud; it flows far to the south, through a land of lakes and mountains, places where the spirits silently dance on pools like polished obsidian. Many seasons ago, we hunted as far south as the Island of Green. At the island another river joins the Hud. I will not name it for it is an ill-omened water, haunted by the spirits of the murdered and stalked by the Heart-Eaters.

Your Tribes like to preen themselves, tell themselves how good they are, how blessed by your Goddesses. Well the Heart-Eaters are blessed too, if you can call it that, and their powers I have witnessed with my own eyes, not just heard through boastful tales like yours. The Heart-Eaters are the vilest of people, killing and enslaving any who they encounter, and using black rites to defeat those more powerful than they.

Many battles the Leox fought with these demons, some as close as the waters of Lac-Ampan. Prisoners tell us insane stories, of bodies in piles that reach the sky, of shamans who copulate with animal spirits. Yet one story they all tell is of a mighty fortress from the World Before. They call it Hattan; they say it stands at the Hud's end. Think of that, Yagan, a place to make your Vimary seem small by comparison.

One day, after we throw the last of the Heart-Eaters into a pit of burning pitch, we will take that fortress. It will become our bazaar, our place of temples, and maybe then your Tribes will not look down their noses at us. Of course if the Heart-Eaters win, you will have new neighbors, ones not as amenable as us. I doubt even that will open your people's ears, Yagan. Never have I seen a people so scared to hear.



Hombor Champlain, Yagan Mapmaker

After being on the losing end of a dispute with the elders of his Tribe, Hombor, a Pellis Artisan Mapmaker, was sent forth to map all the doings of the Seven Tribes in the Outlands.

This duty was meant to be little more than a malicious death sentence, a warning to younger Artisans not to publicly dispute the elders. The record he is writing will win him few friends, and is likely to see his exile, but Hombor has no qualms about this. As far as he is concerned you cannot be exiled twice and what difference is there between being lost to the Fatimas in the Outlands, or lost to them on Hom?

Highlights: Adventurous, calm, jolly, and studious.

Attributes: AGI -1, APP 0, BLD +1, CRE +2, FIT -1, INF 0, KNO +2, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL +1, STR 0, HEA -1, STA 20, UD 3, AD 4

Skills: Craft (Tanning) 1/+2, Dreaming 1/-1, Human Perception 2/-1, Lore (Outlands) 3/+2, Melee 1/-1, Mythology 2/+2, Read/Write 2/+2, Survival 1/-1.

A Path not Taken

I rise through the mist,

Wind cool on my face,

A half-heard call,

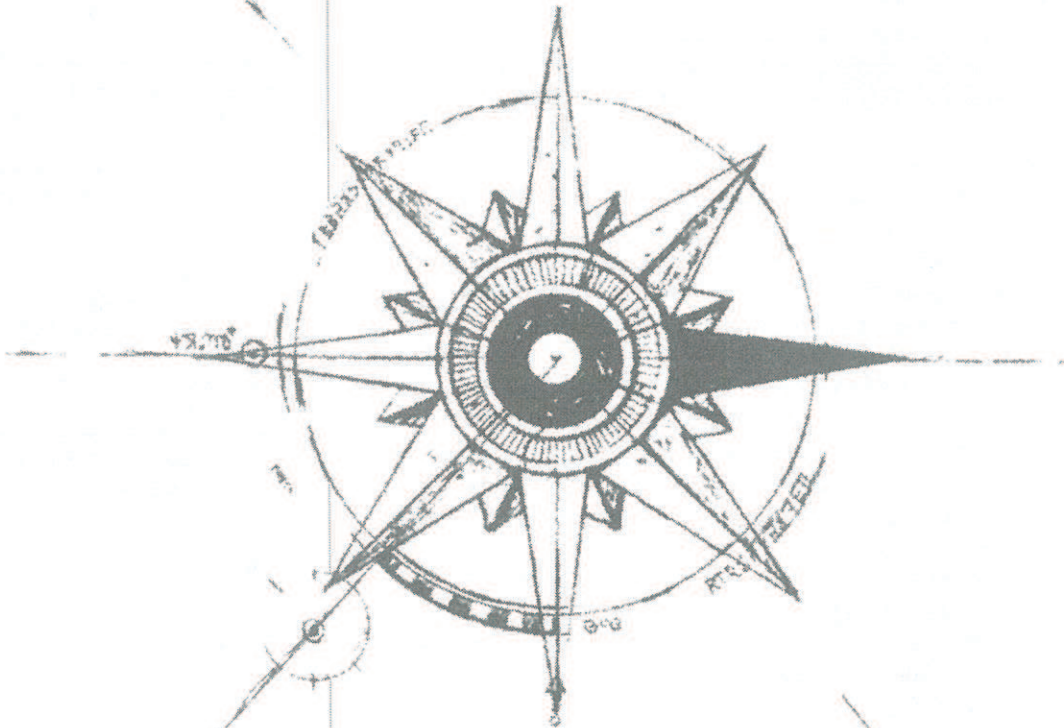
Ghostly form flying,

Longing for the sea,

Current pulling me,

Taking me away.

— Samuel Alghattas of the Eighth Tribe



To the Rising Sun

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

The dream comes to me over and over again. None of the Guides can help me; even Halos refused to interpret the dream, saying it was beyond his skill. This spirit haunts me endlessly, saying words I do not understand, speaking of places I have never seen, and calling to me night after night. Always calling; it's like the pull of the River when you dive in, drawing me away to the rising sun. Why does this spirit torment me so?

Veruka called me to her tower today, saying she had received a vision. A great bird had come to her, a powerful totem spirit, and taken her to the River of Dream. Veruka would not say much, but she did say the spirit meant me no harm. She said it wanted to return a present that it had given to our ancestors. I didn't really understand that, but Veruka told me to follow the spirit, for its presence augured a great revelation. So now I have packed what little I own, crossed the Great River and am walking into the Eastern Hills. In my mind, beneath the noises of the Outlands, I can hear a distant roar.



Paths of our Ancestors

Pertwee, Leox Guide, from the diary of Samuel Alghattas:

Our Shaman often speaks of the spirit magic wielded by our ancestors. He says they built the blacktops to race against the wind. Whatever the truth, the blacktops are indeed the ancestors' gift to travelers. In spring, when snow still lies in patches on the ground, the streams and rivers which run like blood through the Eastern Hills overflow their banks, and turn the land into a bubbling mess. Even we Leox avoid the Hills during this time. Yet on the blacktops you can travel at a good pace, because even after seasons without count they provide safe passage, built up above the mud and water. Of course, if they do not go where you wish, then you are still stuck.

Where a blacktop runs over a river, the ruins of mighty bridges stand like watchmen. Even here the ancestors still bless us, for the bridges were once mighty affairs, and their rubble makes for easy fords. A sensible traveler makes offerings at the fords, else the ancestors may turn their face from your journey, which is why you find shrines amongst the ruins. A little food, some green boughs, the ancestors do not ask for much, but you will regret your greed if you deny them.

There are many more blacktops than you see, for they crisscross the land, most reduced to tiny paths. These are our secret ways. Some are like broken rivers of rock, stretching further off to the horizon, known to all. Few of the large blacktops are open enough for wagons, as trees have taken hold, but they are easy to walk and ride along.

All appreciate the ancestors' gift, for you can double the distance you travel in a day. You will meet Squats, Fallen and even Z'bri on the blacktops. This draws robbers too, some human, some not, and if ancestor offerings are not made, Zoms too can rise up to attack you. In summer, the land around the large blacktops can become overforaged, so you must hunt far afield or carry supplies. Yet the risk is worth it, for though a traveler on foot may go before the end of the floods, a person on horse must wait till they have finished, and those with heavy loads must wait till the lands have dried somewhat. Only on the blacktops can you travel at any time you wish.

Samuel Alghattas,
Doomsayer Quester

Born to the Evans, Samuel was a wistful child, much given to pondering things that his elders told him an honest-minded and hard-working lad should not bother with. Eventually he was accused of being possessed and was exiled. The true reason for his banishment escapes Samuel's understanding, and he thinks it may have had to do with some inter-clan rivalry. He has found a true home on Hom, finding others who share his melancholy interest in spirits and the Fall. His cell is known as the Shadows on Stone, and leaving them for his quest was harder than exile.

Highlights: Angst ridden, obsessive and warm hearted.

Attributes: AGI 0, APP +1, BLD +1, CRE 0, FIT 0, INF -1, KNO -1, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +1, STR 0, HEA 1, STA 30, UD 4, AD 5

Skills: Agriculture 1/-1, Animal Care 1/-1, Boating 2/+1, Dodge 1/0, Dreaming 3/+1, Melee 1/0, Navigation (land) 1/0, Ritual 2/-1, Survival 2/0, Swimming 1/0, Synthesis (2)

Blessed Valley

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

Pertwee has followed the blacktop that starts at the shore of the Great River, to the north of Lac-Empray. Here we lost our easy path; ancient floods have left this land a vast marsh, which Pertwee calls the Erbro. The Sant River rises in this marsh, and it is rich with life. Spirits throng here too, and the River of Dreams is as raucous as Bazaar on market day. It took Pertwee many days to find the blacktop again, as, unseen, it had turned north. Pertwee found travel marks cut into the blacktop that he could not identify. I recognized them, but said nothing. I don't know why the Agnites travel here and don't care. The Hills are rougher now; slowly they rise into steep-sided mountains. Now we are higher, the spirit's calling is stronger than ever before, and my dreams are caught in images of flying before the wind.

We have finally left the blacktop and turned east, at least that's the direction we're trying to go. The hills are driving us as much north as east. No matter, as long as we can keep moving. Pertwee took me to a vale filled with apple trees that reach no higher than my waist. They were covered with spring flowers, making the vale appear covered with white-pink snow, and the smell would lift the darkest heart. Apparently this valley is sacred to the Leox, but they have been forced south, by what Pertwee would not say. We rested here a few days, recovering in mind and body. The River of Dreams seems impossibly peaceful here, a vast stillness. When we leave Pertwee wishes to visit a Leox shaman who lives nearby. I'm not interested, but he insists.

The land here about is rough; you must either keep to the valley bottoms or break your back climbing the steep slopes. The land is productive however, for there lies another lake about two days walk from the Leox's Blessed Valley, not so large as Lac-Emfray, but beautiful beyond description. There are herds of deer, fat and good eating even this early in the season, but the greatest prize are the brown lake trout. The lake fairly boils with them, and we gorged ourselves, smoking a great number for the trip ahead.

Tower of Stars

Aramas, Squat Witchwoman, from the diary of Samuel Alghattas:

Glad is it that Pertwee brought you to us, Samuel whose number is eight, for spirits trail after you like bees to a hive. Here is a place of power; upon this hill our ancestors watched the stars. In great numbers they came, so it is that a blacktop winds around the hill, spiraling like a serpent, a powerful symbol. My domed tower is from the ancestors' time. Beneath the ivy is the gray stone they used, and within is a map of the heavens. Here they watched the Blessed Valley and the eyes of the spirit world.

Which eyes? The stars are the eyes. As I can tell your heart from your eyes, so I can tell the spirits' will from theirs. Here I cast divinations. Rites performed within the Tower are powerful, and the spirits look down especially on this place. I know you already, for the Great White Spirit, she who sees the wide waters, her eyes have been bright for many turnings of the moon. Fear not her summons, Samuel, who died and is reborn. The Great White Spirit has a gift, I know not what. It may kill you, but its reward will be without compare.



Great Moose Lake

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

A week's travel from the Blessed Valley was all it took before the land began to slope away to the east. The lands here remain higher than the Eastern Hills, as if older and grown taller. The valleys are deep, the hills tall and their tops bare of trees, like old men. The forest is a mix of birch, spruce and white pine. All stand thickly, and travel, except on foot, would be hard going. Lakes abound and streams run through every vale, and the signs show that the spring floods are ferocious. Pertwee left me here; he is heading south to find his people, who have crossed the mountains.

It has not taken long to reach a point where the water is deep enough to travel on. A canoe of birch bark and spruce saplings took two weeks to construct, as I had few tools and the wood was too green. No matter, food is plentiful and the days are growing longer as spring turns to summer. Moose seem especially common in these lands, the bellowing hoots of their mating calls sound day and night. Salmon are in the water in great numbers too, which will make for rich eating as I paddle downstream. Just as well, for the waters are running very full, and my only rest from working the paddle will be the many lakes.

I have entered a huge lake, larger than any in the Eastern Hills. It is many klicks wide in places, narrow in others, and I had to paddle for days to find an exit. A spring storm ripped through while I was camped, a bustling, thunderous downpour that whipped the waters up like the froth on a boiling kettle. To be out on the lake in such a storm would be dangerous, yet the sun shone through again before noon. The lake has many wonders; islands that seemed covered more by birds than grass, Squats who live in caves and a place where a mountain has fallen into the water. The cliff that was left was a hundred meters high, and into it someone had roughly carved the outline of a moose's head. The water here was so deep that it was blue-black. The sky reflected in it, and the waters had gone so still that I thought I flew between two worlds.

Flint Hunters

Grinning Bone, Flint Hunter, from the diary of Samuel Alghattas:

We live here. Moose spirits let us, sometimes give one of their children to us. Not live too close to water, carp spirits hungry, cause water to rise up and eat land. Stay amongst cedars, maples and willows, have strong magic, drive off carp spirits. Tree spirits give us much; wood for fire, branches for lean-tos, and cures for ills. All are welcome to our fire; it would upset spirits to deny you. When snows come we go in to hills; caves you saw are our wintering grounds. Good place, warm, easy to keep out wolves and others, can dig for flint too. Not talk of others, bad things, enemies of spirits. You not want to meet them.

Not always happy my people. Every season fewer young born to us. We make great sacrifices to spirits, but still fewer every season. Perhaps we have angered spirits. Others come too, like you, from beyond high hill, come to take our land. Kill all, take all, and drive us from our spirits. Call them Leox, hate them, but they not as bad as others. We are tired. Perhaps it is time to sleep, wait for spirits to call us forth again.

Flint Hunters

A dozen or so clans of Flint Hunters are all that remains of the Squat tribes that once inhabited the lands south of Moosehead Lake. Over the years they have lost hope, the spirits of the land retreating from them as each generation passed, a sign of how the closing of the River of Dreams endangers the existence of man. Yet they remain a content people, living peacefully with the land they worship and celebrating the small pleasures they have left to them. A sense of melancholy pervades them, for though they don't have the words to express it, they feel the death of their way of life.

Highlights: Simple, spiritual and sorrowful.

Attributes: AGI 0, APP -1, BLD +2, CRE -1, FIT 0, INF -1, KNO -2, PER +1, PSY 0, WIL -1, STR +1, HEA -1, STA 30, UD 6, AD 6

Skills: Camouflage 1/-1, Herbalism 1/-2, Notice 2/+1, Ritual 1/-2, Sneak 2/0, Survival 1/0, Throwing 2/0.

Laughing with waters

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

It seems a lake lies every few kliks down my path. Some are small, no more than half a klik, but others fill the bottom of huge valleys and lie many kliks in length, though none are as large as the Great Moose Lake. Creeks and streams pour into the river I am traveling on, and the hills and mountains around me resound with the laughter of rushing and falling water. The river is running very high and in some places it spills over the banks, turning the land around into a muddy pond. The river churns with soil and debris lifted from the surrounding lands, and twice now I have had my canoe holed and had to paddle desperately to get it ashore before it sank. Travel is a demanding task, and if you fell into these waters you would be unlikely to emerge. Even the creatures you would expect in the river, like otters, stay to the flooded lowlands, away from the turbulent flow.

For all their dangers the waters make you feel alive. The East Wind blows strongly, and the river, like an unbroken horse, runs fierce and strong. Rapids are numerous in this rocky country, but the high water level has allowed me to run them with ease. There are numerous falls too, hard to hear over the chorus of the rushing river. A leap over even a small fall would kill you; the pounding waters would crush you without mercy. On land water still haunts you, for what is not flooded is wet with runoff. Only by hoisting myself into a spreading tree and building a platform have I enjoyed a dry camp. As you drift to sleep, the frogs and insects join the wind in a paeon to life, the water's noisy accompaniment loud in your ears.

Crown of the World

Openeye, Eagle Spirit, from the diary of Samuel Alghattas:

Leave your craft, boy, rise above the mud and water, and let your mind fly to the mountain whose heights lie wreathed in clouds. It lies close to your river, not far even for a wingless one such as you. It is the grandfather of these lands, ancient beyond even I, watching when I first soared in the skies, long before your ancestors walked here. Its face is ridged and wrinkled, dented by the thundering streams and falls, bearded in perpetual mist. Few are the paths for ground creepers, fewer still glades where the sun sees through the dense, dripping trees that clothe him. Mysteries he has, hard to find, dangerous to seek, many the ground creeper who has slipped to their doom, no wings to save them.

Many days to reach his heights for you. Rising and rising, like a hot wind, until his trees end, then there grows fields of great boulders and expanses of rock flat as lake water. Little plants grow here, only the hardy and tenacious, like ground creepers who can climb this high, taking hold in the cracks. He is not beautiful, unless you count strength as beauty. Yet he sees a beautiful world of green, laced with glittering blue, laid out before him.

His rocks stand in silent contemplation of the ages, rough figures that watch over you, wisdom and age in shadowed eyes. His head is wreathed in clouds, as a champion of old, and cold and unfriendly he seems to those who make the pilgrimage to him, his interests beyond your mortal concerns. He is not deaf to all, for though the bottomless cracks echo with the desires of ancient seekers, some pleas he will hear, and grant to them the vision of the crown of the world, letting them see all that they would.



River of many Ruins

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

The lands around the river have changed. Mountains have shrunk into hills, the valleys have given way to a great plateau, and the forests have become woods and scrubby bushes. Maples, oaks, cedars and other smaller trees now line the banks. They lend a lighter green to the land, marking it as not so forbidding or impenetrable as before. Lush berry bushes and flowers fill the gaps, and deer are common visitors to the river's edge. The river itself is more relaxed here, slower and wider, only tugging at the marsh lands it has created rather than tearing at them with vicious force. I have started to see signs of our ancestors along the banks. At first it was only the occasional shattered wall amongst the reeds, then a glimpse of broken blacktop, but soon the riverbank was thick with signs of the World Before.

Collapsed bridges are common, and I've had to portage my canoe many times. At waterfalls, at least, portage has been easy, for ancient stairs, cut from the cliff face, are part of the ruins that lie at the base of all the falls. Danger lurks here, however, for Zoms haunt these places after dark. The larger ruins are more ominous still. Strange structures, most no longer physically standing, can be found in the River of Dream. Towers built of rubble and weathered hide, fences of yellowed bones, and pyramids of mummified flesh are proof that the Z'bri once ruled here long ago. Guard yourself well in the River of Dream, however, for insane spirits haunt these ruins, seeking to dim their torment in the pain of others.

Sign of the Beast

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

The largest ruin I have yet seen lay upon the river today, not so large as Vimary but still substantial. Many huge iron boats rusted at stone jetties, and two bridges still rose high over the river. The smell of corruption was strong here, though most of these ruins are almost worn to nothing. Little remains over four meters high, except for the bridges and iron towers along the shore. Many bones lie in the streets, beneath bushes and creepers. Some are just piles, untidy and scattered, but others look once to have been stacked like cordwood. Underground streams are visible through dark chasms that have opened in the streets, and in other places the ruins have collapsed into gullies, water clattering through the rubble. The place is a maze, and I wandered for hours in its green and gray corridors before I found the signs I was expecting.

In the middle of a wide square, all tiled with slabs of bone, stood a battered fortress of skin and long-dead flesh. Whole skeletons lay thickly on the ground, the rusted shapes of weapons beside many. A few breaches had been made in the Z'bri structure, the ashes of ancient fires showing the cause. As I stepped into the plaza, the guardians of the dead structure rose from its only untopped tower. They looked like giant birds, stinking of Z'bri magics, long talons dripping evil-smelling pus. Half a dozen swooped down upon me, and if it had not been for the gift of the River of Dream I doubt I could have held them off. Their attack's intent spoke of more than hunger. Yet no intelligence drove them, I think, for I soon lost them amongst the overgrown ruins. If they had been Gek'roh I do not think I should have escaped them at all.

Ang'Or (Z'bri tainted eagles)

Large eagles, bred long ago by the Z'bri Lords of Ang'Or, the Ang'Or guard the boundaries of their mistress' fallen domain. Not only have they outlasted their mistress, but they have also managed to breed. Five-meter wingspans and unnaturally powerful muscles enable them to lift and carry a full-grown man for short distances. They have developed the tactic of grabbing and dropping prey, rather than rending it with their fanged beaks or poisoned talons. They still guard their dead mistress' mansion, obeying orders that have become instinct, but they fly over a much wider area, feeding on any warm-blooded creature they can catch.

Highlights: Corrupt, screaming and vicious.

Attributes: AGI +2, APP -3, BLD +1, CRE -2, FIT +1, INF -3, KNO -3, PER 0, PSY -1, WIL 0, STR +1, HEA 0, STA 25, UO 5 (plus natural weapon),

Skills: Camouflage 2/-2, Combat Sense 1/0, Dodge 2/+2, Hand-to-Hand 3/+2, Notice 1/0.

Special Abilities: Fanged beak (x4 Damage) Poisoned Talons (x6 Damage, Onset immediate, potency 5)

The Great Waters

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

A few days travel below the haunted ruin, the river emptied into a wide lake, a strange lake, that I have been told is without end. The water is brackish, so much so that the salt creates crystals on the skin and nothing grows along its edges. Wide beaches of white sand or rocky cliffs line the shore, and trees and plants are stunted. Strange plants grow beneath the water, with waving leaves, dark green and brown. Hundreds of crying birds circle high overhead, diving for fish that swim like silver clouds in the dark waters. The Squats here laughed at me when I asked about the other shore; they say there is none, that the world ends in mighty falls beyond sight of land.

This lake, if it is truly a lake, has many islands, but I remain reluctant to risk being swamped upon the open waters, for the waves are rough and wind strong. Squats live in villages up behind the beaches, and they have large canoes made from wooden planks. In these boats they ride high up on the water, making trips across the lake in weather that sends me scurrying ashore. They catch hundreds of fish at a time in their nets; a bounty to makes the water's risks seem worthwhile. These Squats also hunt the strange, slug-like creatures that they call Els, which lie on all the beaches. Els smell bad and are aggressive, moving with incredible speed, for all that they have no legs.

I can hear the Great White Spirit's cry now without sleeping. It sails high upon the East Wind, and is taken up by the birds that haunt the shore. The waters sound different here. The waves roar constantly as they crash upon the shore, a sound that calls to me, a sensuous and seductive call. The waves are as dangerous as they are seductive, however. Like a Magdalite concubine they turn and twist, sucking you one way and then pushing you back. I cannot read the patterns of this place; the spirits too are strange, yet they call to me, urging me to go beyond the shore, out into the unknown. This would be my death, but I sense no malice, just an unearthly eagerness. My dreams have stopped now; perhaps this shore is where dreams and the waking world meet.

People of the Shore

Zara, Captain of Castin, from the diary of Samuel Alghattas:

Our tribes are a standoffish people; every bay and isle has a village and there's no mixing but for festivals and husband hunting. Cooperate? Why, by the Wind, would we cooperate with the others? The Sea Mother has granted us all access to her bosom; it is a person's choice to run the Sea's challenge and to suckle from that bosom. Those who cannot are well lost to their village. We do trade both amongst ourselves, and with strange tribesmen who bring metal from the north. They say they come from San Jon, a long and dangerous journey by all accounts.

This place is the Bay of Vines, for many of the islands here have rich groves of grapes. We grow few crops and hunt a little game, but we are careful to never to refuse the Sea Mother, lest she turn her face from us. Some seasons she does that and hunger kills many. You like my boat? It can carry thirty people and a heavy load of fish. For one of those metal knives of yours I'll take to the last isle. From there you can see the endless water, and feel the breath of the Sea Mother.

Shore People

Living in sturdy villages back from the waterline, the Shore People are split into many separate tribes. The Castin, Olead, Rokort, Sedge, and Sunset are amongst the strongest.

Their boats of hewn planks and hide sails are seaworthy enough for them to ply coastal waters, even into the icy winter months. They fight amongst themselves, and against the weather and the sea.

They have no metal of any sort, except for that which they get by trade, but their skill in fashioning tools from bone and wood is remarkable, and these materials are not affected by the sea air.

Highlights: Aloof, hardworking and unimaginative.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -1, BLD 0, CRE -1, FIT +2, INF 0, KNO 0, PER 0, PSY +1, WIL 0, STR +1, HEA +1, STA 30, UD, AD

Skills: Archery 1/+1, Boating 2/0, Craft (Boat Building) 2/0, Lore (Sailing) 2/0, Melee 1/+1, Navigation (Sea) 2/0, Swimming 2/+2, Throwing 1/+1.

A Broken Place

Zara, Captain of Castin, from the diary of Samuel Alghattas:

Watch your step, landsman, the seas are rough today. Note how many dozens of islands lie off our broken shores. Few but us could navigate their way through this place, and in your little boat you would have drowned. It gets rougher beyond the shelter of the islands; once beyond the safety of the shore the water rolls and swells in powerful waves. Stop worrying, boy! Ships always take on water, see how some of the crew have started bailing. The Sea Mother is like that, always testing your strength, ready to pull you down if you show yourself to be weak.

Look there! That water being blown high into the air — it's a Val, chieftain of the seas beyond the Bay. A big one, too; it must be three times the length of my boat. A fine beast indeed. If it was not for your payment, I would bring that Val back to Castin tonight. No, I do not lie to you; we hunt the Val for they are great sources of bone, meat and oil. Be careful of who you accuse of untruth, landsman, or you may find yourself swimming home.

Here is what I promised you, Samuel, the eastern-most point of Acadia. From here all that there be is endless green-blue water. You look entranced — be wary landsman, for that is the call of the Sea Mother. So vast, so powerful, the wide water calls to us. This is where all rivers end. Listen closely, and you can hear the waters sing, as they pound the rocks. The song is of many places, of all the lands the water has seen, places that are naught but stories in the currents to us.

Look behind you, for the coast lies as broken as the Bay of Vines, as far as the eye can see. Our kin live for many days travel to the south, all the way to the tip of the Long Island. Beyond there I will not speak of, the foul coast we call it, corrupt lands lie there, but even so the coast doesn't end. Perhaps it never ends. Look above! An Alba! The great white bird is the spirit of the ocean winds. An ill sign, for they sail only on the wings of storms. Quick, quick! We must be back to the boat and try for the islands before the storm comes, that or risk being caught in its maw and fed to the Sea Mother.

Wrath

From the diary of Samuel Alghattas, Doomsayer Quester:

We have reached Castin, and I am thankful to the Goddess that I am alive. I think the Great White Spirit was angered by my silent decision to return to Vimary, to collect my cell before venturing further. As we pushed off from Acadia a dark line appeared upon the horizon. Though Zara's crew rowed like madmen, and the sail billowed before the growing wind, that dark line quickly became a boiling wall of blue-black clouds, lit from within by white-blue lightning. Suddenly the wind died, then it returned with a roar, charging down upon us, churning the ocean into white-capped waves high enough to break over the boat's sides.

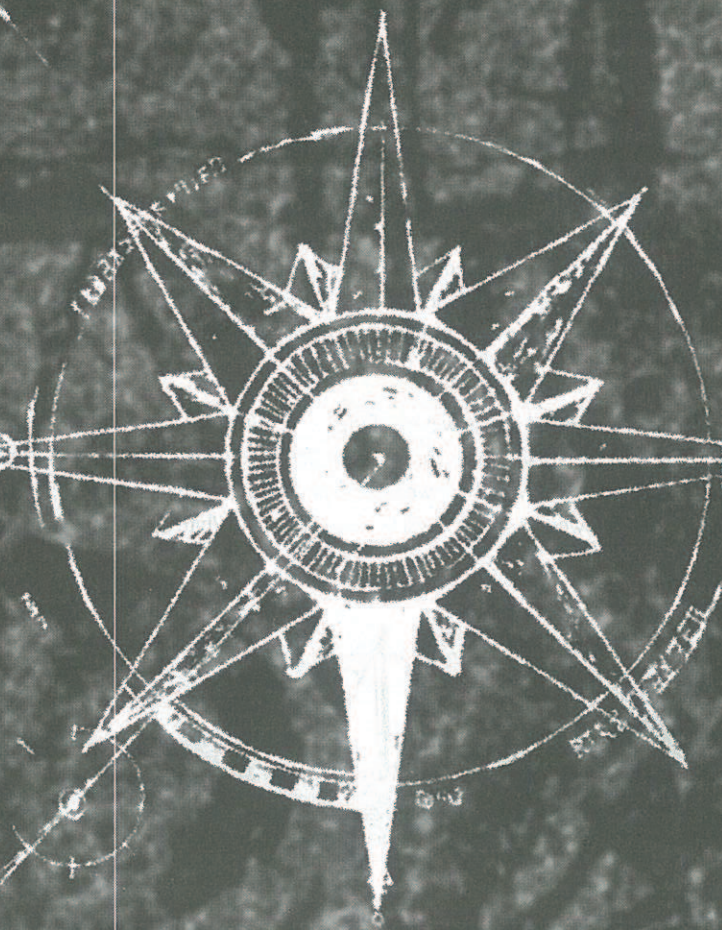
I found myself on my hands and knees, blinded by the water, a hide bucket in hand, desperately bailing as the bottom of the boat filled. A wave larger than most tore away mast and sail, another sucked crew from the deck, and lightning split the prow. In those dark, pounding waters who knows where we went, but the Squats build strong boats, and a wave dashed us upon a beach before the storm swallowed us whole. I will be wary of Great White Spirit's anger when I return.



Chapter Three: Call of the South Wind

The South Wind is summer's innkeeper. It calls out to you, welcoming you to warmth, a full stomach and evenings under starry skies. Eat and be hearty, enjoy the bounty, but be prepared to pay a price in labor, burnt skin and calluses. I like the South Wind, for alone amongst the voices it's entirely honest. What is trustworthier than that which your own hard work has brought you?

— Kymber Reva, Fallen Evan.



River of Riches

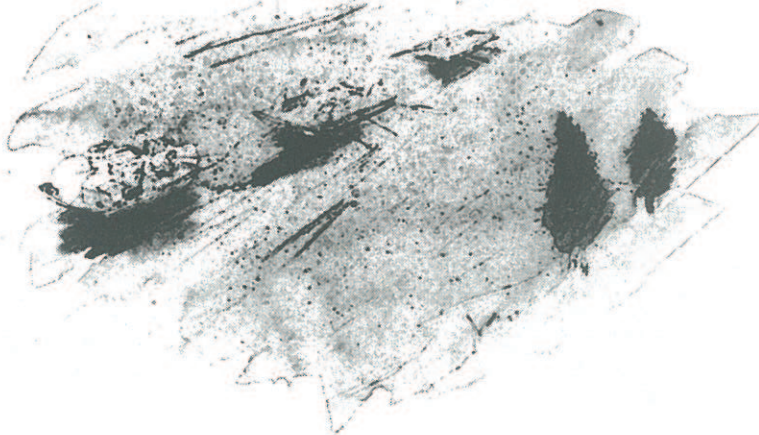
Arla Chopin, Evan Barge Mistress, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

You will not hear this from my tribe's elders, but we have grown so great in numbers since we left the camps that despite our Mother Eva's assistance, the farms of Vimary cannot always support us. If the rains are late, or the spring too cold, then we need to venture up the Great River to reap its bounty. As soon as the spring floods have passed, we poor souls chosen for this duty begin work on the barges. This is our happiest time, for Eva is still among us as we labor into the long summer twilight. Then the day comes when we set out up the River. We leave with heavy hearts. We leave our Mother and our families, risking our souls. No one sees us off. Summer is a time of hard work in the fields, and the grief of our leaving is shouldered silently by all.

Apart from a few Joanite guards on each barge, the expedition to the Thousand Isles is our Tribe's duty alone, for we are best suited to it. Who but Evans would you trust to harvest the River's fruits and crops? The Joanites send hunters, but never their best. Yet the game is so plentiful that they still take a great share of the water birds which flock to the riverbanks, and of the deer and boar that abound on the plains. It is we Evans who smoke the meat, pickle the fruits and dry the grain, however, and not even the Sheban Stiltwalkers have our touch with the barges that carry these riches back home.

Great endurance and strength is needed too, even with my years I still hover on the verge of tears. Anguish grows as every hour the sweeps drive me further from my Mother. Grief and loneliness assail our dreams, and few sleep well. Perhaps this is the Mother's plan, for the barges are cumbersome and heavy, hard to move against the current of the River, so the sweeps must be manned constantly. Even the children and the foragers must do their turn at the massive oars.

When I was young only a few barges left Vimary's shores, but soon I will lead two dozen, carrying three hundred of my people. A few decry this as excessive, claiming we take useful hands from the fields, but they cannot deny the supplies that we collect are necessary; they simply prefer not to mention that fact at all. The barges return laden to the waterline with food, salt, and many more goods we cannot make enough of, or find, on Vimary. Are such goods outside the Goddess' blessing? I do not know. If they are, then why has our Mother Eva, and her Sisters, given each Tribe its task beyond our home?



