

DRAGON-BLOODED

WHAT FIRE HAS WROUGHT

HEIRS TO THE SHOGUNATE

Kickstarter Backer Manuscript Preview



Introduction

“You must learn, child, that what would be wrong for you or for any of the common people is not wrong in a great Queen such as I. The weight of the world is on our shoulders. We must be freed from all rules. Ours is a high and lonely destiny.”

— C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*

The Dragon-Blooded Shogunate born with the Second Age's dawn has long since crumbled and collapsed — weakened by internecine conflicts and ultimately destroyed by the twin tribulations of plague and fae invasion. But from the Shogunate's corpse arose the great Dragon-Blooded lineages and polities that still shape the face of Creation today, including both the vast powers of the Scarlet Realm, Lookshy, and Prasad, and more parochial societies such as the Grass Spiders, the Cult of the Violet Fang, and the esoteric Forest Witches. From the lone outcaste wandering the Hundred Kingdoms to the Great Houses of the Scarlet Dynasty, all carry the flame passed down by the Shogunate.

For the rules necessary to play a Dragon-Blood, setting information on the Scarlet Dynasty and the Realm they rule, and an introduction to other Dragon-Blooded polities, you'll need access to **Dragon-Blooded: What Fire Has Wrought**. The book you're now reading, **Heirs to the Shogunate**, is a companion volume funded through Kickstarter. It delves into more specialized topics, such as how to run games in the Realm's secondary schools and the details of regional outcaste groups. It also includes new Charms and artifacts created with the help of Kickstarter backers who submitted their custom concepts. Thank you to everyone who made this book possible by backing the **Dragon-Blooded** Kickstarter!

This Book at a Glance

Chapter One: The Realm details the Dragon-Blooded cadet houses dwelling in the Threshold that have tied themselves to the Scarlet Dynasty through allegiance and marriage. It also goes into greater depth on the Realm's secondary schools, where young Dynastic Dragon-Blooded receive an education fit for a demigod and have their first adventures.

Chapter Two: Lookshy explores the Seventh Legion, including greater detail on Lookshy's Dragon-Blooded gentes and the Seventh Legion's military might.

Chapter Three: Prasad details this Dreaming Sea empire — once a Realm satrapy, until its governing houses went renegade and established themselves atop Prasad's society as the ruling Dragon Clans.

Chapter Four: The Forest Witches introduces a mysterious group of Dragon-Blooded outcastes whose esoteric secrets transcend life and death and draw back the veil of reality.

Chapter Five: Outcastes discusses a variety of other Dragon-Blooded lineages, polities, and societies. These include the Wanasaan exorcists, the Cult of the Violet Fang that quests against its fae ancestors in the Wyld, the Temple of the Reverent Whisper's courtesan-priests, the deadly assassins of the Grass Spiders, and more.

Chapter Six: Charms supplies new Dragon-Blooded Charms, expanding on the legendary prowess and elemental power of the Terrestrial Exalted.

Chapter Seven: Heirlooms of Power offers heirloom artifacts from a variety of Dragon-Blooded societies: Great Houses, Lookshyan gentes, cadet houses, and more. It also showcases Seventh Legion gunzosha armor, a First Age relic usable by mortal heroes at great cost.

Chapter Eight: Blood of the Dragons presents Quick Character write-ups for a number of Dragon-Blooded from the Realm, Lookshy, and beyond, ranging from youthful scions to Great House matriarchs.

Chapter Nine: The Center Cannot Hold provides Storyteller guidance for including the Realm civil war in their games in a variety of different ways. It also covers the War in the West, a scenario detailing one possibility for how civil war might unfold.

The **Appendix** contains two-page sheets intended for new players of Dragon-Blooded characters of various origins, summarizing the setting details relevant to their characters.

The gala was a beautiful sham.

Nissar Udar stood on a secluded balcony above the grand hall of Peleps Belina's seaside estate in Voice-of-the-Tides Prefecture. His hosts had thrown the veranda doors wide, letting the chilly ocean breeze swirl through the room. Below him, Haltan acrobats clad only in jewels flew through the air, Dynasts and other honored guests marveled at the exotic and ephemeral prodigies from the far West on display, and attendants scurried about, carrying trays laden with paper-thin slices of salted siaka, hybroc balut, and crystal flutes of the most expensive wine jade could buy.

Over the last few years, Peleps' soirees had grown less frequent, though they maintained their opulence. Udar wondered how much this whole affair had set the Great House back, though he'd never be so gauche as to ask. House Nissar's galas in Wu-Jian might be more modest, but at least they stayed within the cadet house's means.

Peleps Belina stood beside Udar. The cadet house scion had commissioned a new silk coat for the occasion, in Peleps blue and black to subtly signal the house had his — and therefore House Nissar's — support.

His first mistake.

Wearing house colors had gone out of fashion on the Blessed Isle, it turned out. Rather than looking the savvy courtier, sending messages to his hosts via his sartorial choices, Udar came across as the country cousin borrowing clothing ten years out of date, or an overdressed servant in house livery. Perhaps that was why Belina insisted on having their discussion up here, where his appearance couldn't embarrass her.

Country cousins or not, Peleps *needed* Nissar, or so Udar hoped to convince her. He pretended not to notice the way her eyes kept slipping toward the party below, as though watching for someone important to pass by. As if to emphasize Udar's inferiority.

"If it comes to war," Udar said, "Sesus and V'Neef will move to secure Wu-Jian's harbors and restrict the shipping lanes. But they'll be focused on *your* ships, not ours."

That snapped her gaze firmly back to him. "Go on."

"House Nissar can deliver you the West. And from there..." From there, the Realm.

Belina gestured, a complicated flutter of her fingers Udar couldn't interpret. Was she signaling assent? Telling him to elaborate? Scoffing? Was the movement a warning that he'd overstepped, or that someone was eavesdropping? This wasn't the first time in this conversation that Belina had left Udar to flounder over her meaning. Turns of phrase and idioms exclusive to the Scarlet Dynasty's elite littered her speech, none of which Udar had context for.

He was a Prince of the Earth, same as Belina. He could trace his lineage back to the Empress, just as she could. And yet she seemed intent on putting him firmly in his place — one well beneath her.

He breathed in the salt air, willed his anger to dissolve like footprints washed away by the tide. "Peleps can't take the Imperial City by itself. Your house's navy and reputation will be a boon, but the money *will* run out."

Belina drew a sharp breath. His candor had thrown her off-kilter, but intrigued rather than insulted her. "I'm listening."

“Peleps needs an ally willing to do the dirty work, someone who knows which throats to cut and which pockets to fill. House Nissar keeps Sesus, Peleps, and V’Neef in check in Wu-Jian. It can put a Peleps on the Scarlet Throne.”

Belina took his arm. “Let’s speak somewhere more private,” she said, leading him away from the balcony.

Udar matched his gait to hers, careful not to break the fragile rapport he’d finally established. It’d be no small feat, convincing her to take his offer, and placing Peleps on the throne would take effort enough to shake the heavens. But to see the Great Houses struck from the Imperial ledgers by a new Empress’ hand and House Nissar elevated in their place? It would all be worth it.

Chapter One

The Realm

Cadet Houses

The cadet houses exist on the Dynasty’s periphery. They’re no mere Threshold nobility, for they trace their lineage back to the Scarlet Empress and are blessed with the blood of the Dragons. But compared to the Great Houses, They’re lesser in almost every respect — status, holdings, numbers, wealth, military strength, and proximity to the center of power on the Blessed Isle. But while their position might confer fewer advantages, the cadet houses’ scions are still Dragon-Blooded heroes. Their deeds have forged legends across Creation, and may yet shape the course of the Realm’s future.

