

# SPHEREWALKER

SOURCEBOOK



by GREG STOLZE  
*foreword by Jonathan Tweet*

A N E V E R W A Y B O O K



# SPHEREWALKER™

SOURCEBOOK





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## FOREWORD

Greg Stolze and I have gamed together for several years now. In the various games we've played, Greg has impressed me with his prolific imagination and often wicked wit. When I introduced him to **EVERWAY**, he took to it with enthusiasm. After I ran the first-ever quest, he ran the second, a brilliant, four-part odyssey called "Broken Silence." He also started developing ideas then that would become the basis for the *Spherewalker Sourcebook*.

Greg accepted quite a challenge when he signed up for the *Spherewalker Sourcebook*. As the first sourcebook in the **EVERWAY** line, it had to satisfy a lot of needs and expectations. Luckily, it's the sort of book that plays to Greg's strengths, allowing his imagination to run wild.

As the first **EVERWAY** sourcebook, *Spherewalker* needed to cover certain basic topics, many of which have been done and redone in fantasy literature and gaming. Here Greg shows his ability to bring new ideas to old concepts. His work on satyrs and griffins, for instance, adds something fresh to these fantasy staples. A lesser author would have simply translated these creatures into **EVERWAY** terms, something I fear I might have done in the *EVERWAY Game Set*. (If you want to see whether you agree with my opinions, you can look them up for yourself. That's the beauty of alphabetization.)

The sourcebook also had to fit into the **EVERWAY** universe. It couldn't be just a collection of random, generic fantasy vignettes. Greg's work had to help define the **EVERWAY** universe, especially the unique aspects that set it apart from other fantasy settings. He gave his own twist to these elements. For example, in **EVERWAY**, almost everyone speaks the same language (called *the Tongue*), which was given to humans by the deities. Not only did Greg work the origin of the Tongue into his background (see the section "Dragons"), but he then

invented the Basahn, a race whose salient feature is that, unlike everyone else, they speak their own language. By creating an exception to the rule, Greg throws the rule itself into stark relief.

But *Spherewalker* couldn't just expand on existing ideas. Greg provided several completely new elements for the **EVERWAY** universe, such as the three tools that the deities used to create the cosmos: the Mirror of Shadows, the True Pearl of Making, and the Edge of Light and Darkness. Elements such as these give the sourcebook surprises of its own, details that now become part of the **EVERWAY** cosmos.

Covering the range of views, from the mundane and petty to the cosmic, Greg shows that his imagination works at any scale, whether he's talking about the effects of wearing brown or the origin of humanity. This range of attention allows the reader, player, or gamemaster to see the grand scope (which serves as a backdrop) as well as the day-to-day details (which make the setting seem alive).

Finally, the *Spherewalker Sourcebook* had to capture the imaginations not only of roleplayers but of fantasy fans in general. Greg's heavy use of dialogue, the first-person accounts, his humor, and his sense of drama make the sourcebook an easy read. Stories such as that of the dragon rebellion can appeal to an audience far wider than the **EVERWAY** game itself.

Greg will be working on at least one upcoming **EVERWAY** project, and his work appears in various magazines as well. If you like what you read here, keep an eye open for his byline.

JONATHAN TWEET  
CREATOR OF **EVERWAY**





## PREFACE

When I started work on *Spherewalker*, close to three years ago, I was bursting with ideas. Now that it's done, I can hardly think of anything to say.

For a look behind the scenes to read about the genesis of my ideas, check out the *Afterword: How I Wrote Spherewalker*. But I'd wait if I were you. It's at the end for a reason: I hate books with prefaces that spoil the text they precede.

Rather than give you a clumsy overview of the polished entries within or focusing on my work (as the afterword does), I'd like instead to describe some of the sources I've found invaluable to my work on the *Spherewalker Sourcebook* and in general.

Edith Hamilton's *Greek Mythology* was gathering dust on my grandmother's shelf when I found it at the age of ten or twelve. I'd finished the book I'd brought to her house to read, the adults were all sleeping off a big lasagna lunch, and I was bored. I figured a book with a severed and snake-haired head on it had to be pretty good. I opened the book and was completely blown away. After that, I read from it every time I went to grandma's. It sparked an interest in fantastic stories that is still (obviously) strong today. More than that though, it was my first encounter with great mythic figures—from the heroism of Perseus to the horrors of Atreus, this book gave me concrete examples of how good stories work.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which I read in college, inspired me with a vision of storytelling on a truly grandiose scale. Instead of characters who represent good or partake in evil, readers are shown a battle of good and evil entire. Yet Milton is not content with just that: his great triumph is the pity and understanding he shows for his great villains. The triumph of heaven is only possible because of the tragedy of hell, and Milton made me truly feel that tragedy. Works of other poets had an impact on my sense of style and content as well (notably Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"), but in *Spherewalker* at least, Milton is dominant.

I first saw *The Dictionary of the Khazars* at my brother's apartment when I was in college. One of his roommates owned a beautiful leather-bound copy. It *begged* to be opened up, and when I did open it, I found entry after strange entry on the bizarre world of the lost Khazars. Stories were woven throughout, crossing and interrelating, jumping from entry to entry. The entries can be read in any order, but the secrets of the whole are not revealed until all have been considered. Writing a novel in this format is difficult enough, but Milorad Pavic did much more, creating a wealth of details alien to

modern fantasy and unlike familiar European fairy tales. *Dictionary of the Khazars* is so different from anything else I've read that it defies classification. You hold in your hands its wan shadow.

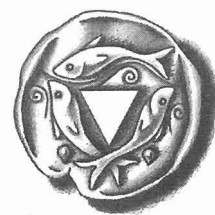
On the other end of the spectrum lies a book called *In Sorcery's Shadow*, by Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes. Unlike the others I've cited, this book is nonfiction. Paul Stoller is an anthropologist who apprenticed himself to a practicing sorcerer in Nigeria. *In Sorcery's Shadow* is his account of his time with people for whom magic is as commonplace and accepted as indoor plumbing is to you or me. The book is suspenseful and entertaining, but more than that, it makes one think about magic as mysticism rather than just as a game mechanic.

Finally, I'd direct the reader's attention to the works of Robin McKinley and Daniel Pinkwater. Their works are usually labeled "children's books," or "young adult novels," which explains why they're much better written than "mature" fare. A children's book author cannot fall back on the ready standbys of sex and violence to retain interest and furthermore must write in a language that anyone can understand. McKinley is by far the more germane to **EVERWAY**, as she writes fantasy novels and retells fairy tales, but Pinkwater supplies more of a genuine sense of wonder than any other writer I know.

Those are a few of the dominant influences in *Spherewalker*. If you enjoy this sourcebook, give partial credit to the authors listed above.

Thanks a-plenty to Jake Steinmann, Mike Wailder, Rob Vaux, Andrea Barrett, Marcus Gregory, and Bill Mullen, for being a swell (and forgiving) bunch of players.

Special thanks to Chris Gorilla, who not only is a swell player but who also fixed my computer five days before the deadline for this book. Chris is smart; he can make it go.



## INTRODUCTION

### TO EVERWAY PLAYERS

The *Spherewalker Sourcebook* was designed and written with a couple of things in mind: It's enjoyable reading for fans of fantasy settings, full of useful information for players and gamemasters of other fantasy roleplaying games, and, of course, rich in inspiring detail for the **EVERWAY** player or gamemaster.

### USING THIS BOOK

Although the entries are arranged alphabetically for easy reference, each entry stands on its own, and so the book may be also read from front to back. Throughout *Spherewalker* you'll notice terms that have been **SMALL-CAPPED**; these are terms that have their own entries in the sourcebook. In addition, terms of interest are *italicized* where they are introduced in the sourcebook.

### TO READERS WHO DON'T PLAY EVERWAY

The *Spherewalker Sourcebook* was written for the enjoyment of fans of fantasy art and fiction. If

you like stories set in mythological and fantasy settings, you'll find plenty of fuel here for your imagination. The book combines short stories, legends, dialogues, and songs with other informative entries to explore the infinite mythical worlds of **EVERWAY**, worlds filled with the dramatic diversity of infinite ancient and archetypal realms. While material in the *EVERWAY Game Set* provides a context for the information here, the *Spherewalker Sourcebook* has been designed to stand alone. Some of the basic information from the game set, such as information about deities, spheres, and gates, has been duplicated here, so you don't need the game set to understand the other entries in *Spherewalker*.

In addition, the sourcebook does not refer to game rules, so if you play a different roleplaying game or don't play roleplaying games at all, you should still find this book interesting and accessible.

The information in this sourcebook can be used to help you create your **EVERWAY** hero and to fire your imagination about the endless possibilities of the worlds of **EVERWAY**. As you read through the entries, keep in mind the following things.

Some of the information in this sourcebook is common knowledge among the spheres. For example, people on many different spheres know the Basahn as merchants. Other information here is privileged or uncommon. For example, not everyone who knows of the Basahn know that they are not human. Still other information is downright secret. Very few humans know that the Basahn string their harps with their own hair, for instance. Use your hero's background as a guide to what he or she knows and doesn't know, and ask your gamemaster for advice when it's not clear to you.

*Some heroes are new to the worlds of spherewalkers. Such heroes are likely to know a lot about their homelands and very little about other realms. Most of the information in this sourcebook would be news to them.*

There are other heroes who are accomplished spherewalkers, who would have at least a passing familiarity with all of the information here, though they probably would not know all the secret or privileged information compiled in this sourcebook.

Much of this information can help you define your hero, providing details that you can add to his or her personal history. At the very least, the entry "Colors," for example, may prompt you to think twice about what colors your hero wears. Creating your hero, however, can have a much bigger effect on the game than you might think. You may, for instance, decide to create a hero based on one of the types or groups listed in this sourcebook. Be sure to work with your gamemaster if you want to play an unusual hero of any kind. Your gamemaster may, for example, forbid players from playing Spring Born heroes if the Spring Born are destined to play a large role in the campaign he or she is developing. Keep in mind also that





having a hero who belongs to a special group doesn't give you anything "for free." If you play a Spring Born hero with an affinity for wolves, for example, you'll still need to "pay for" this Power as you would for any other hero.

One last thing to remember is that just because you read something here, doesn't mean that your hero knows it. For some quests, in fact, it will be important for you to "play along" when you know something that your hero doesn't.

### TO EVERWAY GAMEMASTERS

The information in *Spherewalker* is meant to be usable in small amounts. You can add whatever parts you like into your campaign and leave out what you don't. You can even base an entire campaign around themes or background found here, if you wish. For example, the premise of your campaign could be "The heroes are warriors of the Silver Nail" or "The heroes are trying to reunite the pearl, the mirror, and the sword." Whether the ideas in this sourcebook make cameo appearances in your quests or become the foundation for entire campaigns is entirely up to you. Here are some other things that will help you get the most out of this sourcebook.

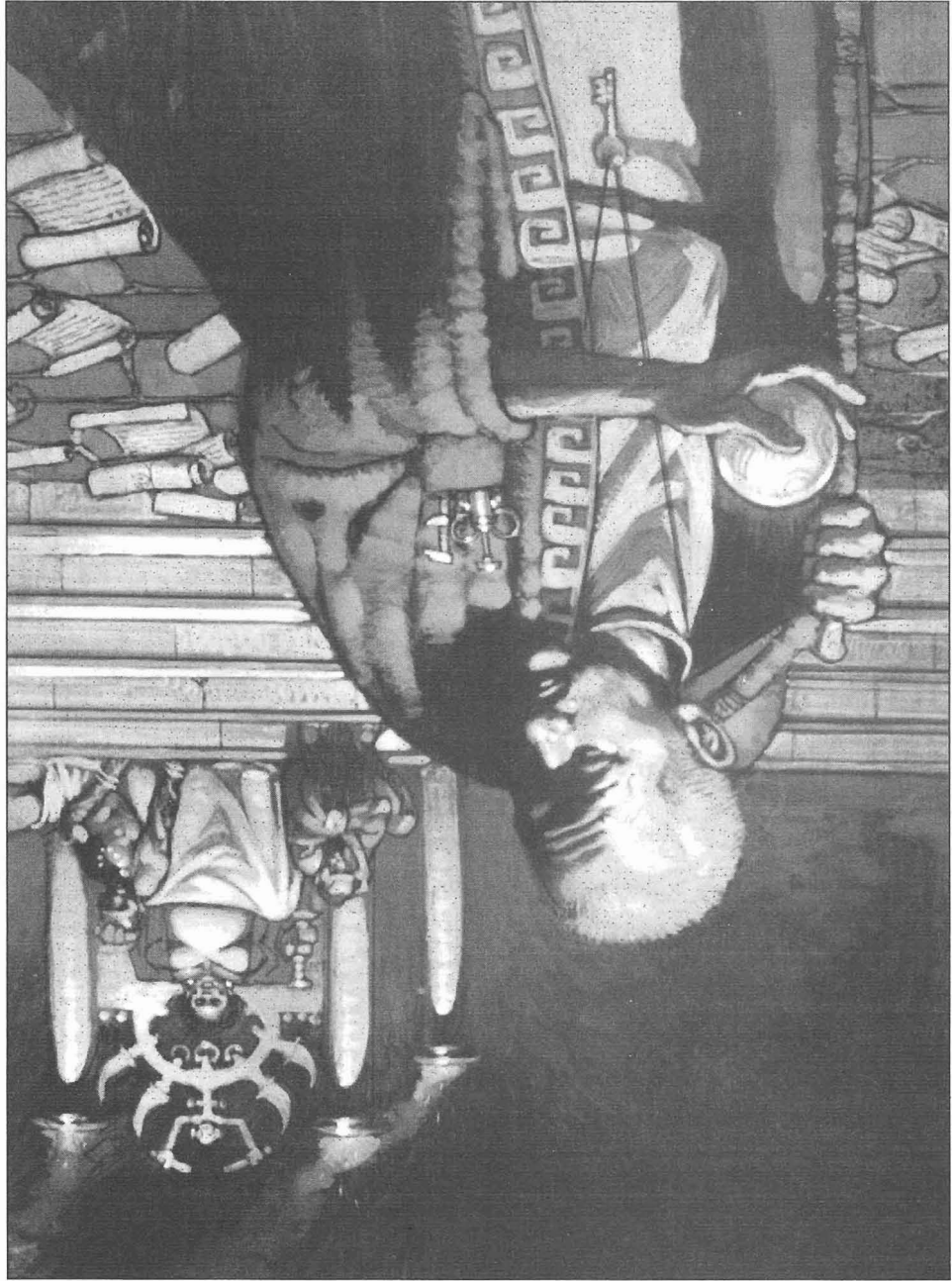
- ✱ Take advantage of the flexible structure of *Spherewalker*. Use the entries as raw material for your own creations. Don't take these entries as the final word.
- ✱ Any story related by a fictitious person in the game setting is just that: a story. No one knows the whole truth. Take these narratives as examples of what people *believe*, as parts of the whole picture. Are griffins really the patrons of lost causes? A certain university student claims that they have a reputation as such, but is that true? For all we know, the student is an Unseen Hand and the phrase "patrons of lost causes" is actually a code sent out to bell-walking agents on other spheres (if the Unseen Hands exist at all).
- ✱ Even those entries related from an apparently omniscient viewpoint are open to interpretation. Remember, no one has the *whole* truth. What seems to be true among a hundred explored worlds whose characteristics have been documented may not be the case among a thousand other worlds that the experts in Everway, the Glorious Empire, and the Twisted Library have not yet visited.

Ultimately, it is the experience of play that counts. **EVERWAY** is a game, after all. Tailor any and all of the information presented here to suit the needs of your game.

### THE SPHEREWALKER SOURCE CARDS

*Spherewalker Source Cards* is a ninety-card set of cards containing color illustrations of places, things, creatures, and characters that can be found among the spheres in the worlds of **EVERWAY**. The text on the back of the cards presents information from most of the important entries found in this book, though not in as much detail. The card set and sourcebook each stand alone. The cards, however, can add to what you'll find here. In some cases, a card's information adds details, such as the reputed powers of especially capable skin scribes. Other cards bring up entire new subjects, such as the Fortunate Ones, mages who draw on the power of the Fortune Deck. The cards are meant to enhance your enjoyment of the sourcebook, but they're strictly optional.







## ABSOLVERS

*From the Journals of  
Walkspear, Dedicated of the  
Order of the Silver Nail*

*Eighth Day of Sagittarius*

A man called Chronicle Gloss arrived in this town several months ago. He is described as a mature man of uncommon height, and pale. He claims to have the sunbane, making him unable to tolerate sunlight. This could be true; I have seen this illness before. However, his description matches that of Four Deed the Absolver. I must be cautious; if Four Deed and Chronicle are the same, he is an ancient opponent, more crafty than any I have ever killed.

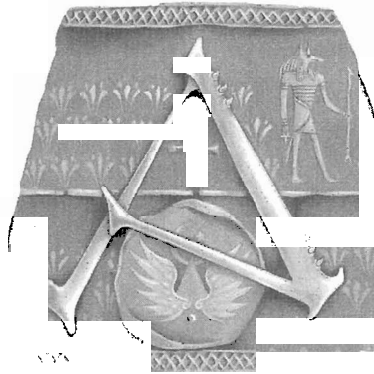
Chronicle earns his keep as a moneylender. His wealth must be considerable; he is staying at the lodge of the medicine chief as an honored guest. He does some trade as well. He sleeps during the day, of course, and entertains only at night. As one would expect from a RED MERCHANT, he has human servants to protect him during the day. I have nothing to tie him to my brother's killers, but it doesn't matter if he's a Red Merchant or not. Tonight I visit the lodge.

(Later)

I have gained much in my visit. As I approached the residence, I saw a shadow nearing it as well. I drew my dagger and hid, but saw the visitor was one of the women of the town—Moonlight is her NAME. She came close to my place of hiding, and I caught her scent—pine, fear, and fresh tears. On her cheek a bruise was just beginning to show.

She knocked on the back door and was admitted by an attendant. I followed. I lowered myself to the floor and caught her scent again, along with that of the man—his was dry leaves and rain. I followed them to a closed door. The servant's trail went towards the front of the house while the woman's led within.

I pressed my ear against it, and I could hear her—sobbing now. Under her cries, I heard a man's voice, low, soothing. I could not make out their words. I looked beneath the door but saw only the legs of furniture and a fire in a hearth. The odor of hickory wood hid any other scents inside.



I went back out the door and paused to let my eyes adjust. Looking up, I saw a plume of smoke against the sky and went around the house to the side where the woman had gone. There were thin windows cut into the lodge, covered with taut animal skin, easy to pierce with the tip of my knife.

Looking within, I saw a thick rug, upon which sat Moonlight and her pale host—Chronicle Gloss, no doubt. He had an arm around her, his hand on the back of her neck.

"Moonlight," said the man, "if you leave him you have a place with me—you know that. But what of your daughters? What of your sons?"

"He's kind to them," said the woman. "Or . . . at least he doesn't beat them. . . ."

"No," said the man, his voice sad. "He has you for that, doesn't he?"

With that, she burst into fresh tears. Chronicle pulled her close, whispered things to her I could not hear, brushed his lips against her cheek.

Eventually her sobs stopped. Slowly, she pulled herself from his embrace.

"Chronicle . . . I can't. I cannot leave my children, and more than that, I can't leave him"

"But the blows. . . ?"

She shrugged. "Some men drink, some gamble . . . some hit. There's no joy in life without its leaven of sorrow. That's what my mother told me . . . and I suppose it's not so very bad. I'm hardly the only woman in the village who wears a bruise now and again. Pinetree's man once struck her so hard he broke the bone in her arm. . . . But when he died, she stayed at his cairn for three days and would eat nothing. The pain doesn't stop the love, Chronicle. I don't know if anything can."

"I understand," he said quietly. "You love him and not me, and that's the way of love. No mortal can rule it. Just know that if you

*It is now known with certainty that the great diplomat Sunshy the Wise was an Absolver. It's claimed that he deliberately stirred up hate and dissent in order to feed upon it—thus gaining a reputation as a great civil servant and peacemaker. Others say he simply took advantage of his unique abilities to aid him in his chosen field.*

change your mind . . . or if you ever need anyone. . . ."

She smiled, and for the first time she looked pretty. "Chronicle, you're the best friend I've ever had." His smile was a little crooked as she rose to go.

When she turned to the door, I saw her cheek. The bruise was gone where Chronicle kissed it. Then I knew.

I ran back to my camp. I must try to sleep, but sleep is hiding; after all, tomorrow I must be at my best to kill Chronicle Gloss.

### *Ninth Day of Sagittarius*

I am in a great confusion. Chronicle found me out. Somehow the Absolver knew I was watching him. As I slept, he led his servants to my camp and took me unaware. Bound, I was carried back to the lodge, the same room where I had spied upon him.

I struggled with my bonds, but they were secure. I wanted to spit hate at him through my gag. However, as his fingers slid through my hair to untie it, I felt my fear and anger fade, replaced with a strange calm. As the cloth came from my mouth, I said nothing. He nodded for his servants to leave, and they did. His scent was lilacs and dry dirt.

For a while we were silent. Then I said, "You're Four Deed, the Absolver."

He nodded. "You're from the Order of the Silver Nail." Like me, he did not ask it as a question.

"Sworn to destroy you," I said flatly. "You and all your kind."

"By all rights I ought to simply kill you now, to ensure my own safety. Do you wonder why I don't?"

I almost smiled. "I admit I do."

"Would it surprise you to know I have never killed anyone? Never ever? Not during life, and not now. I'm not eager to start."

"Then what will you do? Drain me? Steal my heart and make me into a slave?"

"Is that what you think I do? Certainly, I can take emotion as my sustenance. I need to. But if I were to take all your feelings at once it wouldn't leave you as an emotionless servant."

*Some consider the Absolvers to be walkers, undead whose presence is a blessing to be sought, not a menace to be fought. Others claim the Absolvers are the most monstrous undead of all because they harm not the body but the soul.*

He leaned in and spoke clearly and quietly. "It would kill you. Kill you and leave you locked in your corpse, unable to be reborn, unable to die, and unable to feel anything but your own loss . . . unless you, in turn, were to go out and feed. Unless you also took some emotions from a mortal, borrowing them for a time to fuel your own dreams, hopes . . . even loves."

He leaned back again. "Of course, draining someone so thoroughly is foolish. Instead, thoughtful Absolvers take only a little—only what won't be missed—and leave the person able to serve our hungers again."

"Why eat the chicken when you can just steal its eggs?"

"Yes. Though chickens value their eggs. I take only those feelings that hurt: painful despair, wracking sorrow. . . ."

"And tainted love? Is that what you take from Moonlight?"

"Only the taint. Never the love."

"Why not? Has her pain a good flavor?"

He laughed. "Who would prefer pain when he could have pleasure? No, I can transform the feelings once I feed, but as I drink them I take them in raw." His face turned stern. "Can you believe that I don't take love because I *will* not? You see, once I steal a feeling, it's gone. Were I to take Moonlight's love for her husband, she would be empty of all feeling for him except her resentment and fear. Where would that leave her?"

"Better she stay in a painful home?"

"Not everyone is as strong and capable as you. If she left him, how would she support her children? Or would you have me drain off her love for them as well? I assure you, her love for them is strong and pure. I could live for years on that alone if I stole such a treasure. I could—but I don't."

"No, you just cultivate her like a garden, growing seeds of sorrow to feed on."

"I did not plant them. I only eat their burdensome fruit. Why do you think I was welcomed by the medicine chief here? They know my type from old." He came close to me again and bent near. His eyes were inches from mine, and though I searched, I could find no malice in them, no guilt. The only fear I smelled was my own, and even that calmed when his cool fingers caressed my brow.



"Let me take your fear and your anger. Look at me with eyes of reason, not with eyes of hate. Can you call me evil?"

I had no answer.

He let me go after that. Warned me that he knew me now and would know if I came for him. His guards stood behind him, watching me leave.

## ADVERSARIES

*From a Tale by Reach, Shaman and Dreamwalker of the Soul Giants Nation*

There was a boy who had just taken the scars of manhood. He went out on a hunt and saw a red stag. Immediately, he wanted to take its antlers and pelt, and so he chased it. The stag did not run like others would but turned on him. It struck him with its antlers and threw him. Then the boy became frightened of the stag, and climbed a tree to escape it.

When he came back, I told him to walk through smoke to purify the wound.

"Why did the stag hunt me?" he asked.

"Because you are adversaries," I told him.

"What does that mean?"

"You are meant to hunt each other," I said. "I have seen it

in your dreams. Sometimes, in the dream place, you are a large CAT, and the stag is a woman who stabs you. Sometimes you are two men who chase each other through halls of FIRE. Sometimes you are two women, lovers, but you try to stab her as she feeds you poison. Always fighting—it is your destiny."

"But why? Why must we fight?"

I shrugged. "Perhaps a long time ago you hurt the stag, or the stag hurt you. This hurt was so great that it followed into the next life. Sometimes these hurts just repeat, like a fire that spreads from one tree to another. Each life is more strife, more hatred. Or perhaps it is just heaven's will that you fight. Maybe the struggle always teaches you something you need to know."

After I said this to him, the stag was much on his mind. He asked me to guide him on a quest in the dream place, to find wisdom on the question. He was away six days, and when he came back he said that he was going to find the stag.

"I know it is my purpose to break this fate or die. In this life I am human, so it is right that I be the one to forgive."

I said, "I have looked down that path. It goes close to the land of death. Be careful that you do not stumble and fall."

He nodded to me, asked for my prayers, then left. That was when I knew he was worthy of his scars.

*Related Topics:* "Cohorts" and "Reincarnation."

**AESIR DEITIES.** See "Odin."



*The Inhuman and the Undead* illustration  
by Scott Kirschner © 1996 Rubicon Games, Inc.

# AIR

## *From The Tome of Power*

When the gods and goddesses created the first humans, it was the breath of life that made us more than mere automatons. The breath of the DEITIES is what our souls are made of, and it is from this breath that all life comes. That is why we die when we cannot breathe.

Knowing this, we can determine that our function is neither to isolate ourselves from our environment like a mountain aloof, nor to conform spinelessly to our environment like WATER rushing heedlessly over a fall, nor to consume it like a ravaging FIRE. Our function is to live in harmony with our surroundings and to understand our place in relation to the rest of the universe.

AIR IS THE  
ELEMENT OF  
THOUGHT,  
KNOWLEDGE,  
SPEECH, AND  
FOCUSED  
ENERGY.



Air is the medium through which all other matter moves; it is the silent context, unconsidered. Yet when it must move, nothing is swifter than the wind, and nothing more terrible than the thunderbolt. From this, learn the keys to power: stillness, consideration, careful planning, and thought. Let these guide your actions, and when you act you will be inexorable.



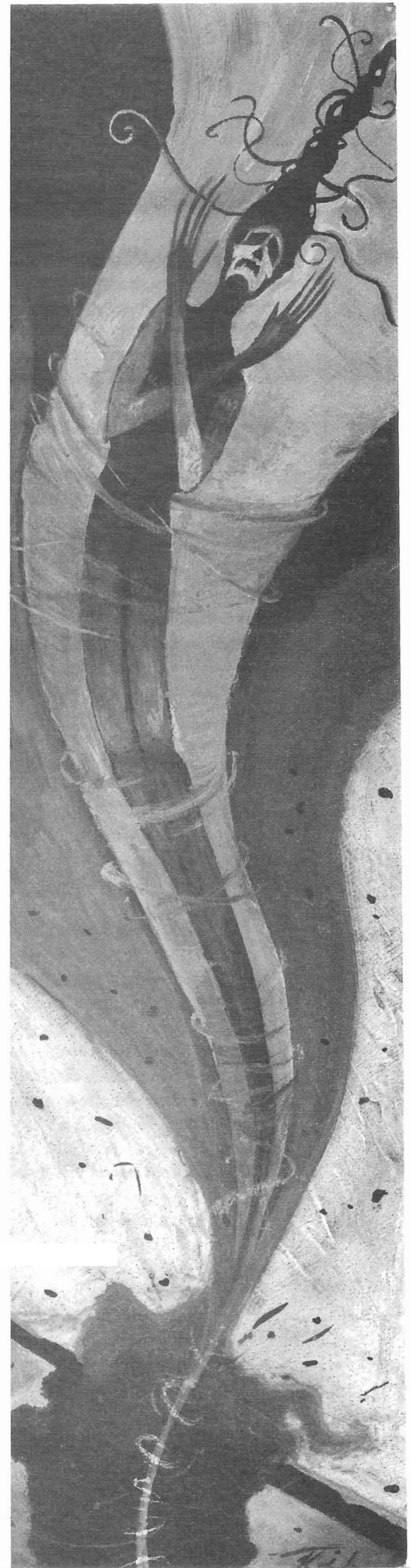
The sky arcing above our heads sees all, and its gentle breath sinks into every crack and crevice. So too ought we to set our sights on high things that we may see far. We should, like the eyes of the sky, strive to sink our sights into every mystery and secret.

People strive for love, for honor, for money and greatness. Love, however, dies with lovers. Honor is eventually forgotten. Money and greatness disappear. Knowledge alone is endless, for the discovery of it remains even after the discoverer is long gone.

Through learning, we push back the darkness of ignorance; and where the fair foot of knowledge has stepped, the foulness of ignorance can never again stand.

We humans are weak and small and foolish; yet with knowledge, we become strong, great, and wise.

*See also "Elements."*





# ALURAX

*Assembled by Diligent Scratch, a Master Librarian  
at the Library of All Worlds in Everway*

Then by the great might of his sorcery, the demon Alurax made the earth open beneath the prince and swallow him whole, and at the sound of his cries the boldest of the warriors became afraid and fled. . . .

—*Chronicle of the Iron Empire*

"[It] had been used most vilely by a sorcerer called Alurax. She had taken this beautiful young girl and stolen from her sixty years of life, leaving her a withered hag. . . ."

—*Tales of the Marksman*

"Though friendly for many years, Queen Alurax suddenly changed her aspect towards us, and by treachery conquered half of our land in one stroke."

—*the Old Kingdom Fragment*

"With growing fear I watched the swelling of my belly, hating the infant within with all the hate I had for its cursed father, the rapist Alurax. Little did I know that this hate and fear would be redoubled when the child was delivered, an inhuman thing possessed of wings and claws and razor teeth. . . ."

—*First Blossom's Saga*

"On a previous walk, our researcher, Faithful, had reported unmasking a sorcerous ruse by one who went by the name Alurax. Our hopes that this was simply some pretender to the name were dashed today with the report of Faithful's unspeakable fate. . . ."

—*annals of the Chamber Platinum*

"In truth, the sword that [the peddler Alurax] had sold to Bittersweet was uncommonly keen, and Bittersweet took great joy in using it. So great was her pleasure in the blade, in fact, that she became increasingly quick to draw and to find insult, and it was eventually with this sword that she killed Life's Staff. Only later did she learn to her great sorrow that

Life's Staff was in fact New Water, the selfsame lost brother she had set out to find. . . ."

—*Tale of the Longest Walk*

"Gadrall, Alurax! Mismo vilhe Alurax! Alurax nevone esart hahle!"

—*Unknowable Chants of the Eaters of Humans*

"Alurax" is pronounced  
"Al-yur-aks."

The fate met by my protégé [Faithful] was a personal loss to me as well; we were friends. But while Faithful was an adventurer and wanderer, I am a simple scholar. Much as I might wish to strike down Alurax, I have not the valor to attempt what countless others have attempted and failed.

I am not a warrior who can fight with Alurax, but a scholar to study it. In this study I am preceded by many, for Alurax has left its claw marks upon a hundred histories. The examples cited above are but seven among hundreds in this library alone. They were selected according to several criteria.

First, they show the wide distribution of sightings of Alurax, for the two sources of tales closest to each other were on spheres nine GATES apart, while the two furthest are a staggering one hundred and four gates from one another—and that by the shortest route we could chart.

Second, the examples are meant to illustrate Alurax's penchant for disguise; there are many different descriptions of Alurax, from that of a skeletal monster thirty feet tall, to a withered old man, to that of a young maiden lovely beyond compare.

Thirdly, the references show the wide variety of evils that Alurax works—from the simply brutal to the complex acts of treachery that can take a hundred years to blossom. Sometimes Alurax strikes randomly, like lightning, picking a life and ruining it in a stroke. Other times, its pleasure seems to be in slowly seducing a soul toward its own destruction and despair.



Finally, one can conclude from the sources cited above that Alurax has been a force for evil for untold millennia: The report on Faithful was written only six years ago. The Old Kingdom Fragment predates by centuries any civilization that exists today.

### Whence Alurax?

Some reliable religious texts say that Alurax was the last survivor of the first race the gods and goddesses created; of all the great DRAGONS, only Alurax escaped the war in heaven without being permanently crippled by its own kind or by the DEITIES.

In these texts, Alurax appears as selfish and treacherous. Moreover, it is cunning. Though the deities knew Alurax was corrupt and self-interested, it was careful not to commit an actual evil deed against them. It avoided the crushing punishments visited upon the rebel dragons by siding with heaven, but it craftily arranged to be disabled early and thus to sit out most of the war.

While the one loyal dragon died in the rebellion and returned as a human, Alurax did not enter the cycle of KARMA; like the primal dragons, it does not age, and death is not natural to it. The deities did not take these gifts from Alurax, but they did warn it that henceforth it would have to live among humans as a human.

Alurax's reaction to this order seems to explain many of its subsequent actions throughout the centuries: it is appalled—a reaction equivalent to the one we could anticipate from a human noble who has been sentenced to spend eternity wallowing with pigs in mud.

Compared to the dragons, it seems, we humans are foolish, frail, and pathetic. Alurax despises us for this and resents being forced to join our numbers. Since it is clearly unable to challenge the deities who made it human, Alurax vents its frustration and anger upon humanity instead, using everything in its considerable power to inflict misery upon us—and perhaps to eradicate us entirely.

### What Is the Nature of Alurax?

This question can be answered briefly by consulting the FORTUNE DECK. Alurax has abundant qualities of The Dragon, in both its upright and inverted aspects. Its cunning is beyond compare, but it is capable of blind fury as well.

The longer and more inclusive answer is that Alurax revels in visiting evil upon humanity, and in the fulfillment of this

goal lies its primary joy and comfort. While Alurax may seek its own diversion, power, and amusement, these are always secondary to the infliction of suffering on humankind. There is one account in which Alurax, in human form, deliberately grabbed an enemy and leaped into a cauldron of boiling WATER. The human victim was drowned, but Alurax was terribly scalded and suffered great pain for many years after. Nonetheless, it never expressed regret over that action. Its only regrets seem to be the missed opportunities to torture and torment.

Such is the emotional or spiritual nature of the beast. Physically, Alurax usually appears human, though apparently it can sometimes change its body in much the same way that you or I would don a new cloak with a change of season. Its body may appear young or old, male or female, sometimes handsome and sometimes hideous. Regardless of its form, it seems to have a superhuman resilience against poisons, injury, and even magic.

The form Alurax takes is not always human; there are reports of its appearing in other forms, notably the shape of an animate human skeleton surmounted by a jackal's skull. The significance of this particular form is unclear, though it is certainly not unheard of for human mages to wear the shapes of beasts or to take on different forms.

It has also appeared at least twice in each of the following forms: a great white fish that swallows boats whole, a mighty tree covered with mouths that speak in strange riddles, a book that eats, a great black bull with horns of FIRE, a ravenous bear with serpents for teeth, and a huge snake with heads on both ends of its body.

Its most dreaded form by far is the one it was given by the DEITIES when they first created it—a great DRAGON. Rarely does anyone unlucky enough to see the spectacle of this form survive the experience, and those who do see it are often so shaken that they cannot describe it in much detail. It is agreed that its first form is a thing of awful, dreadful beauty. It entralls even as it destroys. Gauging from the marks it left upon Castle Manydoor, its fangs must be at least as long as a grown man, with claws even longer, sharp as lances and harder than stone. Fortunately, it appears that its transformations to this form are infrequent, difficult, or limited for some other reason.

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Some say that demons are the misbegotten spawn of Alurax, created for no other purpose than to bedevil humanity. Many sorcerers disagree, contending that Alurax would have made them even worse.



### What Powers Does Alurax Command?

Alurax's powers of sorcery are nearly unparalleled by humanity. It has performed feats of truly appalling power. It once turned a dozen men to stone with a word and a gesture. It escaped from the Habitat and killed three of the Twelve of Eldermark before the others banded together and ward-ed it off with the power of the TRUE PEARL; and those remaining nine lived out the rest of their lives in fear, unwilling to leave the tower where the pearl was. Some lay credit for the blood-moth plague at the feet of Alurax.

Perhaps most impressive is the account of Alurax's escape from the Barren Desert. In an event referred to in most sources as "the Return," the ten greatest mages from antiquity were found in their reincarnated bodies and wakened to memory of their previous power. These ten worthies together were able to banish Alurax to the Barren Desert until such time as their Tower of Reason Triumphant should fall.

The Barren Desert was truly bereft of life before Alurax was banished there. Yet in the three hundred years of its imprisonment, Alurax created a race of servants out of the dust of the plains; invented a language for their use; taught them mining and blacksmithing so that they could forge weapons; taught them the art of warfare; and when the Republic of

Reason was unprepared, sent them in to raze the tower. Thus was Alurax freed.

There are many myths about a secret sect that cultivates madness, the to avoid the attentions of Alurax. Their hope is that they can find the mad Dragon of Air and convince or trick him into destroying Alurax.

### What Are the Limits of Alurax's Power?

While Alurax may appear to be a being of unstoppable might, its power does have limits. Though it is conversant in many schools of sorcery, it seems unable to soulseek; thus, when it wishes to extend its vengeance upon a foe beyond one life, it must employ human wizards to find the reincarnated soul. In the SOULSEEKER school it is considered an anathema to aid Alurax in this fashion, and Soulseekers are much more willing than most to suffer death before capture.

Although Alurax is capable of being in two places at once, this feat seems to be disproportionately difficult for it. While the power to be in two places at once is a great magic, it is not as great as some other feats the DRAGON has performed.

Furthermore, it appears that Alurax is unable to be simultaneously in three or more places.

Legend has it that Alurax has created a great library filled completely with false and dangerously misleading documents. Its sole purpose is to befuddle and confuse the human race.

Finally, on at least two occasions Alurax has been driven back by objects of primal power. In the history of the War of Great Endings it is related that Alurax attempted to steal the MIRROR OF SHADOWS from the Kingmaster and barely escaped destruction at the king's hands. As has been reported, the Twelve of Eldermark kept it at bay with the TRUE PEARL.

There are dubious legends in which Edgebearer confronts Alurax and slays it with the EDGE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS; those who tell these tales counter evidence of his continued existence by saying that when Edgebearer killed it, Alurax was also in another place and so the Edge slew only one of it. While this suggestion seems farfetched (and cannot at present be verified), it is true that Alurax's power seemed to have waned for many years after Edgebearer's life.

### Where Is Alurax Today?

Current research reveals that at least three kingdoms, on three different spheres, are under the direct rule of Alurax. While it cannot be physically present in all three realms all the time, authority in these lands is invested in soulless figure-heads that are totally loyal to the DRAGON. Other than that, Alurax's doings are unknown.

### What Can Be Done About Alurax?

While it might appear that a mere human stands no chance against this immortal dragon of rage, it must be remembered that our kind have foiled its plans in the past. The kingdom of Many Waters is free and wary today because a mere human, my lamented colleague Faithful, unmasked Alurax's true nature before them. While powerful, Alurax is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. Furthermore, while it has legions of slaves and lackeys, it does not really trust them. Alurax is only one, while humanity is legion. We may not be able to confront it directly, but even a great dragon cannot be everywhere; and whenever its back is turned, its enemies dart forward to launch a thousand tiny pinpricks, vanishing before its attentions return to their direction.

If one is unfortunate enough to draw the personal attention of this creature, my only advice can be to die and hope for a better next life; for the whims of karma are infinitely preferable to the cruelties of the Worm.

See also "Dragons."



## ANGELTHORN

*Angelthorn* is a very pale creeper with straight thorns. It flowers once a year, on the spring equinox. If a person who is truly pure picks the blossom, it will not fade but remain perpetually fresh, emitting a gentle aroma that frightens away evil spirits.

The village of Sun's Throne worships Apollo. Their ceremonies are centered on a circle of standing stones. On the spring equinox, the sun's rising rays pass between two small stones and rest upon the largest menhir, which is totally encircled by angelthorn.

Weddings in Sun's Throne center around the menhir. The villagers believe that if a thorn is used to pierce flesh, the blood upon the thorn can be mixed with WATER and given to a lover. If the lover drinks the water, the blood within it creates a glamour on the eyes that makes the blood-giver's visage appear beautiful beyond all others. In the marriage, this bloodletting and drinking is mutual.

Creating such a potion and giving it to an unsuspecting person is a terrible crime in Sun's Throne.

## ANUBIS SENTINEL OF THE DEAD

### *Stories and Teachings*

*Anubis*, the son of Amun-Re and Isis, appears as a man with the head of a black jackal. He is both judge and guardian of dead souls. Cherti, the Ferryman, guides the dead to the Underworld, where they enter the Hall of the Two Truths. There, in the Hall, they are judged by the weighing of their hearts. Anubis presides over the trial and determines whether they are to enter the afterlife or to be eaten by Ammut, the Devourer of the Dead.

Disciples of Anubis believe that leading an orderly and productive life pleases the god and insures entrance to the afterlife. Respect for authority and loyalty to the family please Anubis. Sins against the family and open defiance of authority are crimes, and transgressing against the patriarch is unforgivable.

### *Tribal Worship*

Among tribal people, Anubis is often a patron deity of shamans. Shamans who follow Anubis enter deathlike trances to contact their god and to gain power or

knowledge. Such a shaman may enter a death-trance for a day in order to gain the power necessary to cure a fellow tribe member of a disease. Similar trances may provide visions that guide the shaman or the tribe. In some cases the trance is not merely deathlike but actually fatal; the shaman miraculously returns to life when the trance is over.

Among the Balefire Islands, one can only become a shaman through a ritual in which one actually dies and is buried with all the ceremony that accompanies a normal burial. Anubis judges the would-be shaman and either consigns the applicant's soul to the Devourer or returns him or her to life—now as a shaman with magical powers. The shaman repeats the visit to the Longhouse of the Two Truths to work his or her most powerful magic rituals. When a shaman from the Balefire Islands dies, the corpse is dumped into the sea without ceremony; the shaman has already been buried with proper rites during the initiation.

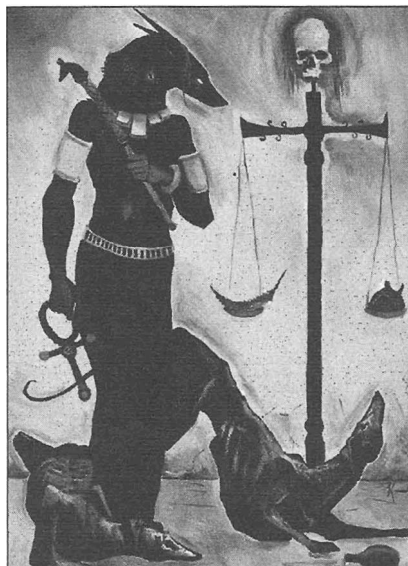
### *Country Worship*

The people of many rural areas revere Anubis as the defender of the just. He is "the Champion of Truth," and he brings retribution to any who oppress his followers. Even though they must wait for the death of their enemies, followers of Anubis live with the comfort of knowing that all must pay for their iniquities some day.

### *City Worship*

In more civilized and populated areas, Anubis insures that people obey the laws and follow their leaders. Many heads of state worship Anubis, and he justifies their legal structures. The cult of Anubis reflects the courts and justice systems of the living and prepares mortals for the test in the afterlife.

The cult of Anubis also oversees the care of the dead. Preparing a corpse for burial or cremation can be an exacting and expensive process, especially in more prosperous lands.



Anubis and those  
deities associated  
with him are known  
collectively as the  
"deities of the ankh."  
The ankh is the  
symbol that looks like  
a cross with a loop  
for the top arm.  
It means life.



*Other Deities of the Ankh*

**AMAUNET:** Mother-goddess of fertility, who emerged at the beginning of time; deity of the monarchs.

**AMUN-RE:** King of heaven; ruler of the sun.

**BAST:** CAT-headed goddess of the home; wife of Ptah, daughter of Amun-Re.

**HATHOR:** Goddess of women and fertility; daughter of Amun-Re; wears a crown in the shape of a sun disk between the horns of a cow.

**HORUS:** Falcon-headed god of the sky; son of Isis and Osiris.

**IMHOTEP:** God of medicine, healing, and learning.

**ISIS:** Mother-goddess of protection and magic; sister and wife of Osiris.

**MAAT:** Goddess of judgment and order; consort of Thoth; wears an ostrich feather on her head.

**OSIRIS:** God of the underworld, who was murdered and dismembered by Seth and reassembled by Isis; brother and husband of Isis.

**PTAH:** God of building and creating; husband of Bast.

**SETH:** God of darkness, storms, and chaos; appears as a man with a long, forked tail and a head similar to a crocodile's, with a curved snout and square-tipped ears.

**THOTH:** Ibis-headed god of knowledge and wisdom; arbitrator among the deities; consort of Maat.

See also "Deities."

## ANVIL OF EVERGUARD, THE

### *A Tale Told by Chains of Poverty*

I did not want to do it; if you must know, such things make me afraid. But Many Voices insisted that we needed the knowledge and she was the one who would pay the price.

The sweat lodge we built was crude, but it did its task. I had always enjoyed a good sweat—before I met her. Now I

could only watch as she became dark in her eyes, and I could only listen as that other self spoke from her mouth. I could do nothing as that spirit used her like a musician uses a pipe, as a mere instrument of noise.

Finally, I spoke. "Where is my shield, the shield of Everguard? Who could have stolen it?"

The voice in Many chuckled. "Poor foolish soul. That shield has stolen itself."

"Don't try to trick me. Can you not speak plainly for once?"

"Oh, if you wish to know the hand that took the shield while you slept, I can tell you that. But that hand no longer carries it, for the shield was taken from her cooling corpse and has been sold and stolen and sold again, all in the short time since you lost it."

"What? How is this so?"

"That shield is simply a playing piece in a much larger game. A spirit of great cunning is moving that shield, even as I move this clay vessel." It tipped Many Voices's face in a grotesque wink.

"Why did I have it then, and why was it taken from me?"

"Why? The great, final why of it is buried so deep that not even my sight can unearth it. But there are shallower reasons, and these I can tell you. The shield was given you to save you from the ambush by Blood Wind and his guards. It was taken from you because you had fulfilled your purpose."

"What purpose? What did it save me to do?"

"It was ten months past that you lay with Dancing Eyes, was it not? Less than a month ago, with the birth of your child, the shield abandoned you."

"I . . . I have a child?"

"One who bears watching."

### *From the Tales of Summer I Am*

In the market of River's Edge, Summer I Am was accosted by a man who begged her to hold a package for him. Summer I Am was uneasy with this request, but before she could protest, the man had already pushed the package unto her and fled in great haste.

Summer I Am sought the man, hoping to return his property to him, but she did not find him. Finally, curious but wary, Summer I Am opened the package and found within a

sword of great beauty, bright and sharp and bearing upon itsommel the mark of a shield.

Taking the sword to the city guard, Summer I Am learned that no such blade was missing and that the man who gave it to her was no one the guards knew.

Next, Summer I Am took the blade to a seller of weapons, who told her that it was an Everguard blade, that it might have magical properties, and that he would give her a great sum of gold in return for the weapon. Summer I Am refused, and carried the blade away with her, still hoping to return it to its owner.

By some strange chance of fortune, Summer I Am did finally find the blade's owner, and in great danger as well. One night, she saw the man running through the Pleasure Streets pursued by two people—a man and a woman in dark cloaks. Summer I Am set out to follow the three and found them in a dark yard by the docks. The man who had given her the sword was being held by the man in black while the woman struck his face, saying, "Where is the blade?"

"I do not know," gasped the sword giver.

"Die then, you swine," said the woman in the dark cloak, pulling forth a dagger.

"Here is the sword," cried Summer I Am, unsheathing it. "Find it in your flesh!" So saying, she struck the woman and killed her.

The man in black pulled forth a dagger and sank it, pitilessly, into the neck of the sword giver. Then he turned to Summer I Am.

"Give me the blade and all shall be well. But do not try to strike me, for I have a charm against weapons of the flesh."

"I will test your charm, murderer!" So saying, Summer I Am struck him a great blow.

"Master, have you betrayed me?" said the man in the dark cloak, and expired upon the spot.

Then, before the astonished eyes of Summer I Am, the sword corroded into rust . . . and vanished.

*Recorded by First Frost, a Historian of the Glorious Empire*

The legendary fortress Everguard has been spoken of in tales for over a hundred years. Most travelers who speak of its location do so only in vague terms, "several GATES away" or "in a distant SPHERE" or "many days journey from here," which leads this listener to suspect that they have never really seen this fortress, if it even exists.

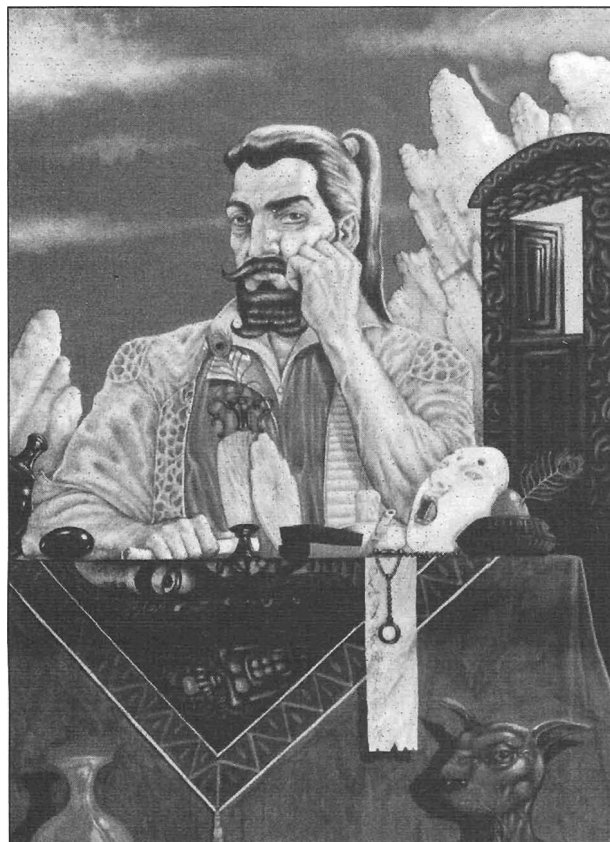
That Everguard existed once seems fairly certain. This examiner has had the opportunity to examine Everguard daggers and an Everguard shield. While none of the objects manifested the wondrous properties that the NAME Everguard evokes in most people among the spheres, the shield symbol upon them was clear and matched the traditional descriptions. A colleague examined them for magical capacity and declared that each had great powers, albeit dormant ones.

Most tales of Everguard mention the magical anvil, which is fused into the stone of the smithy and imparts magic to the tools forged on it. My sorcerous colleague expressed doubt that such a thing could exist, since constructing magical artifacts requires a guiding intelligence. His theory is that the Everguard weapons and armor were made by a great mage for some long-term purpose, a purpose that perhaps they have now outlived, for what sorcerer's gambit would require him to construct tools hundreds of years in advance?

*A Basahn Saying*

Should you have a chance to buy a helm or shield or blade of Everguard, be sure to bargain hard and offer little in return; for if it is fated, the Everguard weapon will come to you regardless.

Once bought, sell it quick and dear, for only the person destined to own it will buy it. Never, never try to use it as your own, for the apparent master of such a thing is really its servant. It will swallow your fate as a toad devours a fly.



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**APEX SOULSINGER.** See "Mirror of Shadows," "Reincarnation," "Shadow Children," and "Tempest Threshold."

## AURA

The *aura* refers to the invisible emanations of the soul. It is said that the true nature of one's aura is always revealed by one's reflection. This should not be construed as an explanation for why many UNDEAD have no reflection. The real explanation is much simpler: the silver backing of a mirror dispels the reflection of the undead.

See also "Dreaming Sickness," "Soul Leeches and Spell Eaters," "Soulseekers," and "Thieves of Essence."

## AVATAR

An *avatar* is a living body that hosts a powerful soul, force, or DEITY.

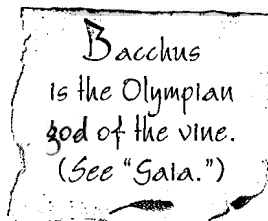
See also "Elemental Avengers," "Phoenixes," and "Soulseekers."



## BACCHUS'S ROOTS

*Bacchus's roots* is a plant whose thick, long roots yield an incredibly potent, clear liquor known as *Bacchus's tears*. According to frequent drinkers, imbibing it always leaves you weeping—either in mirth or sorrow.

Some claim that the leaves of the *Bacchus's roots* plant have properties of their own. If sun-dried in summer and frozen throughout the winter, the leaves can be ground and added to *Bacchus's tears* to create a drink that many spouses call *neverstray*. If consumed, *neverstray* prevents one from performing outside the marital bed.



"I see. . . . What do they trade in?"

"He shrugged a little irritably.

"You know, just stuff. Weavings from this sphere, fruit from that one, uh, horses from a third. They find a place that's got a grain surplus, say. They buy up all the cheap grain there—descend like locusts too, buy up as much as they can—and if

they have to scare off your horses or smash the wheels on your cart to keep you away they'll do it! Then they'll haul the grain to some poor sphere with a famine or a slow season, and they'll all close ranks to twist the price up."

"Really."

"Oh yes, they're merciless price gougers! Taking advantage of misfortune is part of the game to a Basahn. See, they look down on normal folks like you and me. Got their own language and everything—like what HEAVEN gave us isn't good enough for *them*."

"Their own language? I didn't think the word 'Basahn' sounded familiar."

"Yeah, their own god gave it to 'em—that's what they say. Maybe they made it up. One fellow I know said that what *he* heard was that the Basahn say they're 'real people' and their language is the 'real language,' and . . . now how did it go? Something about how the truth could only be said in the real language."

I scratched my head at that one.

"Don't you see?" He leaned in. "That makes it all right to *lie*. If our language isn't the 'real' language, if anything they say in it is untrue anyway . . . well, why not pile on the lies? They're great liars, they are."

"Unlike some humans I could mention."

He shifted uncomfortably, looked around again.

"You didn't hear it from me, lass, do we understand this? If there's one thing they're better at than lying, it's tracking down people they're angry at. That grain thing . . . yeah, that happened to me, and I decided to get even by burning out one of their wagons. I didn't think anyone had seen me, but next sphere I stopped at, this fellow started following me. So I knew some rough boys, told them we were going to go break

## BASAHN

### *A Conversation Retold by Trek, a Researcher of the Glorious Empire Library*

Basahn, eh? Guard your purse, lady. That's what I say about them Basahn."

I poked at the fire, waiting for him to say more. True to form, he did.

"Your Basahn, he's a wanderer. They're not human, though they can pass. They walk among us, I tell you. . . conducting their 'commerce' and sometimes even marrying with human women!"

"What else can you tell me about them?"

"They're wanderers."

"You said that. Are they SPHEREWALKERS?"

"Yeah, each and every one of them. They wander the SPHERES, selling junk and making 'deals.' They're merchants, like . . . and if someone doesn't like what they're selling, they just duck into the nearest GATE and vanish. They stick good and close to gateways, believe you me."

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him up. Ran him to ground in the yard behind a smithy . . . but that's where we learned something else about the Basahn."

He looked around, but none of the others in the caravan seemed to be paying attention. Nonetheless, he lowered his voice before continuing.

"Basahn—they're strong. Stronger than us humans. The one following me, he wasn't a big one, but he picked up one of my rough boys easy enough—threw him into me hard enough to knock me down, then started in on the other. I'd seen enough—I ran, and I've watched my back ever since. I don't know if they're all that strong, or if that one had something from a far sphere or what. I don't *want* to know.

The Tongue  
is the language  
given by the  
deities to all  
humanity  
among the  
spheres.

One source, whom I call "Beloved," claimed that Basahn marriages are usually arranged. A male is expected to have saved enough for a wagon and team of his own, while the female is to have accumulated a store of trade goods. The families exchange prospective suitors for a period of months, and if they decide that the match is suitable, a religious ceremony follows. Careful observation of people suspected to be Basahn seems to indicate that this is correct, though similar customs are also practiced by some human merchants.