Arla Chopin, Evan Barge Mistress

Arla was always destined for a life of drudgery, disregarded by her clan because she lacked an affinity with the land. Yet life held a worse fate, and her family, deciding she was a disgrace, volunteered Arla for the Summer Expedition. Her life was destroyed, even though Arla discovered a flair for handling the barges and reading the fickle nature of the River. Over a decade she has become Senior Barge Mistress, yet receives no respect for her position or blessing from Eva. Now in her forties, she is a browned, weathered woman of middling build, with a sailor's squint from years on the water and a bitter and cynical disposition.

Highlights: Stern, unforgiving, unimaginative.

Attributes: AGI -1, APP -1, BLD +2, CRE -2, FIT 0, INF -1, KNO 0, PER +2, PSY -1, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA 0, STA 35, UD 6, AD 7

Skills: Boating 3/+2, Dodge 1/-1, Hagglng 2/-1, Leadership 2/-1, Lore (Great River) 3/0, Melee 1/-1, Navigation 2/0, Notice 1/+2, Swimming 1/0, Trade 2/-1.



Bogill, Squat guide

Small, like all his people, Bogill commands high wages from the Evans, as the hunts he leads always return with canoes loaded with game. He is also considered trustworthy, a reputation his people do not enjoy because of their common birth defects and supposed cannibalism. Bogill does not like the arrogant Evans, but the steel and glass they trade has made him a wealthy man, making him his wife's senior husband, with a raft of his own and two goats. As long as the Evans pay him well Bogill will guide them, though he worries that their growing demand for game will start to hurt the marshes.

Highlights: Laconic, trustworthy, content.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -2, BLD -2, CRE +1, FIT +1, INF -1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +2, WIL 0, STR -1, HEA +1, STA 20, UD 1, AD 1

Skills: Archery 2/+1, Boating 2/+1, Hagglng 2/-1, Lore (Great River) 2/+1, Notice 3/+1, Navigation (Sea) 2/+1, Survival 1/+1, Swimming 2/+1, Throwing 1/+1.

Green and Pleasant Land

From the diary of Hombor Champlain, Yagan Mapmaker:

By mid-summer, the flow of the Great River had slowed and the expedition set off. Upstream of Vimary the River widens and runs very deep, though the river plains remain as they are around Vimary until after the River meets the Otter. That rough and rushing river causes great turbulence, and dozens of the otters play in the churning waters. The Evans refuse to hunt these otters, claiming they allow the barges to pass undamaged through the rapids, though this trip we lost a barge and all hands on it.

After the Otter the hills recede further from the River, stretching the plains out for tens of klicks on either side. The land is so low that marshes extend inland for up to three klicks. Many streams flow down to the River, and the marshes spread along their courses, some becoming impenetrable swamps. Beyond the marshes, the plains have abundant grass and game. The soils on these plains are as good as those Eva has created on Vimary. I refrain from saying this aloud, as the Barge Mistresses are under orders to flog anyone who says anything good of these lands.

Beyond the lowlands on the northern bank the hills rise steeper and are more heavily wooded. I have not gone there, for the Evans do not allow travel beyond sight of the River. On the southern bank the lowlands do not seem to end, stretching off out of sight. A few hills rise like great mounds, covered with stands of trees. The trees grow ever tighter, until a dozen or so klicks inland the plains give way to dense woods.

Little of our ancestors' works remain intact along the southern River, the water having worn away most traces of their presence. Only the buildings and locks of the Keepers remain. There are many ruins and blacktops on the plains beyond the southern bank, but the World Before shunned the northern bank. I doubt we will ever know why, for the Evans' only want to do their duty and return to Vimary as quickly as possible.

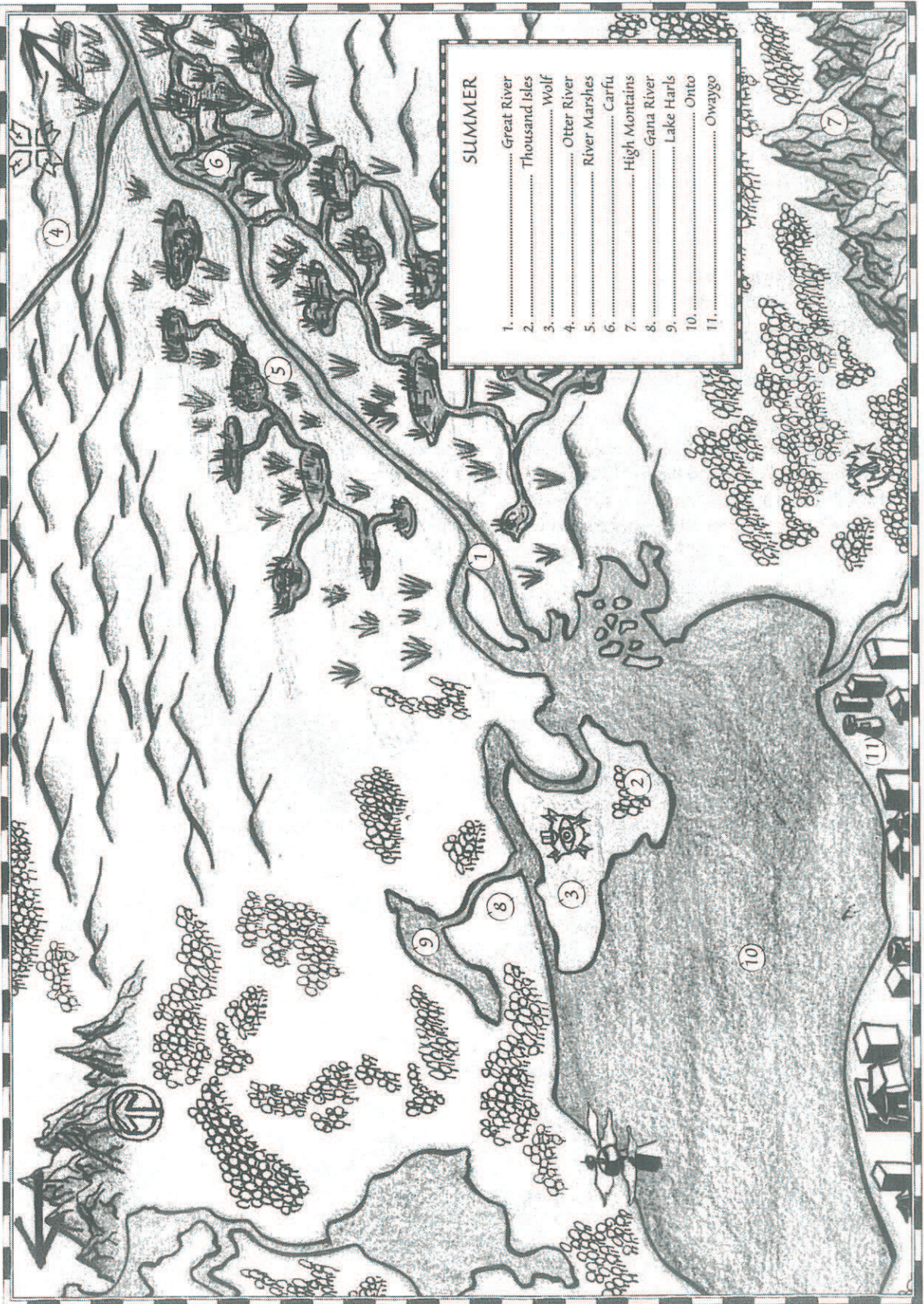
Secret Ways

Bogill, Squat guide, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I guide your kind many years and I not understand you yet. The River is my people's home. In the pools, islets and silent waters we live. We make our life on rafts of reeds, moving as the seasons flow. All we need is here, food, shelter, and even iron can we make from the marsh. Yet you Evans look down on us, call us stupid and lazy. Why?

The marsh is a quiet world, water drifting amongst great banks of reeds and stands of cedar. Sometimes the channels are deep and pools wide, other time choked with weeds or filled with mud. Islets are many. Some are World Before and made of stone, but most are mud, created by flood and washed away a season later. Only those on which the willows grow remain, becoming islands as every flood dumps more mud.

If you think you are so smart, come into the marshes to hunt without us. Wandering forever you will be, lost in its secret ways. Every reed bank looks the same, and the water meanders without rhyme or reason, but cannot be drunk but for certain pools. There are places where the mud will suck you down, and others where the weeds will strangle you. Many things you Evans know, but the river-lands you do not.



Feast of Plenty

Jak, Evan Deckhand, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I wish Eva would come with us to build farms here. The elders will banish you for saying that, but I think the River has to be under Mother's blessing. The elders say only Vimary is blessed, but how does the River grow then? On the trip down we harvest the wild rice and barley that grows in and along the marshes. Even if my clan owned the best fields on Vimary, I doubt the plants would grow as thick. Life That Grows once told me that the River puts down new soil every spring flood, and that's why the plants grow as they do. Just like we cart mud to our fields on Vimary, I suppose.

Life That Grows is a shaman, so I've got to believe him, but I thought the River floods would have washed everything away. Well, Life That Grows, he laughed at me, said that the marshes act like a Stiltwalker's nets. Good nets then, for the soil is as good as that at Lai, but you can't tell no one I said so, else I'll get in bad trouble, worse than being on this expedition. Apart from grains, we also cut stack upon stack of the long reeds. We spend the hours between foraging and rowing weaving sacks from the leaves and baskets from the stalks, using them to hold what we harvest from the riverbanks.

On the return trip we pick wild tobacco, celery, cucumbers, squash and tomatoes. On the plains you can find onions and potatoes, but only if you've the knack of spotting their stalks in the grass. It's the fruits I like though; my family has never harvested such plump cherries, black plums and huge baskets of blueberries, strawberries and raspberries as we get along the River. Except for the need to get back home, back to Mother, we could also take a great harvest of apples and pears too, for the many trees we find are not yet ripe, but all hang heavy with fruit.

For all the food, for all the hard work we do, it's sad here. It's not like home, where harvest is all songs and the Mother's blessing coming over you. Here, you feel cold, and work without joy. My family's a poor one, we've got no land, and I see lots along the River, but I'd never want it unless the Mother was with us.

Dark Taint

Arla Chopin, Evan Barge Mistress, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I know my crew looks with envious eyes at these lands, but we need to keep moving. I have no desire to see more banished for heresy. The elders are right about one thing though, this land isn't good, not all of it anyway. Our ancestors left a legacy of corruption along the Great River. Even now, after all the countless seasons, you cannot eat or drink from some places in the marshes. It is always at points where streams or rivers flow down from the lands beyond, and only a careful eye for the signs will keep you from harm.

The first sign is an absence of squats, or an abundance of them with twisted faces and distorted limbs. Another is that the plants will be sickly, often not obviously, but you will find their seed pods strangely shaped, or with foul smelling lesions. The insects and small fishes will be horrors. I've seen blind mantis, trout with two heads, and worse. A final sign is a lack of frogs; if the little brothers of the marsh are not singing, then be wary, for they seem to sense the unclean and will not congregate where our ancestors' filth still pollutes the River.

Easy Pickings

Massena, River Squat Huntress, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The River is a sacred place, and our offerings bring great rewards. In summer season our cooking fires and smokehouses always burn. The River offers all people its feast; lamprey, sturgeon, salmon and trout. So great is our catch that all must help clean and cook. Some we dry, others are smoked; we do not put ours in pots like Seven Tribes, pickled in sours. Best of all are smoked eggs from the Lake Sturgeon. They are a special feast, and they inspire great passion in my husbands. Never a bad thing, yes?

The marshes are home to our clans, so vast I have seen but a small portion of their secrets, and they thrive with game. Muskrat, otter and mink make their dens along the muddy banks; their fur is good trade with your people. Ducks and swans cover the water like weeds; your hunters prefer them, for they offer the most meat. Smaller birds like wood ducks and ring necks can be found in great flocks, and these we hunt with nets. We lie nets woven from hemp across a pond, anchored by bent willow poles tied beneath the water. Then the hunters wait until enough birds are within the trap, and cut the ropes. The poles spring up and trap the birds. A clever trick, good for teaching our young patience and the ways of the marsh. Many small birds stay into the season of ice, so we are careful to make good offerings to their spirits.

Out beyond our marshes are wide plains of grass, where your hunters find white tailed deer, aurochs, boar, goats and sheep. I have never hunted these animals; their spirits are not with my people. Some boar and auroch come into the marshes, but they are not children of the River. Your Joanites make many complaints, but they stalk like the fox and make a fair hunt. Your people's greed is not a good thing, and if your Evans would rest their barges you could hunt longer, but always rowing they are. Is dangerous work, this hunting among grass. Every season I see some of your Joanites die, under hooves of aurochs, or on tusks of boar. Perhaps your people should make better offerings to these creatures' spirits so they do not resent your hunting so much.

Far from Grace

Gi Jess'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The ease of the River, and the richness of its lands, tempts the Evans. It doesn't surprise me, for these are the daughters of the poorest families, and they'll never have land of their own. Cylix, a Sheban High Judge, has asked us to watch the Evans for signs of heresy. Still, many Evans have been banned from further expeditions for having developed unclean thoughts. It makes me laugh, that; I wonder which fool thinks that not being sent from Vimary is a punishment. It's only the threat of exile that makes the rest keep their desires to themselves.

They're blind in a way; this land is not all good soil and fat boar. The marshes hold hordes of mosquitoes, and poisonous spiders seem to hang from every branch. The Squats too, are not as peaceful as they make out; too many of their villages have piles of human bones for my liking. Whatever problems we have on Vimary, it is our land. The green seductions of the South Wind cannot change the basic evil of these lands. Only the blessing of the Fatimas could do that.



Gi Jess'on, Joanite Ranger

Gi never quite mastered swordplay and he feared that his life would end in the Challenge. Before his time, however, Joan ordered Gi to guard those who ventured into the Outlands. Initially devastated, he overcame his rejection, ignoring the taunts from other Joanites, and dedicated his life to the task Joan had set him. His skill as an archer is 'exceptional,' and his love for Joan overcomes any frustration he feels because of the lack of recognition his skills and bravery receives. No honor goes to those who have been to the Outlands. He sees Tania Berkin's love for him as Joan's reward for his loyalty.

Highlights: Dangerous, idealistic and silent.

Attributes: AGI +2, APP +1, BLD 0, CRE +2, FIT +1, INF -1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY 0, WIL 0, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 4, AD 5

Skills: Archery 3/+2, Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 1/+1, Hand-to-Hand 1/+2, Intimidate 1/0, Lore (Outlands) 2/+1, Melee 2/+2, Navigation (Land) 2/+1, Notice 1/+1, Sneak 2/+2, Survival 2/+1.

Savage Harmony

Layla Ryd'on, Fallen Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I think the Squats are becoming too bold by far. I said so a few times too often for the Old Guard, and that's why I'm Fallen. A good example is Cortu, a large island just beyond where the Otter enters the River. There's a powerful Squat tribe settled here, calling themselves the Carilon. What they do the rest of the year I don't know, but in summer they take to their bark canoes and attack our barges as they pass along the one deep channel past Cortu.

I've faced nothing so frightening as standing on those barges, backed by Evans with only militia training, watching canoes filled with howling, red painted squats emerging from the morning fog. They haven't overrun an expedition yet, but it's only a matter of time. Old Vellan'on has warned the Council, and asked for more warriors so we could try to burn the bastards out. Even if the Rangers got permission, and a fool's chance of that, I don't think they alone could do anything. Cortu is part of a maze of islets and canals, and just finding the Carilon would be a task in itself.

The rest of the Squats on the Great River are not so troublesome. They're runts, often with twisted backs and missing limbs, but like three-legged dogs they seem to get by. The Evans think these problems have to do with the patches of taint along the River. Me, I think they're just vermin. The River Squats live in floating villages built on rafts of bundled reeds, and row reed canoes too. They hunt and gather, acting as guides to our hunting parties in return for metal blades and pots. No Squat can be trusted and these less than most. If the marshes were not so hard to navigate I'd do without their 'help'. In some cases they abandon their charges, and perhaps even eat them. I have seen human bones on some rafts that they refused to explain.

The Rangers can never rest during the trip southward on the River. Not only are they responsible for hunting on the plains, since the Evans are too useless to do that, but Squat attacks on the barges are constant. Never openly, only after dark or in fog. You have to understand the mentality of these lice. They're cowards, one and all. Lazy vermin too, as almost everything they take are things that they could make for themselves.

People of the Lakes

Arla Chopin, Evan Barge Mistress, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The Squats that live in the Thousand Isles live a strange life. While many live on the islands and islets, still more choose to spend the summer wandering in large wooden boats, only returning to land at the end of the season. Others build huts high above the shallow water in the marshes, sinking young birch trees into the waters as stilts. Some of these settlements are small towns, abandoned each winter but reoccupied come spring.

The Lake Squats are a rootless bunch, planting no crops and relying on what they can catch in the rich waters of the Great River Lake. As traders they excel, and probably as bandits too, for they are perfectly positioned to barter with all the other Squats via the myriad waterways that meet at the Isles. Wolf, a large settlement on the island of the same name, is their foremost settlement. Surrounded by a strong palisade, and equipped with long jetties of wood, the various clans provide warriors to guard it from robbers and encourage the great trade fair. Yet typically of these fools, no one lives there. Once the trade fair is done, the Lake Squats abandon it too return to their pointless wanderings.



Keepers of the Locks

Rosa Prescott, of the Brock Keepers, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Thanks to our keeping these wonders of engineering working, travelers don't have to negotiate rapids on the St Lawrence — that's the Great River to you. In exactly eleven places between your Otter and the Great River Lake, our ancestors gouged out great stone canals to bypass the places where falls or rapids interrupt the River. There each canal leads to a lock — this walled pond we're sitting in. Now watch as the gateway swings shut. It's made of solid steel, and according to my best calculations weighs ten tons. Now that it's shut, massive pumps will lower the water. Then a gateway at the other end of the lock will open, and the canal will take you back to the River.

Various families of Keepers live in the locks, and only a few scholars, like myself, show ourselves beyond the walls. Raiders, especially a tribe of mutants from the south, often attack us. We are conspicuous, after all, and the belief that our locks hold great wealth is true, but not the kind a primitive would understand. Luckily our locks are fortresses, with no doors, just ladders we can raise or lower. Our 'magic' helps too, and we have powerful magic. We can kill without touching, and propel boats without oars.

We don't charge heavy tolls, though these Evans always whine. All we ask is a kilo of food for every person and ten kilos of trade goods for every boat. If you only have a canoe, the charge is two kilos of food or trade goods. It can be a bit of a wait, as the pumps are old and we don't like to make them operate more than once a day, but I'm sure you will agree this is a small sacrifice when compared to the hassles of portaging.

Twilight Mountains

Sandi Dove, Lake Squat Sky Warrior, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Halfway to Cortu, near a river beyond the lowlands, the land rises to meet the sky. The distant giants glitter with snow even in summer's heat, and clouds fill the valleys. This land is the mother of all the rivers on the northern shore, all laughing children of the air, as my people are. Returning to our birth-lands like salmon, every few seasons our bravest young warriors go into the mountains to reach towards the sky. The river I mentioned is the Rack, the first trial on the path of the Sky Warrior, and this path takes us across the plains and into the mountains. In the High Mountains you find the panther, a creature of bravery, cunning and power. To find its spoor is a good omen, and the warrior who finds it must try to run the panther to ground. It is the mightiest beast a Sky Warrior can hunt, and a pelt, like this one I wear, brings many honors.

Eventually you enter a land of lakes, the mirrors of the sky, and you paddle through shadowed mountain clefts. Finally the Rack finds the heights of the Conkwin. From here a trail takes us past the mountain of the Sky, and then to the base of the High Mountain. We wash in sacred pools, anoint ourselves with the war paint of a Sky Warrior, and then, naked, make our way to where the Sky Spirits touch the earth. On the bare head of the High Mountain we smoke the pipe of the spirits, communing with them for many hours. Not all survive; you can see their skeletons lying on the rock. They were taken to serve the Sky Spirits amongst the clouds. We, those less honored, return to our people to become the ultimate defenders of our waters.

3. Call of the South Wind

Keepers of the Locks

The main conduit of trade and information between the various Keeper communities along the North American river network, the Lock Keepers have influence beyond their small numbers. This influence is responsible for the great wealth that they have gathered. Many of the technological wonders they possess are beyond the ability of any single Keeper community to restore or maintain, but through trade the Lock Keepers are able to gather the parts necessary to keep devices such as thunder canoes running. Wealth creates envy and the Lock Keeper's small numbers and known locations make them a constant target for Squat raids. Thus much of their technology goes towards making their forts safer.

Highlights: Mercantile, Studious and Suspicious.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP 0, BLD -1, CRE +2, FIT -1, INF +1, KNO +1, PER 0, PSY -1, WIL 0, STR -1, HEA -1, STA 20, LID 3, AD 3

Skills: Hagglng 2/+1, Navigation (Sea) 1/+1, Notice 1/0, Swimming 2/-1, Firearms 2/+1, Techlore (choose two) 1/+1, Tinker 1/+2, Trade 1/+1.

Earth's Flesh



Layla Ryd'on, Fallen Joanite Ranger

Once a senior Ranger and one of the best hunters on Vimary, Layla was exiled for confronting the Old Guard over the threat posed by the Squats. Her exile almost destroyed her, as her enemies hoped, but she was stronger than they thought. After a few seasons of dissolution, she pulled herself out of a black pit of depression and sobered up. Having formed the Fence of Bones cell, she and her new comrades seek to defend Hom from Squat raiders. A rumor on Hom is that she and the Rangers still meet secretly beyond the Great River, though only a fool would say this to Layla's face.

Highlights: Bigoted, forceful and mature.

Attributes: AGI +2, APP 0, BLD -1, CRE 0, FIT +1, INF -2, KNO 0, PER +2, PSY 0, WIL +1, STR 0, HEA +1
STA 25, UD 2, AD 4

Skills: Archery 3/+2, Athletics 2/+1, Combat Sense 1/+2, Lore (Outlands) 2/0, Melee 2/+2, Navigation (Land) 2/0, Notice 2/+2, Survival 2/+1.

Jak, Evan Deckhand, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The river Cana flows into the River, or maybe it flows into the Great River Lake; I'm not sure which. It's in with the Thousand Isles, if that's any help. It's not hard to find. I mean, you don't often see red water, do you? We take one of the barges up there, which shows how it easy it is, all the way to Lake Harls. The lake is clear; the water runs past the clay deposits on the lake's southern shore, and that's when it turns red.

We go for the clay; no place on Vimary has clay like this. Tiles or pots made from Harls clay fire into a rich, pale red and are never brittle. You can make pots as big as you like, and not worry about them breaking. Along the northern lake's edge the clay is a fine white. I like this too; the Squats make really pretty crockery, with sunny flowers painted on it. I wanted to take some to my mother, and use some as a bride price, but I was told to throw it overboard. We don't take anything from the Outlands we don't need, that's what Arla said.

Oneida

Layla Ryd'on, Fallen Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The many Squat tribes gathered at Wolf to trade are a truly vile collection of creatures; most are little more than animals, but I'm open-minded enough to admit that not all are dirty, thieving scum. The Oneida, for instance, who come from the south of the Great River Lake, aren't too bad at all. This is perhaps why the other Squats seem to hate and fear them. It doesn't surprise me that the lowlifes react badly to those few among them who live like people rather than degenerates.

I used to find it hard to think of the Oneida as Squats at all. The great, many-oared barges that carry them are impressive vessels. The Oneida also weave cloth, something no other Squats do. I thought perhaps they were Keepers, but they don't use corrupt artifacts from the World Before. The Oneida can also be trusted to some degree. I'd still be wary of them — I mean they are Squats, whatever else they may be — but the Oneida do deal fairly and honor their promises.

These Oneida are a tall people, painted with red tattoos. In the summer heat they go bare-chested, wearing little but loincloths of a fine cloth they call cotton. Their elders often wear cloaks of red-dyed hide to show their status. One thing that all Oneida carry is a necklace of finely carved bone trinkets. I'm not sure what they mean, but they are highly valued. I once saw a Squat, a starved rat of a woman, try to steal a necklace. What the Oneida did to her still makes me ill. Effective though, for violence is all the Squats understand, and few are so stupid as to rob an Oneida or their laden barges.

On their barges they carry barrels of tasty red liquor that they call wine, as well as bales of woolen and cotton cloth, tobacco, grain and fine pickled vegetables in well-turned pots. The Evans trade a great deal with them, mainly Magdalite incenses and potions in return for food and cloth. A few barrels of wine always get picked up, but strangely none gets back to Vimary, if you understand my meaning. The Tribes, of course, hold that the Oneida are doomed, for all they're a worthy people, because they're outside the grace of the Fatimas.

Stealer of Souls

Odesa, Oneida Elder, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Be careful where you ask questions, for evil haunts Wolf during the trade fair. It's an interesting story, one you and your Tribes will find educational. One morning, not long ago, wailing was heard from amongst the tents of the Renton Squats. Apparently a killing had taken place, such a commotion over one death. The next day all the Renton Squats had fled Wolf. These things happen, you say to yourself, after all death is a hungry beast and feeds where she will. Stranger still, a few days later the same thing happened to the Kars Squats and they fled as well. Few will risk killing on Wolf; the risk of being drowned is a wonderful deterrent.

Of course the unshadowed story is much darker than a simple killing, one that the Lake Squats don't want told — it might stop the trading. You see, a killer stalks Wolf during the trade fair. The victims die in their sleep, unmarked but for a small cross cut in their forehead. Only a few die each season, but do you know the most shocking thing? All those who have died were powerful warriors or hunters, and all had angered my people in some way. It's not us who slay them, those distrustful Lake Squats watch us like hawks. If it weren't for their precious peace, we'd never even be allowed here. Yet these fools die. Interesting, isn't it?

I have heard that you are asking questions about one of these killings, that is not a good idea. Such curiosity could be, how do I put this, everlastingly fatal. None of your people have died, yet, and you should not wish to be the first. For now your Tribes are safe from us, and you should not wish for conflict before you time. Now before I let you return to your barge, answer me this question. An acquaintance of mine overheard you say that a wound in the forehead could be used to reach the soul. An interesting observation, one I wish to know more of.

Who's that? Ah. Gi Jess'on. How fortunate. My friend Hombor here was just about to return to your barges. We couldn't have him walk through Wolf all alone, could we? Who knows what might happen to a single man?

Against the flow

Arla Chopin, Evan Barge Mistress, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

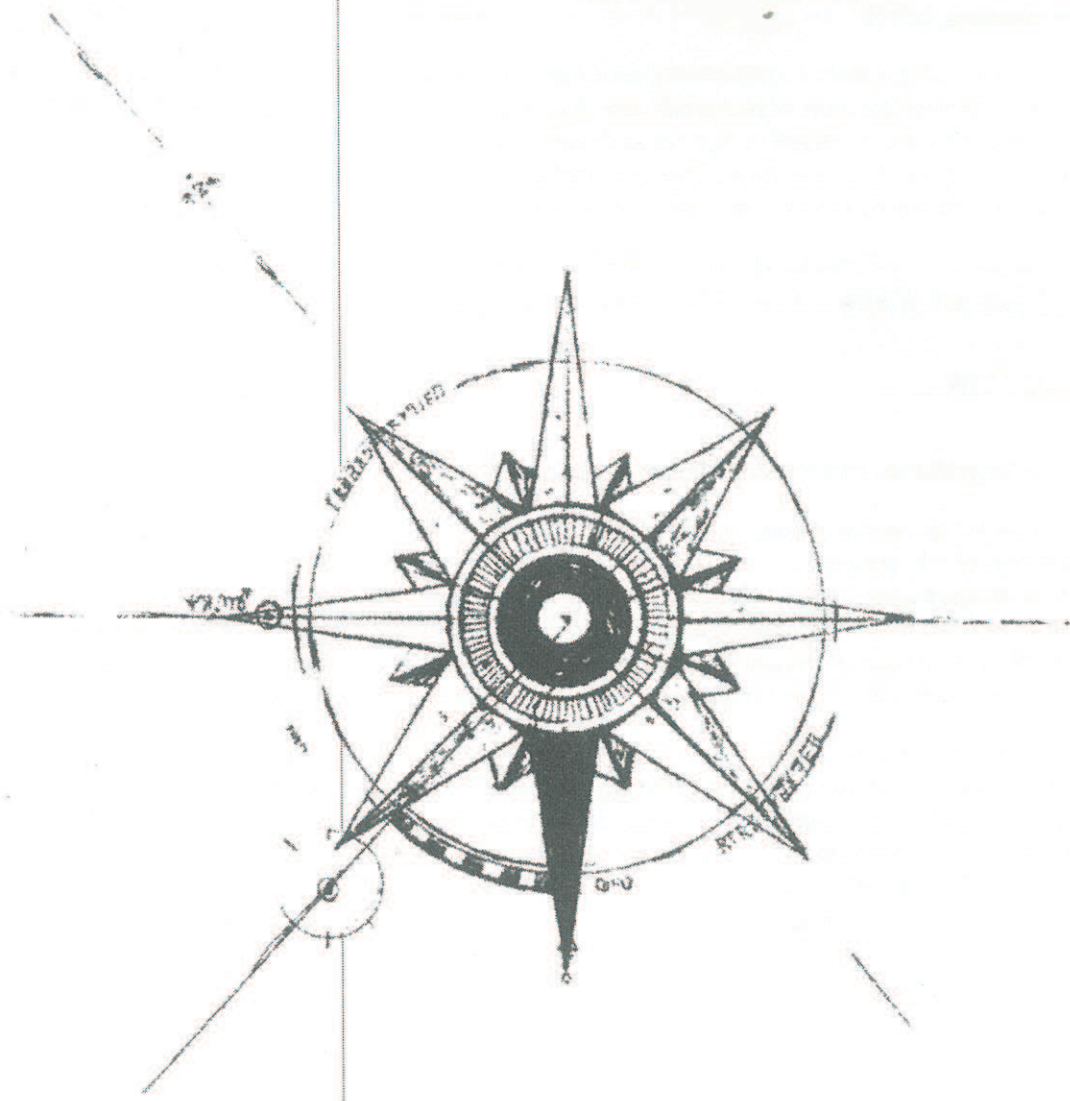
The Great River flows like the seasons, steadily and without great changes. This makes travel upon it quite simple, and our barges make a stately and calm procession to the Thousand Isles, except for the Otter's inflow which always causes us loss. The trip is has its dangers, of course. Sandbanks left by the spring floods, for instance, can ground a barge, taking days to lift it off the bank and repair the damage. Strong winds can be a problem too, for they can blow a barge aground, despite the best efforts of the polemen, especially when the barges are heavily loaded on the return trip. The flow from other rivers sometimes causes odd currents, but nothing we can't handle if the crew is awake to their duties.

We have developed a few precautions against the dangers of the River. One is to link the barges together with heavy ropes. Thus kept in column, we are like a moving wall and easily defensible. The ropes also make it possible to give immediate help to a barge that has run aground. The Joanite Rangers are our first defense in all cases. They range in front of the convoy in bark canoes, looking for all manner of danger. The only place I feel ill at ease is when we must use the dams of those Keepers. They rob us blind and if their services were not so useful I would forgo their impudence. If the elders on Vimary discover we have dealings with Keepers, I'd probably to ordered not use them in any event, so keep your mouth closed.



Land of Milk and Honey

*South Wind spoke,
Its voice like honey,
Words flowed like milk.
A promised land,
Place beyond cold,
Wolf lying with lamb,
The Eighth Tribe's home.*



Water's Edge

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

I'd heard the Evan tales of the Great River Lake as a child, but never did I imagine it would be so wide. Curse Halos and his enigmatic gibberish! The call of the South Wind indeed! I'm here because I'm a fool who listened to the ravings of those even more foolish than I. Still, the calling in my dreams has quieted as I've gone southward.

When I reached Wolf and first saw the Lake, which the Squats call the Onto, I knew my guide had been right to laugh at me when I said I'd use my canoe to travel over it. But the Islanders are a friendly tribe, and my obvious need for their help, along with a few Joanite knife blades, was all that was required to gain their aid. They know the Lake well and I'm glad I didn't venture forth upon it without their wisdom. I doubt I would have gone far before I perished.

I have been here for almost a month and must soon go on — the Evans are due and I have no wish to meet them. I have gained a sailboat and new skills, yet my heart is troubled. An ancient Squat, skin stretched like parchment across his bones, has told me a tale of the end of the world, a place where the Great River Lake drops into oblivion. Was my dream wrong? Has the South Wind lied? I must see for myself, for the wind's voices give me no peace.



Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer

Tera Sheban by birth, Amelia delighted her tribe with a burning desire to learn. Behind her bright gray eyes, however, her desire knew no constraint and eventually she grew to resent being told that so many interesting ideas should not concern her. Eventually, Amelia simply walked off Vimary, going to Hom where shortsighted elders would not deny her. Amelia has seen many things since she became one of the Fallen, leaving her less naïve, but no less determined. She has few friends and isn't part of any cell, refusing to be constrained even by allies. She supports herself by working as a hunter.

Highlights: Adventurous, independent and lonely.

Attributes: AGI 0, APP +1, BLD +1, CRE 0, FIT +1, INF -1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +2, WIL 0, STR 0, HEA +1, STA 25, UD 2, AD 3

Skills: Acrobatics 1/0, Boating 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+2, Healing 1/+1, Human Perception 2/+2, Melee 1/0, Navigation Sea 1/+1, Notice 1/+1, Sneak 1/0, Survival 1/+1, Swimming 1/+1.