House Ferem

Air Cradled in the Jaws of the Sea

Greatness came so very close for House Ferem’s ancestors, yet was not to be. Bagrash Köl’s ambition and hubris ruined the dream of a Grand Cherak. Now the house rules a rump state, their war machines battered into plowshares, their only saving grace marriage ties to the Dynasty. Even that sufficed only to become a cadet house, not a Great House. But Ferem’s scions have worked since their defeat to ensure that Cherak rises once more — that the lands once theirs shall be theirs yet again, and beyond.

House Ferem’s history is one of conquest and power, and its scions haven’t forgotten it. Raised on stories of naval battles and games teaching principles of naval warfare, Ferem scions are taught never to forget that the Cheraki spirit is as indomitable and fierce as the northern winds. Only a fool, they say, sails into a red sunrise, and only a fool sails against House Ferem. Whether they study naval logistics and trade at Scales of Plenty, master seafaring and combat aboard the Hall of Bitter Salt’s teaching fleet, or even win a place at a Realm secondary school, all come of age ready to lay the foundations for Cherak’s rise and House Ferem’s rebirth.

House Economics

Both Cherak’s and House Ferem’s economy depend on the sea, the navy, and the Realm. The sea’s rich bounty of fish, crab, eels, and whales supplements harvests reaped from the region’s poor soil. Ferem’s navy — an ancient and powerful institution — spreads the house’s influence,

filling its coffers (and its scions' pockets) with the spoils of privateering, and safeguarding the maritime trade that's become House Ferem's lifeblood.

Much of that trade is with the Realm for both economic and political reasons, complicated now by the Empress' absence. House Ferem has of necessity mastered the tools of economic warfare — ranging from selective tariffs to resource buyouts to outright fraud. Every obol it takes in is an obol denied to its rivals, and drawing those rivals into debt provides powerful political leverage. For instance, when the merchant prince Yirida of Damanara sought oak galls for the dye trade, he discovered that Ferem Sadano had quietly bought up most of Cherak's supply months earlier. Sadano refused to bargain until Yirida agreed to a lifetime contract for future purchases.

House Ferem's greatest rival in this cutthroat game is House Margard. They're only a family of mortal merchants, rather than a cadet house, but they're cunning, tenacious, and backed by enormous wealth and political ties to the Guild, the Realm, and even intermarriage with Ferem households. More than once, House Margard's intervention has soured a transaction that seemed to be in House Ferem's favor.

House Military

Grand Cherak's traditional strength was military excellence, and its navy, largely dedicated to pirate-hunting, White Sea privateering, and mercenary contracts, is envied by petty states throughout the North. Despite efforts to bring it under Peleps' sway, Cherak's navy remains independent, a source of pride to every hot-blooded Ferem scion. Most have captained at least one warship — those who haven't are either pitifully unseaworthy or seen by the matriarch as better able to serve their house in less prestigious roles ashore. Ferem coast-admirals, serving at the matriarch's pleasure, dominate the navy's upper ranks.

Ferem maintains a tiny standing army, the White Dragon Regiment, to repel bandits and raiders, supplemented by levied serfs and kulak militias. While not as esteemed as the navy, House Ferem nonetheless sees it as an inheritor of Grand Cherak military traditions, and many scions proudly seek commissions in its officer corps.

The Cult of Artora

The Immaculate Order maintains a strong presence in Cherak, but it's not yet been able to extirpate the heretical worship of Artora, the Sea-Reddening Hellion, a regional god of whaling and war. Sailors of all social classes covertly honor her, especially in the navy; many Ferem scions regard her as their house's unspoken patron goddess. Sailors tell stories of the whalebone-clad goddess and her enormous harpoon, with which she spears rogue waves to capsize enemy ships. Her devotees wear tiny wrought-iron harpoons as talismans at sea, far from monks' watchful eyes.

Enemies and Alliances

Ferem Tolosh and Tepet Ilan met upon the field of battle after the collapse of Bagrash Köl's empire opened the door for the Realm to conquer Cherak. They gave each other half a dozen new scars apiece before collapsing, and fell in love with one another during their convalescence — their marriage tilted the scales, securing a sliver of Ferem's once-great empire as their Empress-affirmed birthright. Since then, Tepet and Ferem have intermarried often, and no few Ferem scions perished at the Valley of Shards.

House Margard has ever been a thorn in House Ferem's side, leveraging wit, audacity, and a web of both legitimate and criminal connections to pose an obstacle to even Dragon-Blooded might. Ferem scions are warned to be wary in business or social dealings, for House Margard is always seeking opportunities to outmaneuver their social betters.

Cheraki exports — primarily whale oil, salted and fermented fish, scrimshaw — find their way into Realm markets mainly through Cynis hands, Cynis Belar, the house matriarch, is ever watchful for chances to further tie down House Ferem as a steadfast ally and source of military power, stringing them along with a wedding or three every generation. She also maintains ties — strictly business, so far — with House Margard.

Since the Empress' disappearance, satrap Ragara Razha has labored to gain more control over Cherak on her house's behalf, both to extract tribute and to restrict House Ferem's ambitions. Every shipbuilding project is tied down with mountains of red tape, and the house's finances subjected to constant interference from Ragara allies within the Honest and Humble Assessors of the Imperial Tax.

Despite its status as a cadet house, Ferem enjoys a relationship with the Great Houses — other than Peleps and V'neef — a hair's breadth above its peers for its powerful independent navy. Ferem ships have escorted trade fleets as far away as Chiaroscuro and Wu-Jian, and few Inland Sea sailors know the treacherous waters of the White Sea and the Great Western Ocean better than they — Ferem navigators can always find work aboard other ships, if opportunities are lacking at home.

Though the dragon's share of House Ferem's alliances and marriages have historically been aimed at increasing their Dynastic ties, no few of House Ferem's sons have been married off to the half-dozen neighboring cadet houses that trace their ancestry back to Grand Cherak's Dragon-Blooded elite — such as Japor and Nandorun — and vice versa. Ferem has intensified this effort recently, courting its fellows in a bid to reunify the North under its banner.

Major Holdings

Ferem's navy commands hundreds of miles of coastline, but the house's only official holdings are in Cherak and the surrounding valley.

The Windward Palace, a tall, squared-off tower-manse aflutter with prayer banners that sculpt the wind into trade-favorable patterns, stands in pride of place in the city's heart. Once House Ferem's ancestral home, it was seized for use as the satrapial palace when House Ragara took over Cherak's lease a few years ago. House Ferem now maintains its seat in **the Clear Sky Garden**, a walled estate just north of the city. Once the matriarch's private manor, it's still being expanded to accommodate the rest of her sprawling household.

The Sea Market, a network of alleyways covered over with steeply angled roofs to hold off the snow, is known for the sheer variety of goods that pass through it: imports from across the Northern Threshold and the Blessed Isle, prizes of pirate hunts, goods procured through House Margard's trade network. But more than just commerce is transacted in the Sea Market. Merchants, spies, and criminals carry out countless intrigues, either as proxies in House Ferem and House Margard's rivalry or for their own advantage, and its flagstones are not unaccustomed to the taste of blood.

While Cherak's climate and poor soil demand that every inch of arable soil be put to use to sustain the city's agriculture, the **Tepelye Forest** remains nigh-untouched. The ancient and

powerful spirits of the Court of Burning Soil jealously guard it, demanding exorbitant sacrifices from the rare few hunters and loggers they permit in each year. Despite the efforts of Ferem scions, Immaculate monks, and Cheraki shamans, these spirits remain proud and untamed.