The average Basahn is as honest as the average human, which may account for their widespread reputation as cheats and liars.

### BASAHN WORDS

Perhaps another reason for widespread suspicion about Basahn is their language. While humans and Basahn both speak the Tongue, the Basahn also have a language called *Basahni*, which is incomprehensible to most human ears.

Through observation, a few common Basahni terms have been translated.

### *Recorded by Eye of the Land, a Researcher for Chamber Platinum*

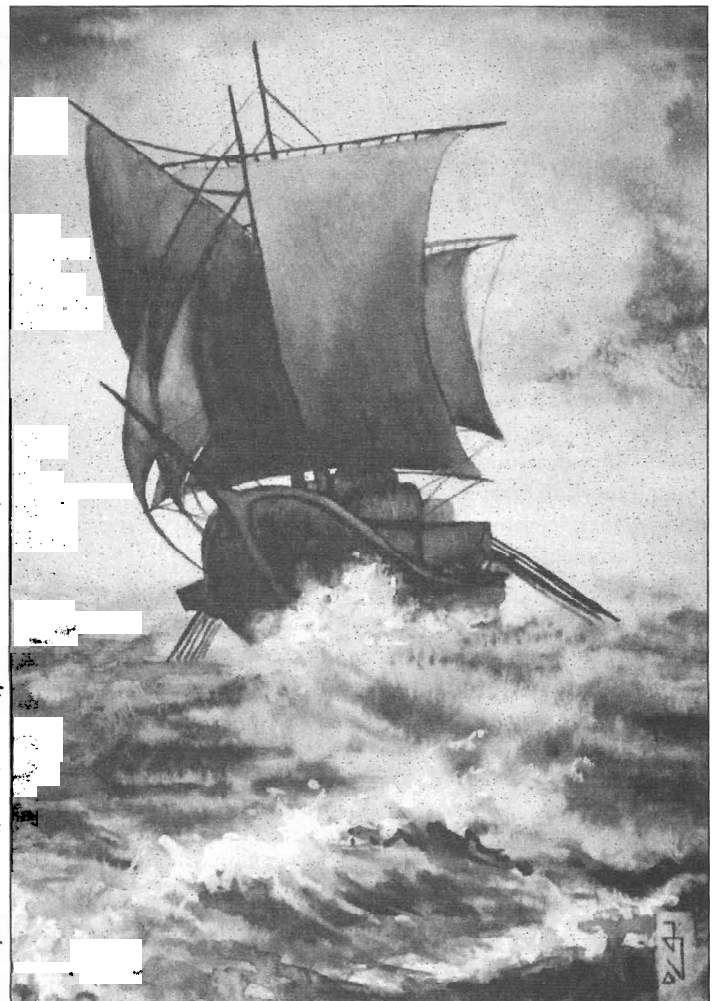
The *Basahn* (called in some realms "Besahn," "Basan," or "Bescan") are a race of SPHEREWALKING wanderers. They operate mainly as merchants.

Basahn are insular and suspicious of "outsiders," who readily return their mistrust. No one is sure what SPHERE they call home—some say that even the Basahn themselves have forgotten where they came from.

It is difficult to tell the difference between Basahn and human people. The Basahn generally have light olive skin with dark hair. Their eyes and hair are dark as well, and their noses are generally strong and slightly curved. It is widely acknowledged that humans and Basahn cannot bear children together; any union between the two is barren.

Given that the one true test of Basahn nature cannot be undertaken lightly, many Basahn (though exact numbers are especially hard to estimate with this race) pass themselves off as human. Facing fear and hatred in many realms, this guise is probably a wise precaution. Other Basahn are quite open about their nature, though this candor seems to be restricted primarily to those Basahn who travel exclusively in more cosmopolitan realms, where they are accepted.

Basahn usually travel as families. A family may be a peddler couple and a child, or it might be a wagon train of cousins and nieces, ruled over by the oldest couple.





## SOME BASAHNI WORDS AND PHRASES

GANAS: Foolish, gullible.

KEVAHL: Annoying, unpleasant. (This word applies only to personality.)

SAHN MUVUHN: Trustworthy.

ATRAHN: Hard bargainer. (This phrase implies respect.)

OTO UVULU MATRI!: As it usually precedes violence, this phrase is generally considered a threat.

JAHQRI: Cheap goods that look expensive or valuable.

RHUDUN: Bribe money.

KEFIN BASAHN: Basahn hater.

SHUVU MAKLI JOMAH!, BORDUN SASHAN: Go upon smooth trails, my friend. (This is the closest translation of a farewell that the Basahn give to honored non-Basahn acquaintances.)

BAHDIN: Evil trade. (This phrase applies specifically to goods or services that are refused for religious or moral reasons.)

LAHT IRJA MATHAN: Let's go get a drink.

IRATI VATU STRAHSO NOMBIN: We're wasting our time here.

## Basahni Pronunciation

a pronounced as *a* in *father*

j pronounced as *j* in *joy*

e pronounced as *e* in *end*

g pronounced as *g* in *get*

i pronounced as *ee* in *feet*

kl pronounced as *cl* in *club*

o pronounced as *o* in *home*

u pronounced as *oo* in *too*

The first syllable in which an *h* follows a vowel is stressed, as in *Basahn* [pronounced "ba-SAHN"]. If there is no vowel+*h* combination in the word, then the first syllable is stressed, as in *ke-fin* [pronounced KEH-fin].

## BASAHN CULTURE

Few humans have been able to approach Basahn closely enough to report on their culture, as they are very private. In EVERWAY, Dexter City, and the Celestial City, however, the Basahn are accepted enough that a few details can be observed.

Many Basahn are dancers, actors, or musicians, accomplished at performing human works. There is a second layer of Basahn culture, however, an inner layer that only they can see. A shadowy individual calling himself Murk said that he was able to spy on them unseen and learn some of their secrets.

Central to the Basahn's secret lives is an instrument called the *sahni harp*. It is forbidden by the Basahn god for non-Basahn to see the *sahni harp* or for Basahn to perform it for them. The harp has a U-shaped wooden frame, through which the musician strings strands of his or her own hair. The *sahni harp* is played both pizzicato and with a bow, and the

tones are low and dense. Though he seemed a hardened individual, Murk claimed that the tunes produced by the *sahni harp* were so sad that even he wept over them. These tunes are accompanied by an eerie wailing song or chant in Basahni. Murk added that it seemed to him that playing the *sahni harp* was physically painful to the Basahn, but that may have been more of a personal reaction to the music itself.

Like every culture, the Basahn have a number of traditional stories, jokes, and poems, all told in Basahni, of course. These are rarely written down—at least among the merchant Basahn who wander the SPHERES. Poetry, which is easier to remember than stories, tends to be the most common form.

Many humans are frightened by the thought that the Basahn live among them, unseen, and cannot be discovered save by magic. This fear has led to pogroms and other crimes of hatred. More pragmatic cultures, however, actually prefer Basahn merchants to human ones because the Basahn do not try to seduce the locals.

## BASAHN RELIGION

I was fortunate in the course of my research to meet a renegade Basahn, to whom I refer as "Beloved." I am honor-bound to shield Beloved from the consequences of what I was told, for the Basahn would almost certainly punish her severely for such revelations.

It was Beloved who confirmed our hypotheses about the marriage customs because Beloved lacked the money to marry a chosen mate. Beloved agreed to tell us of the Basahn in return for money and trade goods. What follows is the transcription of my interview with the Beloved.

*Myself:* Tell me about your people. Where do you come from?

*Beloved:* I cannot tell you that, for we ourselves do not know. According to the tales, our land was destroyed by a human war ages ago.

*Myself:* Surely now that the war is finished you can return to your homeland?

*Beloved:* You do not understand. Our home was not laid waste or invaded—it was destroyed. It no longer exists. We were not involved in the battle—we had nothing to do with it. But we were forced to flee regardless. Since that time, we have wandered.

*Myself:* How did you escape this cataclysm?

*Beloved:* Our god led us away through a hole in the world.

*Myself:* Who is your god?

*Beloved:* No. That I will not tell you. It is forbidden. I am telling you too much already. . . .

*Myself:* Really, you're only confirming things we've long suspected or that we have heard from other sources. Please continue. . . .

*Beloved:* [After a long pause] Very well. The flight from our homeland. . . . Our god appeared to us then. He told us that we would be wanderers in the lands of the humans and that it would be very hard for us because we have no home. It was then he gave us Basahni.

*Myself:* You did not have your own language before that?

*Beloved:* No. Our god told us that by Basahni we would know each other. More importantly, by it we would know ourselves.

*Myself:* What do you mean?

*Beloved:* He said that we would travel among humans and live among humans and that while we might pass as humans, we must never forget ourselves and think we *are* humans. We are not as you are and were never meant to

*Haggling in an exaggerated, entertaining, and melodramatic fashion has come to be called "Basahn theatre." often perceived as suspicious or taciturn, the Basahn seem to derive great from such antics.*

be. Basahni keeps us whole. Our music keeps us whole. It makes us what we are.

*Myself:* Is that why you won't share it?

*Beloved:* Yes. For if humans spoke our tongue and sang our songs, then what would be left for us to call our own? We have no land. We have no ruler. We have only our songs and our god and each other.

Many young Basahn abandon their people and try to pass for human. They buy houses and land, and they do not speak Basahni. They deny knowing any Basahn in order to marry human women. We call them "ahshons." When these marriages do not bear children, often these wives are set aside and called barren. That, or they hire someone—a Basahn if the ahshon is female, or a human if the husband is the Basahn—and this person gets the wife with child. It is a sorry business.

That is why it is so wrong for me to come to you. I have said too much—

*Myself:* No, please! Just a few more questions.

*Beloved:* What good is gold to a traitor like me? My guilt cannot be paid for.

With that, Beloved would say no more, and departed.

See also "Needledemons."

BASAHNI. See "Basahn" and "Needledemons."

## BATWING FUNGUS

As the NAME indicates, this gray-black mushroom is wing-shaped, with ridges and dips that resemble the wings of a bat. It is found in cool, dark forests.

If consumed, *batwing fungus* causes terrible illness, whose symptoms include vomiting, convulsions, diarrhea, and sometimes open sores upon the skin. If, however, the mushroom is finely chopped and sun dried, it makes a superb purgative. Folk wisdom contends that this emetic can even remove the effects of enchantment and possession. These benefits are attributed to the fact that the batwing is so foul that even demons cannot stomach it.

In light of these unpleasant side effects it seems doubly

strange that, properly prepared, the batwing is a delicacy in many realms. If it is sliced thin and dry cooked, gourmands declare that it has a rich, musky flavor unlike anything else. The threat of violent illness, however, dissuades all but the most adventurous and the most jaded.

## BELL WALKING

*Bell walking* is a rare and wondrous art that originated in the GLORIOUS EMPIRE. For every person fortunate enough to see the Imperial Bell Walkers perform, there are easily a thousand who wish they could but never will.

The art of bell walking involves becoming supernaturally attuned to music. A bell walker has become so close to music that she can physically support herself upon it. Movement is determined by tone: ascending tones lift the bell walker higher, while a descending turn in the piece of music lowers her.

There are, of course, impostors. Those who can support themselves midair through sorcery may try to pass themselves off as bell walkers, but anyone who has seen a genuine performance can easily spot a fraud. A flying woman may be amusing, but to those who know, a phony is glaringly obvious.

One imperial administrator who attended a bell walking performance described it thus:

*It was a sight of uncommon beauty . . . twelve or fifteen women floating in the air like thistledown in the wind. They moved in perfect unison, twirling and gliding . . . like autumn leaves when the wind catches them. When they twirled, their scarves would float around them like their own hair. Yet it was neither the sight of such graceful, beautiful women nor the miracle of their flight that so moved me. Watching them, I realized that there was only one way they could go from each note, and that any other way would be monstrous, impossible. That was the real magic of the bell walkers—not that they walk on air, but that they can show others, through beauty, their sympathy with the music.*

The emperor supports two troupes of bell walkers. The First Troupe consists of the twelve finest dancers in the empire. They have a permanent residence at the Imperial Palace but

frequently tour the Glorious Empire. The Second Troupe is much larger. Consisting of the lesser dancers, it travels at the emperor's discretion to other spheres, where the troupe performs for those who have found imperial favor. They also act as unofficial ambassadors and liaisons for the empire.

The Second Troupe has performed for audiences as diverse as the SPRING BORN and the Emerald family of EVERWAY, and on stages as different as the renowned Arena of Dexter City and the Red MERCHANT QUEEN's Crimson Pavilion.

Despite their great beauty and talent, there are some who are suspicious of the Second Troupe bell walkers, claiming that they are a beguiling front for the ubiquitous "Unseen Hands" of the emperor. Protected by a pretense of harmless entertainment, the bell walkers carry out missions of espionage, blackmail, and assassination—or so say the talemongers.

It is worth noting, however, that bell walkers are no strangers to malicious whispers. There is a tiny dissident group in the Glorious Empire's Southern Seahold Territory that calls itself the Fist of Manhood. They claim that the emperor is bewitched by the bell walkers and that for generations the imperial line has been a succession of puppets for manipulative witches from the Northeast Territory. They demand the deposition of the emperor, a total ban on bell walking, and the immediate death by stoning of all who practice the discipline. While these fanatics are small in number, they have successfully disrupted at least one performance by the Second Troupe.

The origins of bell walking are shrouded in mystery. Some say the art form was developed by villagers in what was formerly the kingdom of Piercing Blade (now the Northeast Territory of the Glorious Empire). Peasants there are quick to claim that bell walking was once theirs, that the imperial ministers stole it and killed all the teachers who would not obey them. The empire's official stance is that such tales are revolutionary lies, but it is true that many bell walkers come from the Northeast Territory.

In addition to tales about bell walking's mysterious beginnings, there are persistent rumors that there is more to the art of bell walking than mere dancing. Some claim that bell walking is (or once was) a study of the art of magic. According to Northeast folklore, the ancient bell walkers were witches who could enchant through their mystic dances. The dance of madness, they say, would bind the heart of a man with chains of





unbreakable passion. Once a man had seen the dance, his heart and whole being belonged to the dancer. Another rumored sorcery is the dance of thorns. According to legend, all who saw it were bound to the spot by its beauty but torn in their hearts as if by a scourge. The combination of pain and pleasure was so great that anyone who watched to the end was overcome, and died.

Those who hunger  
should have pride, but  
those whose children  
hunger should have bread.  
found above  
every Temple of Mercy

## BLOODBEEK BERRIES

The small, triangular *bloodbeak berries* are blood-red and piercingly tart. The bloodbeak bush is usually found on mountains. The juice of the berries is sometimes used as a dye, and eating these berries leaves teeth and fingers stained crimson.

Some warriors believe that eating bloodbeak berries before battle steels their nerves to the point of invincibility. They also claim that if the berries are crushed and buried under a warrior's house, or are mixed with dirt and smeared on a victim's weapons or armor, the berries will sap the warrior's courage. Even the stoutest heart, they say, will fail.

## BLUE MERCHANTS

Many years ago, there lived a group of merchants who became so powerful and influential that they came to be recognized as a sovereign power called the Liquid Kingdom, which was ruled over by a MERCHANT QUEEN. A war of succession split the Liquid Kingdom between two twin sisters, named Blood and Breath. The two factions became, respectively, the RED MERCHANT and Blue Merchant Kingdoms.

For many years, the two rival royal families were bitter enemies. Each did all it could to thwart the other. This constant fighting between the Red and Blue Merchant Kingdoms is often cited as one reason that the BASAHN traders became as successful and powerful as they are today.

However, in the reign of the sixty-second Blue Merchant Queen, the entire nature of the Blue Kingdom was abruptly changed. Queen Azure XI had always been devoutly religious, but upon the birth of her first grandchild, she had a sort of epiphany. She closeted herself with religious and mercantile advisors for a week, and when she emerged she made truly shocking announcement: she decreed nothing less than the dissolution of the Blue Merchant Kingdom.

The reason for this startling decision was that the queen felt she could no longer reward avarice at the price of generosity. To make amends for the greed of her family, she intended to found a series of temples, which would be known as the *Temples of Mercy*.

The queen claimed that she had been personally touched by several goddesses, who would give their blessings to the temples and would curse any who profaned their purpose.

The temples would replace the Liquid Kingdom. Those who wished could pay taxes to the temples and retain their rights as citizens, though now as citizens of the temple. Instead of being used to make bribes, to support armies, and to purchase political considerations, however, their taxes would be used to support the temples and their mission.

Many citizens defected, but a great number remained loyal to Azure XI. Perhaps some felt the change was merely a ploy the queen had devised in order to separate out the truly loyal; but many who saw her at this time said that she did indeed have the aspect of one who has been divinely inspired.

Within short order, temples were built in many lands, all on the same pattern: a long, low, unadorned structure that contained a hall of contemplation, chambers for monks, and a few rooms where guests could stay the night.

The hall of contemplation in every temple has three large urns at the front. Traditionally, people use the hall for prayer or mediation and then approach the urns. A visitor approaches each urn, withdraws money from his or her purse, places it into the urn, and then returns his or her hand to the purse. This is done at each urn in order that none can know how much was added or withdrawn by any individual.

The first urn holds small coins, such as copper pennies; the middle urn, larger coins, usually silver; and the last urn is for large donations such as gold or jewels. In lands where hard currency is seldom used, the urn ritual is largely symbolic; there, individuals offer trade goods or foodstuffs to the ministers of the temple in private. The ministers are then responsible for distributing these gifts to the needy in an appropriately subtle fashion. In fact, temple ministers in these lands are so adept at coming and going unseen that some credit them with the ability to turn into a breeze and flow down chimneys or under doorways.

The Temples of Mercy accept no public gifts, by the order of Azure XI. She has decreed "The temple is for those who wish to give to others, not to their own reputations."

All who enter the temples are free to remove as much as they wish from the urns—with the caution that they should take only as much as they truly need. Azure arranged the urn-to-purse system so that none who took would need to feel shame, for she believed that pride kept many who were truly needy from accepting charity.

Where there is no physical security in place to prevent theft from the temple urns by those who are not in need, there are many examples of people who took too much, or who took for selfish purposes and bought only grief with the ill-gotten money: One man, who took money to acquire another business when he already owned a thriving one, was ruined when both his businesses were burned to the ground. One who took money to buy jewelry attracted a young lover with it; but it transpired that the lover was interested only in setting up an eventual robbery. One woman who took money to have a husband killed was discovered, humiliated, and thrown in prison.

Those who take from the urns are encouraged to pay back their loans when they are able, if ever. And many of the wealthy swear that donating to the Temples of Mercy is as good as divine assurance of success in business.

The temples are tolerated by all but the most restrictive fundamentalist churches, tribes, and governments. Since they do not proselytize any particular religion, they are not seen as a threat by those in power. Many monarchs and governments encourage the temples actively, giving large gifts to them, because they seem to be divinely protected from corruption and because the presence of a well-supported temple in a farming district can mean the difference between a lean year for the peasants and a deadly one.

Temples of Mercy are common on widely traveled sphere paths, but recently the temples have had difficulties. Ever since the death of Azure XI, the leadership of the temples has been unsure, bouncing back and forth among her children, grandchildren, counselors, and advisors—not to mention the ministers and clergy of various religions.

In living memory, the feuding between two factions, the Cerulean and the Indigo, became so extreme that the Indigo actually broke off their allegiance to the Temples of Mercy. Both factions were led by descendants of Azure XI, a pair of cousins who gave their contingents their NAMES. Empty Sky VII leads the conservative Cerulean faction. Sky believes that the current administrators of the Temples of Mercy are merely custodians of what Azure built; she does not feel it is her place to change what was built by one divinely inspired. Blue Feather XII, who leads the progressive Indigo faction, contends that in addition to giving money away to individuals, the temples could also benefit needy tribes or races. Along with this plan developed one to make the temples something like banks, enabling them to lend money at interest, without the usual temple requirement that the recipient be in dire need. Feather believed that by lending money at interest, the

temples' treasury would grow to the point that they could readily aid struggling lands. This added income would also, of course, continue to be used to aid the individual poor.

The members of the Cerulean faction were appalled at the notion of lending temple funds at interest, deeming it a treacherous return to the mercenary ways of their ancestors. As for donations to struggling nations, the Ceruleans argued that doing so would enmesh the temples in politics when their proper place was above such power struggles.

The debate led Blue Feather and a group of loyal followers to raid the temple treasury and flee with a large sum. Empty Sky, outraged, declared her cousin a traitor and blasphemer.

In what has become known as the Second Schism, temples everywhere are aligning themselves with either the Cerulean or the Indigo faction. Some try to remain neutral, but this has become increasingly difficult. The debate echoes through countless cities as supporters of the two factions attempt to sway merchants, rulers, and elders to their side. Neither faction tolerates violence, but the intrigue and treachery on both sides is steadily escalating.

See also "Merchant Queens."

## BOOK OF ELDER FEAR

The *Book of Elder Fear* is an exhaustive tome on DRAGONS.

See also "Weeping Dragon Oracle."

## BOON

Among the SPHERES, a *boon* is a special reward, affirmation, or windfall, usually granted by a DEITY or some figure of authority.

See also "Dragons," "Fortune Deck," "Skin Scribes," "Spring Born," and "Weeping Dragon Oracle."

The city of Everway was plagued for years by a crafty thief known only as "the Unseen." When she was finally captured, the wealthy of the city were so delighted that they held a great celebration, but while everyone was involved in the festival, the Unseen escaped. No one in Everway has heard from her since, but travelers claim to have seen her in a Temple of Mercy, working as a minister.



# BRIGHID

GODDESS OF INSPIRATION

## Stories and Teachings

Brighid brings the light of healing, inspiration, and knowledge to those who follow her. She has three forms: first as the healer, poet, and smith; second, as the goddess of divination and prophecy; and finally, as the protector of women in labor.

Brighid and the other *children of Danu* live in a magical world under the hills, making them much closer to their followers than most DEITIES are. They won their land by defeating the Fomorians and Fir Bolgs. (In fact, Brighid's husband, Bres, is not a child of Danu but a Fomorian, the god who taught the Children of Danu agriculture.) Brighid's animals are the serpent and the swan.

Brighid is pronounced  
BREE-ida.

## Tribal Worship

Among tribal people, Brighid most commonly appears in the aspect of goddess of divination and prophecy. Many people devoted to her are shamans or spirit doctors who carry her word to their people, while many others are untrained prophets or visionaries.

Brighid's role as the goddess of poetry is also important to some tribes where she is worshiped. As most tribal people do not have writing, they remember their histories and teachings through poems and songs. For these people, Brighid is both a keeper of knowledge and a source of insight.

## Country Worship

In the farmlands and pastures, Brighid's aspect of protector of childbirth is most important. Her healer aspect is also important. Midwives in the realms of Danu's children typically devote themselves to Brighid.

## City Worship

Brighid's roles as smith, poet, and healer are most important in city life. Creators and innovators of all kinds claim her as their patron. Cities, however, are often home to a wide variety of religions and variations on those religions, so her other aspects are commonly found here as well.

Each city in Riverrun has a temple to Brighid, even though each city has a different patron, such as the Dagda or Nuada. The centerpiece of the temple is not a statue but a perpetual flame. The priests and priestesses of Brighid can light brands

or candles in this flame and then use them for a variety of magical purposes. Smoke from herbs set alight by the perpetual flame can cure disease. Poets working by the light of these candles are given insight and inspiration. Tools created in forges lit by this fire are renowned for their quality. In Riverrun, it is the primary responsibility of Brighid's clergy to maintain the strength and purity of these perpetual flames.

## Other Children of Danu

AENGUS: God of love and youth.

AES SIDHE: The old deities, who dwell in the hills.

ARAWN: God of the underworld.

BELENUS: God of FIRE; wields the purifying fires.

BOANN: Goddess of rivers; mother of Aengus, consort of the Dagda.

BRAN: God of protection and heroes; protects against invasion.

BRES: God of fertility; rallied against the deities when he lost his kingdom to Nuada, but his life was spared when he promised to teach agriculture to the deities; husband of Brighid.

CERIDWEN: Goddess of the cauldron of knowledge; associated with sows.

THE DAGDA: "The good god," father of the deities; wields an enormous club that can take or give life; father of Brighid.

LUGH: God of battle and victory; known for his dexterous hand in battle.

MORRIGAN: Goddess of battle; hovers over battlefields in the form of a crow.

NUADA: God of integrity and justice; lost his kingdom when he lost his hand in a battle and was given back his kingdom when his hand was restored.

OGMA: God of eloquence and learning; invented an alphabet.

See also "Deities."

Brighid and her peers are known as "children of Danu" because they are descended from the earth goddess Danu.

## CAGED DREAMS

Calling himself "Foolish Barterer," a certain merchant at the near end of the Street of Wonders in Dexter City sells the cheapest of trapped dreams—those so weak that they can be contained in glass bottles or crystal capsules. He trades largely in the erotic and the idyllic, with a small sideline in nightmares.



The Foolish Barterer does not deal in powerful *caged dreams*, which are something else again. Caged dreams are sold in apparently empty, rune-encrusted lead cages about a foot across and a yard or more in length.

While the dreams sold by Foolish Barterer are little more than entertainments, the true caged dream is a much different thing. Such dreams are often deeply disturbing, spoken through cryptic symbols. A caged dream can show you things about yourself that you might not want to know—even if you need to. Some of the largest cages even hold prophetic or precognitive dreams.

## CATS

An all-white cat without blemish is often thought to be a messenger of good tidings, and such cats are therefore in great demand. They are often sacrificed by evil magicians, who believe that by killing a white cat and wearing its skin one can steal the good fortune intended for another. Less cruel mages will sometimes attempt to attract white cats in order to enhance their powers, but many who have tried this insist that such cats are impervious to coercive and persuasive sorcery and can only be attracted by genuine benevolence.

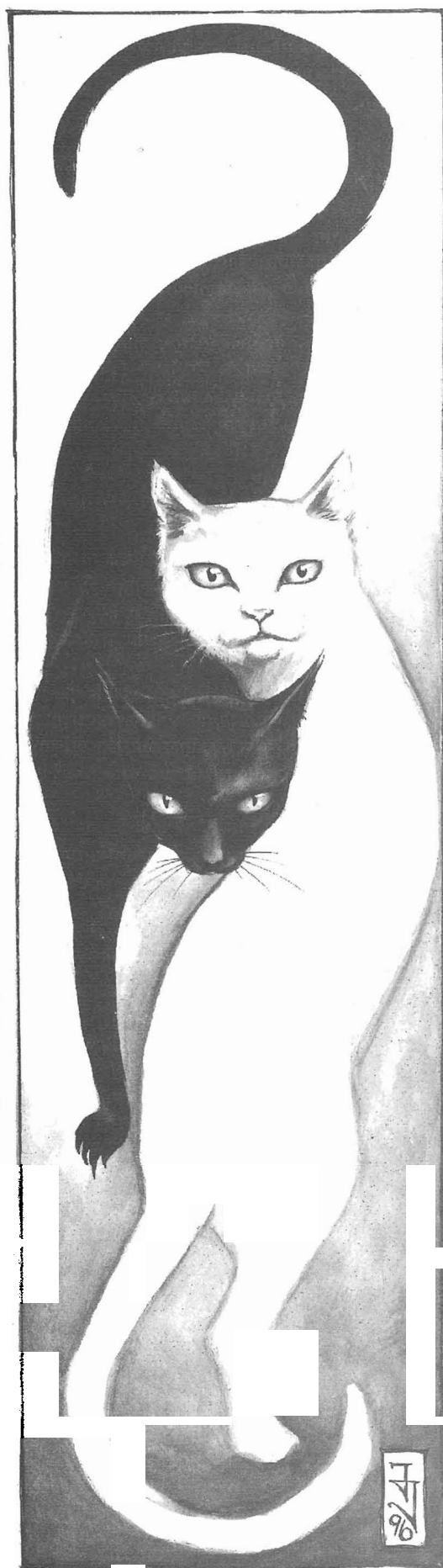
Black cats, on the other hand, are seen as agents of misfortune and evil. They are known to suck the breath out of sleeping victims, particularly infants. Many people simply kill them on sight, but evil magicians try to entice or capture them in order to align themselves with the negative energies that the cats harness.

It may be that black cats aren't evil but are simply powerful. (It is the unfortunate response of many to label as "evil" any power they cannot understand or control.)

It is said that a ship with an all-white or all-black cat aboard will never sink because cats hate WATER and will use all their power to keep the boat afloat.

Some believe that every human soul must be incarnated as a cat nine times before it can transcend the karmic wheel of life and death and reach HEAVEN.

CELESTIAL CITY. See "Basahn," "Thieves of Essence," and "Unity Mages."





## CHAMBER PLATINUM, THE

The *Chamber Platinum* is a respected body of researchers and scholars sponsored by the Library of All Worlds in EVERWAY (which is run by the Scratch family). The Chamber sends its explorers to new realms and spheres, and from their eyewitness accounts, the library's scribes record, document, and chart their findings for the benefit of other travelers.

See also "Everway."

Related Topics: "Alurax," "Basahn," and "Satyrs."

CHILDREN OF DANU. See "Brighid."

## CINNAMON PLAGUE, THE

No one is sure where the *cinnamon plague* originated. It is most prevalent today in the city of River's Edge, but this may be because some of the city's residents intentionally catch the plague, not because it started there.

Silver-Star-of-Wisdom, a sorcerer of the Fortune school, has studied the phenomenon.

*The disease is clearly a corruption, or a distortion, of SATYR energy. I'm guessing there's a COCKATRICE influence. Most diseases stem from an inverted Lion, but this one is not so physically debilitating. . . . My best guess is a Satyr-Cockatrice confluence. Application of The Lion will help the symptoms somewhat, as will an inverted Trickery. Reversed Inspiration and The Eagle can be effective in the right circumstances as well, but for a complete cure, I find nothing that works as well as inverted Cockatrice energy. Of course, an easier cure is to lock the patient in a sweat lodge for a week, but that's not always possible.*

The cinnamon plague is apparently carried on vapors that bear its signature scent. Some strong odors seem effective in keeping it at bay, notably garlic and incense. Perfume, however, has little effect and may actually aid in the communication of the illness. This puts the wealthy at special risk.

In its early stages, the disease is difficult to detect. It causes neither fever nor any other overt physical sign; the effects are almost entirely internal.

Quite simply, the cinnamon plague enhances pleasure. In its early stages, COLORS seem brighter, sounds are sharper and more vibrant, physical sensations more noteworthy and pleasurable. At this stage it is mostly harmless, and the patient is usually in a good mood because the world seems so pleasant.

As the disease progresses, things are perceived by the patient as more and more pleasant. Even a wretched hovel seems to the plague sufferer a garden of earthly delights. At this second stage, the victim is still in little serious danger from the illness itself; however, the symptoms can give the patient dangerous delusions of safety and trust where none truly exists. The victim's perceptions drift farther and farther from reality. During this stage, which can last anywhere from weeks to months, the victim begins emitting the cinnamon-scented vapors that spread the disease.

The final stage is identical to the second, with one deadly difference: the victim begins to find heat more and more repellent. While this is not dangerous in warm climates (merely miserable), it is deadly in cold weather. By this time, the victim's perceptions are almost completely addled. Left alone, a victim would gladly saunter out into the snow and, quite comfortably, freeze to death.

In this third stage the disease can be cured by extreme, constant heat. A sufferer who is locked in a sweat lodge (and by this time most victims will do everything in their power to avoid or escape such confinement) may sweat the disease out in a few days. However, this treatment is not without risks: Sometimes the fever breaks the victim. Some who have endured this cure have emerged weakened and easily tired. Some frail specimens have even died from it. Finally, a number report a certain pervasive dullness of sensation. While most survivors of the plague hope that this deadening of the senses is merely an *illusion* of loss created by the sudden contrast following the enhancement of senses during illness, some insist that when the disease leaves the body, it injures the essential ability to enjoy.

The enhancement of pleasure caused by the disease has led some sybarites in River's Edge to deliberately court infection. They reason that since River's Edge is warm year round, there is little danger of ever freezing to death. The danger, of course, is to any visitor passing through who catches the disease. While the "Cinnamon People" are scorned and regarded as short-sighted and self-destructive, there is little that can be done by authorities; there's no law against getting sick.

## CLEACUUN

*Cleacuun* is believed by the VERBALISTS to be the original language of the DEITIES and the means by which the SPHERES were made.

See also "Speakers" and "Verbalists."

## CLOTHING

Since clothing lies next to the skin all day, it absorbs some measure of the wearer's qualities, which makes articles of clothing useful objects for magic intended to affect the wearer. Rather than give their outmoded or worn-out garments to others, many sorcerers and people of authority burn their old clothes. This keeps the unscrupulous from gaining power over them. Many also have their clothes burned at death so that they cannot be used as talismans of reanimation.

Some thieves are known to steal the robes of the wealthy, not for resale but to wear themselves. They believe that by wearing the clothing they can draw to themselves the same fortune enjoyed by its last owner.

The famous sorcerer Many Masks once used a decoy to trick a demon who was seeking revenge on him. This decoy consisted of Many Masks's favorite robe, which had been anointed with his own blood. The demon mistook the robe for the sorcerer and, smelling the blood, thought him injured and weak. The demon appeared, intending to strike the wizard down, only to be trapped within a special design of enclosure.

It is a common belief that wearing your clothes inside out is a good way to confuse any malignant spells or invisible influences directed toward you. A similar belief is that wearing your clothes backwards confuses divination since the oracle will not be able to tell if you are coming or going. The general Empty Heart was known to wear her clothes backwards before every battle to confound any attempts at divining her plans.

## COCKATRICES

*Told by Silent Stalk, Chief Hunter  
of the Mystic Mask Tribe*

The *cockatrice* is not a good animal to hunt: It has little meat upon it; its flavor is very bad. Eating the meat, even well cooked, will make you sick.

Sometimes you have to kill cockatrices because they are dangerous. If a person gets bitten by a cockatrice, they will have time to take one step or two—then they die. The claws on their legs are not as dangerous, but wounds from them fester. This is because the cockatrice is a dirty animal.

In the cockatrice's skull are two poison sacs. The poison can be mixed with pure WATER and treated with plant sprouts to make an antivenom that is very strong; it can even save someone who has been bitten by the snake that wears a hood.

The poison can also be used on weapons, but we do not do this. In war, it is dishonorable; in hunting, it ruins the food it strikes.

The cockatrice is an angry animal and will attack anything that moves. It runs very fast and flies even faster. It cannot turn quickly in the AIR, but it is still very dangerous, especially when it dives. It cannot fly very high.

The food for a cockatrice is carrion and the excrement of other animals. Though it often kills large prey, it will not immediately consume it; rather, it waits for other scavengers to descend upon the body and then attacks them and leaves their bodies to rot as well.

Cockatrices nest underground and only excrete in their own nests. These nests are repugnant to smell, as is the cockatrice itself.

Nothing preys upon the cockatrice. Scavenging crows and vultures will not touch a cockatrice body—even other cockatrices refuse to eat the meat.





## COHORTS

Many religious sects believe that we do not reincarnate alone but in groups. The usual claim is that we are placed with friends from other lives to help us on the path to enlightenment. There are many cases, however, of enmity continuing after death and into other lives. Many events, too, seem to tragically recreate themselves with the same souls in new bodies, life after life.

Nonetheless, the term *cohort* is used by some to indicate a group in which the members become fast friends not only due to common purpose or compatibility but because they are destined to be together. The SOULSEEKERS claim that they have observed hundreds of cohorts and that refusing to believe in them is as absurd as denying the existence of the rain or the stars.

See also "Adversaries" and "Reincarnation."

## COLOR

Different colors are associated with different universal aspects or forces. Many believe that wearing certain colors influences one's fortune.

### WHITE

In some cultures, white represents purity and joy because it is without stain. Others, however, consider white a color of emptiness, void, and destruction. This is why some cultures wear white for weddings and others wear it for funerals.

Among those peoples who see white as a positive color, the lamb is often used as a symbol of this purity.

### RED

Red is the color of hot FIRE, of blood and passion. Wearing red CLOTHING is thought to increase the passions, drawing the wearer into situations of blood and lust. This is why the lovers' lantern is traditionally red, that its light may increase the pleasures of the flesh.

Others believe that a red garment can be used to frighten away spirits, who will mistake the garment for the wearer and see him or her as a fire, too hot to touch. Some caution, however, that red clothes are more likely to catch on fire since they have a hot nature already.

An exceptionally red sunrise is the traditional harbinger of

storms; it means the fires of heaven are banked, ready to rain down in lightning. A reddish sunset, however, signals the arrival of a night for love. Hence, we have the adage "Red sky at morning, sailor take warning; red sky at night, sailor's delight."

### YELLOW

Yellow governs pure FIRE—the fire of warmth and illumination. It is the color of the sun's warmth and the power of the lion's mane. Those who wear it attract joy, comfort, and health. Many healers hang lamps with yellowed glass in their sickrooms so that the color may warm and soothe their patients.

Some warriors scorn yellow as a color fit only for children. They hold that seeking comfort and safety is all very well when one is young, but an adult should take risks and seek fortune instead of meekly waiting for it to come. To these warriors, yellow is a color for cowards.

### GREEN

Green is the color of spring and rebirth. It is worn to symbolize hope for the future and to draw the energies of renewal. It is also the color of envy, however, because it expresses a desire for change. Wearing green does not indicate satisfaction.

### BLUE

The color of sea and sky is a potent one. Tied to the energies of both AIR and WATER, it is the color of information and communication, spoken and implied, sent and received. Blue is the traditional color for bards and is also favored by civil servants and courtiers. Many believe that the consumption of powdered lapis lazuli can provide a temporary increase in eloquence.

### PURPLE

This regal color is the color of rulers. In some cultures, it is a crime to wear purple if one lacks royal blood. In less militant cultures, it is still considered by some to be a color of arrogance, but many favor it as a tangible symbol of status and power. Others wear it seeking to draw these influences.

As a mixture of blue and red, some see purple as "unnatural" or even destructive, noting that the mixture of fire and water results in the death of both. Others see purple as a mixture of fire's rage and air's eloquence. They interpret this as a symbol of tyranny and leadership turned to bad ends.

Purple is especially bad if it appears in the sky at both dawn and dusk for two days running, for then it indicates that tyranny is preparing to spread over the whole land.

BROWN

Humble brown, the garb of untold peasants, is the color of the EARTH. By wearing it, one proclaims a tie to the fundamental—whether one wishes to or not. Brown is sturdy and practical, in all ways the color of those who are “down-to-earth.”

Many who study the FORTUNE DECK hold that brown clothes align one with the energies of the Peasant aspect. This can lend one strength, but only at the cost of losing one’s finer discernment or perception.

In the Swift Plains, burial sheets are always brown to encourage an easy passing from life in the AIR to death in the earth.

BLACK

Many fear the color black, associating it with death and annihilation. In tales, black garments are the typical clothing of evil witches and cruel kings. Those who fear the dark, however, do not understand its full meaning.

Black is the color of death, yes, but death is a force of change and renewal. Farmers know that black soil is the richest—so it is with the color black, and so it is with death itself. Many who wear black and pursue the course of destruction do so because they yearn for great changes, and change is very often frightening, even when it is the best course.

Black clothes are often viewed with mistrust, considered fit only for thieves and funerals; many who would like to be feared wear it. But for others, black is the color of humility, worn to show a willingness to accept the changes through which all the SPHERES and all souls pass.

COYOTE

GOD OF MISCHIEF AND TRICKERY

*Stories and Teachings*

The *deities of the wilds* teach that the whole universe is one circle. The sky and earth, the animals and the people, are but parts of the circle. A human is simply one of the many animals that exist among the SPHERES, not the master of nature. Followers of this path consider themselves the brothers and sisters of the plants and animals. Their attitude toward nature is in accordance to the golden principle, “Treat as you wish to be treated.”

Long ago, before humans wandered the world, there was no difference between the DEITIES and the animals. The deities frequently shifted between animal and human form. When humans first came, they could understand and talk to the animals and deities. Now, the deities still walk with humankind, but they are more secretive about their identities. Followers of the deities of the wilds treat all living things with the same respect that they show to the deities. After all, any rattlesnake may be the god Rattlesnake.

*Coyote* is blessed with more cunning than any other beast in nature. This is because in the beginning, when the world was created, First Man was told to make bows for each of the animals. The bows were to vary in size to give the creatures varying amounts of power. Coyote tried to trick the others and stay awake all night in order to be first in line, eventually even resorting to propping his eyelids with two small sticks. His plan backfired, though, and the sticks instead pinned his eyes shut. After sleeping through the entire ritual, Coyote was given the smallest bow. First Man felt such pity for him that he begged Great Spirit to give Coyote more strength. Great Spirit consented and bestowed on Coyote an unsurpassed cunning.

*Tribal Worship*

While he is the subject of many stories, Coyote has few devoted worshipers. Most people prefer to put their faith in more reliable deities. Coyote, however, sometimes calls individuals to be his own. These followers of Coyote share many traits with their god: cunning, a sense of humor, and uneven reputations.





### Country Worship

Coyote isn't well loved in the farmlands and the pastures. He tricks farmers out of crops and steals away with shepherds' flocks. Those who admire him most are those who see him as the victorious underdog. Coyote receives more prayers and fewer insults, for example, when enemy armies invade the countryside or when nobles become too demanding.

The people of Fragrant Fields always sacrifice the first spring lamb to Coyote to insure safety for the rest of the flocks. On the evenings of the full moon, the herders and their families build a bonfire of unneeded items, mostly debris cleared from fields and other useless but flammable material. The FIRE symbolizes change instigated by Coyote. As the fire burns, the elders tell tales of the god's antics and teach lessons of his wisdom.

Coyote and related deities are known as the "deities of the wilds" because they are closely tied to the forces and creatures of nature.

reputation for having fun at the expense of clergy who become too pompous.

See also "Deities."

### City Worship

In some cities, the outcasts, thieves, and misfits find a special patron in Coyote the Survivor, Coyote the Cunning. In others, his worship is part of a regular institution that reveres him as one who discovers and who promotes change. Institutionalized worship of Coyote is rare, and he has a

CRANE FAMILY. See "Merchant Queens."

DEATHBOND. See "Night-Blooming Star Rose."

DECEIVER WORM. See "Alurax" and "Dragons."

DEDICATED, THE. See "Order of the Silver Nail."

### Other Deities of the Wilds

GREAT SPIRIT: Supreme DEITY, mighty maker.

MOON: Chases his sister Sun around the sky.

OWL: God of patience.

RATTLESNAKE: God of swiftness in battle; respected as a great warrior and a fair fighter, as he warns his prey before he strikes.

RAVEN: God of guile and deceit; he is less artful than Coyote, and his maneuvers are less amusing.

SUN: Mother-goddess of the EARTH; out of fear of her brother Moon, she stays as far from him as she can in the sky and only shows herself after he has gone for the day.

WHITE BUFFALO: Goddess of guidance; brought the sacred pipe to people and taught them how to pray correctly.

## DEITIES

Deities are ancient beings of great power. The same deities are found on various spheres. One feature of a true deity is that he or she can appear simultaneously on more than one SPHERE. Deities can be regarded in quite different terms by their various worshipers, so much so that the uninformed may not realize that the many different manifestations are the same deity. For instance, to the smiths of Windswept, OGUN is their private patron, and none besides smiths may look on his idols; while to the people of Greatvale, Ogun the warrior-champion repeatedly protects them from invaders. Since no mortal can look on a deity's true visage and remain living, all images of and stories about the deities are to some degree façades and human inventions.

The gods and goddesses collectively are commonly referred to as "heaven," as in the phrases "heaven forbid" and "pleasing to heaven." Some deities are associated specifically with sky, like Odin and the Aesir deities, who live far above the mortal world. Brighid and the other children of Danu, however, live beneath the mortal world, in the earth, and mortals can find their way to the other world by going under the hills.

Unlike people and things in the world of humans, deities often have NAMES that are not common words. Even so, they

## DRAGONS

### THE DRAGONS' REBELLION

In the beginning, the goddesses and gods were given dominion over all that was. They put All into order, making from it all things dry and wet, all things seen and unseen.

When this task was accomplished, they decided it would be fit for the whole of creation to be filled with beings who were alive and intelligent, capable of moving and being moved within the worlds they had made. Furthermore, to appreciate the intricacy and marvels of the All, the DEITIES decided to mold the souls of their creation after the fashion of their own great souls.

"But what shape shall our creatures have?" they asked, for the gods and goddesses themselves have no shape; they are not like WATER that is poured into a vessel, or clay that is shaped, or the flickering FIRE; nor are they even like the wind, which is felt but not seen. The deities are like all of these elements, and like none.

"Let them be firm of bone and strong," said those who governed the EARTH.

"Let their minds be swift and keen," said those who governed the AIR.

"Give them an eye for beauty, and hearts that can know love," said those who governed the water.

"May their blood be hot, delighting in action," said those who governed the fire.

With love in their hearts and joy in their souls, the dwellers in HEAVEN set forth on their task and Made the final and most magnificent aspect of creation: dragons.

There were the dragons of the earth, who writhed sinuously through the ground, carving the stone into wild and miraculous patterns.

There were the dragons of the air, swimming through the stars and challenging the winds in wit.

There were the dragons of the water, eternally creating ever more beauty and joy.



frequently go by titles rather than names. Brighid, for example, is known also as "Exalted One."

The oldest and greatest deities are often not worshiped directly. More commonly it is a younger generation of gods and goddesses that is close enough to humanity to receive worship. For example, while many still worship GAIA, the goddess of the earth, more people worship her granddaughter Demeter, goddess of the harvest.

See also "Anubis," Brighid," "Coyote," "Gaia," "Kuan-Yin," "Odin," "Ogun," and "Quetzalcoatl."

DEITIES OF THE ANKH. See "Anubis."

DEITIES OF OLORUN. See "Ogun."

DEITIES OF P'AN KU. See "Kuan-Yin."

DEITIES OF THE WILDS. See "Coyote."

DEXTER CITY. See "Basahn," "Bell Walking," "Caged Dreams," and "Reincarnation."

## DIAMONDS

The diamond is perhaps the single most powerful symbol of protection and security because all diamonds come directly from heaven.

When the DRAGONS rebelled against HEAVEN, the gods and goddesses were forced to destroy them. Anguished at the rebellion of their favored children, the DEITIES wept for a thousand years, and every tear that fell was a diamond. By owning or wearing a diamond, a human carries a tiny part of the history of the cosmos.

Many claim that dragons have a great sentimental longing for diamonds because they are the tangible sign of the deities' love for them. Even though the great worms are ruined and now exist as mere shadows of their former selves, diamonds remind them of the favor they once enjoyed.

DISEASES. See "Absolvers" (sunbane), "Alurax" (blood-moth plague), "Cinammon Plague," "Dreaming Sickness," "Reincarnation" (blood-moth plague, Celestial Plague), and "Skin Scribes" (wasting disease; healing techniques).

There were the dragons of the fire, reveling in action and lording their power over each other, shaking the firmament with their fierce contests.

The deities and the dragons remained happy for eons, until one day a certain god entreated one of the dragons to perform a task for him—and the dragon said “no.”

The god asked again. And the dragon responded with a question in turn.

“Am I not as you are? Am I not gifted with an eye for the whole of your Making and a heart to love it All? Why, then, should I perform for you a task that benefits you and not me, a task that is distasteful in your sight?”

“Because I am a god and I made you.”

“I never asked you that boon, and it is therefore unjust of you to require obedience in return for it.”

“Dragon, I and mine made the All. You and yours merely move within it.”

“And you and yours? Now that your Making is done, are you not ‘merely within it,’ even as we dragons?”

The god departed, troubled in his thoughts.

From that moment, dissension grew between heaven and the dragons. The gods and goddesses began to demand more of the dragons, asserting over them their authority. The dragons in turn resisted ever more, insisting that their freedom should not be impugned.

In the end, to the grievous sorrow of all, there was war.

The dragons could not win, for the master’s tools cannot destroy the master’s house. They were struck down by heaven, routed in battle, discovered in ambush, hunted down in retreat. In the end, not one in a thousand dragons survived. Not one in a thousand thousands.

Yet the divine paid the price for their victory. And a bitter price it was, for into the dragons they had put the best of themselves. Destroying their beloved creations caused a weeping in heaven that lasted a thousand years, a lamentation that shook the earth.

“We shall need other creatures to appreciate the All,” said the deities at last.

“Yes . . . and let their feet be heavy, that they may appreciate the heights,” said those who governed the earth.

Many guess,  
but none can  
prove what task it  
was that the rebel  
dragon refused.

“Yes . . . and let their minds be contrary and impatient, that each new idea shall be a rare miracle, eked out only by the most determined,” said those who governed the air.

“Yes . . . and let love and beauty be labors to them as well, that they may know how precious they are,” said those who governed the water.

“Yes,” said those who governed the fire. “And let them wither and die, for otherwise they shall sink into despair and have no will to do the little that they are able.”

And thus did heaven Make humanity: frail and weak and destined to decay yet, in our modesty, happier than the proud dragons who had so much more but had not the capacity for awe.

## THE FAMILY OF THREE DRAGONS

In ancient days, when dragons swam the SPHERES, there was a family of dragons.

The father was the dragon who said “no” to HEAVEN. When the lines of battle were drawn, he regretfully rebelled against his masters.

“I wish it had never come to this,” he said, “for I love the DEITIES who made me and the dragons who are my kin, and it chews my heart to see my great loves battle. Yet my course is clear; for heaven is wrong, and even my great love cannot turn wrong into right. I must fight them now and hope for peace after.”

The mother dragon was terribly sad, for she loved her husband and kin, but she, and she alone, chose to battle on the side of the deities.

“I have in me too much respect for them,” she said, “for they were here when we were nothing. We did not see the beginnings as they have. If we have not walked on their path how can we see their course? No, I will not fight those who know more truth than I. Because they are my Makers, without whom I would be nothing, without whom I would not be, I will fight for them.”

The third dragon, their daughter, wailed and gnashed her teeth, and spoke.

“I had thought dissent was evil, but how much worse is evil made from good? For what else can a conflict be that turns my parents against each other? Whichever way I choose is vile: Truth to my father is betrayal to my Makers. Loyalty to one parent is a treachery to the other. The dilemma would rend a heart of iron. My decision is not to decide.”

The third dragon hid herself away for the duration of the battle.

In the end, the dragons were defeated, and the father dragon, he who had said "no," was brought before the divine court for punishment. For his crime of ingratitude, all his glory and power were taken from him. He was stripped of his ears, wings, arms, his legs and his words, and was left to writhe in the dust as a serpent, without even a voice with which to utter his grief. The traitor dragon became the father of serpents. Yet even then the justice of heaven was incomplete, and the gods and goddesses took one last thing from the dragon—his dreams. And that is why serpents sleep with their eyes open to this day: because they have no dreams to see.

The mother dragon was struck down on the battlefield, mortally wounded by the Dragon of Fire. So crushing was the weight of her dying that no god or goddess could save her.

"Now I perish," said she, "and in so doing, pass into the void from which I came."

"No," said the deities. "It is not right that such virtue as yours should pass from the spheres. We will make a great wheel, and though your body passes away, your spirit will ride upon it until a new vessel for it comes. You will die yet not die, and with each rebirth you shall have a new opportunity for goodness, a new place to teach your virtue. This wheel is called KARMA, and you, beloved and loyal, shall be the first soul upon it." Arcing across the heavens came a great rainbow, and the loyal dragon was spun up into the wheel of life and death to be reborn again and again. That is why, when the FIRE of the sun meets the WATER, the RAINBOW wheel sometimes appears, spanning earth and heaven, guiding souls to their new bodies.

The daughter dragon was discovered by heaven in the place where she lay hiding. "What have you to say in your defense?" the deities demanded.

"Only this," cried she. "That it was you who made me able to love, and that my love for you and my love for my parents overcame my reason and my will. I could not choose between you."

The deities were silent for a time. When at last they spoke, they debated quietly among themselves and then pronounced a judgment.

"You have done a wrongful thing for the right reason. By fearing to do wrong you committed an even greater wrong: you abandoned your family as well as heaven. For this, your punishment shall be terrible, but it will be mitigated by the suffering you have already endured. You, who saved your body at the cost of virtue, shall lose it. You shall become a bodiless spirit. You will haunt the spheres and will not rest until you have caught the lightning, for it is the spark of violent decision, which will make you whole. Go now and seek it."

The dragon who hid has wandered the spheres ever since. She has not caught the lightning yet, and to this day when lightning strikes, after a stroke, you can hear her thunder in frustration, once more too late.

## SEVENTY-SEVEN STEPS

The old tales claim that the first dragons to defy the gods and goddesses did so while resting on the seventy-seven steps of a great mountain now called "Dragon's Folly." The steps were carved by the dragons to make it easier to reach the top, where (in ancient days) a gate to HEAVEN stood.

During the rebellion, the gate was closed, and the mountain came to be shunned by dragons and DEITIES alike. Now few venture there, though it is said to be a mountain rich in DIAMONDS, for no god or goddess can look upon it without shedding tears for the deities' lost children.

It is considered bad luck to build a stairway with seventy-seven steps because it recreates the scene that drove the deities to their greatest sorrow. Walking such a staircase is an invitation to misfortune and woe.

This superstition is so ancient that many who have never heard of the mountain are afraid of a seventy-seven-step stairway. Many are afraid even to stop after taking exactly seventy-seven steps in any direction. Instead, they modify their pace to take fewer or more steps, or they keep walking and turn around.

## THE PUNISHMENTS OF HEAVEN

*From The Book of Elder Fear,*

*Twisted Library Copy*

When the world was young, the dragons rejected their rightful rulers and had the folly to battle HEAVEN. In the fullness of time they suffered the righteous punishments that were their due. Though most of these despised worms were slain, there were eight who had been the seneschals of heaven, and their rebellion was so hideous in the sight of the gods and goddesses that if any evil were to merit consignment to That Force Which Is Not to Be Named, this crime should be it. Yet

the DEITIES, being in all things the agents of Existence, were too pure to let their anger tempt them to unmake that which they themselves had wrought. Neither, however, were they content to allow these elder worms the forgetfulness of KARMA. (Though if they had, those mighty dragons would be earthworms still!) No, these dragons' punishment was to be a living one, each one's justice the most bitter to its tongue.

To the Dragon of Water, whose greatest love had been pleasure and beauty, heaven decreed that evermore her eyes should be nothing but pits of stinging fire. Blind and tormented, she slunk from the divine court, weeping tears of acid and black smoke.

The Dragon of Air had led the rebellion as general and tactician. The deities set upon him a seething in the brain, a pernicious infirmity that would plague him all of his days, setting his mind to bite itself. Howling with madness, he flew from the divine court.

The Dragon of Fire was the youngest and fiercest of the eight leaders. First into battle, first to spill the blood of a deity, his punishment was to age as humans do, growing weaker and slower of body and mind with each passing day. Even thus beaten, he dared again to defy heaven, for which he was further condemned to die at the hands of a human. Cowed and humiliated, he slithered away into the shadows.

The Dragon of Earth had betrayed her masters the most grievously and had sinned by seeking that which is not to be sought and opening that which all virtue declares must remain closed. Her punishment was the most dreadful of all, for the deities placed before her that which she had sought to betray them to, and for all time she was compelled to regard the object of her treachery but not die or go blind or go mad. . . . She is bound still within the chambers of justice and shall remain there past the end of time. Each of these four dragons had a lieutenant, upon whom lay guilt that, while lesser, was still deep and vile.

The lieutenant to the Dragon of Water, who was called Beautiful Wave, lost his capacity to love. His NAME was now "Still and Empty." To him was given no pain—but no pleasure either. And he did not crawl far from the court before lying down in despair. There, he turned to stone.

The lieutenant to the Dragon of Air, who was called Swiftest Wind, had her wings taken from her by heaven and was banished from the sight of the sun. She was henceforth called "Eternally Bound." She who had gloried in the freedom to rule the sky now coiled through the dark earth and ate dirt.

The lieutenant to the Dragon of Fire, who

was called Conquering Flame, was condemned to eternal servitude. Nevermore would she supply her own needs; she would forever be dependent upon others. Nevermore would she seek her own desires; now "Conqueror's Flame," she would forever be a mere tool of human ambition.