Flying before the Wind

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

I find it strange that the Evans' tales never mentioned the boats used by the Islanders. While the Evans labor at their sweeps, the Islanders harvest the wind. I am amazed at how simple the concept is. As a dandelion seed catches the wind, the Islanders do so too, with hide hung upon a wooden frame. The boats themselves they make from whole Birch trees that they fell and hollow out. When the Islanders decided that I would need a boat of my own, a shaman walked with me through various stands of trees until he found the one destined to carry me.

Once the tree was selected it took two weeks for the boat to be completed. Fin, the local boat builder, and I felled the tree and then spent six days hollowing it out. Once it had a boat-like shape, a few Islanders came and helped us carry it to the lake. After soaking the log overnight, Fin coated it with tar and placed it over a slow-burning fire. He kept it over the fire for two days, turning it constantly and tarring it all over. When the boat was lifted from the fire Fin forced ribs of white pine into the heated hull, hammering them home. Then the boat was scrubbed down with pieces of flat sandstone and rubbed with deer fat.

The last steps were raising the sides and adding the frame for the two sails, into which the mast was placed. The whole island turns out for the launching of a new boat, and a big feast is held. The island's shaman talked with the Sky Spirits, announcing that the boat should be called Swift Seeking Arrow. With the naming, eyes were painted on either side of the prow so Swift Seeking Arrow should always know where it was going. It is a good craft, faster than any canoe I have seen, and will carry half a ton of supplies. Now I am ready to dare the Lake and find the place the wind speaks of in my dreams.

3. Call of the South Wind

Desolate land

Galloo, Lake Squat Captain, from the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

Take my advice, little girl, and keep your course set close to the shore. Some young sailors would call it a coward's course, but your skills are newly learnt and untested. Be reluctant to sleep upon the water, seek camp on shore if you can. Your boat is too small for safe sleeping. This will also let you hunt, for you should not eat fish from the Onto more than once a week. Do so and you will find your guts on fire. This simply is the case. Some blame the Oneida, some our ancestors, whatever the cause be wary about what you eat from the water.

The shore will feed you well. Deer, boar and aurochs run in great herds, along with the smaller and safer game that abounds in the scattered stands of woods and fields along the shore. The one creature that is missing is man; no one lives on the shores beyond the Thousand Isles. All you will find are the distant memories of villages and the ruins of our ancestors, for two diseases stalk the shores. One is of man. One is of spirit. Of neither will I say more, the Sky Spirits do not favor us calling ill luck on a boat about to sail.

Echoes of Suffering

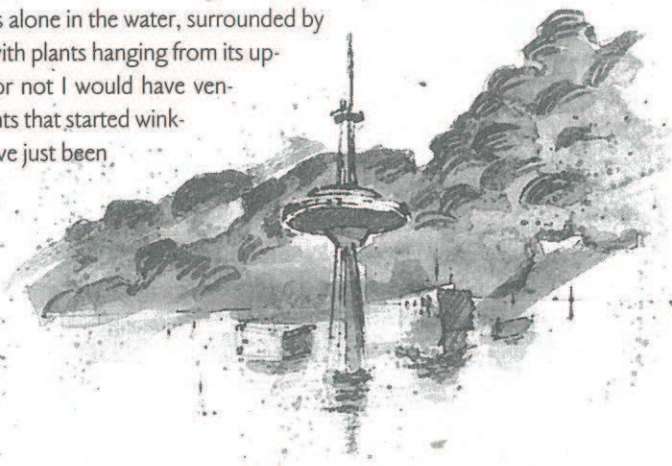
From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

My course down the western shore has taken me past a great city, perhaps larger than Vimary. On the lake I noticed a vast column of smoke rising in the west and as I sailed closer, the city lay like a vast gray stain along the shore. It covers dozens of klicks, going further inland than I could see. All was ruined, and much was flooded or retaken by nature, trees choking what once were streets, and creepers and other plants grew upon the empty shells of buildings. There seemed to be no animals, large or small, except for flocks of ugly black crows and ill-omened birds whose long necks and evil faces bore no feathers.

Putrid smoke seemed to rise from many sources. I could not see what flames fed the myriad tendrils, but no natural smoke rises pitch black and hovers unnaturally in a brisk, southerly breeze. I kept my course away from the shore, wary as to what might lurk in the shadows of this place. Rising over the ruins, north of a great harbor, was a structure taller than any relic that I had ever seen, rising higher than the Great Hill in the center of Vimary.

I sailed north carefully, watching for ruins lurking just beneath the surface of the shallow water, and for the first time I noticed disturbing structures in the ruins. In Vimary, walls built from slabs of rubble surrounded the Z'bri camps. Similar walls stand in this ruined place. Yet I saw no sign of the perverted constructions that the Z'bri create to house themselves. The similarities disturbed me nonetheless, and I changed my course to put me further from the shore.

As I passed what once would have been the heart of this city, I could not help staring in awe at the tower. It stands alone in the water, surrounded by islands, a series of structures thick with plants hanging from its upper reaches. Worries about Z'bri or not I would have ventured in, but for strange flashing lights that started winking at me from the tower. It may have just been sunlight upon the tower's metal skin, but I fear it was too regular to have been natural. My discretion won over curiosity, an unusual occurrence, and I sailed on, but not without a backward glance at the Tower and the wonders it may have held.



Flames of Remembrance

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

I continued sailing north up the coast and slowly, after tens of kliks, the ruins thinned. The smoke grew thicker as the city faded, the rising tendrils coming closer and closer to the coast. Then a burning red glow began to stain the horizon. Eventually the smoke's source came into sight. Geysers of flame were bursting from ground that glowed like metal in the forge. The fires came right down to the lake's edge, causing the water there to steam and boil. I cannot even begin to imagine what great magic causes this fire to burn, for nothing lies on the liquid ground. The flames spurt from cracks, sending thick and acrid black smoke into the air.

The smoke hangs evilly in the sky, rising many hundreds of meters like an insubstantial curtain. On the other side of these fires the land was full of life, and I could see birds flying about the trees, and rustles of life in the bushes. I retraced my course to sail to the city's south, giving up the chance to camp far away in order to see if the fire entirely encircled the ruins. On my return trip no lights flashed at me from the Tower, and far to the south the fire reached the coast again.

Terror

Casus, Rahntoh Z'bri, from the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

So you awake, slave-creature? Foolish are you to sleep so near to our domain. Look not so bewildered; I have brought you here, upon the River of Dark Dreaming, to take your soul for my pleasure. Your fear smells good; you may become a favorite. Now come a little closer and we shall go through the Curtain. Don't back away, foolish insect; look at the Curtain closely. See how it shimmers? Cutting through the River. Hear those howls? They are not of this earth. Feel the heat that radiates from it? Just like the fires that are the Curtain's physical form. We feed the Curtain with the spirits of the unquiet dead. The spirits burn the air with hatred, pain and rage.

Come with me, my lovely virgin, or find yourself fed into the Curtain. At least what I plan for you will be pleasurable, eventually. Perhaps you think I am too slow to take you, my delicate morsel? See this spirit form? This bare and skeletal body is not what I inhabit within Rahntoh, which is our city beyond the Curtain. No, in the world of the Seed I have a lush body, two dozen infants squeezed together like clay. It is a marvel of Sundering, my brothers are jealous of it, for none have the power to make something so lewd, so delightfully sensual.

Oh my innocent dove, why did you weave a cloth of thought about your naked form? I was enjoying watching your spirit shiver in fright. How did you do it? What are you, creature? A simulacrum sent by my rivals to trick me? No, that you could not be, not here beyond the Curtain, for it is death for any of us to go beyond it without permission. The Dome does not allow it. Come no nearer, creature, the Curtain's spirits will not harm me, but you would not be so fortunate.

This is our place, little upstart, ours! Never come here again or we will soak you in pain that never ends. You should leave now. Perhaps you're feeling some tingling in your limbs. I have sent the Curtain's fire out for you. Don't look so shocked. It appears you are able to weave dreams, foul whore, but your powers are nothing compared to mine, or those of my brothers. I'd leave now before your body is naught but ash.

A surer course

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

I will not return to the western shore. I've no desire to repeat my experience with the Rahntoh Z'bri. I lost most of my gear in the forest fire the Beasts started, and only just got to Swift Seeking Arrow in time. Now I know why nothing lives on the western shore. Let me see what mysteries the east contains.

3. Call of the South Wind



Oneida

The Oneida are a debauched and aggressive people who control most of the lands east of the Onto. Their society is split into three castes: warrior, follower and priest. They worship the strange gods who protected them from the Fall. The priests claim that their gods walk the earth in a holy city that lies down the Hud. Slavery and cannibalism are the Oneidas most obvious perversions, but they are highly inbred and regard torture as an entertainment. Their slave raiding is a major risk on the eastern Onto, and their priests are actively trying to capture members of the Seven Tribes.

Highlights: Duplicitous, Hungry and Perverse.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP 0, BLD +1, CRE -2, FIT +1, INF -1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL -1, STR +1, HEA -1, STA 20, UDD 5, AD 7

Skills: Athletics 1/+1, Boating 1/+1, Combat Sense 1/+1, Intimidate 1/+1, Lore (Dark Mistresses) 1/+1, Melee 2/+1, Music 1/-2, Ritual 2/+1, Throwing 2/+2.

Owaygo

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

I have found a village on the Onto, the first I've seen so far. It's a large squat village on a branch of the river, built in the flooded ruins of an ancient city. As I approached, five hide canoes came out to meet me, each filled with fierce warriors. When I stood to show my peaceful intent, they saw my tattoos and fled. On a large beach near the river mouth lay many canoes and large, oared boats. A woman wrapped in a cloak of red hide was waiting for me.

She called herself Mari and welcomed me to Owaygo, a town of the Oneida. Mari believed I was of the Seven Tribes; apparently the Oneida and Evans have dealings on Wolf. Mari showed me around Owaygo, telling me that other villages lie upstream. She also offered to take me to their main settlement, Onondaga. Intrigued by the Oneida and looking forward to sailing in one of their large boats, I agreed. Mari's stories made Onondaga sound as if it would leave Vimary to shame. We agreed to sail with the next dawn, but during the night I awoke to see a naked man, covered in bloody scars, kneeling at my feet. It was then another nightmare started.

Dream of Blood

A nameless Fallen, from the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

Who am I? I know not, not any more. The Oneida, the Fatimas, strange gods, all come together like a broken dream. I was taken, drugged with wine, brought over the water, up a river of blood to a lake of despair. Onondaga, it beats like a funeral drum, where altars drip with blood. A living nightmare, all built of bronze, stone and human skin. I was a man, then the dark ones worked me, used me, took me, now I am no one, just a thing, one who places new stone on the pyramids.

Cloaks of red, sign of the shepherds. They flayed me, wanted my skin for my tattoos, cut them from me as I writhed and screamed. Gave it all to the dark ones, all twisted, piercings of bright bronze, scars in endless spirals. I have called to the Mother, and she does not hear me. I called when they hurt me, when twisted me, took all my memories from me. Tried to take more but couldn't reach it, hurt me more because of it.

Singing, I remember singing, a place, warm and safe. Nowhere safe here, all the lands are theirs, all are watched from pyramids, rowing in boats of human skin to the River of the Mistresses. All, it's all theirs. Can you feel their eyes? They're watching me. Please, please, send me away from here before they come to take it again. I can't remember what it is they want, but it hurts and Mother said to keep it safe.

Away with the morning mist

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

When I awoke the man was dead, his flesh burst open. Mustering all the synthesis I could manage, I made my way to the Swift Seeking Arrow. I fled into the open waters and did not look back.

Floating Lands

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

Despite the Oneida, the Onto is not uninhabited; its lands are too rich for that. For safety though, the Lake Squats do not live upon the shore, but on large barges that they can tow to whichever anchorage suits them. Some of these barges are ancient beasts of stone and iron, while others are recently made from whole tree trunks. A few barges are permanently moored, especially the massive relics of the World Before, with strong defenses built to defeat Oneida raiders. Usually, however, the Squats tow their barges with them as they travel the lake, following the Sky Spirit's call.

These Squats call themselves the Onto, though I think this is merely the name they give outsiders. They're a well-organized and powerful people; they love their boats, lavishing attention on their vessels beyond what I would show a lover or child. There is no doubt that these are the fastest and most maneuverable boats on the Onto. With multiple masts, a fixed steering oar called a rudder and a hull made of well-shaped wooden planks, the Onto's boats are a wonder to behold. Some are as large as twenty meters long, while others measure no more than five. Some they would let me board and others they would not, especially the war boats they use to defeat Oneida raids.

The strangest thing is that these boats are obviously built to fish, but because of the water-corruption from the World Before they do not fish the Onto. I get the feeling that they travel further than this lake, but they are very cagey about this subject. I have heard whispered mention of a path through the Sico Swamp, wherever that may be, that leads to another, larger lake. The Renton tribe of Squats is said to guard the secret gateway to the swamp and the lake beyond, the Chiga. I understand their secrecy, for they don't want the Oneida to find a way beyond the waters they already terrorize.

Whim and Fancies

Ajax, Onto Chieftain, from the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

The waters of Lake Onto run very deep, and strange things lurk in the darkness beneath the waves. Sometimes these things rise and destroy a boat or barge, but more often we are concerned with the waves themselves. Deep water means the winds can whip up high waves, so only a boat with high freeboard will find playing with the Sky Spirits safe. This is but one advantage the Sky Spirits have given us over the Oneida. Their galleys need low freeboards, otherwise their oars would be useless, and so the Oneida rarely sail beyond sight of shore. This means they risk reefs and sandbanks, while out in the deep water we can fly before the wind.

The Sky Spirits rule the air over the Onto, and over many other places I cannot name to you. Their breath is the morning fog, their laughter the evening storms. In spring they make love, and many storms sweep in from the east, often powerful enough to tear a mast right off a boat. In autumn the Spirits rest. There are good winds to be had, and much can be done before winter's fierce grows. I advise you to be gone long before Sky Spirits fight the North Wind, for the battle is fierce and even I fear it. Winds and ice form that can shred a boat and send her to the bottom where hours before a day had been blue and clear. Not something your Swift Seeking Arrow is equipped for.

Onto Squats

The Onto or Lake Squats, who call themselves the Novohuron, are a powerful people who remember much of the World Before. While not Keepers they are more aware of the world beyond their lakes than they are willing to let on. The Novohuron control all the Great Lakes and their trading brings them wealth and many allies. Only the dark powers of the Oneida have given them pause, and they are looking for allies to help them end this threat to their control of the Onto Lake. Skilled craftsmen and warriors, the Novohuron are also a literate people and their charts and maps are the most accurate made by any living people.

Highlights: Crafty, educated and skilled

Attributes: AGI 0, APP +1, BLD +1, CRE 0, FIT +1, INF 0, KNO 0, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL 0, STR +1, HEA +1
STA 35, UD 5, AD 7

Skills: Boating 3/+1, Combat Sense 1/+1, Firearms 1/0, Gunnery (ships cannons) 1/+1, Healing 1/0, Lore (Great Lakes) 2/0, Melee 2/0, Mythology 1/0, Navigation (Sea) 2/0, Notice 2/+1, Swimming 2/+1.

End of Hope

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

The Squats have shown me where the Great River flows onwards from the Onto. Perhaps I should say I have found where the Onto ends, for the river I have found flows out of the lake, not into it. It appears that the Lake Squats were correct when they told me that the Great River was not so great after all. Instead of flowing from one end of the world to the other, it barely flows five hundred klicks. Yet another of the Fatimas' lies; one meant to focus the Tribes on Vimary, keeping us close where they can control us.

I have heard the Squats call this river the Gullet, saying that here the Onto swallows all that it has collected. I understood their awe of this place when I first saw the falls. I will call them the Great Falls, for they truly deserve that name. The thunder of their passing greets you long before the ever-present cloud of their spray can be seen, and the clouds rise high into the air. I am glad I had Onto guides, who directed us ashore well upstream of the Falls, for the waters above them are a dangerous maze of rapids and whirlpools.

The Falls are almost one massive drop, with just a thin island separating the two flows. I watched them from the western shore and I have not gotten their drumming from my ears yet. Balt, my Onto guide, also showed me some of his peoples' secrets, for they regard the Falls as holy to the Sky Spirits. They make ritual sacrifices here, tying victims to logs and sending them down the Gullet. This is done, Balt tells me, to give sustenance to the Sky Spirits in their fight against the North Wind, thus ensuring a mild winter.

Wind and Water

Balt, Onto Squat, from the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

This is my people's holiest ground, the only reason we do not give the polluted waters of the Onto to the Oneida. These three altars are all mighty structures from the World Before. The ancestors built them to look at the majesty of the Great Falls, to watch the Sky Spirits drink. Every autumn my people gather here, including many from the other lakes as well, who moor their boats far below the Falls and make their way up ancient stairs. We decorate the towering altars with treasures we have found, made, or taken throughout the year. Then we light huge fires to crown the altars and feast into the night.

The next day we sacrifice for a mild winter. Sometimes we use captured enemies, sometimes criminals, but often we have volunteers, warriors crippled by age or wounds. When the sacrifices are done, we take our offerings from the altars and place them in the Cave of Winds. I cannot tell you where that is, as only the elders and Sky Warriors may go there. Rumor has it that it lies beneath the Falls. The place we no longer go is to the eastern shore, there was once an altar there but the Oneida have polluted it and the Sky Spirits no longer touch it.

Tower of Sacrifice

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

Well, my curiosity has led me astray again. I've seen first-hand why the Onto do not venture east of the Falls. When he said the Oneida have polluted the ancient altar, Balt wasn't explicit enough. The altar is a tower of rusting iron beams, built out into the swirling waters beneath the Falls. The place stinks of Oneida perversion, with rotted bodies decorating its sides and flayed faces sewn upon the floor. I don't think the Oneida come here often, but it does look as if they perform some ceremony at the altar. Thank the Goddess that I cannot imagine what.

Temple of Waters

From the memories of Amelia, Lightbringer Adventurer:

Near the Great Falls, on both shores, stand ancient buildings that suck in and spew forth thundering masses of water. I have never seen works from the World Before as large as this. Mighty fortresses of stone and steel, they are home to a strange tribe of Keepers, less sane than most. They are wary, fearful of Oneida raiders, but once I won their trust they showed the customary Keeper curiosity. They were hospitable, and inside those mighty fortifications I felt safe for the first time since fleeing Owaygo. The fortresses stink, though, a strangely metallic stench, and the air seems to cling to you. I would not wish to attack these places, for while the Keepers seem few in number, the fortresses are connected by systems of cables and moving platforms that allow them to reinforce threatened defenses.

These Keepers call themselves the Arc Priests, though I wonder if that is not just some conceit, for they smile smugly amongst themselves at that name. When I asked what they worshipped, they told me power and would say nothing more, but showed me row upon row of mighty machines that they said created the power of the World Before. While the machines gave me a strange tingling, I think they were pulling a traveler's leg. Unlike the Keepers on Vimary, who hide like rats, the Priests seem to prefer great whirring machines and bright lights. Lights are something of a fixation for them, and their fortresses light up the sky for kiks, a visible glow on the horizon for a day's travel from the Falls. A young Priest, called Marie, told me that some of their lights can blind a person and that they prove very useful for keeping the Oneida at bay.

The Priests have boats made of a strange bright metal and powered by coughing boxing spewing foul fumes. They called these boats Thunder Canoes, and I have never gone so fast in my life, but again they treated the name like a private joke. For all their power the Priests rarely leave their fortresses, even growing their food in strange pipes under their World Before lights. It is not just the Oneida they fear, for they talk of their brethren in a place called York who are besieged by monstrous creatures that sound much like Z'bri. I wonder if this was not the burning city I saw on the Onto's western shore.

The Priests have also shown me an ancient secret hidden in the ruins they call Katrin. The Great Falls are not the end of my journey, for our ancestors dug another river parallel to the Gullet, one the Priests call the Welan. It carries the waters down to the next Great River Lake, one called the Ere. My journey will continue. I have summoned a spirit to take my tale to you, my sisters of the Eighth Tribe, I will find our destined Land and then I will return to you with glad tidings.

Endless Road

Dream cry of Thero, Sea Eagle Spirit:

My duty has been done, my obligation discharged, the words of Amelia who Flies Before the Wind are spoken. Last I saw her was upon the waters of Ere, the wings of the Swift Seeking Arrow speeding before the Sky Spirits' breath. Seek her southward if you would find her.

Arc Priests

The Arc Priests are descendants of the engineers who took shelter in the massive hydro-electricity power plants lining the Niagara River. With endless power, machine shops, thick walls and miles of tunnels, they survived the Fall and prospered. While they have lost some of their ancestors' skills, the Arc Priests are masters of using techno-smithing to manipulate electricity, and use it to power all manner of wonders. The centuries of living inside, and eating hydroponically grown food, has weakened their immune systems. Thus much of their reclusiveness is to avoid infection rather than fear of their neighbors.

Highlights: Cautious, Industrious and Isolated.

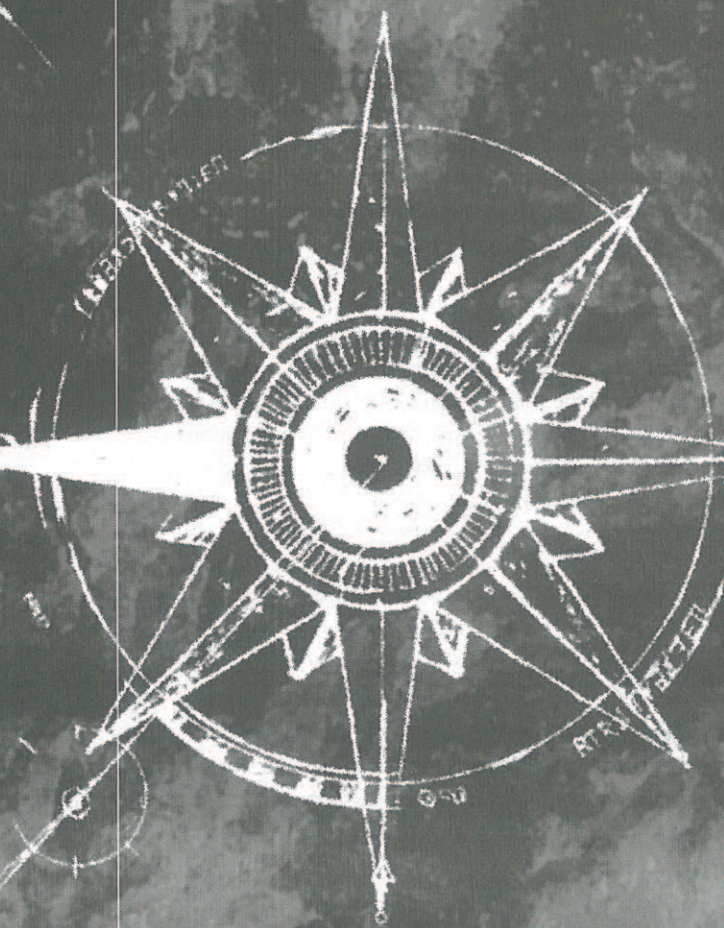
Attributes: AGI +1, APP 0, BLD 0, CRE -1, FIT -1, INF 0, KNO +1, PER 0, PSY 0, WIL 0, STR -1, HEA -1, STA 15, UD 2, AD 2

Skills: Boating 2/0, Demolition 2/+1, Drive 1/+1, Firearms 2/+1, Techlore (Electronics or Life Sciences) 3/+1, Tinker 2/-1.

Chapter Four: Lament of the West Wind

Summer doesn't die so much as fade away with the languid sighs of the West Wind. It is a rich season, and the Wind talks of repose and harvest, but it also carries the certain grief of those who are waiting for death. The Wind is like a mother's lament, knowing what the world will bring but unable to change her children's fate.

— Altara Ven, Member of the Eighth Tribe



Nev, Little Trickster of Autumn Caravan, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The Autumn Caravan is a harsh game, but it's perhaps the biggest joke we play on the wretched Squats and ugly Keepers. The presence of all those idiot Sheban Stiltwalkers limits the fun we can have, of course. The good thing is that since it's only outsiders we swindle, the Shebans don't mind our tricks like they do on Vimary, and care for nothing they don't see, if you get what I mean. The trading is a real challenge, for Adawe, the island in the Otter River where the Caravan goes, is beyond the Trickster's illusions. It's hard leaving Vimary, even harder when you feel your ties to the Trickster slip away from you. Our tricks take on a black side in the Outlands, showing the Squats our pain and despair. It hits the Shebans worse, for Dahlia encourages us to stand alone, not grovel in abject devotion like Tera Sheba demands.

The Stiltwalkers provide the great birch bark canoes and tireless rowers that propel us up the swift ways of the Otter. It surprises me, but there are actually more Shebans in the caravan than Dahlians. The Stiltwalkers are all skilled boatmen, and as fishermen they know the ways of the water better than most. It pains the stuffy judge types on Vimary no end that their brethren have to answer to us, even if the poor Stiltwalkers who go on the Caravan are treated as manure, no doubt to make the arrogant Judges feel better. Never the less, it amuses me to have the proud Shebans bowing to Dahlian traders. Don't get me wrong, without the Stiltwalkers the Autumn Caravan wouldn't happen. Even though we Dahlians send some of our best, if tarnished, traders, it wouldn't do us any good if everyone drowned, would it?

We always try for speed, and no one wishes to be away from Vimary longer than we have too, so we don't forage much on the trip upstream. After the trading is over we build huge rafts, and my mood picks up since we're getting ready to return to the Trickster. Sailing the cumbersome rafts, heavily loaded with our booty, down the Otter, becomes a race against the coming claws of winter. While riding on a raft in white water is dangerous, it can't compare to dealing with the Squats and Keepers at Adawe for pure unpleasantness. The wretches come with their furs, metal ingots and dried fish. We bring cloth, colored thread, glass beads, liquor and Magdalite concoctions. The latter are especially prized by the Squats; it's good practice to give them 'samples' while negotiating. Even the Keepers aren't immune. I have a few 'special' customers who are just dying to buy the little packets I bring from Xstasis.



Nev, Little Trickster of Autumn Caravan

Young and beautiful, Nev liked to dance, drink and sing into the early hours. As a result few took her seriously, thinking her a silly girl who needed to grow up. A few tart remarks to elders from other Tribes caused enough of a problem that Dahlia sent her to oversee the Autumn Caravan. Distraught Nev still tries to enjoy herself, using the trade in drugs and alcohol with the Squats to maintain her own habits. Her hidden despair and drug fogged malice are leading her to subconsciously provoke the Squats, deliberately stirring up trouble between the warring Horse Squat clans.

Highlights: Deceptive, duplicitous and suicidal.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +1, BLD 0, CRE +1, FIT 0, INF +2, KNO 0, PER +1, PSY -2, WIL -1, STR 0, HEA -1, STA 20, ULD 3, AD 4

Skills: Boating 1/+1, Dance 2/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Hagglng 2/+2, Melee 1/+1, Notice 2/+1, Sleight-of-Hand 1/+1, Streetwise 2/+2, Survival 1/0, Theatrics 2/+2, Trade 1/0.



Benji Costa'on. Tera Sheban Stiltwalker

Benji's placid and morose attitude as he works, a simple boatman for Dahlian traders, would surprise those who knew him as a hard-driving aid to High Judge Cylix Seth'on. Three seasons ago he had a falling-out with the High Judge and joined the Stilt Walkers. Cylix didn't want him to become a problem; however, and had him assigned to the Autumn Caravan. Now he has been disowned by his family and resignedly recognizes his life is over.

If not in this season then in the next, the Otter will take his life. At least it means he won't have to watch Cylix pervert the law any more.

Highlights: Competent, despairing and regretful.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -1, BLD 0, CRE 0, FIT +2, INF +1, KNO 0, PER +1, PSY -2, WIL 0, STR +1, HEA 0, STA 25, LD 4, AD 5

Skills: Athletics 1/+2, Boating 3/+1, Craft (Boatbuilding) 2/0, Dodge 1/+1, Law 1/0, Melee 1/+1, Navigation (Sea) 2/0, Notice 1/+1, Swimming 1/+2.

Split River

From the diary of Hombor Champlain, Yagan Mapmaker:

Beyond the turbulent waters where the Otter meets the Great River the going becomes a little easier, though the Otter remains a fast flowing, rocky and vicious river, prone to whirlpools, uncertain currents and hidden obstructions. Even with the skill of the Stiltwalkers there are a dozen places where the canoes and their cargo must be portaged around waterfalls or particularly dangerous rapids. The north bank is steep and rocky, but broken by many streams. The southern bank is mostly low and muddy, changing greatly from season to season as the spring floods carve and mold it to the Goddess' whim. These differences are but one facet of this split river.

South of the Otter, the land is a wide river plain, stretching for klicks to distant hills. The hills slowly close on the Otter, until, near Adawe, they stand only a single klick from the Otter's banks. The plains are much like Vimary itself, with verdant stands of trees hugging the many watercourses that run through the chest high grass and ruins from the World Before. The Dahlians have investigated many of these, stripping them of relics that they can trade to the Keepers. In places our ancestors built huge dams to block waters from flowing into the Otter. Vast and tall, these relics stand covered in moss and ferns, mighty waterfalls whose purpose is beyond our understanding. A pity the Ancients did not build locks like those they left on the Great River.

The land north of the Otter is broken and rocky, under the constant shadow of dark pines and spruces. The Dahlians seek to avoid this shore as much as they can, and I heartily agree with them. Even far westward, the soil of the north bank has a stench of corruption and death. Poor soil it is too, struggling to support the suffocating forest that strangles the sun over the northern hills. It does have some uses, I suppose. The Stiltwalkers, for instance, harvest birch bark from the darkly clad slopes, and Joanite hunters take great numbers of muskrat and beaver. Strangely, it seems that even our ancestors avoided the northern bank, for their ruins are few and far between.

Log jam at Duskfall

Benji Costa'on, Stiltwalker, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Only for Tera Sheba the Wise would I risk the waters of the Otter. You need good judgment to bring a canoe through the jagged rocks of the Otter's swirling waters. Built of layered birch bark and supple spruce reinforced with strong oak, a Stiltwalker boat normally lasts many years, but few are good for more than one trip up the Otter. If it were just the rocks it would not be a problem, for we judge the river well. However, the debris-laden water obscures the river bottom and often carries half-submerged logs capable of fatally breaching a hull.

The return trip is worse than interrogation by a High Judge. We build rafts made of dozens of fresh logs, binding logs with heavy hide straps. We use rough poles to direct the rafts, a task made harder by the trade goods piled upon them. The hardest part of the day is beaching the rafts on the low southern bank. Often the Otter drives the rafts onto the rocks. As the rafts jam up, some break apart under the pressure. I've seen strong boatmen crushed like eggs. That's what mistaken judgements get you.



Fire against the Night



Dashan, Fallen Dahlian Trader

Dashan was always a better thief than trader. Unfortunately he attracted a little too much attention to his tribe, and was sent on the Autumn Caravan. Despite being terrified at the loss of Dahlia, he traded profitably with the Squats, and stole them blind. A natural sneak, he soon discovered most of the Caravan's secrets, including Nev's drug addiction. Dashan is not an idiot, and he saw that Nev's drug dealing and other mischief was going to create major problems for the Caravan. When he tried to raise this back on Vimary, some of Nev's powerful Magdalite connections had him exiled. As Dashan sees it, they were sparing him a death sentence far from Vimary.

Highlights: Boyish, energetic and greedy.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +1, BLD 0, CRE +1, FIT 0, INF -1, KNO 0, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL 0, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 4, AD 4

Skills: Acrobatics 1/+1, Boating 1/+1, Disguise 1/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Haggling 2/-1 Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Human Perception 1/-1, Melee 1/+1, Notice 2/+1, Sleight-of-Hand 2/+1, Streetwise 2/-1, Survival 1/0, Theatrics 1/-1.

Dashan, Fallen Dahlian Trader, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I'm not sure how something so green can also be so black. The northern shore of the Otter is as thick a forest as any I've seen. The Jack Pines, Black Spruces, Balsam Fir and Tamaracks seem to be thriving, but something about them is twisted. When you walk amongst them, something I always try to avoid, you find that nothing grows beneath them. It's more than a lack of sun, for absolutely nothing grows there, not even lichen. Only where fire clears the land, or a fallen giant gouges a gap, does anything grow.

You can feel that the trees hate you, and each other. They're all fighting, struggling upward and trying to strangle each other, all so they can reach the light. In some places, the trees stand so thickly that when one dies, it can't fall. This means there are entire patches of forest where all the trees have died, but nothing new can grow. The dry leaves and needles that carpet the forest floor are a great danger, for the slightest spark will start a fire, and in a wind the blaze sweeps through the trees like a storm.

South of the Otter the land feels and looks different, though all the same trees can be found, especially the Tamarack, which the Stiltwalkers love to use for their rafts. The trees grow in stands, and you don't get ugly shadows either. Bright trees, like the Aspen and Poplar, along with groups of Elm and Maple, break up the stands; maybe that's the difference. The Maples are spectacular, for under the breath of the West Wind, their leaves burn like flames and they glow like brands in the darkening season.