Scions of Note

House Ferem's matriarch, **Ferem Remini**, is a serious and studious woman beneath her polished socialite persona. An alumna of the House of Bells, she uses her strategic understanding to position her house for maximum benefit in the coming civil war. Remini personally interviews every Ferem scion upon graduation from secondary school, and few walk away without some assignment at home or abroad. Such tasks may seem trivial or without clear purpose, but always serve her singular aim — the restoration of Old Cherak.

Ferem Yuran is a happily married husband — truly, not just as a polite fiction. His wife, Cynis Ishiga, is both lovely and light-handed in directing Yuran's affairs. Although devoted to his wife, he remains quietly loyal to House Ferem, using his position to make connections on behalf of the house at Remini's behest. He's secured smuggling routes between Cynis holdings and Cherak, and while he isn't privy to House Cynis' inner secrets, he regularly corresponds with Remini in code, passing on relevant bits of gossip overheard in salons and at galas.

Ferem Milela is the master shipwright of Cherak's naval yards, a tall woman with the ragged, rough-edged look of someone who's spent half her life at sea. She runs her crews with clockwork precision, working them to the bone — a practice that's seen her maker's mark on nearly half the ships in Cherak's fleet. Despite this ruthlessness, she sees to it that any of her workers that retire or suffer injuries are pensioned from her own purse. She's recently come into a real challenge: a wrecked Shogunate warship salvaged from within an iceberg. It's being restored in extreme secrecy lest it be uncovered by the Ragara satrap, House Margard, the All-Seeing Eye, or anyone else.

House Nissar

The Dragon Unseen Beneath the Waves

A century ago, when the Realm prepared to seize Wu-Jian, the city was ruled by the Lords Criminal. Several outcastes, as much partners as agents, served as their lieutenants. As the conflict escalated, the wary Lords vested key responsibilities and secrets upon the outcaste they trusted most, their castellan Nissar. But they'd misjudged his ambition and guile; he betrayed the Lords to assassins and the Imperial Navy. The Empress rewarded his service with his own cadet house, folding the Lords' other surviving lieutenants — and a smattering of other local outcastes who'd thrived under the Lords' rule — into his family.

In many ways, House Nissar emulates its predecessors. It rules through unscrupulous agents, seeks wealth and power, and chafes under the Realm's rule. And now, with the Empress gone, independence seems within the house's grasp.

Governing Wu-Jian

House Nissar dedicates its governance to raising taxes for tribute, ensuring the free flow of trade along the Western sea routes, and promulgating the Immaculate Order. Beyond that, it has little interest in the details of administrating Wu-Jian's teeming populace and tottering infrastructure, contracting such responsibilities to merchant houses, martial arts schools, criminal organizations,

and other private entities. These contractors are surveilled and kept in line via underhanded means, including blackmail, embedded agents, extortion, and violence.

Nissar scions learn at an early age to weigh risk against reward at every angle. The family matriarch, Nissar Vedan, meets with all scions personally, who work as legitimate shipping captains, black flag pirates, and risk-taking entrepreneurs. The family's small handful of young scions must balance the benefits of cooperating against their elders with the risk that their peers will betray such efforts to said elders in exchange for boons. Vedan is quick to elevate scions who please her, and demote failures, making Nissar a meritocracy rife with internal intrigues and backstabbing.

Social Standing

Descended from a criminal elite, the Nissars retain a devious, treacherous streak. They're taught that laws exist merely as tools to be manipulated for personal gain; many respect no rules beyond respect for family and service to their elders — and sometimes not even that. They also prefer not to dirty their hands with personal involvement in governance, leaving such matters to subordinates. Instead, scions play games of decadence and covert action, rejoicing in outsmarting and outmaneuvering foes while seeming to do nothing at all.

Nissar maintains outwardly good relations with House Sesus, diligently raising tribute and providing information on Wu-Jian's criminal underworld. Sesus spymasters have discerned several blind spots in Nissar's reports — all criminal operations where Nissar would benefit from Sesus' ignorance. The Masked Council hasn't decided if Nissar is merely concealing income, or actively planning treachery; Nissar must work hard to dispel the latter notion.

Houses Peleps and V'neef have a strong naval-oriented presence in Wu-Jian. Nissar seeks good relations with both, but the longstanding enmity between these Great Houses complicates matters. Its galas, gifts, and other attempts at currying favor must be painstakingly calculated, lest too grand an overture to House Peleps offend House V'neef, or vice versa.

House Nissar holds close working ties with Wu-Jian's criminal underworld — small gangs running protection in a single neighborhood, large-scale syndicates, certain of the Thirteen Schools (**The Realm**, p. 172), and even agents of the Lintha family. The house has its agents turn a blind eye to avoid antagonizing these criminal allies — save for when they crack down on a gang to curry favor with its rivals. Vedan encourages scions to cultivate underworld contacts and allies, both as tools to keep control of Wu-Jian, and from paranoid desire to keep any potential enemy close. After all, Nissar itself rose to power by betraying the Lords Criminal.

Dynastic Spouses

While many young cadet houses remain closely tied to a single Great House, Nissar struggles to remain unattached. Its households have spread the family's Dynastic marriages widely, to avoid being subsumed by one house — Nissar deems such commitments risky — and to widen the scope of information and favors they can extract from the Dynasty.

However, these connections still tug at the house. Mortal Dynastic spouses — from Cynis, Peleps, Nellens, Ragara, and so forth — petition Nissar on their kinfolk's behalf, manipulate their offspring's loyalties, and quietly meddle in Wu-Jian's affairs.

House Economics

House Nissar's primary income comes from subcontracts with Houses Cynis and V'Neef, ferrying goods from the Blessed Isle to the Western Archipelago. They augment this with independent contracts with city states, and their shipping empire ranges from An-Teng to Fajad.

More enterprising scions manage their own businesses, often with the goal of making them profitable enough to attract wealthy buyers. Vedan gives scions great leeway in proposing new endeavors, matching funding on those she particularly likes, from pearl farming by aquatic beastfolk to charting faster shipping lanes through bordermarches. The drug trade — unregulated in Wu-Jian — is especially popular; many scions devote great effort to seeking out novel narcotics for import or improving on existing drug-refining methods.

Wu-Jian also sees a robust Guild presence. Nissar taxes Guild enterprises heavily, hoping to discourage membership among Western merchants, but not so heavily as to trigger a trade war. The house also plays Guild factors and merchant princes against one another, lest a unified Western Guild undercut Nissar's local economic dominance. And with the Empress' disappearance, Guild merchants feel freer to escalate — especially those with Cynis backing.

For every legitimate merchant captain or harbormaster, Nissar counts two pirates in its ranks. Its corsairs attack coastal villages throughout the West, using knowledge of Sesus and Peleps movements to maneuver past their coastal patrols and pirate hunters. Most merchant captains double as marauders, ready to seize vulnerable ships. Profits from raiding enter house coffers after captain and crew get their cut. Smuggling is common among legitimate merchants and pirates alike, to sell illicit goods and bypass tariffs.

House Military

House Nissar lacks a standing army or navy. However, its ships' crews are trained in both naval warfare and hand-to-hand combat to repel seafaring enemies and capture vulnerable cargoes.

House Nissar leverages its ties with Wu-Jian's criminal element to deploy paramilitary forces, mustering brigands, cutthroats, and assassins to supplement the thugs and legbreakers on the house's payroll. The Thirteen Schools provide the most impressive weapons in Nissar's arsenal — primarily the Blood, who'll take about any job in exchange for imported firewands and firedust, and the Jade Sky, masters of Devil Pipe style.