The lieutenant to the Dragon of Earth, who was called Precious Silver, threw himself before the divine court and begged forgiveness. "I did not know what my mistress was doing," he said, "and when I saw it, I would have turned from her, but my fear of That Force Which Is Not to Be Named was too great. Oh, beloved masters, do not punish me for my weakness!" But the deities said to him, "Get from our sight, you hypocrite! We ordered that you should obey us and neither open what you opened nor seek what you sought." For speaking lies, Precious Silver became "Empty Noise." As his words were without substance, so now is he. As his words were devoid of truth, a mere reflection of what he hoped his listeners wanted, so now is his voice compelled to speak nothing new but only repeat what has already been said. It is his doom to fly forever, swift as thought, from mountain to valley, repeating that which is shouted aloud; and he never rests.

Thus were those punished who had betrayed heaven.

See also "Alurax," "Diamonds," "Reincarnation."

## THE DECEIVER WORM

*From The Book of Elder Fear,  
Twisted Library Copy*

h the rebel DRAGONS gathered their strength, there was one among their numbers who was uneasy. "Surely," said this worm to himself, "the DEITIES will strike with great anger those who disobey them. Our Making was by their hands; they must know the secrets of our undoing. Rather than partake in the punishment of these fools, I will ally myself with those who will win."

So reasoning, the dragon flew to HEAVEN.

Seeing with the all-seeing eyes of wisdom, the deities knew that this worm had come to them not out of love but out of self-interest, for this one had a flaw of the heart. Like an eye regarding itself, he saw his own person as

Some consider dragons to be, like roses, a perfect balance of the four elements: the fire of their breath, the air between their wings, the earth of their iron strength, and the water of their supple speed.



larger and more important than anything else. By his own self was his vision obscured.

Seeing his cowardice, the goddesses and gods sent him into battle. Such was the cunning of this dragon, however, that he first at his own brethren, who were unsure of purpose. He exposed himself so carefully that he was injured in the belly but not slain.

"Alas, my beloved makers," the dragon wailed, "I am struck in your service." The deities knew that he had let himself be struck, but since he spoke the truth they could take no action against him.

And so the dragon spent the rebellion upon his back, recovering from the wound to his belly. He only recovered when the divine, victorious, had set upon the other worms their dire punishments and were preparing to shut the gates to heaven.

"My masters," said the dragon, "I would beg a mate of you. For it appears that I alone am the last of the dragons, and I fear I will be lonely in heaven." The dragon had become bold during his confinement.

"We should certainly hate for you to be lonely," said the deities, "but making another dragon is something we shall not do, for were we to make one we might be tempted to make another and then another, until our victory in this battle was all for nothing."

"Yet we would not have you onesome," said one of the deities of the AIR, who was clever. "Therefore, I will craft a human form upon you, that you may go among humans and be with them."

"Me? In human form? What wrong have I committed that I must be consigned to become something so frail, so weak, so loathsome?" demanded the dragon.

"Only this: You have tried to deceive us, in purpose if not in words. You have hidden a cowardly heart behind a mask of valor, and in so doing made a mockery of all whose valor is true. For these falsehoods, you shall be condemned to live a lie

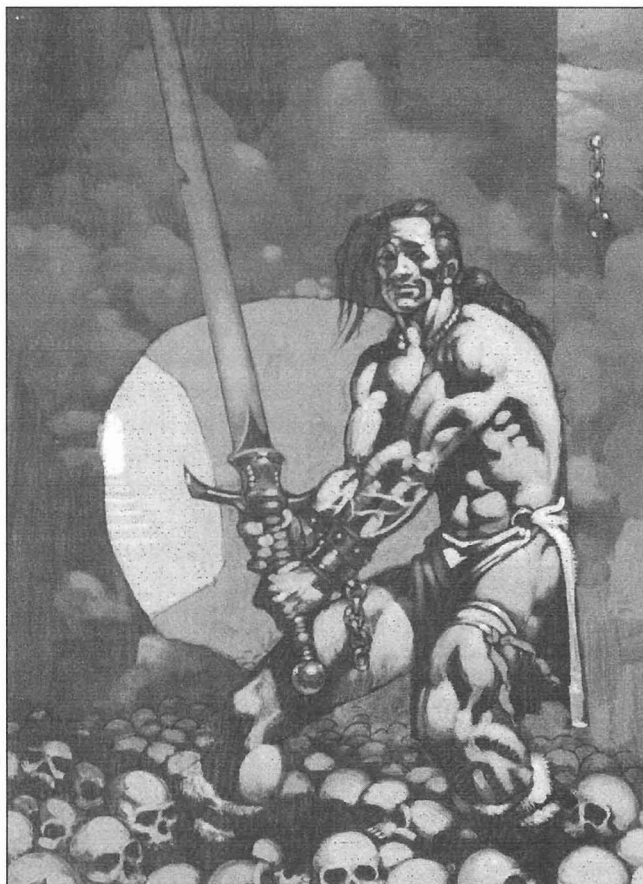
of humanity. Your true dragon's nature we will not change: You will neither age nor die as humans do, but upon you we inflict all their other limits."

The dragon flung himself in supplication before the deities. "I implore you masters! If you must do this, allow me to beg one boon at least. Not because I deserve it, but because you are all good, all merciful, the source of all munificence. Let me, at times, wear again my old shape, that I may retain the memory of it?"

The deities were reluctant to let this last, if least, vestige of their greatest Making vanish. Because of this, they agreed. For one day a year, the dragon could take upon himself his old form, in all its glory. For the rest of the year, he would walk among humans as a human.

This great deceiver worm has thus been hidden in our number from the first, and his rage and hatred for humanity have only grown stronger. His greatest joy is in our suffering and misery, and his greatest hope is our eradication. Even as a human, his power is vast, for he knows more of sorcery than any other. Speak not his name, lest you draw his attention, but memorize it, that you may better avoid him.

His name is ALURAX.



*Related Topics:* "Dragonbane Sword," "Undiscovered City," and "Weeping Dragon Oracle."

## DRAGONBANE SWORD, THE

Decades ago, an entire realm was terrorized by the awakening of Rasmadahan, the Dragon of Fire. Rasmadahan was so old that he had taken part in the DRAGONS' rebellion and thus had been personally punished by HEAVEN. After untold eons, Rasmadahan's rage at his continuing punishment drove him to strike out at everything within his reach.

Though senile and weak and nearly crippled by the standards of a great worm, he was still cunning enough to strike

first at the army, crippling them so thoroughly that all other warriors were terrified to face him. . . .

. . . All but one—a hero, it was said, blessed by a goddess to be the bane of all dragons, great and small. It was this man, known as "Dragonbane," who struck down Rasmadahan. Though Dragonbane died in the battle, his sword was recovered. When pulled out of the dragon's heart, it was found to have turned a deep, angry red. Anyone who wields the Dragonbane Sword is immune to the flame of all but the greatest worms and is also invisible to the entire dragon breed. Finally, the impenetrable scales of the beasts are said to melt like butter before this weapon.

It is also said that Rasmadahan's dying curse was that the sword's bearer would know the agony of aging, even in youth. Nonetheless, most dragon hunters seem unconcerned about dying of old age—even at age twenty or thirty.

DRAGON'S FOLLY. *See* "Dragons."

DREAM CAGES. *See* "Caged Dreams."

## DREAMING SICKNESS, THE

The *dreaming sickness* is a peculiar illness that does not seem to behave like a normal disease. Some suggest that it was created not by HEAVEN but by some terrible magician or spirit for purposes unseen.

In the early stages, the disease is undetectable: the first symptom is the recurrence of unusually vivid and pleasant dreams. After a time (which ranges anywhere from a few nights to several weeks), the dreams begin to take on a serial character, that is, one dream continues where the previous night's left off.

Typically, the dreams associated with this disease involve wealth, beauty, power—typical human desires. As the disease seats itself in the patient's body and soul, it becomes more personal; the affected person finds that the dreams promise particular rewards, often rewards that the sufferer really cannot—or *should* not—receive in the waking world.

At this stage, victims nearly always try to spend more and more time in the fantasy world of dreams. As they do so, the waking world becomes less significant, less vivid. Some survivors report that at this stage they could no longer distinguish between what was real and what was dream.

In the final stage of the disease, the victim succumbs to sleep and never awakens.

Fortunately, dreaming sickness is rare. No one is sure exactly how a victim becomes infected, but most healers theorize that it enters through the eyes. Perhaps by seeing an object of desire in conjunction with some other pattern or symbol, the victim's aura becomes open to infection. So far, however, no one has determined the particular conditions that awaken the illness.

Though the disease can be fatal, it can often be cured by clarifying the victim's airy aspect. Incense in the bed chamber has a salutary effect, though in the later stages it can only serve to slow the inevitable. A particularly strong victim may be able to shake off the disease on his or her own, but this disease is resisted through strength of will instead of strength of body. Even for the seriously afflicted a full recovery is possible through meditation and dream-mastery techniques, if the disease is diagnosed early enough. Sadly, due to dreaming sickness's seductive nature, it is rarely identified so soon. In its advanced stages, it can only be cured by magic.

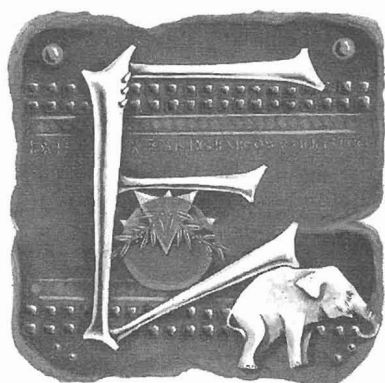
Worse yet, it appears that many malicious spirits know how to align their powers with the degenerative nature of the dreaming sickness. From the increasing number of victims in some SPHERES, it appears that these spirits know what causes the illness even though the healers do not. They seem to use this knowledge to encourage the infection and then use their native talents to manipulate the infected. One spirit was found preying upon an infected sorcerer's apprentice. By using its own powers, the spirit manipulated the delusions of the illness to make the student more hungry for power. Seeing the sensual revels that the student dreamed of, the spirit actually partially cured him and then suggested (again through the acolyte's dreams) that if the student would simply disturb one of his master's experiments, the pleasurable dreams would return. The master, when she noticed the disturbance, cured the student (and expelled him), but by then the damage had been done. The spirit had fled, and the fruits of decades of the master's preparation were irretrievably lost.

The illness can be seen, by those sensitive to such things, in the AURA of the afflicted. It appears as a gold-lined gray smudge, which usually floats around the front of the forehead. The size of the smudge gives some indication of how advanced the disease is.

DROWNING GIFT. *See* "Shadow Children."

DRY SPIRES. *See* "Glorious Empire."





## EARTH

Earth is the ELEMENT that is most generous to humanity. From it comes all crops, all tools, all shelter. Its kindness is so common that many take it for granted. This is one reason that earthquakes are so fearsome. One can escape a storm in a cave, a FIRE on an island, or a flood on a hill, but when the earth itself turns against one, there is no escape; the betrayal seems as brutal as that of a mother who kills her own child.



Flesh and bone are the earthy parts of the human body. Like the earth, they are our closest and most reliable resources, and like the soil, they reward those who tend them with care with strength, health, and growth.



If this element has a flaw, it is its slowness. Wind blows, WATER flows, fire leaps and spreads, but earth is still. The strength of earth's endurance can, if untended, become the weakness of stagnancy.

Earth is associated with the COLORS brown and green.

See *also* "Elements."

EARTH IS THE  
ELEMENT OF  
ENDURANCE,  
HEALTH,  
AND PASSIVE  
POWER



*From the Chants of Soil and Stone*

Humanity comes from earth.  
Heaven carved us from the soil and woke us by their will.  
The food we eat comes from the ground.  
When we die, we go to the soil.  
From earth we come; to earth we return.  
From the earth, we learn to be useful.  
The earth gives us cotton to spin, grain for our bread,  
metal for tools, and stones to build homes.  
Be like the earth: find something you can give to your people.  
By giving, you find your place.  
O earth we are made; from earth we learn.  
From the earth, we learn to have joy.  
Each winter, the world sleeps.  
Every spring, the world awakens.  
Every summer, the world toils.  
Every autumn, the world rejoices.  
Live the cycle of the earth. Do not rejoice when it is time  
to rest,  
or sleep when it is time to labor.  
Find your way to produce; live in the cycle,  
and you will be satisfied.  
The earth is settled and firm; happy are we to be  
settled and firm.  
From the earth, we learn to be wise.  
Truth is like rock and does not change. With the stones  
of truth,  
a house of virtue is built. These are the truths of the earth:  
Life is the gift of the earth to us.  
Respect for life is gratitude to heaven.  
It is never wrong to return good for good.  
Love that is true is like a mountain: it is always there and  
cannot be moved. Love like rain, that comes and goes, is  
no love at all.  
Trouble breaks on an iron will.  
All things come in time, and all pass.  
Only a fool clings to the treasures of this life; for only virtue can  
be taken to the next life.  
The wisdom of the earth is the wisdom that never dies.

EDGE OF LIGHT AND  
DARKNESS, THE

*From the Stories of Talebearer Twofoot*

There once was an old woman who was called Scars, for her body and face were maps of sorrow writ on flesh. Though Scars was generally a woman of quiet (some would say sullen) demeanor, on occasion the fancy would take her to speak of her past, and then she would tell tales of her great adventures. She claimed that for each scar upon her there was a tale, and no tale was greater than the tale of Edgebearer. This is how she told that great tale to me. . . .

"Note well this scar upon my brow," she said, "for that is where Edgebearer cut out a curse that was on me. This curse had been placed to weaken my will and submit me to the dominion of a wizard named Furiously Bright.

"Bright was envious of Edgebearer, who was my master, because Edgebearer's blade was one of mighty magic; it was none other than the Edge of Light and Darkness, a blade so potent that it could divide anything—if one had the wit to use it so.

"Our troubles with Furiously Bright began when Edgebearer and I were caught in an ambush. Our foes were hiding behind a ridge of rock and firing down from behind it. Their arrows frightened our horses, and our guards as well, for there was no way to climb up to where our enemies were. Or so we thought. Then suddenly Edgebearer drew her weapon, and with a mighty slash, cut a hole in the air itself. 'Through here,' she cried, 'and we shall be upon them!' When we rode through the gap in the air, we found ourselves upon the ridge of stone, and we rode down our attackers and killed them all."

Scars leaned in, and her eyes glittered.

"And they were *not* human," she added, before continuing.

"I asked Edgebearer how we had been able to move to the ridge of stone, and she simply said, 'I cut a hole there through the air. It will heal quickly enough. Now, though, I will make a cut not only from place to place but from SPHERE to sphere, for I would know who sent these enemies.' She did it as soon as she had said it, and by the cut of the blade we found ourselves in a new realm. There, we consulted an oracle and by and by learned that our enemy was Furiously Bright.

"Edgebearer rode to the wizard's keep and demanded that Furiously Bright come forth to parley. Upon her words, a figure appeared on the battlements. Edgebearer raised her weapon and slashed it through the air, and though the man on the wall was a long bowshot distant, his head fell down from



er cut into the moat. Yet the head did not bleed, nor did the body. They merely turned into mist. . . .

"We then heard a voice, which said, 'This is how you deal with peaceful parley? I will not show myself only to be slain with a cut of distance. Yet can we not, in truth, speak in peace?'

"It was not I,' said my master, 'who sent my minions to ambush you.'

"I underestimated you, it is true,' said the voice with no body. 'I shall not do so again. You have mastered some. . . tricks of the Edge, but still you do not realize its true importance. Give it to me, and you shall have anything your heart desires.'

"I desire nothing but what is mine—my life, my freedom, and my blade.'

"Ah, but even the blade cannot free you from death—as I can. Eternal youth is within my power. Give me the Edge, and I shall carve for you a world of your own, a sphere in which all adore you and you rule over all. Only give me the weapon and you shall be a goddess.'

"Your words are fouler even than your minions,' she said and then, turning to us, cried, 'Forward to attack!' For all his sorcery, Furiously Bright could not keep Edgebearer from cutting a hole through the air into his castle, and though the battle was bloody, in the end we took his keep. Yet he had long since fled."

Scars paused in her tale and looked sad. As an afterthought, she showed us scars from the battle: one where an arrow had pierced her arm and another where a sword had cut her shoulder.

"We lived in that keep for some time, and we were seduced by the quiet. We thought Furiously Bright had given up, but he was only saving his strength, crafting a plot that would doom us all. And I was the means he intended to use to hatch that plot.

"He sent to us a goodly man, a smith, kind and with a fine figure. In time I thought I loved this man, and he asked for a lock of my hair, a token, he said, of my love. By that token I was enslaved, for with it Furiously Bright was able to steal away my will and make me his creature. . . . Everything it seemed that I did was really his doing. In truth, it was his eyes that saw, his hand that raised the blade. . . ."

She trailed off once more, and I thought I could see a tear following a tortuous trail between the wounds and wrinkles down her face. When she spoke again, it was in a whisper.

"It was his hand that stole the Edge and crept off with it

in the darkness, and it was his hand that raised it against its rightful owner. . . ."

She wiped the tear and spoke again, more loudly.

"Every day I wake and thank the DEITIES that they made me weaker than my master, and less clever, and less brave. For when she came upon me and I struck at her, I lacked the knowledge to awaken the powers of the blade. When she grabbed me, though she was wounded, she held me in a grip I could not break. When she flung me to the ground, I didn't have the courage to stand to her again. As she raised the blade, I braced myself to go the hell of traitors. . . . But by her art she cut the enchantment from me, breaking it with the blade's power.

"Together we found and killed Furiously Bright, though my master paid a terrible price for her victory. . . . She told me later that a man like that should never bear the Edge. That sword is older even than the DEITIES and is not so much a sword as it is a focus of the primal division between the Is and the Not. Through the sword, one can order things in a fundamental way. But such power was never meant for mere humans.

"Edgebearer claimed that even she had only scratched the surface of the blade's power. She said it was best that way, that a weapon capable of undoing even the works of HEAVEN was best placed in the hand of one too ignorant to use it fully."

### *Some of the Findings of Year Seer, a Senior Historian at the Twisted Library*

Using the art of *past viewing*, I have verified parts of Twofoot's secondhand tale. There was, indeed, a woman called Edgebearer who was in possession of the Edge of Light and Darkness for a time. The stories of her using it to attack from afar, break enchantments, and eliminate distance appear to all be true. Other stories, which we have yet to verify, claim that she used it to cut off a man's shadow, that she cut out the sores of a leper and left him whole. . . that she cut a man's life out of him and left his body unmarked. One tale claims Edgebearer sliced through a stone wall, and another says that she used the Edge to seal a GATE behind her. I suspect that some of these tales are exaggerated, but on the other hand, they are quite believable in comparison to the other claims made about this weapon.

Most sources agree that the Edge of Light and Darkness is a long sword worked from unknown materials. The blade is composed of a black metal and is set on both sides with runes (written in a language some sources identify as CLEACUUN) in an unknown white crystal. The guard, handle, and pommel are fashioned from an unadorned black metal, the same as the blade.

The blade's sharpness is, as one might expect, unparalleled.





Undone Deed, who claimed to have wielded it in battle, said that he once dropped a single hair upon it, and the hair was divided lengthwise in two. One is asked to keep in mind that Deed has been caught in lies before, but according to his tale he gave up the blade to a god after the battle was over.

The oldest known mention of the blade is in connection with a sorcerer named Sunrider. According to the legends of the Dune people of Farfire, Sunrider tried to use the weapon to recreate an entire SPHERE, cutting it down into the most basic elements and then recombining them. This attempt ended in disaster, say the Dune people: it made only a sea of madness through which none could escape or travel. The blade was rescued from this chaos by a great DRAGON.

While this tale seems farfetched, it is worth noting that the Dune people described the blade in great detail and called it by the NAME "Edge of Light and Darkness." Furthermore, this tale had already been told among the Dune people for generations before they came into contact with SPHEREWALKERS from outside their own lands.

**EDGEBEARER** See "Alurax," "Edge of Light and Darkness," and "Night-Blooming Star Rose."

**ELDERMARK.** See "Alurax" and "Pearl of Making."

## ELEMENTAL AVENGERS

Those who study such things claim that each ELEMENT has a type of avenging spirit associated with it. These fearsome creatures exist to strike down those who profane the element in which they clothe themselves.

A mage of sufficient power can call upon the services of such a creature, though the price of the calling can sometimes be more than is initially apparent.

### *THE SERPENT OF ICE*

#### *From a Tale Recounted by Hippo Sagasayer*

Long ago, a tribe of hunters was passing through a country where there lived a magician. This magician lived behind a waterfall, and he told the hunters that while they were welcome to take all the WATER they wished downstream of the waterfall, they were not to touch the spring on the hill, which was the stream's source.

The chief of the tribe agreed, for she saw no reason to make trouble. But that night, having taken many cups of wine, she began to resent the magician. Because she was angry, and perhaps also a little afraid, she began to mock the mage. She made jokes about the cold company of fish, and compared the waterfall to the magician's white beard.

"He's probably afraid that we or our horses will make water by his precious stream, or that we will bathe there and he'll have to drink our sweat. Hah! Fitting for him to be drowned in his own precious stream."

The chief's son, who was also very drunk, heard his mother's taunting, and that very night he rode out to the waterfall. After rudely waking the magician, he proceeded to beat and ridicule the old man.



"Where are your great magics now?" asked the chief's son. "You are nothing but an old fraud." Leaving the magician with one last kick, the nomad returned to his campsite.

The magician spat his blood into the mist of the waterfall and, using his magical powers, asked for revenge upon the chief's son and upon the chief as well.

That night a mighty storm shook the camp of the nomads. The chief made light of it, saying that the magician must have heard her. But in her heart she was afraid.

The next morning dawned bright and clear, and the chief's son told himself the storm had been the sorcerer's impotent attempt at revenge. Yet though his head was satisfied, his heart was still afraid, and to convince himself that the magician had no real power, he went that morning to fetch water from the spring above the waterfall.

When the chief's son returned from the spring, however, his water skins burst across his back, and he felt upon him a great serpent.

The young warrior cried out and tried to grasp the snake, but his hands passed through it like water and did nothing.

"You have wronged the river and my master," said the snake. "I have descended with the rain to destroy your mother, but you will be the first to die." Then the serpent bit into the nomad's neck with fangs of ice and killed him. The young man's wife rushed into his tent and found her husband dead in a puddle of water.

The chief was afraid and called for her wise woman. The wise woman said, "This is the work of a watery spirit, undoubtedly. Have the magician struck down, and perhaps the spirit will pass with him."

"But if it does not?"

"Sit between two great fires, and the spirit will be afraid of them."

The chief did as she was told. Her warriors came upon the magician, who was still sore from his beating and tired from his sorcery. They put him to the sword and threw his body down the waterfall where he lived. But as he died, the magician spoke a great curse upon the chief, that she should die soon, but slowly.

The chief, sitting between the two fires, was miserable from the heat. When she could bear it no more, she called for water. Her husband, seeing her suffering, thought to bring her water from the spring because it was colder. As the chief raised the

cup to drink, the serpent reared out of it to strike her. The chief, however, flung the goblet into the fire, and the serpent perished in a great cloud of steam and smoke.

The chief still died by the magician's curse, however, for the sight of the serpent rising had so frightened her that she would touch neither wine nor water again for fear of it. She died of thirst two days later, still sitting between her two great fires.

The wise woman, however, recovered the chalice in which the spirit had hidden and in it found two icy serpent's teeth, which did not melt. Since that time, the chalice has had magic properties.



The water avatar comes in the form of a *serpent of ice* as long as two grown women and thick as a grown man's head. The serpent has a watery aspect, seeming to be a clear blue stream brought to life. It is armed with fangs of ice that never melt.

Though ferocious in combat, these serpents are most feared for two magic talents. The first is that while they are apparently solid, and can coil and crush and slither upon the ground, they can make themselves liquid to the force of weapons. A strike from a normal weapon will no more stop a serpent of ice than a blow from a sword would halt a river. Only weapons of a fiery nature can harm them.

The ice serpents' other feared ability is that they can travel undetected in water, even in an amount of water as small as a cupful. By this stealth they can approach an enemy in the bath or rise to kill one from a dinner goblet.

Some wizards find that these serpents make unreliable servants: they are not particularly bright, but they are very sensitive to the moods and desires of those they serve. A mage may awake in the morning, regretting a quarrel, only to find that the serpent has slain the lover to whom he or she would apologize.

Despite their intellectual limitations, however, these serpents are crafty and intuitive and are feared assassins on many SPHERES. The serpents can only be summoned near large bodies of water or during rainstorms. Those summoned at waterfalls seem to be the most powerful.



### THE CHALICE BLADE

The wise woman's son dipped the chalice into the stream, and as he poured the water out it formed a great frozen blade. He then took the blade to the temple of dark FIRE and struck down the corrupt priest, who perished in a great cloud of smoke, leaving behind only ashes.

—Hippo Sagasayer

A magic chalice can be made from the fangs of a dead serpent of ice. If such a chalice is filled and then unended, the WATER freezes into a razor-sharp blade that does not melt until it has struck. Once it strikes, however, it melts instantly.

The icy *chalice blade* has a superior sharpness and balance, but it is only exceptionally effective against fiery creatures or weapons. For example, one strike from such a chalice blade can kill a flame wolf, no matter how powerful the wolf is, although if such a blade is used to parry a blow from a candle blade, both are destroyed. Chalice blades are also effective against mundane fires, though they are, of course, destroyed in the quenching.

### THE FLAME WOLF

Much like a serpent of ice, the *flame wolf* is a spirit of revenge and violence that can be summoned by priests and mages who are allied with flame. Flame wolves are called by throwing a complete wolf skin into a large FIRE. Especially powerful wolves can be called from volcanoes, forest fires, and other potent natural fires.

As can be inferred by the NAME, the flame wolf appears as a large wolf. Its fur burns but is never consumed. The wolf is strong, fearless, and tremendously destructive but not especially crafty. Though ferocious in battle, the flame wolf is easily outwitted by any half-clever ruse—the difficulty lies in getting it to stop attacking long enough to be fooled.

Lacking the stealth and invulnerability of the serpent of ice, flame wolves are used less often for assassinations than for direct assaults and for the protection of homes and objects.

If a flame wolf is injured, it can restore its lost vitality with fire. Consuming a torch is a sufficient cure for minor injuries, while devouring a large bonfire completely heals the wolf of any nonfatal wound.

These creatures' one weakness is WATER: they will never voluntarily cross water, not even a pond an inch deep. A flame wolf will leap over small streams, but fording a river would quench the flames of its coat and kill it. Such a wolf might cross a bridge but would never wade. A complete soaking, as by a whole cask of water or a heavy rainfall, would also kill a flame wolf.

### THE CANDLE BLADE

When a flame wolf is slain, a magical candle can be made from its body. Its hair is woven into a wick, and the fat of its body is rendered **k t** wax. Such a candle, when ignited, burns with a more-than-natural flame; in fact, it produces a searing blade of FIRE as tall as a child.

Since the *candle blade* is made of flame rather than metal, it is marvelously light and quick but still solid enough to parry another weapon. So swift is the blade that if two equal combatants were to battle, one with a candle blade and the other with a longsword, the candle-armed warrior would have a decided advantage. Furthermore, the blade does more damage than a usual weapon. While the weapon is swift and deadly against almost any creature, it is especially effective against creatures of a watery nature, such as serpents of ice. Upon striking such a beast, the blade is extinguished, but usually (unless it is of uncommon power) so is the creature.

The only drawback to such a weapon is its limited life span. After the wick burns down, the magic blade is gone forever.

### THE SKYHAWK

Like the flame wolf and the serpent of ice, the *skyhawk* is a magical elemental creature.

The skyhawk may take the form of an unusually large gray hawk with piercing blue eyes. However, it can also become unseen and immaterial at will, as invisible as a breeze and as swift. While invisible, it can travel any distance more quickly than any horse or vessel, though it can only travel thus to areas under the open sky. It can enter enclosed spaces only in its avian form.

In wind form, the skyhawk cannot attack, only observe. It may be able to affect objects and events but only in the way that they could be moved or changed by a strong wind. In this form, however, the hawk cannot be harmed by anything but the mightiest magics.

Smarter than any of the other elemental avengers, skyhawks nonetheless suffer from a terrible literal-mindedness: they obey their instructions to the letter and have little initiative to do anything beyond what they are told to do. Within the limits of their commands, they are obedient and extremely observant, however. The famous general Fountain of Orphans' Tears is said to have used a skyhawk for reconnaissance to great effect.

### THE ARROW OF THE SKY

If a skyhawk is killed in its avian form (usually the only way it can die), the feathers can be used to make a superb fletching for an arrow or crossbow bolt.

These missiles have unusual abilities if properly prepared. Not only do they fly true regardless of the wind, but impact they draw down a mighty stroke of lightning. This effect, of course, only occurs beneath the open sky, not indoors, underground, or underwater. However, when it does occur, the result is instant death for most creatures. If the lightning does strike, it consumes the arrow of the sky with

### THE STONE ELEPHANT

The fourth element has its avenger as well. A mage with ties to the EARTH can summon forth an elephant as big as a house, with tusks the length of a tall man. This elephant is made of stone and is almost impervious to harm. Great heat can injure it, and magic can as well, but hand weapons are harmless to it; to hurt it, one would require the force of a siege engine.

These stone elephants are the mightiest of the elemental avengers and the most difficult to summon. They are neither as intuitive as water snakes nor as crafty as skyhawks. They are slow of thought and speech but endlessly loyal. When they are fooled it is through their excessive devotion to their masters' directions.

There is a tale of a stone elephant's being summoned against the Fireworkers of the Velvet Empire. Seeing their warriors, beasts, and sorceries all fail against the elephant, the Fireworkers dug a great pit for it and

lured it across. When it fell into the pit, it shattered, leading the Fireworkers to conclude that the only thing mighty enough to destroy a stone elephant is the earth from which it came.

The tusks of stone elephants are said to have magical properties, but no one is sure what they are.

## ELEMENTS

Students of nature agree on very little, but almost all agree on this much: the universe and all within it are composed of four basic elements; EARTH, AIR, FIRE, and WATER. By understanding these elements and the interactions between them, all things can (eventually) be known and understood.

These four elements not only compose the material world, but they are also the principles on which the magical and aesthetic worlds depend. All forces, all events, all forms and substances obey their laws.

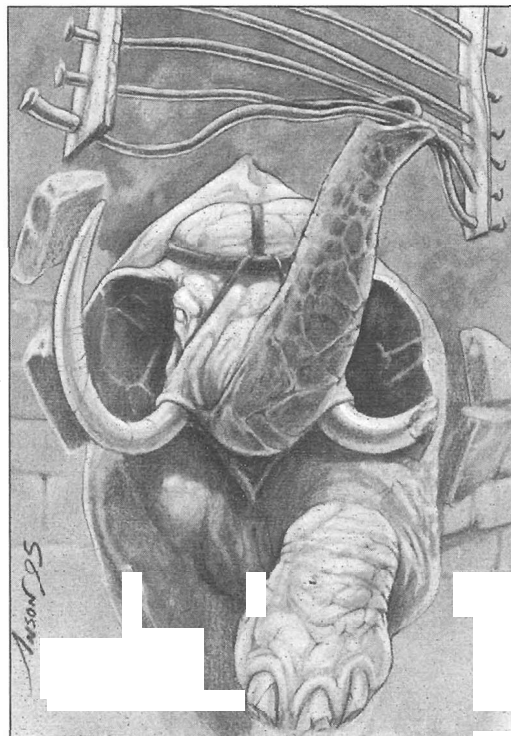
The earthy principle is the principle of foundation, solidity, and resistance to change. The element of all that endures, resists, withstands, and remains is earth.

The watery principle is that of reception, subtlety, and comprehension. Water is the element that envelops, contains, and accepts.

The principle of air is the principle of communication, organization, and division. All that reasons, categorizes, or makes itself understood does so by applying an airy aspect.

The final principle is fire, the principle of renewal, change, and destruction. All difference, alteration, and innovation emerges from the principle of fire.

These elements are the four threads from which the tapestries of humanity, as well as the characters of individual humans, are woven. Our bodies, personalities, minds, and even souls are woven from these four elements. Those who study the elements can tell at a glance which energy is dominant in a particular person or creature; through this knowledge, they can judge how to act. Placating flattery, which would please a person or creature of fire, would most likely irritate a person with the



watery perception to see through it. An intellectual attitude, which would engage a person with air ascendant, could seem snobbishly annoying to someone more down-to-earth.

A person who is primarily composed of earth, or who is strongly inclined towards the earthly element, is one who is strong and healthy in body. The personality of such a person inclines towards firmness and practicality—perhaps with a touch of mulish stubbornness. The earthy soul tends towards conservatism and materialism, seeking meaning not in some emotional release or intellectual accomplishment but with a good meal in a warm house.

A person whose body is mostly water has great personal grace and may be quite beautiful besides (water being the element of aesthetics). The watery type is open, caring, and sympathetic, in all ways living a life of emotion. The greatest satisfactions of these souls are experiences of beauty that transcend words—experiences that must be felt and which cannot be described.

The air body is neither a stout nor a stalwart one, tending towards a slenderer frame. Often, such people might even be called "spindly." However, the pursuits favored by the air-infused soul rarely require hulking size or massive thews. The air soul inclines towards study and operation, seeking knowledge of the "hows" and "wherebys" of the world. This understanding is different from the understanding sought by the water soul, however: The air soul seeks a mechanistic, categorizing comprehension. The water soul understands intuitively, on an emotional, instinctive level.

The final element in the human experience is fire, which is the essence of action and change. The fire-dominated body is generally compact but can be surprisingly strong and quick. It is a frame made to react instantly and decisively, for that is the circumstance in which the fire-dominant personality revels. Change, novelty, and challenge are the meat and drink of this daring nature—though it must be added that impetuosity and a quick temper are also associated with it.

See also "Air," "Earth," "Fire," and "Water."

**EMPIRE, GLORIOUS.** See "Glorious Empire."

The disciples of the  
Four-Bladed Star  
study the elemental  
correspondences of  
the human body, as do  
the skin scribes.

## ENTANGLING ART, THE

There is a story that tells that long ago a group of followers of COYOTE complained to the god about the lack of respect accorded them by the warriors of their land. Coyote heard their

complaints and taught them the *entangling art*. There are those who claim that the story of Brother Rabbit and the Tar Baby is actually the story of those warriors' attempt at fighting an accomplished entangler.

This art is a form of wrestling, but it bears little resemblance to the formalized wrestling practiced in some lands. Indeed, one practicing the entangling art often appears clumsy, staggering out of the way of blows, accidentally tripping up enemies, and clumsily dashing weapons out of their hands. Despite its sometimes comic appearance, it can

be used to break arms, knock down stout warriors, and even kill opponents—that is, if the stories are true.

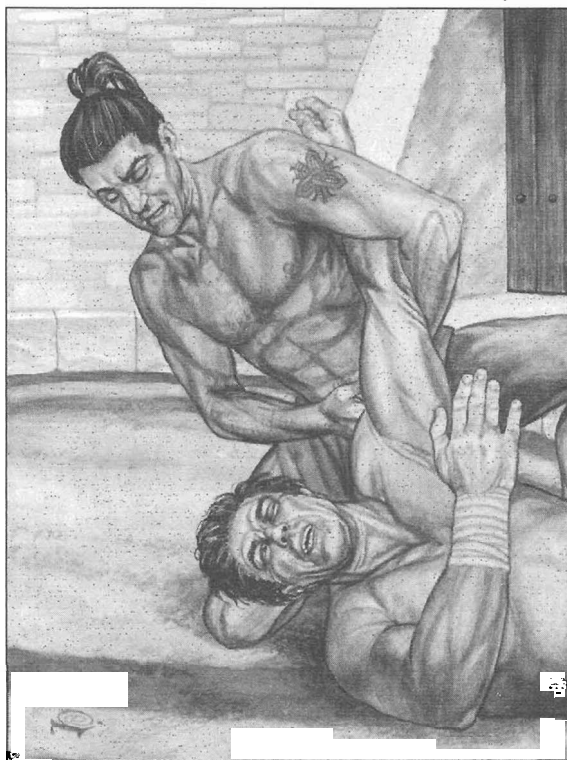
A weapon is sometimes used, but not any common weapon—or rather, common things are sometimes used that are not usually considered weapons. In the hands of an entangler, any rope is a lash and any necklace a flail.

In many cities there are men and women who claim to know the inner workings of the entangling art, but it should be noted that there are also those who lay claim to the battle secrets of the SPRING BORN and the WIND MONKS. Countless such "masters" have been unmasked as frauds by true students of these latter arts, and if any genuine master of entangling exists, he or she remains unknown.

Most people consider the art a complete lie.

The GLORIOUS EMPIRE is one of many prominent realms whose official stance on the entangling art is a scoffing disbelief. This may be because their agents, the Unseen Hands, are often said to be entangling experts of the highest caliber. The Glorious Empire makes a policy of ridiculing such claims, first denying that the Unseen Hands exist at all and further declaring that in any event no "entangling art" exists for them to know.

There are those, however, who say that the empire protests too vehemently. Those who claim to teach the entangling art ask how the empire and other naysayers can





be sure it does not exist since they have not traveled to every realm and seen all things that can be seen.

Still others believe that the art exists and that the empire is hiding its knowledge of it, but that those outside the empire who claim to teach entangling are frauds. According to this group, the Unseen Hands hunt down and kill anyone outside their group who knows the art.

**ESSENCE THIEVES.** See "Thieves of Essence."

**EVERGUARD.** See "Anvil of Everguard" and "Oracles of the Writing Wind."

**EVERMORE.** See "Pearl of Making."

## EVERWAY

### CITY AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE SPHERES

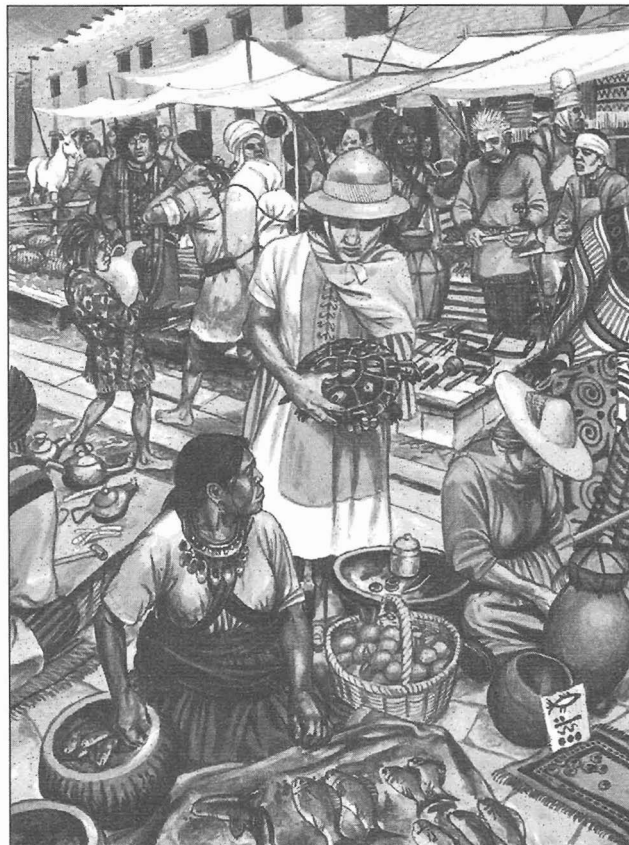
Seventy-one GATES lead into the realm of ROUNDWANDER, whose capital is Evenway, an ancient city populated by half a million people. Several features of Everway are of special interest to spherewalkers.

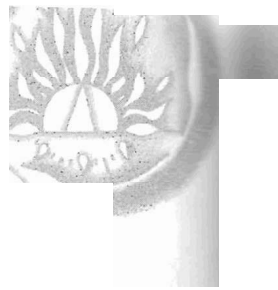
Strangerside is a sprawling city across the Sunset River from Evenway proper. In Strangerside, spherewalkers from a hundred SPHERES meet, exchange secrets, trade rare goods, and mingle with the locals.

The LIBRARY OF ALL WORLDS in Everway contains thousands of volumes filled with knowledge. To peruse the library's extensive collection, however, visitors must convince members of the Scratch family, which runs the library, that they are worthy. CHAMBER PLATINUM, a group of scholars serving the library, sponsors SPHEREWALKERS who explore new spheres and realms.

The ancient Walker's Pyramid at the center of the city is the subject of many stories. An enigmatic DEITY known as the Walker has been building the pyramid stone by stone over countless millennia. Most gates are really the footsteps of the Walker's, created on the deity's continuous search for the pyramid's stones. One more stone will complete the pyramid, and the Walker is said to be out among the spheres searching for it now.

E  
V  
E  
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## FIRE

### *From the Teachings of Flux*

Fire is life and life, fire. Know this and know wisdom.

When we were nothing but dead lumps, it was the spark of HEAVEN'S fire that gave us life, set us upon our feet, made us able to live and work our will!

If you doubt me, answer this challenge: what dies without AIR, drowns in WATER, and dies if not fed? If you say fire, I say the human body, and if you say the human body, I answer fire. I say this not to be obscure but to illuminate! Know the fire and know yourself.

Look into your heart and feel the hunger there. Feed the fire of love and you will see everything in its warmth and light.

Like heart's fire of love, feel the seething coals in your brain, the burning hunger to know. It is matched only by the body's fire to do. Know more, do more!

Listen now, and I will tell you the greatest secret: change is life, and stillness is death. Settle, and though you may still seem to live, your wit will molder, your heart will die, and your body will lose its life as you watch. Action, change, the power of fire—these are not only the powers we are given but all our reason to be.

See also "Elements."

FIRE IS THE  
ELEMENT OF  
ACTION, VIOLENCE,  
AND FORCEFUL  
ENERGY.

## FIREBLOSSOM

The vine-born *fireblossom* flower is long and slender, about the size of a human finger. Its color at the base is a deep yellow that deepens to a brilliant crimson at the rim. It favors hot climates.

To brew a restorative tea, find a *fireblossom* growing upwards and harvest it at dawn. Boil it and drink to relieve exhaustion, restore strength, and improve vitality.

Beware the *fireblossom*'s roots: they cause weariness and can make the body more receptive to the humors of illness.

FIRST BLOSSOM. See "Alurax" and "Unicorns."

FLAME WOLF. See "Elemental Avengers."

Loki is an Aesir deity by blood oath. See "Odin."

gods and goddesses of air decreed, "so that they may know each other and pass on knowledge of themselves to others."

The rulers of flame, earth, and air were content, each thinking their gift was the greatest. Those who ruled the water were less pleased, however.

"Look," said the deities of water to the deities of earth. "See how the people are using your gift to forge clubs and spears so that they can strike each other down."

"Look," said the deities of the water to the deities of the fire. "In their pride, the humans are gathering into warring bands, and nothing can make one show mercy to another."

"Look," said the deities of the water to the deities of the air. "The people are using your gift to enslave the minds and bodies of others."

Then heaven was sad once again.

"Our gifts have been put to ill use," said one wise goddess. "Therefore let us give humankind a final gift, one that will teach them the right use of all the others."

"Yes, let us give them wisdom," said another.

Then spoke Loki the Cunning.

"Shall we let wisdom become another of their windfalls? Observe the careful stewardship with which they have treated our other gifts."

"But we cannot leave them in this rut of violence," said another god.

"No," Loki agreed, "but if we are to give them wisdom, we can make them earn it. Their unearned gifts are taken for granted. If they achieve wisdom only after great struggle, they will know it is precious and never ignore it."

The deities admitted that this was so, and together they set out to create a path that humanity would have to follow in order to arrive at wisdom. At the end of their deliberations, the deities had devised a set of six and thirty images, each teaching a lesson and showing one step on the path to right living.

When the images were finished, heaven was greatly pleased.

Some priests consider gamblers to be agents of evil since they use the sacred cards in the pursuit of money. Others embrace them as "fortune's fools," teachers who don't know they're teaching.

## FORTUNE DECK, THE

*From the Later Writings of Silver-Star-of-Wisdom, Sorcerer of the Fortune School*

In ancient times, after the ruin of the DRAGONS, humans were young and knew little. HEAVEN looked on the struggles of humanity and was sad, for we were brutish and lonesome and cruel.

The DEITIES pitied us and decided to give us gifts, that we might better enjoy each other and the universe.

"We will give them music," said the rulers of the WATER. "From it they shall learn that pleasure does not need a reason to be."

The rulers of the FIRE, seeing what a fine present had been given, decided that their gift should be at least as fine. "We will give them pride," said they, "that they may hold their heads high and seek to prove their worth."

Seeing what a fine gift pride was, the rulers of the EARTH decided that their gift should be at least as great. "Unto humankind we will give the secrets of working wood, clay, stone, and metal, that they may have tools with which to discover their world."

Knowing what wonders the BOON of working the earth could produce, the rulers of the AIR decided that their boon should be at least as wonderful. "To humankind we will give the gift of language, which shall be called 'the TONGUE,'" the

"By following this simple path, even the most foolish mortal may come to know our wisdom," said one god.

"An impressive claim," said COYOTE. "Might I look once more upon this marvel?"

When the other gods and goddesses handed the deck to Coyote, he quickly cut the deck and shuffled the cards together.

"Stop!" they cried. "You'll make them disorderly!" But Coyote kept shuffling.

"Stop!" they insisted again. "The people will not know the true order!" But Coyote kept shuffling. And with cries of dismay, the deities fell upon the deck and began trying to sort it out.



Loki approached Coyote and spoke to him.

"Why have you done such a thing?"

"Because heaven makes too well," said Coyote, "and it would not be wise to put perfection in the hands of mortals."

"You see very far," said Loki.

"Indeed," said Coyote. "Far enough to know that I shall be closely watched. Therefore, please take this and hide it away." Coyote handed Loki one of the cards. He had hidden it while shuffling.

There is at least one known game that is played with the Fortune Deck in some realms. The game, called Godlike, is illegal in many realms. It is said that its players can end up winning and losing more than they suspect.

Loki, his eyes alight with mischief, stole away with the thirty-sixth card and hid it

To this day, no one has recovered the thirty-sixth card of the Fortune Deck. Since the cards describe the forces that move the universe, this missing card has left a void, which is filled by different forces in different realms. This is one reason that realms are so different from one another.

Nor has the true order of the cards been found, which is one reason that people are still foolish and lonesome and

cruel. Yet through contemplation of the Fortune Deck we have unlocked a few of its secrets and have taken our first small steps towards wisdom.

See also "Coyote," Deities," and "Tongue."

FORTUNE SCHOOL OF MAGIC. See "Cinnamon Plague" and "Fortune Deck."

FORTUNE'S FOOLS. See "Fortune Deck."

FOUR DUTIES, THE. See "Walker's Code."

## FOUR-BLADED STAR, THE

### PHILOSOPHY

Our human lives are limited; our vision is short. We are ill-equipped to know much, but what we are best-equipped to know is what is closest to us: we are best suited to the study of humanity. By knowing how the body is constructed, we can change its functioning, for good or ill—but this is secondary.

The spirit spends many lifetimes in many forms; therefore, the spirit has no true form. Like WATER in a jug, it assumes the shape of its container. Knowing the human body is the key to knowing the human spirit.

All things rise; all fall. The sun rises and also sets. Winter turns to spring. These are the paths that all life follows; they are in us, body and soul. These cycles, too, are the keys to our knowledge.

The force of life is like the blood in the body. It is held close within, but it flows freely throughout, from part to part. When polluted, it can cause illness, and it can also be spilled; but it can be strengthened and regulated as well.

### HISTORY

Many of the techniques of the Four-Bladed Star were invented by a man named Rising Eyes, who was a healer in a realm that was conquered by the Leopard Clan. Rising Eyes fled with those who rebelled and met a warrior called

Blood Artist. As he learned combat from Blood Artist, he began to see that there was a connection between the warrior's combat skills and his own healing skills. The pair developed a system of fighting based on this knowledge and eventually used it to expel the Leopard Clan. The two ruled the land together for many years. But in their later years, they quarreled, and the kingdom was split in two, the followers of each fighting those loyal to the other. In the end, the two former friends died in each other's arms, on the battlefield.

A student of the two kings named Edge of Sorrow was the only one who understood what had truly happened. She declared that they had been doomed from the moment they turned aside their true study: humanity. When they shunned the study of the body for the study of statecraft, they entered into a destructive cycle.

Edge of Sorrow formed the *Discipline of the Four-Bladed Star* in response, incorporating the techniques learned from her former teachers. Disciples of this philosophy swear never to govern others because the study of inner knowledge is paramount.

The new ruler of the kingdom was a student of Blood Artist, and he disagreed with Edge of Sorrow. Edge and her students were eventually forced to flee the realm, and the disciples of the Four-Bladed Star have been wandering ever since. Schools exist in many cities, but many rulers are understandably uneasy about welcoming any group that scorns civil authority and views governance as an annoyance.

## METHOD

The disciples of the Four-Bladed Star are close students of the human body. Through their study they know how to heal and how to cripple. The first skill is called the *restorative cycle*, while the second is the *destructive cycle*.

Both cycles work by affecting the centers of the body's ELEMENTS: the head for AIR, the chest for FIRE, the belly for WATER, and the feet and legs for EARTH. To influence these elemental seats, disciples apply *catalysts* that channel the elemental forces: iron for earth, crystal for air, gold for fire, and silver for water. In the absence of these catalysts, there are slightly less effective surrogates that can be used: broken glass for air, sharpened stone for earth, a burning splinter of wood for fire, and (if possible) a sharpened icicle for water.

The catalyst must always be sharp, for it is necessary to pierce the skin for both the restorative and the destructive cycles. The four-bladed star (from which the school takes its NAME) is usually a tool about as long as a shin bone. It

resembles four daggers attached at their pommels. Each blade has a vein of the appropriate substance.

When healing, a disciple often presses the center of the star against the afflicted part, feeling the four arms for sympathetic vibrations and judging by them the relative strength of the elements in the body. Used as a weapon, the star can be thrown or used like a dagger. Many disciples fight with a star in either hand. Fighting techniques involve spinning the stars in an almost hypnotic pattern, in order to present different arms to different targets.

## The Restorative Cycle

Disciples memorize the restorative cycle through a series of ninety-nine chants, but understanding them is more than a matter of rote learning. In their training, disciples pierce each other in order to learn the feel of the flow of life in the body; without this intuitive experience, the chants are meaningless. The restorative cycle can cure many diseases and accelerate healing. Some mystics have even used it as a focus for treating less straightforward maladies, such as possession, enchantment, and madness, but there are no techniques for these treatments in the original teachings of the disciples.

To heal an injury, a disciple balances the energies to the afflicted part. For a chill, it is necessary to supplement the fire element; in such cases, a needle of gold is pushed into the chest, directly under the sternum. For a headache, it may be salutary to insert a crystal needle into the highest point of the skull. By drawing more airy energy down the needle, the skull is filled and once more functions properly. On the other hand, some headaches are caused by a surfeit of airy energy; then it is necessary to apply an iron needle to the juncture of head and neck at the lowest point, either the top of the throat or the base of the skull. This earthy energy drains out the excess air energy, grounding it and relieving the pain.

The disciples know that too much of an element is as dangerous as too little. It is easy to spot an imbalance; true mastery requires being able to determine which factor is the surplus and which the deficit.

## The Destructive Cycle

The disciples feel that anyone who attacks them without reason must be sick, either in body, spirit, or mind. They consider it a duty to use their knowledge of the star to return such a person to health. It is not their way to initiate an attack. To one with knowledge of the star and the cycles, an attack is

Many  
disciples of the  
Four-Bladed  
Star hammer  
iron studs into  
the bottoms of  
their shoes,  
believing that  
this gives  
them a closer  
connection to  
the earth.  
Because of this,  
they are known  
to some as the  
"ironshod."



merely a symptom from which one can diagnose the attacker's illness.

The destructive cycle is taught by means of a dance, which is a ritualized reenactment of the final confrontation between Rising Eyes and Blood Artist. The dance takes several minutes and contains most of the blocks and attacks of the disciples' combat lexicon.

The disciples strike with iron to the head, silver to the chest, gold to the belly, and crystal to the legs. These are the spokes of the destructive cycle's wheel, in which each element is confounded by its opposite. The head, seat of air, foresight, and thought, is weighted down with earth. The legs, which join one to the earth, can be ruined with the swiftness of air, leaving one off balance or unable to move. The water within the belly can be struck with fire. (This causes great pain, but to the disciples that is a secondary concern, for a strong warrior can fight through pain. Without the water, the body is only a collection of parts, like spokes of a wheel that has no hub. Without water, limbs feel unconnected and do not work in concert.) Finally, the fire of the heart can be thwarted with water to quench the rage. A deep strike can kill, but a more restrained blow leaves a foe gasping and weak, unable to battle further.

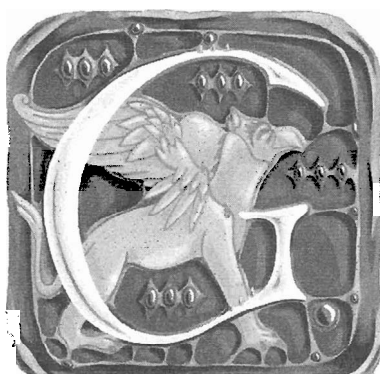
#### THE DISCIPLES' QUEST

There are many who study the Four-Bladed Star in order to learn the secrets of healing and harming, but true disciples see these skills as mere tools for the *Quest for the Great Cycle*.

Unlike most quests, which have a concrete, final goal, the quest of the disciples is a process, not an end. These dedicated wanderers consider it their task to correct or assist the Great Cycle wherever they go.

Each disciple has a different interpretation of the Great Cycle. Some see it as their duty to heal any who cross their path. They reason that since the Great Cycle is composed of many lesser cycles, by restoring the flow of individuals, they participate in the healing of the larger world.

Others, however, seem to relish the destructive aspect of the Great Cycle. Armed with deadly skill, these few see themselves as a purifying fire, destroying in order to prepare for new growth. Some have called such disciples evil, though these self-appointed destroyers claim only to be far-sighted. By making the bad worse, they wish to hasten the Great Cycle's lowest and most degenerate ebb. Only then, they say, can the cosmos begin to improve.



## GAIA

### MOTHER EARTH

#### Stories and Teachings

Gaia is Earth itself. She is the Mother of all creation, not just of the DEITIES. Before there was humanity, Chaos formed Sky, Earth, Night, and Day. Earth was named Gaia. With Sky (whose was named "Uranus"), Gaia begot Rhea, Oceanus, Iapetus, and Cronus. Cronus later vanquished his father and became ruler of the HEAVEN. He and his sister Rhea had five

children, but out of fear for his position, Cronus swallowed all of them. Rhea was determined to save her sixth child, Zeus, and tricked Cronus into swallowing a stone instead of Zeus. When Zeus was old enough, he rose up against Cronus and defeated him, just as Cronus had defeated his father. Zeus then freed his five siblings and took his place as ruler of the deities.

Gaia nurtures humans and their crops. She sustains all life on earth. Those devoted to her hold life in high reverence. Those who devote themselves to her do not eat animal flesh or the root of any plant; to do so would destroy life. Instead, they take nutrition from the fruits of the trees. Devotees also recommend drinking animal milk as a peaceful substitute to eating flesh. The highest-honored virtue of Gaia's devotees is generosity. Sharing the wealth of Mother Earth is considered the root of all morality.

Followers of Gaia believe that when death occurs, the soul confronts Gaia herself. She asks the soul to choose the form in which it will spend its next life. If the soul has led a peaceful life of prosperity, it is granted its wish. If the choice is a wise one, the next life is sure to be one of happiness and contentment. Sinful souls usually choose unwisely and therefore punish themselves. However, from time to time a wicked soul will choose wisely. When this happens, Gaia reminds the soul of its evil deeds and chooses a form for it.

#### Tribal Worship

In its most rudimentary form, worship of Gaia consists of simple, everyday practice of stewardship of the earth. Many tribal people express their reverence for Gaia simply through their everyday great respect for living things rather than through special rituals. Gaia's tribal followers often call her "the Goddess," "Mother," or simply "the Earth."



### Country Worship

People in rural communities worship Gaia as a fertility goddess. She is the earth; the farmers give her the seeds of life, and she gives them back crops. Many farmers simply call her "Mother Earth." They pay homage to her in many different ways. The shepherds of Sweetglen, for example, offer her the first-born lamb of the spring. The animal is left in a pit below an oak tree, known as the Oak of Nativity. Gaia only takes the lamb if there is penance to be paid by the shepherds. If the lamb remains unharmed until morning, it means that the goddess is content.