The forage on the southern bank would feed all of Vimary. There are many fruit trees and vegetables in the plains. Apples, beets, blueberries, carrots, corn, pears, my stomach growls at the list! The Caravan never collects much on the trip north, but we load the rafts on the trip south with all that we can gather. The reason is simple; this food will help feed our families in the winter. Once you've been into the Outlands you can guarantee you'll be the last on the list when the Evans distribute the winter stores.

Creeping death

Gi Jess'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Only a fool Dahlian would say everywhere north of the Otter is forest. Along some rivers and streams, as well as where fire has burned, meadows exist. Not that it makes for easy passage, for under the sun an army of nasty plants spring up to defend the north bank's secrets. Brambles and barren blackberry are the worst of them; I have never seen thorns so long — they rip through heavy leather like knives. Every stream has walls of these clawing bushes defending the banks, and often they grow down to the waterline, making it hard to even moor a canoe.

In what narrow paths can be found through the trees other pleasures await you, like thistles, stinging nettles, poison ivy and burdock. Where there is more light it just gets worse. I've seen whole glades filled with waving thistles, a putridly colored variety I've seen nowhere else. Even plants that you'd normally welcome, like the wild climbing roses you occasionally find in ruins, bring no relief here. You'll find no flowers on the rose or fruit on the Hawthorne. Venture forth with us and you'll feel as if you've been skinned like a beaver by the time you make it back to the Otter.

So Silent the Lands

Irvette, Dahlian Trader, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

It's reason to thank the Trickster that we don't have to hunt to feed ourselves on the trip to Adawe. If we did, I think we'd starve halfway. On the north bank Serf settlements go quite a ways, and the Gek'roh roam the bank for a long way westward. On the southern shore the lands are lush and game is more plentiful, but it seems reluctant to come near the river. Whether this is fear of the Z'bri, or some other taint, I cannot say, but it is not till after the Silent City that the southern shore has easy hunting.

In the Otter itself you can always find a meal, as the trout run so thickly that you can pull three or four on board in an hour. Other fish can be found too, but nothing tastes quite as good as trout, I just wish I was eating it over a table in the Bazaar, not in the Outlands far from my family. I'll never grow fat and sleek from feeding on the trout like the many otters, not while I pine for Dahlia. If they had the time, the Rangers could take many more furs than they do, for the otter, mink and muskrat seem inexhaustible.

The population of foxes and raccoons is even greater. The Rangers say the critters live on the many small birds that throng in the southern woodlands, but what do I care about that? What I would care for is the killing I would make if I could take even a small tithe of these vermin. Cheap furs are useful for trade to the poor, the Fallen and the Squats. The only woodland birds that interest me, and for eating, not trade, are the partridges and pheasants that the Rangers bring back from patrols.

On the upper northern shore nothing much lives. The occasional pack of starved-looking wolves or rabid-looking raccoon can be seen, but usually nothing larger than a rat disturbs the shadows. According to the Horse Squats, the forest turns to open woodlands and plains northwest of Adawe. Up there, they say that deer and moose are numerous, and the rivers run thick with salmon. While I am loath to believe anything a Squat says, it can't be denied that they come to Adawe well-fed. I just wish I knew where they get their horses. If I could manage to get some to Vimary the Joanites would pay a good steel sword for each.

Dark Shapes beneath the Boughs

Play, Otter Spirit, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

This is my river, Man. The water's fresh and cool and the fish are plump and juicy, a good place for my siblings and I to be. When you come by, unclean spirit beasts follow you. Sometimes I have lain in the water and watched your canoes land on their bank. All wet and bloody the men become, eaten and their bones tossed into the river, good food for the fishes. The dull ones who run with the spirit beasts aren't good for the fishes; their dens pollute the waters. Some spirit beasts swim in our waters, they go after your canoes. The spirit beasts also catch a few of my siblings; they don't play any more, all lost to us.

The spirit beasts don't like to go upstream, up there they seem alone. I've seen some just curl up and die. Other creatures there are though, creatures with no names I know, for they come not into the water. I have not seen them, you will not see them, but they are there, lurking, waiting, and watching. You are clever, Man, maybe you can discover what they do. Sometimes the eyes seem hungry, other times not. It might be the eyes that leave the bodies without skin and blood, hanging in trees, but then it might not.



Thieving savages

Nev, Little Trickster of Autumn Caravan, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The lower Otter seems uninhabited but for a few scattered Serf settlements on the northern bank. There are Squats on the southern shore, but they don't come near the Otter, or at least, not where we can see them. As the Caravan travels further westward robbers become a problem, especially when we enter the range of the Horse Squats. They take to theft and rape like Shebans to prudery, and if it wasn't for the vigilance of the Rangers, I doubt the Caravan would ever get to Adawe.

The Horse Squats spend summer to the north of the Otter, leaving when the West Wind warns of the coming winter. They come to Adawe on their way south, their horses and travois heavily loaded with food and furs. Abundance doesn't stop them trying to steal, both from each other and the Caravan. The most despicable thing is the way they raid other clans to steal women. A disgusting habit, of a truly disgusting people, and I take special pleasure in setting them against one another while we're on Adawe.

The island is meant to be under truce, but a few shrewd words and appropriate drugs, and these savages would eat their own children. Of course this also means it isn't unusual for groups of them to attack us, and we lose people every year. We find most of them. The lying and deceitful scoundrels always claim their attacks are to reclaim property we've stolen. The truth is that their raids are out-and-out theft, because those morons don't have the wits to realize that we have actually robbed them.

There are other Squats who come to trade at Adawe, called the Smoke People. They row down the Otter in bark canoes and dress in stinking hides. I don't know how stupid these fools think we are, since any Dahlian would pick them as Keepers as soon as they open their mouths. Still we don't reveal we're onto their little fraud. Every advantage you have over those you trade with is something to be cherished.

People of Smoke

Irvette, Dahlian Trader, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I find the People of Smoke, as these Keepers name themselves, endlessly interesting. Partly that's my greed, and partially the irony of the name. Then again, talk of smoke and mirrors is something only a Dahlian would understand. It's a bad idea on their part. The Horse Squats ignore them, but for trading food and furs or for basic blacksmithing work. When you considering how treacherous and dangerous the Horse Squats are, pretending to have nothing worth stealing isn't a bad idea. Of course the fact that the Horse Squats are hopeless idiots makes the deception much easier.

I'd love to know where these Keepers come from, for they have very good steel. The Joanites I trade it to in Vimary say they've seen none better. The false Squats also trade blades forged from a metal colored like a rainbow, a metal the Joanites cannot name. One or two blades reach Adawe every season, and when offered one you pay the Keepers whatever they demand, even if that price is Horse Squat infants. These blades can score tempered steel, and will cut through a Beast like it was Evan butter.

Their other trade goods are of the steel I mentioned, an alloy, or so the Joanites call it, of great strength and endurance. One rather flexible Swordsmith I know, thinks the Keepers have a special forging technique. He's offered me a discounted supply of items made of from this alloy, if I can gain the secret for him. Next season it seems a little kidnapping is in order.

Silent City

Benji Costa'on, Sheban Stiltwalker, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

About halfway to Adawe, the ruins of an ancient city lie on the south bank, around the mouth of a small river. Only the Keepers might know what this place was once called, for now it lies abandoned in a swamp. I call it the Silent City, for even the rushing river drops to a murmur, deserted by birds and fish alike. I cannot explain why this is so, but I advise you that the water here shouldn't be drunk. I'd prefer we could simply row past this dead and cursed place, even the greedy Dahlians aren't fool enough to flaunt the law here, but our ancestors' legacy is not so easily escaped. They built numerous bridges across the Otter, all of which have collapsed, so we are forced to portage around the rapids formed by the rubble.

At night the Silent City becomes truly disturbing, the sort of place the Laws of Tera Sheba were meant to protect us all from. Parts of the ruins glow with an unearthly green light, but if you go searching you will never find the source. If this were not bad enough, spirits of the dead plague your dreams. Only in the abandoned camps on Vimary have I found spirits as tortured as these. Whatever fate took the Silent City, the spirits of its people linger, screaming faces and burning bodies twisting in a fierce wind only they can feel. The West Wind sighs through the ruins like a lament, but the only sounds are the muffled screams of your companions as they wake from nightmares.

Some say that it is all due to the Z'bri tower near the river, but even the plants are twisted and warped. In the swampy ground there are many sickly cedars and willows, while a few stunted maples and birches stand on higher ground. All are diseased, their bark crumbling, leaves small and wizened, and none seem to live more than few years before they join the silent ranks of deadwood. Beyond the city the birches, pines and spruces grow straight and strong, and I don't need an advocate to tell me to stay away from here. The Silent City is the only place on the Otter where we prefer to camp on the western bank. Better to be risk the Gek'roh than whatever silences that place.

Spire of Flesh

Gi Jess'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

No one likes the time it takes to get past the Silent City. The silence grates on you after a while and the Dahlians squawk like chickens, hiding their fear in stupid banter. At least the Stiltwalkers have the backbone to keep quiet. My guards and I watch carefully for Gek'roh; they always attack us here, but never on the eastern bank. I wonder if this has to do with the unsightly tower that stands on a high hill above the river.

It's Z'bri for certain, nearly a hundred meters high and made of yellowed bone bound by translucent, living flesh. There is no gate, and our attempts to hack a breach never get through the walls, for the wounds we hew simply heal overnight. I stood guard overnight to see how it healed. It was bizarre; animals just marched up, entered the wound and were absorbed, the ghastly parade only finishing when the gash was healed. I'm not sure if any Z'bri even live here, if they do they're as quiet as the dead. This tower is old, I can't say why I think so, it just gives that feeling. So maybe it has stood empty since the Fatimas rose and led the overthrow of the camps.



Neiklot, Tibor's Lieutenant

Neiklot stood at Tibor's right hand during the camps. Steeped in debauched pleasures and lost in his dark dreams, Neiklot was surprised by the Baron's treachery, but managed to escape. He forced his dying host to travel for many days.

Finally, after crossing the Otter, Neiklot's host-body died. His spirit would not die, however, even though he was poisoned by a venom that tied his spirit to the dying Serf he wore. So Neiklot drew animals to him as he sank into a fitful sleep, and built a living cocoon. This is where he remains today, healing within the Spire of Flesh.

Atmosphere: Dreaming, potent, and watchful.

Attributes: AGI -5, APP -2, BLD +10, CRE +1, FIT +4, INF -5, KNO -1, PER +1, PSY 0, WIL +4, STR +7, HEA +4, STA 65, UD -, AD -.

Skills: Sundering (All aspects) 4.

4. Lament of the West Wind

Black River

Homa, Horse Squat Trapper, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Near Adawe is a river as black as the moonless night. I have trapped the rivers beyond Adawe all my years, but never the Black River. You will not see the Black River's water mixed in the Otter, as the black fades away, but I'll not drink downstream of Adawe; not even a medicine woman could make me do that. The water is heavy, more like pitch than mud, and while the northern rivers flow rough and rapid, swirling and pouring over high falls, the Black River smothers sound like it was an unwanted babe.

Chalk Faces

Calling themselves the Snow Spirit People, this tribe of Squats is closely attached to the River of Dreams.

Even while awake they can see the spirit world around them, and they

treat spirits as more real than the physical world. They spend summer camped by the many lakes north of the Otter before venturing north on their dog sleds when the snows

cover the land. They have no weapons beyond hunting bows and spears, relying on their spiritual rituals to defend themselves. Their language has religious significance and they do not speak it front of strangers, keeping it pure.

Highlights: Friendly, silent and intelligent.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -1, BLD +1, CRE +1, FIT +1, INF -1, KNO 0, PER 0, PSY +1, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA +1, STA 30, UID 5, AD 5

Skills: Animal Care 2/0, Animal Handling 2/+1, Boating 1/0, Camouflage 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+1, Healing 1/0, Herbalism 1/0, Human Perception 1/+1, Lore (Northlands) 2/0, Notice 1/0, Ritual 2/0, Survival 2/+1, Throwing 1/+1.

We do not go east of this River. It is the border of our range, and beyond is bad medicine country. All the way from Tiskagin the river flows, from the Round Lakes and poisoned lands. Many times as we ride southward for the winter we find bodies along the Black River. Mighty creatures like none that stalk our lands. Some young fools have cut trophies from the bodies, but I'll have none carry such bad medicine into my camp. These creatures have no spirits; when the medicine women go searching all they hear is silence. The Hawk will not speak of them. Nor will the Raccoon or the Wolf.

Your Tribes took their canoes up the Black River once. I remember that season well; there was great laughter in our tents when so few came back. Your warriors are not so mighty that they could face the Black River. They took water with them, but still some became ill, and those who ate game from near the Black River died. I have seen a rabbit caught near the black waters whose innards were filled with lesions and boils. I know your people went as far as the lakes, but turned tail before they saw Tiskagin.

Chalk Faces

Dashan, Fallen Dahlian Trader, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I remember that cursed Black River — I still thank Dahlia's mask I didn't die on it. Of the twenty who left, only seven of us returned to Adawe. We only went because Nev, the greedy little sow, had heard a Horse Squat call the source of the river the Mother of all Metals, as if one of the stinking Squats would know metal from manure. Not all the lakes share the river's poison, but the others sound like that one Mika Guri'on talks of in the Eastern Hills. These black lakes are fetid pits; the fumes that rise off them make the eyes water and the stomach turn. The good lakes are absolutely blue-clear, as clean as the black lakes are filthy.

Among the northernmost lakes we found some Squats. I don't know what to make of these Squats. They all had their faces painted with chalk, which made their eyes seem like deep pools surrounded by snow. After the weeks on the Black River I wasn't really interested in more surprises, but we were desperate for food. The strangest thing of all was that when I went to their camp to trade for food — the bloody Joanites and Stiltwalkers said I had to do it as I was the Dahlian — the Squats didn't speak to me. They don't seem to speak to each other, either; everything is done in a simple sign language. They did trade food with us, though, and were quite friendly. One little hunter seemed to take a particular liking to me. I'll be exiled again as a liar if the little runt didn't start to play tricks on me. Nothing dangerous, and as any Dahlian would, I returned the favor. He seemed to enjoy it.

Marsh Rot

Nev, Little Trickster of Autumn Caravan, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I can't say I like the Stiltwalkers. They're arrogant and prudish, just like their better-regarded sisters. Not that I reject all of Tera Sheba's laws, I'm no Fallen fool. I mean, who could disagree that the Outlands are unclean? Diseases that never appear on Vimary strike down people on the Caravan, and the lucky ones die quickly. The worst is the Marsh Rot. It doesn't seem to lurk in any one place along the Otter; it just appears, striking down one or two people before fading away into the wilderness. Some seasons, however, it stalks the Caravan and dozens die. Only our return to Vimary and the Fatimas' blessing saves any of us.

It starts as a stomachache, something that you might not even mention. If it is Marsh Rot, though, the ache slowly gets worse, until you start vomiting and lose control of your bowels. The victims can't keep anything down, and the stench is appalling as they bring forth their rotting guts. The screams echo in your dreams, I doubt the Z'bri could inflict pain like this. Eventually the victim dies, sometimes of thirst, but often the pain is too great and they die of agony. When we realize someone is infected, not just by Marsh Rot, but by anything, we leave them behind. Trying to help merely infects more of the Caravan. If we were not lost in this terrible place the Fatimas would help us, but we are outside their blessings, and worse still, those who die out here know their souls are lost forever.

Necklace of Stones

Flor, Horse Squat Medicine Women, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

We traded here for many seasons before your Tribes came. Said the Trickster sent them. That may be, for you have tricked us surely enough. You bring many good things to Adawe. Cloth, bright beads and boots that last many seasons. If this were all, I would not make sign against dark spirits when you entered my tent. Your traders carry firewater and the dust of flowers, trade it to our young warriors. This makes them forget their families, their duties and the needs of the coming winter. When some tried to stop your traders, the two-faced ones stirred anger amongst the clans. Warriors dying over nothing but pretty words.

We are a fighting people; the spirits of Hawk, Horse and Wolf ride with us. Never would we let another clan eat from our game or drink from our streams. This is honorable battle and scars are well worn, pleasing to the spirits. Now some clan chiefs preen themselves like young girls, vain from your honeyed words and drunk on your presents. Good furs are given for nothing but a few hours high. This will not feed children when the North Wind blows snows upon the tents. Worse still are the clans who lose furs to the raids of others. This is not honorable battle, not the taking furs rightfully hunted. Yet what do these fallen warriors care, as long as it brings them more liquor or powder?

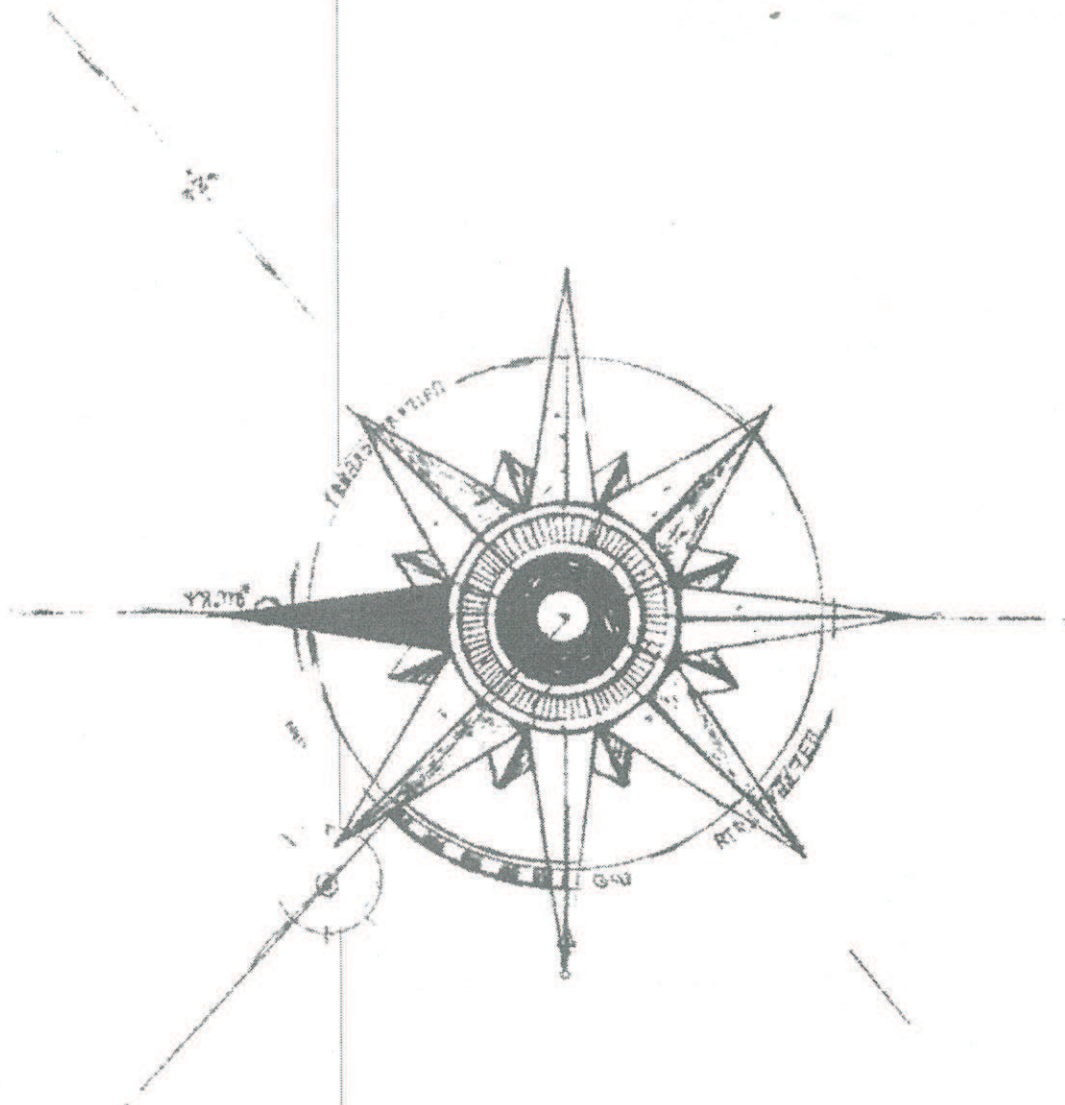
It is you, not us, who will be destroyed, for the clan spirits are speaking hot words. Your traders underestimate us. Not a few raiders will you face, but the anger of the spirits burning in a hundred hundred breasts. Our warriors will sweep your Caravan from Adawe, and the Otter will run red with your life's blood. Soon the storm will come. Soon.





Ever-dying Lands

Dark the earth where our ancestors toiled,
Mighty the works they wrought in bright steel,
Red was the blood they spilt in their wars,
Off to the west, the wind sang to me,
Lie the dark places our ancestors left,
Potent weapons to break the Beasts' hold.



The Keeper's Tale

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

I have never been the most spiritual of people, but autumn has always been my season. Plans, fights, lovers and money all come my way when the trees turn. The West Wind comes to me, a voice whispering of a warrior's death, of all the warriors who have died, lamenting and praising their sacrifice. It disturbs my dreams, but I have never been able to work out what it wanted of me until one night in Theren's Den.

There was a Keeper spouting on, the way they do. The usual inane nonsense about the World Before, about things only they care about anymore, but worse than usual because she was drunk. Then, as I sat with my friend smoking some Magdalite concoction, I heard the word 'Tiskagin' and the Den fell away around me. I flew over a sprawling and blasted land, where great structures of rusted steel stood like dead trees, the only landmarks in the wasteland. Marching forth, like new life returning from the dead past, were legions of mighty warriors in shining armor, wielding glittering swords. They marched beneath the banners of the Eighth Tribe, marched eastward to Vimary.



Good Medicine

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

It is their corruption that makes the Dahlians the easiest of the Seven Tribes to deal with, and those sent on the Autumn Caravan are the most corrupt you'll find outside of Hom. Which is lucky, because Den-Hades said that I should follow my dream to the source of the West Wind, and joining the Autumn Caravan was the easiest option. Once I reached Adawe I tried to arrange passage further west with the Squats who came from further up the Otter, the ones the Dahlians call the Smoke Squats. An unfriendly and uncooperative group they are, too. Not only would they not discuss passage, they wouldn't even sell me one of their canoes. After a few days they would not speak to me at all, casting me suspicious looks whenever I happened by.

The Horse Squats proved far more hospitable when I approached them about buying a horse. Still, none would part with one of their prized possessions. A clan chief, called Serman, whom I got to know quite well, offered to let me ride with his people as they journeyed southward to their wintering grounds. More importantly, he offered to sell me a horse after they had reached the wintering grounds. It wasn't a direct route, but was better than returning to Vimary empty-handed. Negotiations took many days, as the Horse Squats love to haggle. Serman wanted a large iron pot, a steel axe head and knife, a dozen arrowheads and a large skin of Evan spirits. I didn't mind the weapons or utensils, but if you ever see Horse Squats on Tribal liquor you'll know why I refused him a skin. I'd no desire to ride with a violent drunkard.

Eventually we agreed on the weapons, the pot and a dyed bridle for his horse. It cost me everything I'd scrounged to bring with me, but it was worth it for food, guidance and a horse. As I waited for the Autumn Caravan to leave, the Smoke People paid me a visit. A group of them, led by an old man I presumed to be an elder, accosted me. They weren't subtle, hefting weapons while the old man threatened me. Said if I was found on his people's land I'd die in a slow and unpleasant way. I assured them my intention was to travel southward with the Horse Squats and they left me alone.

Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer

Luther was born a Magdalite, but his nature was too aggressive and violent for his Tribe to accept. While working as a guard in a brothel he beat a customer to death, barely escaping to Hom ahead of the Watch. Luther found his true calling when he joined the Jackers. Properly directed and given an outlet for his violent tendencies, Luther became a much calmer, though no more intelligent, man. Luther has one central belief, which is that the power of the Eighth Tribe can defeat the Z'bri. The only thing he feels is missing is the equipment necessary for them to carry out this momentous duty.

Highlights: Aggressive, determined and dim.

Attributes: AGI 0, APP 0, BLD +3, CRE -1, FIT +1, INF 0, KNO -1, PER 0, PSY +1, WIL +1, STR +2, HEA +1, STA 30, UD 10, AD 11

Skills: Archery 1/0, Athletics 2/+1, Boating 1/0, Combat Sense 2/0, Craft (Boat building) 1/-1, Dreaming 1/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/0, Healing 1/0, Intimidate 2/+3, Melee 2/0, Navigation (land) 2/0, Notice 1/0, Survival 2/+1.

Riders with the Spirits

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

The Horse Squats worship the sky, which they call the Plains Above, and honor their clan spirit. They believe that they are simply poor reflections of perfect spirits that hunt in the endless paradise of blue over their heads. Their shamans are powerless frauds, and I've had to hold back my mirth when watching them perform 'ceremonies' that are no more than carnival tricks. The medicine women are a different matter, but they say little to the menfolk. Yet these are a good people, not one with any love for the Tribes, but a good people nevertheless. They are attached to their clans, and never take more than the land can sustain.

The Dahlians talk of the Riders fighting each other, but these contests are mostly bloodless demonstrations of bravery. Still, they are fine cavalry and I would not want to fight them, especially not on their own land. Also, the comments made to me about their treatment of women aren't right. They raid for wives, but only after clan elders have prearranged the marriage. After all, as Serman said, you can't expect a woman to marry a warrior who was not willing to risk her brothers' rage to steal her away.

Riders with the Spirits

The Riders are a nomadic people who travel between the southern Great River Lake and the lowlands north of the Otter River. Whilst not warlike, they have a warrior culture with a strong honor system. They have a growing hatred of the Seven Tribes, with whom they trade with at Adawe. They are constantly cheated by the Dahlians, while the effects of Evan liquor and Magdalite drugs are fissuring their society. Eventually this anger is likely to cause a massacre of the Autumn Caravan. Only a few Riders stop at Adawe, the rest keeping travelling, and so the Tribes believe the Riders are far fewer than they actually are.

Highlights: Honorable, tempestuous and superstitious.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +1, BLD +1, CRE -1, FIT 0, INF 0, KNO -1, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL -2, STR 0, HEA -1, STA 20, UD 4, AD 5

Skills: Animal care 2/-1, Animal Handling 2/-1, Archery 2/+1, Combat sense 1/+1, Dodge 1/+1, Melee 1/+1, Navigation (Land) 1/-1, Notice 1/+1, Riding 3/+1, Sneak 1/+1, Survival 2/0.

Travel to Big Water

Serman, Falcon Clan Chief, from the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

Beneath the Otter the land is not good for horses. It is broken, hills split by streams and lakes. Traveling is only possible because our clan spirits have shown us many paths; some are of ancient black stone and run straight like arrows. As broken clouds may bring rain, this land brings our hunters deer and boar amongst the trees, and geese and ducks on the lakes. The women find meals of nuts and fruit in the trees' golden-red tresses. Fording the many streams is dangerous; horses often break legs on the rocks. If the clan spirit is not with you, it can take many days to find a safe place to cross, for the hills are such that what you seek can be hidden just out of sight.

As we travel southward the waters spread out. The land is not less rocky, just more wet. Three weeks from the Otter lie huge lakes; the land there becomes too wet for horses, and we must turn eastward. In the spring, when we return to the northlands, the clans must hurry past this land before spring thaw. If not, floods will trap you for many weeks. The wetlands are bad medicine country. The tribes upon the Great Water call those lands the Sico Swamp, and even in dry seasons it comes to within sight of the Great Water. Before the clans turned southward again, we trade with the Renton. These are not Great Water squats, but are good friends to the clans.

The lands near the Great Water have few rocks, but far southward there lies a mighty wall of stone. Beneath this wall are our wintering lands, the place of fruit trees. There is good country, good brown soil, with few trees, plenty of space for our horses to run. As we journey southward, we keep to the edge of the bad medicine country, away from the Great Water. This is good for us, best to stay away from the smoke as long as possible. Not grass fires, autumn rains mean few fires sweep the grass. I have never seen what flames make the smoke, and I have no wish to. Only a fool does not fear the smoking country. Even the spirits fear that place, and the Sky is hidden from the land.

Blood Passage

Erieau, Falcon Spirit, from the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

Look out upon the Riders With the Spirits. See how many thousands there are. A strong people, a true people, loyal to their clansmen, a good people you would say. Then you would say wrong, for the Riders are a disgrace to their ancestors. The purpose of the great moot at this hill, the Mond, is craven dishonor. The ruins of a mighty city lie here, and soon the Riders will become but a memory. I wish a better fate for my clan, but smoke and drink have replaced faith.

The fall of the Riders is not why I am here. I am here for you, Man from the north. Your soul is pure, your purpose noble, your heart seeks only for others. This pleases me. Around the moot, have you seen young warriors wearing wreaths of autumn leaves? These are the sacrifice, the ultimate sign of the Riders' debasement. On the Mond is a cage made of bone, carved with strange sigils. That place is your fate, Pure-Heart, for Serman will betray you, as he has betrayed his ancestors and I.

Serman wishes for you to pay the price of his fear. A fell price it is — a young warrior from every clan — and for what? The right to winter undisturbed! What right is that? A generation ago my clan would have won it with the blood of their enemies, not suppliant sacrifice. This is why I have come to warn you. None shall say my clan slew its guest, even before the Enemies of the Sky.

You have seen the smoke to the east, Pure-Heart? It rises from a wall of fire that surrounds hidden lands. The Enemies of the Sky rule there, and by their will the smoke blocks the sky. Fear of this place has brought the Riders to disgrace. Fear of the monstrous beasts that serve the Enemies of the Sky. Not all are afraid though. Some of the clans are still young and strong. Yet that is not your fight, Man. Be gone from the River of Dreams, leave the Riders. You will find your way through the Sico Swamp. All I ask is that you slay the cur, Serman, before you leave.

Good Medicine

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

Serman's death was sweet revenge, and with his best horse beneath me I felt much better about heading off on my own. I had to flee the Falcon clan, but it also put me as far from that cursed Mond as possible. I'll never be the rider that the Horse Squats are, but once I reached the swamp they never had a chance to find me. Their attempts to follow me into the murky waters showed how little skill they have away from their horses. They stopped even trying to follow me when the water deepened.

My trek through the Sico wasn't pleasant. Leeches, stinging insects, stinking mud that tried to suck you down and a dozen other dangers seemed to lie round every bend. At the center of the swamp are a series of placid lakes. I made a simple raft of bound reeds, and crossed on that. It didn't keep me dry, but it sufficed to carry me on the placid pools and rivulets of the swamp. At least food wasn't a problem, for fish and birds abound. The swamp's green ways are a tangled mix of willows, cedars, birches and bog oaks, all bound by vines, mosses, lilies and other thick-growing plants. Nor is the water deep, except in the lakes. Indeed, the water is so shallow that in places I had to tow my raft as I slogged through waist-deep mud. The rocky hills, which occasionally provided a dry place to sleep, seemed like Xstasis after a day in the mud.

Eventually I found a wide current, almost a river within the swamp itself, and on occasion gray stone banks rose up around it, even though it was surrounded by water. In other places massive gates of rusted iron sat open along its path. Whatever the reason, the flow soon drifted me to the shores of a massive lake, at least as large as the Great River Lake. With a little effort I hunted until my pack bulged with smoked fish, good supplies for the long trip north.

Beachcombing

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

The Sico swamp drains into a vast bay, part of a lake that stretches beyond the horizon. The coastline was a series of beaches and islands, heading away to the northwest, a natural pathway to where the West Wind calls. The shore was low, though rocky uplands, which seem to make up the entire country north to the Otter, started a few scant kliks inland. Little water flowed into the lake, though streams are plentiful and I have seen lakes further inland. Most rivers seemed to flow eastward, towards the Sico, rather than into the lake. A feature of the rocky ground perhaps, but the dry going was very welcome. During my days in the swamp my feet had started to swell, the skin peeling off from the constant wet.

The shore is good land, but exposed. All the trees showed the signs of their struggle against the wind. Twice during my trek fierce storms blew in, whipping the waves up higher than houses and sending them crashing inland. Some of the islands are quite large, covered by scrub and the occasional wind-bent tree. On their leeward side large marshes grow, providing a home to many birds, a source of food only to those with a boat. The beaches themselves are interesting, for the lake throws up many curios, including middens of shells that showed I was not the only person to have walked those shores. Perhaps the others came from the strange boats I saw upon the lake, for no trails went far inland.

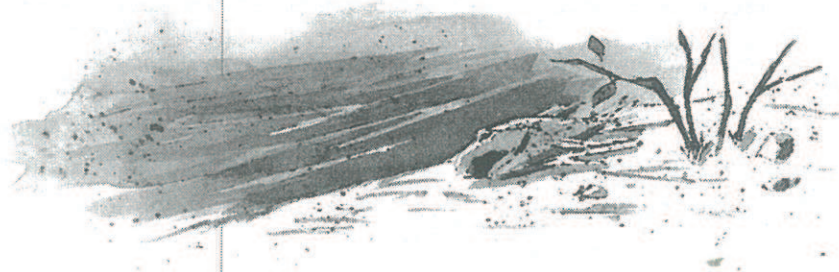
Place of Four Waters

Ivor, NovoHuron Trader, from the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

So you wish for information. . . I'm sure that can be arranged, but it will cost you your sword. If you head northwest, you'll find four rivers flow into the Jorena, this bay whose shore you're walking on now. You can't miss the place for the rivers create a wide marsh, one full of dangerous mud banks. This time of year most of the birds are gone, but earlier the Four River marsh teems with them. Now if you wish to head westward you should follow the coast, but if you seek this fabled land of dust you've spoken of, I'd go inland. I can assure you that no land of dust lies near the coast.