Seeing the Great Houses' recall of the legions as an opportunity to secede from the Dynasty, Vedan is quietly increasing Nissar's paramilitary forces, while secret envoys lay groundwork for alliances with nearby Western regional powers. The matriarch offers commercial advantages to the Guild, including lowered taxes and docking fees, in exchange for loans and discounted mercenary contracts. While this gives the Guild a greater foothold in Wu-Jian than she prefers, it also funds to purchase pirate vessels and assemble a navy. She's currently negotiating with local Lintha and other pirate leaders.

Major Holdings

Situated on the jagged overlook known as **the Promontory**, the looming fortress-manse **Hurricane Bulwark** serves as the family stronghold. Few Nissars reside there long-term — most maintains their own small country estates — but it's well-suited to family gatherings, strategy meetings, and hatching secret schemes. Caverns beneath the manse wind down through

treasure vaults and training grounds to sea-caves containing a handful of small, sleek yachts and smuggling vessels.

At the edge of the disreputable Shades neighborhood's riot of hawkers, bars, and casinos, **the Green Garda** is an island of quiet. An opium den for the well-to-do, its walls are draped thickly in rich tapestries to establish an air of opulence and to dampen any noise that might distract its patrons. Some of its clientele is transient — pirates, mudlarks, and thieves burning through momentary wealth — but most are crime lords, merchant princes, and aristocrats, their security assured by an array of Thirteen Schools bouncers. House Nissar owns the Garda and uses it to conduct secret dealings, including with Fair Folk from the nearby undersea courts.

Scions of Note

Matriarch **Nissar Vedan** is a tall and curvaceous woman, well-muscled from her years as pirate captain. She's usually the sharpest mind in the room, and it frustrates her that she hasn't yet sent House Sesus packing from Wu-Jian. In her eagerness, she takes increasing risks as the Realm turns its attention elsewhere. Vedan likes to meet personally with successful scions; she's highly charming, reserving her acerbic wit for those she truly trusts.

The smuggler **Nissar Jarana** has seized part of the western Blessed Isle's market on contraband by usurping control of the smuggler fleet called Crimson Horizon. Jarana relishes sneaking past Realm patrols; unlike many of her kin, they favor adventure over profit. Jarana is boisterous, loud, and curses like the pirate they are, and House Nissar usually keeps them far away from Dynastic affairs. They serve as the House's main liaison to Storm Mother's Son.

Nissar Hiran had the luck to be able to marry for love — assisted by the sizable dowry brought by her wife Vaxilna, a rich merchant plying the Western sea lanes. Vaxilna, however, has ulterior motives. Her true identity is **Iselsi Natalin**, a deep-cover spy using her Nissar ties to work against Houses Sesus, Peleps, and V'neef. Natalin has since revealed the truth to Hiran, who's willingly pledged herself to Iselsi's Vendetta out of love — and in hope that House Iselsi could back Wu-Jian's secession from the Realm.

Raised on luxuries and perfect etiquette, **Nissar Hatek** is now the house's prime host to visiting Dynasts — a task well suited to his easygoing, sybaritic nature. His parties are lavish affairs, with drink and drugs freely flowing, and he has a talent for inviting young nobles to Wu-Jian to escape overbearing family. Hatek's mission is to listen, and carefully assess which noble might be turned against another. But recently he's fallen in love with the poet Cynis Amari — Sesus Nemoia's urbane niece — and has begun sharing more of Nissar's secrets with his lover than he ought.

House Simendor

Dark Wings Enfolding the Agate Throne

House Simendor exemplifies all of the Realm's fears about sorcery. Its scions are dissolute, insular, moody, and relentless — always ravenous for new spells and knowledge, and for such luxury, wealth, and political power as permits them to pursue their obsessions at leisure. The entire house is a deadly game of one-upmanship, with favor and influence granted in proportion to discoveries rather than loyalty. Even their ancestral tradition of sorcery is built on a foundation of decadence and pride, drawing power from their pursuit of hedonism.

The house's current incarnation is named for Daimyo Simendor the Hellblade, one of the first Threshold lords to pledge fealty to the Scarlet Empress, plying her with gifts of magical lore and artifacts, and tutoring her in certain sorcerous arts. Doing so secured her good will, which has for centuries discouraged Mnemon satraps from looking too closely at the more troubling practices — demonic pacts, mortal test subjects, and the like — surrounding the house's pursuit of sorcerous knowledge. Now, in the Realm's twilight, House Simendor is a microcosm of the coming civil war — perched on the edge of extinction, the house will either rise anew in glory or crumble into dust.

Social Standing

The ancestors of House Simendor's sorcerer-princes sat the Agate Throne of Chalan in the long-forgotten First Age. While the house has flown many banners and gone by many names since then, it endures. Its long history means that the house is entangled in the affairs of both the Realm and the South, having married into illustrious families of both many times over. Though regarded as eccentrics (if not apostates), the house is undeniably ancient, offering allies legitimacy through connection to the distant past.

While Simendor is feared in its own holdings, the Dynasty regards it with a mixture of confusion, unease, and anticipation. Its scions' wholehearted embrace of dubious sorcerous practices runs against Realm mores, and their failure to recognize the Great Houses' social superiority grates against Dynastic pride. And a few recent high-profile assassinations within the house raise stark questions about what a less inward-turned Simendor matriarch might do upon Chalan's throne.

Status within the house is measured by sorcerous knowledge, skill, and accomplishments. Those who lack talent for sorcery are pitied and relegated to such unglamorous but necessary roles as administration, finance, or military command. Those with talent who refuse to pursue it — or who've learned sorcery but forgo its use — undermine the house's self-image. They face a coordinated onslaught of insults and petty slights for squandering Simendor genius on trivialities, and either linger as black sheep or flee Chalan.

House Economics

Loved, feared, or hated, House Simendor is too well-positioned to ignore. Chalan's port is essential to commerce between the South and the Realm, its ships laden with tribute and treasure destined for the Empress' coffers. Shipping forms the cornerstone of the house's wealth, and it extracts a tidy sum from tariffs, fees, and bribes.

More than coin, however, Simendors value knowledge, exotic reagents, and useful servants. They eagerly trade with the Guild for skilled slaves and specimens for their many experiments. Their treasure houses are stocked with both petty talismans and puissant artifacts collected over their long history. While their income is middling compared to other cadet houses, their vaults are fathomless, each strata of coins an archeological record of Creation.

House Military

House Simendor has little interest in warfare, and a history of mutinies has left it disinterested in a conventional military. Still, the house requires protectors. It boasts a handful of soldiers, each uniquely altered or twisted through sorcery, but relies primarily on bound demons and elementals, sorcerous war-constructs, and other strange guardians. While in Chalan, Simendor

sorcerers are expected to devote one night in seven to tending these defenses, whether in summoning, research, or attending to their servants' peculiar urges.

Enemies and Alliances

Chalan's people don't love the Simendor. Most endure them as one endures any oppressor, but there are considerable pockets of resistance within the city, which grow more restive as they see opportunity in the coming time of tumult. With the Realm's legions withdrawn and the Mnemon garrison on the defensive, rebels grow increasingly bold, sabotaging treasure-ships in port or burning cargo on the roads outside the city. Foremost among the rebels is the grim mortal sorcerer Gabara Kairon, who seeks bloody vengeance against the house for its cruelties; his band has raided several Simendor libraries and now turns their oppressors' own cruel magics towards seizing Chalan's manses.

House Mnemon has a strained relationship with its quarrelsome satrapy. Simendores embrace the Immaculate Philosophy's pageantry but not its substance, leading to frosty relations at best. While satrap Mnemon Darow Sha may daydream of Simendor destroying itself through petty infighting, she nonetheless supports its authority to keep tribute flowing.