Gaia" is pronounced say-uh.

### City Worship

Worship of Gaia has all but been replaced in many cities by the following of Demeter, a younger goddess. Still, some followers of the older sect remain faithful to Gaia. Her temples often are found on the outskirts of cities, usually near springs or patches of wildflowers.

### Other Olympian Deities

**APHRODITE:** Goddess of love and beauty; beautiful and jealous; wife of Hephaestus.

**APOLLO:** God of youthful masculinity, music, prophecy, medicine, and hunting; carries a lyre and a bow; twin brother of Artemis.

**ARES:** God of war; embodies horror and strife.

**ARTEMIS:** Virgin goddess of the hunt, women's initiations, and wild animals; twin sister of Apollo.

**ATHENA:** Goddess of wisdom and battle; embodies the nobler aspects of warfare; thoughtful and self-controlled.

**DEMETER:** Goddess of fertility and agriculture; sister of Hera and Zeus.

**HADES:** God of the underworld; watcher of the dead; brother of Hera and Zeus.

**HECATE:** Goddess of the night and of magic.

**HEPHAESTUS:** God of fire; patron of blacksmiths; crippled but extraordinarily skilled; husband of Aphrodite.

**HERA:** Goddess of marriage; sister and wife of Zeus.

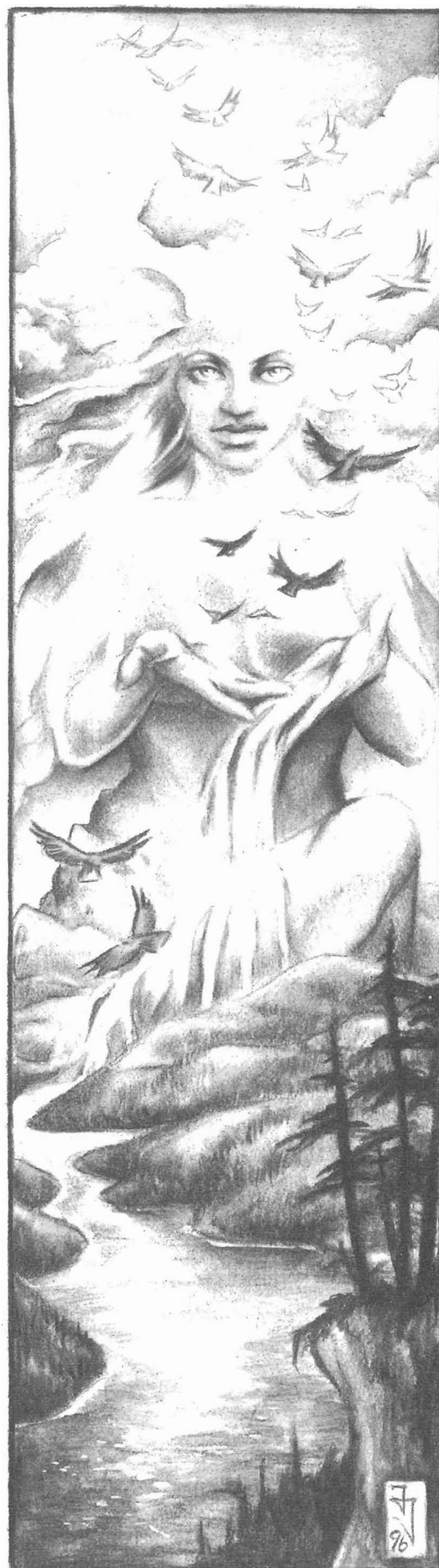
**HERMES:** God of speed; messenger of Olympus; the patron of merchants, travelers, thieves, and gamblers; wears winged sandals and carries a herald's staff entwined with snakes.

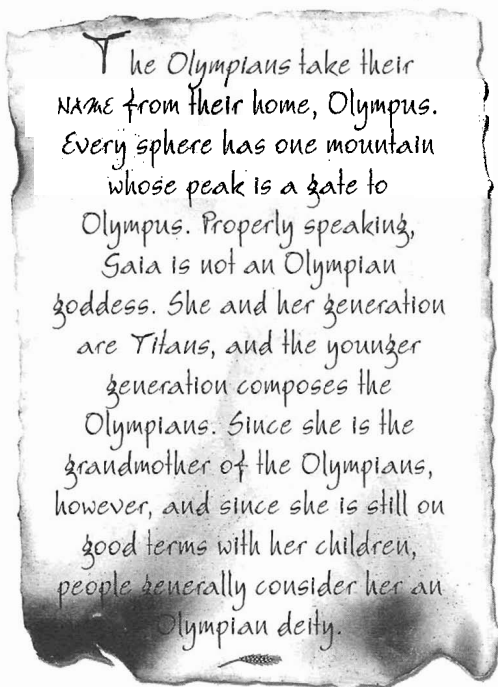
**HESTIA:** Goddess of the hearth; sister of Hera and Zeus.

**POSEIDON:** God of the sea; brother of Hera and Zeus.

**ZEUS:** God of thunder; ruler of the Olympian pantheon; brother and husband of Hera.

See also "Deities."





## GATES

A *gate* connects two worlds, or SPHERES. By its gates, a sphere is connected to the vast universe of other spheres. Most people cannot travel through gates. Those who can are known as SPHEREWALKERS.

## GATEPASSES

A *gatepass* is a small, complicated device made of silver. It consists of slender, intricate arms, hinges, and slides, which form a many-sided figure with frequent gaps through it. In the center of the device rests a silver sphere, connected to the arms and the angular framework. The silver sphere is hinged and devised so that it can move with complete freedom within the framework. The sphere is covered with intricate runes and patterns but has only one indentation, a steep dimple that points towards the center of the sphere.

Gatepasses perform a similar function to that of compasses, only instead of pointing north, gatepasses point to the nearest GATE. They only locate permanent gates, such as those that lead to EVERWAY, but they are nonetheless highly sought by traders seeking routes to new SPHERES.

**GIFT OF THE ROSE.** See "Night-Blooming Star Rose."

## GLORIOUS EMPIRE, THE

The Glorious Empire is a large and diverse nation that takes up an entire continent on the sphere known as Dry Spires. The climate of the realm is generally warm, though the nights in the Dry Desert can be cruelly cold.

When it conquers other nations, the empire lets the conquered people keep their religion, as long as they acknowledge that their DEITIES have blessed the emperor's reign. They are also allowed to keep their culture and traditions, as long as they pay their tribute to the empire and do not interfere with imperial administration.

Thus, the empire has a diverse population, ranging from the peoples of the north and east, who tend to have fair or yellow skin, straight dark hair, and slanted eyes, to the people of the west and south, who have darker skin, sharper features, round eyes, and thicker hair. The cultures of imperial territories are similarly diverse, ranging from nomadic herders and simple peasant farmers to sophisticated merchant clans and banking houses.

The empire is bordered by WATER on all sides.

### THE CITY OF HEAVEN

The physical center of the empire is the City of Heaven. When the entire continent had been "pacified," Emperor Wide Grasp used captured prisoners to help his artisans and engineers build a grand residence at the exact center of the empire. This residence, the City of Heaven, is an entire town of great beauty. Except for food, it is completely self-sufficient. The architects and artisans who built it agreed that they and all their descendants would spend the rest of their lives in service of the imperial line and would never leave the City of Heaven. With a few exceptions, this has been the case.

Around the City of Heaven a larger city of commoners, soldiers, traders, and the like quickly grew. This city is known as Heaven's Gate and is if not the largest in the empire certainly one of the most wealthy.

The City of Heaven is heavily fortified and is defended by the descendants of Emperor Wide Grasp's hand-picked personal guard. Like the artisans and servants, these guards have never left the City of Heaven, and few have any desire to do so. While their use in a field war might be questionable, they know every inch of the City of Heaven.

In addition to its physical defenses, the magical protections of the City of Heaven are considerable. When Dying Sky attempted to fling a falling star upon it, the star was deflected off into the desert. Attempts to use magical plagues or to send mighty storms against it have met with no greater success.

The only people allowed into or out of the City of Heaven are high-ranking clergy and administrators.

## HISTORY

The first empress was Chosen by Heaven, and whether or not she had a divine calling, she is widely considered one of the great military geniuses of all time. She quickly rose to eminence within her tribe as the war chief and then as *kaghan*, or king. Under her direction, her tribe quickly united or subjugated the other nomadic riders in the area into the first great *Horde*.

The Horde attacked the city-state of Travelway, and it seemed that it would be a long and deadly siege on both sides. What is said to have happened next depends on the source you consult. Imperial history has it that Light of Justice, the chief priest of Travelway, had a vision that showed him the divine nature of Chosen by Heaven. Numerous insurgent groups claim he was simply bribed or that he caved in to fear. Regardless, he opened the GATES to the city and soon made himself indispensable to Chosen by Heaven.

The unlikely alliance of a nomad kaghan and a city-born priest proved to be a powerful one. When Light of Justice described gates to Chosen by Heaven, the kaghan quickly realized their military significance. She made the closest local gate her prime military target—and the gate would become her obsession for the rest of her life. In the process of taking the gate, Chosen by Heaven revolutionized tactics and warfare in the area.

With the gate under her control, she began devoting resources toward gaining the power available on other SPHERES. This program was continued by her son, War Fist, and continues to this day. In their many wars of conquest, the empire has made decisive use of mercenaries, beasts, magics, and tactics gained from other spheres.

Upon the death of Chosen by Heaven, Light of Justice declared her to be divine and granted her son the title "Son of Heaven." This firmly linked the priesthood to the imperial family. At various times through the centuries, this link would prove valuable to both sides.

War Fist and his descendants made it their business to conquer

as many gates on Dry Spires as they could. Though they could not have known it at the time, this changing of goals would lead to the policies that made the empire grow. As the goal of the Horde had been simply to conquer and loot, it did not need diplomacy, governance skills, or the ability to stand and fight. As roving nomads, they could always flee a powerful foe or choose not to attack a town that was too well defended. Now that they had unique resources to protect and to conquer, they needed to be able to manage towns and cities and to protect them.

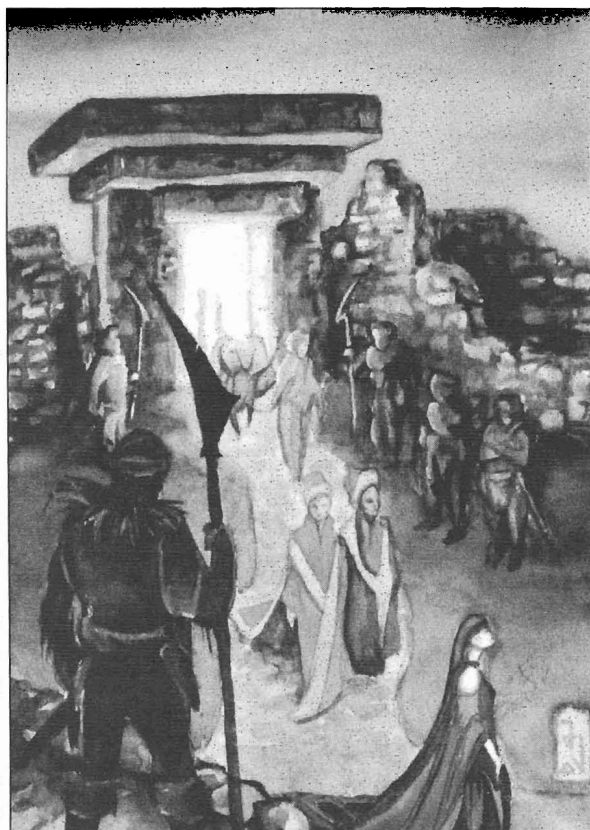
During this precarious stage in the growth of the empire, a conspiracy of renegade priests staged a revolution. With much bloodshed, it was suppressed, but it convinced Keen Heart, then empress, to rid the priests of their political power.

Out of this situation grew the empire's system of administrators. Promotion in the army had long been based upon skill and ability. Keen Heart ruled that power within the government should be based on the ability to administrate.

In a mere fifty years after Keen Heart's decree, a system of tests was in place throughout the empire. Priests were not allowed to test for government positions, but any other literate person could. Those who tested well were given positions in the various ministries, where their promotion would depend upon their performance.

The results of this policy were manifold, but the key repercussions were the following: Religious, military, and political authority were divided, except at the very top, where all met in the person of the emperor or empress. Many natives to an area were able to take part in the governance of that area since they tended to understand the people and their needs better than outsiders. The provinces of the empire were better governed by the locals and became more peaceful. And finally, the promise of possible advancement was offered to all.

This last effect is the most unusual, for it meant that in the empire, it is theoretically possible for a beggar's child to become First Minister, provided he or she can read. There are public schools at which all are welcome, but their quality varies drastically from territory to territory. Almost without fail, those who score highest on the tests are the children of those who can afford expensive tutors;



however, there are undeniable examples of people bettering their station by entering the administration from a background of poverty. The imperial family quickly discovered that even if only a few peasants entered the administration, it gave hope to all the other peasants—and consequently made them less likely to cause trouble.

### ENEMIES

Within any government there are dissident elements, but the Glorious Empire seems to be particularly rife with insurgents. In living memory, the Ministry of Intelligence has uncovered cabals of administrators, executed the followers of rogue cults, sought out uncounted independence movements, and quelled at least one military coup. One of the most feared is Dry Spires' branch of the Sisters of Night.

The many insurgent groups have many varied goals, and the current emperor is careful to direct their rage at each other and away from his government; but these manipulations can only serve to distract. As long as he faces no outside threat, the insurgencies are not a great problem, and as any invasion would have to come across the sea, it would have to be a long time coming. The emperor is currently expanding his fleet in order to forestall any such problem.

The greatest strength the emperor has is his monopoly on gates. Through them he controls access to the unpredictable outside effects that his ancestors used to such great effect.

### A HIDDEN GATE?

While the emperor believes he has control over all six GATES on the continent, there are recurring tales and rumors of a seventh gate leading to a land that is rich and strange. Perhaps the gate is undiscovered and a potential source of wealth (should a high-ranked administrator, priest, or military officer find it) or of ruin (if anyone else does).

Many say that the gate is known and functional but is used by a secretive insurgent group to amass power, wealth, and information for the eventual destruction of the empire. Some even go so far as to say that the holders of the gate negotiate for its use with several insurgencies, attempting to unify them—at least until the empire has fallen.

In the Glorious Empire, it is a crime for anyone other than members of the imperial bloodline to wear diamonds. The punishment for this transgression is confiscation of the diamond followed by execution of the wearer.

### THE GLORIOUS EMPIRE ON OTHER SPHERES

Entry to the Glorious Empire from other SPHERES is fairly easy, and departure from the empire by SPHEREWALKERS is even easier. A tax is levied upon all who enter, but it is kept low to encourage the trade of "safe" products from other lands. The six GATES scattered about the empire are carefully guarded by fanatically loyal members of the Horde.

The gates let imperial citizens exit onto other spheres while allowing foreign spherewalkers to enter the empire. However, the only imperial citizens allowed to leave through the gates are those whose loyalty is beyond suspicion.

By far the most popular and exciting spherewalkers from the Glorious Empire are the BELL WALKERS, whose art guarantees them an audience almost everywhere. These dancers have become unofficial ambassadors for the empire and as such have a disproportionate degree of influence within the City of Heaven.

A persistent rumor is that the bell walkers, and most others allowed to use the gates, are agents of the Ministry of Intelligence. These agents, called the *Unseen Hands*, are supposedly sent out from the empire on a variety of missions, from exploration to assassination.

### SPHEREWALKING TO THE EMPIRE

The empire is considered wealthy, sophisticated, and exotic on many distant SPHERES, and natives attempt to present such an appearance to visitors. Underneath this initial impression, however, there are other sides of the empire to be seen.

In the Glorious Empire, every city with a GATE and every city along a trade route has an area called the *visitors' quarter*, a tiny, discreetly walled-in section of the city where the inns, stores, and entertainments cater to spherewalking guests. Within the quarter, guests can be sure of seeing happy, handsome, and satisfied citizens. Prices are high, crime is virtually unknown, and everything seems just fine.

The sorcerers of the empire have perfected a simple device they call the "loyalty necklace," which kills the wearer instantly if he or she willingly and knowingly contravenes the Imperial Will while wearing it. The charm can only be made for a willing subject, and while not all soldiers opt to have loyalty necklaces constructed, promotion past a certain point without one is almost unheard of.



Leaving the quarter is discouraged by everyone from the friendly innkeepers to the guards at the gates that lead to the rest of the city. Unless one is obviously from out of town, getting into the quarters is difficult as well.

Outside the visitors' quarter, things are different. For one thing, there are beggars. For another, there are thieves. Depending on the city and the part of town, these may be clever pickpockets or brutal gangs of thugs.

Administrators, military officers, and clergy keep to their own separate neighborhoods, with little mixing between them. These areas are better policed than other areas, and foreign visitors are unwelcome unless expressly invited.

The other neighborhoods of town are much like those in other realms: some are rich, many are poor, some are pleasant, and some are absolutely repulsive.

What visitors may find strange about the Glorious Empire, however, is the sense that they are being watched. It's not a

tangible sensation, nor even something spiritual; it's the attitude of the imperial citizens. Even though they may say with their mouths that the Unseen Hands are only tales to frighten children, their eyes reveal to any perceptive observer that the children are not the only ones who are frightened.

Many citizens of the Glorious Empire truly, honestly believe that the emperor has divine power. Optimists in this camp are blind patriots and may be rude or even aggressive towards foreigners who do not properly revere the Child of Heaven. Pessimists may see the imperial divinity as an angry one, ready to strike out at any treason, intentional or not.

The wealthier the neighborhood, the more likely it is that the citizens are patriots. In the slums, patriotic sentiments are mumbled in public—but the shadows are full of treasonous whispers.

**GODLIKE, GAME OF.** See "Fortune Deck."

#### ADVICE FOR VISITORS TO THE GLORIOUS EMPIRE

You'll have considerable freedom while traveling in the empire, but expect to be thoroughly (though politely) searched when arriving and exiting. Offering bribes to officials does much more harm than good; if discovered accepting bribes, officials are given one lash for each coin.

All visitors can expect to be followed. You may attempt to evade the watchers if you wish, but rest assured that any such actions prompt greater vigilance on their part.

For the most part, as an outsider you can expect to be free from molestation. The administrator class is often intrigued by SPHEREWALKERS and may be friendly and hospitable. It is wise to accept their hospitality; not only is it excellent, but some administrators can be quite petty if rebuffed.

The clergy class generally tolerates spherewalkers as a necessary evil. Expect condescension if you meet them outside temples and hostility if you enter a temple. While the clergy have no actual authority, their influence is wide and deep.

The attitude of the military is the hardest to describe. Some among its ranks are extremely wary of spherewalkers, having heard of (or seen) the powers bred on distant SPHERES. Others are belligerent, wishing to prove their valor and skill against every foreigner they meet. It is wise to allow these abusers to win verbal victories and not to tempt them to use physical force; not only are the officers very loyal, but they are very loyal to each other, and word travels fast in the military. Beating a member of the military in a fight is a sure way to ensure challenges for the rest of your journey. The most common attitude from the military towards visitors, however, is one of pity; they feel sorry for anyone who isn't an imperial citizen.

These guidelines are, of course, only general notions based on the experience of many. Certainly there are friendly clergy, interested soldiers, and obnoxious administrators.

Finally, while in the empire, try the dish they call *chocolate*. It is a delicacy of uncanny sweetness and flavor.

## GODLINGS

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To a mortal, the diminutive term *godling* seems misleading. It refers, after all, to creatures who can wreck nations, command the ELEMENTS, subdue the wildest monsters, and blacken the sun at noon. On the human scale of things, godlings are not small at all; to human beings, they are divine.

To the true DEITIES, however, godlings are "small." It can be difficult for a person, at times, to tell the difference between a godling and a true deity: from the viewpoint of humanity both are staggeringly great. Yet to an ant, a dog may appear as huge and powerful as a human, though the human knows it is only a dog. So it is with these spirits, for in truth spirits is what they are. There are several tests that can be applied to distinguish godlings from the true denizens of HEAVEN.

The first test is one of locality. When a deity such as KUAN-YIN or Hermes appears to a devout and fortunate follower, the power of that divinity still extends through the infinite SPHERES, guiding and protecting those things with which that goddess or god is particularly concerned. In fact, is wholly possible for the truly divine to be in more than one place—indeed, in many places—at once.

Godlings, on the other hand, are almost always tied to a single location. The few who do appear in multiple localities do so in the same way that human sorcerers do, through an exercise of will and power. Godlings are where they are, and if they appear elsewhere it is because they have moved. The truly divine can appear anywhere because they are, in truth, everywhere at once; their essence permeates the cosmos.

The second limitation of godlings is that while they are eternal, they are not necessarily immortal. That is to say that although godlings are not prey to normal ills of the flesh, such as sickness and age, most of them can die through violence. It is unknown whether those that are slain (usually by another such spirit, by a DRAGON, or by a true god or goddess) are allowed the grace of KARMA. Judging from the frantic measures godlings take to avoid death, some people conclude that godlings simply fall into oblivion when they are killed.

Finally, godlings generally operate on a smaller scale than that of the truly divine. While Zeus is the lord of all sky everywhere, a godling may be the patron of a particular forest or perhaps of a certain city. Most of them confine their activities to one particular sphere, generally to one part of that sphere.

Since godlings have small territories (often smaller than

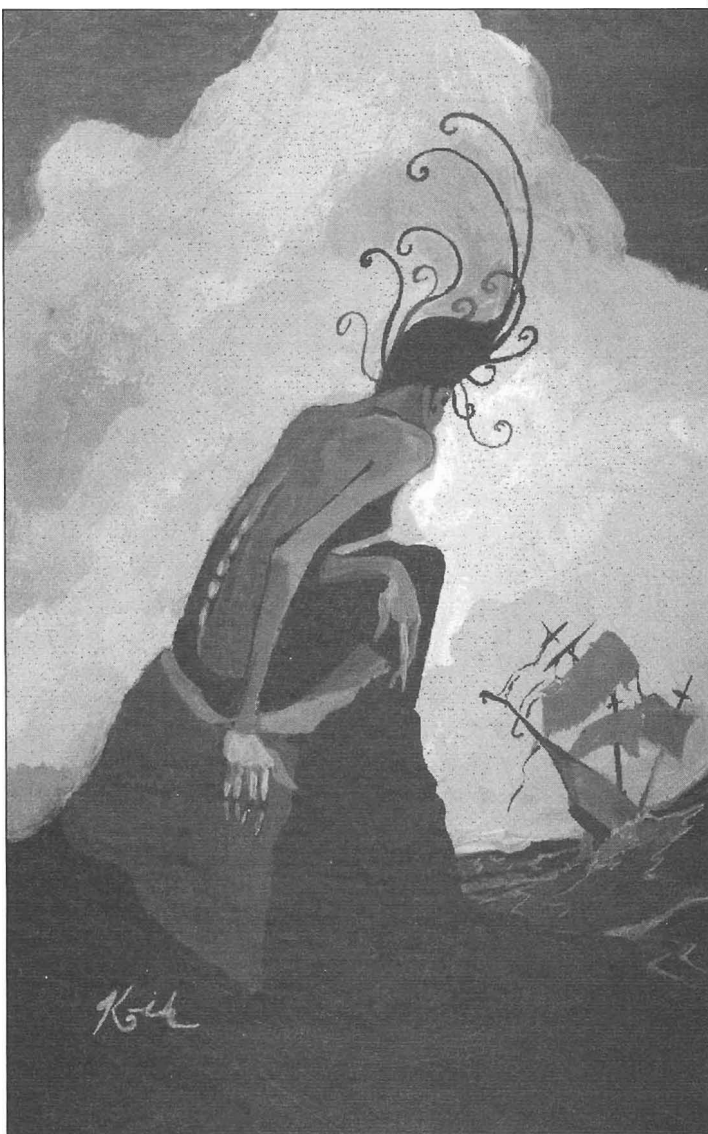
those of mortal rulers), it would be impossible to list all the godlings of a given sphere. Here, however, are a few examples godlings.

## GARUNE OF THE MANY SWORDS

Garune is the patron DEITY of the Bull Kin, a people who live in the SPHERE of Racing Clouds. Like his followers, Garune has the head of a Brahman bull and the body of a human being.

The Bull Kin believe that the first twenty Bull Kin were created during HEAVEN's battle against the rebel DRAGONS.

*Sailors claim that when Merimee is present, strange fires cling to the rigging. It is considered a good sign in a storm—unless the captain is an obstinate one.*



These twenty heroes rose from the dust where twenty drops of Garune's blood fell, and they stayed by his side, helping him, throughout the war. In return for their loyalty Garune taught these heroes the secrets of combat and gave them the code of honor by which the Bull Kin live.

Garune's *Many Swords* each have a different purpose, and it is in honor of him that the Bull Kin carry one blade for combat with other Bull Kin, one blade for acts of honor such as beheadings and ritual suicides, and yet another blade for battle with non-Bull Kin. Garune is, nonetheless, a practical godling: his laws of honor provide for a "neutral" blade, which can be used for any purpose, though of course it is better to use blades specifically for their intended uses.

Although the Bull Kin have human allies and often travel in human lands, they are not human. Not only do they have alien attitudes, but they also have some secrets that few humans know. These secret teachings were given to them by Garune, and though some humans have tried to follow him, Garune accepts worship only from Bull Kin.

#### MERIMEE, THE SEA SISTER

Merimee of the sailors has absolutely no pretensions to divinity: she has no following, is mentioned in no religious texts, has neither prophets nor revealed wisdom, and does not appear to demand (or deserve) the same reverent awe that is the due to DEITIES.

Merimee is a spirit of great power who rules a particular sea. (As such, her territory is far greater than that of most godlings.) Called the "Lady of Storms" by some sailors, she embodies the uncertain kindness and cruelty of the sea. Many wear her likeness and speak of her fondly in an attempt to draw her favor, and numerous sailors credit her with salvation after shipwrecks.

Her personality is almost universally described as "trick-some" or "mischievous." She is a practical joker who can command the sea and storm, and while her tricks can be elaborate, they are rarely destructive.

If the tales are to be believed, however, there is one thing that rouses her ire beyond all else, and that is arrogance and rigid thinking. A captain who is too strict or cocky is sure to gain the anger of Merimee—if the sailors are to be believed. Her irritation may be expressed by a series of harmless but humiliating mischances, or she may simply crush his ship and all aboard, depending on her mood and the degree of offense.

Doubtless many of the "accidents" that occur to strict captains and are blamed on Merimee are in fact the actions of disgruntled sailors. There are, however, some acts attributed to her that no normal sailor could possibly counterfeit. A case in

point is a captain who arrogantly swore that he would deliver his cargo at high noon in two weeks, not a minute sooner nor later. When his crew warned that such rash statements could lodge in the ears of storms, the captain scoffed and declared that he was master of the sea, not merely some tolerated passenger.

Within days of setting out, the ship vanished in a storm—a storm that mysteriously bypassed other ships in the area. The sailors who survived this journey report being completely lost in strange, foreign oceans for a long time. After many bizarre encounters and adventures, they reached their initial destination—exactly *two years* to the day after they set sail. Furthermore, they arrived at high noon—not a minute sooner or later.

#### SHIAMA, WHO SPILLS THE BLOOD

The cruel spirit Shiama lives in the lands of the Ash Spear. Her seat is the mountain that bears her NAME.

Shiama is a spirit of brutal fertility, embodying the circle of life at its bloodiest. She offers children to women who have none but requires a sacrifice in return.

To please Shiama, a woman must spill blood on her mountain. Human sacrifice is the best, but an animal will satisfy her for a while—as long as human death is promised as well. There are stories of women so desperate to bear an heir for a demanding husband that they promise Shiama their own lives in return for a child, dying in childbirth to pay the debt.

Shiama promises the blood of childbirth to women who spill the blood of death; she also promises the blood of battle to warriors who offer her their progeny. If a warrior dedicates his child (especially a daughter) to Shiama, she guides his weapon, making sure that he spills death blood in his next battle. The children dedicated to her often dwell on her mountain, serving her and defending the mountain from those who would profane it or halt her worship. It is also said that these clergy sometimes waylay travelers as offerings to the "Blood Spiller."

In pictures, Shiama always appears as a pregnant woman armed with two swords.

#### YINVA, THE SEEKING SHADOW

Yinva is a god of destructive justice in the realm of Rain Wall. The Seeking Shadow's duty is to find and destroy wrongdoers, especially those who hide their wickedness from the sight of their fellows. The Seeker can see into others' hearts and feeds upon the dying screams of evil-doers. Dwellers in Rain Wall believe that when all evil has been eliminated from their lands, the Seeking Shadow will disappear, starved to

death. Until that time, however, Yinva hunts.

Though Yinva seems to be a protector, he is regarded with greater fear than most of his evil victims. It is said that his visage is so terrifying that to see it is to be struck blind and that seeing even his shadow brings bad luck for a year. He can be harmed neither by the weapons of mortals nor by human sorcery, though there was a period when Yinva was bound in a cavern by an evil oath-breaker. The sorcerer's reign ended only after a group of brave peasants, guided by their priest, broke the wards around Yinva.

## GOLDEN OAK, THE

*An Account Told by Quick,  
of the Rain River People*

We found the foreign mage when we were returning from a trading mission. We had gone to the people to the south, who thought they had tamed the land. There were a dozen of us, all armed; there were bandits on the road, and beasts.

As we rode out on the second day, we smelled the reek of burning flesh. Alarmed, we drew blades and rode forward. We found two men and a woman, all three burned dead, and another man and woman killed by the spear.

The tracks were very clear: the burned ones had killed the other two, but someone or something had crawled off down the road. The burned people looked southern; the other two were foreign. Three horses had run off as well.

At my command, my fellow riders split up to flank whatever person or creature had used the FIRE and then crawled away. What we found was a woman, who we later learned was called Spring Walker, lying in the middle of the road. She was badly injured and did not wake until we began dressing her wounds.

"Back! Don't think my sorcery is empty, I have enough to . . . oh."

"You are among friends, traveler—if you choose to make us so."

She had a wide, foreign face, the type that is as easy to read as tracks in fresh snow at noon. She looked us over and considered us primitives, far less clever than herself. Her eyes told me she wanted to use us.

"I guess you saved my life. . . . Thank you."

We took her to our camp. She broke bread with us and told us stories of strange lands. Then her face said that she was going to do something she considered very clever.

"To thank you for saving me, I'm going to tell you a secret, something that will change your lives, change the lives of your whole tribe."

She pulled something from her garment and gave it to me to examine and began to tell the story of where she had gotten it. It was an oak leaf, made of solid gold. I turned it over, impressed.

"Careful not to curl the edges. Gold so pure is soft," she said.

The three points, the flamelike lesser points, the veins on the surface, even the slight curl at the base of the stem—all perfect. I tried to marvel at the skill that could create such a replica but found myself unable to think anything but that it was what Spring Walker claimed, a real leaf from a tree of gold.

"If you find the leaf beautiful, imagine the tree entire." Her harsh voice softened with longing—or was it greed?—as she spoke. "Even in the darkness it shone like the sun."

"Where was it?" I asked.

"Was? *Is*. It's still there. My partner Dill wanted to chop the whole damn thing down—idiot. Nothing would turn his greed aside, not even finding the last would-be thieves." Although we were on a hill and could see that there was no one for a dozen miles, Spring Walker looked over her shoulder.

"Turned to wood, they were. Wooden men, wooden women, all with this look of fear and pain. . . . And just so you'd know they weren't statues, those tree mages left their hair unchanged, beards, mustaches . . . even the hair on their arms and legs."

She leaned back. "Dill wasn't scared though. Too stupid. Strong as the tides, but stupid as the shore. . . . And when those trees started walking, he pulled out his axe and ran to meet them."

Spring Walker shook her head at such folly.

"Me, I ran on to the oak. Treewalkers, they're not so fast, see? I ran to the tree. I was going to get what *I* came for and light out—and I got it too. Almost made it away clean," she said bitterly. Then she gestured at her crutches.

"Never even saw him—him, her, *it*. Whatever it was must have had the eyes of an owl to shoot me that far . . . right in the back. And I haven't had the use of my legs since. Healers, damn fools, can't help. One even said 'this righteous wound will never knit,' but I'll show him, the watery little milksop. . . . When my plans grow up big. . . ."

She delved into her grubby clothes and produced another object, another small golden miracle.

"But I need partners, see? Someone to take care of things while our investment matures. . . ."

I still feel I did the right thing in refusing her offer. What would my people do with a golden oak? We were not meant to have such earthly wealth. Besides, I am sure she was hiding something.

But sometimes, in my dreams, I still see that golden leaf and wonder if I am not the greatest fool among the Rain River People.

## GOLEMS

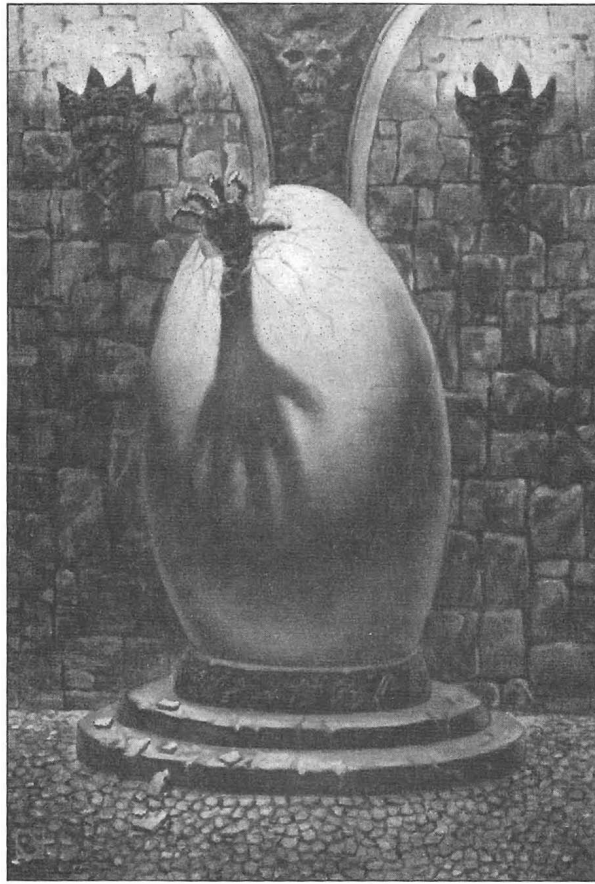
To create a dutiful and obedient *golem* requires much effort and time, but it is well worth the cost. Such a creature is tireless, powerful, and perpetually loyal.

Many variations on the golem can be made, but there are some basic elements that all such automata require.

The first is an egg from which the golem hatches. Such an egg is best made of clay, the primal stuff from which humans, too, were formed. The egg should be at least as tall as a grown man with walls perhaps a hand's length thick or thicker. It is best to prepare the egg in two segments so that the other ingredients may be more easily sealed within.

The second ingredient is a body, freshly killed and with no blood spilled. This corpse serves as a model for the growing golem; therefore, it is best to have a specimen of great size, beauty, or utility. Many prefer to use human bodies in order that the intellect of the golems created will be closer to human (though soulless).

There are also those who use animal bodies, trying to create creatures that can track like hounds or fly like birds, but these attempts almost always fail. There was one well-known account of a mage who created a paper falcon, but it was useful as little more than a curiosity. Her later attempt at an iron hawk was a dismal failure, as the creature was unable to lift its own weight.



The next element is the raw material with which the body is formed. Metal is the most common as it is durable and confers upon the golem an unusual strength. Silver and gold are decorative, but they are also expensive and soft; a FIRE of sufficient heat can render a gold-based golem inert. Iron is good, despite the threat of rust. Golems of clay are invincible to heat, but their movements tend to be stiff, and a hard blow can shatter them. One teacher had a quicksilver serpent that was quite a marvel; though small, its movements were flawlessly smooth. Rock golems are quite sturdy and resist heat well, but they lack suppleness.

The raw material need not be prepared in any special fashion; the transformation occurs at the hands of the other elements. The golem's weight is determined by the quantity of material used, and its size is determined by the body

on which it is modeled. While this make seem to make a metal eagle possible, in practice the balance is wrong, and the metal shell is either too heavy or so thin that it crumples.

Once these elements have been placed in the egg, they are impregnated by a drop of the maker's blood. Then the egg is sealed and marked with the appropriate glyphs.

This done, the egg must be heated to the point that clay turns solid. At this point, there is naught to do but wait for the golem to hatch, a process that takes about a month.

During the incubation period the egg is guarded with great caution, for if one with knowledge tampers with the egg, control of the golem can be stolen. Not only that, but a golem has a link to the mage whose blood invigorated it and can be used to strike at him or her.

After a month, the golem bursts forth from its shell, ready to do the will of its maker. Golems of human form often have the gift of speech, though usually only if they are formed of the finer metals. A silver woman made in the city of Running's End had a lovely piping pitch to her speech that was so quick and intricate listeners easily forgot that she was an automaton. An iron golem, on the other hand, lacks comprehension and uses only the most basic words. Rock golems can not speak at all and are easily confused.



*Words Discovered Engraved on a Broken Wall*

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I have left this message for myself, carved in stone to last through my great slumber.

If you can read this, future self, then my great work was successful. You may be confused and uncertain at this time, but behind this wall lie journals and books that will make all clear to you. You shall have to smash this wall to reach them, but it should be a light task for your mighty steel fists!

Know this: you were once weak and frail and old, but that mattered not, for you were wise and you were daring. You knew the art of crafting golems and in your time made many grand servants. But unlike most, you were not complacent with this power. Where others meekly accepted the traps of age, infirmity, and death, you saw the way out.

What the other crafters failed to realize was that the golem process was not simply a way to transform others into servants; it could become a way to transform yourself, taking the meager punishment that is the human frame and turning it into an inexorable and immortal engine of steel.

I sealed myself in the egg and went into the FIRE, and if my

theories were wrong, I have died horribly for no reason. Yet I know that I am not wrong and that it is not my death I will find, but endless life and limitless power.

Humans will no doubt fear you; even the golem slave, with no will of its own, was seen as evil in my day. My fellows and I were condemned by the clergy and by weaker mages for mimicking HEAVEN by making life. Obscene, they said, to make life without soul, but life without soul was their death when they tried to stop us. Such weaklings will threaten you. But have no fear: you are stronger and smarter, and you are not limited by the eyeblink span of a human life.

Has it taken a hundred years for you to emerge from your cradle? A thousand? It does not matter; all time before you will be seen as prelude. Your birth is the dawn of a new age, the age of a steel master for puny humanity.

## GRIFFINS

*From the Tale of Whistler Gold*

Winding Twine's eyes glittered cruelly at Whistler Gold. "You should not have come back." He raised his hand, and the



Griffin illustration by Scott Kirschner  
© 1996 Rubicon Games, Inc.

Black Stone glinted upon his finger.

Whistler said nothing, though she wanted to scream, to run, to plead for mercy. She did nothing, only stared.

"Like all of your clan, you are remarkably resourceful." He turned his head, and like a striking snake the Servant of the Stone sprang from his hand. Whistler cried out despite herself as the spirit knocked the dagger from her hand.

"Your people are mine, and now you are mine too."

Quicker than thought the Servant wound around Whistler's legs and pulled, knocking her flat on her face. She saw Winding Twine's sandals as he strode up to stand before her. Looking up, she saw the Servant coiling back into the Black Stone, saw Winding Twine draw breath to gloat.

She struck, both hands lashing out, one behind Twine's ankle and the other upon his shin, reaching for the spot she'd been shown. Twine shouted as he fell backwards. He landed heavily but fell upon the cushions with which his tent was littered. Knowing it was her last and only chance, Whistler leapt upon him.

Twine yelled again in surprise and pain as she climbed his body, punching and striking at everything she could reach, desperately trying to keep him distracted, keep him from using the ring. And then she grabbed his hand and bit down hard upon his finger.

Winding Twine screamed as she pulled the ring from his hand. She reeled back and, with a painful gulp, swallowed it.

"Slaves!" screamed Winding Twine. "Guards! Help me!"

As his twin servants led guards into the tent, Whistler felt a strange calm. They would gut her; they would recover the Black Stone; her clan would still be enslaved. Yet it all seemed unimportant because she had at least grabbed her fate with both hands.

Winding Twine was shrieking at his slaves, demanding to know how Whistler Gold had gotten past them. Above his cries, however, came the sound of rending cloth and on top of it a horrendous shriek of power and rage. Whistler stared in shock as the great beast that had been following her for days shredded the roof of the pavilion. A clap from its great wings and the remains of the tent flew away, leaving a tangled ruin.

She recognized the creature from old tales as a griffin, and it occurred to her that she was happy that she would be killed by this great beast and not by the minions of Winding Twine.

"Slaves! Save me!" cried Winding Twine, but all through the tent city there was chaos as people fled the monstrous

griffin. Twine's twin servants scarcely had time to raise weapons before the beast stabbed one with its beak and killed it, meanwhile opening the other all across his ribs with its razor claws.

Winding Twine tried to flee, but the griffin was faster than he. With a contemptuous flick of its tail, the griffin slashed the tyrant open along the line of his spine. Then it turned to Whistler Gold. She had struggled to her feet, determined to die standing and not crawling, and she watched in astonishment as the griffin knelt before her. . . .

### *Notes Taken by Heritage, a Student at the Glorious University*

With the forepart of an eagle and the hindquarters of a lion, the *griffin* is a beast of awesome power and ferocity. Few creatures are swifter, either on land or in the AIR, and the rending power of the beast's claws are second in might only to the deadly snap of its enormous beak.

The griffin is truly the prince of predators, feeding its young almost exclusively on other carnivores. When the lairs of such beasts are found it is not uncommon to find them littered with the bones of bears, great CATS, mighty serpents, and raptors of the air.

Griffins' dealings with humankind are not typical of their dealings with other beings. It is said that any warrior who can best a griffin in battle without using weapons, armor, or magic can tame the animal and use it as a mount. This is much easier said than done, however.

Some sorcerers believe that griffins can scent valor and that it draws them. The stories of griffins seeking out fighters of renown to challenge them seem to bear this out.

However, courage in arms is not the only sort of valor that attracts griffins. They have been known, on rare occasions, to serve those who show great courage against great odds. Their rare attachments to such people have earned griffins a reputation as patrons of lost causes.



"HALLMARK OF HEAVEN".  
See "Roses."

## HARP OF THE HIDDEN CITY, THE

Held in ancient times to be the greatest feat of humankind on any SPHERE, the Hidden City was so great that when the ocean rose and claimed it, the people made their peace with the waves and continued living under the ocean.

Living in this city was a musician named Fair Rejoicing, and so great was the music he played upon his harp that the waves would cease their swells to listen when he played, and the fish would follow his melodies into the nets of fishers. So beautiful was his playing that he could charm the coral into growing as he wanted. With his tunes he grew the great royal palace as a gift to his queen and her consort. He was named the poet laureate of the Hidden City and was also given the honored title of Royal Bard. Many festivals were held to honor him, and all who heard him play admired his skill.

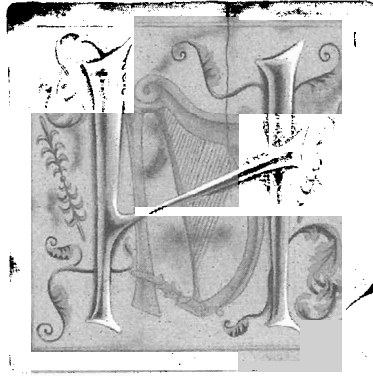
Yet, despite all this, Fair Rejoicing was not content. His heart was not light but heavy. The source of his unhappiness lay in his loving above his station; indeed, his heart was sore with love for the queen herself, though he knew that he could never hope to win her affection.

Though he had wealth and fame and popular acclaim, he was the most wretched of people. Every smile from a woman reminded him that the queen would never smile at him and yield to his embrace; every beautiful thing he saw seemed a mockery of the beauty of the untouchable monarch.

Fair Rejoicing's songs became so sad that cobblestones wept to hear him play his harp as he trod upon them.

Finally, one night, tormented past sleep by his longing, he went to the temple and played. Every smallest part of his pain and longing was put into music as he crafted a song so powerful and so pure that some say it took on life of its own and flew off to have children.

As his finished playing his piece, he noticed tears upon the face of a statue. In wonderment, he stepped closer, and through the statue, a goddess spoke.



"Fair Rejoicing, you make a lie of your name. Why are you so sad?"

"Because I love who I shouldn't, and in a way that is wrong."

"Ah, the queen. That is sad, but it is said that out of sorrow comes great art, is it not?"

"I would trade all my art for her love—yet the dishonor of what I say pains me to the core."

The goddess was silent. Then she spoke again.

"If there were a way that you could have the queen's love, with honor . . . would you take it?"

"Yes!"

"Even if she were not as she is? If she were plain, or old, or infirm?"

"Yes!"

"Even if you had to suffer for her love? Suffer greatly, and for a terribly long time?"

"Yes, yes, a thousand times yes!"

"Then perhaps a deal can be made, if your love is so pure. By your wish, I will put your soul into your harp, and as the harp, you shall have power. You shall be bound to protect the queen through her next thousand incarnations. On her thousand and first, she shall love you above all others."

"Nothing could give me greater joy."

"Do not be so certain; for her soul is a great one and is marked for great deeds and great trials. You will see her suffer and will not be able to prevent it, and you will see her love others, many others, and be unable to prevent that either."

"I don't care, as long as I can be with her."

"Then play, and put all your soul and longing into it. It would be good that her soul, so marked for greatness, had a defender."

Fair Rejoicing did as the goddess directed, and his melody was so great that all the people of the city, and all the animals too, came into the temple and listened in wonder. The people and animals stared, stepping quietly aside as the queen and her husband came into the temple, and all were amazed to behold the body of Fair Rejoicing dissolving as it flowed into his harp, which played on a few minutes longer and then stopped.

Fair Rejoicing's harp became the instrument used by the royal bards for the rest of the queen's lifetime, but with her death the harp mysteriously vanished from the treasury. It was often seen and heard in different parts of the city but was never recovered. Then the Hidden City was struck by a great disaster, and its people fled.

Since that time, the harp has been seen and heard in many places, many times. Some say its strings will snap when its bearer is in danger. Others claim that it can play itself with such profound beauty that it can calm the wildest beasts. Still others say that anyone who plays it can mold the emotions of listeners like putty, making the tired fierce and the vicious loving.

Some romantics say that Fair Rejoicing's quest ended at last when the thousandth incarnation of the queen smashed the harp during a fierce winter storm to make a FIRE and warm herself. They say that in their next lives the two met and loved at first sight, living out a long life together, joyous and peaceful.

Cynics say that the goddess Fair Rejoicing dealt with was a trickster and that after his long imprisonment he found himself incarnated as the queen's own son, an only child she did indeed love above all others.

As for me, well, Fair Rejoicing lived less than three thousand years ago and a life protected lasts more than three years. And therefore I believe that the harp is out there still among the SPHERES, working its wonders in protection of the soul it loves, even beyond death.

*Related Topic:* "Living Songs."

## HEARTFINGER

The smallest fingers on each hand are the *heartfingers* and are directly linked to the seat of emotion. In many cultures the marriage ceremony involves putting rings on the heartfingers in order to provide an emotional link between the two partners. Gold is the preferred metal for such rings, and the link is considered especially potent if the two rings are made from the same nugget.

Some palmists and students of body correspondences draw a distinction between the two heartfingers, claiming that the left one indicates romantic and sexual love, while the right has significance for the love of family and friends.

Unscrupulous sorcerers have been known to make use of the heartfinger to manipulate emotions. This is done either by means of charms placed on rings that are then given to the unsuspecting, or by talismans placed in gloves or sewn into the finger itself.

Some healers swear that pounding or pulling on the heartfinger can sometimes restart a stopped heart. Others claim that removing the heartfinger is the quickest, surest way to get over an unhappy love affair.

## HEAVEN

On many SPHERES, the gods and goddesses are collectively referred to as "heaven."

*See also* "Deities" and "Dragons."

**HOLY FOOL.** *See* "Satyr Day."

**HORDE, THE.** *See* "Glorious Empire."

**HYDRA.** *See* "Unity Mages."

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# KARMA

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**K**arma refers to the natural laws of cause and effect. Every action taken accumulates karma, which is neither "good" nor "bad." As part of the soul, one's karma follows one from life to life through various incarnations. The *Wheel of Karma* refers to the entire cycle from death to the next incarnation in a new body, including time spent awaiting the new form.



Many claim that one's karma determines what form one's soul will inhabit in its next life. These same people believe that the purpose of REINCARNATION is to perfect and purify the soul.

See also "Dragons," Reincarnation," and "Soulseekers."

*Related Topics:* "Alurax," "Cats," "Godlings," "Names," "Order of the Silver Nail," "Pearl of Making," "Phoenixes," "Red Merchants," "Skin Scribes," "Undead," "Unity Mages," and "White Walkers."

**KINGMASTER.** See "Alurax," "Mirror of Shadows," and "Tempest Threshold."

could neither eat nor breathe because he also had no nostrils. One day, Hasty and Heedless opened an orifice in the shell of Chaos. They worked each day to open a new cavity. On the seventh day, their work was done. Chaos could see and hear and breath and taste, but then he died.

It took seven days to set the universe in order, to change Chaos into Cosmos. But then P'an Ku came from the egg and formed the world. With his hammer he carved the mountains, and with his chisel he formed the skies. He became one with the EARTH. His bones became the rocks, and his eyes became the stars.

## Tribal Worship

**K**uan-yin protects her children from natural calamities and disasters. Many tribal people give offerings to the goddess to insure protection from floods and storms. They often worship her before a battle so that her children will be inspired. Because she also brings good fortune and luck, prayers before hunts and other such events are common.

## Country Worship

**I**n many rural lands the people revere Kuan-yin as a fertility goddess. She insures a good harvest to her children and protects the flocks and herds of those who worship her. Protection from evil and hunger are gifts she grants to those who are faithful in remembering her. Offerings of the first calf of the spring or the first handful of grain are gracious gifts to She who Bestows Children.

Kuan-yin and her peers are known as "deities of P'an Ku." It was P'an Ku who broke out of the egg at the beginning of the world.

## City Worship

**I**n cities, where disease is more common than in the countryside, Kuan-yin's role as a healer is very important. At her temples, scholars study all manners of medicine. Kuan-yin's doctors treat the wealthy and the poor, accepting donations instead of charging fees. Some temples also sponsor large orphanages and provide homes for children who have lost their families. The children of the priestesses also live here. It is considered an honor to father a child of a priestess of Kuan-yin, though a priestess rarely discloses the lucky man's NAME.

An urban temple to Kuan-yin usually includes a carefully carved statue of the goddess. She is almost always portrayed in pure white, except in the wealthier cities, where her statue

# KUAN-YIN

GODDESS OF HEALING AND PROTECTION

## Stories and Teachings

**K**uan-yin is the mother of all people. The goddess found P'an Ku and admired his great beauty. She wandered over his mountains and fields for years, fawning over all the exquisite creatures inhabiting the earth. Yearning for her own children, she made a reverent offering and asked that she might bear children. While resting that day, her wish was granted. She became pregnant and gave birth to the first person. Hence, humanity was born of Kuan-yin.

The first thing was nothing. Vast emptiness was everything. Then, in the emptiness, the nothing became something, and that something was an egg. Ages passed, and two oceans formed, one to the north, called "Hasty," and one to the south, called "Heedless." Inside the egg was Chaos. Hasty and Heedless visited Chaos often. Chaos was always kind to them, so it was their wish to grant him a favor. Chaos, having no eyes, no ears, and no mouth, was blind, deaf, and mute. He



may be gold or silver. Often her figure is holding a child. The main statue is displayed prominently at the far end of the chamber from the entrance. She stands on a high pedestal, which ideally protrudes over some of the worshipers, symbolizing how she protects and shields her followers.

In the Amethyst Empire, Kuan-yin's role as the goddess of mercy has led to the practice of *sanctuary*. No one in her temple may be attacked or even arrested by rightful authorities. After the law defined "in the temple" to include "on the temple steps," the followers of Kuan-yin built broad steps that flow out a long way in all directions from the temple entrances.

See also "Deities."



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### Other Deities of P'an Ku

**CHANG TAO-LING:** God of the afterlife; watches over the dead and grants them peace.

**ER-LANG:** God of protection from evil spirits; drives out negative forces from the world and drives away demons of the heart, mind, and soul; guardian of humankind.

**FU-HSING:** God of happiness; rules contentment and tranquillity.

**GAO YAO:** God of judgment.

**GONG GONG:** God of the devils, who broke the world out of anger and jealousy long before the coming of humans.

**HENG-O:** Goddess of the moon; the essence of all that is female.

**HOU CHI:** God of the harvest.

**HSI WANG MU:** Goddess of love, beauty, earthly paradise, and mortal temptation.

**KWAN TI:** God of war and fortune-telling.

**MENG P'O:** Goddess of the underworld; brews the tea that ensures peaceful sleep for the dead.

**NU KWA:** Goddess of creation; fixed the world when Gong Gong shattered it.

**P'AN KU:** God of the mountains and the sky; formed the world with his hammer when he broke out of the egg at the beginning of the world.

**SHEN YI:** God of the sun and archery; the essence of all that is male.

**T'EN:** God of the sky; stretches across the sky and separates HEAVEN and earth.

**YU-DI:** Lord of heaven; rules the cosmos.

**YU-KWANG:** God of the sea.

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**LAME NEMESIS.** See "Night-Blooming Star Rose," Soul Leeches and Spell Eaters," and "Unity Mages."

**LANGUAGES.** See "Basahn" (Basahni), "Cleacuun," "Speakers" (Cleacuun), "Tongue," "Verbalists" (Cleacuun), and "Wind Monks (Shanji)."

**LEGION OF SHADOW.** See "Shadow Children."



it, vanishing forever from the physical world to exist as pure music. Some even say living songs are Fair Rejoicing's children or some sort of aspects of his self.

In any event, living-song concerts are undeniably powerful emotional experiences that cannot be described, only experienced. According to Star, the only danger of owning a living song is that it can escape—and escape they do, if their tune of return is not played on the instrument soon enough. Some songs have escaped after only an hour, while one, which was in the possession of Lord Wavecrest of the Floating City, sang for up to three hours before escaping.

## LIBRARY OF ALL WORLDS

The *Library of All Worlds* is a vast library in the city of EVERWAY. It hosts the CHAMBER PLATINUM, a scholarly organization dedicated to exploring the SPHERES.

See also "Everway."

**LIQUID KINGDOM.** See "Blue Merchants," "Merchant Queens," and "Red Merchants."

## LIVING SONGS

Little is known about the merchant called Star, and nobody knows where she goes to retrieve her living songs. It is conjectured, based on the supplies she requires for her yearly journey, that this journey must be both difficult and hazardous.

A *living song* is not a physical thing, though it can be physically contained. Star returns with the songs trapped in instruments appropriate to the songs' natures, violins and flutes, primarily. When a tune of release is played upon the instrument, the song emerges and performs.

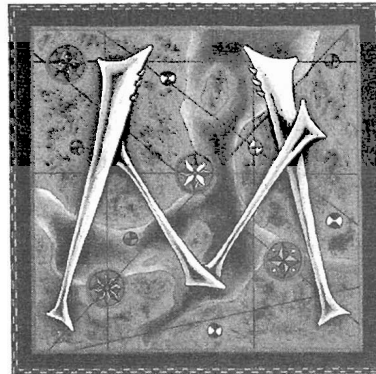
Being in the presence of a living song is different from hearing music performed by human hands: instead of listening to the melody, the observer becomes *part* of the melody. Instead of merely listening, the audience is absorbed into the tune. One master musician said that at his finest performances he came close to that sensation of being one with music—but did not quite achieve it. Perhaps the legendary Fair Rejoicing of the Hidden City achieved it. He produced a song so sublime it is said that he unwound his entire body, soul, and spirit into

Of course, there is a persistent tale about a noblewoman (no one knows quite who it was—it's always said to be "someone my cousin knew" or "a friend of a friend of my wife") who was so entranced by the beauty of her song that she did not return it to its captivity. The song did not flee, however, at least not



until the noblewoman had died of thirst, lost in the countryside where she'd isolated herself with her music. The song did not leave its captor until it had avenged itself upon her.