I'll tell you my best guess — follow the twin rivers. You'll soon see which of the four rivers I mean, for both have a strange taste and streaks of red and blue silt float in them. I've been up those rivers in my younger days, hunting for hides and looking for timber. They're not truly two rivers, just one split by a large rocky ridge for many kliks. Their source is a good-sized lake, no surprise there, and unless you eat or drink from it, its waters and marshes seem like those of any other lake. If you look long enough you'll find places where this lake lies brown, gray and dead. Whole schools of fish float on the surface, bloated and stinking. Drink or eat here and you might well die. Another river flows to the northeast, but I've no idea where it goes.

The pollution here all flows in from the one river, its surface glittering like a rainbow, and nothing grows or moves in its flow. A metallic stink hangs in the air around it, my eyes watered from the river's reek. I'm no scholar, but I don't doubt that this river leads from some unholy place where our ancestors did vile things. I'd say if you're looking for a land destroyed, then this river would no doubt lead you there. Some free advice, stay away from corrupted earth. You can die just from walking on it. You'll not be dissuaded, then? Well, may the Sky Spirits watch over you.



Iron Lands

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

The tainted river I followed led me into a land like no other, the land from my dream. Nothing lived at all. Above the dust only the broken skeletons of trees and ruins from the World Before stood to stare at the empty sky. The few lakes steamed and bubbled like kettles, more mud than water. I couldn't approach too closely, for the fumes made my head swim. Huge holes had been dug in the earth, kliks deep and wide. I often saw tall structures all made from rusting iron, swaying in the disturbed West Wind. Even birds don't fly over this blasted and doomed land. In places huge cracks spewed acrid black smoke and steam into the air. This smoke hung in the valleys like fog, and I avoided these places like plague houses. I might not be smart, but I'm not stupid.

Some of the iron towers were huge complexes of pipes, vast halls, great barrels and things even less understandable. Near one fire spat at me, and as I walked past another the earth erupted in a fearful concussion. After that I gave them all a wide berth. Everything looked deserted, but I wonder if this was always the case, for in places I could swear the towers looked deliberately fortified. If these were the places my dream spoke of, then I knew I had to keep searching, for somewhere there would be one that still had fire burning in its belly. It took more weeks than the season gave me before I found what I wanted. I had to make too many trips out of the devastation to find water and food, always having to retrace my steps. It mattered little that I had no horse, for a horse would have needed too much water to be useful.

Tiskagin

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

I found the exact place I sought — Tiskagin. The lands around this lake were as desolate as those to the southwest. Good land lies near, though; you can tell from the green smudge that stains the northeastern horizon. Tiskagin itself is clean, for reasons that I suspect only the Goddess could answer. The Otter flows from this lake, and I'd had to travel far to reach it. A forest of iron towers lies upon Tiskagin's shore, the air ringing with the working of mighty machines, and behind makeshift walls of iron plates was a vast building made of gray stone and steel. Never have I seen anything so large; what a place of power it must have been. The land beyond the wall was littered with the ruins of what were once massive works. All around were huge roads, deep pits and high dams, and over everything a reek of smoke and disease that has lasted centuries.

I made no attempt to approach these Towers too closely. I had no wish to discover what dangers this place posed. My shouts got no attention; I doubt whether they were even heard over the din that echoed over all the lands around the towers. Someone must have seen me though, for as I camped by Tiskagin that night, the land around me erupted into howls and light, as a dozen strange creatures came roaring at me out of the night. They howled like no animal I have ever heard, and their single eyes cast light like a small sun. Strange men rode on their backs, but nothing scares me much, and my axe chopped two from their saddles before I was dragged to the ground by a heavy net. Before I could struggle free helmeted men approached, and, wielding batons that arced like lightning, beat consciousness from me.

4. Lament of the West Wind

Metal Wolves

A small group of Bury Keepers with carefully maintained Keeper dirtbikes, the Metal Wolves scour the desert looking for valuable salvage. Always in need of supplies, the Wolves are willing to do Bury's dirty work in return for parts and fuel. This work involves traveling as guards to Adawe every season, and mounting patrols amongst the abandoned facilities. The Wolves are not good fighters, not even realizing that their cattle prods are not terribly effective in a fight, but the appearance of their dirtbikes scares off most attackers. For taking prisoners they have developed the tactic of stringing heavy nets between two speeding motorcycles.

Highlights: Nervous, young and proud.

Attributes: AGI 0, APP -1, BLD -1, CRE +1, FIT 0, INF -1, KNO +2, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL +1, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, ULD 2, AD 3

Skills: Camouflage 2/+1, Demolitions 1/+2, Dodge 1/0, Drive 2/0, Intimidate 1/-1, Lore (Pollution Desert) 2/+2, Melee 1/0, Notice 2/+1, Sneak 1/0, Tactics 1/+1, Techlore (choose one) 1/+2, Tinker 2/+1.

Pit Town

Henry, Bury Keeper, from the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

Glad to see you awake, young man. I have to say that I'm impressed that you've gotten here. Don't recognize me? Not surprised. I sometimes don't recognize myself when I'm dressed up to look like an uncivilized barbarian. I was the guy who threatened you on Adawe. Now you remember! I wish you'd remembered what I said. Now you've placed us in an invidious position. Threats aside, we aren't a violent people. The pollution desert keeps us safe and isolated, so you're going to be held here for a little while, at least until the Demos can work out what to do with you. Who? The Demos is our council. They rule Pit Town.

Bury Keepers

Descended from mine workers from the World Before, the Bury Keepers have kept alive some of the worst aspects of their ancestor's technology. Long isolation in their desert towers has made them xenophobic, and they deal with the outside world only because they must. Ironically their activities have prevented the land around the ancient mines and refineries from cleansing itself, and they have to trade with Squats for much of their food. Even their techno-smithing is corrupted; every use of it leaves something twisted. Birth defects have culled their numbers, and they are slowly killing themselves with poisons.

Highlights: Diseased, knowledgeable and paranoid.

Attributes: AGI -1, APP -1, BLD -1, CRE +1, FIT -1, INF 0, KNO +1, PER 0, PSY -1, WIL +1, STR -1, HEA -1, STA 20, UD 1, AD 1

Skills: Demolitions 1/+1, Firearms 1/-1, Notice 1/0, Survival 1/-1, Techlore (Earth Sciences) 2/+1, Techlore (choose one) 1/+1, Throwing 1/-1, Tinker 2/+1.

I've heard what you told the others, about why you've come here and all of that. Interesting idea, but not my problem. Can I get you anything to make you more comfortable? You don't like the smell? Sorry, can't do anything about that, but I doubt you will be here long enough to take permanent harm, if that's what you're worried about. The only time you need a mask is if you're working in the furnace or one of the foundries.

I'd love to take your word that you'll not try to escape, but my people are scared of you. We're a fairly cowardly lot when it comes right down to it. Don't get so upset, I'm not doubting your word. Your Tribes have always struck me as reasonably advanced, at least socially. The simple fact is that no outsider has ever entered Pit Town before. Well, not one as old as you. You're a large man and we're a small people, and that, combined with our natural timidity about the world outside the refinery, makes you a frightening thing. You're an observant fellow, and I'm sure you've noticed the twisted backs, missing limbs, blind eyes and albinos amongst us. Don't tell me you haven't. Our blood is contaminated and we're growing weak. Too weak to let you walk free until we know what to do with you.

Bowels of the Earth

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

In a vast metal hall the Bury Keepers met to condemn me. Despite the grandeur of the hall, with tier upon tier of metal ramps lit by jets of flame, nothing could hide how few of these Keepers there were. The one called Henry spoke for me, but not well enough, for they decided to throw me into the darkest pit.

Before my execution, however, the Goddess smiled on my ugly head. A Keeper came to my cell, a mask hiding his face, and released me. I have no idea why a Bury Keeper should have freed me, even giving me my swag and weapons, but he had eyes like a rabid dog. I bolted as soon as I was free, but I heard laughter drifting after me.

Pit Town is a maze of halls and platforms, lit by nothing but widely spaced jets of flames, and it took me many hours before I finally reached a place where I could see the sky. I had thought it was night, and the light blinded me when I finally forced open a rusting metal door and stood, blinking, in the morning sun. I'd come out onto a platform high over Pit Town's wall. As soon as my eyes adjusted to the light I climbed from my perch, and I slipped away into the desert.

Strange Waters

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

In my escape from the Bury Keepers I wandered far to the north, many days' travel above Tiskagin. It was cold and the trees were all Pine and Spruce. It's a hard land, and the dusty smell of snow was already heavy in the air. I was too close to the lands of winter and the stories my gran told me seem to be true, that the closer to winter's land you get the sooner winter comes to you. The land is rocky and the soil poor, except for near water where bogs of peat make the going treacherous and slow. Game is plentiful and I can see how the Horse Squats harvest such quantities of furs. I moved quickly as I could, for I had a bad feeling about the weather.

I found a stream and built a simple raft of lashed pine logs to take me to the Great River. The land was not so hilly as to make the stream too rough to ride.

The waters ran fast and the stream soon joined a river of good size. The hills ended after a few days travel and plains began, though the trees remain the same, just thicker than before. Many days I rode that river, only to find that the lying Fatimas had led me into a death trap. The river emptied in a huge bay, not into the Great River at all! All rivers lead into the Great River, father? Now I know your lies for what they are. This bay stretched away beyond sight, perhaps going as far north as the winter lands, for a freezing wind clawed at me and I felt the coming snows in my shivering bones.

Edge of the Knife

From the tale of Luther Danzkin, Jacker Explorer:

I crossed the plains all too quickly and the hills, which seemed gentle on a raft, were far more rugged when climbed on foot. The West Wind blew slowly weaker, its lament fading from my dreams, replaced by a hungry cry from the north. I needed no dream to hear the growing howl of the North Wind. It could be heard every evening, announcing a pounding rain that struck colder with each passing day. The animals were not so foolish as I. The beavers were hiding in their dens, dams bulging with wood sunk against the coming cold, and mournful herds of caribou, coats heavy with winter fur, were making their way south, faster than my legs could carry me. I never saw any deer; all animals that could had already fled.

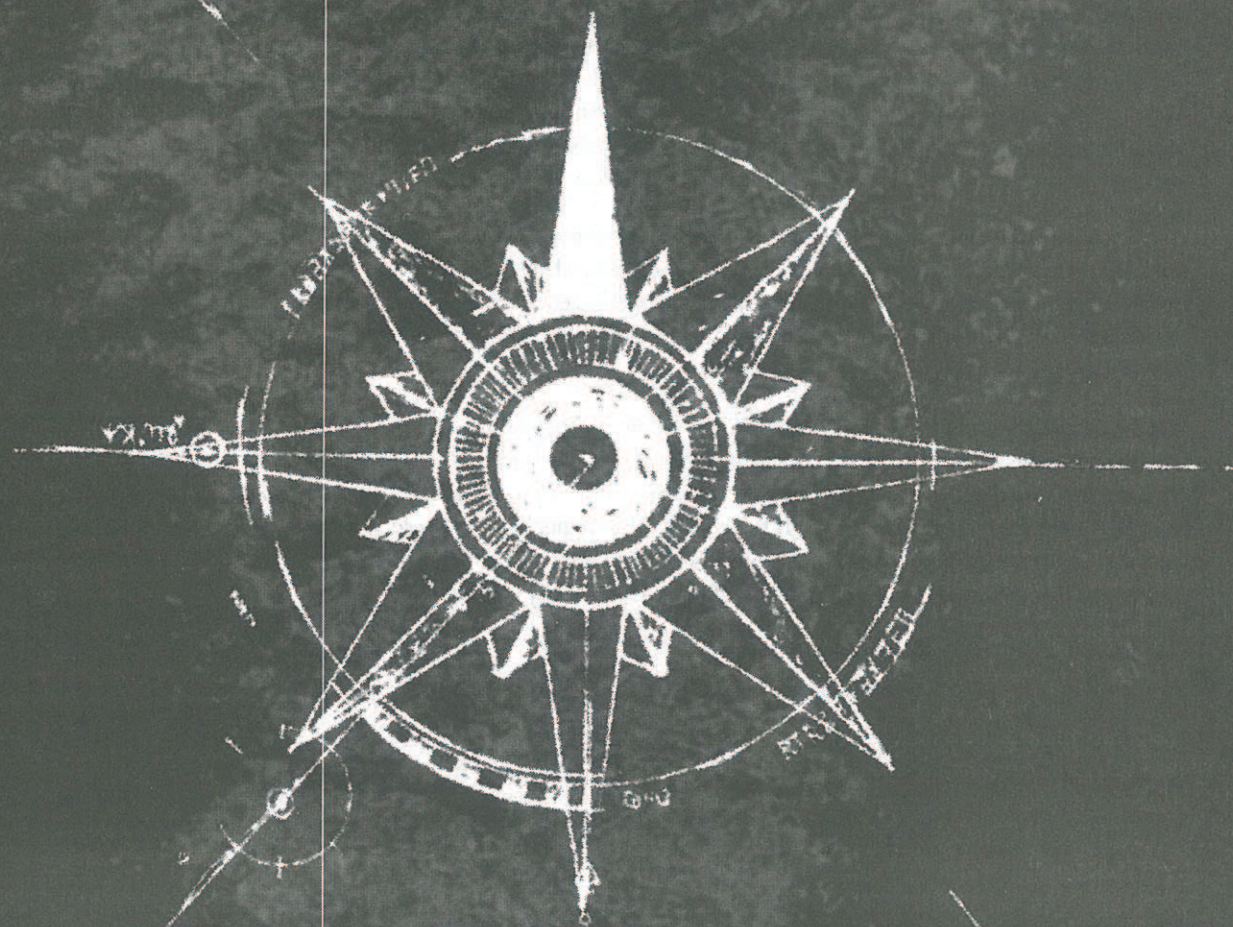
The first snows came, even though the stars told me that autumn was not yet passed. I traveled and searched, desperately, for a stream that would carry me south, only a river's speed could help me escape the snows. Marks on the trees I passed told me that the snows above Tiskagin are deeper than experienced on Vimary. One wizened old Spruce had markings showing snow had reached at least three meters up its ancient trunk. If the North Wind trapped you, only the spring thaw would find your frozen body.

Yet the Goddess was not ready for my ugly face, and before the snows came again, I found a stream. It was no more than a trickle, but it was flowing southward. The autumn rains became my friend, for the small floods they brought filled the streams, and sped me on my way south. When the water became deep enough, I took the time to build a canoe, a few days well spent, for the waters were already too cold to risk a wetting. A fever would soon follow, and in the cold air nothing would save me from the Hacking Cough. The Otter's swift waters returned me to the Great River in only two weeks, and Hom was never such a pleasant sight for me as on the day I returned.

Chapter Five: Fury of the North Wind

The North Wind is like a Beast's howl, furious with hatred and death. Its ungentle tones are the last sounds that many of our people hear, as winter takes both young and old with impunity. I wonder why the North Wind rages against us, I wonder why Tera Sheba bans travel to the north. What terrible secret does the North Wind hold, I sometimes wonder, that its voices are so insane with spite and anger?

— Troy Fenys, Herite Crusader



Blood, Skin and Bone

Francios Velan'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

After the first snow, when the North Wind's wild cries cut through man and beast, it is time to set out. Our families hold a funeral feast for us before we leave, for most do not return. Yet the need is great, for if the harvest was not good, by the time we return there will be many empty bellies. Both we and the Yagans take on this hardest of tasks, for it is our Tribes who truly understand the concepts of death and duty. Others also accompany us, to atone for crimes against the Tribes that are not quite great enough to warrant exile. Once they have 'died' in the northlands all is forgiven, or so the lie goes. You're always guilty once you have been to the Outlands.

Yagan hide boats are used for the trip, for they will survive the cold. We travel down the Great River, but only as far as Lac-Pere and the Muri River. We heed the words of Tera Sheba the Wise and go no further north. You can feel evil waiting further down the Great River. What it is I cannot say, but there is a lurking presence that freezes my soul worse than the North Wind.

Traveling up the Muri, only the warmest oiled hides and furs will keep you alive. We change from boats to sleds very quickly, and we don skis to follow the yapping lines of sled dogs. On sunny days the going is merely hard, but then a storm will break like a battle cry and trap you for days. Some disappear in these storms, gone without trace. More are lost amongst the winding trails, sent blind by the brightness, or robbed of their senses by the cold. Those who die here are lost to their Fatimas; I will always mourn for their souls.

The source of the Muri is the Lake of Ghosts, and to it the caribou come in great numbers. The hunting is hard and dangerous work, for we are not the only predators lurking in the snow. When we have loaded the sleds with bones, furs and meat, we can turn for home. Tired and sore we march back, listening to the seductive whispers of the North Wind. It calls on you to surrender, to fall and let the warmth of death take you from the cold. Many succumb during the long black days, but when seduction fails the Wind falls on us with all its fury, so still more of us die, frozen where they huddle. Yet enough survive to bring the life-giving food to our people. For all those that die, tenfold are saved and that makes it a price that I will pay 'till one day, I too do not return.



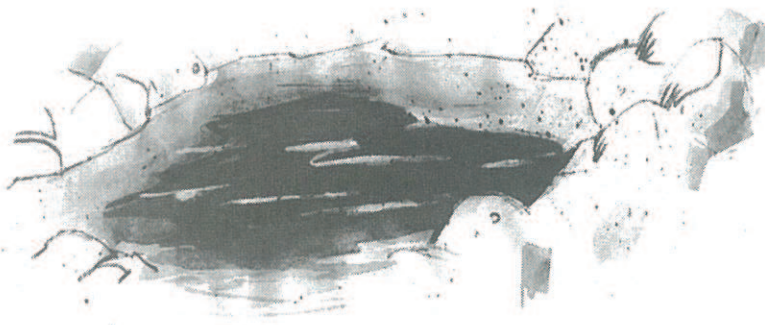
Francios Velan'on, Joanite Ranger

Francios' face is a patchwork of scars, a legacy of a fight with a great white bear many years ago. Once a member of the Old Guard by virtue of leading the Hunter's Guild, he was given command of the ones called Rangers by Nostra Guy'on, as a dishonor. Instead he took true command of them, treating the lowest of Joan's warriors with fairness and respect. Eventually Guy'on managed to have another Joanite replace Francios as head of the Hunter's Guild, leaving him with only the Rangers. Not disheartened, the old man joined his warriors beyond Vimary's shores, hoping that Joan will grant him a warrior's death.

Highlights: Old, dangerous and patient.

Attributes: AGI 0, APP -2, BLD +1, CRE -1, FIT +1, INF +1, KNO -1, PER 0, PSY -1, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 5, AD 8

Skills: Animal Handling 2/-1, Archery 2/0, Combat Sense 3/0, Dodge 2/0, Healing 1/-1, Herbalism 1/-1, Human Perception 1/-1, Intimidate 2/+1, Lore (Outlands) 2/-1, Melee 3/0, Navigation (Land) 3/0, Notice 2/0, Sneak 2/0, Survival 3/+1, Throwing 3/0.



Beyond the Goddess' Blessing

From the diary of Hombor Champlain, Yagan Mapmaker:

The river plains down to Lac-Pere are flat, their features obscured under a thick blanket of snow. The streams and marshes are frozen solid already, the ice slowly encroaching into the Great River. Large chunks must be watched in case they hole a boat. In Lac-Pere the water freezes where it does not flow so fast, which makes the mouth of the Muri obvious, for it is a fast-flowing river and cuts through the growing ice.

Around Lac-Pere the hills march down much closer to the Great River, their snow-clad forms looming up on the horizon. The hills of the northlands are rugged and steep, but our hunters stay close to the course of the Muri, which runs through a deep vale. The lands around are not rich — even in the snow patches of bare rock show on hillsides. Many streams and rivers flow through the hills too, lying unnoticed under snow till a sled and driver are dropped into the freezing water. Thankfully by midwinter the ice is thick enough that this risk diminishes on all but the larger rivers.

After a few days travel the hills rise up around us, much taller than any I have seen before. To the north the hills look especially steep, many of the slopes seeming peculiarly bare of trees. I suspect that their crowns are very rocky and unforgiving. The high, steep slopes along the Muri Vale pose a risk of avalanche, especially on our return, when the snow on the slopes is many meters thick. As the Muri goes further north however, the hills become lower again, until they form a low, hummocky plateau around the lake of Ghosts. How wide this area is I could not guess.

While the winter hides many of the land's secrets, it cannot hide the fact that the Lake of Ghosts is our ancestors' work. The lake is held by a vast dam, dwarfing the things our ancestors built in the other places I have been. A mighty frozen waterfall hangs upon it, a glittering rainbow of ice in the dying winter sun. Even when the dark of winter has finally swept the sun from the sky, the waterfall still glows under the bewitching lights that descend upon the lake, in a mystery beyond my ken. I feel the Lake's spirits understand the place's mysteries, but they will not answer my summons.

Land of Frozen Tears

Alain Rob, Yagan Trapper, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Land and the storms both conspire to kill you in the northlands. On the hills, the storms howl through and the wind cuts to the bone. Don't think that the trees will protect you either, for they are snapped like twigs by the North Wind's anger. In the vales the wind is dulled, but twists so it can hit you from all sides, sometimes forming twisting pillars of ice that can tear a hunter apart. The North Wind is the real killer. With good furs and hides, as long as you keep dry and eat hearty, you will not die of cold. . . if you can keep out of the wind. That's why we stick to the valleys.

Northland vales are riddled with lakes, rivers and streams, all hidden under snow. You will need a good stick, stoutly wielded, to tell you when you are crossing ice. In summer a dunking is a pain, in winter it is death. If the cold does not kill you outright, illness will claim you instead. The sled dogs are good advisors; they can smell what lies beneath the snow, and a sensible driver pays close attention to their cries.



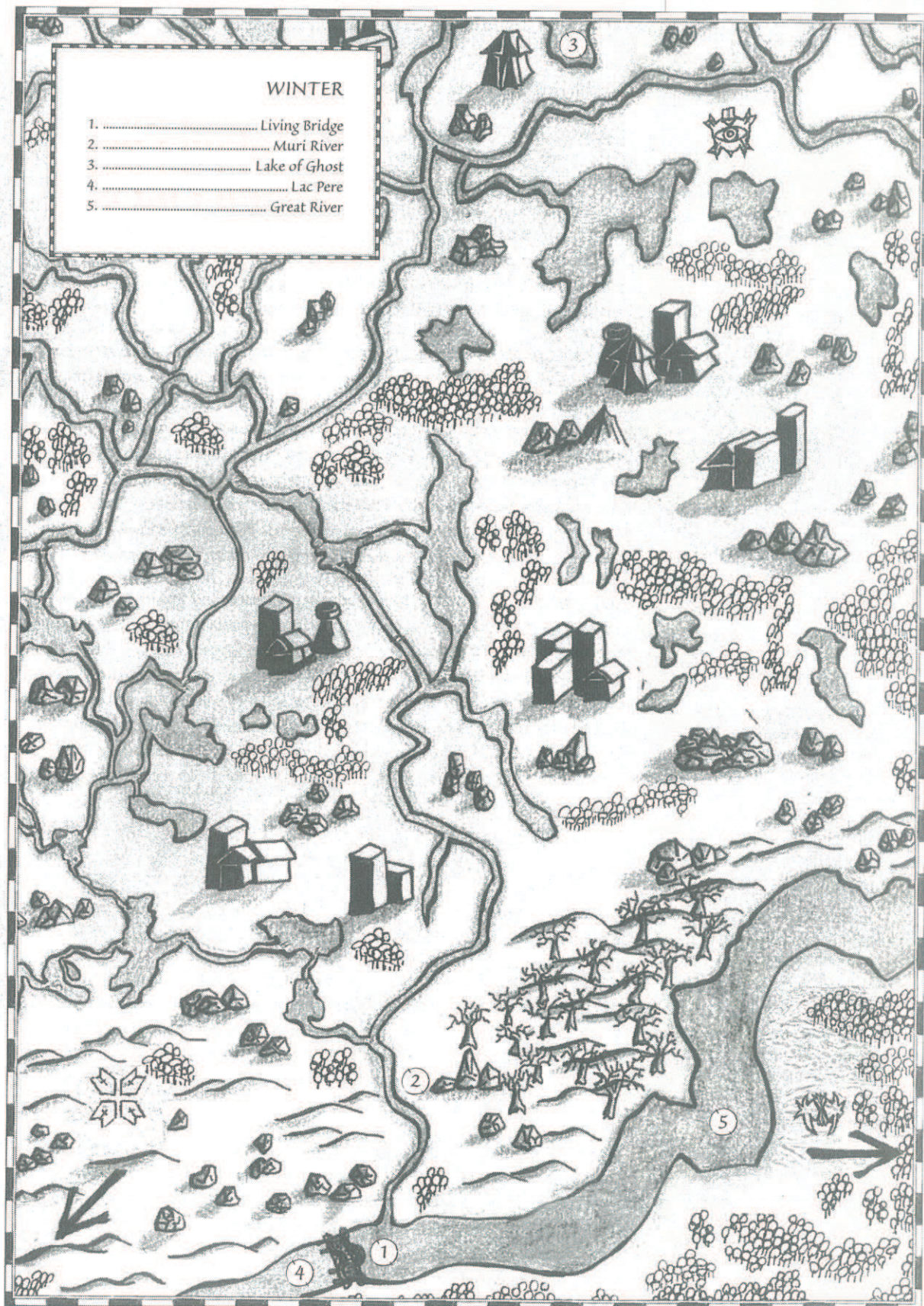
Alain Rob, Yagan Trapper

Alain comes from a line of trappers, and openly argued that Eva's limit on trapping was foolish, saying it did not leave enough fur animals to meet the Tribes' needs. Alain's insistent complaints finally annoyed his elders to the point he was sent to trap for furs on the Winter Hunting Expedition. A trained woodsman, Alain survived his first dreadful trip into the northlands and discovered that the rivers and vales of the north abounded with beaver, fox, mink and otter. The furs Alain brought back didn't return to him the respect that he'd lost, but they at least allowed him to support his family.

Highlights: Experienced, generous, helpful and jovial.

Attributes: AGI -1, APP 0, BLD -1, CRE 0, FIT +2, INF 0, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL 0, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, LD 2, AD 3

Skills: Camouflage 1/0, Craft (Trapping) 2/+1, Dodge 2/-1, Herbalism 1/+1, Lore (Northlands) 1/+1, Lore (Fur Animals) 2/+1, Melee 1/-1, Navigation 2/+1, Notice 2/+1, Sneak 2/-1, Throwing 2/-1.





Silent Leaves, Evan Shaman

A strong shaman, once much respected by his people, many people wonder why Silent Leaves goes on the winter hunt. Only his Tribe's most senior elders know the truth, for he had a violent argument with his fellow shaman, Storm Cry, and the lies being spread about the Fallen. Knowing his views were in a minority, and to avoid creating conflict within his Tribe, he chose instead to manifest his opposition by exiling himself from his Fatima, hoping Eva will intervene. For one so close to Eva the Outlands are the sheerest agony, but he knows he brings a little comfort to those who meet their death in the snow and ice.

Highlights: Considerate, powerful, and wise.

Attributes: AGI -1, APP +1, BLD +2, CRE +1, FIT 0, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY -2, WIL 0, STR +1, HEA -1, STA 20, UD , AD

Skills: Athletics 1/0, Dodge 1/-1, Dreaming 2/-2, Healing 3/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 2/-2, Lore (Evan) 2/+1, Melee 1/-1, Mythology 2/+1, Notice 1/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Teaching 2/+1, Synthesis (2).

Walk under Green Shadow

Zebedah Hoinishkin, Fallen Magdalite, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

I only went on the Expedition once, and I'm here on Hom, living in exile, because I refused to go on it again. In winter the nothlands are a frozen and blasted nightmare. It gets so cold that some trees explode. Down near the frozen rivers, where you would expect reeds and marshes, the ground is frozen harder than stone and twice as lifeless, but you have to dig away a lot of snow to even find it. The only indication of life is the battered Cedars and Willows along the banks, and numerous stands of Black Spruce up the slopes. If the expedition didn't take food with them all they'd eat is red meat, for apart from game nothing remains that could nourish a man.

Even back amongst the stands of Tamaracks and White Spruces that nestle in hollows amongst the hills, little forage can be found. These high and powerful trees have the least snow and best cover, however. They're good timber, standing strong, with deep roots and clean trunks. You'll also find well-worn runways from small game. Still, you're eating red meat and nothing but, for I have spent hours scouring through the thin snow in these woods and come up with nothing but lichen, mold and rusts. Useful if anyone had a bad stomach, but little else. The strength of the trees is reassuring when the North Wind gets too harsh. The Rangers tell me that a snow shelter built at the base of one almost always survives, even in the most brutal of storms.

As you go up those slopes the trees gradually get smaller and smaller, more worn by the wind, more battered by the ice and snow, until eventually the high hills are just frozen rock. On the hills the tree are mostly Jack Pine, Black Spruce and Balsam Pine, with a few scattered stands of White Birch. Always stay away from the latter if there is danger of avalanche, for their roots are shallow and they will provide no protection. All these trees are thin-trunked and sparse-leaved, giving little shelter from the North Wind's harsh caress. On the leeward side of some hills you'll find stands of Aspens and Poplars. These are your best shelters if you cannot make the lowlands, though they are also popular with wolves and wolverines.

Beneath the White Blanket

Silent Leaves, Evan Shaman, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Those who tell you that the northlands in winter are a frozen wasteland are ignoring the evidence of their own eyes. Why do they come up here? To hunt, of course, and if there are animals to hunt, those animals must be able to forage for food. The Caribou for example, eat plants that lie frozen beneath the land's snowy mantle. Lichen for the most part, but also grasses and some bark, leaves and mosses. Not much of this is edible by us, but it shows that the land isn't dead.

The blanket of winter also provides protection for many plants as the North Wind retreats. It seems hard to think that something so cold, so unforgiving, could protect new life, but so it does. The snow hides seedlings from animals that would eat them, and much like our own snow shelters, protects the young plants from the North Wind's fading fury. Since many of these plants grow from deep roots and nuts, they have no need of sunlight for a while. These roots and nuts are a source of food that a hungry hunter can use if they have the knowledge to find them.

Only the Fittest

Alain Rob, Yagan Trapper, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Not every creature has wings like a bird to flee from the North Wind. Most animals remain, surviving as best they can, including many birds, especially grouse. If you know where to look amongst the evergreens, this bird can make an easy meal for a desperate hunter. Brown trout can be fished from the rivers, though it's hard work cracking a hole through the ice, and black ducks can be found where rapids have kept the water ice free. To hunt in the white fields requires patience and skill. I often tell young hunters to watch the fox and snowshoe hare if they want to know how to survive. Stay low, run fast and always be wary.

Big animals do best by working together, just like our Expedition. The caribou move in large herds, the wolves hunt in packs, even the white tailed deer come together when the weather is bad, standing in tight groups in sheltered hollows, relying on the bad weather to prevent predators from finding them. Only the moose stand alone, and if I were that big I probably wouldn't care about the winter much either. Occasionally, in the worst winters when the snow is many meters deep, great white bears come down from the north. Never many, thank the Crone, for they are the fiercest animals I have ever seen, but a man isn't much of a morsel for them, and they seem intent on bigger game. They can outrun a man on foot however, and a single swipe will kill a hunter, so if one comes forth, prepare to die.

The little animals seem less affected by the cold, and are more often seen. For hunters the hare and the fox are useful for food and pelts, but the best of all is the ermine in its winter coat. A bale of white ermine, with their thick, soft fur, will bring enough corn to feed a family through the other three seasons. For the less skilled, beaver, fishers, martens and mink are all to be found in the northlands, all much easier to trap than the tricky ermine. An annoying problem is that some animals have learnt to follow trap lines. Nothing worse than finding trap after trap where the pelt has been torn asunder by a wolverine or lynx seeking an easy meal. Wolves sometimes do this too, but a wolf pelt is not a bad consolation if you have the strength and bravery to take one.

Red Snow

Francios Velan'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

In the snow-covered plains, taking the caribou is easiest for a team of hunters. Many things can give you away, your steaming breath, or smell on the wind, disturbing ptarmigans hidden in the snow, cracking through ice, I could go on and on. We mitigate the problems by having a few of our best spearmen hide downwind in holes in the snow. Then we drive a herd of caribou towards the places where our hunters are hidden. When the plan works we can take a dozen caribou at a time. When we're not so lucky the beasts stampede, and we can get trampled and killed.

Small groups can hunt the caribou the same way you would hunt white deer or moose. You find a place they are likely to come, for instance where there is still open water, or an easy passage in between the rocky hills. Then you wait like stones until the caribou come close enough for a charge, and hope the wind does not give you away. Once you have made a kill the wolves will often close in on you, attracted by the smell of blood. This is why I prefer hunting teams, for it is easier for ten to drive off a pack than for two or three.