House Ragara has intermarried with Simendor for centuries, seeking access to financial opportunities and occult secrets. Simendor sorcery secures several Ragara vaults, and Ragara scions often travel to Chalan to meet with Southern potentates and plutocrats. But the Mnemon satrap has long interfered in such affairs, and without Imperial oversight she's begun meddling with a much freer hand. Should Simendor and Chalan prove crucial assets in a Realm civil war, House Ragara may intervene blatantly via economic warfare, espionage, or military action.

The Guild is always welcome in Chalan. Guild caravans are met with extravagant impromptu festivals; visiting merchant-princes occupy finely appointed suites. The house especially craves artifacts, exotic slaves, and novelties of every stripe. Guild factors and merchant princes closest to House Simendor remain neutral in its growing schisms, selling to any and all without prejudice or preference.

Local spirits vary in opinion toward Simendor. The house scarcely enforces Immaculate doctrine, making a show of force every few years to avoid opprobrium from House Mnemon and the Order. But individual Simendores often meddle with spirits for their own purposes, binding them or even stealing their panoplies for use in sorcerous workings. The Simendores' greatest divine allies are the Court of Nameless Gods from whom they derive their signature sorcerous initiation (p. XX).

Major Holdings

House Simendor dominates Chalan and its surroundings, but rarely interferes with its satellites unless provoked or intrigued. They maintain waystations, tollhouses, and caravanserais along nearby roads, extracting taxes and tempting wealthy merchants to indulge in sorcerously devised intoxicants. The house's general disarray and lack of a unifying voice prevents it from pursuing a more active agenda in its holdings, but this suits its laissez-faire spirit...as long as wealth continues flowing into its coffers.

While Simendor may let exploited neighbors conduct their own affairs, it vigorously claims and exploits the local geomancy. Foremost among these holdings is the **Palace of the Agate Throne** — a grandiose manse, encrusted with masses of raw crystal, that dominates Chalan's skyline.

Other manses and demenses range from the Betrayal Tower's foreboding heights to the chaotic beauty of Washerway Fens and its schools of glimmering sandfish.

The well-guarded Screech Owl Mine produces not only silver and tin, but fabulous orichalcum. These riches fuel Simendor's experiments and arm their scions — Simendors have special fondness for orichalcum's extravagance and raw power.

Scions of Note

Matriarch **Simendor Aksaja** is a sorcerer-queen of peerless skill and refinement. She rarely leaves her chambers in Chalan, instead seeking to foster unity and avoid schism through an exhausting series of balls and masques. Growing increasingly erratic, she showers unsustainable rewards upon scions for sorcerous discoveries, especially those she can integrate into her magnum opus — a collection of hideous curses she intends to deliver to the next Empress as tribute. Many in the house grow increasingly frustrated with her abdication of her duties, either vying for her position or grooming potential candidates to succeed her.

Simendor Eshi is heavyset and strong, an anomaly in her otherwise cadaverous house. While her post as “administrator” of the Weepstone Wastes was intended as both insult and exile for being too overt in her ambitions toward unseating Aksaja, she's taken an interest in the region's unstable geomancy and ancient crypts. She desperately seeks the resources to investigate the Wastes in greater depth, trading wildborn hearthstones for the manpower and supplies she requires.

Born on the furthest, shabbiest branch of the Simendor family tree, **Simendor Toren** masks his insecurities in flamboyance. He travels the South atop a flaming azure chariot drawn by winged horses, leaving a trail of wonder and chaos; he generously offers unasked-for sorcerous miracles, while demanding satisfaction of his appetites for luxury, strangeness, and attention. He has no taste for the house's schemes, often protecting young Simendors from their elders' machinations by threat of violence, or seeking promising outsiders as apprentices for his experiments in battle sorcery. He sees this network of protégés and allies as his true family, and can become erratically, violently overprotective of what he sees as their interests.

Simendor Sorcery

In a time now lost to history, House Simendor's ancestors cavorted with spirits of sand and shadow in the open desert — rogue gods and elementals who refused to bow to the Old Realm. From this Court of Nameless Gods, they learned the art of sorcery. Today, many scions still honor their house's traditions by initiating into sorcery under these spirits' tutelage, seeking out their hidden pleasure-sanctums.

Shaping Rituals

God-Pacting: The sorcerer may bargain with spirits for portions of their power. Once per day, the sorcerer may strike a pact with a willing spirit. Its player proposes an Intimacy for the sorcerer to gain. If the sorcerer's player accepts, the sorcerer gains that Intimacy at Minor intensity and (spirit's Essence + 3) sorcerous motes, which last for the rest of the day. The contracting spirit loses that many motes.

Wild Revel: Opulence and hedonism nourish the sorcerer's soul. Once per scene, when she partakes in a gala, festival, night of drunken carousing, or other form of revelry, she rolls (Charisma + Occult) against difficulty 3, adding non-Charisma dice

equal to the total Resources cost of the event, gaining sorcerous motes equal to (1 + extra successes), which last until the end of the day.

Unbroken Spirit: Like the rogue gods she emulates, the sorcerer draws power from opposing others' will. Once per scene, when she successfully asserts her Resolve against social influence or another effect, she gains (Integrity) sorcerous motes, which last until the scene ends. If the character she resisted had a higher Essence than her, she gains additional sorcerous motes equal to the difference in their Essence ratings.

Other Benefits

Hedonistic Affinity (•): The sorcerer exerts subtle charm over her fellow revelers. Anyone who's drunk, drug-impaired, or under a Psyche effect or magical social influence that causes hedonistic pleasure is treated as having a Minor Tie of friendship towards the sorcerer. Spirits associated with alcohol, drugs, or revelry are treated as having a Minor Tie of respect towards her instead.

Living Bezoar (••): Revelry and magic have honed the sorcerer's body. She doubles 8s on rolls to resist poison and harmful drugs' effects.

Anything But Temptation (•••): The sorcerer gains +2 Resolve as a Charm bonus against influence that would require her to refrain from hedonistic indulgence, or against any Psyche effect or magical social influence that diminishes her capacity to enjoy sensual pleasures.

House Yueh

A Dragon Among Vipers

From the harbor city of Nai Lei, House Yueh rules the satrapy Nandao, situated at the edge of the Southwest's Meiyu Sea. Heir to both the seafaring Baihu people's rich cultural legacy and the Shogunate traditions of their Tepet ancestors, House Yueh is a family of mariners, warriors, and merchants. Its scions hold a majority of seats on the Lamenting Stone Assembly, Nai Lei's council of ruling oligarchs.

The house honors Tepet Sharas as its founder. That dragonlord besieged Nai Lei during the Realm-Baihu wars, then married Raja Yueh Po-Thuan VI to seal the peace treaty — a love match brokered to both sides' political advantage. Through Sharas, House Tepet gained influence over Nai Lei's strategic port and sizable navy, aiding the Realm's conquest and partition of the Greater Zhao empire. Granting cadet house status to Nai Lei's royal family, the Empress awarded the satrapial lease elsewhere to restrain Tepet influence. Though reformers sponsored by Dynastic rivals eventually abolished the Yueh-Tepet monarchy, Sharas' progeny retained control over Nai Lei's politics through the oligarchic Lamenting Stone Assembly.

Social Standing

A regional power, House Yueh wields little influence over politics beyond its Southwestern trade lanes. V'neef and Peleps both see Yueh as a potential pawn in their struggle for the West, while Tepet strives to maintain good relations with its estranged relatives. Other Great Houses hold that the Yueh think too highly of themselves, when they consider their distant cousins at all.

Satrap Ragara Kimisei's relationship with House Yueh has soured over the years as the cadet house's internal power struggles have slowed the flow of tribute back to the Blessed Isle. Nandao as a whole has managed to escape crushing tributes in the Time of Tumult through exorbitant bribes delivered to Kimisei and her household. But House Yueh bears the brunt of this burden; it cannot maintain this forever, and expects no goodwill from the satrap once the stream of gifts ends.