A different version of the story, however, relates that the noblewoman (again, never named) became so enamored of her song that she gave it its freedom. The song trebled in beauty as it realized the gift it had been given, and her eyes streamed with tears as the melody floated away. However, each year, so the story goes, the song returns on the anniversary of its release to give the noblewoman (of River's Edge? The Floating City? Eldermark?) her own private concert. And every year, it is said, the song is more beautiful.



The trade wars were ended, ironically enough, by the GLORIOUS EMPIRE's campaign against the Basahn. In their **enthusiasm**, the imperial army killed a great number of members of the Crane Family, assuming that they were Basahn—or that they might be. The result was that spherewalking merchants shunned the Glorious Empire. Between the Basahn and the Crane Family, trade from other SPHERES to the Glorious Empire ceased. Their combined reach was so great that there was not even a significant black market.

Having united to defend themselves against the Glorious Empire, the Basahn and the Crane Family discovered that they had much in common.

The leader of the Crane Family at that time was a woman named Staccato. It was she who decided to allow Basahn into the family. She was also to become the first *Merchant Queen*.

With the death of Emperor Lies With Lions, who had declared war on the Basahn, the merchants decided to attempt diplomacy. By a quirk of imperial law, the emperor could not make peace with mere merchants, only with other sovereigns. In order to reopen the channels of trade, the emperor formally recognized Staccato as the queen of her followers. The Crane Family began its evolution into what would be called the *Liquid Kingdom*, so called because it had no set center.

In many ways this new organizational structure did not change family operations. However, many merchants soon saw the advantages of having a noble title and began asking the queen to bestow titles to them. The queen quickly capitalized on this. Citizenship in the Liquid Kingdom was available for sale to anyone who could afford it and who had no conflicts of citizenship. Titles could be had in return for a large donation of valuables.

The higher a merchant rose in the Liquid Kingdom hierarchy, the more taxes he or she had to pay on goods; however, this increased rate was offset by the gain of powerful connections, the right to bring an armed entourage into many realms, and other considerations negotiated by the queen with various sovereigns, chiefs, and high priests and priestesses.

At its height, the Liquid Kingdom had a powerful police force, highly mobile standing armies, and a truly feared secret tax bureau that was empowered to confiscate all the goods of any citizen found to be slighting the queen on her cut.

*Related Topic:* "Harp of the Hidden City."

**LIZARD PYRAMIDS.** See "Pyramid Lizards."

**LOYAL DRAGON.** See "Alurax," "Dragons," "Phoenixes," and "Soulseekers."

**LOYALTY NECKLACE.** See "Glorious Empire."

**MANY MASKS.** See "Clothing" and "Soul Leeches and Spell Eaters."

## MERCHANT QUEENS, THE

Many, many years ago, two sisters became merchants. Their NAMES were Quill and Star Crane. They were very successful and passed on to their daughters a thriving collection of trade goods and merchant contacts. These daughters, and their daughters after them, continued to expand the family business until they were so wealthy and powerful that they formed the center of a merchant guild called the Crane Family.

As the Crane Family grew in size and power, it came into conflict with the BASAHN. The Basahn claimed that the Crane Family encouraged *kéfin Basahn*—Basahn haters. The family responded by accusing the Basahn of infiltrating their guild and sabotaging their caravans, even of stealing their goods and murdering family members. The resulting terrorism, raiding, and price gouging was known as the *Merchant War*.



However, the Liquid Kingdom is currently in decline, following an event known as the *Schism*. The reigning queen before the Schism had twin daughters, named Blood and Breath. Upon her death, each daughter claimed the throne, and as a result a second Merchant War broke out. As the situation became more and more muddled, other claimants to the throne presented themselves, until at one point there were no fewer than six women claiming to be the true Merchant Queen. However, in the end, only Breath and Blood prevailed, each in control of one part of the diminished but still powerful Liquid Kingdom, which was now divided between the BLUE MERCHANTS and the RED MERCHANTS.

See also "Blue Merchants" and "Red Merchants."

## MIRROR OF SHADOWS, THE

*Research Notes by Bookish One,  
a Historian at the Twisted Library*

I have made the *Mirror of Shadows* my special area of study. There is something darkly fascinating about an object regarded with such a mixture of fear and desire.

I'll begin with the specifics. The mirror, as commonly described, is a saw-edged disk a little larger than the palm of a large hand. It is made of a dark, hard substance—no one knows what, exactly—and is much heavier even than lead or gold. The edges of the disk are saw-toothed and razor sharp, which led one of its owners, a general named Empty Heart, to craft a setting for it.

Every significant tale about the mirror emphasizes its destructive capabilities. Apparently all it takes to operate the device at a basic level is ill will—one simply looks at the object or person one wishes to destroy in the mirror and it . . . it vanishes. Never heard from again. Can't be retrieved.

Truly terrifying is the report of Apex Soulsinger, who saw her sister . . . removed . . . by the power of the mirror. Being a mage of the SOULSEEKER school, Apex immediately left her body, setting off on a quest to find out where her sister's soul had found flesh. It was never found. Up until her celebrated death, Apex believed that her sister had never been reincarnated. She hoped that HEAVEN had retrieved her from the wheel of life and death, but after she had seen more of the mirror's might, she eventually came to believe that the device had destroyed not only her sister's body but also her immortal soul.

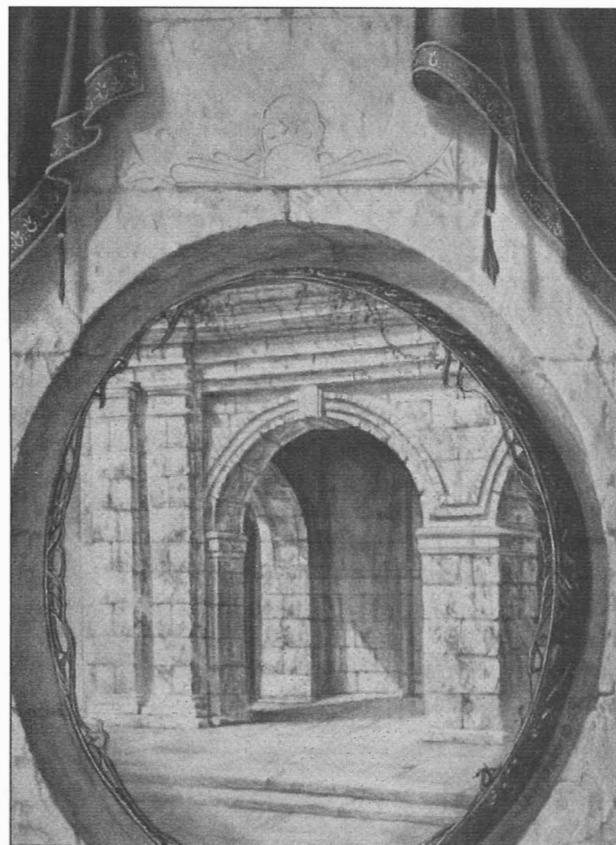
This is the true power of the mirror: it does not merely reshape the world—it undoes it.

The mirror appears to be one of a triad of objects, the other two being the EDGE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS and the PEARL OF MAKING. Together, the mirror, sword, and jewel form a range: the pearl embodies the power of creation, the mirror the power of utter destruction, and the edge the dividing-line between.

A colleague at the EVERWAY library believes that sacrificing the pearl could destroy the mirror, that the two would somehow cancel each other out. I fear that this is not so; no act of might, magic, or nature has ever harmed the mirror. If the reports of its use so many years ago in the Kingmaster War are accurate, it even survived the destruction of an entire SPHERE.

The other significant theme running through most tales of the mirror is that of price. The mirror exacts a terrible toll upon its bearer. The feeling of being drained is reported by most who have used it. In fact, Apex declared that when she saw the mirror in use, she could sense it devouring the soul of its user.

If such reports are true, they certainly account for the tragedy of the Kingmaster. What else can explain his actions?



## The Legend of the Kingmaster and the War of Great Endings

Once upon a time, there was a mighty sorcerer who had set himself as king of a small country in the hills. An ambitious man, he looked with hunger in his heart at the lush plains of the Daring Kingdom to the west, but he did not have the soldiers to conquer it.

Knowing that the rulers to the north and south were sorcerers as well, the Kingmaster enlisted their aid. And there was war. But the three sorcerers had underestimated the Daring Kingdom, for it was guarded by the Legion of Shadow. Furthermore, in allying with the Demon Queen to the north and the Dragon Mage to the south, the Kingmaster made their foes his own, and their enemies became friends to each other. The elves of Ravenwood entered into the fray, as did the Sword-Sworn Brothers Sixty, mighty warriors one and all.

The three sorcerers were powerful, but they had neither the numbers of the elves, nor the fierceness of the Sixty Brothers, nor the strategy of the Shadow Legions.

Winter came, and the nations settled in for a great border siege. The Kingmaster, impatient with the impasse, put on his throne a second self and went off to search the SPHERES for a means to destroy his enemies. No one knows where he went, or what he did there, or how he got what he came upon, but he returned with a small, black, mirrored disk that would make anything he looked upon with it disappear.

At first the Kingmaster was uneasy with the disk and with the power it held. He knew in his heart that the mirror was evil and that nothing good could come of it. But the Dragon Mage spoke to him and said, "Who are these others who would rule? They have not studied. They have no understanding of mysteries, and they do not see into the heart of force. We sorcerers alone are fit to rule!" Then the Demon Queen spoke to him and said, "You have struck the hornet's nest and cannot make peace with the insects now. If you draw back, they will come forward until they have devoured your kingdom and scattered your dust to the winds. Your only hope lies neither in their appeasement nor in their tolerance of you, but in their destruction." The Kingmaster listened and was swayed, and with the art of the mages in league with him he mastered the deeper powers of the mirror and was able to scry with death through it and kill from a distance.

At this time the Dragon Mage became envious of the mirror and tried to steal it away from the Kingmaster. When the Kingmaster discovered him in this attempt, he raised the disk to destroy his ally, but the Dragon Mage stopped his eyes with a spell and fled while he was blind.

With the flight of the Dragon Mage, the Kingmaster was surrounded by the Shadow Legion and half of the Sword-Sworn Brothers, while the rest of the Brothers led the elves of Ravenwood against the Demon Queen. "Use the mirror," cried the Demon Queen. "Use it, or all is lost!"

Like a great shadow, oblivion fell over the battlefield, and all who saw it shook with fear. The Brothers Sixty were undone to a man, and the Legion of Shadow fled in terror. The army of the Demon Queen swept forth, setting fire to Ravenwood and putting the elves to the sword, down to the last child.

The Demon Queen turned to her ally, swollen with victory, and was destroyed by the disk. The armies returned home in triumph and were swallowed by the disk. Their wagons of loot and mules laden with treasure—all were destroyed. For the use of the mirror had made the Kingmaster empty of heart, and all he loved was the destruction wrought by the mirror. Those who could, fled. Those who did not flee, died.

Once upon a time, there was a GATE from the Flying Sea to the lands of the Daring, and once there was a gate to Ravenwood from the city of Stone Shade. Now those gates are empty and go nowhere.

Now those lands are gone.

This is not a bottle  
I drink power out of.  
When I raise it to  
my lips, I know it is  
drinking me too."  
—Empty Heart

## MIRROR OF SOULS, THE

Setting out from EVERWAY, we took two carts of food and supplies, along with twenty horses. We had eight casks of water and one of ale, a chest of gold and one of silver, two teamsters, five guards, and one Blood Mountain hunting cat. We hoped it would be enough, for the last four SPHERES to the mirror were unknown to us."

—The Chronicle of Storm Sister

What Storm Sister sought—and apparently found—was the legendary Mirror of Souls. None can be completely sure where the mirror is, but its location is definitely fixed. The description of the mirror in legends could apply equally well to a still pond or a smooth sheet of volcanic glass.

Storm Sister's quest for the mirror took her "eight gates from Everway," and since she had been through the first four spheres before, she did not consider them worthy of

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comment. The last four lands she traveled through were all, in one way or another, harsh and inhospitable. In the first, a realm of dense forests, she describes a group of babbling cannibals who did not speak THE TONGUE. Her account of the land after the forest is lost, but after that she came to a land of burning sulfur and flaming rock. She said she saw not one thing living there, nor did she find any potable water at all. Though nothing alive was found in that realm, two of her followers mysteriously vanished there, and no trace of them was found. The final realm she traveled through was a mountainous one, and it was in a chamber of one of the peaks there that she at last found the mirror.



MOONCHILDREN. See "Night-Blooming Star Rose."

## NAMES

Naming is considered an act of power, either magical or ceremonial, in most cultures. The VERBALIST sorcerers believe that the DEITIES created humanity and the whole of the universe with the spoken word. Even if this is not so, the deities certainly created THE TONGUE, and therefore its use is sacred. Many parents select names for their children that will attract the favor of HEAVEN to them or that will protect them from inimical ELEMENTS of the universe. This is why names such as "Good Fortune," "Pure," "Ever Bless," and "Reverent" are common to cultures that may be different from each other in other respects.

Most cultures have specific naming patterns. These naming patterns serve several purposes, the primary one being unification of the people. Naming patterns distinguish locals from strangers. Some believe that these patterns even create magical bonds, unifying the spirits of the people in common purpose.

One example of a naming pattern is the one used by the Sun-Marked people. In the Sun-Marked tribe, every person's name consists of an element or force of nature followed by a part of the body. Some Sun-Marked names include "Thunder Hand," "Lightning Heart," "Bear Arm," "Mountain Eyes," and "Winter Mouth." The Sun-Marked believe that this way of naming sets up a correspondence between the child and the virtues of nature, giving that child blessings that will help the tribe. Thus Thunder Hand and Bear Arm might have gifts as warriors, while Mountain Eyes might see with the enduring vision of wisdom. Winter Mouth would probably be blessed with soothing speech, while Lightning Heart would have great courage.

Among the Chain Breaker nomads, the naming of a child is always the responsibility of the mother, who is expected to have a vision known as a *foresight* during labor. Because the mother is, at the moment of birth, a channel through which KARMA flows, she alone can see the child's life destiny. Foresights are often facilitated with the Chain Breaker's ceremonial *rainbow root*, a medicinal plant believed to connect the consumer with karmic flow. The names of Chain Breakers tend to be somewhat long and enigmatic: "Whirlwind the Farseeker," "Joy of Life's Pain," "New Moon at Midnight," and "Unhomed Born to Greatness" are some examples.

In its smooth, flawless surface I saw myself, but in my face were a thousand other faces—men and children and beasts as well as women. Looking deeper, I saw not only who I was, but who I had been, and suddenly the nightmares that I had thought were madness became clear. My last life had been as a wolf, and I had fallen upon a hunter and savaged him. Now I remembered the ill-starred day of my brother's death. I remembered at last the wolf that fell upon him and that I had been too afraid to save him. My dreams of tearing at him, of devouring his flesh, they were false. My dreams had confused my last life with this one, mixing my sorrow with my guilt. . . . The mirror showed me that my debt was one of cowardice—a heavy burden, but light compared to the burden of fratricide."

—*The Chronicle of Storm Sister*

Many seek the mirror, believing that it alone can reveal the total truth of the soul. Those who have sought it include those who are tormented by unhappy dreams; those who suffer from madness, curses, or enchantments; and those who have lost their memory. Despite the many reasons for which people quest for the mirror, no reliable path to the mirror has been charted. If one starts from the city of Everway, the number of worlds that can be reached through eight GATES is simply staggering; looking for the mirror in all those many realms is like seeking one white strand in a blond head of hair. The promise of self-knowledge is so great, however, that many pilgrims and explorers still make the attempt.

MONKS OF THE WIND. See "Wind Monks."



In some societies, individuals choose their own names. While many cultures that follow this tradition lack distinct patterns, others have naming traditions. Those born into the Screaming Sky warrior class of the Dune people are not given names until their first battles. The Screaming Sky believe that every battle is a message from heaven about the course of a warrior's life, and no battle is more crucial than the first. A Screaming Sky name is always an animal name followed by an action word. Every Dune person has an animal spirit as a guardian; those of the Screaming Sky believe that their spirit leader comes to them in battle, helping them survive. Thus, the Screaming Sky have names such as "Serpent Strike," "Hawk Fall," and "Scorpion Sting."

## NEELED DEMONS

*Needledemons* are far and away the most skilled surgeons among the SPHERES. Their skilled fingers move so swiftly at their work that they appear only as a green blur. Their touch is so gentle that they have been known to sneak into villages and amputate legs and arms from sleeping victims, who suspect nothing until they awaken—maimed.

Needledemons' skills do not end with the removal of limbs, however; they can also reattach them so firmly that there is no loss of use. Indeed, there is not even much loss of skill; a needledemon who has stolen the arm of a mighty warrior and attached it to his or her own shoulder is a fearsome opponent indeed.

There are many tales of those who have dealt with needledemons, offering perhaps a hand and an eye in exchange for the eye of a shaman who was able to see spirits. A needledemon who is trusted can earn a fortune, purchasing sound limbs from the healthy but poor and selling them at a profit to the wealthy and infirm.

Sadly, needledemons' capacity for theft has made most people afraid of them. It may be that their fear is warranted; these creatures do not deny their demonic nature. On the other hand, it may well be that the actions of a few unscrupulous surgeons are reflecting badly on the whole race.

Physically, needledemons are unimposing (unless they have added one or more limbs to themselves). They stand a head or so taller than most humans and tend to be lean and lanky. Their skin is a deep,

almost waxy green. Their hairless faces are broad, with wide mouths and enormous, pointy ears. They seem to be at least as intelligent as most humans but are curiously single-minded. They are able to learn such things as human social skills and can manage themselves in most cultures if given the opportunity, but they do not seem to have any inherent interest in doing such things. Manners, customs, and laws are means to an end for needledemons. They are polite or fierce to humans as required, but no human has ever befriended one.

Their single goal seems to be the practice of their unique art. Some needledemons use their skills to enhance themselves, often beyond all recognition. Others, however, engage in trade, and barter their skills apparently without wishing to improve their own physiques. Even when they amass great wealth, these creatures do not spend it on comforts; the greatest luxury these surgeons seem to want is improved tools.

Needledemons have been found universally to be solitary creatures. The question of when, and even *if*, they procreate remains unanswered; the demons themselves say nothing about it. Indeed, they will say nothing about their dealings with one another, the source of their skills, their own nature, or anything else about their history or society (if such a thing exists). Even under the influence of magic and torture, these demons remain silent, which has led to the conjecture that they themselves do not know or that there is, indeed, nothing to know. The riddle of the needledemons is a deep one, but it is apparently completely closed.

Howling Heart, a mage who has studied needledemons, advances the theory that they were a race created by human magic rather than divine power. As such, they are flawed and limited creations, and while needledemons could (and obviously do) have intelligence and great skill, they may not necessarily have souls or mortality. This could account for the single-minded fashion in which they pursue their craft, even to the point of deliberately associating themselves with armies who will use them for their own purposes. If needledemons were created for a long-ago confrontation, perhaps one which only they survived, their kind might well live on without a concrete sense of direction. This in turn could lead to the actions they take today.

If Howling Heart's theory is true, needledemons may not reproduce; once those currently alive have died, there will be no more. This possibility is greeted with great cheer by their victims but with some remorse by those who have benefited from their powers.

RED MERCHANTS deal with needledemons most frequently

The tools used by needledemons in their surgery have a bizarre and impractical appearance that belies their usefulness. Strangely curved saws, odd compressors and stitchery tools, and curved, flanged knives are all used in their lightning-quick operations. Needledemons are very particular about their tools. Even when they themselves don't make them, they supervise every stage of construction.

because their UNDEAD nature offers them some protection against the needledemons' habits; a limb stolen from a Red Merchant begins to decompose immediately. Thus, they are able to associate with the demons on something like equal terms. Red Merchants who are associated with needledemons often turn incredible profits by brokering limbs for the demons and arranging meetings with clients and donors. Such arrangements may cut into the demons' profits, but in lands where the Red Merchants are trusted, the exchange is well worth it.

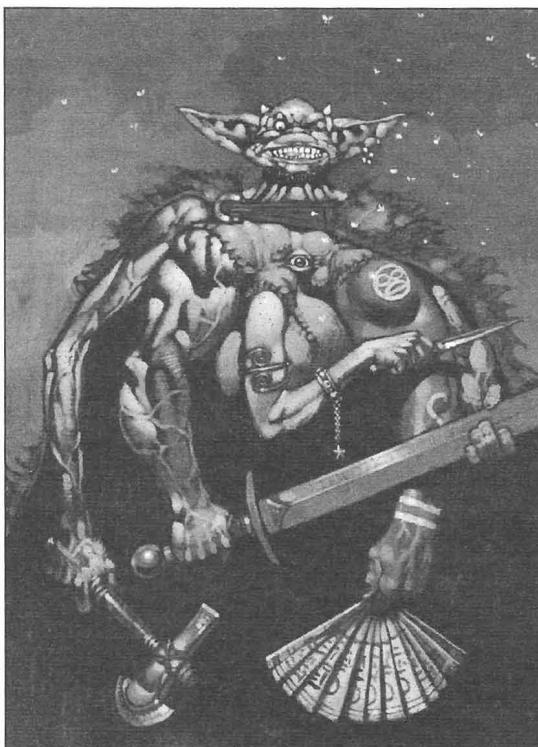
It is said that the needledemons are so well accepted by the Red Merchants that the Red MERCHANT QUEEN's personal bard is a needledemon who has used magic to acquire the limbs (and thus the skills) of a number of talented musicians. Guided by a single thought, this one musician can play the violin, the harp, and the flute together as superbly as any trio in the spheres. However, it should be noted that an interest in music is very uncommon among needledemons, which are rare creatures in the first place.

The BASAHN, on the other hand, maintain a deeply adversarial relationship with needledemons. The explanation for their hatred is that during the GLORIOUS EMPIRE's pogrom against the Basahn, needledemons sewed Basahn ears onto agents of the empire, which allowed them to understand Basahni. The demons have never been forgiven for this transgression, and the Basahn consider it justice to enslave such creatures when they can be found and captured. Needledemons enslaved by the Basahn are usually kept under strict guard and compelled to operate at the command of the Basahn, constantly reminded that their captors will execute them on the slightest provocation.

NEVERSTRAY. See "Bacchus's Roots."

*Mystic sisterhoods based upon the powers of the night-blooming star rose have been found on several distant spheres. Some think that there is one organization, whose members travel from sphere to sphere, bringing the rose with them. But others suspect that the rose itself influences women to form sisterhoods.*

Needledemons illustration by Dermot Power  
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## NIGHT- BLOOMING STAR ROSE

Few have seen the mysterious blossom called the *night-blooming star rose*. In fact, some skeptics doubt that it even exists. What is certain, however, is that many deeds have been done in its name.

At least five known SPHERES host organizations that claim to have gotten mystic gifts from the night-blooming star rose. Given the secrecy with which these groups operate, there may well be many more.

These *star-rose cults*, as they are called, often admit only women. Some permit men to join but only at the lowest levels, where they serve as lackeys and foot soldiers of the women at the higher levels.

If there is some genius or spirit that works through the night-blooming star rose, its goals are unclear. Some who claim to follow the path seem to love virtue and hate injustice, while others use their power to oppress and subdue those around them. Some lands revere rose cultists as possessors of secret wisdom and treat them with the same respect they would give other priests or priestesses. Yet in other realms organizations centered on the same bloom are hunted and reviled—indeed, the actions of these cults seem to be little more than banditry. In some cases, atrocities of the most gruesome sort have been proudly claimed by star-rose cults.

Joining such a sect can be difficult; even if one can find a current member, the prospective sister must be willing to leave behind all possessions and earthly ties to join the cult. If she does so, she may still be required to endure trials of body and spirit to prove her worth and dedication to the night-blooming rose.

Many believe that all ROSES are symbols of the DEITIES and that the night-blooming star rose must therefore be an especially powerful totem for connecting with a goddess or god. Others say that the night rose is nothing but a flower, and its various followers are simply mages who wish to give their power a godly mask. Regardless of the source of the followers' power, it has been proven time and again to be quite real.



*From a Dossier Prepared by Brimming Cup,  
Ninety-Second Minister of Intelligence  
for the Glorious Empire*

Most Exalted Favor of the Deities, Shining Beacon of Virtue, Invincible Knight of Justice, it is with great relief that I can report to you that the threat posed by the Sisters of Night is far smaller than we supposed.

I am able to bring you this glad news because we have successfully penetrated the Sisters' organization. Even as we speak, one of our loyal agents is learning the innermost secrets of this heretic sect.

As you know, the Sisters hold the blasphemous beliefs that your imperial reign is not directly sanctioned by HEAVEN and that your august person is in fact guilty of blasphemy by claiming the divine heritage, which is (in actual fact) your own.

The apparent success of the Sisters (to wit, the robbery of the Southwest Treasury, the murder of Sectional Minister Falcon Feather, and the assassination of Regional Overseer Mercy Sweet) has been due to little more than luck. It is said that fortune favors drunkards and fools; perhaps it is time to add these women to that "august" company.

Despite the dramatic notions the public has about these crimes, they were accomplished with little more than low guile and treachery.

For example, consider the robbery of the Southwest Treasury. It appeared that a group of highly trained robbers somehow sneaked past the garrison, entered the Fortress of Finance, and there overcame all the guards before even one of them could sound an alarm. In truth all that was required was one woman in the fortress kitchen. By mixing some drug with the guards' drinks, she rendered them unconscious. It was then a simple matter for this scullion to plant the black crescent dagger of the Sisterhood in their chests, making it appear as though they had died by violence, not by cowardly craft. The means by which the money was removed is still under investigation, but surely an equally reasonable explanation awaits us there.

The murder of Falcon Feather is less clear; our agent has been able to learn little about it. However, let us examine the facts. Falcon Feather was found murdered in a cruel fashion, with the black crescent dagger of the Sisterhood stuck in his heart. His bodyguard is nowhere to be found, though all his belongings remain in his chamber. The conclusion widely accepted is that the Sisterhood sent one of their "moonchildren" to kill a veteran bodyguard (and make the body vanish utterly!) and murder Falcon Feather—all without a single body in his household awakening or suspecting.

Is not this tale outlandish? Is it not more reasonable to suspect that the bodyguard was overcome not by some night-spawned creature of evil but by the more mundane charms of a comely maiden? Smitten with love, the bodyguard might have been persuaded to treacherously slay his master and flee in the night, hardly an impossible feat for one so trusted and capable. As for the question of why a fleeing bodyguard would leave valuables behind, do not forget the treasury robbery: the Sisterhood could easily offer him great wealth.

The final example of the Sisterhood's "power" is their alleged "assassination" of Mercy Sweet. As you surely recall, his death was most dramatically announced a month beforehand. A rose of great beauty was sent to him along with a prediction of his demise. When he pricked his finger upon the rose, it turned black and withered instantly. Finally, on the date named, though he was surrounded by guards, magicians, and healers, he died of no apparent cause.

This would appear to be sorcery of the highest rank, but in fact it is mere chicanery. My hypothesis is that the Sisters have a fortune-teller among their ranks who was lucky enough to foresee the overseer's entirely *natural* expiration. Crafting a rose that turns black and dies is a feat many naive apprentice sorcerers can manage. Besides, the rose story is largely unsubstantiated and could be a complete fabrication by these women.

In short, I believe that these misguided and treacherous wenches are merely throwing shadows, creating the appearance of vast size and power from a threadbare and meager bag of tricks. There are no "moonchildren," no "deathbonds," and no "night-blooming star roses."

*From a Dossier Prepared by Shining Star,  
Ninety-Third Minister of Intelligence  
for the Glorious Empire*

Most Benevolent Lord, for Whom the Birds Sing and the Blossoms Open, it is with a heavy heart that I report the demise of my predecessor, Brimming Cup. Though I am reluctant to speak ill of the dead, especially of a man as capable and wise as my former master, to do my duty to you I must do so. With sad visage I report that Brimming Cup underestimated the Sisters of Night, as his death at their hands surely shows.

May a thousand virtuous curses rain upon the head of Timid Mouse, the two-faced traitor upon whom we relied in that nest of vipers! I suspect that it was by her hand that Brimming Cup perished. While I must admit the possibility that she was a Sister of Night even before she was recruited by the Ministry of

*Members of the Sisterhood of the Silver Star, a so-called night-rose cult, claim that both Lame Nemesis and Edgebearer were moonchildren.*



Intelligence, I find it much more likely that she was subverted after being sent to infiltrate them. A great price is upon her head, and I have every confidence that our agents shall quickly bring her to justice.

Given the Sisterhood's ability to penetrate even the Ministry of Intelligence, I have reevaluated all the stories of their powers. These stories, which Brimming Cup dismissed as myth, must be considered as possible truth. While we had previously assumed that the Sisters were throwing shadows to make themselves appear greater, it may be that they were actually concealing their might.

The source of their power is the night-blooming rose. Our contact in the LIBRARY OF ALL WORLDS has spoken with a druid who has confirmed the existence and appearance of this flower. It is a ROSE of unusual size that blooms only on nights of the full moon. Its petals are said to be a pure, velvety black that is broken up by luminous pinpricks of vivid light. The blossom thus appears to be a piece of midnight sky in the shape of a flower. Where the Sisterhood is concealing their wicked rose garden is, unfortunately, a mystery to us.

The organization seems to consist mainly of younger sisters; out of the line of inheritance, the traditional role of younger sisters in our empire is to stay home and tend the children and elderly. Unsatisfied with this lot in life, they seek not only to make some fortune of their own but indeed to unseat you, the Son of Heaven!

From the night rose, they receive unholy powers with which to pursue their wretched goals. The gifts of the rose are three in number.

The first gift is the scent of the blossom. A woman anointed with this aroma gains the power to confound the minds of those around her. The exact form of this enchantment is unclear, but it seems that those under her spell listen to her words without question, trust her, and obey her. Some evidence indicates that a woman skilled in using this power can even deceive the memory or senses. It appears that this gift is the first given to initiates into the Sisterhood.

The second gift is given to women who are older. These women are required to leave the bosom of their family and reside permanently with the Sisterhood. Upon a night of the full moon, they are taken with the child of the blossom—by what loathsome means I know not. When these children are delivered (and these "moonchildren" are without fail female), they are said to be possessed of unnatural gifts, though

they are human in shape. It is said that while the power of invisibility may be given to one, the strength of a dozen warriors may be given to another. One such moonchild might have the power to travel between shadows, while yet another might have the ability to change her shape. The only signature of these moonchildren is that by night their black eyes contain within them bright stars.

The third gift of the rose is given only to the aged and infirm, and this is the legendary *deathbond*. The Sisters of Night have been known to refer to this as the "Gift of the Thorn." The crone with this gift pierces her flesh with a thorn and then sends the rose, now poisoned with her blood, to the one she wishes to slay. Upon receiving the rose, the victim is pierced by the same thorn, and the mingling of the blood causes the lives of the pair to become irrevocably entwined. The death of one means the sure death of another. Apparently it was by this means that Overseer Mercy Sweet was slain.

While this last power appears terrible, the Sisters' sparing use of it leads me to think that it is rare for one of them to be willing to die for the cause.

If I may be permitted a moment of conjecture, Masterful Lord, let me say this: this reluctance shows the Sisters' weakness. Though they are powerful in magic, their only goal is a narrow and selfish one. Someone who seeks only personal betterment would be a fool to die for it. We, on the other hand, fight for the cause of virtue, peace, and our holy duty to you. This higher cause makes the taste of death sweet on the tongue, where it is bitter to the Sisters of Night.

Their lack of vision will prove the undoing of this Sisterhood; for if I do nothing else in my life, I swear to their utter destruction.

See also "Roses."

In the *Saga of Oarbreaker Warmother*, Oarbreaker's wise woman is described as following "the path of the dark blossom." This wise woman could calm wild seas by strewing blood and rose petals on the water. Later, however, Oarbreaker became suspicious of her and stabbed her to death with an icicle.





# ODIN

THE ALL-FATHER

## Stories and Teachings

**O**din is worshiped in many realms as the All-Father. He sometimes travels disguised as a mortal, sharing wisdom with his people. Wisdom brings forth purity of heart, honor, and valor. It is said that "the mind knows only what lies near the heart." If the heart is pure, the mind is pure also. Conversely, if the mind is filled with wisdom, the heart has the means to choose the path of valor.

Odin is also known as Ygg, the god of war. His Valkyries (divine warrior maidens) watch over battles and select valiant fallen warriors to come to Asgard, the home of the Aesir deities. Here they live in the Hall of the Fallen, waiting until the end of time, when they will face the forces of evil in final conflict.

Odin is also the master of the runes, whose magic secrets he learned by sacrificing himself on Yggdrasil, the world tree.

## Tribal Worship

**M**any tribal people worship Odin as the creator of humanity and the father of the mortal world. Among these people, strength in battle is held in high esteem, and warriors who die in battle attain the highest honor.

## Country Worship

**F**arming and herding people emphasize Odin's fatherly nature. Nurturing the land and the flocks are sacred to the followers of Odin. He is the All-Father, father of human and beast, creator of the One Tree, and protector of the world. Tending the land and caring for its inhabitants are of the utmost importance.

## City Worship

**C**ity people often worship Odin as the god of wisdom and learning. He stands for the advancement of humankind through the expansion of the mind. Knowledge is more important and more respected than anything. It is said that Odin once asked the Norns if he could drink from the Well of Knowledge. They told him he must put out one of his eyes as a price for the drink. Odin, seeing that knowledge holds more importance than physical abilities, immediately put out his own eye. Worshipers of Odin also find knowledge to be far superior to anything else. Libraries and



universities are often built in his name.

The great city of Ashford was built around the university to Odin. Worship services are held daily in the courtyard. Only those who are devoted to Odin are admitted for study. It is rumored that a one-eyed high priest of Odin lives in the library, though no outsider has ever seen him.

## Other Aesir Deities

**BALDER:** God of charm and affection; blessed with great beauty and grace; killed by a trick of Loki's.

**FREYA:** Goddess of love and beauty.

**FREYR:** God of foliage and blossom; tends the fruits of the EARTH.

**FRIGGA:** Goddess of motherhood and protection; wife of Odin and mother of Balder.

**LOKI:** God of strife and FIRE; giant to whom Odin has sworn brotherhood.

**SLEIPNIR:** Renowned eight-legged steed of Odin; the swiftest and wisest of all horses.

**THE NORN:** Guardians of the Well of Knowledge, where the DEITIES pass judgment on humans; they are Skuld (the future), Urda (the past), and Verdandi (the present).

**THOR:** God of thunder, giant-killer; wields the red-hot hammer Mjölhnir.

**TYR:** God of war; lost a hand to the giant wolf Fenris (one of Loki's children).

**YGGDRASIL:** The ash tree that is the axis of the universe.

See also "Deities."

"Aesir" is pronounced "Ay-sir."

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## OGUN GOD OF IRON

### *Stories and Teachings*

When the world was not, there was only darkness, darkness and Olorun, the distant god. Olorun sent Olodumare to create the world. Olodumare sent his children, Obatala and Odudua, down to the world. He gave them a sack, a hen, and a chameleon. Odudua poured out the sack into the WATER that covered the world. That is how land was created. The chameleon walked out onto the land. That is how Odudua knew it was solid. The hen also walked onto the land and began to peck and scratch. That is how the heap of EARTH was spread into the lands of the world.

Ogun blesses the ironworkers and teaches them their craft. In some lands, the secrets of smithing iron are closely guarded. Because iron is used in many things, Ogun is present in many places. Woodcarvers and blacksmiths alike worship him.

Ogun is also a god of war. The iron and steel weapons of the warrior are his gifts.

### *Tribal Worship*

Tribal societies that follow Olorun's ways maintain shrines to Ogun and make offerings to him before even felling a tree. Not all tribal people know the secrets of iron. Ogun's help can make a tribe very powerful.

Ogun and his peers are known as the "deities of Olorun" because Olorun is the supreme deity of the pantheon.

### *Country Worship*

In lands where the children of Olorun are worshiped, farmers generally worship Odudua or Orishako. Followers of Ogun are mostly blacksmiths, those who make the iron tools for farming.

### *City Worship*

Because of the abundance of iron and other metals in most urban cultures, shrines to Ogun are quite common in many cities. In some realms, Ogun's worship takes a more philosophical bent. Here his smithing secrets and weapons are seen as symbols of all skills and tools. He is worshiped as the god of success, not just in battle but in all endeavors.

The artificer concept also endures in the wondrous altars built in Ogun's houses of worship. Ornate metal work is

embellished with delicately carved wooden figures symbolizing the many faces of Ogun. In the shrine of Giltcity, worshipers have carved life-sized figurines of all of the deities of Olorun and placed one in the windows that encircle the entire house of Ogun. The famous altar at the center stretch taller than an old acacia tree from floor to ceiling and is covered with two hundred and fifty gilded miniatures representing Ogun's many faces.

### *Other Deities of Olorun*

**ESHU:** Messenger of the DEITIES; causes trouble for those who neglect the deities.

**IFA:** God of divination; mediates between the deities and people; reveals the wishes of Olorun.

**OBATALA:** God of peace, harmony, and purity; created the sun; son of Olodumare.

**ODUDUA:** Goddess of the earth, who created the earth by pouring sand and soil (gifts from her father, Olodumare) into the water that covered the world; wife of Orishako.

**OLODUMARE:** God of the sky; the central creative force, who sent his children (Obatala and Odudua) down from HEAVEN to create the world.

**OLORUN:** Supreme god; far too remote from people to be worshiped directly.

**ORISHAKO:** God of agriculture; husband of Odudua.

**ORUNMILA:** God of destiny and compassion.

**OSHUN:** Goddess of love, sexuality, beauty, and diplomacy.

**OYA:** Goddess of wind, FIRE, and the thunderbolt; guardian of the gates of death.

**SHANGO:** God of thunder; a great warrior; slow to provoke but vengeful if angered.

**YAMAJA:** Goddess of rivers and lakes; patron deity of womanhood and maternity; daughter of Odudua.

See also "Deities."

**OLYMPIANS.** See "Gaia."

**ORACLES.** See "Oracles of the Writing Wind" and "Weeping Dragon Oracle."

## ORACLES OF THE WRITING WIND

Throughout the myriad SPHERES, there are many who consult hidden wisdom and who are known as *oracles*. However, the *oracles of the writing wind* (also called *wind readers*) are different; while most spirits that inspire oracles are tied to a specific area and sought out by devoted followers, it seems the spirit who writes on the wind chooses those who are to receive its knowledge—often, it would seem, whether those oracles will it or not.

All wind readers describe a similar awakening to the spirit. Like a sudden madness, it descends upon them. They describe fear and confusion but also exhilaration and even ecstasy. Some are taken by the fit in moments of calm contemplation, others in the middle of everyday activities; one is known to have been struck in battle. Furthermore, the people who the spirit chooses come from many different strata of society, from nobles and clergy to hermits and pig keepers.

All oracles of the writing wind describe a great sense of urgency and power associated with their visions. The term "writing wind" was coined by an oracle to describe the voiceless messages that were given her. She did not see visions as such; instead, she said that ideas simply passed into her mind as though she had read them in an invisible text or heard them in a silent voice.

Some oracles embrace their new role, while others try to reject it, but almost all end up doing the bidding of the spirit. Specific tasks seem to be required of the oracles, although these tasks often seem utterly senseless. One oracle was instructed to travel to a realm on a distant sphere, only to plant a single apple seed at a crossroads once she arrived there. Another was badgered by the spirit for weeks until he agreed to stand beneath the window of an inn at midnight, shrieking and banging a rock against an iron kettle.

Such nonsensical actions have given oracles of the writing wind a bad reputation in many lands. At times, however, wind readers have given advice to military officers that led to decisive victory and have helped courtiers gain advantage against their rivals. It should be noted, however, that there are several tales of oracles

Some Red Merchants claim that the Allure who was the patron of the Order of the Silver Nail is none other than Alurax, the dragon who wishes to keep humanity humble and easier to crush.

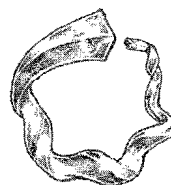
giving advice that if followed leads to the surest route to disaster.

In short, the oracles of the writing wind are a mystery. Unlike other oracles, they are rarely available to be consulted, but they may suddenly appear with strangely specific advice. The decision to take it or not is up to the hearer, but it certainly should not be ignored.

See also "Anvil of Everguard."

## ORDER OF THE SILVER NAIL, THE

The *Order of the Silver Nail* was founded in the eightieth year of the DRAGON, four days before the ascendance of Sagittarius, by a man called Final Strike. Initially, the order was a small cadre dedicated to the destruction of the wizard Evermore, a sorcerer who misused the PEARL OF MAKING. After Evermore's demise, however, the five founders chose to remain together and form a group devoted to the eradication of all undead. Known as *the Dedicated*, the members of the order operate in many lands today.



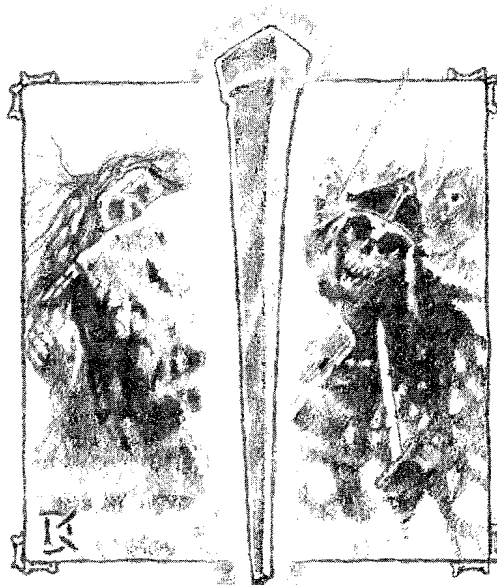
Though he had some skill with the sword, Final Strike was actually more a scholar than a warrior. He and his companions defeated Evermore not by greater power but by knowledge of his weakness. Final Strike's writings on the UNDEAD are considered authoritative.

Upon joining the order, each of the Dedicated is given a silver nail pendant and a ring made in the form of a twisted silver nail. The reasons for these gifts are best explained in the words of Final Strike himself.

### *A Lesson Taught by Final Strike*

Silver is the metal of *elemental water*, which governs the transport of souls from body to body. This is why the RAINBOW, the symbol of KARMA, is often seen near waterfalls.

Undeath is a violation of rebirth's natural cycle; the application of active, watery powers is ruinous to it. This is why many of the undead cannot cross



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running WATER: its energy is like a fierce FIRE to them, threatening to destroy them.

If running water is anathema to the undead, still and stagnant water can sometimes serve to support their animation. That is why undead are often found near swamps.

A silver nail through the heart breaks the spell of undeath. It is true that a wooden stake in the same place has a similar effect because the wood carries the energy of new life and rebirth, but in some cases wood only inhibits the power of undeath. If your stake is removed, the creature rises again. Silver not only inhibits the power, it disrupts it. The silver nail is your sword against the undead.

Your nail is also a means by which you can alert your fellow Dedicated. Should you be in danger and require our aid, touch the nail to your own fresh blood. The nail will become hot, as will the ring of any member of the order who is within riding distance. Your Dedicated ally is honor-bound to cease whatever he or she is doing and ride to your aid.

Next, consider the silver ring on your left hand. As the nail is your sword, this ring is your shield. I cannot guarantee that you will not die in the line of duty, much as I hope that you won't, but this ring will save your soul from becoming like those you hunt. The finger on which it rests is the SOULFINGER, and the silver ring is a talisman of KARMA. No sorcery can penetrate it to trap your spirit in your body and force you into unholy servitude. Never remove the ring under any circumstances.

Some claim that the order's silver does not come from a mine at all but from magical trees known as "silver willows."

It is through the ring that you shall know when others in the order need you: if the ring becomes warm or hot, it means one of the Dedicated nearby is in danger. As they would do for you, you must drop whatever you're doing to ride to their aid. The ring gets hotter as you near them, and you will feel it pulling you in the right direction. The ring cools only in the immediate presence of the endangered Dedicated—or with his or her death.

The nail and ring may seem to be frail weapons against the powers of darkness, but rest assured that we have other weapons in our arsenal; the greatest is the noble men and women who are with you in the order.

Final Strike, the founder of the order, was said to have found a great vein of silver, which he used only for the order and not for his own purposes. This secret mine has been a source of fascination for generations of fortune hunters, for if the mine is real, it is still producing silver hundreds of years after its discovery.

*From the Journal of Final Strike  
Eighth Day of Capricorn,  
Eightieth Year of the Dragon*

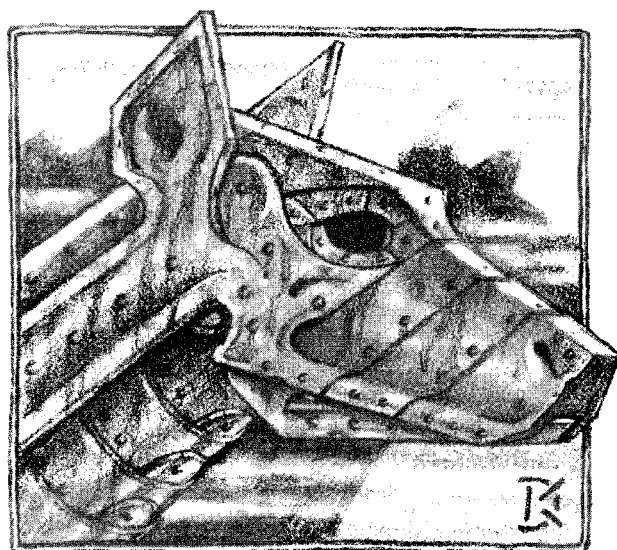
As Evermore's castle showed me, undeath is an affront to life and to HEAVEN. Today I proposed to the others that we remain in league, dedicating ourselves to the eradication of undeath. This suggestion was met with universal acceptance. I told them we must be prepared to face any horror, any threat, any challenge to remove these blights from the face of humanity. All were steadfast. Was ever anyone so fortunate in his allies?

*Eighteenth Day of Cancer,  
Eighty-First Year of the Hare*

Today my careful courtship has come to fruition: the sorceress Allure has joined with us in common cause. In addition to her great store of knowledge about the UNDEAD, she has given us several animals from her clockwork menagerie. To wit, five iron hounds, each as strong as a bull; an untiring iron horse, more swift than any fleshy steed; ten silver scorpions (although they are small, I have no doubt their metal will terrorize many undead); and two steel falcons with silvered beaks. Stronger than any living raptor, they can nonetheless fly swiftly.

And as if all these are not sufficient, Allure has promised us more when she can craft them.

I admit that I had my misgivings about these constructs, but Allure assures me that they are merely engines, magically animate. There is no real mind or spirit in them, and thus they are not in any sense undead, nor do they smack of an attempt to mock heaven.



# PEARL OF MAKING, THE

*A Story Told by Long Rider, the Last of the Red Wind People*

People of the Red Wind took to the hills, our warriors all fallen. There we hoped to hide from the Floaters to the Flame, but our enemies made to chase us down and slay us and scour every trace of us from the face of the land. At this time, when all seemed dark, our lost daughter returned.



There was a burst of light, like daybreak, although it was night. There stood Crimson Dream, and in her hand she bore a white ball like nothing the Red Wind People had ever seen. Its surface was marked with strange lines, and it had within it all the COLORS of the RAINBOW, though it was also white.

"Have no fear, my people," said Crimson Dream, "for with this ball we shall be saved." With her words, the ball made a great light once more, and there upon the dirt there was formed a tall hill, the likes of which none had ever seen. It was harder than rock and redder than blood and smoother than WATER. It had the shape of an arrowhead or a spear tip.

"Come inside, my people," said Crimson Dream, "and have no fear of the Floaters to the Flame."

The Red Wind People ran towards the tower, but the Floaters to the Flame made to block their way. Then came from the tower creatures like none any had seen before. They seemed part-animal and part-plant, part-stone and part-person, yet in truth they were like none of these. No part of any of them was like any part of any beast the Red Wind People knew or like any person, and not one creature was like any of the others. These creatures ran and crawled and flowed and flew at the command of Crimson Dream and drove away the Floaters to the Flame. They killed them in a hundred different ways, and those who lived fled screaming.

"Crimson Dream," asked the chief of the Red Wind People, "where did these creatures come from? How do you command them?"

"They have come from me, and I command them because I made them loyal."

"But . . . to make new life? Surely this cannot be!"

"With this ball, all things may be. All that is unmade can, through this, be made. The only limits are those of my mind's eye."

Crimson Dream laughed to see the look of fear on the face of her chief.

"Do not fear, my noble chieftain. I do not seek to mock the DEITIES or to take their place. These lives are not permanent. Within a day they will become as shadows and fog, and they will fade at the touch of the sun."

The chief was happy to hear this, but Crimson Dream had the intent to deceive him; for though those creatures did indeed fade away, those that she later made did not, and they live to this day, if they are not slain.

With the power of the white ball, Crimson Dream made her son chief and made in all the Red Wind People a great loyalty to him. Her line ruled until the Red Wind People were no more, but by that time the white ball had long since been taken from us.

*A Tale Recounted by Grating Sound, Talemaster of the Glorious Empire*

Hear now the tale of Evermore, a sorcerer whose power was great, but puny next to his pride. In his arrogance he has set a scar upon the face of humankind that shall last until our final days.

Surely it was the will of HEAVEN that Evermore was given the power to mark forever our race with his gall; surely this was done to keep us humble, to remind us that we are lower than dirt and worms next to the DEITIES, that we are only a bare speck more than nothing.

Unto Evermore was given that object which is known as the *True Pearl*, and may a thousand curses rain upon any who would take for themselves this artifact. It should be known as the "False Pearl," for it wears the cloak of good but is evil, and its evil is doubled for that deception.

The legends of the Sun Race of the Chill Plains indicate that they were created not by the deities but by a human using the Pearl of Making.

The great lie of the *True Pearl* is that it promises to make us like the gods and goddesses, by giving us the power to *Make*. This is not the flimsy, pretentious making of magicians and enchanters, who truly do little but change one thing to another, like someone pouring WATER from a jug to a cup; no, with the pearl, a person can *Make* from nothing, as the deities did when they crafted the universe. Yet humanity is imperfect and foolhardy and frail,



while the deities are endless in their virtue. Thus, while the Makings of heaven are all good, the Makings of humankind are warped by the clumsy hands of their creators.

This cannot be more perfectly demonstrated than by the tale of Evermore, for in his great arrogance he declared that he would not search for a woman, court her, and earn her love, which is the path of Venus and the natural course. No, he said that he would simply Make a woman for his wife, the way a tailor weaves a cloak or a smith makes a tool upon his forge.

From the first, the deities tried to warn Evermore of the error in his thinking, and he found that his path towards Making was hard. The pearl refused to make a human for him. That is how he learned its first limitation: the pearl can Make but cannot copy. That which has once been Made cannot be Made again.

Yet this did not deter Evermore; rather, he decided that he did not need a human woman, nor even a woman of flesh. In his pride, he decided that he would craft an amorphous creature, a shapeshifter, who could take the *shape* of a woman, or of *any* woman who pleased his fancy, or indeed of any creature he requested. This the pearl could do, and so it did; through its power he Made a living mass that was shapeless yet able to take any shape. Into this creature he instilled a great loyalty and devotion to him alone, as well as intellect and wit, kindness, grace, and passion. Yet he could not give the thing much sense since he was himself so great a fool.

The NAME he gave to this crime against the cosmos was "Elidriel." He declared that the name was his creation, thus marking her as his alone.

Upon the flesh of this unholy creature Evermore slaked his filthy lusts, and from its everchanging womb it even bore him children. These putrid abominations dwell still among the ranks of humankind, and though they pass for human and even bear human seed, they still bear their ancestor's power to change their shape.

For a time, Evermore was content with this simulacrum, but in time he realized that despite all the virtues he had

tried to give her, he did not love this creature. When he consulted an oracle, he was told that he could not love it because although it had life and wit, it was still soulless and could never truly give nor receive love.

Though the crimes Evermore had worked with the pearl were great, they are dim shadows compared with his next offense, for he mocked heaven by Making for his perverse creation a soul.

For many years, Evermore lived a life of dissolution with his enchanted whore. Apparently, he either deceived a priest into marrying them or found a cleric degenerate enough to do so, or perhaps he simply declared her his wife by his own self-deluded authority. It happened, however, that Evermore grew old and came unto the shores of death. He fought heaven even to the last, trying to Make for himself a body like that of his wife, but since he had already Made that matter, it could not be recreated. His children, fearing that he would try to somehow steal a body from one of them, fled in fear. In desperation, Evermore turned to his wife. Having been Made to love him completely, the creature gladly died in his place giving to Evermore her own undying flesh.

The soul of Elidriel, discorporate, rose up towards the RAINBOW disc of KARMA. Upon arrival, she found her way blocked.

"Turn back," said the Guardian of Karma. "My masters did not make you, and you are therefore barred from karma."

"But how will I be reborn?" cried Elidriel.

"Ask your Maker, for you shall not ride here today."

Returning to the SPHERE where Evermore lived, Elidriel sought out her husband, but being without body, she could not make herself seen. As she wandered away from Evermore's fortress of blasphemy she came upon a traveler dying upon the road. Seeing his soul fly from the body, she entered in the same fashion and brought the corpse to staggering life. In this stolen vessel, she made her way to Evermore's fortress and begged entrance.



"Evermore! It is I, Elidriel! Even the bonds of death are broken by my great love!"

Yet Evermore looked and was appalled, for the body in which her spirit moved was old and frail. It had been dead for several days and had been walking in the sun.

Evermore, still a man of shallow desires, could not accept his creation when it was not clothed in lovely woman-flesh. And his great age still sat heavily upon his mind.

"If you truly love me, go forth and trouble me no more, for you ought to be dead, even if you are not."

Weeping, cast out, Elidriel fled his castle.

In time, Evermore's mind weakened to the point that he could not wield the True Pearl, and he was eventually slain by the ORDER OF THE SILVER NAIL. Some claim the matter he created, which was formless but could hold any form, was gathered by a sorcerer, who used it for her own purposes.

Elidriel's spirit wandered, and still wanders. Sometimes it is incorporate and sometimes it finds a home in freshly dead flesh. Whatever her form, she eternally seeks the lost soul of Evermore, for she was designed to love only him. Her torment is unending, for her lover's soul no longer remembers her. I have no doubt that it will be a thousand times a thousand years before karma lets such a criminal walk in human form again.

FROM THE HELL'S GATE FRAGMENT,  
EMPIRE OF WISDOM COLLECTION

But we have not the time to do so," cried Marten.

The sorcerer raised up the True Pearl with a slow smile. "How much time do you need?"

"An . . . an hour only," stammered Marten.

"Then you shall have it," said the sorcerer. That is why, in the [unintelligibly damaged—possibly "lands of" and some third word] the days are an hour longer than they are elsewhere.

From Steel Wind's Lectures on the  
History of Eldermark

The chronicles never make clear when or how the Twelve of Eldermark came into possession of the True Pearl of Making.

They first mention it in regard to constructing the GATE to the Jeweled Kingdom. Since said gate works almost as swiftly as those of the Walker, it would have required magic of almost unimaginable power to create. I doubt that the habitat could have been stably Made without the pearl, considering the abysmal failures with which every other attempt to create a stable SPHERE has been met.

However, though they had it once and claim to have it still, no one has seen any one of the Twelve with the pearl in over a hundred years. In that time, not one project that they have completed would require the great Making power of the True Pearl.

It could be that the pearl has been stolen and that the Twelve claim to have it in order to keep their enemies at bay. On the other hand, it is at least equally possible that the Twelve's respect for its power is so great that they are reluctant to use it for trivial purposes.

Related Topic: "Soul Leeches and Spell Eaters."

## PHOENIXES

Some believe that the DEITIES created certain beasts to be lessons or conundrums for humanity, puzzles that when contemplated teach us about the nature of the world around us. The mysterious *phoenix* is widely regarded as one of these puzzle-creatures.

Descriptions of the phoenix vary greatly. Some describe brightly plumed birds that move with great speed. Others have seen them perched motionless on rocky crags for hours at a time. All phoenixes, however, are known to immolate themselves at death, rising anew from their ashes as newborn phoenixes.