Fools in the Cold



Mersha Anders'on, Joanite Ranger

Mersha is a new member of the Rangers, having been expelled from the Watch. In Bazaar, Mersha found herself beset by many temptations, surrounded by others of her Tribe who had already succumbed to dishonor. The pressure and tensions eventually became too much for Mersha, and she went on a bloody rampage, killing a corrupt advocate and his three cronies amongst the Watch. Rather than exiling or executing her, Joan looked into the young warrior's soul, then sent her to the Outlands, ignoring the Sheban claim to judge the case. While still doubting herself and missing Joan, Mersha is at least happy that her role in the Outlands is an honest one.

Highlights: Doubting, inexperienced and honorable.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +1, BLD 0, CRE -1, FIT +1, INF -1, KNO -1, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL 0, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 5, AD 5

Skills: Archery 1/+1, Athletics 1/+1, Boating 1/+1, Combat Sense 1/+1, Dodge 1/+1, Dreaming 1/-1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Interrogation 1/-1, Investigation 1/+1, Melee 2/+1, Navigation 1/-1, Notice 2/+1, Survival 1/+1.

Gi Jess'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

The North Wind will kill whomever it can, so we are not the only hunters who seek out the caribou. Those Squats who come from the south are a disparate lot. Some are good woodsmen, our equal in the snow, but many aren't, and you find their frozen bodies on the paths along the Muri. You'd think that, facing the North Wind's rage, the vermin would have better sense than to continue their thieving ways, but no. The better-equipped Squat parties avoid us, but the desperate scum that have come north to die eventually turn on anyone they come across, like the rabid skunks they are. Their dying doesn't matter; it's the fact that they're killing my warriors that angers me.

Around the Lake of Ghosts yet another group of Squats appears, regularly, too. Short, and dressed entirely in furs, these ones have strange features, and if they weren't so obviously peaceful I might think them Serfs. They ride dog sleds and build wondrous villages out of snow, using ice as if it were stone. As hunters, I'll admit every Ranger I know is outclassed. They seem unaffected by the winter; their hunting calls can be heard in fierce storms that have driven us to shelter, and I've seen them stalk and catch hares. Strangest of all is that they speak not a word, always using sign language. Velan'on says he has never heard of the Silent Ones attacking anyone, but those who attack them, however, apparently go mad, attacked by the spirits within the Lake.

If only our return trip was so untroubled. Like the bandits they are, warriors, claiming allegiance to Squat warlord Boarhead, attacked our returning Expedition. It's just like Squats; they won't risk venturing up into the northlands to take their share of the Goddess's mercy. They'd rather lie in wait to steal from those who have the strength to risk all. We get attacked only on the lower reaches of the Muri, the point when we are at our weakest, and they harry our Expedition for days. Sometimes they will not even loot a sled they have captured, and I suspect that malice and a desire to kill motivate their attacks. Every season they seem to be more powerful than before, and they might overwhelm us if too few survive the trip northwards. Many would die on Vimary as a consequence. Something must be done about this menace, and soon.

Ware the White Beasts

Mersha Anders'on, Joanite Ranger, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

Some creatures of the snows are unnatural. The older hunters call them the White Beasts, though some claim that they are men. All hunters at the Lake of Ghosts have come to hunt the caribou, except the Beasts. They have come to hunt the hunters. I think that they are no manner of man at all. Even Squats at their worst only eat human flesh when driven to it by desperation. These corrupt creatures actively seek it out, and the bodies I've seen suggest they don't wait for death before taking the choicest parts.

I think they may be Serfs, for some of those we've killed possessed talons and fanged jaws like the Koleris' slave warriors. They show more skill and thought than Serfs, though. They're almost as good at hiding in the snow as the Silent Ones, the only people they seem to avoid. Not all the people they take are killed, at least not immediately. Last Expedition they took two Yagan trappers. One was slain and eaten on the spot, but of the other there was no sign, except tracks heading eastward.

Lake of Ghosts

Temerue, Fallen Yagan Mordred, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

This Lake of Ghosts lies in both this world and in the River of Dream, or so the Hag taught us. In this world it is a rocky lake, surrounded by rough plains where the caribou winter. In the River of Dream it's a shimmering pool that lies near the Sea of the Lost. As one traps water under ice, the other traps souls. There are many spirits there, going back for many generations, back as far as the World Before. The lake is like a whirlpool, sucking in passing spirits and holding them like insects in amber. The Hag would never say the Lake did this, but even those powerful in the ways of dreaming need to be very careful. Veruka, now, she won't go near it, and that's a fine idea.

Being trapped in the Lake doesn't do the spirits any harm, I think, but I'm not keen to join them. Not all are friendly, some are disinterested, but others are communicative and excellent sources of information. While the spirits cannot leave the Lake, they can enter the world around it. They manifest as animals, often as birds, and in these forms see much that is hidden. The spirits do not trade their information lightly, and the deals struck with them can cost you more than you think. I've traveled there once, Jess'on allowed me to tag along with the Hunting Expedition. My communion with the spirits garnered me much information about the Outlands and the Beasts, but its cost still haunts my dreams, and I will always wonder if it was worth it.

Such communion has its risks for, as I said, not all the spirits are friendly and many are cunning in their malice. As the Lake's ice is treacherous, often cracking unexpectedly to drown the unwary hunter, so too are the Lake's spirits prone to sudden furies. The Silent Ones have some special relationship with the Lake, and the spirits will never harm or discuss them. I have never seen them on the River of Dream itself but I have a suspicion that they interact with it in a way I do not understand.

Prophecy

Tuttut, Husky Spirit, from Hombor's 'Record of the Outlands':

In the snow you cannot hide from me, for I am not in the snow. Rise; look around you, your body lies sleeping in the snow. All this worry, for such an unappealing piece of meat. I think I can assure that your mortal form will stay warm. I am Tuttut, totem spirit of the Nuit, those you call the Silent Ones. Many spirits have spoken your name, Hombor Champlain, and your words are flowing with the River. What purpose has your record? Not for your Fatima, I know Her purpose. I asked what is your purpose, what do you seek amongst the endless white and black of the northlands?

Truth, you say! Now that is a powerful thing for any man to seek. Are you prepared for it? It can be a painful burden. Already one of your Tribe has borne it, she who was your sister, Tanya Ever'on. Now she lives out of mind, grieved for as if dead, eating scraps. Her words remain powerful, bringing the sun to the dark places of your island home. Will your words remain powerful, Hombor Champlain? What truth do you think you have found, out here amongst these Outlands, so far from your Fatimas? I am asking all these questions and you merely look at me. You are thinking, that's a good thing, for in thought you are powerful, in following you are made weak. Near Vimary there is a place for you, Hombor Champlain, a place you can think. Go there. Maybe someone will help you find your truth.

Crossing the Forbidden

Hatred boils in my veins

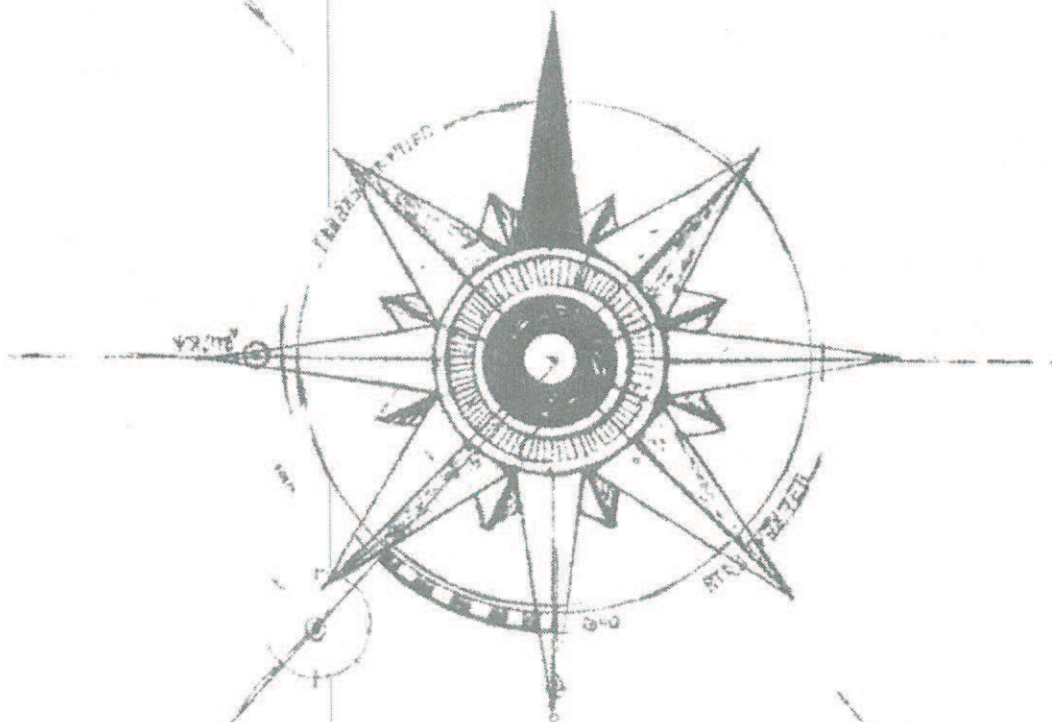
I resent all your words

I detest your laws

I will walk in my world

Talk of my thoughts

And make my future without you



Defying the Seven Deaths

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

I can still hear the words of my teachers echoing endlessly in my head. Love the Fatimas, obey the Fatimas, let the Fatimas keep you safe. It was like being penned, having your thoughts twisted until what was good was bad, and what was bad was good. All, of course, with the Fatimas' blessing on those who lived like sheep.

The most vain of all the Fatimal decrees are those regarding travel off Vimary. Why shouldn't we leave? For what reason should we have to stay on one small island, when a vast world lies beyond? I'd had enough when my Tribe, those fat farmers, threw me out for asking questions. Now I'm leaving this hell. I've stolen a boat and I'm going to let the river take me as far as it flows. I'll see for myself what Tera Sheba is trying to hide from us.

Dangerous Waters

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

I wonder if I was too hasty in my choice of boat. The cold reaches up through the birch bark and I find my legs going numb. The ice also clings to the hull, making it brittle. Twice now I have had to get ashore quickly, when jagged shards of ice have punctured the bark. Thankfully my otter-hide trousers have stayed waterproof. The old trick of rubbing the outside with bear fat and the furred inside with oil actually works, otherwise I think my trip would already have been over.

The river is strangely calm. None of the normal sounds are present. No birds, no frogs, no insects, nothing but the grate and grind of the ice. Some parts of Lac-Pere are already iced over, but not so thickly that I can't force my way through. I can feel something growing, something dark and unworldly northward. A trick of the Fatimas, perhaps. I will not be deterred.

The Living Bridge

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

Goddess protect me from what I have just seen! I have witnessed an evil that makes the Ziggurat pale into nothing. Beyond where the Muri flows into Lac-Pere, at the north end of the lake, the Great River flows beneath a vision from the darkest hells. It is work of the Z'bri, but a work beyond any they have wrought on Vimary. At the mouth of Lac Pere the Great River must be five klicks wide. Over it, in a series of arches, is a bridge of living flesh, decorated by the faces of those whose bodies are its bricks.

As I sailed towards it, my mind screamed for me to turn and flee, but a hopelessness seized me and I could not even lift my paddle. The faces called out to me, some I knew, adventurers who had gone before. I cannot remember their words but I can still feel the chill, a cold that makes the snow around me seem like a hearth fire. The blank terror of their eyes has infected me and I am having trouble writing, but a dreadful compulsion has me and I cannot turn my back on what lies beyond.



Sassa, Herite Radical

Sassa is a young Evan with a bitter disposition. From a poor and less-respected clan, she found herself excluded from roles her natural ability should have won for her. Bitterness often leads to indiscretion, and in Sassa's case too many open complaints led to an investigation. Accused of lacking faith, of not accepting the Fatimas' authority, Sassa struck back verbally with all her pent-up venom. Her exile has only increased her anger and bitterness. Now she seeks the total destruction of the Fatimas and all their works. Rather than striking back in little ways, she seeks information to destroy the Fatimas' hold on the Tribes with one shattering blow.

Highlights: Burning passions and unshed tears.

Attributes: AGI 0, APP +2, BLD -1, CRE +1, FIT +1, INF 0, KNO 0, PER 0, PSY +1, WIL +2, STR 0, HEA +1, STA 30, UID 2, AD 3

Skills: Agriculture 1/0, Athletics 1/+1, Boating 1/0, Dodge 1/0, Dreaming 2/+1, Human Perception 1/+1, Investigation 1/0, Lore (Fatimas) 1/0, Melee 1/0, Notice 2/0, Seduction 1/+2, Streetwise 1/0, Survival 1/+1.

A Dark Shore

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

Beyond the Living Bridge the land on the western shore changes, the trees grow more closely together and seem as dark as night. The further downstream you go the more twisted the trees become, until you wonder if they are not all staring at you in some mute hatred. Eyes glow in the blackness beneath the boughs, green and red, in twos and threes and more. No shapes are discernable, but I feel if the ice was thicker I might see more than I wish, for I can feel hunger emanating from those hidden shapes. There are no meadows or glades on the western shore; the trees are strangling the land and killing any competition to their gray and dusty mastery.

The eastern shore has not changed and I have no doubt about which side of the river I shall camp on. Scattered stands of trees decorate the river plains and the occasional hare or other small creature can be seen scurrying through the snow.

Yet the land seems to be weighed down by silence, and by the anticipation of something awful, as if a massive storm was waiting to break just over the horizon.

Boarhead

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

I sometimes wonder if I offended the Goddess at some unknown point in my life, for my luck is as evil as it gets. I spent my second night past the bridge on the eastern shore, near a river whose ice was shot through with black corruption. I should have known better, but the cold was tiring me, so I camped there anyway. As a result, I have been the guest of the Squat Warlord Boarhead for some weeks. He claims all the lands beyond the White Wastes, or so the foul-mouthed windbag says. I think we underestimated his power, for in my trip to his winter camp I was taken through three large, palisaded villages. Though these places are not up to the standards of what the Tribes build, the walls and huts are stoutly made, and the Squats well fed.

Boarhead's winter camp is another large village, far to the northeast, built beside a small lake called Etchim. I have no idea why I am still alive, or still unviolated. In every village I saw male slaves, castrated I was told, and have no doubt the tales of forcibly taking captured women as wives is true. Boarhead wants something else. He is no fool, and if I am not mistaken, his questions are directed at forming some sort of alliance with the Eighth Tribe. This worries me — what can such a powerful chief fear? Not only does he have many powerful warriors; he also has access to Keeper 'guns.' His personal guard, his Tusks, wield long weapons like those I've seen Keepers use to kill a person at fifty meters. All I have is rumors of powerful allies, apparently many weeks travel to the northeast, and the name Sanjon.

There is no doubt that Boarhead's people are organized. Today a large hunting party headed off to supplement the large stores of food prepared against the winter. Their farming is not as organized as ours, but they make an effort. When I asked Boarhead why the hunters did not go to the northwest he lost his temper, said that only fools would venture to the western shore. He said he'd ordered attacks on the Tribal expedition, trying to stop the Nation before they brought the final darkness on us all.

Boarhead's Warriors

Well-trained, well equipped and victorious in every battle,

Boarhead's warriors follow their chief with fanatical devotion. All

young men and women are expected to fight, but only the best

become Tusks, a warrior caste within the many tribes and clans who belong to Boarhead's nation.

The Tusks have great authority within the nation, but live under brutal discipline, where failure means death or mutilation. The most skillful and courageous Tusks join Boarhead's household, and are given muskets supplied by the Sanjon Keepers. It is a tribute to Boarhead's ability as a leader, and his warrior's courage, that they have kept the Capal Z'bri from their lands for so long.

Highlights: Brave, devoted, well trained and violent.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -1, BLD +1, CRE -1, FIT 0, INF -1, KNO -2, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +1, STR 0, HEA +1, STA 30, UID, AD

Skills: Athletics 2/0, Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Intimidate 1/+1, Melee 2/+1, Notice 1/+1, Survival 2/0, Tactics 1/-2, Throwing 2/+1.

City of Tearing Souls

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

Boarhead has said he will take me to the Great River and show me what he fears so much. The trip was fast, for an ancient blacktop runs near the river that the Squats call the Auder. It's so rocky that even in the North Wind's breath it still flows, and the Squats have many fish traps on it. Before reaching the Great River, the Squats turned their sleds north. Boarhead said he was taking me to an ancient fastness, from where the heart of evil could be seen. As we approached the River, I could feel the heavy depression and lethargy that affected me before take hold again. The feelings of hopelessness and fear affected the warriors greatly, and it was only Boarhead's urging and the sheer force of his presence that kept them going.

Boarhead led us to a large ridge of stone that rose out into the River. He called the place Leve. The ridge was covered by thick stands of oak, maple and birch, and we took a winding path that hid us completely within the woods. Despite this, I could taste the warriors' fear, and they clutched their Keeper guns as if their lives depended on them. Atop the ridge were the remains of a great fortress, but waves of agony drew my gaze beyond it. Across the Great River was another hill, and upon it was a maze of flesh that my eyes could not grasp. Before I had time to scream silently, within the terrified vaults of my mind, creatures rose from the snow and attacked, howling insanely as their talons tore the life from Boarhead's warriors. Only the warriors' Keeper guns drove back the beasts' first assault, and in that moment of calm I panicked, fleeing down the slopes, away from that dreadful city.

The Hungry Forest

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

I ran until I collapsed exhausted, my clothes torn and face bloody. When I looked up I was crying in fear, for I had run the wrong way. I'd crossed the ice-covered Great River, somehow, though I cannot remember when. The woods hemmed me in, locking out the sky, constricting me in an embrace of tangled roots, dead limbs and shadows. Things were watching me, licking their lips and pondering how to kill me. I know not what they were, but I could feel them. Can you understand? The western shore is like a great beast, and every shadow hides eyes and mouths waiting to devour you!

The forest seemed untouched by man or animal. Perhaps that was worst of all, for all I had to fear was the fear encircling me. I touched the River of Dream and recoiled from the corruption I found there, a layer of garbage on the flow, a barrier so fetid I could not bear it. When I awoke I was lying curled up in the snow, covered in my own vomit. It was then the North Wind's voices started, gloating that I was soon to be their plaything.

Every step away from this place takes me two steps closer. If I had a knife I would plunge it into my own breast, anything to avoid that which lures and taunts me. Pursuit has started; something is moving through the forest towards me. The North Wind blows fiercely now, screaming at me to run, to run to the darkness, to embrace it and give myself up to the masters. I cannot think, I am too tired, let what will catch me.

Goddess protect me! I have never seen such a beast, rotting where it stands. So I let the darkness take me in my fear.

Forest Lord

From the diary of Sassa, Herite Radical:

I am alive! I am near Vimary in a small squat village. They tell me that the Green Lord, whoever that is, brought me to them. I have wandered in darkness for many weeks, and the Squats worried that I would die, too lost to hold onto my life. Spring is close. Soon I will make my way to Hom and speak of what I have seen. Tera Sheba has hidden something terrible from us, for what attacked my mind is a vast and terrible power, whose hate for us alone is venom that almost killed me.

WEAVER RESOURCES

Into the Outlands introduces Tribe 8 to a much wider world, a world so vast that this book can only barely begin to explore all the people and places it contains. The stories told here provide a good overview, but are not meant to be definitive. After all, these are primitive people, what maps they possess are dubious at best, and knowledge is passed by word of mouth. We have drawn a loose framework in the hopes that it will encourage your imagination to fill it out as best suits your cycle.

WHERE AND WHY?

Tribe 8 has always tried to keep its geographic setting indistinct enough that, despite the open secret that Vimary is set in the modern city of Montreal, a Weaver can place their game in any locale they wish. We have endeavored to maintain this convention with Outlands, even though it will be obvious to many readers that the geographic area outlined is Northeastern America. In keeping with our desire not to place restrictions on Weavers, place names have been changed to make it easier to move locations. A subsidiary reason is that name changes also provide a sense of linguistic drift, a signpost to the centuries that have passed since the Fall.

YOUR OUTLANDS

Weavers should feel free to rework the resources presented in this section of Outlands. If you feel your cycle would work better with an arctic climate, then maybe an ice age is approaching. If for a particular adventure you wish to stop the Niagara Falls, then maybe the water level of Lake Ontario has fallen. Perhaps your Players have an interest in mountaineering, so you can make the High Mountains more important than they are currently presented to be.

The natural diversity of Northeastern America and shadowy presence of the World Before are the key elements of the Outlands' flexibility as a setting. Most good cycles strive to maintain the Players' suspension of disbelief, and a setting that has no jarring elements to break the flow of the story helps achieve this difficult task. By making the Outlands as flexible as possible, in the most reasonable way, we hope that Weavers will find it easier to make the lands around Vimary their own.

OUTLAND LIMITS

The downside to the diversity of Northeastern America is that the resources presented here are nothing but the slimmest introduction. We can provide enough just enough general information on the areas for you to take your game into the Outlands. However, depending on the level of detail you prefer, you may find that further research is necessary. For most cycles a good encyclopedia and atlas is all that will ever be needed. If you still want more, however, information on all aspects of the American Northeast is available in most local libraries and on the Internet, with far more detail than you will ever need.

THE VOICES OF THE WINDS

To the Seven Tribes the winds are the spiritual representation of the seasons. Though not all winds in a given season come from one direction, the Tribes associate one particular wind with a particular time of year. The winds bring visions and dreams of the places they have been, sometimes welcome, sometimes not. Whether a Weaver uses the winds as an active element in their cycle or not is a personal choice, but they can be invaluable. The winds are useful not just as starting points to adventures in the Outlands, but also for getting cells out of trouble, or as the source of esoteric information to get a cycle back on track.

PRIMITIVE EXPRESSION

An important aspect of an Outlands cycle is primitiveness. In the world of Tribe 8 nature can kill entire communities, and is feared for its power. Coupled with danger is ignorance for, with the exception of the Keepers, no one can answer the basic questions humans ask of their environment. In the modern world we know why winter starts, the rivers run and geese appear in spring. In the Outlands, spring may not follow winter, rivers are the blood of the Goddess and animals are spirit brothers. Giving Players an inkling of what it feels to not be so certain of the world around them is useful in creating the appropriate mood for an Outlands cycle.



ANIMAL SPIRITS

The people of the world of **Tribe 8** tend to view other living creatures as equals, not surprising when you consider how powerful and well-adapted animals are compared to humans. Not unnaturally therefore, animals are presented as having spiritual power just as humans do. This is not to say that primitive people are vegetarians, but rather they respect the role that animals play in the natural order. This respect manifests in the many rituals that accompany interaction with animals.

In **Tribe 8** animals all have spirit forms upon the River of Dream. These spirits range from the powerful Totem Spirits to the fading ghosts of the slain. Animal spirits allow Weavers to make animals into interesting NPCs, interacting with Players as guides, foes, friends, or mysterious powers.

MINOR ANIMAL SPIRITS

These weak spirits are the dream forms of the animals that inhabit the Outlands. From insects to sheep, these spirits wander the River of Dream, acting much as their natural forms do, but closely reflecting the true state of the Outlands. Where the land is corrupted, the spirits will show the corruption clearly. If the Goddess is angry in a locale, the spirits will attack those who enter the River. If properly coaxed, they can perform spiritual, or even physical, services for the Players.

Highlights: Small, skittish.

Attributes: INS +1, PER +1, WIL -1, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 3

Skills & Abilities: Athletics 1/+1, Camouflage 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Notice 1/+1, Sneak 1/+1, Bite (x5 damage) Claws (x7 damage), Hide (Armor Rating +5)

PLAY (OTTER SPIRIT)

A minor totem spirit, Play represents the otters of the Otter River, and is only found in the River of Dream near that physical river. He hunts minor animal spirits like a normal otter, but his sense of fun is much more like a Dahlian's than an animal's. He is fond of harmless tricks, but those who pollute the Otter River or fail to make the proper rituals after slaying an Otter will find that his tricks have a very nasty edge.

Highlights: Playful, communicative.

Attributes: INS +3, PER +4, WIL +2, STR +2, HEA +2, STA 45, UD 9

Skills & Abilities: Athletics 4/+3, Dodge 3/+3, Hand-to-Hand 2/+3, Lore (Otter River) 3/+3, Swimming 5/+3, Bite (x10 damage), Claws (x10 damage), Speed of the Otter (Play may act twice a round), Whirlpool of Dreams (by making an opposed INS roll against an opponent's Dreaming, Play can drop that person out of the River of Dream).

TUTTUT (HUSKY SPIRIT)

An important tribal spirit of the Nuit Squats, Tuttut interacts with man a great deal, and is a keen judge of human nature. She follows her tribes in their migrations, ready to defend them against harm, but is curious about the wider world. Tuttut feeds exclusively on the sacrifices that the Nuit make, but her wolf-like appearance makes her look more aggressive than she actually is.

Attributes: INS +5, PER +3, WIL +4, STR +4, HEA +4, STA 70, UD 9

Skills & Abilities: Athletics 3/+5, Hand-to-Hand 4/+5, Healing 3/+5, Lore (Northlands) 3/+5, Human Perception 2/+5, Bite (x15 damage), Claws (x17 damage), Warmth of the Pack (protects a person from the effects of cold), Soul Storm (paralyzes a victim within a moral crisis, INS opposed to opponent's WIL).

GREAT FOREST MAN (MOOSE SPIRIT)

A major totem spirit, the Great Forest Man walks throughout the Outlands. Many Squats worship this silent and ancient spirit, though he answers few, for he believes that all must make their own way in the world. He wanders through the River of Dream, always alone, his purpose to watch over the forests and ensure that no one destroys the life that they hold.

Attributes: CRE 0, INF 0, KNO +8, PER +5, PSY +5, WIL +13, STR +13, HEA +9, STA 115, UD 32.

Skills & Abilities: Hand-to-Hand 3/0, Healing 4/+8, Herbalism 5/+8, Intimidate 3/+13, Lore (Forestry) 5/+8, Mythology 3/+8, Notice 3/+5, Ritual 5/+8, Butt (x40 damage) Kick (x30 damage), Bellow (-2 to any opposing WIL rolls in same turn, can reach into physical world), Blessing of the Green Ways (grants a person double movement through the forest for a day), Prison of Life (opposed WIL roll, binds an opponent's spirit to a tree for MoS days).

LITTLE BROTHERS OF THE MARSH (FROG SPIRITS)

These are the combined spirits of all the frogs of the Great River lands. Individually they are very weak, but together they have become a powerful spirit, important to those who would use the Great River marshes. They are intolerant of anything that pollutes the waters, punishing those responsible.

Attributes: INS +4, PER +6, WIL +6, STR +6, HEA +5, STA 75, UD 0

Skills & Abilities: Camouflage 5/+4, Investigation 3/+6, Lore (Great River Lands) 3/+4, Music 5/+4, Notice 5/+6, Swimming 3/+6, Song of Sleep (INS roll against opponent's WIL, can put the victim to sleep for MoS hours), Plague (summons plagues of frogs and insects; see rules for swarms, T8 Rulebook p. 157)

THE GREAT WHITE SPIRIT (ALBATROSS TOTEM SPIRIT)

Though a solitary spirit, the Great White Spirit has missed the presence of man upon the waves of the Oceans it observes. With the coming of the Eighth Tribe, it has decided that it is time for man to once more return to the high seas. To this end it is sending visions to various Fallen, trying to seduce them to sail the Oceans as their ancestors once did. To those willing to join this spirit upon the Oceans it would be likely to give great gifts of knowledge.

Attributes: CRE +3, INF +6, KNO +5, PER +6, PSY +4, WIL +10, STR 10, HEA 7, STA 100, UD 24.

Skills & Abilities: Boating 5/+6, Dodge 4/+3, Hand-to-Hand 4/+3, Lore (Ocean) 5/+5, Navigation (Sea) 5/+5, Seduction 4/+6, Teaching 3/+3, Spirit Flight (can carry up to 8 passengers into the River of Dream), Storm Front (INF roll, can summon a storm that will last for MoS hours, but only over the ocean), Call of the Sea (opposed INF roll against an opponent's WIL, it can cause a person to be constantly haunted by visions and sounds of the sea).

ANIMAL RITUALS

All the peoples of the Outlands depend on hunting, and they have evolved rituals to ensure that hunting does not create problems in the spirit world. Other rituals actively seek the aid of animal spirits. Weavers are encouraged to enlarge upon the samples given here because having NPCs, or better yet Players, perform such rituals creates an appropriate atmosphere of mingled fear, ignorance and reverence. Players who choose to deny such rituals face social stigma and the very real threat of spiritual retribution. If, for instance, the Players offended the deer spirits by failing to perform the appropriate ritual after a successful hunt, not only would they find hunting deer more difficult, so might everyone else on Hom, which is a lot of new enemies to face.

Rituals are specific to a geographic area or season. Animal spirits are like the animals they are linked to — some move according to the seasons, while others inhabit a specific area. A player may not roll more dice in their Ritual action test than the Margin of Success (MoS) they achieve from a Mythology or Lore (local area) action test. Mythology rolls should be at a higher Threshold because it is a general rather than specific skill. If a player fails this first test they do not know the area well enough to call on its spirits.

These rituals follow the rules for Ritual Synthesis (T8 Rulebook, p. 174) except that they are more properly classified as Ritual Dreaming and can be performed by any person possessing the Dreaming skill and appropriate knowledge. They are less powerful than synthesis rituals, however, and cannot be rolled with more dice than the character possesses in the Dreaming skill. Also, each new dreaming ritual must be purchased as a new specialization of the ritual skill.

DEER HUNTING

This ritual encompasses the entire hunt. It starts with a small ceremony before the hunters leave, with other portions done during the hunt to find deer, and to celebrate a successful kill. When the hunters return to their camp or village a final ritual must be performed to thank the spirits for their cooperation.

Game Effects: +1 on all rolls while hunting deer

Threshold: 4

Time: entire hunt

RACCOON DETERRENT

Raccoons can rip a camp apart if they get into the food and baggage. Rather than take this risk, many travelers perform a nightly ritual to appease the spirits of the Raccoons so they will not enter a campsite.

Game Effects: no raccoons enter the camp while the sun is set

Threshold: 3

Time: 1d6 minutes before the sun sets.

OTTER'S STRENGTH

The need to swim in dangerous waters is common in the Outlands. In order to make this dangerous task easier, numerous Squats call on the powers of the Otter spirits. The ritual needs to be performed beside the appropriate waterway before the ritualist enters the water. It will not work for rivers that have no otters.

Game Effects: +2 to FIT for river crossing

Threshold: 4

Time: 3d6 minutes

BEAR'S HEALING

An injured bear may sleep and then emerge healthy again after the long winter, and this ritual is meant to gain that blessing for someone seriously ill. If the bear spirits respond, the ill person will sink into a deep sleep and if they awaken they are cured. If this ritual is wrongly cast, the bear spirits will tear the injured person's spirit apart and they will not wake.

Game Effects: the target sleeps for a day for every point of MoS, and heals 1d6 wound levels a day.

Threshold: 6

Time: 2d6 hours.

NAVIGATING DARK PATHS

The maps in Outlands do not come with a scale, and this is deliberate. While we have used the Keeper measurement of klicks (kilometers) occasionally, Weavers may wish to avoid this in cycles, along with other conventions of modern navigation. Primitive peoples navigate by landmark, and by forcing Players to do likewise it forces them to think and act a little more like their characters.

VAGUE AND TWISTING DIRECTIONS

When a Tribal says that they are travelling north, they are referring to their eventual destination, not the direction they are traveling. In the modern world we build roads and railways over, through or under the obstacles nature presents us. In the Outlands, with the exception of the ruined blacktops, paths are as nature provides them. Therefore travelers wander like a river, and for the same reason, to avoid difficult terrain. There are many other reasons for taking an indirect path, such as avoiding enemies or areas with poor hunting, and due to nature's vagaries paths often change from season to season. Spring floods can cause a stream to shift its bed, new growth can obscure a trail, and the list goes on. A final reason for this convention is that it is reassuringly familiar to Players while still reinforcing how different the Outlands are.

LAND TRAVEL

Weavers can make travel as abstract as they desire. Some Players feel uncomfortable without solid figures to quantify travel, while others prefer to freeform it. In Outlands we have tried to respect this difference by making the rules informative, but easy to use so they do not distract from the mood of the game by bogging play down with calculations. If a Weaver wishes to emphasize the mystical aspects of Tribe 8, we recommend allowing the use of the Mythology skill in place of the Lore skill in the following rules.

Maximum movement in one hour is four kilometers plus the sum of a creature's BLD and FIT Attributes, and Athletics Skill. Vehicles move according to the speed per hour listed in their game statistics. Movement is doubled when traveling on blacktops.

A creature moves continuously for one hour plus its MoS on a FIT roll — modified by Athletics — against a Threshold of 2. After this time a creature must rest for an hour or make further FIT rolls every hour, at -1 for every subsequent hour traveled. Once stopped, a creature must rest for as many hours as it traveled. If a creature is moving faster than a brisk walk, a Weaver should ask for FIT rolls every hour.