House Economics

Nai Lei makes a show of its culture, but playwrights and philosophers don't fill Yueh's coffers. The house's true wealth lies in trade and luxury goods — silks, enameled pottery, spiced brandies, porphyry, and sandalwood. Yueh ships also smuggle everything from trained slaves to jade ore, and engage in wide-ranging privateering.

House V'neef, Yueh's maritime partner, invests in revitalizing Nai Lei's Sunset Harbor, provides charts and escorts on Western trade routes, and maintains the region's primary Merchant Fleet depot here. But accepting V'neef's aid risks provoking House Peleps, which backs the rival Baihu cadet house Zihao in the neighboring satrapy of Huang Hei.

House Military

House Yueh lacks a standing army, instead relying on the citizen army typical of Baihu city-states. Citizens provide their own arms, and are supplemented by mercenaries hired from Nai Lei and other Baihu ports. Leadership falls to a general elected by the Lamenting Stone Assembly from among its members. Yueh's majority in the Assembly assures that Nai Lei's elected generals are always Yueh scions, rendering the citizen army an extension of the house.

By age-old custom, the Baihu port cities commission mercenary captains as privateers against rival city-states' fleets. Such attacks are restrained — excessive raiding or egregious conduct invite reprisal from other city-states' privateers, incite trade disputes, or spark outright war. Privateer captains who claim too many prizes or commit atrocities under their city-state's aegis face pressure at home, ranging from revocation of their commission to criminal punishment.

Foreign ships, however, are fair game for privateers unless their home country has treaties with a Baihu city-state. So are other Southwestern pirates: Guild-backed corsairs, Bleak Yatar's ghost-reavers, Lintha raiders, etc. House Yueh's Dragon-Blooded privateers are among the Meiyu Coast's mightiest naval powers — and when faced by foreign threats, other Baihu cities' privateers form alliances of convenience with them.

House Tepet traditionally paid for House Yueh's most promising scions to attend the House of Bells, with the understanding that they'd serve in the Tepet legions after graduation — and indeed, a few such scions perished in the ill-fated campaign against the Bull of the North. With House Tepet's downfall, these funds have vanished, and some Yueh households curry favor with House V'neef or shoulder loans to put their children through premier secondary schools. Others recruit talented instructors, mercenaries, and outcasts from throughout the Southwest to supplement the martial tutelage provided in Nai Lei's open-air academies. This homegrown curriculum can't equal the House of Bells' quality, but the prospect of a generation of Yueh warriors free of entanglements with the Scarlet Dynasty is promising.

Enemies and Alliances

Since its inception, House Yueh has been a loyal subject and partner of House Tepet. Ports in Tepet prefectures and satrapies offered Yueh excellent trade opportunities, while a handful of Yueh officers served proudly in the Tepet legions — many of them perishing in the campaign against the Bull of the North. With the Empress gone, Yueh is caught between loyalty to fallen Tepet, which can offer little of what it once did, and overtures from House V’neef, which have much to offer to those with ambition. House Peleps has also taken interest in Nai Lei, if only as a means of deterring V’neef.

After the recent loss of Tepet’s financial patronage, many Yuehs have turned to House Ragara for loans to support business ventures and secondary school tuition. Though grateful, they resent the barely sustainable interest rates Ragara’s imposed. House Nellens has reached out to offer key Yueh households more reasonable financial aid, seeing an opportunity to win Yueh’s loyalty amid the coming strife.

Beyond Great House politics, Yueh’s more immediate concerns are with Nai Lei’s neighbors — rival satrapies around the Meiyu Sea and old feuds with Nandao’s other city-states. House Zihao of neighboring Huang Hei — a clan of proud, ruthless swordmasters and merchant princes ruling the region’s oldest Realm bastion — has been especially aggressive in political and economic gambits against Yueh. In exchange for aiding their Peleps patrons in conquering the region, the Zihaos were offered authority over the entire Baihu people; they’re readying themselves for war. Yuehs and Zihaos who’ve married into one another’s houses face difficult decisions.

Houses V’neef and Peleps both watch Yueh scions closely, determining whose loyalty is strongest, and who might be swayed. Peleps pressured Yueh shipping through Huang Hei. V’neef offers financial forgiveness for favors, introductions, and favorable terms, presenting itself as a generous friend — one able to take the place of the now-ineffectual Tepets.

While the threat of Greater Zhao, one-time oppressor of Nai Lei, was broken generations ago by Imperial forces, old rivalries aren’t so easily abandoned. The eldest Yuehs nurse grudges against Greater Zhao’s successor-states — Maichu, Ferazha, Zhujen, and especially Zhaojūn (**The Realm**, pp. 169-172) — as only those who’ve struggled through centuries of war can, while Zhaojūn’s reigning Mnemonrai family fears invasion from the southern Baihu cities and contemplates preemptive strikes. Though Yueh champions have honed their skills in the Tepet legions, and carefully tended feuds with neighboring city-states have kept Nai Lei’s military somewhat sharp, the broader peace has left the mortal officer corps unready for the logistics of a major conflict, should one arise.

Linha, XXX, and assorted lesser pirates — from independent freebooters to rebellious fisherfolk — afflict the Meiyu Coast. House Yueh hones its navy against them, ridding the region of threats to commerce. With Peleps and V’neef poised to strike at one another, the Imperial Navy and Merchant Fleet have flocked to the region, causing the pirates to keep their heads down for the nonce. But once the Realm Civil War kicks off in earnest, Yueh fears that it will need to protect the region alone.

Major Holdings

Carved into a clifftop just outside Nai Lei, the **Ampitheater of Fragrant Attar** offers a magnificent view of the Meiyu Sea. A pillared marble pavilion stands at the amphitheater’s center; its gilded dome shelters the ancient, pitted Lamenting Stone itself, moved centuries ago from the beach where priests made bloody offerings to its now-forgotten god. The Assembly

holds days-long meetings here, members drinking and dining as they conduct state business. Villas, shops, and the like have accreted around the Stone Court, forming a small town dedicated to the Assembly's aristocrats and their entourages.

At strategic points amid the hills surrounding Nai Lei stand a pair of Shogunate fortress-manses, **the Eyes of Mi Tha**. Rebuilt from ruins by the Realm, the domed jade pagodas' reconstructed walls remain untested in battle. Each hosts V'neef troops under garrison commander Tepet Ramna, who chafes at her inability to aid her Yueh kin. A third identical manse lies submerged beneath the waves offshore, victim of a sorcerous cataclysm that decimated Nandao's coast in a long-forgotten war. Efforts by Yueh's engineers to rekindle this lost manse have met with limited success.

The **Distant Emerald Shipping Company** commands several ships and an entire swath of dockside warehouses in the Zhao city-satrapy of Zhujen (**The Realm**, p. 171). As Nandao's cities consumed the island's old-growth woods, House Yueh established the Company to transport timber from Ferazha's forests to Nai Lei's shipyards. Now a contingent of house guards protects the business lest Zhujen's prince seize it in the runup to civil war, denying House Yueh a critical naval resource.

Scions of Note

A distinguished war hero, matriarch **Yueh Kho Luhn**'s gifts lie primarily in delegation and oversight. Balancing the aims and ambitions of proud Yueh oligarchs, admirals, and merchant princes demands firmness and tact, as do diplomatic responsibilities and managing espionage assets. Luhn's influence has transformed Nai Lei into a regional power, outmaneuvering rivals and setting them against one another. He negotiates with neighboring Baihu princes, deals with V'neef's Merchant Fleet captains, and slips information to Huang Hei's Peleps handlers and Ledaal satrap alike.