Few humans have witnessed this transformation, but from the few descriptions available it seems that the newborn phoenix lacks the memories and knowledge of its previous incarnation—at least at first. Aged phoenixes are known as creatures of great wisdom and knowledge, able to recall memories from previous bodies; but it seems that the newborn phoenix is a creature of instinct and power, even as the elder phoenix is one of knowledge and wisdom.

Some claim that a young phoenix can be enticed by offerings of fine combustibles such as liquors, incense, and fragrant woods. In exchange, the young bird may agree to aid the supplicant in some way. Yet even the rawest newborn seems to have a sense for self-preservation and an instinctive repugnance for true evil. If phoenixes are truly creatures of HEAVEN, it is hardly surprising that they are able to evade or resist use for ill ends.

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The Silver Sage, revered by many as an AVATAR of the Loyal Dragon, said that the phoenix race was created by heaven as a demonstration of KARMA: many lives but one soul; many purposes but one overriding goal. She said that this overriding goal was the service of virtue and that the many purposes were specific steps in some great divine scheme. If she was correct, this scheme (or schemes) must be subtle beyond the comprehension of humanity to progress in such slow steps. Perhaps immortal wardens for this great plan were necessary for seeing it to its ultimate goal.

**PLAGUES.** See "Alurax" (blood-moth plague), "Reincarnation" (blood-moth plague, Celestial Plague), and "Cinnamon Plague."

**PLANTS.** See "Angelthorn," Bacchus's Roots," "Batwing Fungus," "Bloodbeak Berries," "Fireblossom," and "Wanderer's Root."

The bite of the white lizard has a weak poison, but the poison has a cumulative effect. Since the lizard can bite again and again, the poison slowly weakens a victim until death ensues.

The bite of the red pyramid lizard contains a very potent poison, which is capable of killing instantly. It is usually instantly fatal against an average individual and sometimes even against tougher victims. However, each red lizard can inject poison only once.

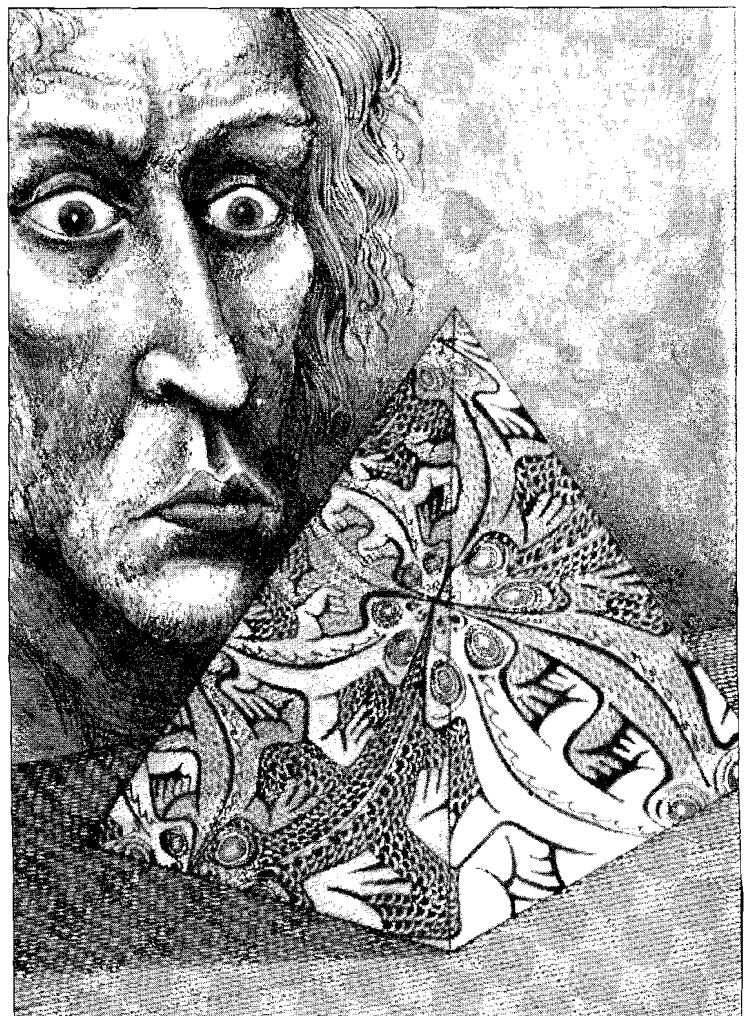
Pyramid lizards are not particularly tough. Even the weakest of humans can trample one underfoot. They are nimble, however, and able to dodge very quickly.

## PYRAMID LIZARDS

*Lizard pyramids* are pyramid-shaped puzzle boxes with a repeating pattern of stylized lizards in black, red, and white. The pieces fit so tightly together that not even a paper ribbon fits between them.

If one of these pyramids (each of which is of a size small enough to fit inside a hat) is shattered or flung, the pieces do not simply break into fragments; instead, they come alive as a dozen or so thumb-sized lizards known as *pyramid lizards*. There are four to seven lizards of each COLOR, depending on the size of the pyramid. All have the ability to leap up as high as a desk or table and can climb even the smoothest surfaces with their suckered feet. Pyramid lizards have vicious tempers, perhaps a consequence of their long confinement. The bite of a pyramid lizard, while tiny, can have dangerous consequences.

For instance, the bite of the black pyramid lizard causes temporary blindness. Its poison is extremely potent—sometimes able to overcome even someone who is very strong. The poison's duration and potency increase with repeated bites.



## QUETZALCOATL

GOD OF THE AIR AND KNOWLEDGE

## Stories and Teachings

Quetzalcoatl teaches the arts and sciences, and champions knowledge and wisdom. Quetzalcoatl teaches people to build and to study, not to attack and slay. He remade humanity by descending to the underworld and gathering bones from eras gone by. He brought these bones back to the land of the living, where he molded them into people. Sprinkling them with his own blood, he gave his creations life.



The term "Xocoatl" (chok-koh-atl) refers to the brown, bitter drink that these deities enjoy. They teach their followers to make the drink, which is popular as a trade good.

He is the son of Mixcoatl, who resides in the land of the sunrise. Cihuacoatl is the mother of Mixcoatl and of a new generation of DEITIES, more peaceful than the older ones. The new race of people are more peaceful. Full of insight and curiosity, they are to be Quetzalcoatl's students, his children. He wanted to lead them and guide them, but he did not stay with his earthly children. It is said that he was driven from earth by Tezcatlipoca. On a raft of serpents he floated to the east, where he dwells forever with his father, Mixcoatl. Disciples of Quetzalcoatl honor intellectual achievement and artistic advancement.

## Tribal Worship

When Quetzalcoatl appears among tribal people, he is generally a tribal patron, one who has taught the tribe to give up old ways and to adopt new ones. (Quetzalcoatl himself may have taught the tribe new knowledge, or the tribe may have been visited and taught by followers of the god.)

The people of Sunrise Coast revere Quetzalcoatl as a savior. Once a warring, bloody, and brutal tribe, Quetzalcoatl has turned them into a deeply ritualistic and creative band of artisans and sages. Every member of the tribe makes gifts for the god, which they offer up on the beach at sunrise once a week.

## Country Worship

Among farmers and herders, Quetzalcoatl often finds little worship. They pass their earthly wisdom from parent to child, and they call on the deities of fertility and harvest for their prosperity. Those who devote themselves to Quetzalcoatl's path of knowledge can be very valuable to rural communities, especially if they introduce the wonders of irrigation or other techniques. Still, such worshipers are often out of place where people's lives are more aligned with the EARTH than with the wind.

## City Worship

City people embrace the values of spiritual advancement and knowledge taught by Quetzalcoatl. Advanced schools, collections of art and literature, and libraries of magical and scientific research are often the largest part of a temple to Quetzalcoatl. His worshipers believe that sharing knowledge is among the most honored gifts to the god.

## Other Xocoatl Deities

CIHUACOATL: Goddess of the new age; daughter of Coatlicue; mother of Mixcoatl; grandmother of Quetzalcoatl.

COATLICUE: Goddess of EARTH and FIRE, birth and death; she was impregnated by a ball of feathers and was decapitated by her infuriated children, but Huitzilopochtli emerged from his mother's womb in full armor and slew many of his brothers and sisters.

COYOLXUAHQUI: Goddess of the moon; one of the children of Coatlicue who killed their mother and were killed in turn by brother Huitzilopochtli.

HUITZILOPOCHTLI: God of war; emerged from Coatlicue's womb fully grown and armed and then slew his brothers and sisters who had murdered her.

MIXCOATL: God of hunting and the stars; father of Quetzalcoatl; dwells in the land of the sunset.

TEZCATLIPOCA: God of darkness; ruler of all material things, patron deity of warriors, and nemesis of Quetzalcoatl; wears a mirror in his hair in which he can see all things.

TLAZOTEUTL: Goddess of the earth, sexuality, and filth; beautiful temptress of earthly pleasure and sin.

TONACATECUHTL: Goddess of creation and everything that is female; with Tonacacihuatl, created all mortal life.

TONACACIHUATLI: God of creation and everything that is male; with Tonacatecuhtl, created all mortal life.

TONATIUH: God of the sun; the first volunteer to leap into the flames to create the Fifth (current) Sun; ruler of the current world age.

XIPE TOTEC: God of penitential self-torture; feeds his children (humans) by thrashing open his flesh and letting his blood fertilize crops; gives life by torturing himself (which is why followers offer him human sacrifices).

XOCHIQUETZAL: Goddess of flowers, fertility, and childbirth; the only one of the Old Deities (before Mixcoatl) who stands for nonviolent contentment and joy.

See also "Deities."

## RAINBOWS

The *rainbow* is the visible symbol of KARMA, granted by the DEITIES so that humans would never forget to be good and virtuous. A rainbow is said to appear whenever a soul takes leave of its body at death.

See also "Dragons," "Names," "Order of the Silver Nail," "Pearl of Making," "Reincarnation," "Soulseekers," and "White Walkers."

## RAIN KEYS

*Rain keys* are thumb-sized crystals shaped into keys. Most are sold by the BASAHN.

When a rain key is flung or fired into a cloudy sky, it opens the clouds and lets out rain. If thrown into a clear sky, it attracts a few clouds to the site where it was thrown. If not opened by sorcery or a second rain key, the clouds soon dissipate.

An unfortunate side effect of using rain keys is lightning: a flung key is disintegrated by a blast of lightning if it is used to open the clouds. If used to draw clouds, the key is not destroyed, but it will still attract lightning.



Rain Key illustration © 1996 Doug Keith



## RED MERCHANTS, THE

When the dynasty of the great MERCHANT QUEENS foundered upon the Schism, half of the followers followed the banner of the daughter named Blood, who became known as the *Red Merchant Queen*.

The Second Merchant War between the Red Merchants and the BLUE MERCHANTS lasted for many years. During this conflict, both sides used wealth, religion, magic, and politics as so many arrows in a quiver; soon, however, it became apparent that some of these arrows flew better from different bows.

While the Blue Merchant Queens eventually concentrated on political and religious power, the Red Merchant Queens focused their energies on exploration and magic, always hoping to find a way to destroy the rival claimant and reunite the Liquid Kingdom.

Eventually both sides realized that their war was helping no one but merchants outside the Red and Blue folds. It was this realization, more than any diplomacy, that led to a grudging and hostile armistice. The open conflict was over, but the old envies were still there. They did not finally end until the abdication of Azure XI. Had things been different, the line of the Red Merchant Queens might have been able to absorb those who left Azure's temple and forge a new Liquid Kingdom. As it happened, however, there was no line of Red Merchant Queens. There was only Sunset the Undying.

Ten years before Azure XI was even born, Sunset X took the Red Merchant throne. The Red Queens had actively been studying magic for several generations, and Sunset X was a prodigy, able to perform great feats even as a youth. A brilliant and powerful sorceress, Sunset was expected by all to revitalize her line and, perhaps, be the one to subjugate the Blue Merchants. Not long after her coronation, however, Sunset learned that she was unable to bear children.

For one who had been taught that bloodline was everything, the blow was a crushing one. She attempted to remedy her condition with magic, only to learn that even with the help of magic, she could not form the connection to the immortal forces of KARMA: she could bear children, but they would be born soulless.

Some believe that Sunset's mind snapped when her first and only child was born a soulless abomination and had to be destroyed. Sunset herself, however, maintains that her decision was made with complete calm and sanity. To support



this assertion, she points to the hundreds, even thousands, who have followed her.

In her thirtieth year, Red Queen Sunset X became Queen Sunset the Undying. With her sorcery, she took her soul from her body and stored it in a place of safety, leaving her body animate and her mind within it. Undead, Sunset would age no more, would be impervious to harm, and would have eternity to gain power and wealth.

Announcing her decision to her followers, Sunset offered the same transformation to any who would follow her. Lured by the promise of power, or perhaps goaded by the fear of death, many did.

The Red Merchants are openly accepted in some cities but are shunned in many others. The majority of Red Merchants travel incognito out of fear of local prejudice and persecution by the ORDER OF THE SILVER NAIL, among others.

Many Red Merchants—most, in fact—are still living. However, in order to enjoy the privileges of the higher ranks in Red Merchant society, they must become UNDEAD. Queen Sunset has altered her policy for movement within the hierarchy of the Red Merchant Kingdom: instead of being based on financial donations, promotion is now based on finesse with the powers of undeath. Increased rank still requires higher tithes, but titled nobles now have direct authority over specific vassals, where in the past they had only general precedence over all Red Merchants of lower status.

The Red Knights are the lowest rank of undead, and almost all of them have children before making the transformation. This is because they must drink the blood of the living to survive, but knights can only drink blood that is “their own” (in other words, only the blood of close relatives). The marital bond is insufficient proximity for this requirement; the blood must come from parents, siblings, or (most frequently) children.

A knight is severely harmed by the briefest glimpse of sunlight and is repelled by ROSES and silver. For some who are new to their state, even a picture of a rose has the power to halt or repel them, and they are vulnerable to harm even from ordinary weapons.

A baron or baroness is also harmed by sunlight and silver, though many can overcome the power of roses. Furthermore, these nobles are not limited to feeding from family members; they can thrive on the blood of outsiders as well. They are each able to survive damage that would kill two strong people. Any injury that does not kill them heals completely within two sunsets. (An exception to this rule is injury inflicted by silver weapons, by ice, or by weapons of the spirit. These wounds are healed at the slow rate of mortals.) Some barons and baronesses gain mastery of what is called *whisper form*, which is an

ability to become dim and immaterial, sliding like a swift wisp of fog from place to place. It usually takes a knight fifty years or more to develop the powers of a baron or baroness.

Dukes and duchesses are rare, as hunters of the undead prefer to kill Red Merchants as knights (or while they’re still warm, for that matter). Nobles of this rank can gain sustenance from the blood of any creature with a soul; furthermore, if they take the blood of an animal, they can take that animal’s shape whenever they wish on the night following the feeding. All dukes and duchesses have whisper form, and many are said to have an unearthly charisma or an otherwise dominating appearance. This may be due to their long experience with manipulating people since it generally takes at least a hundred years for a baron or baroness to become a duke or duchess. (Currently there are only five Red Merchants of this high status known to exist.) They are less susceptible to sunlight than their inferiors, though they can still survive it for only brief periods of time. They are vulnerable only to weapons of silver, WATER, or spirit, and any wound that is not instantly lethal is healed by the next day’s sunset.

The process of transformation from living to undead is performed by the Red Queen only and is shrouded in secrecy; it is known, however, that the queen removes each newcomer’s soul and imprisons it in a receptacle. If an undead Red Merchant betrays the Undying Queen, she has but to break or open the receptacle; the soul flees, and the unnatural state of halted death ceases. It is believed that if the body is destroyed and the soul is not freed from the container, it simply remains there, trapped and powerless. The queen requires very reliable death reports before she is willing to release a soul, preferring to be safe rather than sorry. Still, there are rumors of barons and baronesses’ and even dukes and duchesses’ assassinating one another by forging accounts of death that convinced the queen to free a rival’s soul.

The current location of the queen is unknown. She was undoubtedly a powerful sorceress even before she became undead. The extent of her current powers has not been tested—at least not by anyone who has survived to tell about it.

## RED MERCHANTS AMONG THE SPHERES

Like their rivals, the BASAHN, the Red Merchants often travel in wagons until they have amassed enough wealth to establish a store in any town that tolerates them. They specialize in commodities that are difficult or hazardous for the living to obtain (such as COCKATRICE venom and the skills of NEEDLEDEMONS).

Red Merchant operations are often open all day, run by human employees of the UNDEAD storekeepers; however, truly

rare or valuable merchandise may only be bargained for after dark, if the Red Merchant wishes to attend to such purchases personally.

An association with the Red Merchant Kingdom can be very hard to discern. There is no rule stating that members of the kingdom have to identify themselves or their stores as such. In hostile areas, they usually deny the association.

On the other hand, in lands where the Red Merchants are tolerated or even favored, the living members of the kingdom go so far as to wear red CLOTHING to declare their loyalty and hang the mark of the kingdom (a red coin with a woman's profile) above their doors to show the powerful protection they enjoy. Woe to any criminal who tries to rob or extort from a store with such a mark.

Living Red Merchants often appear to be normal humans; in fact, they *are* normal humans, and they consider their business associates to be nothing more than useful and powerful friends. Human Red Merchants are duty-bound to give blood to any titled Red Merchant noble of baron/baroness rank or higher who asks it, and the penalty for refusal is usually exile from the kingdom.

The higher-ranked members of the kingdom vary greatly in appearance. Some Red Merchant knights are gruesome creatures, with decaying flesh hanging off their still-animate bones. These, however, are the least successful knights. The magic of their transformation delays rotting for quite a while; it is only those who have stayed knights for a long time that begin to noticeably decompose. Once this process has begun, they are often at the beginning of a downward slide. No one wants to buy from what is obviously a walking corpse, and the lack of funds can make it hard for knights to support the large family they need to feed. Once their families begin to shrink, they are in a desperate race to attain baron/baroness status before they run out of descendants.

The most repellent specimens are sometimes killed by the queen herself, who releases their souls so that they cease to be an embarrassment to the kingdom. Alternately, she may call them to her as her personal guardians.

Barons and baronesses can pass for humans with much greater ease. They do not decompose as long as they feed regularly. They are, however, deathly pale, a condition that no amount of feeding alleviates. Most use cosmetics to cover this, with varying success. They are corpse-cold as well, and they neither sweat nor bleed.

The Red Merchant Queen has a standing offer of ten thousand pounds of gold and eternal life—not undeath, but true immortality—for anyone who delivers to her the Pearl of Making or the Edge of Light and Darkness.

If they have recently fed, dukes and duchesses cannot easily be distinguished from humanity, since they gain a ruddy COLOR and the warmth of the living.

See also "Merchant Queens."

## REINCARNATION

*From a Public Address by  
Theologian Faithful Way*

When I was a child, my mother told me that if I was good I would be reincarnated as a butterfly and enjoy a life of ease, flying from blossom to blossom. If I was bad, however, she warned that I would be reborn as a rabbit and know nothing but flight, fear, and the bite of the wolf.

This sort of simplistic belief is taught to most of us as children, and it serves its purpose. Like mules, we can be prodded along a path by the promise of reward and the threat of punishment.

When I became an adult, however, I questioned this simple arrangement. I searched for answers by studying the records of SOULSEEKER scribes and Memoran students. What I found was not at all what I expected.

In a previous life, Thorn the Warlord, who persecuted the People of the Tall Grass until not one man, woman, or child remained free, was Kindgiver, the healer who stemmed the spread of the Celestial Plague almost single-handedly.

Lies With Lions, who led and engineered the GLORIOUS EMPIRE's pogrom against the BASAHN, was Saint Overlook in a previous life, a woman who died holding open the mountain so that her people could flee to safety.

Strange Embrace, the heretic and terrorist, was in a previous life the sorceress Apex Soulsinger, who died to save the lives of the Legion of Shadow.

Amazed by these discoveries, I tried to locate the reincarnated souls of other great historical pillars of virtue. This I found:

Ray the Lawgiver, who pacified and united the Empty Moon Tribes, had recently been incarnated as a man hanged for the murder of his own daughter.

Sunday Too Late, who gave up her kingdom to save a foreign tribe from the Blood Moth Scourge, was found living as Thunderously Swift, a petty criminal of Dexter City. When his soul's noble past was drawn to his attention, I am sad to say he immediately attempted to capitalize upon it for gain through the gratitude of the Blood Moth Scourge survivors. However, since that time he has entered my tutelage, convinced that my theory makes more sense of his life than anything else ever has.

Here is my theory: It is the noblest souls who are tempted the most. The lure of evil is a refiner's FIRE, the final gloss and test on souls who have proven themselves selfless and kind.

The life of Thunderously Swift as he tells it and as it is described by others seems to be a case in point. For him, virtue has no rewards; the good things he has tried, even those he has succeeded at, have brought him nothing but difficulty and suffering. His good deeds were not appreciated but met with demands for further sacrifices on his part; or, as was the case in several instances, his actions were totally misconstrued, earning him yet more scorn.

Acts that were selfish, however, came easily, and he always seemed able to elude his way out of any consequences. With the path to virtue steep and slippery, and the road to evil simple and straightforward, it is not surprising that Swift took the road to evil.

What *is* surprising is that Swift has not wound up in worse circumstances than those he is in. While he may be a drifter, a thief, and a swindler, Swift has never killed for gain, though he has had many chances. He has never molested the defenseless, though for that too he has had disproportionate opportunity. And while his friends are shiftless and immoral, he has avoided acquaintances who later became figures of great evil and greater power.

Swift saw himself as "soft," as "a sucker" for not taking these opportunities, but though he cursed what he saw as inner weakness, he still could not give himself entirely to a life of cruelty, selfishness, and sin. Had he done so, he might share the breath of speech with Strange Embrace and Thorn the Warlord.

Virtue that is easy loses its value. That is why we were made imperfect: so that we would have to struggle for the difficult good. The reward for a virtuous life is not, therefore, a life of ease and luxury but a life of greater challenge.

This explains how evil can be created by DEITIES who are all good. Evil was created not to torment us or to ensnare us but to give us something from which to free ourselves. If we resist, we purify ourselves. If we succumb, we still give others the opportunity to be purified by resisting our failure.

I thank you for your attention. May peace be within you.

See also "Karma."

*Related Topics:* "Adversaries," "Cohorts," "Phoenixes" and "Rainbows."

**RIVER'S EDGE.** See "Anvil of Everguard," "Cinnamon Plague," "Living Songs," and "Soulseekers."

## ROSES

### *From the Research of Priestess Vineway*

Roses have been called the "Hallmark of Heaven," a phrase marked in beauty that serves to remind us of our one divine source.

I believe that the title is more than mere poetic sentiment. I have traveled to over seventy SPHERES, and in almost every one I was able to locate a rose. In my research I have found over 180 other spheres with roses on them. I believe that my failure to find them on some spheres is due not to their absence but to my own lack of persistence.

Roses are found on more spheres than are any other plant or animal, are found with more frequency even than humans. It is my understanding, in fact, that roses live on every sphere.

It is clear to me that the rose was left by the DEITIES as a symbol of their love and as a means of teaching us of the nature of the universe; for truly the rose is a universe in microcosm.

The foundation of the rose is the root, sunk deeply into the EARTH. From the root, the rose draws strength. When the rose withers in winter, it is the root that promises new life in the spring.

Rising from the root is the stem, which twines sinuously upwards. A rose vine crawling up a trellis takes on the same flowing drape as WATER falling down the trellis. This is no accident: the stem of the rose is its water component, adapting to its surroundings and becoming one with them.

At the end of the stem is the brilliant, flame-like blossom. Like a flame, and like the FIRE of human ambition, the blossom transforms the environment from one of uniform green to a riot of COLOR. While the stem adapts, the blossom stands out as an individual.

Finally, there is the airy perfume of the rose, which drifts away from the body to attract all who smell it. The fragrance can linger after the blossom is cut. In this, it parallels the deities' gift of THE TONGUE. Although words seem transient, they frequently outlive their speaker.

All roses have these four elemental traits in common. Within the similarities, however, there is great variation. In my travels, I have seen a great many wonders, but to my eyes nothing is more wondrous than the variety of roses. Included for your enjoyment are several descriptions of the more unusual strains.

## THE HOME ROSE

Among the Forest People of the Bountiful Kingdom, there grows a variety of rose so large that it can be used as a dwelling. These *home roses* have a light, butter-yellow color, and over the course of several years they can grow large enough for two men to lie in end to end. By the time they reach this ponderous size, they are usually pulled forward on their thick stems and bent to the ground. Some Forest People cut the stems and use the enclosure of the blossom as a rude hut. While impermanent, these roses are cultivated for use along the hidden paths on which the Forest People travel.

The fragrance of home roses is extremely light and subtle, which is fortunate, for otherwise it would overpower those who dwell in them.

## THE STONE ROSE

Among the Granite Lands of the gargoyles, the *stone rose* blossom can be found. Though only the size of the nail on one's HEARTFINGER, these crystal roses are exceptional because of their flinty nature. Just as the gargoyle is a creature of animate rock, so the stone rose is a form of vegetable stone. Stone roses are found twined along the edges of boulders, sprouting their delicate, white, crystal blossoms. While lovely, the stone rose is difficult to obtain because it is extremely fragile; a single clumsy touch will cause it to crumble.

## THE FLAME ROSE

The *flame roses* of the Sundered Hills are very rare and will not grow in captivity. It is unfortunate that they are so highly sought, for they are of rare loveliness even without their unusual properties. The flame rose is a deep, rich gold at the core, flaring through orange to a brilliant red at the edge. Its perfume is rich and strong, but sadly it is not sought for its beauty. Instead, flame roses are used to determine truth, for if the rose is held by a liar, it erupts into brilliant crimson flames.

## THE BUTTERFLY ROSE

These rare flowers can be found on several SPHERES. Their petals are emerald green with golden circles upon them. What is truly unusual about the *butterfly rose* is how it spreads its pollen. Once a year, the blossom of the male flower detaches itself from its stem and flutters off in search of a female flower. Some have been known to fly for miles before dropping from exhaustion, their cargo of pollen

undelivered. Some call this the *widow's rose* because the male dies delivering its pollen.

## The Ocean Rose

Equally rare is this rose found in the Eastern Ocean of the GLORIOUS EMPIRE. Its peculiarity is that, like a wayward child, it separates from its roots when it reaches maturity and drifts off upon the sea. The blossoms of the *ocean rose* are a light blue and are so fine that they are actually translucent.

Ocean roses have traveled so far upon the eastern waters that many islands are completely encircled by them. Sailors say that the scent from such islands can be smelled from miles away.

*Related Topics:* "Night-Blooming Star Rose" and "Unity Roses."

# ROUNDWANDER

Located on the SPHERE of Fourcorner, the vast realm of *Roundwander* is best known as host to the great city of EVERWAY. There are seventy-one GATES in Roundwander, more than in any other known realm.



## SANCTUARY

*Sanctuary* refers to the practice of providing safe haven to any person from local authorities while they remain on holy ground. Almost all temples dedicated to DEITIES offer sanctuary.

See also "Kuan-Yin."



## SATYRS

*Excerpts from the Journals of Ascetic Son**Ninth Day of Scorpio*

Satyrs have come to our village! At noon today they descended like a murder of shrieking crows, singing, dancing, spilling their noxious wine upon the good people here and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

They have the upper parts of men and women, but they have the lower bodies of goats—not to mention similar manners and modesty. Their disruption of commerce and labor, not to mention their libidinous assaults on the morals of the community, should not be countenanced!

*Tenth Day of Scorpio*

A satyr had the colossal effrontery to accost me today as I attempted to purchase some bread for my noontime meal. This was much more difficult than on most days, for the baker—and his wife, who is usually so sober and demure!—were engaged in some boisterous circular dance with these beast-folk.

I was looking for some bread, and for someone to accept payment for it, when I heard a voice behind my shoulder.

"Hungry?"

I turned, only to be assaulted by the wine-sweet breath of a female satyr, who stood immodestly close to me. I was momentarily lost for words.

Having never been in a position to examine one of these creatures closely before, I was struck by how much it resembled a human woman in face and form.

I have no knowledge of the history of these creatures, but I suspect they were crafted as some sort of test of our souls, pitted against our baser, animal drives. Thus, it is of course logical that their form should be comely and attractive, as this

particular satyr was. So much so that I find myself brooding upon . . . well, nothing worthwhile, certainly. I seem to have become sidetracked.

"Yes, I was trying to purchase some bread," I said at last.

"Here. Just have some," it said.

"I prefer that my sustenance be paid for!"

The satyr laughed and scattered a handful of silver upon the baker's counter!

"The bakers have no complaint with us, and we none with you. Won't you join us?"

"I most certainly will not!" I declared. "Don't think I don't understand the vile purpose that lies behind your fair features! You're here to tempt me with the pleasures of the flesh, but I have better things to do with my attention!" So saying, I spun and stalked away to my home.

I have left my domicile since only to fetch water, and then as quickly as I could. My fellow villagers have all fallen under the spell of the satyrs and are neglecting their futures for this temporary riot of merriment. Their raucous shrieks continue now even as I write by candlelight.

I shall have to cease soon as my fingers are becoming numb. Since my encounter with the satyr cut short my daily shopping, I have had neither food nor firewood today. Perhaps this is a sign: I am meant to purify myself through fasting.

*Eleventh Day of Scorpio*

Today as I left my home to get water, there was a satyr outside, seated upon a stump. It was the same satyr-woman that accosted me yesterday.

"I'm Heron," she said. "Sorry if I offended you yesterday. I thought I'd bring you some lunch with my apology. May I come in?"

I fear that my nerves were somewhat frayed, for I had slept poorly.

"You won't trick me that easily," I said with, I fear, some asperity. "I know well that creatures of darkness cannot enter a house until invited, and I would keep mine a safe sanctuary."

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The satyr gave me a look that on a human I would have characterized as "withering" and stepped over my threshold. She stood within my home, turned completely around once, shrugged her shoulders, and stepped out again.

"Actually," she said, "I asked to be polite, not because I'm a 'creature of darkness.' Did you want lunch or not?"

I opened my mouth just as my treacherous belly gurgled. The satyr found this remarkably amusing. I felt heat rising to my face as I said, "I'm fasting." I turned towards the pond.

Heron was not so easily deterred. "Fasting? What for?"

"I'm sure you wouldn't understand."

"Certainly I won't if you don't tell me. Or is it one of those human compulsions that can't be explained?"

"Absolutely not! My decision to go without food is entirely rational, logical, and premeditated."

"I see. Well, enjoy your fast. I'll just have to find someone else to eat this roast chicken." So saying, she bounded off through the woods.

I spent the day gathering firewood and trying not to think about revelry, chicken, or comely satyrs. The continuous sounds of merriment from the village made this quite difficult.

### Twelfth Day of Scorpio

Heron was, once again, waiting for me when I emerged this morning. Today, in addition to her picnic basket she carried a large bundle of firewood.

"I noticed that your chimney plume looked a bit thin yesterday. Are you finished fasting yet?"

"No, I am not."

I was in no mood to bandy words with her, having dreamt of Father again last night. I was so distracted that I somehow stumbled and fell on the path to the pond—a path I've walked without thinking for months. Before I knew what was what, Heron had helped me to my feet.

"Are you all right?"

I tested my ankle and winced but tried to hide it. I knew

Satyrs have a bad reputation because they help people do what they really want to do. This is not always a wise or good thing, and people like to blame their own failings on the satyrs—after, of course, they have indulged them."  
—*Lamplighter, from Chamber Platinum*

that she would exploit any weakness.

"I'm perfectly fine," I said and then fell down again. This time I was unable to repress a cry.

"Are you sure about that? I think perhaps I'd better get your WATER for you and then help you into your house."

This plan appealed to me not at all, but before I could register a complaint she was bounding off down the path with my buckets in hand. She quickly returned with them lipping full but did not spill a drop—doubtless from much practice with wine goblets.

"I'll be back for you in an instant," she said and, delicately knocking the dirt from her hooves, stepped into my house.

She wanted to carry me in, but I insisted that I hobble on my good ankle. Once inside, she ignored my protests and flung wood upon the FIRE until it was roaring. She then plunged my sore ankle into a basin of pond water so cold that I gasped.

"The cold will draw out the swelling," she explained and quickly drew my small table between us. My puzzlement evaporated as she began unpacking her basket of food.

"I'm still. . . ."

"Are you sure fasting is wise, in your injured condition?"

Her words did have some merit, and prejudice is as much an anathema to pure reason as sensualism is. She had brought mince pies, which were quite good. Nourishing, I mean.

"Do you realize, I don't even know your name?" she said.

"Ascetic Son."

"Pleased to meet you." She reached out to shake my hand and, since I was eating her food and drinking water she'd carried, I would have felt like a rude ass refusing the gesture. "You chose the name?"

"I did."

"What for?"

"To remind myself to devote myself to my studies and to contemplation. I belonged to a religious order for a while, but I . . . well, we parted."

"I see. I've been thinking about something you said when we first met."

"Oh?"

"You said you had 'better things for your attention.' I was wondering what they were."

"I doubt you'd understand."

"Like the fasting?"

"I'll thank you not to mock my practices!"

"Very well. . . . Still, they are somewhat hard to understand. And to explain, it appears."

"Listen. . . . I fast for the same reason I've cloistered myself here. I am trying to quell the urges of my animal nature in order that my higher functions will not suffer from being oppressed by them."

She was quiet for a second, her normally smooth brow wrinkled. Then she said, "You're right. I don't understand. What do you mean by 'animal nature'?"

"I mean that lower part of the human spirit that has appetite but that lacks thought. Our cruder emotions, our ecstasies and agonies, our angers and lusts." If I had been thinking cautiously, I would not have said that last word.

"Appetite is oppressive to you, then?"

"Of course. How can the brain engage in pure reason if constantly plagued by seething cries from the . . . the lower regions?"

"Like hunger? This is a distraction to the brain?"

"Yes, of course."

"Lust, this too is a distraction?" She said this with a sort of half-smile.

"Lust is definitely a distraction. It has no place in the true scholar."

"So . . . if you're diverted from your thoughts by hunger and lust, why cultivate them?"

I was shocked speechless.

"I do nothing of the sort!"

"Perhaps I misunderstood your fast then.

You were going without food, right?"

"Yes. . . ."

"It doesn't take a royal scholar to know that people who don't eat get hungry. The less you eat, the hungrier you get and therefore the more distracted, right? Then there's the question of lust. . . ." As she said this last, she smiled again and leaned her elbows on the table.

"Let's stick with fasting," I said. "To the uninitiated it would seem that gratifying these urges quells them, and it does—for a time. However, attempting to feed them into submission is like trying to quench a bonfire by throwing wood on it. After an extended period of abstinence, the desires are weakened."

"For example, people who starve themselves to death."

"For example, hermits who lose their taste for fine foods, rare wines, and *immoral women*."

That earned me something of a glare.

"Very well, Ascetic Son," she said, looking around my bare cabin. "I'll leave you to your . . . studies. If I were you, I'd keep that ankle tightly wrapped."

I could think of nothing to say. One part of me was sorry to have offended her and wished to apologize, that we might continue our discussion. Another part wished she would just take her distressing inquiries and go away. For once, I could not say which was my thinking part and which my feelings.

She paused in the doorway, the firelight shining dramatically upon her horns.

"Do you know what they call you in the village? The 'demon wrestler.'"

"They . . . what? Why would they call me that?"

"They say you cry out in the night because you're struggling with demons who want to come to the village."

With that, she left.

I know I have nightmares, but I hadn't known that I cry out.

### Thirteenth Day of Scorpio

I awoke this morning when Heron pulled my blanket off my feet.



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"What are you doing?" I shouted. She simply giggled.

"If you could see your own expression! . . . And if you'd put enough wood on the fire you wouldn't have to clutch your blanket to yourself like that."

"What are you doing in here?"

"I knocked on the door, but you didn't answer. I thought you might have taken a delirium or that you might be unable to walk, so I let myself in."

"Well, I have *not* taken a delirium, so I will thank you to leave this instant."

"What, afraid that you'll distract me from pure reason?" She sat upon the edge of my pallet with her back to me. The light was falling upon her hair. I had thought it was brown, but I could see glossy red glints within. Then I felt a sharp jab of pain in my ankle.

"It's not so swollen," she said. "Probably because of your low fire. I'm going to put some ointment on it and wrap it up tight. You make sure to keep it warm today."

"And who made you a doctor of medicine?"

She laughed. "I'm not so good a dancer that I've never twisted an ankle."

Before I knew it she had some sort of tray sitting across my lap with a bowl of hot oatmeal on it.

"You eat that before it gets cold. I'm making eggs."

"I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that your people are decadent enough to have trays for eating in bed."

"You shouldn't be surprised by *anything* my people do in bed."

My shocked silence lasted until the eggs were done and was only broken when Heron spoke again.

"I've been thinking about something you said yesterday," she began, and I inwardly groaned. "Are thought and reason the highest purpose of humankind?"

I blinked. I tried to think of any way this question could be a trap—if nothing else, this woman had honed my skills at debate! I cautiously said, "Yes, I believe so."

Satyrs are like most people, only much more so."  
—Paper Press, from the Twisted Library

"Why is that?"

"Because all our finest works are the product of thought."

"But doesn't that just make thought a tool of works?"

"No . . . because our philosophies and art are based on thought as well. Thought underlies all good things."

"What use are your philosophies and art?"

"Why, they make us happy!"

"So then, thought is a tool of happiness?"

"No! It's a tool for *every* purpose. Nothing can be had without thought!"

"Except food."

"What?"

"If hunger distracts you from thought, you must be able to eat without thinking, correct?"

"Certainly. Beasts can do as much. All the lower functions can be had without thought."

"Ah, the angers and lusts, right?"

"Right, Heron. Our thoughts are what separate us from the beasts."

"I've noticed that you write."

"What?"

"Quill pen on table, sheets of parchment, ink stains on your fingers. It doesn't take a royal scholar. Why do you write?"

"To . . . to preserve my thoughts and observations."

"Thought is worthy of preservation?"

"Of course."

"For whom? Just ourselves?"

"I don't understand these pointless questions. . . . Of course not merely for us. That would be selfish. Our thoughts can



also be shared with each other and with future generations. By building on what has gone before, today's children will be able to reach even higher pinnacles of thought."

"But how are you going to have children without lust?"

I threw up my hands in exasperation.

"Such . . . activities are needed, of course, in moderation." Heron seemed to find my phrasing hysterically funny. "But that is no reason to let them rule our behavior."

"Why not?"

"Why *not*? Where would we be if we allowed our animal passions to consume us? We would be no better than beasts, rutting and raging and, and, and violating each other! We would have no dignity, no purpose, no *meaning* in our lives!"

I found her saucy expression intolerant, and I fear I raised my voice.

"We'd be no better than the villagers have been the last few days, doing nothing productive, wining and wenching and abusing themselves and others, making their children ashamed! You beasts come in here with your wine and fine foods and loose silver, and you turn this village upside down for your own amusement. But these good people won't be amused this winter when their stores are gone because they let food rot on the vine while the satyrs were here!"

Heron no longer looked smug; she looked shocked. She spun on her hoof and stalked out without another word, not even pausing to take her tray.

#### Fourteenth Day of Scorpio

My ankle was healthy enough to walk upon today, and I took Heron's tray down to the village. I looked for her with the dancers and the revelers and the players of games but found her by the edge of town, looking out over the fields.

"Heron," I said. She turned.

"Oh, hello."

"I brought your tray."

"Thank you. I see your ankle is better."

"Yes, it is. . . . Thank you for the ointment. It worked."

"You're welcome. I'm sure it will be cold

comfort this winter when the stores are gone, however."

I sighed as I sat beside her. She wasn't going to make it easy.

"Heron, I am sorry I said that. It was wrong of me. Please forgive me."

She said nothing. No, not easy at all.

"I really had no right to speak for the villagers. I'm sure they can set their own schedules and harvest or not as they see fit."

She relaxed a bit.

"And I'm sorry that I made you angry. That's all I really have to say. I'll go now."

"Stay." She'd turned to me and said the word. I sat beside her. It was some time before she spoke.

"The villagers think very highly of you, you know. They say that the demon you wrestle must be something terrible."

"I don't wrestle any demons."

"Don't you? I've heard you cry out."

I said nothing.

"Is your life so empty, Ascetic Son? So hollow that you must make this of yourself?"

"Make what of myself?"

"A priest to pure reason, cloistered, fasting and celibate before a jealous, angry heaven. A hunter who stalks rare philosophy through the fields of loneliness. Isn't it enough just to be happy?"

"I don't know."

"Haven't you been?"

"No."

She turned towards me, eyes wide, mouth opening to speak. I put a hand over her lips.

"My father died when I was very young. I didn't understand where Papa had gone or why Mama was crying all the time, do you see? She married another man, and he used to beat her. All the time I was growing up, he beat her and beat her. Whenever I'd tell him to stop, he'd beat me."

The satyrs are the embodiment of a divine aspect or force; it is not for them to be good or bad, and neither should it be surprising that their impact on the lives of humans can be considerable."  
—Long Cross, a Fortunate One



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Suddenly it seemed hot, even though the day was chilly.

"One time she beat me, beat me and begged me to never cross him again. She said that I mustn't anger him, that I hurt her worse when I made him beat me. . . . Then one day he beat her to death."

"And you left for a contemplative order."

"Yes."

"Why? So that you could be alone with all that sorrow? So that it would be quiet, the better to hear the cries in your head?"

"I just wanted to get away. . . . They asked me to leave because I was disturbing the other initiates."

"How?"

"We were a silent order, but I would cry out in the night."

She started to cry, and I asked her to stop. She couldn't, and soon I was crying too.

"I just wanted to not want anything . . . not feel anything. I felt that I *couldn't* be happy. Even love . . . Love to me was thinking of the pain of loss. I couldn't stand it."

"Your animal nature."

"My animal nature was eating me alive."

"Did you ever cry about it all?"

"Crying isn't reasonable."

"For an orphan boy who's afraid to love, I can't think of anything more reasonable."

For a while we sat and cried and held each other.

### *Fifteenth Day of Scorpio*

I am amazed: almost everything I own can be carried upon my back.

This morning I said farewell to the villagers. "Do not fear the demon," I told them. "I think I have beaten it at last."

That said, I set out with the satyrs, Heron at my side. As I was turning to take my last look at the village, she spoke.

"It was you, you know."

"Me what?"

"It was you we came for." I laughed.

"It's not a joke," she insisted.

"Now it's my turn to not understand." She leaned against me, and I put my arm around her.

"We came to rescue you."

## SATYR DAY

On the autumnal equinox, many farming villages celebrate *Satyr Day*. For people who work hard tilling the land from dawn until dusk, this day is the one when it is permitted to sleep late, gorge oneself on delicacies, and drink oneself into oblivion—in fact, it is a holy duty. While traditions vary from realm to realm, and sometimes even from village to village, some similarities in practice can be found.

Some minimum civil order is still imposed on Satyr Day—stealing is not permitted, for example—but regulation is rarely required. Since the normal restrictions are already so loosened, few feel a need to carry things further. Besides, such crimes committed on this holy day would surely be punished with greater severity, by the civil authorities if not by HEAVEN.

In many communities, the spirit of liberation extends even to the bonds of matrimony. For one day, the laws of fidelity no longer apply. While many take advantage of this exception, it is fewer than some city dwellers might think; in a town where everyone knows everyone else, the pressure of conformity extends even to this day of utter decadence.

Most communities also use this day to select a *holy fool*. Methods of picking the fool vary. In some realms, lots are drawn from a hat. In others, a great cake is baked with one bean in it; whoever gets the piece of cake with the bean is crowned the king or queen fool. In a town with a river or pond, the fool may be whoever can stay underwater the longest. And in some villages, the village priest or priestess selects the fool based on interpretation of omens.

The role of holy fool carries with it considerable license; in some lands the fool does not have to pay taxes or is made exempt from work until the first snowfall. It is a widespread tradition to give the fool any food or drink requested, and doing so is supposed to guarantee good fortune to the giver. Finally, in most realms the laws of marital fidelity do not apply to the fool; he or she is free to lie with anyone who is willing. The children of these unions stay with the mother, regardless of who the fool was.

## SHADOW CHILDREN

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It is widely agreed that these children always have interesting lives, supernatural powers, or extraordinary capabilities, although, oddly, children conceived by the fool and his or her own spouse do not show any unusual qualities.

Satyr Day festivities have caught on in some cities as well, but the festival takes on a somewhat darker tone in areas where numbers provide anonymity. The revels often have a more sinister, hysterical, or destructive aspect in cities, and city guards are almost never exempt from duty on Satyr Day. In fact, their numbers are usually doubled.

In city Satyr Days, the fool king or queen may be selected from a limited group, often the nobility. In other cities, the position is selected by lottery—but the lots may be sold at prohibitive prices. In other places, the fool is decided by the clergy, who may swayed by political considerations.

The city fool has the same license as the country fool, but the position seems to lack the same potency for members of the leisured class. After all, a noble fool has usually never done manual labor. As for marital fidelities, many peasants believe that the upper classes have little use for them anyhow. The primary advantage is the tax exemption.

Other city elders despise the “primitive” celebration of Satyr Day and attempt to suppress it, usually without success.

Someone who has been “fooled” once is often exempt from being the holy fool again, both in city and country practices. Interestingly enough, most country fools feel that this is just fine.

Stonedigger Fieldsson, one-time holy fool, put it this way:

“Getting everything you want just isn’t as good as you might think. It’s great at first, but you reach a point when you wonder what’s next. Then you realize that nothing’s next. Now I work hard again, but at least I’ve always got something in front of me—something to go towards. When I was the fool, towards the end anyhow, I didn’t have anything. . . .

“Not even my wife, really.”

SERPENT OF ICE. See “Elemental Avengers.”

SEVENTY-SEVEN STEPS. See “Dragons.”



In many lands, on many SPHERES, people have been found bearing a strange birthmark. Though their skin may be pale or dusky or any other COLOR, these people are marked by a pitch-black hand. This sign is seen as a blessing in some realms, as a curse in others, and as simply a strange mark in still others; yet those so marked rarely lead ordinary lives, for with the dark hand come gifts of sorcery. When the hand draws in light like a starless night, then the ELEMENTS bend to the will of the *Shadow Child*.

That is the NAME given to the black-handed: Shadow Children. These people often walk the spheres searching for adventure, for others so marked, or even just for an explanation of their origin. Unfortunately, they often find prejudice and hatred.

But where do the Shadow Children come from, and how is it that they are found in so many disparate spheres? The answer lies with an ancient group known as the *Legion of Shadow*.

Once the sworn defenders of a single nation, the Legion of Shadow was wrecked, and its members spread across uncounted spheres. Though the mark of the black hand and its powers continued to be passed on, its history was often forgotten or pressed into new shapes by too many tellings.

Some Shadow Children find others of their kind, and some do learn about their proud history, but there is little that can be said with certainty about their past.

Most Shadow Children who come together choose to do so in a spirit of loyalty and honor; even if the old stories of the legion’s honor are false, the Shadow Children of today take them to heart.

### *From the Chronicle of the Legion of Shadow*

Ocean never dropped her blade, even as her hand dropped from her wrist. Though maimed, she would have thrown herself bodily upon her foe had not her friend Shadow held her back.

Her cry would have cracked the heart of HEAVEN.

“Shadow, I have lost! How can I have my vengeance without a hand to hold a sword?”



"Do not fear, my lady, for your next meeting with Slate shall be his last."

Ocean's ministers gathered around, eyeing the pitch-hued sorcerer. They spoke: "Why does her hand bleed so? Cannot your spells stop his wound?"

Shadow shook his head.

"No wound from that blade will close, and our lady Ocean should be glad that Slate has no greater control than he has or he might have struck her from across the field."

The queen paled. "An unclosing wound? And my father unavenged? I cannot die with my task undone!"

The dusky Shadow spoke again to his ruler. "There is a way, my queen."

Pressing the bleeding wound to his good right hand, Shadow encircled both with the palm of his left, and, speaking a Word, his own hand was enjoined to the queen's, as a black glove upon a yellow arm.

"Shadow! I am whole once more! But you . . . you have gained a death in this exchange—a poor trade, one I'd have undone!"

"How can I die with my flesh living in you?" The sorcerer's teeth shone in a grin, like many moons in a starless night. "And my prophecy is fulfilled—despite my desire to lie with no woman, my blood has been mixed with a royal line."

"Your prophecy . . . and hope for mine as well. With a new sword hand, I can strike Slate to the ground, avenging my father and, now, you."

"I am with you always my lady. . . . My blood and my power, they shall live on in you . . . in your children, children destined for greatness. . . ."

"Shadow? Of what do you speak?"

"Attend me, for I am dying, and it is your death I gladly go to . . . . We three shall meet again—you, my queen, and me and Slate. You are the closer of fortunes. You shall complete these prophecies but . . . there are others, far distant. I await you in them."

The sorcerer's eyes closed, and for the second time Ocean cried in mortal loss.

Afterwards, she went on to slay the evil Slate and to wrest back the land of her ancestors, which she ruled for many years. Upon her death, her first son, Prime, took the throne. But by the time the wars were over Ocean had borne other

children, and each of them had a fist as black as their mother's. The black hand bred true, as did the sorcerous power of the mage Shadow, and though the ruling house of the land never carried the power, all those of the black hand are marked from birth for a holy fellowship of warriors. These warriors, then, are the Legion of Shadow.

*From the Tellings of Right Mark,  
a Citizen of the Holy Empire of New Moon*

Though my skin is yellow, my right hand is black as night, and though this mark was not on either of my parents or upon my sisters or brother, it was upon my father's mother as well. We knew nothing of it, but when I reached my age of naming, I took "Right Mark" as mine, for I felt that the COLOR of my hand meant something.

I traveled in search of others who had the mark, and I found some. I also found those who despised the mark and would have killed us for it.

The others with the mark were Golden Black, who is now my husband, Stonesmooth, who was an aged man when we met, and Firebrand, a mercenary.

Firebrand taught me some of the use of the hand, that through it I could cast FIRE on my enemies and not be burned. The mark was strong on him, and he had learned this power of ignition untaught, though his first use of it was tragic. Golden Black and I found that with our marks we could also call for fire without tinder or flint, though in me this power was weak.

We were still looking for Stonesmooth when we were set upon by a band of mercenaries. With the fires of our hands we drove off many, and from a survivor we learned that the mercenaries had been hired by a group of merchants, but we knew no more than that. We were later to encounter many hardships on our travels because of inexplicable animosity from travelers. To this day, I do not know why they hate us so.

Had we not met Stonesmooth, I would know even less of our history. The following is what I learned from him.

Once there was a queen of a distant land who was given the black hand by a sorcerer as a gift. With the powers of the hand, the queen and her descendants could use the powers of the sorcerer.

According to Stonesmooth, those with the mark were of a special legion, sworn to the defense of the realm. The more of these marked warriors gathered in a place, the greater the power they could command.

One warrior alone could command the lightest and most fleeting of ELEMENTS, fire. As we had already discovered, if we

**SILVER.** See "Four-Bladed Star," "Gatepasses," "Order of the Silver Nail," "Red Merchants," "Unity Mages," "Unity Roses" (silver roses), and "White Walkers."

**SILVER NAIL, ORDER OF THE.** See "Order of the Silver Nail."

**SILVER WILLOWS.** See "Order of the Silver Nail."

**SISTERS OF NIGHT.** See "Night-Blooming Star Rose."

## SKIN SCRIBES

### PHILOSOPHY

The body is its own map. It is so much itself that the division between described and description blurs. Changing the appearance of an ill body can lead it back to health.

Left to themselves, all things rise and fall; all things grow and decay. As we wheel through our lives on the disc of KARMA, we see many cycles. In our hands, HEAVEN has put the power to change these cycles. In our minds exists the wit to see them, and in our hearts, the will to do right.

Our power is the power of a circle: we can go forward and back, ascending and descending through the cycle of health. We could choose not to change anything, but if we choose this, we remain unchanged; this is a waste of the life karma has given us. Instead, we must use the power, grasp the wheel, and try to make a virtuous change.

### METHOD

A *skin scribe* is a particular type of sorcerer specializing in healing. By drawing on the skin, either with a pen or by striking tattoos, a skin scribe can control, regulate, and restore the energies of the body.

The scribes use symbols for the four elemental energies of the body in order to control those energies. The symbols are as follows:

**WATER:** A serpent, because it moves like WATER and is cool to the touch.

**AIR:** A bird, because it dwells in the sky.

**EARTH:** A tree, because it lives by the grace of the EARTH.

**FIRE:** The sun, which is the primal source of all FIRE.

Each ELEMENT is also associated with a part of the body.

**AIR:** The brow and eyes, the seat of reason.

**FIRE:** The heart and lungs, which burn when we make a great effort.

**WATER:** The belly and bowels, where the fluids of the body are stored and changed.

**EARTH:** The feet, because they are the foundation on which we stand.

### HISTORY

The first skin scribe was named Black Smoke. She had studied the discipline of the FOUR-BLADED STAR, and from the star-bearers she had learned the correspondences of the body. She disagreed, however, with her master on the crucial question of the unity of creation and destruction.

"Creation and destruction," said the master, "are of one piece. Without one, the other cannot exist. Surely the cycle of the Four-Bladed Star has taught you this much?"

"But master," replied Black Smoke, "the existence of a thing does not justify that thing. The existence of what is negative and destructive does not mean that we must follow them."

"You have the sight of a child. We pursue neither creation nor destruction purely. Our quest is for the unity that underlies them."

Black Smoke shook her head. "I cannot agree. Everywhere I look I see decay, destruction, and death. The roots of good and evil exist side by side in humanity, but without cultivation the good root may die and the evil one flourish. Even among our own disciples there are death seekers who use our skills only to slay and never to restore."

"We are in a dark cycle, my daughter. A cycle of light will follow."

"I am not content to be steered by fate or by the cycles or by my teacher. I have been given the potential for good, and I will not shun this gift. I will devote all my energy to what is positive, to that which heals and creates. If a cycle of light is coming, it is my duty to speed it."

It is a bitter irony that after dedicating her life to healing and the positive cycle, Black Smoke was killed by a renegade follower of the Four-Bladed Star. His actions were censured by his fellow disciples, and he was sentenced to death, but no punishment could replace the great healer.

So saying, Black Smoke left the discipline and founded her own school, the Skin Scribe School. From the Four-Bladed Star she took the study of the human body and the restorative cycle, but she omitted their teachings of the destructive cycle. To this she added knowledge gained on extensive spherewalks. The symbols representing the four elements were a BOON given her by a DEITY or spirit in recognition of her striving for wholeness.

*From Black Smoke's  
Writings on Healing*

*Although Black Smoke's  
cure for blindness is effective  
since understanding sight  
relies on the element of air,  
most scholars now agree  
that sight itself is  
primarily linked to fire."  
—Lizard's Ghost,  
a pupil of Black Smoke*

symbol upon the affected organ. In many cases the serpent alleviates immediate distress, but it rarely addresses the real cause of the discomfort.

#### FOR A PAIN OF THE HEAD

An ache of the head is most often caused by heavy thoughts. To relieve these thoughts, trace the bird upon the brow. The patient's thoughts will become light, and the heavy problems will be seen in a reasonable perspective.

#### FOR CHILLS

Chills are caused by a deficiency of heat throughout the whole body. To treat them, draw the solar sign upon the feet; by increasing fire energy at the body's root, the chills can be driven out of the body entire.

#### FOR FEVER

Fever is caused by the predominant influence of the heart, with FIRE upsetting the balance of the other elements. A serpent drawn upon the chest alleviates fever.

#### FOR DELIRIUM

Delirium is caused by an overheating of the brain, where by the thinking function becomes confused. The application of a serpent image around the skull can cool the brain. Accompanied by a bird, it will restore reason.

#### FOR A PAIN IN THE STOMACH

There are different cures for aches of the stomach, and which one is chosen should depend upon what influence is acting upon the pain. An excess of winds in the stomach can dry out the organs, causing severe distress. To treat, apply the tree symbol to the belly, which will block and diffuse the winds. On the other hand, the source of stomach distress is sometimes a blockage caused by too firm an EARTH energy. This kind of stomach pain can be treated by placing the bird



#### FOR A POX UPON THE FLESH

A pox indicates an imbalance between WATER and fire. If the flesh seems moist or oily, there is too much water; apply the sun sign temporarily to the belly to dry it. If the flesh seems dry, there is too much fire; apply the serpent to the heart temporarily. Be warned: the permanent application of these signs to their converse zones can have far-reaching and dangerous effects on the sufferer!