Navigation and Lore (local area) Skills represent a creature's ability to track their position and knowledge of a geographic location. Every day a creature must make Lore (local area) roll against a Threshold of 2. The MoS or MoF of this roll is added

or subtracted from 3 to set the Threshold of a Navigation roll. The MoS or MoF of the Navigation roll is added or subtracted from the creature's base movement. This represents the ability to find the easiest path through the surrounding terrain. Only one set of rolls is needed for a group, a good reason to seek a local guide. Modifiers for darkness, weather etc, can be made at the Weaver's discretion. Many Z'bri are limited by this rule, but animals are not. Animals make a INS action test, INS representing wild instincts, and add or subtract the MoS or MoF of this roll from their base movement.

Basic Movement per hour = $4 + 1 \times (\text{Fitness} + \text{Athletics} + \text{Build})$ [x2 on Blacktops]

Allowed Travel Time = $1 \text{ hr} + \text{MoS} (\text{Fitness} + \text{Athletics against a Threshold of } 2)$

Lore Modifier = $\text{Knowledge} + \text{Lore (local area)}$ against a Threshold of 2

Human/Z'bri Terrain Modifier = $\text{Knowledge} + \text{Navigation against a Threshold of } (3 + \text{Lore Modifier})$

Animal Terrain Modifier = $\text{INS against a Threshold of } 3$

Vehicle Terrain Modifier = $\text{Knowledge} + \text{Navigation against a Threshold of } (3 + \text{Lore Modifier} + \text{Vehicle Maneuver} + \text{Vehicle size})$

NATURE'S HIGHWAYS

Traveling by water is the preferred option in the Outlands. Rivers and lakes provide an efficient transport system, making easy paths even for travelers without a boat. In a world without reliable roads, waterways are especially important to long-distance trade. Watercraft can be built to carry as much cargo as the depth of the water will support in any particular waterway. Traveling on water also makes you harder to ambush, and unless traveling against the current, the distances covered in a day far outstrip any achieved on land. Naturally enough, boat building is a fairly advanced craft in the Outlands, and a wide range of craft are available.



CANOES

Canoes can be constructed from three main materials: bark, hides or logs. The skills required to build with each material are quite different, even if the resulting canoes differ only slightly. All three require the Craft (boat building) Skill, but log canoes also require Craft (woodcarving), bark canoes need Craft (carpentry) and hide canoes use Craft (leatherworking). Able to take years of wear, as well as being fast, maneuverable and stable in flowing water, canoes are the main form of water transport in the Outlands. They provide no protection against weather or attacks, however, and must be maintained regularly with weekly Craft (boat building) rolls.

Size:	+2 to +6
Crew:	1-20
Speed:	17 meters/round, 10kph (sea)
Maneuver:	0
Range:	unlimited
Damage Rating:	20/40/80
Special Characteristics:	If going upriver divide speed by 2, if traveling downstream multiply speed by two. Load 50-4000kg. Bark canoes have +1 maneuver but have a 10/20/40 damage rating in winter. Log canoes cannot be larger than size +4 but have 30/60/90 damage rating

LARGE RAFTS

Lashing logs together to form a floating platform is a very easy operation, requiring no specialized skills. The Weaver should allow Players to use any Skill they think is appropriate. Unless properly dried logs are used, however, the raft will eventually sink after a number of days equal to the MoS of the building roll. Rafts, especially large ones, are very cumbersome, slow and have no freeboard, so everything carried on them gets soaked. Sails can be added to large rafts, but this makes them even harder to control. Propulsion, therefore, is via poles and sweeps.

Size:	+4 to +7
Crew:	4-6
Speed:	8 meters/round, 5 kph (sea)
Maneuver:	-2
Range:	unlimited
Damage Rating:	20/30/60
Special Characteristics:	If going upriver divide speed by 2, if traveling downstream multiply speed and maneuver by two. Rafts that are not strongly built have half Damage Rating.

SAILING SHIPS

The smallest sailing vessels are log dugouts, often designed as catamarans. Most, however, are built with keels and a ribbed, planked hull. The main differences lie in the method of attaching the planks and the propulsion used. Planks can be attached by leather stitching, like the Oneida, or by wooden or metal pegs, like the Novohuron. Sails provide speed, while oars are slower but not dependent on the wind, so most vessels have both. The construction and maintenance of sailing vessels is a specialized process requiring the Skill Techlore (shipbuilding).

Size:	+2 to +12
Crew:	1-100
Speed:	8 meters/round, 5 kph (sea) oars/17 meters/round, 10 kph (sea) sail
Maneuver:	-2 to -6
Range:	unlimited
Damage Rating:	30/60/90 to 150/300/450
Special Characteristics:	Sailing against the wind, divide speed by 4/Sailing across the wind, divide speed by 2/Sailing with the wind, multiply speed by 2. Oared vessels may double speed for as many minutes as the FIT of their crew, after which make FIT rolls against a Threshold of 5 or need to rest for an hour. Oared vessels are flooded in rough weather on a failed Boating roll. Pegged hull vessels add 2 meters/round to speed.

For statistics on river boats see the T8 Rulebook, p. 142

WATER TRAVEL

Rowing a boat is a hard task. Traveling against the current requires FIT rolls against a Threshold of 3 every hour. Every two hundred kilos of cargo raises the Threshold by 1. FIT rolls are not required when traveling downstream. Water is not stable, and travel over it requires constant attention. Every hour Players must make boating rolls against a Threshold of 3. Failure indicates that they have capsized, run aground, or some other appropriate fate. A fumble indicates that the vessel has been holed; a repair roll against a Threshold equal to the MoF is required.

Rapids are impassable, except to rafts and canoes going downstream. To run rapids requires boating rolls against a Threshold of 6 for every kilometer traveled. If successful, the vessel travels twice its top (downstream) speed. If not, the MoF becomes the level of damage taken by the vessel and another boating roll is required immediately. The safest way to safely traverse rapids, and only way to pass waterfalls, is portaging cargo and vessels around the danger. On all well-traveled rivers paths have been made along the banks.

Sandbars, hidden rocks, floating obstructions like logs and changes in currents affect all waterways. To simulate these dangers, Characters must make Navigation (Sea) rolls against a Threshold of 3 every hour. Failure indicates that they have run aground or struck something, and they suffer the MoF in damage to their vessel. A Boating roll is required against a Threshold equal to the MoF to get free. Failure on this roll means that they have done MoF more damage to their vessel.

PLACES AND WEATHER

Geography and weather are not passive actors in the Outlands. A massive, rearing thunderhead is an obvious manifestation of power, while the dark and twisted heart of an ancient forest exudes grim evil. The use of the four winds in Outlands is one example of this personification of nature. It does not have to stop there if a Weaver thinks this idea suits her cycle. Places and weather patterns can either be directly personified by creating spiritual forms for them, as with animal spirits, or their 'other worldly' presence can be given game effect.

A traditional example of a nature spirit would be a dryad or nymph. Such creatures, with their 'High Fantasy' feel, would not commonly be suited to **Tribe 8**, but a Weaver should feel free to include them if they fit her ideas. By using the spirits presented above and in the main rulebook as templates, it is easy to create almost any traditional nature spirit a Weaver can imagine.

A subtler effect can be had by adapting the Atmosphere rule used with Z'bri Sundering. Rather than granting a location or weather phenomenon an actual form, give it an effect instead. A storm that a Weaver wishes to portray as the personification of wrath might require Players to make a Willpower roll, or be paralyzed with fear. The MoF becomes a minus on any actions undertaken while the storm is overhead. The exact effects of any Atmospheric influence depends on the feeling that the Weaver wishes to evoke. While entirely optional, applying Atmosphere to places and the weather — not necessarily all the time — gives the Weaver a powerful tool to set mood by forcing Players to bring the effects of fear, ignorance and superstition into play.

HIDDEN DANGERS

Not everything that is deadly is obviously dangerous, and many apparently mundane things in the Outlands can kill. Whether or not a Weaver chooses to use the options offered below depends on the nature of her cycle, for these rules can be very frustrating to Players if not used judiciously.

DISEASE

The Seven Tribes are very susceptible to disease, because they lack modern sanitation and drugs. In the Outlands disease is even more of a problem because they cannot call on the powers of the Fatimas for cures. Also, mixing with peoples outside Vimary means that the Tribes encounter new diseases more often, thus reinforcing their belief that the Outlands are unclean.

Explanation for the rules covering disease can be found in the **T8 Rulebook**, p. 151. All Thresholds given below are set at levels reflecting optimum conditions for treatment, so if a patient is not resting in a quiet, warm environment, then the Thresholds should be raised appropriately.

RIVER BELLY

Caught from unclean food and water, River Belly is very common in crowded places without good sanitation. Most food preparation rituals and taboos relating to water sources help reduce the risk of contracting River Belly. Players making successful Ritual Skill action tests when looking for water or preparing food will reduce the chance of contagion by the MoS.

Contagion:	4
Onset Time:	1 day
Virulence:	6
Effects:	
Success or MoF 0:	Diarrhea, mild fever, cramps
Failed roll:	Delirium, constant diarrhea, fever, severe cramps (-2 Action penalty for MoF days)
Fumble:	Ulcers develop in bowels, liver and brain, severe internal bleeding (roll HEA vs 3 once a day to avoid taking a Flesh wound for MoF days). Symptoms continue for MoF days then fade away.

ROT

The Rot is caused by the infection of wounds, or the death of body tissues due to trauma such as frostbite. The affected flesh rots while still attached to the body. Apart from surgery, the only cure is prevention, which requires quick, sanitary treatment of wounds and traumas. A virulent version of disease is called Marsh Rot. This version starts as River Belly, and then rots the bowels. Since a person can hardly remove their intestines, it is fatal unless Synthesis is used.

Contagion:	7
Onset Time:	2 weeks
Virulence:	3 if the wound is properly treated, otherwise 7
Effects:	
Success or MoF0:	Wound becomes slightly infected and takes twice as long to heal
Failed:	Wound becomes severely infected, becomes one wound stage worse (i.e. a Flesh wound becomes a Deep wound, a single Deep wound becomes two Deep wounds etc) and takes three times as long to heal.
Fumble:	Becomes a permanent injury.

6. Weaver Resources

HACKING COUGH

An infection of the lungs, Hacking Cough is usually caused by improper treatment of lesser diseases, especially Hunter's Fever (T8 Rulebook, p. 152). If one person becomes infected, the entire group most likely will.

Contagion:	4
Onset Time:	1 month
Virulence:	10
Effects:	
Success or MoF0:	fever, chills, and chest pain for a week.
MoF 1-3:	High fever (HEA roll vs 4 once a day to avoid a Flesh wound), severe chest pain, and coughing up red mucus (-2 Action penalty for MoFx2 weeks)
MoF 4+:	Incapacitating fever (HEA roll vs 4 once a day or take a Deep wound), constantly brings up red mucus and blood (HEA roll vs 4 once a day or take a Flesh wound), patient is delirious (-4 Action penalty for MoF weeks)
Fumble:	Deadly fever (HEA roll vs 5 once a day or die), and damage to lungs causes permanent injury (-1 FIT) lasts for a week before fever breaks.

LOCKJAW

If open wounds come into contact with dirt, it is likely that they will become infected with Lockjaw. Only quick and careful treatment of wounds can prevent the disease, and compounds that alleviate poisoning will help but not cure an infection.

Contagion:	8
Onset Time:	1-5 weeks
Virulence:	5
Effects:	
Success or MoF0:	violent muscle spasms of the jaw muscles for a few days
MoF 1-3:	Spasms affect entire body (-1 Action penalty, -2 to physical actions) for MoFx2 days.
MoF 4+:	Spasms become continuous (FIT rolls vs 4 once a day or take a Flesh wound from exhaustion) for MoFx2 days.
Fumble:	Spasms affect breathing (Fit rolls vs 3 once a day or die) for MoF days.

FOOD AND WATER

While supplies can be taken on journeys, even a cell with packs and horses can carry supplies for a week or two at most. Having to forage for food and water means that travelers are always at risk of eating or drinking something unclean.

FOOD POISONING

Without refrigeration fresh food rots quickly, and can cause serious, if short-term, illness. Every meal, the cook must make a straight Survival roll against a Threshold of 3. The MoF is the Threshold for HEA rolls by all those who eat the tainted meal. When collecting water Players should make a Survival roll against a Threshold of 4, modified by Lore (local area). In both cases failure leads to a mild case of River Belly (see p. 77). A fumble indicates serious poisoning and should be treated like a fatal toxin (T8 Rulebook, p. 152) of a potency equal to the MoF.

POLLUTION

All the generations since the Fall have not completely cleansed the Outlands of the corruption of the World Before. Eating or drinking within an affected area can lead to poisoning. In the most contaminated places merely being in the area can be dangerous. The Weaver should assign a Potency to the pollution, just as if it was a fatal toxin, and resolve damage by according to toxin rules (T8 Rulebook, p. 152). In areas where the effect is cumulative, the Potency builds by one point for each day spent, or meal eaten, in the polluted area. When the Potency reaches the level the Weaver has assigned, then the effects take hold.

POLLUTION EFFECTS

Areas of the Great River:	
Potency:	2-5
Period:	One point for each day of consuming food and water from a polluted area.
Lake Onto:	
Potency:	8
Period:	Two points for each day of consuming food and water from the Lake.
Silent City:	
Potency:	10
Period:	A HEA roll every day spent within the ruins.
Tiskagin	
Potency:	12
Period:	A HEA roll every day spent within the desert.

SCURVY

The body needs a reasonable range of foods to stay healthy, as limited diets can lead to scurvy. Tomatoes, raw cabbage, celery, onions, fresh cress and carrots, potatoes and citrus fruits will prevent scurvy, but can be hard to find during winter.

It is up to the Weaver to determine when a character is at risk, and for the first two weeks Players should merely be told they feel weak and bruise easily. After two weeks Players must make HEA action tests against a Threshold of 4 every day or suffer a Flesh wound. After another two weeks this becomes a Deep wound. After six weeks, failed HEA rolls should reduce FIT by one until the PC dies. All FIT points can be recovered after a PC starts eating a proper diet, unless they fumbled a roll, in which case they permanently lose a FIT point.

WEATHER EFFECTS

We have already discussed how the people of **Tribe 8** view the weather with awe because of the powerful effect it has on their lives. Below are a number of effects that demonstrate the dangerous side of the weather. Obvious risks like fire and lightning have not been included because they are covered in the **T8 Rulebook**, p. 153.

EXPOSURE

Anyone traveling through the Outlands without proper equipment, or taking proper precautions, will find the weather slowly taking a toll on their health. Determining what 'proper precautions' are is left up to the Weaver, depending on the level of realism that they wish for their cycle. In game terms anyone traveling the Outlands without taking proper care can do so without problems for a number of days equal to their FIT. For every day beyond this the Player must make HEA rolls vs the number of days passed (in excess of FIT) or suffer a Flesh wound. Extreme environmental conditions, such as midwinter, make the period hourly (or every few hours) rather than daily at the Weaver's discretion.

FROSTBITE

In extreme cold, exposed areas and extremities are often damaged, most usually the feet, hands, nose and ears. Frostbite is a useful tool to remind Players not to take the dangers of winter travel lightly. For every day spent in subzero conditions Players must make a Survival roll against a Threshold of 3, modified depending on precautions and preparations they have made. The MoF is the Threshold for a HEA roll, where failure indicates a Flesh wound affecting a Weaver-chosen body part. Unlike normal wounds, it will become a Deep wound once four Flesh wounds have been suffered. This has the normal chance for permanent injury.

HYPOTHERMIA

To function properly the human body must maintain a certain internal temperature. Being improperly clothed, or wet, in low temperatures can lead to body temperature falling to dangerous levels. Considering how deadly hypothermia can be Weavers should be careful that rescue is possible before using it.

Every hour that a PC is exposed to sub-zero temperatures they should make a BLD roll against a Threshold of 5. The MoF becomes a minus against KNO and FIT. When KNO becomes zero the PC becomes delirious. When FIT becomes zero the PC lapses into unconsciousness. At this point the character lives or dies at the Weaver's discretion.

SNOWBLINDNESS

The sun reflecting off snow can be so bright as to blind a person for several days if preventative measures are not taken. Resting the eyes out of the sun can help speed recovery. World Before sunglasses or goggles will prevent snow blindness completely, as will the bone goggles made by the Nui Squats. Rubbing charcoal beneath the eyes to cut the glare will help but not completely prevent the damage.

PCs not making any effort to protect their eyes should make a HEA roll against a Threshold of 4. The MoF is the number of hours that the blindness lasts once they are out of the light. In the case of fumbles, PCs suffer -1 to PER rolls for MoF hours following the recovery of their sight.

SUNSTROKE

In hot conditions failure to rest and drink can cause the body to overheat. The Weaver should decide when conditions warrant the possibility of sunstroke. Players should make a FIT roll against a Threshold of 4. Failure indicates that the Player is at -1 on all Action tests until they rest and recover. If exceedingly foolish, for instance constantly wearing full armor, Players should make a FIT roll against a Threshold of 6 or develop severe sunstroke. The MoF becomes the Threshold for a HEA roll. If Players fail the HEA roll they are delirious for MoF hours. Each hour another HEA roll is made, failure indicating the PC suffers a Flesh wound.

PEOPLE

The forests of Northeast America have always supported a rich tapestry of human society and still do so in the world of **Tribe 8**. Though the Seven Tribes and the Fallen are the focus of **Tribe 8**, they interact closely with those who live around them, and all communities are at the mercy of the environment in which they live. The concept of nature as a serious threat is not prevalent in the modern world. Blizzards and floods, no matter how severe, are merely temporary inconveniences for most of us. In a primitive world nature is a constant and unpredictable threat. This is the world of the peoples of **Tribe 8**.

THE SEVEN TRIBES

The Seven Tribes, while primitive in terms of technology, are an agricultural and urban people. Through sustainable farming, they produce a surplus that supports non-agricultural workers like craftsmen and entertainers. Thus Tribal culture is rich compared to its purely hunter-gatherer neighbors. The Tribes' sense of cultural superiority and the knowledge that they are the Goddess' chosen has made them insular and arrogant. They focus on Vimary, the center of tribal power and culture, and dismiss the Outlands as unnecessary. Yet Vimary is a small island and the Tribes have growing needs. Despite their intense dislike of off-island travel, the Seven Tribes have to seek resources off Vimary, securing what they require through trade and theft.

VIMARY - CENTER OF THE WORLD

The central focus of Tribal existence is the Fatimas, and because the Fatimas reside on Vimary that island has become the center of daily life. Reinforcing this inward focus is the fact that Vimary is also the place of the camps, the ancestral homeland of the Tribes, and that as a relatively settled people the Tribes are not generally adept at survival in the untamed wilderness. If these facts were not enough, distance weakens the connection to the Fatimas, and members of the Seven Tribes suffer -2 on all Dreaming and Synthesis action tests when off Vimary.

The result is that the Tribes pillory the Outlands as unclean, denying their reliance on the resources they collect off Vimary. Naturally few wish to travel the Outlands, and those who do are treated as if they had become unclean themselves. To ensure that the necessary resources are collected, each Tribe is assigned a specific duty. To man their expeditions each Tribe demands a levee of people from their member clans, allowing the clan elders to pick whomever they will, usually the poorest or most disliked.

The Outlands have thus become yet another fracture point in Tribal society. Many travelers resent the way they are treated once they return, and a few are intrigued by what they see: plentiful resources, rich lands and wide horizons. As time passes growing land pressure on Vimary will cause increasing discontent amongst those who see opportunities being denied them by the status quo. As well, more former travelers are being exiled for their attitudes, something that reinforces the prejudice both against leaving Vimary and those unfortunates who do.

NOT TO THE NORTH

All Tribal taboos regarding travel into the Outlands are only semi-official. While the Fatimas and their priestesses decry travel off Vimary, it is not explicitly banned. Social ostracism enforces the taboos without any need for Tera Sheba's intervention. The one exception is Tera Sheba's ban on travel north of Lac Pere. The Fatimas are aware of the presence of Z'bri north of Vimary, and initially the ban was to prevent a war the Tribes could not win. As time passed and the Fatimas became more conservative, the ban remained from a desire to not upset Tribal society.

SPRING FORAGING

The most undeniable sign that the Seven Tribes cannot remain locked on Vimary for very many more years is the level of food production. The Tribes are eating more and more of what they produce, and storing less and less. This is especially noticeable in winter when production ceases. For the moment Eva's bounty still manages to sustain the Tribes, except when winter comes early or is particularly harsh. After such winters the Tribes face severe food shortages and cannot wait for the first crops. Such winters used to come only once every five or six years, but recently have been as regular as every other year.

After bad winters the Magdalites and Agnites take foragers into the Eastern Hills. This is their duty because they have the fewest warriors, and since the Hills are the least dangerous of the Outlands only a small number of Joanite Rangers are needed to protect them. The Magdalites carry out important, but secret, rituals at Jardin during the expedition. The other Tribes condemn this, but the Magdalites persist. The Tera Shebans are watching them closely for any further signs of heresy, or open flaunting of the taboos about the Outlands.

SUMMER EXPEDITION

Eva can read the signs of nature in ways unfathomable to man. Once every three or four years, She gathers Her Tribe's elders at Lai and tells them to send an expedition down the Great River. Inevitably on these years a drought or major fire will drastically reduce the crops harvested by the Tribes, and they have to rely on what is foraged along the Great River for winter stores. The gathering of stores is the Evans' main focus. The trading at Wolf is valuable but not essential, for though the Tribes benefit from the hides, furs, metals and small luxuries that they gain, these things do not feed hungry mouths when the snows come.

It is increasingly difficult however, to deter the poor, and overwhelmingly male, Evans who crew the riverboats from speaking of the arable land they have seen. The desire to have land of their own is driving more of the Evan boatmen to heresy, and strong crackdowns by Evan elders and the Shebans have seen a fair number exiled. Another result has been that many experienced boatmen are now banned from the expedition, and many young Evans are now seeing these lands for themselves.



AUTUMN CARAVAN

Dahlia's seemingly random decision to send an Autumn Caravan to Adawe every few years is not as capricious as it seems. She keeps a watchful eye on trade in the Bazaar, and when business falls off or costs, especially for Joanite metal or Yagan furs, get beyond what the poor can spare from their food stores, she sends a Caravan to fix matters. The Caravan stimulates activity greatly, and the influx of metal and furs from outside Vimary just before winter allows the poor to get what they need without having to barter so much food from their stores that they starve.

Tera Sheba, whose Stiltwalkers fulfill their Tribe's duty in the Outlands by crewing the Caravan's canoes, loathes the Caravan and opposes it every time it is called. The Fates, however, back Dahlia on this point, trusting Her instincts about Bazaar. The Dahlians exhibit the least problem with traveling into the Outlands, while Sheban travelers are finished within their tribe. They will never be able to leave the Stiltwalkers, and even their children have trouble attaining the necessary education to progress within the tribe. A problem is that greedy Dahlians, their appetites whetted by trading at Adawe, have started to trade secretly with the Squats south and east of Vimary.

WINTER HUNTING

Though food is ostensibly the motivation for the winter expedition, other needs now drive it as well. Furs are perhaps the most important resource the Tribes consume after food and metal. In the harsh winters of the Northeast they are indispensable for clothing, and the Seven Tribes would have trapped out Vimary but for Eva's prohibitions and manipulations. Not enough furs are gained in trade to cover the shortfall, and so the expeditions to the rich streams of the northlands are required. The Tribes are now almost totally dependent on this resource, and hunting expeditions leave every season, a fact justified by sending convicted criminals and calling the trip punishment.

Even without the effects of winter the northlands are not particularly inviting, and the expedition's members are the least inclined of all travelers to develop unconventional attitudes towards the Outlands. The effect of being close to the Living Bridge further reinforces negative opinions about the Outlands. While few of the groups have ever seen the Bridge, enough have done so to start rumors. In the longer term this undermines Tera Sheba's goal to hide the existence of other Z'bri from the Nation, and Inquisitors keep a close eye on returned hunters.

THE EIGHTH TRIBE

Freed of the constraints of Tribal society, the Eighth Tribe is looking at the Outlands through new eyes. The Fallen are slowly removing their blindfolds, and realizing that the future ultimately must lie beyond Vimary's shores. This is not a discovery that comes easily, and many of the Fallen regard the Outlands as a distraction. The looming presence of Vimary, and of the Z'bri, convinces many that matters closer to Hom need more immediate attention.

A MANIFEST DESTINY

Whatever their views about what should they do with the Outlands now, all the Eighth Tribe agree that it belongs to them. Prophecy dictates that the Outlands are theirs to discover, and so it shall be. The present debate is about the timing of this exploration, as opposed to putting more effort into destroying the Z'bri and freeing the rest of the Seven Tribes. The future is set for a struggle within the Fallen, however, between those who take the Prophecy of Joshua to mean they have the right to take whatever they wish from the Outlands, and those who believe the prophecy is not meant to be interpreted in a material sense.

Those Fallen who see their status as a license to indulge in the worst traits of humanity, such as Raven and a cell of Fallen Dahlians called the Sellers of Souls, will lead the Fallen in bloody slaughter of the Squats if they have their way. They are opposed by the Fallen who struggle to rise above petty sins and temptations. If these idealists, led by Altara Ven and Mek, have their way the Eighth Tribe will find both allies and enemies in the Outlands and truly start history anew rather than repeat mistakes made before. The question of the eventual winner of this argument will be of the utmost importance to the Eighth Tribe.

EXPLORATION

The Fallen, like their sisters in the Seven Tribes, are not at home in the wilderness. As a result exploration represents a serious risk, and a lack of survival and navigation skills is the first and most vital problem that the Eighth Tribe must overcome. Even beyond this, the Fallen are few and the dangers of the wilderness, especially the Squats, are numerous. Yet the Fallen bring their powers of Dreaming and Synthesis into the Outlands without any limitation, and this can make the difference between life and death.

A Weaver should make the Outlands as disturbing and unfamiliar as possible to her Players, surprising them with the unexpected. Even if PCs have skills such as survival there is a great difference between Vimary and the Outlands. It is strongly suggested that Weavers use the Lore Skill (local area) to balance out the indiscriminate use of other Skills. For instance a PC may have Herbalism, but finding herbs in a specific area also relates to knowing the lore of that locale. Appropriate negatives on rolls in locations where PCs do not have Lore or local guides, can be a useful way to introduce the problems of exploration to game play.

SQUAT TRIBES

The Squats are a numerous and diverse people. Their communities range in size from small extended families to multi-tribal confederations, while technologically they range from the Stone Age to surpassing the Seven Tribes. The Squats share a relatively common language, however, various dialects of English that have developed in the generations since the Fall. The Squats lead brutish and often short lives. They face the weather, predators and the Z'bri without magical protection. Weavers shouldn't make Squats automatically pushovers; they are survivors and fighters. Competition for resources means that warfare is endemic amongst Squats, and these wars are slowly creating powerful alliances amongst the various tribes.

EASTERN HILLS SQUATS

The Hills Squats live in clans linked by loose tribal affiliations. Nomadic in summer, the clans return to a tribal village to share the hardships of winter. The former presence of the Joshuans has given the Hills Squats a level of technology on par with that of the Nation. Their lands are under serious threat, however, for the Oneida are pushing up the Hud River from the south and Boarhead is pushing down from the north. Because the Seven Tribes treat the Eastern Hills as if they owned them, many Hills Squats consider them hostile as well.

The increasing conflicts are driving some tribes to migrate over the White Mountains; there they are displacing the Flint Squats in a slow war of extermination. Other tribes have formed a powerful alliance, known to the Seven Tribes as the Leox. Determined to protect their lands, from the Oneida especially, the Leox need allies but are ignored by the Seven Tribes. This is forcing the hard-pressed Leox to contemplate allying with Boarhead. If this happens, the Tribes will find the Eastern Hills held by a powerful nation, as large as their own and with expansionist ambitions.

GREAT RIVER SQUATS

The numerous family groups that live along the Great River above Vimary are one interrelated community. Living on rafts of reeds, they are a simple people who face few threats in their watery domain. The only time they leave the water is in the winter, when they retreat to a number of large islands and set up communal villages. They have no tribal structures at all, and various family elders make decisions in council. The families are quite backward, trading with the Lock Keepers for those things they can't make themselves, which is anything beyond simply metal arrowheads, but their low level of technology isn't a problem, because of the simplicity of their lifestyle.

GREAT RIVER LAKE SQUATS

The Great Lakes Squats, who call themselves the Novohuron, are an advanced and closely knit confederation of different tribes, the main divisions being between islanders and nomadic sailors. Due to the pollution problems in the Onto the majority of Novohuron live on the other Great Lakes, and only a few travel the secret route through the Sico Swamp that connects the Onto to the Ichiga. On the Onto the islanders only live in the Thousand Isles, having been driven from their southern lands by the Oneida. The nomads sail where they please; though the presence of the Oneida on the eastern shore makes that side of the lake unpopular.

The Novohuron have maintained a very high level of technology, a secret they keep closely guarded. Apart from their unmatched skills as shipbuilders, they also have black powder muskets and small cannon. These weapons keep the Oneida at bay, and make the Novohuron the undisputed masters of the Great Lakes, rulers of the best trade routes in North America. The wealth this brings attracts many enemies, but with their ships and guns the Novohuron have defeated every attempt to drive them from the lakes.

RIDERS WITH THE SPIRITS

The Riders, or Horse Squats, are a loose collection of nomadic Squat clans that migrate yearly from the southern shores of the Onto to the Great Bay far to the north of the Otter. Their lack of settlements is due to the Z'bri presence in Rahntoh. While the Onto lowlands are rich, they are open to Z'bri raids. By only spending the harsh winters on the southern shores of the Onto, the Riders minimize the threat. To ensure a peaceful winter, they have also developed a tradition of bribing the Z'bri with a tribute of young men and women. Despite the danger, the Riders are far from united. The clans compete aggressively, and small battles are common. Horses are the most prized possession of the Riders, who have a strong warrior culture. Technologically they are backwards, relying totally on bone and wood, but they eagerly trade for metal goods, especially weapons.



ONEIDA

The Z'bri of Hattan had few resources to support their mighty city and sent successive waves of Serfs out to forage. Eventually serf villages were built along the Hud and Hawk Rivers. In time the Serfs became more like Squats, taking the name Oneida. Despite the changes, the Oneida remained loyal to Hattan, sending tribute down the Hud and worshipping the Z'bri as gods. Those who dealt with their distant mistresses became a priestly caste, twisted by Sundering and taught secret rites. Beneath the priests a class of elders act as captains, chieftains and traders. Many Serf practices are now kept as religious observances despite serving no useful purpose.

Eventually the priests became greedy, eager to please their mistresses with greater quantities of tribute, and they led the Oneida onto a path of conquest. Thanks to rites of Sundering, strong organization and superior numbers, the Oneida have slowly conquered all of the lands between the High Mountains and Tomac River. Following a conquest, the Oneida herd the surviving locals into slave farms, and build a fortified town to cement their power. In the last few seasons, however, the Oneida have stopped expanding, blocked by the Leox to the north, the Novohuron and Arc Priests to the west, and a land of devastation to the south. War can only be a short time away.

NUIT

The Squats that live far to the north of Vimary are a mystery. Removed from contact with the rest of humanity for many centuries, the Nuit do not speak a language understood by the Tribes. They have strong links to the River of Dream, placing much importance on ritual. They live as much in the River as the physical world, each tribe possessing a powerful guardian spirit. This spiritualism, and refusal to communicate with outsiders in anything but crude sign language, is why the Seven Tribes call them the Silent Ones, though they are also called the Chalk Faces by the Dahlians. They are well adapted to the cold, reversing the normal migration cycle by moving south in the summer and north in winter. They have a subsistence lifestyle, making everything they need from the animals they hunt.

BOARHEAD'S CONFEDERACY

Boarhead is a natural warrior and charismatic leader. Since becoming chieftain of a Squat tribe near the Etchim River ten years ago, Boarhead has brought all the squats tribes northeast of the Black Lake under his rule. The first Squats Boarhead conquered were absorbed into his tribe, the Irinakoiv. When this became unwieldy, Boarhead created a confederation of tribes. Weak tribes that accept Boarhead's rule are treated as vassals, and must supply warriors and tribute. Strong tribes sit as equals at his council with the clan heads of the Irinakoiv. Tribes who resist are destroyed, their men becoming castrated slaves and their women distributed as booty. Boarhead has also created a special force of warriors called Tusks. The best warriors of his confederacy, they are loyal only to him.

Far to the northeast he made contact with the Sanjon Keepers. After establishing friendly trade relations, the Keepers gave Boarhead an ancient map that showed him how to finally bypass the Black Lake and Valley of White Death. It was at this point, three years ago, that Boarhead first encountered the Seven Tribes. His initial overtures were friendly because he was impressed with the fact that the Tribes had defeated the Vimary Z'bri. Boarhead wanted the Tribes as allies in case the Z'bri assaulted his lands, for the one thing he fears is the lurking menace of Capal. He was rudely rebuffed, however, and in vengeance Boarhead now plans to conquer Vimary. His anger has only been increased by the Tribes' winter hunting expeditions, which risk annoying the Capal Z'bri.