He employs these same traits in matchmaking for young Yueh scions, a task that's suddenly become paramount. Much of the family's future depends upon its marriage prospects, and with House Tepet's fall, she seeks to realign Yueh with stronger houses.

Yueh Kho Gui, youngest of the matriarch's three sons, is highly accomplished, especially in poetry and martial arts. Fostered by House Tepet, Gui views himself as a true scion of Tepet's martial traditions of honor and excellence. After studying at the House of Bells, he traveled broadly throughout the Meiyu Sea, battling pirates, Fair Folk, and monsters. These exploits have made him a rising star in the house, his name a byword throughout Nandao for honesty, integrity, and bravery.

Luhn has broken Gui's engagement to a respectable mortal Tepet in order to negotiate a marriage with a disreputable, craven black-sheep Ragara. Aggrieved, Gui prepares to elope with his original betrothed, regardless of the consequences to his house.

For over a year, the young diplomat **Yueh Fahn** has served as Nai Lei's ambassador to Goldenseal. It's a demanding job; even decades after its surrender, Zhaojūn still bears the scars of war against the Realm, and resentment is ever-present. As an eligible young Dragon-Blood, Fahn entertains fantasies of whirlwind romance and marriage into the Mnemonrai line. He idles his time away chatting with palace contacts and seeking entry into the High Queen's graces. Recently, he's unearthed disturbing evidence of financial fraud in the Ministry of Silver and

Jade. He considers advancing his social prospects through blackmail or bringing the matter to the satrap, though this might antagonize the very Mnemonrais he hopes to romance.

Tranquil Sky, formerly Immaculate monk Yueh Dresvara, follows the Empty Path, a proscribed philosophy preaching escape from the cycle of reincarnation through selfless virtue. Having cast off her former name and station, she wanders the southern Meiyu cities seeking enlightenment. She's preached the Six Harmonious Emptinesses (**The Realm**, p. 171) to beggars and scholars alike, dueled Immaculates seeking to drag her back into orthodoxy, and delivered comeuppance to haughty elites — but it wasn't until she offered assistance to a coalition of anti-Zhao rebels that Queen Mnemonrai Enzei pressured Zhaojūn's Immaculates to declare her Anathema. Now she works in the shadows, ever watchful for Wyld Hunts, while her family sorrowfully seeks to stop her themselves to cleanse their name.

Storytelling Cadet House Games

Cadet house characters occupy a middle ground between the Great Houses and outcastes, enjoying many Dynastic privileges while facing the frontier's challenges and the crushing burden of the Realm's tribute demands. Their unique circumstances make them ideal for games that mix politics and family with traditional adventuring.

At the Threshold

Cadet houses occupy a unique place in the Realm as Dynasts that rule subjugated regions of the Threshold. A game set in a cadet house's home satrapy naturally emphasizes Dragon-Blooded themes of family and privilege. Cadet houses are much smaller than Great Houses, numbering a hundred Dragon-Blooded at most, so characters from the same house probably grew up together. Think carefully about the circumstances of the family and their satrapy, and what they mean for the characters. Encourage players to consider Ties to family members and Principles detailing stances on local politics.

Enemies Abound

Cadet families are powerful within their sphere of influence, but beset by challenges larger than themselves. Specific challenges vary from house to house, but invariably include tribute demands from a Great House satrap. Their Threshold domains are vulnerable to the depredations of Anathema, the Guild's economic manipulations, and numerous other threats. Cadet house games offer a wide variety of political and practical antagonists — even several at once — such as fending off a warmongering legionary general's ambitions, quelling a local rebellion before a bloodbath ensues, and taking charge of a Wyld Hunt.

Far from Home

Regardless of whether cadet house characters face challenges at home or abroad, they carry their house's cultural and political identity. In games set away from the satrapy, the characters' peers still expect them to comport themselves as representatives of their house. As satrapial subjects themselves, cadet house characters may have more empathy for oppressed Thresholders than do their Great House counterparts.

As a middle ground between outcastes and Dynasts, cadet house characters shine especially in mixed Dragon-Blooded games. Alongside Great House Dynasts they're poor cousins and underdogs, as outcastes are to both. They're able to connect at some level with just about any Dragon-Blooded character.

Adventure Seeds

House Desai (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 77) faces demands from House Mnemon to supply auxiliaries against the Jiaran insurgency. With limited resources, the Hearth must maneuver between House Desai's needs, pressure from Mnemon's emissaries, and political complications involving their homeland's princes and satraps — and the risks of incurring the wrath of the Anathema.

An advisor to Cherak's satrap is murdered while visiting the Clear Sky Garden, and House Ferem is blamed. The Hearth must clear their family name and discover the truth among all the possibilities, whether it's internal Realm politics, a crime of passion, a Ferem faction's power play, or sabotage by a rival Grand Cherak cadet house.

The theft of an ancestral daiklave belonging to House Nissar sends the Hearth delving through Wu-Jian's underbelly, and entangles them in a plot orchestrated by an elusive Anathema revolutionary.

A malign spirit approaches a Simendor Hearth to extract repayment for a pact made by long-dead ancestors. While resolving the situation, the characters fall under suspicion of Immaculate inquisitors, convinced that Simendor is abetting the spirit's diabolic cult for their own ends.

An ancient sunken city mysteriously resurfaces near Nai Lei. House Yueh must stake its claim as every local power — from pirates to rival cadet houses — converges to exploit it. Threats escalate from neighboring city-states to Great House fleets to the shadowy powers of the city itself.

Secondary Education

A young Dragon-Blood's acceptance to secondary school carries a variety of familial traditions, whether forging her first battle-ready sword or braiding a lock of each parent's hair into hers. Ragara scions receive an endowment to manage during their education. V'neef personally speaks to each child of her house before he leaves for secondary school.

The most universal tradition is the First Salon, held close to start of term, usually in a country home. It involves much lecturing as elders reminisce and offer advice — desired or otherwise — about the institution in question. The young scion's father must shed tears as his child walks the first mile to a waiting carriage. Another male relative may take this role at need — it's inauspicious should no man from the scion's family weep.

Secondary School Narratives

Secondary schools are a time-tested favorite setting for Dragon-Blooded campaigns, and media centered on educational settings is no less prevalent in wider society. The *Harry Potter* series is tailor-made for a Heptagram campaign, and with some finesse *Pretty Little Liars* makes a fantastic Spiral Academy premise. *Fire Emblem: Three Houses* is great inspiration for games set in the House of Bells or Pasiap's Stair. Shows like *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Riverdale* capture the strange relationships and pressures of schools that are slightly beyond normal.

These stories are full of variations on a handful of archetypal stock characters: bully, bookworm, teacher's pet, popular one, stoner, etc. It's easy to mold these to fit the Dynasty. Take your bog-standard bully; she was the only member of her primary school class to Exalt, which — along with all that Fire Essence — went to

her head. You can do this to all sorts of archetypes, applying Dynastic childhood pressures to twist them into new and interesting shapes and add unique details, quirks, and characterization to flesh them out beyond a stock character.

Faculty are just as important. Some are approachable (your family owes them favors, or vice versa); others are distant (something happened at that salon your mother held twenty years ago). Favoritism is real (your professor is your nephew), but so are strange antipathies (your mother killed her favorite cousin in a duel. Almost every Dynast has a relationship or history, even if both are initially ignorant of it, and faculty provide opportunities to play out Realm politics in miniature.

The Cloister of Wisdom

The Humble Gate of Hesiesh's Resolve, a simple oaken gate atop smoothly polished stone stairs, leads into the Cloister's main courtyard. New students are made to kneel and wait for three days, given bread and water at dawn and dusk and permitted to rise or rest while they eat. Mothers intent upon sending children to the Cloister may make them practice such austerities for a year preceding attendance.