#### FOR A SEVERE COUGH

A cough is caused by a surfeit of AIR in the heart and lungs. Being dried by the air, the body sometimes tries to compensate with watery matter or even with the essential water of life, blood itself. Instead, what the patient requires is application of earth energy, the air's contrary, to the lungs and heart. The application of the tree symbol usually cures a cough.

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#### FOR BLINDNESS

Blindness is a sign of severe damage or loss in the airy aspect. The restoration of sight requires powerful and difficult techniques, and they must be permanent.

If this cure is performed incorrectly, it can be extremely dangerous. The energies involved are very powerful, and if they are not perfectly balanced, they spread out from the eyes and infect the brain as well. Madness is a certain result, and death is not an unlikely one. Having thus cautioned the reader, I will proceed with the description of the cure.

First, a bird must be struck upon each eyelid, with care being taken not to further damage the eyes. Once that channel between the air without and the mind within has been restored, it must be stabilized. A tree should be tattooed on each cheekbone to provide permanence to the eyelid marking—a home for the bird, one might say. Above each eyebrow, place a sun in order to prevent stagnation of the system. Finally, a serpent should encircle all these symbols, in order to provide smooth and balanced interaction.

#### FOR MUTENESS

There are two causes for muteness, each requiring a different cure.

When someone has experienced a great fright or sorrow, his or her speech may depart. This is because the rational air

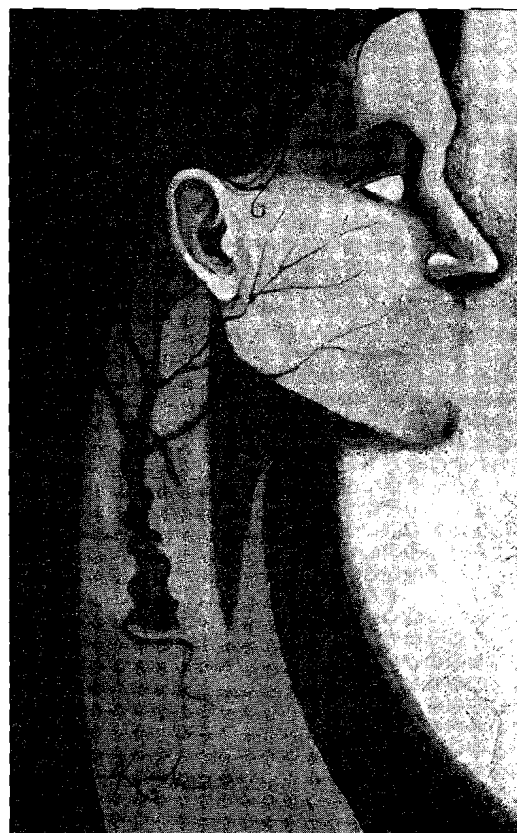
element has been eclipsed by the emotional water element. The tongue believes that all speech is dangerous and remains limp from the influence of a weak stomach instead of obeying the head. In this instance, a bird mark upon the tongue itself serves to bind the rebel organ back to its original function.

In cases where disease or injury has left the subject voiceless, muteness is more likely to be a problem of the throat. Since the throat is disordered and cannot translate the air of the mind and the fire of the heart into words, it must be bolstered with the contraries of air and fire: earth and water. The presence of these energies tempers the malignant effect that air and fire have upon the injured throat. With the balance restored, speech can once again commence. Thus, the marking of a snake wrapped around a tree can be struck into the throat to restore speech.

Many can learn a few simple cures from skin scribes, but the truly great and permanent healings take years to learn, and the scribes with the skill to perform them are rare and highly sought after.

#### FOR THE WASTING DISEASE

This most perilous of diseases is caused by a complete inversion of the natural order. Because the energies of the body are reversed, the body turns inward and consumes itself. Once the *wasting disease* has struck, the victim is on the path to death; there is no way out but through.





The cure is perilous. Upon each of the primary zones, an image of death is made: Upon the brow, a grounded bird with folded wings. Upon the chest, the sun eclipsed. Upon the stomach, a serpent with its tail in its mouth. Upon the feet, a barren, winter tree.

Under the influence of these images, the body slows down and eventually dies, bringing the death of the disease with it. Quickly, before the soul has time to flee the body entirely, the images must be reversed, the dead bird replaced by one in flight, the sun returned to its glory, the serpent straight instead of curled, and the tree once more clothed. The slightest error in the inscription of the markings will ensure that the patient never recovers, but time is nonetheless of the essence. Furthermore, should the markings ever be damaged, the patient's life inexorably flees.

A further hazard of this treatment is that on occasion the body is revived after the flight of the soul. In this case, it is an empty vessel, open to the use of any passing spirit. Be warned.

#### FOR THE FALLING SICKNESS

The *falling sickness* is caused by tyranny of the fire in the body over the air. Instead of obeying the will, the body is racked by a

thousand conflicting impulses and is reduced to a falling, quivering mass. The cure is made by permanently marking the chest with the sign of the bird. However, this permanent subjugation of fire by air can have unfortunate effects on the patient: while the falling sickness is cured, many later complain of a loss of vitality, their internal fires having been suppressed by the airy element.

#### FOR A WITHERED LIMB

Limbs that are withered, either from birth or by sorcery, are usually shrunk by a dissociation of the tissues. In most cases, a permanent serpent wound around the limb restores it to suppleness within a lunar month.

SKYHAWK. See "Elemental Avengers."

## SOUL LEECHES AND SPELL EATERS

### THE TALE OF THE SPELL-EATING MAGE

The talespinner's smile seemed almost malicious in the firelight as we gathered around. "Now listen, if you dare, to a tale of magic and fear.

"Once upon a time there was a great enchanter, the Obsidian Mage. Magic was his meat and drink, his bride and his children. No sorcery was too great for his challenge, and no sacrifice too great for his knowledge.

"The Obsidian Mage would test his spells on the bodies and souls of other mages, deeming combat the only true proof of mettle. He struggled with Door of Rings and with his great art banished her to a distant realm. This was before Door of Rings had found the Eagle's Mountain . . . but that is another tale.

"The mage battled with the great Graytail and sealed her into a mountain for a year and a day. He challenged the legendary *Lame Nemesis*, who frustrated him by refusing to battle with him. It was by the hand of this mage that the Shadow King was killed, in a battle that lasted ten years, a battle that darkened the sun and left the countryside barren, as it remains today except for . . . ah, but that too, is another tale.

"This is the tale of the Obsidian Mage and his battle with Many Masks, the tale of his first loss. The Obsidian Mage was no match for the trickery of Many Masks, who was seen to be where he was not and who was never seen where he was. Confounded by

Cures of permanent or fatal conditions require permanent markings and greater healing energy. These marks are usually struck with needles and ink, though some skin scribes prefer to make a mark by drawing a sooty thread through the skin.



Many Masks, the Obsidian Mage could not tell up from down, sunrise from sunset, the EARTH below from the AIR above. In this state of madness, he was seduced by the forces of darkness, for he could not tell right from wrong or wisdom from folly.

"Some say the mage was approached by that great worm who is the enemy of all humanity, the DRAGON whose NAME should not be spoken. Others claim it was a demon of mischief who tempted him, and still others say that a colleague wished to usurp his tower of knowledge. . . . But me, I believe those who said it was one of the DEITIES who tempted him. Aye, a deity who saw that in his arrogance the Obsidian Mage had made magic his deity and power his religion.

"Whoever the tempter, the mage succumbed and offered to endure any changes the spirit would put him through. In return, the mage was to receive the power to eat spells and have them not harm him but only make him ever more powerful.

"The spirit agreed, and on the mage's belly it put a great mouth, full of sharp, yellow teeth. Armed with his new power, the mage approached Many Masks, and devoured all his spells, and was not confounded, and laughed, and struck him down. And then the mouth on his belly spoke to him and said, 'I want to eat this man.' And the Obsidian Mage agreed and cut up Many Masks and fed his body into the mouth at his belly.

"The Obsidian Mage was greatly pleased at first, but he discovered that his hunger quickly returned. When he ate the meat and bread of normal people, the mouth of his stomach spat it out upon the ground. 'I do not like this meat and bread,' it said. 'I would have mage flesh instead.'

"The Obsidian Mage made haste to the tower of another wizard and without so much as a challenge tried to strike her down with sorcery—only to discover that the great mouth on his belly did not care about the source of the spells it ate. The wizard in the tower tried to strike down the Obsidian Mage with FIRE and darkness. Seeing her spells come to nothing, and furthermore seeing that the Obsidian Mage had no spells of his own, the wizard shut her tower up tight and ordered guards with spears and swords to drive off the Obsidian Mage, who was put to flight.

"The Obsidian Mage gnashed his teeth with rage, and the mouth in his stomach gnashed its teeth with hunger. With heavy steps, the mage turned towards his own tower, knowing he would not be turned away and knowing furthermore that his own apprentices would be there. 'They are small mages,' said the mouth in his belly, 'but mages nonetheless, and they will fill my void.'

One spell eater,  
called Student  
of the Flesh, was  
known to hire  
herself out  
as a mercenary.  
Her powers  
commanded a high  
price, but she  
would only battle  
for those who  
agreed to sacrifice  
sorcerers to her  
when there were  
no spells for  
her to eat.

"This was not to be, for the ghost of Many Masks flew ahead of the Obsidian Mage and warned the apprentices. All fled but one, the one known as Graven Longbow, who waited to see for herself the thing her master had become. When the Obsidian Mage returned he fell upon Graven Longbow with desperate hunger, and the spells of both were worthless before the roaring appetite of the devouring mouth. Graven Longbow escaped only by her fleetness of foot, and the Obsidian Mage was left alone in his tower.

"I am very hungry,' moaned the mouth in his belly.

"I, too,' said the Obsidian Mage, 'but since you consume my magic as well, I cannot get you any more mages to devour.'

"I cannot help my nature,' said the devouring mouth. 'But I do see one more mage to eat.'

"And with those words the mouth ate the Obsidian Mage, leaving nothing behind, not even itself."

The storyteller leaned back into the shadows, his body a shadow against the deeper darkness. A branch in the fire snapped loudly, and I jumped as the fire flared bright.

"Some say that in that mage's tower you can still hear those chattering teeth . . . moaning and biting and ever hungry for masonry. Let this be a lesson to any who would ally themselves with hunger."

## Soul Leeches

The legend of the Obsidian Mage has been distorted through the centuries and contains many falsehoods. However, the notion that a wizard—or indeed anyone—can be seduced into destruction by the lust for power is entirely true. True as well is the story of the devouring mouth.

Long before such a mouth manifests, however, its potential exists in a seed known as a *soul leech*. These leeches have no substance, and they attach themselves to the AURAS of enchanter in order to feed.

At first, soul leeches connected to the soul of a sorcerer are very difficult to spot. A sensitive enchanter, or any other exceptionally perceptive person, might notice them. At this point, the leech is very weak.

The leech waits for the mage to fail a spell. When an attempt at magic fails, the leech is able to consume the miscast enchantment. The leech then grows. At this stage, it is

still very difficult to spot, but it can begin to influence the thoughts of the mage. It does so by encouraging him or her to use ever more magic, in ever greater displays of power. At the same time, the leech begins to exert its power to foil spells. Any time a spell is foiled (even by outside influences), the leech consumes it and grows.

When the magic of the leech equals that of the mage, the mouth develops. The mage gets no nourishment from normal food; his or her hunger is only slaked by consuming magical power.

Consuming spells, either those cast by the host or those of other mages, nourishes the soul leech for a few days, depending on the power of the caster. Consuming a magical artifact or permanent enchantment sustains the mouth for weeks, or even months.

The mouth completely dominates the host after it consumes the flesh of a mage. After that event, the sorcerer's original soul is gone, REINCARNATED; only the flesh remains, totally dominated by the hungry parasite. In some cases, it seems that traces of the will, mind, and personality of the sorcerer remain as well, though distorted and twisted. The spell eater at this stage is full-fledged.

Spell eaters seek out enchanters and try to consume them, sustaining themselves on what other magical objects and effects they can also absorb.

A spell eater can consume any spell cast by someone using weaker magic but cannot consume any well-cast spell of a stronger magician. If a sorcerer battles a spell eater and their powers are equal, victory lies in the hands of fortune.

When a spell eater conquers a mage, it gains that sorcerer's vitality. However, by consuming spells, the eater can become temporarily more powerful. For every spell successfully consumed, the eater can apply its energy to its own vitality, or it can make itself more fierce and strong. If it does so, however, it is not able to nourish itself from the spell.

Spell eaters are always hungry.

It's said that a spell eater once tried to consume the Pearl of Making. It is the only story in which one of these creatures chokes to death.

## RUNETUSKS

If one can kill a spell eater and pull out its teeth, the teeth can be made into *runetusk*s. Runetusk share the property of spell absorption with their source; however, runetusk cannot digest or release the energy they store. The strength of the tusk depends on the magical strength of the spell eater from which it was taken. It can safely absorb any spell of lesser power that is cast directly at the tusk's wielder.

It cannot "drain" magic from static sources, disenchant magic that is in place, or protect anyone but the person holding it.

If a wizard of weak magic tries to cast a spell immolating a merchant with a powerful magic runetusk, the spell will fail. If, however, the wizard tries to set the merchant's wagon on fire, the spell will succeed—even if the merchant and the tusk are inside.

The absorbed spells do not vanish; they remain in the tusk. If a spell that is too strong for the tusk to capture is cast upon the tusk bearer, not only does that spell take effect, but the tusk breaks and all the enchantments it holds spill out at random, affecting everyone and everything in the area.

Runetusk with strong magic are prohibitively rare and difficult to obtain. No one has heard of a runetusk powerful enough to stop the spells of a truly powerful mage.

Merchants rarely mention the differing potencies of the runetusk they sell—if, in fact, they know the tusk's various limitations themselves.

Related Topic: "Clothing."



## SOULFINGER

The third finger on the left hand is known as the *soulfinger*, the conduit through which the soul enters and leaves the body. Many necromancers know how to restore mobility to a corpse by breathing into its soulfinger. Doing this creates a creature with animation but neither soul nor independent will. Some burial customs include the removal of the finger or the entire hand in order to prevent such tampering. Others simply place iron rings on the soulfingers of their dead before burial in order to "chain out" any other spirit that might enter it.



Losing the left hand can be extremely dangerous. Unless the proper spells or rituals are performed to reopen the channel, the spirit may become trapped in the body after death.

## SOULSEEKERS

### PHILOSOPHY

The DEITIES, being perfect, live only one life. We, being imperfect, labor through many lives. In each, we are given a task to complete—a challenge to overcome or a goal to attain. These are not physical goals but rather refinements of self. As many years of WATER wear a stone smooth, so many lives can remove the flaws of a soul.

Our path to perfection is hard, however, and the farther along the road we get, the more barriers are placed in our path. The lying DRAGON, great enemy of humankind, tries to tell us that the deities are jealous of perfection. We, however, feel that the purpose of our difficulties is to show us the worth of the goal. From those who have done much, much is always expected. A perfection easily won would be pointless.

We frail humans need all the help we can get, from our past selves and from each other. To chart the course of our future refinement, it is useful to look back upon the course we have already walked.

### HISTORY

The school of the *Soulseekers* is ancient, and its founding is apocryphal. Their *Book of What Was* claims that the school was founded by no lesser person than an AVATAR of the Loyal Dragon. Seeing that humans go through many incarnations repeating the same mistakes, the Loyal Dragon (then incarnate as a woman named Great of Soul) taught them the art of looking back into their past lives. With the careful use of this art, which was named *true recall*, they were better able to see their patterns of error and guide themselves away from them.

The school continued in this fashion for a long time, until one of its members, a mage known as Oakenhold, discovered another secret of KARMA. Oakenhold had studied other forms of magic and was adept at moving out of his body as an invisible spirit. By means of a technique he named *chasing the rainbow*, he was able to follow a soul after death and find the newborn into which it was placed.

Many who had studied the art of true recall felt that chasing the rainbow was a perversion of the Soulseeker's original purpose, for it focused one's attention on the physicality of others instead of the spirituality of self. Those who felt this left the school, though they continued to practice their past-life searches. The followers of Oakenhold, who now claimed to be

the only "true" Soulseekers, said that some were ready for a larger moral quest, one that included the well-being of others as well as of self.

By chasing the rainbow, souls were able to continue acquaintance over many, many lifetimes. The Soulseekers had already discovered that souls tend to move through incarnations in groups (called *COHORTS*), with one soul being father to another in one life and daughter or wife to it in another. Now the Soulseekers were able to hand down the knowledge of true recall from one life to the next.

Many people have little sympathy for the Soulseekers, considering them more than slightly odd. Many have found it alarming when a complete stranger shows up bearing expensive gifts for a newborn, claiming that the child used to be a parent. Some suspicious parents accept the gifts but do not allow the child to have any contact with the Soulseeker. The Soulseekers feel they ought to be patient with such behavior; after all, there's always the next life.

Some Soulseekers have been in groups with their cohorts for ten or even twenty lifetimes. These groups know each other so thoroughly and intimately that they rarely bother to get to know outsiders. Soulseekers claim that such intimate groups (known as *utter families*) are well on their road to enlightenment and have little need for those who are not as far along the path. Clergy have condemned utter families as being ingrown and spiritually incestuous, distracted from the divine by an obsession with repeating past acquaintances.

Another reason that many distrust and dislike utter families is that they show little regard for the conventions of sexual partnership. Since everyone in an utter family has been both male and female, has been both husband and wife to almost every other member, the adult family members' current genders, ages, and relationships carry less relevance. Among conservatives, they are reviled as sexual deviants of the first caliber.

Soulseekers often seem otherworldly to those around them; their concentration on the spiritual leaves them little time or energy for the physical treasures most people value so highly. To the Soulseeker, such things are transient; the souls of one's cohorts or one's utter family are all that matter. To find such soulmates, Soulseekers will risk any trial or hardship—to them, death is the least of worries.

### METHOD

The magic of the Soulseekers is highly receptive in nature; by attuning themselves to what they call the *water soul*, they become like a reflective mirror, in which the images of past and present can emerge.

The first discipline practiced by the Soulseekers is one that

is widely practiced in other religions and mystic organizations. This is the practice of true recall, and through it, one can gain access to the personalities of previous incarnations.

At the most basic level, true recall enables one to access some of one's memories from one or two past lives. The memories lack a sense of immediacy, though they do carry emotional overtones. The memories that are most accessible are those of crucial junctures, life-changing decisions, and, often, life-ending ones.

Greater proficiency in true recall allows one to completely access the memories of one life and to touch on the key memories of dozens of others. The memories of this "prime" life are so accurate that skills from that life can be utilized in the current one: a woman who was a clock maker in a previous life could construct a clock even if she had never even seen one before her true recall.

At an even higher level, the true recaller can recognize a person met in a past life, even if that person is now incarnated in a different body. How much the two remember depends on which life they met in and how closely they knew each other.

Mastery of true recall enables one to completely remember dozens of lives—sometimes more than a hundred. With so many memories at their disposal, true-recall masters become skilled at all but the most secret and obscure techniques in most every area of human endeavor.

Most who reach this level can integrate their past selves into a coherent whole. There are a few, however, who find the rush of past personalities terribly disconcerting, especially if their past personalities were widely different from each other. These unfortunates often go mad or become "possessed" by one particularly strong-willed incarnation.

The other major discipline of the Soulseeker's art is that of chasing the rainbow. The first step entails learning to detach soul from body. Novices can only stay outside of their bodies for an hour or two before they lose their concentration and inadvertently move body instead of soul. While in spirit form, they are invisible and immaterial, unable to affect or be affected by events around them. Indeed, a Soulseeker in this state cannot perceive the physical world in any sense; he or she is open only to strong spiritual energies.

The fallacy of the Soulseekers is that they believe that humans can puzzle out a divine plan. By recalling past lives they are trying to cheat karma, when their observations may lead them to conclusions that are exactly the opposite of what karma is trying to teach them."  
—Velocity, a philosopher of River's Edge

At the next level of mastery, the chaser of rainbows can see a multihued karmic trail to the place where a person recently died, or from the dead body. This trail can be followed to the new body. Only the highest of masters can follow the trail so closely that they are not thrown off by an incarnation on another SPHERE.

There are hazards to chasing the rainbow, however. The first is the danger to the physical body. Immobile and oblivious, the body is easy prey for wild animals—or wild humans, for that matter. Furthermore, a disincorporate Soulseeker is visible to those who see AURAS and to others who can perceive the unseen.

Powerful spirit doctors and wizards can capture the Soulseeker as they would any other spirit. Finally, some Soulseekers follow a soul's path so far that they are unable to find their way back to their own bodies. This is especially likely to happen if the Soulseeker's physical body is moved while he or she is chasing.

Related Topic: "Rainbows."

SOULSINGER, APEX. See "Mirror of Shadows," "Reincarnation," "Shadow Children," and "Tempest Threshold."

## SPEAKERS, THE

### PHILOSOPHY

The words we use are reflections of thoughts. They are the bridges between minds. They are images. Yet these words, the servants of the mind, are also the mind's master.

Reflections can be directed. Bridges can lead astray. Images can be distorted. Only thought and experience are pure, and yet these too pass through the gate of the word.

Control the gate, control the mind.

### HISTORY

The origins of the *Speakers* are shrouded in mystery—the *Speakers* themselves refuse to speak definitively on the subject. A persistent rumor is that the school was founded by a renegade SPRING BORN who had learned the secrets from a DRAGON.

The *Speakers* deny that any of their number study Cleacunn. They claim the myth was created whole cloth by the Basahn, who were miffed that the *Speakers* could comprehend their secret tongue. Most people believe the *Speakers*.

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METHOD

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Followers of the Speakers' school are taught that we learn words as tools for thought but that the mind soon becomes lazy. With such a powerful tool as words, the mind soon verbalizes all experience instead of remembering directly. Soon, instead of genuine memories we have internal monologues, accompanied by visions that are crafted to correspond to the words instead of preceding them. Language throws a web of illusion around the very reality it is supposed to be describing.

This is a weakness. As a leg becomes weakened if constantly supported by a crutch, so the mind becomes weakened if constantly relying only on words. The first and most critical stage of a Speaker's training is learning to think without words (a skill that allows Speakers to baffle many who practice "mind reading").

This first stage leaves Speakers with great clarity of thought and purity of memory. Many leave their masters at this stage, happy to have gained these abilities.

*Do you truly remember, or do you only recall remembering?"  
—a Speaker saying*

Others continue into the second stage. Having distanced themselves from words, they can now manipulate words objectively, both in their own minds and in the minds of others. At this stage Speakers gain their admired—indeed, feared—skills at rhetoric.

A Speaker of this level is more than a sophist; he or she can directly observe and manipulate the "verbalness" of others. Many Speakers disdain the manipulation of the weak and verbally crippled minds of their fellows. Others, however, become Speakers specifically in order to gain such control.

Through observation, Speakers of the second level can learn the cadences and vocabularies of others—this is child's play to them. Once they have observed these patterns of speech, however, they can read from them patterns of thought. A Speaker who has been exposed to someone long enough can not only predict his or her next words but can say with confidence what he or she is thinking.

Speakers of this rank are widely believed to be mind readers. Their skill is, in truth, much more useful than mere mind reading. Like a carpenter who can look at a table and guess what tools were used to build it, a Speaker can listen to a phrase and guess at the mind and spirit that crafted it.

*You are impressed by the poems of Town Stone? They are beautiful, but they are nothing compared to the beauty that is in his mind when they are made. The words of a poem are the excrement of the poetic process. To a word-crippled mind, they have worth, but the real beauty can be found by using Town Stone's poems as a road into the castle of his thoughts. From there, vistas can be found that shame any mere collections of words on a page."  
—Black Crane, Speaker*

Picking the right words with which to persuade is easy at this stage. Some Speakers use this command of language to amass wealth or power, but most are unimpressed by such things. To them, the real potential for their skill is to collect mind forms.

To a second-stage Speaker, consciousness, outlook, and personality are no longer individual. By following the speech of a great general, the Speaker can uncover the unspoken tactical notions beneath. By listening to a great musician or dancer speak, the Speaker can feel with them the deep heartbeat of their art. From the words of a saint, a Speaker can not only learn the dry piety of the mind but can also infer the rich dedication of the devoted soul.

Many Speakers have their original personalities completely eroded by their constant "borrowing" from those with superior mental or spiritual talents.

There are hazards for a Speaker who becomes too enmeshed in the thought patterns of another. If the Speaker is unable to return to a wordless state of mind, he or she may become trapped within the personality of another, aping his or her behaviors until death. It is said that the dread worm ALURAX takes a special glee in "collecting" Speakers through philosophical debate.

The roads opened by Speakers' skills run both ways. Even as they are able to absorb thought frames from others, they are also able to implant their own beliefs and perceptions in others. This is difficult, of course; instead of merely observing and copying a mind, they must actually change it. Complete transformations are rare, but many Speakers are able to revise the consciousness of others, even to the point of changing or erasing their beliefs and memories.

Ironically, the one thing that a Speaker cannot graft onto another's personality is the skill of wordless thought.

There are rumors of a third level of the Speakers' art. Supposedly, an inner core of practitioners has allied itself with the negative VERBALISTS in their search for words of CLEACUUN. The negative Verbalists believe Cleacuun is the language of HEAVEN and that the four ELEMENTS are just manifestations of the underlying words of the DEITIES. While these Verbalists seek Cleacuun in order to gain power of the elements, the Speakers seek the words for a far different reason: by learning them, they hope to be able to build a road into the mind of the divine.

**SPELL EATERS.** See "Soul Leeches and Spell Eaters."

## SPHERES

A *sphere* is a world composed of many realms or nations and containing on it a huge variety of cultures and geographies.

See also "Gates" and "Spherewalkers."

## SPHEREWALKERS

A *spherewalker* is someone who can walk through GATES to other SPHERES. Some realms shun spherewalkers because of the disruption (usually unintentional) spherewalkers cause to their daily lives and to their beliefs about the world. Others welcome spherewalkers and the new ideas they bring with them from other spheres. Because of their fresh perspectives, spherewalkers can often solve problems that the inhabitants of a given realm cannot.

See also "Gates" and "Spheres."

## SPRING BORN, THE

### THE HISTORY OF TWO DRAGONS

In ancient days, the Dragon of Water sought out a people of peace who loved the quiet virtues of harmony and serenity. These people were known as the *Spring Born*, and as it happens there were no men among them.

"I wish to sleep," said the Dragon of Water, who had been punished by HEAVEN with blindness and pain, "and I wish my slumber to be undisturbed. Therefore, do not let war and strife come into your land."

"Great Dragon," replied the leader of the Spring Born, "nobody seeks war and strife, our people least of all. Yet they sometimes come despite all resistance."

"This is true," said the DRAGON. "Therefore, I shall give you three gifts, that your land may be happy and peaceful, and that I may rest undisturbed."

The first gift was a glass orb, which was set into a stand worked into the shape of a dragon's claw. "Look into this and you shall see through the eyes of your land's greatest threat. It cannot show the face of your danger, but with it you can discover many problems before they come to fruition, and with it you can prevent the problems of the future."

The second gift was a double-headed axe. The axe was shaped like a serpentine dragon, with no legs to mar the length of its body but with two keen crescent wings for blades. "Whosoever bears this axe shall be mighty in battle," said the Dragon of Water, "and shall never tire. Even if a problem should escape the eye of the orb, with this weapon you can battle it as it matures."

The third gift was a lens, and its setting was shaped like a dragon whose neck and tail curved to hold the glassy disc. "If a problem cannot be prevented and cannot be stopped, with this it can be cured," said the dragon, "for whoever bears this lens shall be seen by all as one of worthy opinion, whose words will be persuasive and wise in the ears of all who hear."

"Finally, should any truly great crisis occur, the three can be given to one great champion, and a miracle will occur. That woman shall become a warrior four times as tall as an ordinary woman. She will see each strike from a foe before it is made and will strike swift and sure. Her actions shall be deceptive and misjudged by all enemies who behold her."





The dragon crawled off to sleep. Armed with the three devices, the realm of the Spring Born was peaceful for many years.

When a spy came from a neighboring realm, he was foreseen by the orb. Well prepared for him, the Spring Born were able to hoodwink him. He returned to his land full of great lies about the mighty Spring Born warriors.

When a great COCKATRICE as long as a train of wagons descended upon the land, a woman took up the axe and struck its head from its body in a single blow.

When the mighty warlord Father Tyrant came to their lands, he was met by one wearing the lens, and she was seen by him as a wise and mighty noble. Father Tyrant decided not to strike their lands, but later, when he had conquered all the realms nearby but theirs, he returned and would not be dissuaded. Then the three BOONS had to be taken by one woman, who became an apparition so fearsome and so

strong that Father Tyrant was slain, and his army was driven in all directions.

The Spring Born lived in peace and plenty for many years, until the dread lord ALURAX heard of their great power. And knowing that such power must be the work of dragons or DEITIES, he took it

upon himself to steal the three gifts and keep them for his own purposes.

Through his cunning, Alurax was able to deceive the one who looked through the orb, for he used his power to deceive even his own eyes, and through them the orb, and through the orb, the one who looked through it. He came upon her with words of temptation and seduction, and by his persuasive wiles she was taken. He showed her and many who followed her the ways of men and women. But one night Alurax said, "I have one more secret to show you. Dismiss your servants so that we can be alone." As soon as she had done so, he devoured her in two bites and lapped up her blood from the floor. Then he took the orb and stole away with it.

There was great consternation at the loss of the orb, but the Spring Born consoled themselves with the presence of the axe and the lens, for if they could not see the problems of the future, they might still heal the problems of the past and halt the problems of the present.

There was one Spring Born who was gifted in speaking and who had eventually risen to the rank of prime mediator and ambassador. And with this post, she was given

the lens. Upon receiving it, she immediately slipped away from the Spring Born lands, traveling to foreign realms, where with the power of the lens she gained many followers and amassed great wealth. It is said by some that the school of magic known as the SPEAKERS was founded by this Spring Born by using secrets pried forth from the lens.

The Spring Born were very sorry that two of their gifts had been taken from them, and they reasoned that the lens would not have been lost if they had possessed the orb to warn them of treachery. Therefore, they dedicated themselves to the study of war and to the mastery of the axe, and they set out to raze the kingdom of Alurax and win the orb back.

The war between Alurax and the Spring Born lasted for hundreds of years, and though the dread lord tried many tricks and ruses to steal the axe from them, in the end he was forced to flee, taking the orb with him.

As for the Dragon of Water, she was awakened by the loss of the orb, and though she tried to sleep again, she could feel the Spring Born's distress at the loss of the lens, as well as their rage as they took to following the axe. And so the dragon fled their land and searched for another place to rest.

To this day, the Spring Born swear eternal enmity against Alurax, and they still walk the SPHERES searching for their lost treasures.

## SPRING BORN AMONG THE SPHERES

The Spring Born are a race composed entirely of women, residing in a fertile land called Riverwind. Years ago, the women of Riverwind were entrusted with three great treasures by a DRAGON, but through trickery and treachery, only one remains: the double-bitted axe that has become the symbol of their people.

Their NAME refers to the unusual means by which a wholly female race propagates. The details are shrouded in mystery, and the Spring Born take great offense to any outsider who inquires too avidly. Most people believe that there is a sacred spring where the women go to lie with a god of the waters, but where this spring is, none can say.

*It is said that some whitecaps have been accepted by the Basahn. Not only are they trusted to ride in Basahn caravans but they are even allowed to study the Basahn language.*

The Spring Born have no taste for conquest; though mighty in battle, they save their rage for the dragon ALURAX, who long ago stole one of their great treasures. Many Spring Born consider it a sacred duty to thwart the wiles of the worm wherever they can be found. Many others oppressed by the dragon have found these women to be powerful allies.

Besides the hunting of the worm, the Spring Born slake a thirst for adventure with the *twin quests*. The twin quests are, of course, to restore the two treasures stolen from them. One treasure, the dragon lens, was stolen by a Spring Born, and though rumors of it persist here and there, none can say for sure where it has been. The orb, the other treasure, was stolen by dread Alurax, who presumably still has it.

Perhaps one Spring Born in a hundred is born a *whitecap*. Whitecaps have hair the color of starlight, even as infants. They are considered to be both blessed and burdened: blessed with great gifts but burdened with great fate and responsibility. In addition to strength of body and spirit, many whitecaps seem to have supernatural abilities as well. A whitecap called Icelock, who served as a scout for the general Empty Heart, was known to walk across WATER and FIRE to flank an enemy. Autumn Sea, ambassador to EVERWAY, was known to strike birds from the AIR without sling or bow, using only the force of her gaze.

It would seem that all whitecaps can SPHEREWALK, but in general it seems that spherewalking is far more common among the Spring Born than it is among other peoples. It is speculated that a patron DEITY has given them this ability in order to help them find their treasures. Furthermore, those who have encountered Spring Born along the gatepaths say that the talents of the Spring Born are not limited to the opening of GATES.

Some of these women are great warriors, students of the axe. They are trained in a series of fighting maneuvers based on the FORTUNE DECK. The upright card positions teach defensive movements, while the inverted cards represent direct attacks. For example, the movement called *Overlooking the Diamond* involves raising the axe horizontally above the head, thus exposing the stomach and legs. When the opponent strikes low, the axe is brought spinning downward with

tremendous force. Performed properly, this move can shear both hands off an enemy. The *inverted Creator* movement is an attack that actually throws the axe at an enemy. Since when inverted The Creator is a card of abandonment, the warrior abandons her weapon to attack a foe. The inverted Defender card is a card of peril, and the corresponding attack involves spinning in a complete circle to generate power for the strike. Turning her back to an opponent, however briefly, puts the axe bearer in peril, but the power of the attack is great.

Students of this style of battle believe that success lies not in initiating battles or provoking others into attack but in being able to triumph when struggles do occur. They are not belligerent, but they don't back down either.



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Not all Spring Born are warriors; indeed, some of the finest diplomats known on any SPHERE hail from the courts of Riverwind. A Spring Born organization called the *League of the Lens* maintains a massive library and school that teaches the customs, habits, and etiquette of uncounted religions, cultures, and realms. Most members of the league are comfortable in dozens of civilizations. In fact, many are skilled enough to pass themselves off as members of different societies—even to members of those societies. Accent, dress, beliefs, and appearance are all impeccably mimicked.

If rumors can be believed, the League of the Lens produces as many spies as diplomats. These spies travel to far spheres, hoping to infiltrate lands that are under the sway of ALURAX, eventually freeing them from his yoke or even getting an opportunity to strike at him directly. These spies' aid has been of great use to those who resist the tyranny of the worm.

While some Spring Born search for Alurax on the field of battle and others pursue the twin quests in libraries and noble courts, still others can be found in the wilderness, far from city and battlefield. Considering the wild lands the perfect place in which to hone their bodies and refine their spirits, these women are renowned as scouts and trackers. It is said that some develop such an affinity for the wilderness that they are adopted into animal clans. Such a woman may hunt with wolves or call on falcons for aid.

STAR ROSE. See "Night-Blooming Star Rose."

## STARHORNS

A *starhorn* is a special glass cone that is long, thin, and curled like a ram's horn. The surface is carved with symbols of constellations and stars, and the horn itself forms a twisting map of the movements of the stars through the seasons. Even when their magic potency is gone, starhorns are valued as works of art.

A starhorn lets you hear, for one night, the voices of the stars. Some speak in the human TONGUE, but listening to the inhuman tones of great constellations gives one even purer communication. Those who have listened to starhorns say that the music of the stars is indescribably beautiful and that by steady attention one may glean insights into what is, what was,

and what will come. It is said the great general Fountain of Orphan's Tears would not go into battle without listening to such a horn the night before.

STONE ELEPHANTS. See "Elemental Avengers."

STRANGERSIDE. See "Everway."

Summerwater is  
the opposite of  
winterwater.

## SUMMERWATER

A drop of *summerwater* melts a large quantity of ice or evaporates several large casks of WATER. A barrel of summerwater could free a mountaintop of snow.

Such a quantity was used by the twelfth Red MERCHANT QUEEN against her enemies as they forded the Angry River. The summerwater instantly turned the river to blinding steam. It confused the riders and their horses long enough for the moving water on both sides to rush into the void and knock the horses off their hooves.

SUNSET THE UNDYING. See "Red Merchants."



## TEMPEST THRESHOLD

Though seldom used, the *tempest threshold* is among the most powerful and dangerous known spells. The tempest threshold is a short-lived rip between one SPHERE and hundreds, or even thousands, of others, and the medium through which such a rip is formed is the death of the caster.

Possibly the most famous use of this spell was when Apex Soulsinger used it to save the Legion of Shadow from the immanent destruction of their sphere.



### THE SACRIFICE OF APEX SOULSINGER

Looking behind, the legion could see the horrible fading by which the Kingmaster was unmaking the sky and the EARTH. Many wept in rage and despair, but Apex Soulsinger told them to have no fear, for she had a way to save them.

When she told the legionnaires to line up, they did not know what she had planned, but they trusted her. She said that when the GATE appeared they must march through it as quickly as they could, for she did not know how long she would be able to keep it open.

Apex Soulsinger drew her knife and buried it in her own heart. Her scream of death rang across the land, and it rang through a thousand spheres as a gate opened in her flesh. Although its outline bore the shape of their ally and friend, it seemed to have within it the brilliance of the sun. It began to flicker with views of countless worlds.

Realizing that their lives were to be bought with her death, the legion charged into the gate. Countless worlds flashed through the gate, shimmering like reflections on a pond when ripples collide. One soldier would step through into a jungle, while the next would arrive in a desert, and another would find herself in a distant city.

In this fashion, the Legion of Shadow was broken, spread across a thousand spheres, and in each sphere, they told the story of Soulsinger's courageous deed.

### THEORIES ABOUT THE THRESHOLD

Some sorcerers of Eldermark who have studied this spell theorize that a tempest threshold turns the life energies of the sorcerer into a sort of wave that moves out from the point of death. As rings of ripples expand from a flung stone in a still pond, so goes the front of the tempest threshold through many spheres. The entry point remains on the sphere where the caster is dying, but the exit point is in constant movement.

Soulsinger's celebrated sacrifice was able to transport her friends to safety, though it did scatter them. So great was her sorcerous strength and her will for her purpose that she was apparently able to hold the gate open for at least a full hour. Other, lesser mages who have cast this spell have only been able to maintain the gate for minutes or seconds.

It is also interesting to note that this technique does not seem limited to one particular discipline or school of magic: while Apex was a SOULSEEKER, there are recorded instances of this spell's use by flux sorcerers (of course), open-chalice mages, and even one student of the Memoran system.

Those in the GLORIOUS EMPIRE who have studied this peculiar spell believe that its use could provide great insight into the true geometry of the spheres, showing how they lie next to one another, but until a safer means for casting the spell can be found, this research will have to wait.

## TEMPLE OF CHANGES, THE

Little can be said for certain in regard to this legendary structure; its design, location, even the DEITY who governs it, are all matters of conjecture.

What is known, for certain about the *Temple of Changes* is that many believe in it and many seek it, hoping for a release that perhaps nothing else can offer; for it is said that within the temple, bodies, souls, and even destinies can be exchanged.

The description of the path to the temple—through a deep, hazardous forest and up a high, towering mountain—is so vague as to be nearly useless. Those who claim to have been there say that it is cloaked in mist and its form is indistinct, but all agree that it is a massive and impressive structure.

Cheater of Fate, who took his NAME after a supposed visit to the temple, says that all is like a dream within the temple grounds. While there, he had many strange encounters with

figures from his dreams, as well as challenges from people who seemed very familiar but whom he had never met.

Daughter of the Wind claims to have visited the temple twice, with a visit to the MIRROR OF SOULS in between. From the knowledge she gained from the mirror, she says she recognized the mysterious guardians of the temple as past selves and other significant people from her previous incarnations. She theorizes that the visitor to the temple must confront the past before making such a significant change in the future.

At the center of the temple is something that allows you to leave behind aspects of yourself in exchange for the aspects discarded by others. What exactly this "something" is, no one seems to be able to say; some claim it is a pool, others that it is a statue, and still others say that a path of FIRE must be walked. Whatever it is, after some contact with this phenomenon, the visitor is able to exchange his or her body for a different one. Some say it is possible to exchange fortunes as well.

Daughter of the Wind was destined to die at the hands of her brother, yet she shied away from changing this fate on both of her visits. She claimed that confronting the shades who guard the temple had made her see the necessity of her death.

She also said that once she realized how difficult the journey to the temple was, she reasoned that the only fates available for trade would be equally odious.

This is the most that can be said of the temple with any reliability at all. The unsubstantiated tales are wild, and their number are legion. The quester who would seek should be wished good fortune but should consider this caution: Many claim the temple is a snare set by the enemy of all humanity, others say it is a test by HEAVEN of our hubris, and many others claim that it was established by a deity of trickery.

*Related Topic:* "Reincarnation."

TEMPLE OF MERCY. *See*  
"Blue Merchants."

## THIEVES OF ESSENCE

Little is known about the mages who call themselves *Thieves of Essence*. Mainly there are descriptions of their terrible powers and fearsome deeds. As their NAME implies, these sorcerers steal. But they are not limited to the theft of mere money or possessions; these thieves steal lives, identities, sorceries . . . some say even souls.



*Thieves of Essence* illustration by Doug Keith  
© 1996 Rubicon Games, Inc.

Worse, there seems to be some shadowy central goal towards which the individual Thieves of Essence labor. Few have ever been captured alive. Fewer still have been captured in any condition to discuss their organization. Almost none survive long enough to betray their cause, even if they choose to. Some observers believe that two thieves are dispatched on every mission: one to perform the mission, and another to kill the first if he or she should fail.

The only Essence Thief in living memory who was questioned with any success was captured by the Ministry of Intelligence for the GLORIOUS EMPIRE. He was soon murdered in prison by means unknown, but not before the Minister of Intelligence was able to have a "frank and open discussion" with him. The Minister's observations have been offered by the emperor to the rulers of several nations with whom he is on friendly terms.

*From Maiden One, Ninetieth  
Minister of Intelligence for the  
Glorious Empire*

Masterful Ruler, whose Heartbeat Guides the Waves upon the Shore and Whose Footsteps Are the Breath of Spring, I humbly offer to you the fruits of my unceasing labors on behalf of you and the empire.

Fallen Wing was the name the captive gave, and from him I learned a good deal about the Thieves of Essence. Unfortunately, he was slain in prison before I was able to learn the location of his fellows or what the goals of their cabal are. I humbly beg forgiveness for my failure, secure in the knowledge that you will temper your justice with mercy.

I did learn from him many valuable things about the powers of these thieves. The first was the means by which Fallen Wing was able to impersonate First Minister Rain.

Fallen Wing described himself as a "body taker," by which he meant that he possessed the ability to change himself into another person. This imitation is not limited to physical appearance; it includes the mind and spirit as well, with only a small portion of the soul being reserved for the original spirit of the body taker. This is why the mages charged with defending the First Minister did not detect this subterfuge until the last; not that this alleviates the guilt of their failure.

*Thieves of  
Essence have been  
discovered in the  
Celestial City, in  
the Kingdom of  
Thunder Feet, and  
in the Ram's Blood  
Theocracy. In all  
three realms they  
were attempting  
infiltration or  
assassination.*

Apparently these body takers are often in danger of losing themselves within the lives of their victims. Falling Wing referred to this as "the consuming," when a borrowed life overcomes the borrower. Though able to take the forms of animals and plants, body takers are reluctant to do so, for the pull of this consuming becomes stronger the farther one's spirit is removed from human form.

A further limitation on the power of the body takers is the need for a *key* to the person whose form is stolen. This can be fingernails, hair, blood, or flesh. The body taker consumes the key in order to absorb the victim's *pattern*. However, this pattern begins to degrade with the death of the victim. That is why Fallen Wing kept Rain alive: so that he could continue to renew his imitation using the Minister's blood.

A final weakness of the body takers is that they cannot maintain a stolen form while they are asleep.

In addition to the body takers, there are apparently other talents given to the Thieves of Essence. According to Fallen Wing, no one person gets all of these diabolical gifts; each thief receives one, if any, and those gifts are had at different strengths.

Note well that Fallen Wing may have been ignorant of thieves with more than one talent or may have been deliberately attempting to mislead us. In any event, there are three other skills given to the Thieves of Essence. Fallen Wing was unable to give us full accounts of these abilities and their weaknesses.

Those known as "hard takers" are also given the ability to change form. Unlike the body takers, they cannot adopt living forms, only the shapes of things that are dead or that were never living. The examples he gave were such things as a sword or a blanket. When pressed, he admitted that the hard takers were unable to move themselves when in a taken form and that large or complex objects were harder to become. However, the hard takers run no risk of being consumed because they retain their human minds and AURAS while transformed.

Hard takers must also have a pattern for the shape they would borrow, but they can take a pattern simply by touching the item. Also, because the forms they take are simpler than living forms, they are able to carry several in mind at once. Once a hard taker has sampled a pattern, he or she can transform into that shape for as long as the pattern is recalled.

The third branch on this repugnant tree consists of those called "givers." While the first two types of thieves change themselves, these sorcerers change others. Generally they give the forms of objects, in the fashion of the hard takers. Fallen Wing believed that giving a living shape such as a beast or person was much more difficult. The givers, he said, cannot change auras, only forms. They must take a pattern for the changing after the fashion of the first two and must touch the person they would change. Furthermore, the change lasts only

as long as the giver is looking upon the victim and concentrating on the pattern. Fallen Wing said that even the most powerful could only keep three or four people changed at once, and then only in simple forms. Furthermore, these transformations cannot be held for very long.

The fourth and most secretive group are those that Fallen Wing called "spell stealers." Apparently the gift of these thieves is to store spells cast at them and release them later at their discretion. According to Fallen Wing, if a giver tried to transform a spell stealer, the change would not occur, but later the spell stealer would be able to work the identical change on another person. According to Wing, these sorcerers could only take a spell one time; once used, the spell was gone and could only be regained by having it cast towards them once more. He suspected that a spell stealer could not take a spell cast by a greater mage, but he was not certain.

I am secure that this knowledge, in your wise and mighty hand, will become a weapon with which to scourge these unnatural rebels from our lands. I only wish that I was able to tell you the means by which Fallen Wing was slain in our own prisons. Yet even my most diligent questioning of the guards has uncovered nothing.

*Related Topic:* "Wind Monks."

## TONGUE, THE

*The Tongue* is the language given by the DEITIES to all humanity among the SPHERES.

*See also:* "Basahn," "Dragons," "Fortune Deck," and "Names."

TRUE PEARL. *See* "Pearl of Making."

TWELVE OF ELDERMARK. *See* "Alurax" and "Pearl of Making."

## TWISTED, THE

The *twisted* were created by a vengeful DRAGON as a last curse upon despised humanity. They are called the "twisted" because they are distortions of the four elemental qualities of human nature.

### THE WATER TWISTED

To corrupt the sensitive, the dragon crafted the twisted WATER spirits. The goal of the water twisted is to seduce





targets into a life of pleasure instead of understanding.

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These spirits are entirely ignorant of their own nature and purpose; even if one was somehow to discover its own nature, it would be unable to accept or even comprehend it. Thus, to a sensitive water person the intentions of the twisted water spirit are wholly pure and unblemished.

These twisted usually appear as good-looking, richly clad, and attractively groomed people. Their personalities are open and friendly, and they are personable, entertaining, and charismatic.

These twisted walk the GATES, collecting followers, usually rich sybarites and others of the leisured class. The twisted always knows another "wonderful SPHERE" to walk to, and its followers come along, eager for new sights and experiences. Water twisted have a knack for amassing goodly sums of money from their companions while running terrific, all-day-and-night parties. The atmosphere around the twisted and his or her friends is one of lighthearted, innocent gaiety. A good time is had by all.

Except that all the followers die, eventually.

The water twisted lives by subtly draining vitality from those around it. Once a week, on Saturn Day, it feeds—on a follower. Neither the twisted nor its victim is aware of this slow victimization, but the victim loses strength and vitality, usually attributing the weariness and slight illnesses to strange foods and energetic fun. The loss remains for as long as the twisted is close to the victim. If the twisted's followers are ever all reduced to extremely weakened states, a terrible thing happens: In the night, the twisted pulls the remaining spirit from *all* of them, killing them. The twisted collects its treasures and moves to a new sphere, where the process starts all over again. It remembers its old companions but is unable to recall how they parted company.

These are the water twisted's activities before it meets a highly spiritual or sensitive person, a "water person." When it meets someone of this type, especially someone who could be romantically attracted to the twisted, it invites the water person to join its group, using its considerable charm to make the group appear fun, sophisticated, and carefree. If this fails, the twisted asks to be permitted to follow the sensitive person, declaring that he or she is fascinatingly wise and perceptive. If the intended victim still refuses (for whatever reason) this attractive, wealthy, and entertaining companion, the twisted follows anyway. The twisted develops a tremendous affection for the water person, an emotion that the water person perceives as genuine.

The twisted does all in its power to distract the water person from important tasks of understanding, all the while appearing to be nothing more than what it believes itself to be, a fun person who means no one any harm and wants to enjoy life. Many water twisted convince their strong water victims to "settle down" and set up permanent residence somewhere. Many marry their victims and are probably genuinely sad when their spouses sicken and die.

If the twisted cannot convince the water person to settle, they continue to travel, and the twisted continues to feed. If it can kill the victim in this fashion, all is well and good. However, since its targets are the type to notice such vampirism, many of the water twisted are eventually discovered by water people.

These twisted are miserable fighters. However, they cannot be killed by anyone but their chosen targets. They recover from any other violent incident by the next nightfall. If a victim attacks, the twisted does not defend itself but instead acts terrified, betrayed, and miserable—all things it genuinely feels. Its emotional torment is easily perceived by the attacking victim. Some victims, even some who know that killing the twisted is the only way to save themselves and others, are unable to slay the beloved companion or spouse. If they can bring themselves to do so, however, the twisted finally dies permanently, and in the instant of its death, it recalls all of its victims.

Most of these spirits who die the final death thank their slayers. There are even tales of such spirits returning to aid their killers in times of need, as a gesture of gratitude for their liberation from a destructive and evil life.

## THE AIR TWISTED

Unlike the twisted spirits of water, the AIR twisted has no ability to directly kill its victim. Indirectly, however, these creatures have been the deaths not only of their intellectual prey but of hundreds of thousands of others.

These spirits affect their victims first in dreams. The target has an incoherently magnificent experience of creation and artistic satisfaction. Upon awakening, however, the sensation is gone.

These tantalizing visions continue and climax in a clearly remembered dream in which a beautiful person, exactly the type to attract the victim, appears and says, "Here. I will help you remember." Upon awakening, the victim is able to recall a brilliant poem or a blood-stirring piece of music—even if he or she has had no previous skills in these areas.

*On the eve of a great battle, the general Fire Phantom struck and killed her closest friend and advisor, and was afterwards said to be mad. Some suspect she may have been tormented by a twisted spirit who had in the past stolen her friend's form.*

The poem or music is memorable and, if shared, quite popular. After a while, the victim has another dream in which the muse helps him or her create a brilliant piece of art.

After this second piece, there is again a hiatus. At the end of about a month, the "muse" appears—in the flesh. It approaches only when the victim is alone. It tells him or her that it is a spirit of music (or verse, or whatever art is being produced) and has fallen in love with the victim because of talent. It attempts to seduce the victim. If successful, it flatters him or her and makes sweeping protestations of love. If it fails, it declares its admiration for the "wisdom" of the victim, "who knows that it would be wrong for two such as us." In either case, it offers to aid its chosen in any artistic endeavor.

In the meantime, the popularity of the victim's brilliant artistic creations spread like wildfire. Unfortunately, these catchy tunes and inspiring phrases are actually crafty seductions to evil. They cleverly present wrong as right. Some examples are as follows:

- ✱ Ballads that sing of great heroism and mighty battles but imply that the enemy is utterly base and worthy of destruction. These battle chants help the hearer to despise the enemy, making it palatable to commit any atrocity against them and difficult to believe any promise of peace.
- ✱ Bawdy poems about a person whose spouse cleverly conceals several adulterous affairs. In the end, the adulterer and the lover are able to get a great deal of money from the cuckolded spouse and suffer no punishment for their deeds. These tales make married men and women suspicious and mistrustful while convincing young people that they can get away with sins of the flesh.
- ✱ Tragic stories of star-crossed romances that end only with the lovers' suicides. The tale tells of their meeting in the next life and their great bliss then. The hidden message of this story is that it is easier to give up in the face of adversity than it is to endure it.

While these stories weave their destructive spell, the muse-twisted remains ever ready to respond to a call from the victim. If called, the twisted indeed gives creative aid. Through the help of the twisted, the highly intelligent victim can create as if he or she were even more brilliant.

When summoned for help, the spirit asks, "Will you put your wit in my care?" If the summoner refuses, the spirit looks sad and says, "Then I cannot help you." If the summoner agrees, the twisted does indeed help. The first time the spirit is summoned, the aid is without cost.

The next time the air twisted is called, the poetry given still has the same high potency as before, but when the spirit departs it steals away some of the victim's wit, making him or her slightly less intelligent. The next time it is called, more is stolen. The twisted spirit of air also begins to confuse and dull the mind of the victim each time the poet or musician has sexual congress with it.

The person so victimized begins forgetting common words. Though capable of great artistic creations (with the help of the spirit), the poet or musician is forgetful, easily confused, and unable to phrase simple concepts unaided.

There is only one way to be rid of such a spirit and restore the lost intelligence, and that is to recite the *Litany of Worthlessness*. The spirits are so arrogant that they tell their victims that this is the only way, recite the litany to them, and even allow their victims to write it down. However, when the time comes for the victim to become freed of his or her curse, the litany must be recited from memory, without flaw, and with no assistance from other persons, devices, creatures, or any other resource. The litany is as follows:

*"We are mud made and ill-made mud. Fit . . . only to be trod upon by our betters. **We** put on airs as if we were ought else other than the **dying** dirt upon which we stand, the dirt that is our ancestor and our descendant. Mud our past, filth our future, our world is an endless ant heap devoid . . . of meaning, love, or **virtue**."*

Certain words (marked here in boldface) must be stressed louder and higher in pitch than those words around them. The ellipses in the text indicate pauses, which must be in the verbally recited litany. If any word is mispronounced, if a pause is omitted or a stressed word spoken unstressed, the litany fails. Each victim gets only a single attempt to banish the airy tormentor, and if it fails, the twisted spirit flees, leaving the hapless sufferer permanently feebler of mind. If, however, the litany is successfully pronounced, the spirit restores the missing intelligence, compliments the human on his or her perceptiveness of the lowly nature of humankind, and vanishes.

Twisted spirits for fire and earth have not been authoritatively documented, but there is no doubt that they exist.

To drink once more that  
bitter cup, Upon my mind  
once more to sup,  
To slowly aid my wit's own rot,  
I do this—Call my mistress,  
For without her I am not."  
—"Ode to His Muse,"  
by Winter Blue

## UNDEAD, THE

### *Final Strike on "Uncovering the Undead"*

The *undead* are many in type and form. Some, such as zombies and deadwalkers, can brazenly transgress by daylight. Others, such as vampires, cannot abide the sun's rays. When a corpse-mouse has stolen a human form, it can walk by daylight, but in its natural shape, it fears the sun.

While the minor undead are easily recognizable, the more powerful types can often pass for humanity. However, there are some signs by which even those who most closely resemble the living can be spied.

Pallor and chill are common, as the heart of an undead is still and no longer warms the blood or pumps it through the body. An undead may seek to mask this by feeding on the hot blood of a living human, but the temporary warmth and color soon pass.

The undead, being animate bodies, which should be empty of souls, shun mirrors and other reflecting surfaces. Some forms of undead are merely animate corpses that have no reflections at all. Others have spirits that have been ensorcelled into bodies past their time. Though a body may deceive, its reflection tells the truth: such an unnaturally preserved spirit may appear as an old withered hag in the body of a young girl, or a moldering corpse may be cast in the glass by a handsome young man. Even in the freshly reanimated the differences between reflection and body can be seen, though they are subtle at first. The longer a spirit remains in a body, the greater the disparity between image and flesh. Keep in mind also that this can be disguised by sorcery.