Living in numerous fortified villages, Boarhead's people survive by a mix of hunting and farming. Despite the quantity and quality of steel used by Boarhead's people, they are not technologically advanced. Boarhead's alliance with the Sanjon Keepers is his source of metal goods. Terrified by what lurks in Capal, the Keepers have also equipped Boarhead's Tusks with muskets, though they carefully keep the secret of making gunpowder to themselves. Boarhead's present concerns are the destruction of the Seven Tribes and the absorption of the Leox Squats. He is a patient man however, and careful not to overreach his resources. Raids on Vimary Keepers are providing him with extra items to trade to the Sanjon Keepers, and he is building up stores for a massive attack on the next Tribal expedition to the Eastern Hills.



6. Weaver Resources

KEEPERS

The Keepers know more about the Outlands than any other people; their World Before maps are detailed, and short wave radios allow them to regularly communicate with other communities. Yet they have few of the skills needed to brave the wilderness. Only caches of World Before artifacts can drag Keepers into the Outlands, and then they rely on local guides.

ST LAWRENCE KEEPERS

Called the Lock Keepers by the Seven Tribes, after the system of ancient locks they maintain along the Great River, the St Lawrence Keepers are a fearful people. Spread out in their heavily fortified locks they are the least numerous of the Keepers, each lock being run by a single family. Only their role as facilitators of Keeper trade has kept them from becoming inbred. By dominating trade along the Great River they have amassed an unsurpassed collection of World Before technology. Much of this technology has gone into making their homes more secure, but while attacks by Squats have always been a fact of life, now they face the Oneida. In one attack, only a desperate rescue mission in Thunder Canoes staved off an Oneida force using Sundering rites. Now the Lock Keepers are looking for allies to redress the numerical advantage of the Oneida.

NIAGARA KEEPERS

Safe within their massive hydroelectricity complexes, the Niagara Keepers, Arc Priests to the Squats, are complacent and studious. While they have faced the threat of the Oneida for many seasons, they have easily repulsed the assaults. Disturbed nevertheless, the Niagara Keepers have begun a series of biological experiments on captured Oneida, trying to discover the source of the strange powers some display.

Research is at the heart of Niagara Keeper existence, for their unlimited supplies of power have kept numerous computers and labs operating. Slowly they are attempting to create a complete database of human knowledge. Some of their experiments on Oneida involve testing live subjects with a variety of chemical and biological substances, the goal being to find a better way of dealing with the Oneida problem. They are very careful with safety following an accident that killed several dozen people.

SUDBURY KEEPERS

The Sudbury Keepers are isolationist to the point of xenophobia. Living in an ancient Smelter, isolated by a vast wasteland, the Sudbury Keepers have grown paranoid and suffer serious genetic problems. The World Before blasted the Sudbury and Tiskaming areas through unrestricted industrial activity, activity that the Sudbury Keepers keep going. Noxious chemicals and other poisons have destroyed the land, and are now destroying the Keepers. Many are twisted and infertile, and every year there are more stillbirths. To keep their numbers up, the Sudbury Keepers now trade steel weapons for newborn Squat children.

Whatever their other problems, the Sudbury Keepers are the preeminent smiths of the world of **Tribe 8**. In their plant, titanium and tungsten-steel alloys are turned into rifles and engine parts, armor and swords, and many other wonders. The quantities are not great, but despite this they are absolutely indispensable in keeping much World Before technology working.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

Many different areas are detailed by the Voices of the Wind. Weavers will have noticed that not all areas around Vimary are given descriptions, however, especially to the north. The Seven Tribes and Fallen have not gone far from home as yet, and much remains for them to discover.

EASTWARD FROM VIMARY

The lands to the east of Vimary are the most visited and best known of all the Outlands. They are also among the most heavily inhabited and conflict ridden, well-suited to a 'Last of the Mohicans' style cycle. As the most likely pathway to the Atlantic, the east is also the gateway to new realms beyond Vimary.

EASTERN HILLS

The Eastern Hills cover the Eastern Townships near Montreal. The Appalachian and White Mountains lie to the east, the Beauce Plateau to the north, and Lac Amplan (Lake Champlain) and the Squio (Missisquoi) River to the south. Of all the Outlands the Seven Tribes know this region best, because of its proximity to Vimary — 60 klicks as the crow flies — and abundance of navigable rivers and blacktops.

The Hills rise from the tangled lowlands along the Great River, to gently wooded hills dotted with numerous lakes. Human occupation has kept the Hills open through farming, forestry and fire. The further east or north you travel the more the land rises, becoming rougher as mixed boreal-deciduous woodlands give way to dark, overgrown boreal forests.

The open meadows of the Hills have a strong population of aurochs, boar, deer and moose. Some Squats even run small herds of goats and sheep, though the prevalence of game brings many predators, especially wolves and ontos. There are unnatural threats as well, for the Gek'roh inhabit the Grand Bee in large numbers.

The Hills can be introduced into a cycle by simply having the Players need to leave Hom to hunt. Squat raids, an increasing occurrence as Boarhead comes south, could also lead Players into the Hills. Alternately, if the PCs have a reputation the Leox may come to them for help. Deer and Moose spirits are particularly strong in the Hills, and they can be used to bring the Players eastward through vision quests.

The main themes for a Hills cycle are human, as banditry, war and hunting are the main action. There are many World Before sites, good places for artifact hunts, and Z'bri at the Grand Bee (Granby) and on the Aska (Yamaska) River for those Players uninterested in more than human endeavors.

The Hills feel good, comfortable, rich and safe. The greens are bright, the waters crystal clear, and the sun seems to sparkle a little brighter. Thus the PCs' first meeting with the Hill Squats should be an interesting contradiction, the beauty of the land and the ugly, petty violence of humanity. Many spirits in the Hills are ancient, remembering the World Before and man's ancient mistakes. A lingering grief pervades the Hills, as man rises to ruin the natural perfection of this place once again.

LANDS OF THE FLINT SQUATS

Lying in the heart of Maine, along the Penobscot River, the Flint Lands are an almost primeval area dominated by mist enshrouded hills clad with ancient forests, which rise above numerous rivers, streams and lakes. Towering over all are large, bare-topped mountains. The strangest thing about the Flint Lands is the lack of humans and almost no sign of the World Before, as if the forests have come back and swallowed all that was left from the Fall.

Water is the most notable feature of these lands. In every season but winter it is impossible to travel without moving through it, on it or being soaked by it. What the Flint Lands are rich in is spirits, especially around the Crown of the World (Mount Katahdin). Unless following the migrating Hills Squats, the PCs are most likely to be led here by spirits. Mighty rites, miraculous cures and great secrets are what the Flint Lands hold for those willing to risk their souls.

BROKEN COAST

The Atlantic coast of Maine is ragged, with many deep bays and hundreds of coves and inlets lined with sandy beaches and salt marshes. Off the coast there are a multitude of islands, ranging in size from tiny to Vimary-sized. This rich habitat swarms with life, including sea-going Squat tribes. The Broken Coast also bears many battered reminders of the World Before, including signs that Z'bri once lived here, the miasma of their corruption not yet gone from the larger ruins.

The ocean is the greatest challenge and treasure of the Broken Coast. The most likely way for PCs to get here is down one for the many rivers, but once they reach open water they will find they lack the skills to do anything more than quick island hops. Yet the desire to explore is almost palpable here, the same effect the sea has had on humanity for generations, and like the sirens of old, it can be used to call the PCs.

SOUTHWARD FROM VIMARY

Following the Great River southwards, into the heart of America, will return a cycle to the heart of World Before. Here the corruption and power of the World Before still affect daily life. The corruption of the Z'bri is also present through their pawns, the Oneida, and the mystery of Rahntoh.

GREAT RIVER LANDS

The land along the Great River (St Lawrence Seaway), which runs from the Onto (Lake Ontario) to the Great Water (Atlantic Ocean), forms a continuous lowland the entire length of the river. Though the basin changes in width, ranging from 16 to 160 kiks wide, the conditions remain otherwise the same. Good soil and plentiful water ensure that they are covered with thick vegetation, as well as being dotted with marshlands, though human foresting has kept much of the lowland free of trees, especially around Vimary.

Many small Squat tribes eke out an existence in the World Before ruins that dot the upper lowlands. These slovenly and desperate people, given to banditry and pillage, are what the Tribes normally think of when they speak of Squats. On the Upper Great River the Squats who live in the marshes are much less pitiful, having learnt to make full use of the lowlands' many resources. Throughout the year boar can be found in the long grass, and in winter many larger animal migrate to the lowlands, especially moose and deer, but so do starving packs of wolves.

Getting characters to the lowlands is easy; they lie right next to Hom, and their entire length is easily reached in any boat. Hunting, Squats and Z'bri are the most likely action, though trading is a different and roleplaying-focused option that can be a good change of pace. A blunt instrument to get the Players into the lowlands is to simply have them hunted by someone powerful enough, the Watch for instance, that leaving Vimary for a season makes good sense.

6. Weaver Resources

The Great River Lands show the dual nature of the Outlands quite well. As you go northward, the hills close in on the lowlands, and they become overshadowed by the silent hills, a dark, forbidding land that foretells of what is found around Capal. Southward from Vimary the lowlands become a continuous marsh, full of life and holding many opportunities for the adventurous, but still the murky waters hold dangerous secrets that can kill the unprepared.

HIGH MOUNTAINS

The Novohuron regard the High Mountains (Adirondack Uplands) as their true homelands. Since the Novohuron migrated from the area, no other Squats have moved in, the land is simply too forbidding. The High Mountains are very steep, many peaks reach above 1200 meters, and the High Mountain itself (Mount Marcy) rises 1629 meters.

The region stretches from the Great River Lowlands all the way to the Hud (Hudson River), a deserted wilderness whose silent vales and mirror-like lakes are places of mystery. Unless a Weaver has a desire to have his PCs hunt moose or mountain lions, then the only lure the High Mountains have is communion with the spirits who throng the majestic peaks. Such communion should not be easy, harder than a trip through these hard lands, but if a cell needs an answer to a particularly difficult problem the High Mountain spirits may hold the answers they need.

THE ONTO

Also called the Great River Lake, the Onto (Lake Ontario), is a massive and polluted freshwater lake that any trip up the Great River will inevitably find. The pollution of the Onto is the dominant metaphor for all encounters on the Lake. No one but the Oneida and Z'bri actually live along the lake, and even the Novohuron only sail the Onto to protect the clean lakes upon which the majority of their people live. A Weaver should encourage her Players to think of the Onto as a battlefield, for there is both the battle between the corruption of the World Before and nature, and battle against the corruption of the Z'bri.

ONTO SHORELINE

Outside the maze of the Thousand Isles (also the World Before name), no Squats live upon the shore of the Onto. The lands are much like those of the Great River lowlands, rich plains with scattered stands of woods, though the lack of man means that the game is more plentiful. Only on the southern shore of the Onto will the Players find settlements, those of the Oneida, which lie between the Great Falls (Niagara Falls) and the mouth of the Owaygo (Oswego) River. Conflict with the Oneida can lead into a cycle all of its own. The Z'bri are also present, the great ruin of Rahntoh lying hidden behind its curtain of hate. A Weaver may well find that an isolated cell cannot handle the Z'bri directly, but exploration of the deserted shores, discovering the true nature of the 'diseases' that the Novohuron say infect the Onto, is a powerful possibility.

WESTWARD FROM VIMARY

Not so forbidding as the northlands, nor so rich as the east or south, the westlands are as mysterious as they are secretive. It is the secrets of the ancient lands beyond the Otter that make the West Wind so intriguing. Like Dahlia with Her masks, the land westward is many-faced.

LANDS ALONG THE OTTER

The Otter (Ottawa) River is as playful as the creatures that gave it its name. Compared to the Great River it is relatively deserted. The only permanent villages are those of the Serfs along the lower northern bank, and far-ranging Gek'roh keep the northern bank unwholesome for many klicks westward. Only the Horse Squats spend any time living along the Otter, and even their presence is temporary. Time is the great difference along the river. The northern bank is not so much corrupted by the Z'bri, as ancient beyond knowledge. Like a bitter old man, its dark and untouched forests are mean, disinterested in life and spiteful to those who are. The southern bank is young, the spring floods bringing rebirth every year. Here the land actively invites exploration, seeming to desire the hand of man upon it once more.

The Otter may seem uninviting to Players; it seems to offer so much less than the south or east. Still the Z'bri are there, along with ruins from the World Before, and since we have left it mostly unexplored, it is free for the Weaver to change as she will, adding new secrets for the West Wind to reveal.



LANDS OF THE HORSE SQUATS

Ranging from the lowlands of the Great (Hudson) Bay to the Place of Fruit Trees (Essex County), the Horse Squats traverse the entire length of the World Before Province of Ontario at the turning of the seasons. The eclectic mix of lands is impossible to describe in a few words, for almost any landform a Weaver desires can be found in amongst the ridges and swamps of these lands. The mix of landforms and multitude of ruins from the World Before lends itself to cycles of exploration. If a Weaver wishes for her Players to uncover lost societies, hidden temples, or some wonder from the World Before, the Lands of the Horse Squats are well suited to such cycles. The Horse Squats have many of the traits of the Plains Indians, and Weavers may find them a useful foil to Players used to cutting a swathe through Squats, as well as offering a different mystical perspective.

TISKAGIN

The land between ancient Sudbury and Timiskaming is a sinkhole into which all the ancient corruption of the World Before has been drawn. It matters not how this is reasoned, if at all, to Players; it is the explanation for how much of the land lies renewed and pristine. Perhaps it was the ancient mines and refineries that attracted the corruption to these lands, but whatever the reason they lie dead without hope of rebirth. These lands can be used to recreate the desert imagery of many post-apocalyptic genres, or they can become the ultimate temptation for Players. Many powerful secrets can be found in the unclean hills, secrets that could win a cell many victories. Yet the corruption of the World Before is tangible on everything brought from these lands.

NORTHWARD FROM VIMARY

The home of winter, the northlands are seen as a place of grief and danger. There is something wrong with the northlands beyond the clawing of winter, however, a dark cloud that always seems to hover just out of sight. Still, the land holds precious resources for those willing to risk the dangers.

BOARHEAD'S LANDS

The lands of the powerful Squat Warlord stretch from the Beauce Plateau to the northernmost tip of the Gaspé Peninsula. All Boarhead's villages lie inland, as fear of Capal is so great that they do not risk settling in the rich Great River Lowlands. The main settlements are all in or near the rich lands of the Beauce Plateau, with fewer and fewer villages the further north the Great River runs. The reason for this is that the land becomes more mountainous and forests thicker, though deep valleys do exist and this is where most Squat villages can be found. A few river valleys lead down into the lands of the Sanjon (Saint John) Keepers, far away on the Great Water.

The lands here hold little interest except for the nation that a single charismatic chieftain is building amongst the trees. Boarhead is building a nation much like the confederation of

Indians that existed in the World Before. If he succeeds then even without the magical power of the Fatimas, his people will be a force to be reckoned with. If a Weaver believes that a strong Squat nation would unbalance her cycle, then by all means reduce Boarhead to a particularly dangerous bandit.

NORTHERN HUNTING LANDS

The northlands on the western side of the Great River lie atop an ancient and rocky plateau (the Canadian Shield). The soils are thin, and bare rock seems to grow as abundantly as the boreal forest that covers the many hills. The land is shot through with rivers and lakes, and bogs and marshes compete with the forest to dominate the valleys and lowlands. Few Squats live in these lands in the summer, the hordes of insects and difficulty traveling through the endless bogs making it unpopular. In winter it is a hard land of ice and snow, and only the desperate need to hunt the rich caribou herds who winter around the Lake of Spirits (the Gouin Reservoir) tempts people to risk their lives.

The prosaic attractions of the northlands are unlikely to attract Players, but the power of the Lake of Spirits is a temptation many won't be able to resist. Once in the northlands the dangers of the North Wind, or of the bogs in summer, provides a Weaver with many other diversions for her cycle. The toys of the Beasts that stray westward from Capal are also available if a Weaver wishes her Players to become the hunted rather than the hunters.



ANIMALS AND CREATURES

The animals of the Outlands vary widely in size, range, numbers and ability. Many seem to have adapted specifically for the region, while others have had those changes forced upon them. Travelers must always be aware that they are the trespassers in the animals' rightful domain.

AUROCHS

These wily beasts are the descendants of the domesticated cattle from the World Before. Generations of living in the wild have seen them grow huge, the better to cope with the dangers of the Outlands. They are nervous beasts, unhappy when anything approaches their small family herds. For all their bulk, they can move quickly and with their sharp hooves and massive horns are more than capable of holding their own against any predator. They prefer the edges of marshes and bogs for the rich grass that grows in such places, and migrate south of the High Mountains to avoid the worst of winter.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+1	BLD	+9	FIT	+1	INS	+2	PER	+1
WIL	+1	STR	+5	HEA	+1	STA	75	UD	16

SKILLS:

Skill	Level	Attrib.
Athletics	1	+1
Combat Sense	2	+1
Hand-to-Hand	2	+1

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Gore (x15 damage), Kick (x10 damage)



BOAR

Prolific throughout much of the Outlands, reaching pest proportions in some places, boar are the descendents of domestic pigs from the World Before. They are noticeably larger than domestic pigs and have nasty dispositions. Hunting these creatures on foot is considered a foolhardy tactic, for they are much faster than one would expect, capable of dodging a spear thrust and then gutting a hunter with their large tusks. Nor is their meat always good to eat, for many are scavengers not adverse to carrion. These have parasitic worms that can infect someone who eats their flesh.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+1	BLD	+2	FIT	+1	INS	+2	PER	0
WIL	0	STR	+1	HEA	+1	STA	40	UD	7

SKILLS:

Skill	Level	Attrib.
Athletics	1	+1
Combat Sense	2	0
Dodge	2	+1
Hand-to-Hand	1	1

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Gore (x10 damage + HEA roll or be infected with Rot)

FUR ANIMALS (BEAVER, ER-MINE, MARTEN, MINK, MUSK-RAT AND OTTER)

Small and quick, the various members of the rodent and weasel families that provide the furs that clothe the communities of the northeast in the freezing winter, are tempermental species. Their populations fluctuate greatly depending on the conditions from season to season, and they are very susceptible to over-hunting and can be quickly driven from a region. Catching these quick and agile creatures requires patience and skill, and is most easily done with special traps.

ATTRIBUTES:

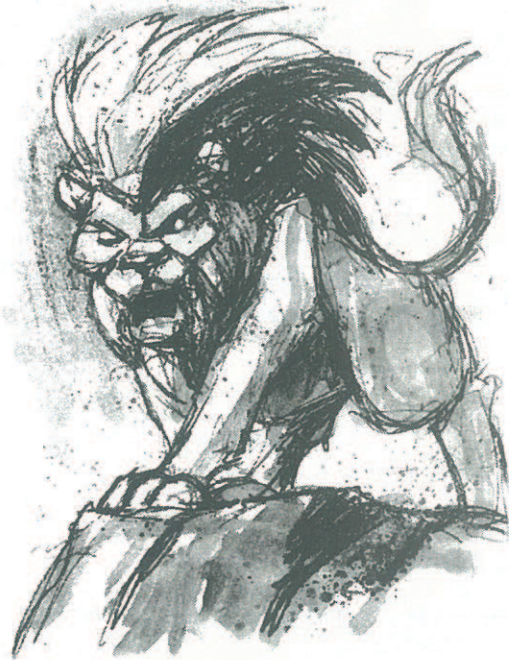
AGI	+3 to +4	BLD	-4 to 0	FIT	+1	INS	+1 to +2	PER	+2 to +3
WIL	+1	STR	-1 to 0	HEA	+1-2	STA	10 to 20	UD	1

SKILLS:

Athletics	3 +3/+4	Combat Sense	1 +2/+3	Dodge	3 +3/+4
Hand-to-Hand	1 +3/+4	Notice (Tracking 2)	+2/+3	Sneak	3 +3/+4
Swimming	2 +1				

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Bite (x4 damage)



ONTOS/PANTHERS

These shaggy, golden-tan creatures are descended from the great cats that escaped from zoos into the wilderness during the Fall. In the colder climes of Northeast America their coats have grown shaggier, but otherwise they remain much the same as they once were. Now they follow the migrating auroch, as well as preying on deer, moose and boar. While most still live in prides, a few have become solitary mountain wanderers, living in the vastness of the High Mountains.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+2	BLD	+2	FIT	+1	INS	+2	PER	+1
WIL	-1	STR	+1	HEA	+1	STA	40	UD	6

SKILLS:

Athletics	2	+2	Combat Sense	3	+1	Hand-to-Hand	3	+2
Notice (tracking)	1	+1	Sneak	1	+2			

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Bite (x9 damage), Claws (x12 damage)

6. Weaver Resources

CARIBOU, DEER, AND MOOSE

Living in small herds or wandering alone amongst the forests and meadows of the Northeast, these three species of herbivores are the dominant inhabitants of their ecosystems. They are vital to the health of all the peoples that live in the northeast, for they provide the bulk of the meat and leather that communities need to survive. They are without natural predators except for wolves and ontos, but are wary creatures, difficult to get close to, and able to kill hunters that get too close with well-placed kicks from their sharp hooves.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+1	BLD +5 to +9	FIT	+2	INS	+2	PER	+1
WIL	+1	STR +3 to +5	HEA	2	STA 60 to 80	UD	8 to 10	

SKILLS:

Combat Sense	1	+1	Hand-to-Hand	2	+1
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SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Butt — Moose only (x12 damage), Kick (x10 damage)



ELS

Since the Fall, seals have returned to the many beaches from which they had been hunted. Called Els by the Squats, they are an important source of meat, hide and oil to communities along the coast. Despite the hunting their numbers hold up because of the rich feeding grounds off the Atlantic coast. When on shore they aggressively defend their beach territories, and can move faster than their appearance indicates. At sea, men have almost no chance of catching their fleet forms.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	0/+2	BLD	+5	FIT	+2	INS	+1/+2	PER	+1/+2
WIL	+1	STR	+3	HEA	+2	STA	60	UD	11

(first stat is for land use, the second for sea)

SKILLS:

Athletics	2	0/+2	Combat Sense	2	+1/+2	Hand-to-Hand	1	0/+2
Swimming	3	+2						

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Bite (x8 damage)

EASTERN HILLS ZOMS

Living amongst the ruins of the World Before, these creatures differ from those found on Vimary. For one, most are ancient, all flesh long since having withered from their limbs, leaving them nothing more than yellowing bones. Age has made them tougher than Vimary Zoms, but their joints are stiffer and they are not so fast. Few are seen before twilight, but they often claw their way from the ground to surprise unwary travelers who have camped amongst ruins. These Zoms rarely carry weapons, using instead their very sharp claws and hands.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	0	BLD	+2	FIT	0	INS	+1	PER	0
WIL	0	STR	+1	HEA	0	STA	35	UD	6

SKILLS:

Combat Sense	3	0	Hand-to-Hand	2	0
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SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Claw (x8 damage), Hardened Bones (Armor +15)



THUNDER CANOE RIDERS

These Keepers come from a number of different communities, including those in Vimary. The name comes from the motorized aluminum runabouts that they use to travel the Great River, the Onto and beyond. They act as the principle traders of their people, and also fight against groups like the Oneida, who try to stop Keeper maritime activities. Some very daring Thunder Canoe Riders run supplies to the beleaguered Keepers of Rahntoh.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Adventurous, Gung-Ho, foolhardy.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+1	APP	-1	BLD	0	CRE	+1	FIT	0
INF	-1	KNO	+1	PER	+2	PSY	0	WIL	-1
STR	0	HEA	-1	STA	20	UD	3	AD	3

SKILLS:

Boating	3	+2	Combat Sense	2	+2	Dodge	1	+1
Firearms	3	+1	Gunnery (Sea)	2	+2	Haggling	2	-1
Melee	1	+1	Navigation (Sea)	2	+1	Techlore (Mech.)	1	+1
Survival	2	+1	Swimming	2	0	Technosmithing	2	

EQUIPMENT:

Thunder Canoe (Size: +8, Crew: 2-5, Speed: 90 meters/round/55 Kph (sea), Maneuver: +1, Range: 1000km, Damage Rating: 40/80/120), Assault Rifles, Dynamite Stick.

6. Weaver Resources

SKY WARRIORS

The best warriors of the Novohuron are chosen to undergo a dangerous ritual on the High Mountain. Tested in mind, body and spirit, only the strong and pure-hearted survive the ordeal. These become the elite fighters of the Novohuron, leading assaults on enemy ships and staging raids onto the shore. In battle they eschew the use of armor or weapons that kill from a distance. Those that survive often become important Captains and chieftains, their status still shown by the intricate face tattoos that mark every Sky Warrior.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Aggressive, determined, honorable.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+2	APP	-2	BLD	+1	CRE	-1	FIT	+2
INF	0	KNO	0	PER	+1	PSY	+1	WIL	+2
STR	+1	HEA	+1	STA	35	UD	7	AD	8

SKILLS:

Acrobatics	1	+2	Athletics	2	+2	Boating	2	+1
Camouflage	1	-1	Combat Sense	3	+1	Dodge	2	+2
Hand-to-Hand	2	+2	Intimidate	2	+1	Leadership	1	0
Melee	3	+2	Notice	2	+1	Ritual	1	0
Sneak	1	+2	Survival	2	-1	Swimming	2	+2
Tactics	2	0						

EQUIPMENT:

Tiskagin Steel Sword, loincloth.



SOUL STEALER

A Priest of the Oneida, this creature is now more beast than human. Warped into a fearsome collage of naked muscle and shadow, the Soul Stealer oversees the Oneida expeditions to the Thousand Isles. The Soul Stealer feeds on a diet of human meat and blood, and smells like a freshly exhumed corpse. The Soul Stealer serves his mistresses by collecting spirits in beads made from crystallized blood. When he has collected enough, he sends these crystals to Hattan where the spirits are interrogated. The Soul Stealer especially wants a soul from the Seven Tribes, but is wary of the Tribes' magical abilities.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Curious, inhuman, watchful.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+4	APP	-4	BLD	-1	CRE	+2	FIT	-2
INF	-1	KNO	+3	PER	+2	PSY	-3	WIL	+2
STR	-1	HEA	-1	STA	15	UD	2	AD	1

SKILLS:

Camouflage	1	+2	Dance	2	+4	Dodge	2	+4
Hand-to-Hand	1	+4	Human Percept.	3	+2	Interrogation *	3	+2
Leadership	2	-1	Lore (Oneida)	2	+3	Melee	3	+4
Notice	3	+2	Sneak	4	+4	* (Torture)		

EQUIPMENT:

Bronze Hand Claws (x3 damage), Bronze scalpel, Cloak of Woven Ghosts (+2 to Sneak rolls), selection of poisons.

SUNDERED OTTERS

Created by the Koleris out of amusement and a desire to disrupt Tribal use of the Otter River, these otters are as large as a full-grown wolf. Made in defiance of the Baron's orders, there are not many of these creatures, which is a good thing, for the dozen or so that exist are a significant threat to the Autumn Caravan. Given a thirst for human blood, and minds devoted to killing, the sundered otters turn on the local Serfs, and each other, when no other quarry presents itself. This requires that a few more be created every season.

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+3	BLD	+5	FIT	-1	INS	-1	PER	+3
WIL	0	STR	+2	HEA	-1	STA	45	UD	11

SKILLS:

Athletics	3	+3	Combat Sense	3	+3	Dodge	2	+3
Hand-to-Hand	4	+3	Notice	2	+3	Swimming	3	-1

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Bite (x8 damage), Claws (x10 damage), Slimy Hide (+2 to Dodge rolls when on land), Ram (x4 Damage, only on boats or swimmers)



WHITE BEASTS

Whether these creatures are creations of the Capal Z'bri, or merely warped beasts attracted to the evil of that city, remains a mystery. What is known is that they are dangerous hunters, capable of moving in total silence, whose hide mutates into perfect camouflage to match the season. While a dim intelligence does seem to exist in their red eyes, they act more as beasts, reacting to instinct rather than reasoning. Those they ambush are gutted and the internal organs eaten directly from the screaming victim. Some victims, however, disappear without a trace and no body is ever found. Some claim these poor souls become white beasts themselves.

ATTRIBUTES:

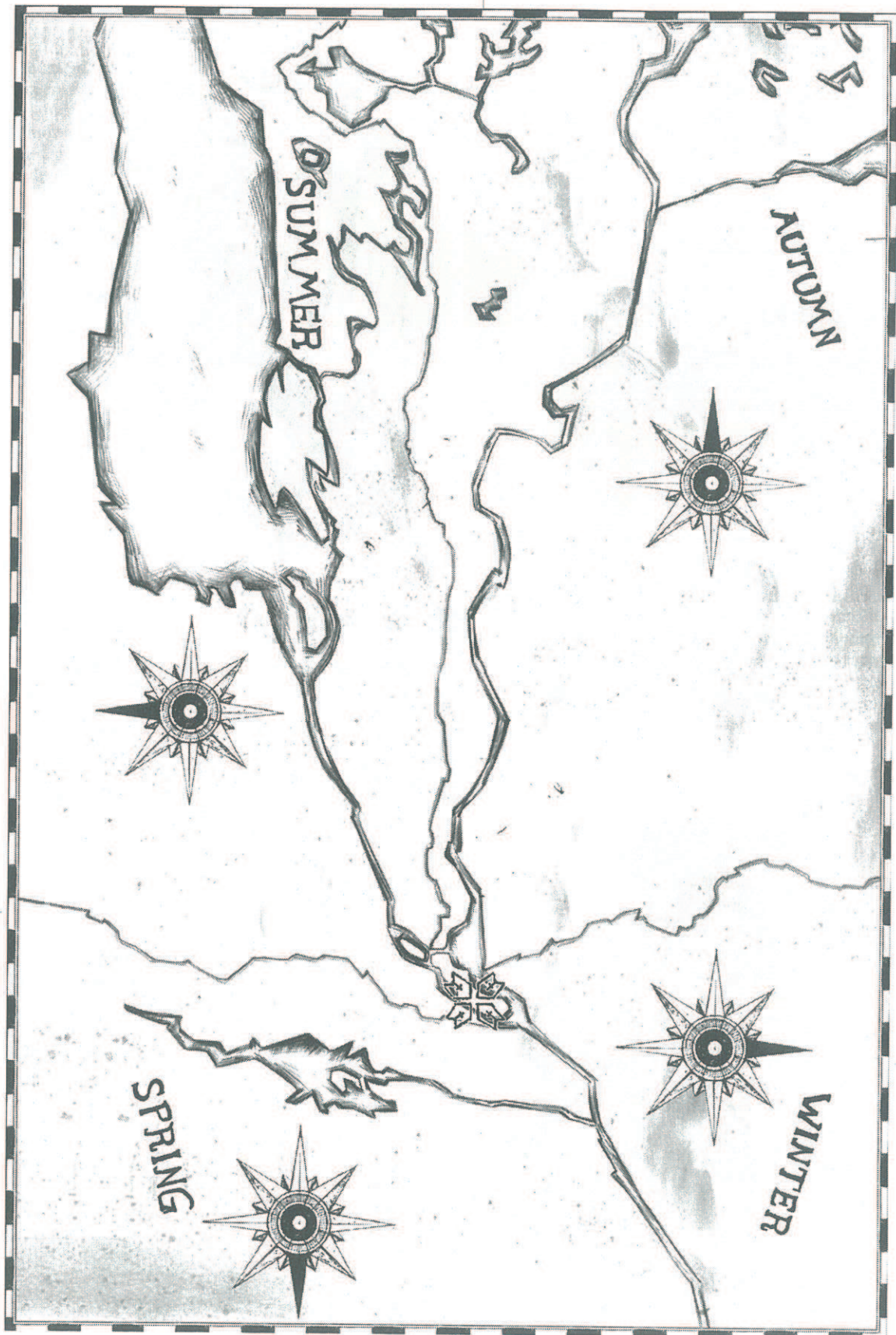
AGI	+2	BLD	+1	FIT	+3	INS	+3	PER	+1
WIL	-1	STR	+2	HEA	+3	STA	45	UD	5

SKILLS:

Athletics	4	+3	Camouflage	3	+3	Combat Sense	3	+1
Hand-to-Hand	2	+2	Notice	2	+1	Sneak	4	+2

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Claws (x6 damage), Maw (x4 damage), Mutant Hide (+2 to Camouflage rolls), Padded Paws (+2 to Sneak rolls).



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A Tribe & Sourcebook

Into the OUTLANDS

All we have are the tales the wind tells as it travels by, tales of the places our ancestors left, of treasures unfound and paths not yet walked. Listen to the wind! It speaks of distances beyond measure, of lands rich with game and the beauty of the world beyond Vimary's shores.

Beyond Vimary we are free. Free of the past, free of the Fatimas and free to remake that which our ancestors lost. This is our destiny, to explore, to discover, to conquer, to reclaim our birthright. So sit here and listen, for the winds speak in many voices. Not all the voices are friendly, not all are hopeful, but they all speak of freedom and destiny. We are the Eighth Tribe, we will listen to the winds, we will howl with them and walk those distant paths.

- Mek the Jacker

Into the Outlands is a sourcebook detailing the wilderness that surrounds the island of Vimary and the lands of the Z'bri. It follows the brave explorers who dare to push their way through the dangers of the wild. The sourcebook provides hundreds of plot hooks and story ideas, along with resources for use by any and all gamers, including:

- Extensive detail on the climate, plants, animals and people inhabiting the Outlands
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