If an undead has a soul trapped within, the SOULFINGER must be sealed to prevent the spirit's flight. This can be done with a piece of iron (which closes the corridor of the soul), by keeping the finger permanently curled, or by removing the finger.

Undead do not need to eat normal food, and many cannot.

For what it's worth, moths are afraid of the undead. Moths are drawn to vitality and change, which is why they seek flames. Since the undead embody the total absence of these qualities, they frighten moths away.

Silver disrupts the spell of undeath more surely than any other cure. It is the metal of elemental water, anathema to undead of all known varieties."  
—Final Strike



### *Final Strike on "Weaknesses of the Undead"*

These weaknesses are not common to all defiers of KARMA, but most undead have one of the following flaws, if not all.

Sunlight, being the sign of vitality, is harmful to most forms of undead.

Even those that can walk by daylight are struck dead if a RAINBOW appears in the sky; they cannot overcome this direct manifestation of karma.

Some undead are unable to manage square turns; thus, one can safely flee from them across a path that is bent many times.

Many are vulnerable to ROSES. Since roses are the living symbol of the divine whole, they reject the undead. Sometimes they even combust in contact with unnaturally animate flesh.

Some types die if fed certain foods, such as pure white rice or the seeds of fruit. (Since the fruit seed has the potential for life within it, it is destructive to unlife.) Some types of undead have been found to be completely destroyed by foods that have been offered to a DEITY—yet they are irresistibly drawn to such viands.

Immersion beneath running WATER kills many undead, though some are simply put into a state of stillness, which passes if they are removed from the water.

*Related Topic:* "Order of the Silver Nail."

## UNDISCOVERED CITY, THE

Universally believed to be the first city of humanity, the so-called *Undiscovered City* was the greatest, though its true NAME is now lost in history. It may have stood on the shore of a mighty ocean or on an island, but its exact location is unknown. The people there were happy because they were beloved by HEAVEN. So great was their favor with the DEITIES that they were entrusted with three objects of great power: the PEARL OF MAKING, the EDGE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS, and the MIRROR OF SHADOWS.

Using the powers of these things, the people of the city were able to create wonders and marvels the likes of which have not been seen since. However, there were some in the

city who were discontent. None know why, though perhaps it was because of the natural shortsightedness of humans. Perhaps they envied the power of the objects and wished to have it for their own selfish ends. Or perhaps one person who had one of the treasures yearned for the other two, in order to have complete power over all things. Whatever the case, there was unhappiness. And the discontent led to arguments, and the arguments led to war.

Never has such a war raged, for in the space of one city, the three most potent powers ever wielded by humanity were used. A woman named Horse Leg carried the Mirror of Shadows, and with it she had the power of universal destruction. It had been given to her because she was humble and would not use it except out of greatest need. Hanging Rose carried the True Pearl of Making. She bore it because of all the people in the city, she was the most inventive and could best use its power of creation. The Edge of Light and Darkness was given to Single Dream. Of all in the city, his discernment was the finest, and thus to him was entrusted the power of dividing all things.

Though they fought each other greatly, none of the three bearers was able to triumph. Yet as they battled, the very EARTH shook, and the sky cracked.

Perhaps the deities saw the suffering of the city and took steps to end the battle. Perhaps nature itself broke under the strain of the powers being used. Perhaps some other agency or a human strategy went awry. But whatever the cause, the city began to sink beneath the waves.

Horse Leg, who carried the Mirror of Shadows, was drowned in the first great wave. While she had the power to destroy the WATER around her, it rose more quickly than she could unmake it. The mirror was washed away and was not heard of for a hundred years, until Serpent Star found it within the belly of a great fish.

Hanging Rose used the pearl to create a great wall around the city, by which the water could be sealed out and the people saved. Even as she performed this act of mercy, Single Dream struck at her with the Edge of Light and Darkness, cutting out her life in a single stroke. Yet this was his undoing, for from her dying she made a hole in the SPHERE and pulled both Single Dream and the Edge of Light and Darkness through it. This was the first use of the TEMPEST THRESHOLD,

and because of it the Edge was lost for a thousand years, until the miner Green Will found it in a mountain.

The people of the city found themselves lost. In a single day they had lost two of their great objects and their three greatest citizens. Yet the remaining treasure was a great one, and with its power they made their peace with the waves.

A woman called Finder claimed to have objects from the Undiscovered City, and indeed the things she had were like nothing we had seen before. She had a boat that swam with great frog legs and strange musical instruments that played themselves. She sold us a shirt that fastens itself upon you and changes color to match your eyes, and she had shoes with springs in the heels that let her leap over small houses. We were eager to find out where she had gotten these treasures, but she stole away in the night, and we never saw her again."

—Valor Moon, Knight of the Red Merchant Kingdom

Yet even this peace was to be denied them, for the great Dragon of Air, who had led the rebel worms against heaven and been punished with madness, took it upon himself to seize the pearl from them. With its power they could hold him back, but there was no one in the city with imagination strong enough to make something mightier than the DRAGON. In the end, as the Dragon of Air was attacking the Tower of the Pearl Guardians, the king of the realm tried to use the pearl to make a GATE to some other place. Just as the gate opened, the Dragon of Air burst into the chamber. Unable to follow the king through the closing gate, the dragon nonetheless struck him down with a blast of fierce FIRE and killed him. The pearl was lost through that gate, and to this day none can say where it came to rest.

Enraged by the loss of the pearl, the dragon ravaged the city, and all who did not flee died by his cruel claws, searing breath, or mighty teeth.

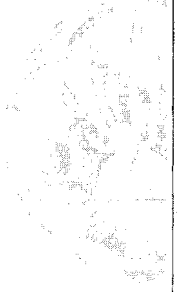
Some say the Dragon of Air rests in the ruins of the city to this day. Others say he left, searching for the pearl, and that some of the city's people have returned. Still others maintain that the pearl remains hidden beneath the waves, its treasures waiting anyone daring enough to plunder them.

## UNICORNS

### From First Blossom's Saga

Unbelieving, I watched as it approached. It seemed to be woven of starlight, white and cool, like the cloths we'd wrapped my baby sister in.

"It's going towards you, First Blossom," Drum said in a voice full of wonder.





"No," I whispered, eyes wide. All my breath was gone. "It can't want me. . . ."

The single horn seemed luminous, a milky icicle that could take away all my pain, all the sickness inside. . . .

"But I'm . . . I'm soiled . . . ." I closed my eyes and wept, unwilling to look at the unicorn that must have made a mistake, that would certainly turn and run when it saw the evil I had known, turn and run or fade like smoke . . . .

I opened my eyes again as it knelt before me and put its head upon my feet.

*From the Research Notes of Rain Heart,  
a Researcher at the Everway Library*

The *unicorn*, the most rare and fabulous of creatures, is widely credited with a taste for virgins and a repugnance for the sexually experienced. With all due respect, one could argue that those preferences are more common in certain exalted families than in these creatures of light.

*Purity* is the true lure of the unicorn, the lure and the promise. Many of the literal-minded have interpreted "purity" to mean physical virginity, but the example of First Blossom surely gives this the lie. True, she had been used most cruelly and was certainly "soiled" in the eyes of her community—even in her own eyes. Yet the unicorn saw beyond this to her true purity.

Reports of unicorns are legion, and in many cases, where drunkenness, imagination, and rumor aren't to blame for these reports, the "unicorn" turns out to be a horse enchanted by some half-skilled bush magician pursuing a quick coin. Genuine sightings often revolve around a young child or an unmarried female, but a significant number of those sought by unicorns fall into neither of these two categories.

Careful questioning of those at the center of the most seemingly genuine incidents reveals a startling trend: those who encounter unicorns are inevitably left with a definite sense of forgiveness and grace.

The unicorn, it appears, often appears to those who suffer from false guilt. First Blossom, for example, was raped by the demon ALURAX, and her community had wrongly blamed her for the terrible incident. The unicorn appeared to her to teach her that it was not her fault that she had been ill-used. Another telling incident was that of a child who blamed herself for burning an old woman's house because she had "tried to put a curse" on the old woman. Another involved a child who had knocked his sister into a pond. The sister drowned, and the child was convinced that his sister's ghost would come for vengeance. Yet in every one of these incidents, a unicorn appeared, proclaiming innocence to all, especially to those to whom it appears.

The unicorn's horn, it is said, can heal any mortal wound and purify any poison. I would submit that the power to cast out false guilt puts these physical miracles to shame.

That is the first function we see the unicorn performing: the proclamation of innocence. This is rare enough, but unicorns have a second power that is even more fascinating. Sometimes, a unicorn attaches itself to a person of exceptional spiritual purity and purpose, serving as steed, defender, and companion.



The historical examples of such combinations raise an interesting question: do these people perform exceptional deeds because they were unicorn-chosen, or do the unicorns only attach themselves to people capable of exceptional deeds? I suppose in the long term it doesn't matter, but I would argue that the latter is the case, based on the deeds of some unicorn riders even before they were chosen.

## UNITY MAGES

### PHILOSOPHY

Before the gods and goddesses existed, there was a unity of ELEMENTS, an existence in undivided glory. This primal essence was apportioned into the elements and given unto HEAVEN to combine and recombine in endless variation. Nonetheless, the echoes of the original unity remain. The symbol of this unity is the ROSE.

The DEITIES did not create; they shaped what was made before, this unified essence. The true path to knowledge and wisdom is to go back to the primal mass from which all has come.

Purity gives the appearance of strength, but it is a falsehood; only in combination is there balance.

### HISTORY

Ages ago, there was a group of six SPHERES, and they were linked by GATES. In one of these spheres there grew a mighty beast called the *Hydra*, the Great Devourer, the Seeker of Six. So great was this creature that it swallowed the entire world that gave it birth and began seeking more.

The Hydra had five heads, one for each world left in the group. It began to poke its head through the gates and consume the other spheres, one after another. The people in these other spheres tried to resist, but in the end they all had to flee the Seeker of Six. Its progress was slow, but the Devourer had no seed of death in it. It was patient. Eventually, one sphere was crowded with the survivors of all six spheres. They pooled their wisdom in an attempt to find some way to save themselves.

When the Hydra's last head emerged, the people sent the mages of the WATER to examine it. The mages were unable to find a weakness in it, and many went mad trying.

Next, the sorcerers of AIR approached it and tried to find a way to reason with it, but the Seeker of Six struck them down, one and all.

The wizards of the FIRE went next, and their power blazed like the day for seven nights, yet it was insufficient. One after the other, they winked out like sparks.

Finally, the magicians of the EARTH tried to resist it. They slowed it, but their defenses were not strong enough to stop it.

The last school of magery was the *Unity school*, and from it was sent a single envoy, a woman who was given the NAME "Nemesis." She wore enchantments from each school: the Occult Lens of the Water, the Blade of Destruction from the Fire, the Three Seals of the Earth, and the Seven Veils of the Air.

She was helpless against the Devourer; the sword broke upon it, the lens did not conceal her, and the Hydra smashed the Three Seals and tore aside the Seven Veils. It swallowed her whole.

This was according to the plan, for Nemesis was to defeat the Devourer by becoming one with it. In taking her, it bound itself to her and to her mortality. Upon Nemesis had been placed one final spell, a spell to kill her if she ever returned to her sphere of birth. Now this spell lay upon the Hydra as well.

When it realized that the sixth world had been closed to it, the Seeker of Six was enraged. It turned its rage upon Nemesis, who found herself in the barren husk of a world that had spawned the beast.

The Hydra would not let her die and cursed her to forever stand upon the surface of its world. Though she had saved her sphere, Nemesis herself was trapped in a desolate land. Bound to the Hydra's immortality, she could not even age to death and reenter karma.

Nemesis was clever, however, and found a way around the curse. By use of a strange spell, she made a gate around her and within her. Through this gate most of her fled, but Nemesis can never pass through the gate entirely. One leg remains behind on the Hydra's world to fulfill the curse that she stand there forever.

Immortal but lame, Nemesis wanders the spheres to this day, spreading the teachings of Unity. Some say she still seeks a way to return to her home sphere, even though it means her death.

### METHOD

Like other magicians, a sorcerer of the Unity school has a foundational ELEMENT from which power flows. Unlike others, however, the Unity mage cannot use magic of just one element; there must always be a mix, a balance. To conjure magical forces, the Unity mage concentrates on an image that reconciles different elements.

*The Unity school of magic is most popular in the Celestial City.*





There are six *bridges* (combinations of two elements) and four *pillars* (combinations of three elements) in Unity magery. The most powerful magic, of course, is that of total *Unity*—all four elements working at once.

## THE BRIDGES

### *The Desert*

This is the bridge between EARTH and FIRE. Fire destroys to clear for new growth, but earth prevents change; so the *Desert* prevents positive change from occurring. Under Desert spells, an enemy's wounds fester, sleep does not refresh, food does not satiate, and the enemy's mind and body are in a constant (and in some cases instant) state of fatigue.

### *The Mountain*

This is the bridge between earth and AIR. Since earth is immobile and air represents boundaries, the *Mountain* is a bridge of total defense. Malevolent beings and energies cannot reach the body, and even if they do, the body resists the changes they bring.

### *The River*

The *River* is the bridge between earth and WATER. Earth preserves, and water mediates, so this is a bridge of healing. (The water interprets which state the earth should revert to—in this case, one of health.)

### *The Steam*

The *Steam* is the bridge between fire and water. The implication of this combination is either destruction through understanding or understanding through change. The first is never easy, especially emotionally. If properly applied, the fire-water paradox allows a caster to use an enemy's own strength and power to bring his or her downfall. Put another way, we each carry the seed of our own (fiery) destruction. The bridge of Steam uses water to nurture that seed to deadly fruition.

The second application, that of understanding through change, is a more positive one. All life is dynamic, not stagnant, and this bridge can be applied to understand the changes a person or object has been through.

### *Snow*

The bridge between water and air is the *Snow*. Air separates,

but water changes and flows; hence, Snow is the bridge of travel, individuals, matter, ideas, and energies. This bridge is used frequently since it is so versatile.

### *The Sun*

The meeting of fire and air is the *Sun*, an esoteric bridge. One particular virtue of the Sun is that of abandoning one form (through fire) while maintaining the essential nature (through the airy boundaries). This can be the bridge of surface transformations, even as the sun apparently "dies" each night but in truth returns the same the next day.

The solar bridge is also one of cyclical change; as the sun rises and sets in a constant cycle, so many things change—but the patterns through which they change remain the same. This bridge allows the sorcerer to accelerate or retard cyclical changes in himself or herself as well as in nature, accelerating the growth of plants, for example, or withering them with a premature winter frost.

## THE PILLARS

### *Volcano*

This pillar is supported by EARTH, FIRE, and AIR. Through the use of the *Volcano* a destructive potential is fulfilled. The caster's personal integrity is protected while his or her wrath reaches out to destroy.

### *Glacier*

This is the pillar of earth, WATER, and air. The powerful preservative combination of earth and air in the *Glacier* freezes the water into a glaring ice-screen of isolation. Hiding behind this pillar, the mage can be cut off temporally, spatially, mentally, physically, or emotionally.

### *Oasis*

The *Oasis* is the pillar of earth, fire, and water. The renewal promised by fire is formed by water and supported by earth. This is a potent pillar of renewal, regeneration, and newness.

### *Thunderstorm*

This is the pillar of water, fire, and air. The water reaches out to join with the object of the spell, while air maintains a strict boundary. Finally, the fire of lightning strikes out, destroying what the water links it to. The *Thunderstorm* is a pillar of destructive transformation and manipulation.

## UNITY

**U**nity, the combination of all ELEMENTS, is the magic with the greatest power of all: that of creation from nothing. The meditative focus of Unity magic is the ROSE.

The *lesser making* forms a temporary object, colloquially known as an *anomaly*. An anomaly is just that—a warp, a wrinkle in the fabric of Being and Nothingness that temporarily resembles a real object, creature, or force. Anomalies are not permanent; eventually the regular flow of existence eradicates them. Small, mundane anomalies (such as a key to a set of shackles) can go undetected for years. Large anomalies (a coach with four horses) vanish within hours. Anomalies that don't adhere to normal reality (a flying coach carved from a single ruby, a burning sword that moves itself to strike down foes, a wooden DRAGON with a venomous bite) have life spans measured in minutes.

The *greater making* creates something unique, real, and stable. Unlike the lesser making, the greater making is permanent. The limit to greater making (other than the simple limits of power) is that nothing that already exists on a SPHERE can be permanently made there. A human being can never make another human being, simply because that would violate duplication. If a mage were on a sphere with no horses, then he or she could make a horse (but only with difficulty, since a horse is a great deal of mass to produce from nothing). But if there were even *one* horse in the entire world, the making would fail. This also applies for chimerical creatures, for example, a creature with the wings of a hawk, the head of a snake, and the body of a CAT might not exist on a certain sphere, but if snakes, cats, and hawks do, the chimera cannot be created there.

Furthermore, things and creatures that are produced by greater making leave "tracks" in the fabric of reality. Anyone who is even moderately sensitive can sense something unusual about the presence of the made.

Another known hazard of these makings is that they seem to change the nature of fortune around them: the extremely unlikely may happen, and the almost certain can fail in their presence. They are very much the wild cards in the deck.

### LIMITS OF THE UNITY SORCERER

**W**hile Unity magic is extremely powerful, there are limitations to its reach. The primary one is that no mage can use all the bridges and pillars. Since each mage has one ELEMENT as a focus, upon which the magic depends, he or she cannot use a bridge or pillar that does not contain that element. A mage who is based in AIR, for example, cannot

use the Oasis pillar, nor can he or she use the bridges of Desert, River, or Steam.

Furthermore, a spell that uses an element in which the mage is particularly weak may work, but it will be hindered by the limits of the element. A spell with weak FIRE lacks force, while a deficiency in EARTH leaves a spell without foundation. A lack of air gives a spell poor definition, while inadequate WATER means a spell has inferior guidance.

Unity mages find it very easy to combine their powers. A Unity sorceress based in the earth can readily combine with a Unity sorcerer of the air—a skill rare in other magics. This makes a group of Unity mages much more dangerous than a single one.

## UNITY ROSES

The UNITY MAGES periodically create a variety of enchanted ROSES. They sell about one of each type per year. A discerning buyer can usually find one for sale—if said buyer is willing to pay the mages' astronomical prices.

### LEAD ROSES

**T**he rose is a symbol of the twining of the four ELEMENTS, while lead is the symbol of earthy stability and permanency. A *lead rose*, therefore, grounds magic of all types. It is a powerful talisman for weakening magic. It does not protect against the most powerful spells, but it dampens their powers. The drawback of a lead rose is that it interferes with magic impartially. It does not, however, affect the operations of GATES or other magics of DEITIES.

### GLASS ROSES

**A**s a lead rose mitigates magic with EARTH energy, the *glass rose* infuses it with AIR energy. While earth energy dampens magic, air energy controls it. A mage in possession of a glass rose finds sorcerous power more pliable to will. Some strong mages have even used glass roses to wrest control of spells from enemies—though this frequently results in the breaking of the rose.

### SILVER ROSES

**T**he metal associated with WATER is silver, and water energy is used to blend and alter magics. *Silver roses* are most frequently used by groups of sorcerers to more harmoniously blend their powers. The sorcerer known as Meld owned a silver rose and attempted, in her final duel with Blackwater Fury, to use it to flow into his magics and turn them against him. Fury, in response, used the power of the rose to pull Meld into his magic. The result was unanticipated by either: they immediately became one of body and mind, went mad, and killed themselves.



GOLDEN ROSES

UNSEEN HANDS. See "Bell Walking," "Entangling Art," and "Glorious Empire."

UTTER FAMILIES. See "Soulseekers."

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Gold, the metal of FIRE, gives the *golden rose* powers that are terrifying in their scope. A golden rose radiates energy into its user, intensifying magic effects. There is a price to be paid for this power, however; some call these the "hungry roses" because like a fire they must constantly be fed. What they consume is the power of the mage who bears them. An unfed rose may simply "go out," losing all its power permanently. Some claim, however, that a mage who bears such a rose for a long time becomes so harmonized to it that the rose, if unfed, will pull energy out of its bearer. If magic energy is not available, the rose consumes the energies of life itself.



Related Topic: "Roses."

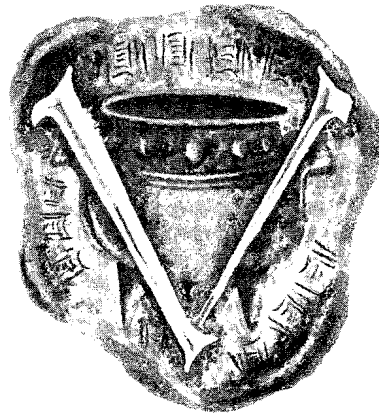


VAMPIRES. See "Red Merchants" and "Undead."

## VERBALISTS

### PHILOSOPHY

*Verbalists* are mages in a school of sorcery that holds that the link between word and reality is the ultimate magical correspondence. They make the arcane tongue of CLEACUUN their study, and through it they cast spells that can reshape their environment—and even create new ones.



### HISTORY

In ages past, there were two sisters, who were also magicians. One, named Gift, was short and quiet. True to her name, she was a kind and giving woman, happy to give health and joy to others.

The other, named Wish, was tall. Unlike her sister, Wish was not quiet. She felt that the greatest suffering was not from the works of the DEITIES, but from the works of humanity. Thus, she used her power to strike at tyranny and oppression wherever she could.

Wish became a celebrated hero and freed many people. Gift was known as a healer, but because her kindness was quiet, she was not as well known as her sister. This did not bother Gift.

One day Wish came to visit Gift and told her an amazing thing. Having struck down an evil wizard, she had discovered within his library a text on CLEACUUN, which contained a word that neither of them knew.

Cleacuun is not like THE TONGUE, and sometimes its words are hard to describe. Gift was afraid of this word, for while the Tongue paints an image in the mind, Cleacuun brands the mind with its meaning. Gift knew that this new word had great power but that it was a word of evil.

Wish was not afraid and wanted to learn the word. She believed that if she could learn it then evil and darkness would have no more mysteries before her. With her intimate knowledge of the malign, she would be better able to battle it.

Gift refused to help her. Wish said that she understood and went off on her own to study the word. In time, she learned it.

For a time it seemed that Wish had the strength to use the word and not be used by it. But slowly, Gift saw that her sister was being changed, seduced by the power of the grim word she had claimed. Wish was closing off; her own idea of good was the only one she would accept, and her own wisdom was the only counsel she would take. Saddened by her sister's selfishness, Gift began study of another word, one that she was afraid of because it was a word of unmaking and oblivion.

"Cleacuun" is pronounced  
klay-AH-koo-un.

### VERBALIST PHRASES

"In the beginning, there was the word."

"As above, so below."

"As in the mind, so in the world."

"Change the symbol, change the fact."

"Heaven creates by naming."

Verbalists believe that Cleacuun is the original tongue of the DEITIES and the means by which the SPHERES were made. By manipulating the language of HEAVEN, the Verbalists gain power over the creations of heaven.

There are two branches of the Verbalist school, the positive and the negative. Positive Verbalist magicians believe that Cleacuun is the path to wisdom, hidden by the deities so that its power would be given only to those wise and dedicated enough to unlock its secrets. In their study they seek not to unseat or undermine the deities but to understand them and thereby approach virtue.

Negative Verbalists believe heaven deliberately taught humankind a "feeble, castrated tongue" in order to keep humans humble and powerless. Resentful of this belittlement, negative Verbalists are hubristic and irreverent to the deities, attempting to gain ever more vocabulary in an attempt to make themselves godlike.

Wish had set herself as queen of the land, using her great word to enforce her will. Gift went to her and begged her to try to give up the word, but Wish would not hear her. With great sorrow, Gift used her word of the void. It made a wound in reality, and Gift drew her sister through it.

The people had begun to fear Wish, and they praised Gift for deposing her. But Gift was not cheered, for when she had graven the word on her heart, it took something from her. After that, she was no longer a calm and happy healer.

### METHOD

The key to Verbalist magic is vocabulary. While most Verbalists know enough CLEACUUN to use it for basic concepts, they continually seek words of power. Through these words, they can channel their own energies and govern the world around them.

The words are the essence. Most Verbalists have perhaps ten words of true power. A very powerful adept might have as many as twenty, but the words themselves are only as strong as the will behind them.

While the Verbalists' words have power, there are hazards to learning of them. Cleacuun, when read, etches itself directly on the soul of the reader. Gaining a new word of power is not a casual task; absorbing the word can be a trial of body, mind, and soul.

## WALKER'S CODE, THE

When and where the *Walker's Code* was formulated is a mystery, but its rules are widely known among the SPHERES. They are guidelines for SPHEREWALKERS, intended to keep them out of trouble—and to make less trouble for future travelers.

The code is enforced largely by honor, though it can be backed up by threats, either to person or to reputation. News of a serious breach of the code travels around the spheres with surprising speed, and a spherewalker who breaks the code may find that it no longer offers its protection.



The code, struck into a massive brass plate, can be read in its entirety outside the main city gate of the Celestial City. Similar copies are carved into stone monuments near all the GATES of EVERWAY. However, the code is primarily taught orally.

The Walker's Code, also known as the *Four Duties*, is as follows:

*Your DUTY TO SELF is to use the gates only for pure purposes. To do otherwise is an offense against virtue and against heaven. But it is also a crime against oneself to take a divine gift, such as the gates, and use it for shallow or selfish ends.*

*Your DUTY TO OTHERS is to give assistance to any in need. One who is hungry should be fed, one who is lost should be shown the path, and one who is hurt should be taken to shelter.*

*Your DUTY TO NATIONS is to keep knowledge of the gatepaths a secret from the unready. To nations and peoples not prepared for new realms, the opening of a gate is a curse, not a blessing.*

*Your DUTY TO HEAVEN is to remember your place next to the deities. Many who walk the spheres possess the power to pass as divine to ignorant people. This deception is offensive not only to the dignity of the deceived, but to their souls and to the body of the pretender.*

WALKER'S PYRAMID. See "Everway."



## WANDERER'S ROOT

This creeper thrives in many climates but is difficult to find because it grows close to the ground and has very fine vines and small leaves. The leaves are heart-shaped, about the size of the nail upon one's HEARTFINGER.

If such a leaf is placed in boiling WATER, it supposedly orients itself with the nearest GATE. Considering the energies of FIRE (change, an association with gates) and water (magic and receptivity), this claim seems reasonable.

Some claim to have had successes in plating a leaf with gold (a solar metal) and encasing it in water within a glass bauble. This, they claim, provides a permanent gate beacon.

WAR OF GREAT ENDINGS. See "Alurax" and "Mirror of Shadows."

## WATER

*From the Lessons of the Open Chalice*

The principle of water is the principle of life. The first people came awake from nothingness when the DEITIES poured water into their throats. This is why life is passed on through liquid, to remind us all of our liquid nature.

To learn all that is worth knowing, one must only contemplate the rivers, streams, and oceans. Open yourself fully, and the waters of wisdom flow in.

Water flows into any vessel, taking its shape as its own. From this, we must learn to see ourselves in the actions and circumstances of others. By considering this man's suffering and that woman's joy, we learn compassion for one while sharing the happiness of the other.

WATER IS  
THE ELEMENT  
OF FEELING,  
INTUITION,  
AND UNSPOKEN  
WISDOM.

A lonely person is like an island: surrounded by all, there is no one but himself or herself. Like an island, such a person is rocky and barren, refusing to yield and believing in nothing. One who listens and truly hears, who looks and truly sees, is one who is never lonesome because such a person sees the self in all others and therefore draws them close.

Open yourself to the good and it comes to you.

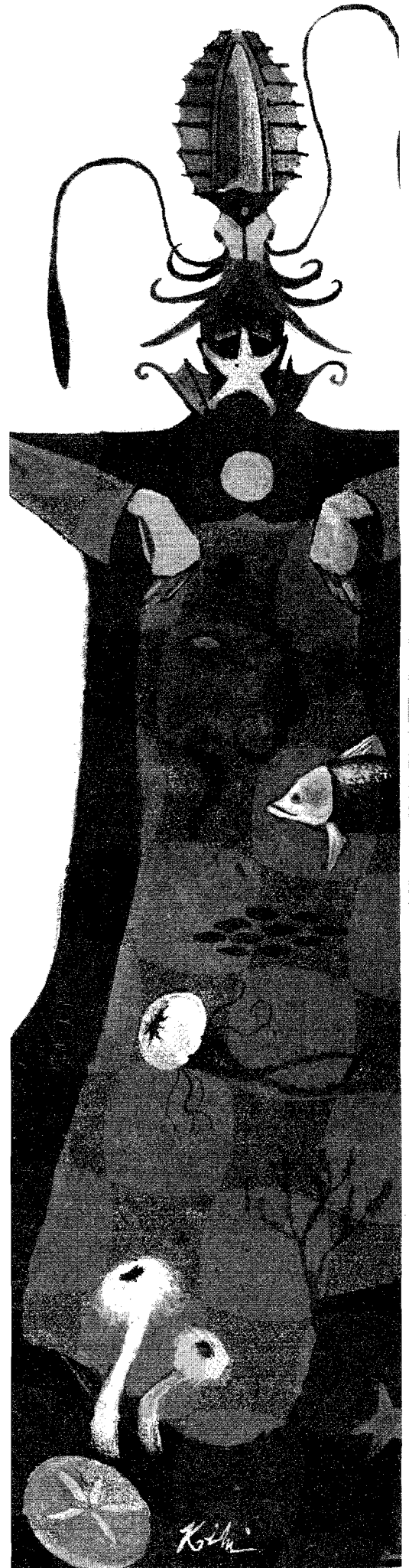
This world is full of trouble and strife. A hard person tries to resist problems, like a stern oak. Let such an oak feel the bite of an axe, and it falls. A fierce person tries to destroy her problems, and, like a FIRE leaping from house to house, she becomes that which she tried to strike down. A learned person tries to argue with his problems, not realizing that they will never listen until he first listens to them.

A yielding person deals with problems by facing and knowing them. When water is struck by an axe, it parts and is unharmed when the axe is pulled free. Arguing with the ocean merely wastes one's breath. When water strikes fire, the fire is quenched and loses its rage to feed. Only by knowing evil can we outgrow it.

Open yourself to the evil and it flows harmlessly past.

See also "Elements."

Water illustration © 1996 Scott Kirschner





## WEeping DRAGON ORACLE, THE

*From The Book of Elder Fear, Private Collection*

The knowledge of humanity is slight, and our vision is short. Furthermore, we are an impatient species, given to attempting great things far beyond our meager powers.

Most who try to grasp beyond their reach simply fail and weep, but little more tragedy comes from it. Some, however, are driven to try to build a bridge across the wide abyss of their flaws and weaknesses, from their small talents to some grandiose goal. Some are even tempted to ally with forces that are hated by the DEITIES. Once such force is the *Weeping Dragon Oracle*.

Few know where this sorry creature makes its lair. By most accounts, its home is a large body of WATER from which great heat and steam arises. This is because the creature within is none other than the great Dragon of the Water, the DRAGON who rebelled against HEAVEN before humanity had even been created. For her crime, her eyes were dug out and replaced with pits of burning FIRE. Chastised, the unhappy worm crawled off to hide in some ocean, lake, or sea, hoping that the soothing waters that are her namesake might quench the searing agony of her eyes. Naturally, the will of heaven is not so easily thwarted. Her eyes burn still, her days are a torment, and her nights are filled with misery.

Yet this wretched creature, tortured, despised, and brought low, is believed by some misguided humans to be a source of great wisdom and knowledge. In truth, the dragon surely knows much, for she was present when this worlds were young, and before her unthinkable betrayal she was one of the deities' favored race. Some short-sighted people, bolstered by the courage of foolishness, actually seek out this horrible worm for counsel.

It is a sign of the righteous wrath of heaven that most who seek the oracle die before ever reaching the seething sea or boiling lake that is her lair. Few who reach it are equipped to follow her into her watery prison. Those who have survived and returned, however, say that the Dragon of Water has made for herself a court of wretchedness. In the center of this misbegotten city, surrounded by her spiny, twisted servants, lies the great beast herself, fire and smoke pouring endlessly from her visage.

Oh, if only those with the stupid determination to reach her city and her side had instead the wisdom to devote their energies to the proper worship of deities! What miracles of piety and devotion might they work? But no. Instead they turn their talents and BOONS against heaven and seek their own exaltation, even to the point of consulting with the most hated creatures in creation.

It is a sign of the deities' wisdom that they do not strike these heretics where they stand. Instead, they allow these blasphemers to craft their own punishments and to fling themselves heedlessly into their own misery.

Their regret surely follows swift upon the heels of their impetuosity. It is true that the dragon will answer one's questions—presuming one reaches her in the first place—but the price she exacts is terrible, for she will not answer until the reckless querent has spent a day shouldering the terrible burden of her blindness. From one sunrise to the next, the human must know the agony of heaven's curse—must know what it is to be blind, to weep fire, to have one's eyes consumed with gnawing agony. Some say that the dragon has the craft to put her punishment on others for a time, but this is surely not so, for the justice of the deities is absolute. No, she simply takes some mean, meager pleasure in sharing her utter torment.

The unfortunate querent emerges from her lair with the answer sought but also with the memory of a day of suffering, darkness, and, worst of all, the hatred of the deities.

## WHIRLWIND RIDES

A *whirlwind ride* is contained in a glass top with golden tracings about it. Within its glass container, the winds can be seen, in the form of constantly swirling clouds. Looking into a caged whirlwind gives one the curious sensation that the whirlwind observed is not terribly small but rather, by some trick of perspective, very far away.

When the top is spun, it unravels, releasing a powerful funnel cloud that picks up the person who spun the top and lifts him or her up into the sky. The cloud is large enough to lift a carriage full of people within its eye. Those on the periphery, however, are most likely to be flung violently



outward and away; for example, any horses attached to a wagon would be cast aside.

Once the whirlwind has picked up its owner, it carries him or her at a great velocity to a desired location, where the whirlwind gently sets down its charge and disperses. If the location sought is on a different SPHERE, the rider has to effect the shift but is able to move the entire whirlwind, even if normally unable to do so.

The sight of a rainbow, a symbol of karma, destroys many types of undead, but whether white walkers are destroyed by rainbows is unknown.

against the undead puts them in a sort of stasis, but they rise again when the nail is removed.

There is one sure way to kill one: a white walker can finally rest when someone else willingly dies in its place.

## WIND MONKS

*From the First Report Prepared by Brimming Cup, Ninety-Second Minister of Intelligence for the Glorious Empire*

WHITECAPS. See "Spring Born."

## WHITE WALKERS

It has been said, and on rare occasions verified, that a person who selflessly dies in the place of another can achieve limited immortality as a *white walker*. Such resurrected martyrs never fully heal from their fatal wounds (or from any other wounds they have) but are nonetheless able to move about and operate while bearing injuries that would kill the strongest mortals. The fate of these virtuous dead is a strict one: they are inexorably drawn to circumstances in which their original sacrifice can be repeated. In other words, they are forced to martyr themselves again and again to defend the innocent.

Unlike many of the lower types of UNDEAD, white walkers seem to retain the mental and even emotional capacities they had while living. Some can even use sorcery.

White walkers can be damaged, slowed, or disrupted by magic, but it is extremely difficult to destroy one permanently. They are not harmed by sunlight or running WATER, and they can even continue to function with a wooden stake through the heart. The traditional silver nail used

Most Exalted Son of Heaven, Light of All Eyes, Shining Beacon of Virtue, my heart leapt within me at your order to investigate these "monks of the wind." Your concern at the appearance of a large group of these people in our land is a valid one.

The reports of a secret language are not exaggerated: the monks speak with a second tongue, and no one is able to fathom its meaning. Even our attempts to decipher it with sorcery have met with only limited success.

The citizens, your glorious and admiring flock, are naturally frightened by these people. Surely it is because they realize that only people with something to hide would reject THE TONGUE of HEAVEN—a gift for understanding—and replace it with some devious construction useful solely for the keeping of secrets. Some peasants even believe the wind monks to be devils.

Early encounters by our agents, disguised as drunken belligerents, indicate that the martial prowess of these individuals has not been exaggerated. A trained master of marines accosted one of their outriders, and though he attacked from surprise and was better armed, he was disabled by the monk, who then tied





him to a horse and forced him to run along to the next town, where he was handed over to authorities.

This encounter teaches us much; while these monks are mighty in battle, they are still awed by the sheer magnitude of the Imperial Horde. This fear leads them to respect the laws of our land.

The number of monks in this company is insufficient to pose any serious threat to the empire, but they could nonetheless cause serious disruption and discomfort to your beloved citizens. We are continuing surveillance and have mobilized a sufficient force of swift, mounted archers to deal with them should they lose their respect for our laws.

In addition to following their trail, I will continue my research.

*From the Second Report Prepared by Brimming Cup, Ninety-Second Minister of Intelligence for the Glorious Empire*

Glorious Lord of All Dignity, Master of the Four Winds, King of the Land and Lord of the Sky, it is with immense pleasure that I am able to serve you by presenting you with additional information on the wind monks.

The source for this new intelligence is a former member of the wind monk cult, an individual named Full Portion. Our otherworldly representatives located him and, after a sufficient retainer was offered, led him to me. A transcript of our interview is included below.

*The Words of Full Portion*

Your name is Full Portion, and you are a former wind monk?"

"That's right."

"Tell me about the monks."

"Well . . . I saw one when I was young. He came through our town during some troubles, and when he saw these soldiers pulling a woman out of her house, he told them to stop. One of them tried to knock him down and . . . and he killed them all. There were three, maybe four of them, with swords. He just had a stick. He killed every one of them."

"How was he able to defeat multiple, armed opponents? Did he use sorcery?"

"No, he just fought like . . . like a tiger! It was as if he was everywhere at once . . . He was swift, and he never hesitated, and . . . It's difficult to explain. Later I learned how it's done. They call it *teng quatto*."

"What does that mean?"

"*Teng quatto* means 'wind sword fist.' Through diligent practice, the student's punches and kicks become as fast and as sharp as a winter wind. If you'd like I can demonstrate parts of it, but I'm not a great teacher."

"Perhaps later. How did you find them?"

"After our country was conquered, I was homeless . . . I just wandered. I wanted to learn how to fight, and I served in some armies, did a little mercenary work . . . but I never saw anyone move like that scrawny monk with the wild hair. I asked, and people said he must have been a wind monk. So I looked for them, and I found them."

"Where did you find them?"

"It's a SPHERE a long way away. The people there call the realm 'Everfrost' because it's never summer there. The monks live up in this ridge of mountains called Tengui."

"Tengui?"

"They never explained it to me."

"How did you find them in the mountains?"

"I just wandered up there, and eventually I met one. I think they'd been watching me because it was like he was waiting for me."

"And he took you in as a student, just like that?"

"They'll accept anyone as a student—or at least that's what they say. It's hard though. The master, who you're supposed to call *usai*—"

"*Usai* is a name or a title?"

"It's a title. . . . Means 'ultimate teacher,' but it's more than that. It implies that the *usai* is going to reshape your soul. I was told to obey Heavy Foot, who was my *usai*, utterly. I was supposed to make his will my will, and he asked me to do some crazy things. I had to sleep outside in the snow without a FIRE and run along mountain ridges blindfolded, just for examples."

"You slept in the snow? Every night?"

"Not every night. Just once really. That was towards the

end. He said it was a test and that when I did it, I'd passed. All this time, I'd been studying *teng quatto* as well."

"And after the test?"

"He said he had no more to teach me, that I was a *shindolin*, which means 'wanderer.' I was supposed to go out and find virtue walking the GATES. I did that for a while, but eventually I stopped calling myself a wind monk or a *shindolin*."

"Why is that?"

"I figured out that they were lying to me the whole time. I met some wind monks while I was wandering, and I saw them do things I never learned how to do."

"Such as?"

"Well, part of it was fighting secrets. I saw them throw people around as if they were weightless—they never taught me how to do that! Once, one of them let me push him. Now, I'm a lot bigger, but it was like pushing the side of a house. I just couldn't move him! I think there's another art, one higher than *teng quatto*, that they wouldn't teach me."

"Did you ask your fellow monks?"

"I did, but they just ignored the question. Another thing, is that they obviously knew more of *Shanji* than I did. *Shanji* is the secret language. My *usai* never taught me much of it, just a few words and phrases. I'd ask them about all this, and they'd try to put me off saying 'Different teachers show different things,' and 'We've seen you use strikes we don't know.' What really made me quit was when they said they weren't going to travel with me."

"When was this?"

"I told them there was a noble who was hiring mercenaries and that we could wander over that way. They said that my destiny wasn't with them and that I shouldn't try to follow them. Ever since then, I haven't had any use for them. Now, what about my money?"

#### Brimming Cup's Comments

Little else of value was learned from Full Portion. Our other agents on various SPHERES were able to gather only apocryphal stories and

anecdotes. For what it is worth, they often spoke of the monks as having a reputation for honor and virtue. Nonetheless, it would do us well to remember that not all definitions of virtue are the same.

#### From a Fragment in the Twisted Library Collection

There are many strange techniques that the *wind monks* use. They are referred to as *dendi*, which means "gifts" or "given talents." Not all monks develop all the *dendi*, and some don't develop any at all.

These unusual abilities apparently derive from the inner teaching of *eshai raman*. No *shindolin* ever develops these abilities.

#### WINDWALKING

By means of this *dendi*, the monk can make his or her tread as light as a breeze. *Windwalking* requires great concentration—rarely is it seen in combat, though there is a noteworthy account of two monks who battled on the surface of a swift-moving stream as a practice exercise.

At the lowest level of skill, the monk merely exhibits an unusually silent tread. As the student gains skill, windwalking allows even a heavy man or woman to walk across snow or mud without leaving any visible trace. Windwalkers of this caliber can even run across a field of autumn leaves in perfect, unbroken silence.

The highest level of windwalking allows the monk to cross the surface of WATER, though this is a difficult task if the water is rough or swift-moving, for the surface only supports the soles of the feet.

#### EYE EXCHANGE

This strange *dendi* is the explanation for many combat victories by the monks against larger or even more skilled foes. To an outsider, it appears that one opponent becomes momentarily disoriented and bewildered, at which time the monk moves in decisively. This has given rise to legends of the wind monk "strike of the mind," which is probably a complete fabrication.



What actually occurs in *eye exchange* battles is that for a moment the opponent sees through the eyes of the monk, while the monk sees through the eyes of the enemy. Each, however, retains complete control of his or her own movements and body, as well as the other senses.

Since most wind monks who use this in battle close their eyes before beginning, to the enemy it simply feels as though his or her sight has gone black. In the meantime, the wind monk uses stolen vision to guide his or her own body in for a devastating strike.

In training, the projecting monk does not shut his or her eyes, and thus the novices are trained in guiding their bodies from the viewpoint of another's eyes. This difficult *dendi* is applicable in combat only by those with some practice and skill; beginners can only borrow the vision of someone they are touching. A more advanced student can exchange with anyone he or she can see. It is said that the masters of this gift can exchange vision with anyone they have met, no matter how distant. While this has not been verified, if it is true it would account for the speed with which news travels among the monks, even those on far-flung spheres.

#### THE RIGHTEOUS WOUND

This is the most feared *dendi* in *eshai raman*. Simply put, the wounds inflicted by the monk using this discipline do not heal. Ever.

In order to inflict a *righteous wound*, the monk must be acting with pure purpose and clarity of spirit; an uncertain monk, or one who is acting for personal reasons, is not able to inflict such an injury.

Righteous wounds do not fester or sicken, but they are extremely dangerous because they do not close over and heal like normal wounds do. Even magic seems unable to affect such injuries. If the wound is a cut or other breach of the skin, it can be bandaged or sewn shut to stem the flow of blood, but the blood will not harden or cease.

To perform this *dendi*, the monk projects EARTH energy into the opponent at the instant of the injury and "kills" the foe's earth energy around the wound. This leaves the body permanently injured, unable to repair itself, and resistant to healing magics.

Most monks with this *dendi* can only project their energy through their bare hands or feet, but those with particularly strong ties to the earthly ELEMENT can project it through hand weapons. The highest masters can inflict these wounds with arrows.

The difference between a  
shindolin and a wind monk  
is one night's humility."  
—a secret stolen from the  
wind monks by a  
Thief of Essence

WIND READER. See "Oracles of the Writing Wind."

#### WINTERWATER

Winterwater is superficially no different from ordinary WATER. It can be dipped, poured, and contained in normal vessels. It cannot, however, be safely consumed; if drunk, it turns the blood to ice in the veins. If a single drop of winterwater falls into a stream, the stream freezes solid for several feet in each direction. A large jug is enough to freeze a wide river fast for a mile—and all in an instant.

Winterwater was invented by a sorceress working for the sixth Blue MERCHANT QUEEN, who used a barrel of it to freeze a lake and then marched an army across it.

Winterwater is the opposite  
of summerwater.



## AFTERWORD

## How I Wrote Spherewalker

Lots of my ideas for the *Spherewalker Sourcebook* came from that weird place in my brain that periodically pukes something strange up into my conscious mind. Some of those ideas were modified, or lifted wholesale, from dreams I had after particularly spicy dinners. Others were produced in a more mundane fashion.

Originally, the content of *Spherewalker* was going to be *radically* different from what it is now. As initially conceived, it was going to focus largely on a group of spheres called the *Golden Road*. I had a lot of swell ideas for the *Golden Road*, which the **Everway** line developer, Jonathan Tweet, proceeded to demolish, saying they were inappropriate (and, in retrospect, I can see that they were).

Undeterred, I produced ideas for the *Golden Road*, which consisted of six spheres that were more in keeping with the **Everway** approach. Jonathan liked these much better but decided that he didn't want them in **Everway's** first supplement *at all*.

Jonathan also wanted to attach cards to the book. This was an idea I was initially dubious about but came to like a lot. My idea for the cards was that if you chose to play a very experienced hero, your gamemaster would give you two or three cards; the text on the back would represent knowledge your hero had picked up in his or her travels. Inexperienced heroes would get only one card, or perhaps none at all. I kept that idea in mind when writing the card backs for the *Spherewalker Source Cards*. I was, however, adamant that the books and cards, while interrelated, would be independent. As I saw it, there would be people who bought the book, people who bought the cards, and people who bought both, and I didn't want any of the three to feel cheated. There is nothing in the cards that you can't understand without the book, and everything in the book makes sense without the cards. With that established, Jonathan encouraged me to put something on each card that isn't in the book—not crucial information, but interesting details. That sounded fair to me.

By this time I had twenty thousand words of non-Golden Road material written, and I got a contract to have a seventy-five-thousand-word first draft within two months. I got off to a good start, cranking out about five thousand words a day, but this rate quickly flagged. Not only was I running out of endurance, I was running out of ideas.

I needed notions, and I needed them to be **Everway**-ey. Shrugging my shoulders, I picked up the Fortune Deck and tried to kick my slumbering creativity to wakefulness.

What follows is a general explanation of how I got some of the ideas for the entries in the book—or at least, how I *think* I got them.

"Air," "Earth," "Elements," "Fire," and "Water." These are pretty obvious and basic. Jonathan thought the book should have entries on them, so I did them up as I saw them. I thought it might be fun (while I was at it) to associate them with the sample mage schools given in the rules. I also decided that each of these schools would think that *their* element was the crucial one.

"Basahn." The race called the *Basahn* was one of my earliest ideas for **Everway**, one that I conceived back when the game was still being called by its code name, "GRIT," which was during the stage when I was thinking up the first *Golden Road*. The *Basahn* were wanderers who were often despised and feared, and, initially, they had the power of growing their hair at will and controlling its color. Jonathan really liked the idea of these tragic outcasts but hated the hair thing, so I changed it. Ironically, about the only remnant of my very





original conception of them is the name “Basahn,” which Jonathan misspelled in the first printing of the *Playing Guide* that comes with the *EVERWAY Game Set*.

“Bell Walking.” In an early email, Jonathan mentioned “bell walking” as an example of a learned skill. Curiosity piqued, I asked what it was. He said he’d just stuck two words together. Behold!

“Cats,” “Clothing,” “Colors,” “Diamonds,” “Heartfinger,” “Sign of the Sprout,” and “Soulfinger.” These were originally one big file called “Superstitions.” The clothing and color ideas (along with the idea of the “Seventy-Seven Steps”) came from a brainstorming session with one of my players, Bill Mullin. I had the idea that diamonds were tears wept by the deities a long time ago. In traditional acupuncture, the little fingers are connected to the heart; the soulfinger tradition is very similar to what the Sorkos of Nigeria believe. The sign of the sprout is an **Everway** version of the traditional hand gestures against the evil eye. The cat notions had no particular inspiration.

“Cohorts.” This was an outgrowth of the Soulseekers. When Jonathan wanted a reason for widely disparate groups of heroes to travel together, this seemed ready-made. (As a blanket explanation, karma is particularly warm.)

“Dragons.” Another early idea. Obviously, I owe copious debts to John Milton and to Edith Hamilton’s *Greek Mythology*.

“Edge of Light and Darkness,” “Pearl of Making,” and “Mirror of Shadows.” These are *really* old ideas. I wanted objects that represented and embodied the ideas of Being, Nothingness, and the division between them. Their forms were loosely based on the imperial symbols of Japan.

“Golems.” When I was pulling fortune cards for inspiration, it was months before the publication of the *EVERWAY Game Set*, so I was using my homemade, hand-drawn deck. My version of the Nature card simply had an egg on it. One late night I drew Nature upright and came up with this idea.

“Griffins.” I had an idea that the griffin’s valor shouldn’t just be the usual “all pain, no gain; all guts, no brain” type. I wanted to communicate the idea that “no fear” is different from “resisting fear.” Incidentally, I ought to thank Jonathan for pointing out that the setting for this was originally very unoriginal, and for kicking my butt until I made something less “faux-euro.”

“Harp of the Hidden City.” Having used up my single-card ideas, I started laying out fantasy art cards and the Fortune Deck in various divinatory patterns. This one was from art cards, but I don’t remember which ones.

“Shadow Children.” Another old Golden Road idea was the “Legion of the Ebon Fist.” This was months before the

“Ebon Hand” cards in Wizards of the Coast’s **Magic: The Gathering** game came out [Initiates of the Ebon Hand and Order of the Ebon Hand, both in the *Fallen Empires* expansion], and we eventually changed the name to avoid confusion. I started with an image of people who had off-colored hands (for some reason, no doubt deeply Freudian) and then began to ask myself how the Basahn had lost their land. . . .

“Merchant Queens.” Also from my original Golden Road conception, these were initially Merchant *Kings*, until my editor, Jenny Scott, pointed out just how few women there were in *Spherewalker*.

“Angelthorn,” “Bacchus’s Root,” “Batwing Fungus,” “Bloodbeak Berries,” “Fireblossom,” and “Wanderer’s Root.” With these, I invented herbs based on the Phoenix, Cockatrice, Griffin, Dragon, Unicorn, and Satyr fortune cards. (The Dragon herb got cut.) I tried to work in both their normal and inverted aspects. Wanderer’s Root was an afterthought because I thought it would be useful but not unbalancing.

“Roses.” I came up with the symbolism a long time ago, and then I had the idea that it would be neat if they were in every sphere—a kind of divine signature

“Satyrs.” Like “Cockatrices,” “Phoenixes,” and so on, this entry was a request. The story *just happened*, but I like it at least as much as anything else in *Spherewalker*. More, probably. When I began writing it, I had no idea that it would turn out the way it did.

“Satyr Day.” The entry was inspired by the upright Satyr card, along with bits of Tom Robbins’s *Jitterbug Perfume* and an idea from the upright Fool card.

“Order of the Silver Nail.” I woke up one night with the phrase “Order of the Silver Nail” in my head, along with “Order of the Black Hood” and the idea that there was a “starsong,” which duplicates spells. I haven’t used the Black Hood yet. Perhaps because of the combination of the silver and the executioner imagery, I got the notion to make them executioners of the undead. The rings that get hot are a distorted swipe from *The Stress of Her Regard*, by Tim Powers (“when you care enough to steal the very best”), and the starsong idea became the Thieves of Essence.

“The Sisters of Night.” Another set of ideas that came at night and was written on my “late night concept” pieces of paper, the three gifts of the rose are for, of course, the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone.

“Spell Eaters.” I think this came, in a very roundabout fashion, from an illustration in Kim Dietch’s *A Shroud for Waldo*. He likes demons with second faces in their stomachs

## SPHEREWALKER

"Spring Born." Enclosed in an issue of *SHADIS* magazine was a catalogue of dragon art. I cut out all the stuff I thought looked neat, and three of the images inspired the three objects described in the Spring Born entry. A picture (Raphael, I think) of stately women looking over some map or something inspired the story of the blind dragon's gifts. Jonathan pointed out that the Spring Born was an idea with a lot more inherent potential than three more dribbly magic items, so I changed focus.

"Tempest Threshold." This started as a plot device, stuck in my craw, and got an entry of its own. (A real success story. . . . Only in America!).

"Twisted." I got the idea for humanity's elemental nemeses, and since each element is associated with specific personality traits, I decided to make these plot/characterization threats rather than simple bash-on-through threats. Credit where due: the air spirit was my wife's creation in many ways.

"Unicorns." Yet another request entry, this one probably shows some bias from my work for a social work agency; to

me, the image of a unicorn chasing virgins was much less potent than one of unicorns restoring a lost sense of innocence.

"White Walkers." This idea was partially inspired, I think, by Ray of the Prismatic Path, Eric Tumbleson's hero in an early game.

There it is. Only it isn't, really. As explanations of where the entries came from, these are pretty pathetic. I can tell you about the genesis of these concepts, but of course I can't tell you how they developed any more than I can understand it myself. I can only hope that by showing you where my ideas came from, I can fire up your imagination so that you can invent *your own* people, places, and adventures—which is what roleplaying is really about. (Just don't tell the people in Marketing that I let you know that.)



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# SPHEREWALKER

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Greg Stolze is the author of *Wildest Dreams* (a sourcebook for the **Over the Edge** game by Atlas Games) and the column "Deep Thoughts for Game Geeks," which appears regularly in *The Familiar* magazine. He also contributed to the sourcebook *Friend or Foe?*, also by Atlas Games. Stolze's *Cult of Transcendence*, a sourcebook for the **Call of Cthulhu** roleplaying game, will be forthcoming from Pagan Publishing. He has contributed to many other forthcoming projects as well, including Atlas Games' *The Myth of Self*, Dædalus Games' *Marked for Death* (for the **Feng Shui** roleplaying game), and Nightshift Games' *Alien Recognition Manual* (for their **Hidden Invasion** game).





# SPHEREWALKER

## SOURCEBOOK



pex Soulsinger drew her knife and buried it in her own heart. Her scream of death rang across the land, and it rang across a thousand spheres as a gate opened in her flesh. Although its outline bore the shape of their ally and friend, it seemed to have within it the brilliance of the sun. It began to flicker with views of countless worlds. . . . Realizing that their lives were to be bought with her death, the legion charged into the gate. Countless worlds flashed through the gate, shimmering like reflections on a pond when ripples collide. One soldier would step through into a jungle, while the next would arrive in a desert, and another would find herself in a distant city. . . .”

—*Spherewalker Sourcebook*



reathtaking tales, mysterious peoples, exotic worlds: such is the landscape of *Spherewalker Sourcebook*. The *Spherewalker Sourcebook* is the perfect reference tool for gamemasters and players of the EVERWAY game system, as well as excellent reading for those who enjoy fantastic yarns set in a richly embellished multiverse. Experience the power and diversity of a thousand possibilities as you embark on your journey as a spherewalker!



covering the range of views from the mundane . . . to the cosmic, Greg shows that his imagination works at any scale, whether he's talking about the effects of wearing brown or the origin of humanity. This range of attention allows the reader, player, or gamemaster to see the grand scope . . . as well as the day-to-day details. . . . Greg's heavy use of dialogue, the first-person accounts, his humor, and his sense of drama make the sourcebook an easy read.”

—Jonathan Tweet, EVERWAY Game Designer  
from the foreword

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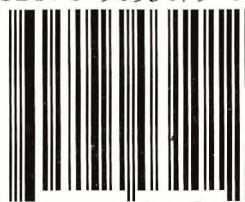
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