Each student has her own room at the Cloister, allowing private space for meditation and contemplation. These chambers are hardly luxurious — little more than a low desk, firm cushion, and straw mattress. Students dine in common at long tables, seated upon benches and eating as Immaculate acolytes do.

Classes take place in chambers suited to the topic, from small, thick-walled rooms for philosophical debate to large, open halls for meditation and lecture. Physically oriented classes, such as martial arts training, takes place in the courtyard. Most preceptors are monks; for a lay professor to be invited to teach at the Cloister is a high honor. Courses from geography to history to mathematics cultivate virtues such as forethought, leadership, and responsibility.

Students are usually only permitted outside the Cloister for religious purposes, under a monk's chaperonage: undertaking a pilgrimage to a holy site, journeying to meditate in a potent elemental demesne, or participating in Wyld Hunts deemed suitable for the students' discipline, maturity, and level of education. Leaving for other purposes is rare, but not impossible.

Study here is highly structured, but each student is expected to set her own curriculum after her first year. She must obtain permission from the preceptors of each class and lecture she wishes to attend. Overly driven students who set too heavy a course load are gently guided to ease up. Meanwhile, a too-clever student who sets herself an overly light course load receives invitations to classes during times when she's free. If she's fool enough to decline, an elder monk sets her to a meditation schedule that even the strongest-willed students can rarely endure — and if she can, that too is an education.

Lesser Immaculate Academies

The Cloister of Wisdom is far from the only source of Immaculate education in the Realm. Virtually every temple serves as a school for peasant children, inculcating moral virtue and basic literacy and mathematics. Some double as academies, offering higher-level courses for adult peasants or patricians — though rarely in the same temple. A rare few rise to such excellence that Dynastic parents consider sending mortal (or even less-distinguished Dragon-Blooded) scions to attend.

Acorn's Wisdom Temple rests in the shadow of the enormous ash at the heart of Myion's Evergreen Sanctuary. Dedicated to Sextes Jylis, Acorn's Wisdom specializes in horticulture. Each student is assigned a plot of the courtyard's rich, fertile soil to tend as devotional meditation. The school prioritizes virtues such as patience and harmony, with an eye to managing and guiding underlings. Unlike the Cloister, Acorn's Wisdom students are free to seek wisdom in Myion's many other temples, which are accustomed to accommodating such requests.

Absence in Clamor is a monastic temple in the Imperial City's heart, its high walls shutting out the city's hubbub. The monks — most of whom take vows of silence — maintain a vast library of ancient records, and suffer only a few new students each year. Among the Realm's most exclusive lesser secondary schools, it offers students the opportunity to pursue obscure religious scholarship and sorcerous initiation.

Faculty

Well into her third century, dominie **Repentant Blossom of Winter** has led the Cloister for eleven decades, training students — some now serving as faculty — in martial arts, Immaculate doctrine, and sorcery. Her face is mature, but still vital; such is her Essence that students quickly learn to dress warmly for her classes, even in summer. She's known to take interest in students she believes have extraordinary potential, even the outwardly hopeless — sometimes *especially* those students — and invites them to special classes on days otherwise devoted to rest and contemplation, the subjects of which vary widely. Her devoted emulation of Mela makes her an unflinching taskmaster; she's willing to be cruel if, through that cruelty, she may serve as a crucible of perfection.

Willow Breaker, a lay preceptor of martial arts, was born Iselsi Rasuna. Those few faculty who know her lineage let it pass unmentioned; the rest think her a talented and fortunate outcaste. Her piety runs to the bone, though she still serves her fallen house and gives special guidance to hidden Iselsi students. Aside from martial education, she lectures on classical and modern literature. Words are the one distraction she permits herself, as are students who display a like interest — she's always happy to share tea and debate the virtues of novels' protagonists with bright students.

Quiet Moth came to the Cloister a troubled patrician youth. Since graduating, she's roamed the Isle as an itinerant, but her heart's never left the campus' shrine to Daana'd, where she realized her inner truth. Through meditation and alchemical distillations, she's aligned her body with her gender in emulation of Daana'd, She Who Remakes Her Children. Now, she's that shrine' head monk, tending it alongside teaching history and culture, watching for young misfits who might need a gentle nudge down the right path. Her mother, believing the Empress' disappearance presents an opportunity for patricians, pressures Moth to curry favor with the Order for their family. She has little desire to besmirch her station thusly, but the more corruption she witnesses within the Order, the harder it becomes not to ensure that her family shares those benefits.

The Heptagram

Students arriving at the Heptagram for their first year are referred to by their seniors as “sacrifices.” Most assume it's a hazing ritual; then they discover the hells that await, a year-long period of guided study called “the Ten Thousand Labors.” Fully half of those few students who

fail out or die do so within their first year. From learning to channel foreign Essence to tending the recurring rituals placating the school's bound spirits, first-years must not only excel in academics but must build relationships to carry them through the Labors and the following six years.

Within the residence tower, students live two or three to a room — the faculty doesn't trust fledgling sorcerers who don't properly grasp sorcery's dangers with total privacy — making it difficult to find quiet places to work undisturbed. Magically sealed doors forbid access to any without the requisite opening ritual. Students who fail to properly reseal such portals earn fiery reprimands from faculty, lest they expose unprepared peers to sorceries beyond their skill.

Lesser Occult Academies

While the Heptagram isn't the Realm's only source of sorcerous education, few lesser secondary schools offer tutelage in the art. More common are those specialized in other forms of mystical study: geomancy, artifice, spirit-lore, and the like.

The Balustrade of Glorious Harmony, a geomantic academy endowed by Mnemon herself, sprawls across a grand stretch of alpine meadow in the mountains above Mnemon-Darjilis. The academy-manse's architecture is both geomantic marvel and teaching tool, allowing students to observe the seamless flow of Essence from one structure to the next — and to witness the consequences of shoddy workmanship, through flaws deliberately built into the design. Many residents of the Valley of the Ancients only employ this institution's graduates, renowned as among Creation's best, but the greatest honor a student can receive is the right to design a new edifice on the campus.

The Forge of Mother's Fury sits atop a great upwelling of Fire Essence, where rocks glow red and run like slag, on an island just off Howling Heart Prefecture's coast. One of the few forges in the Realm licensed to work orichalcum, it's the only one that accepts students, and has a history stretching back to the Shogunate. The current dominie, Ledaal Shigora — famed Anathema-slayer in her youth — has been retired for over a century, during which she's forged dozens of nigh-perfect weapons. A Shigora blade isn't merely a treasure, but a statement; she gifts them only to those who swear to heed the Wyld Hunt's call.

Faculty

Ragara Bhagwei, the Heptagram's founder, remains its dominie despite his advanced age. He ignores politics unless his research is threatened; when it is, his voice remains gentle and calm, but his frustration or anger is palpable. He's phenomenally intelligent but lacks perspective, such that his lectures can be wholly impenetrable for younger students; faculty occasionally schedule follow-up lectures to unpack the concepts Bhagwei casually peppers his speech with. Only the most brilliant, promising, or abnormal students catch Bhagwei's eye and receive direct training, more grueling even than the life of first-year "sacrifices."

Zadaki Twelve-Feathers is an outcaste from the far North who, rumor has it, once held an advancing Imperial legion at a mountain pass for a season, calling down avalanches from nowhere. Rumors disagree on how Zadaki was bested or convinced to surrender, let alone how she came to teach at the Heptagram. She's the only Realm sorcerer known to practice the nigh-

forgotten Aria of Emptiness, shaping sorcery with nothing only her perfectly trained voice — among her favorite demonstrations for new students is singing a stone to dust. But even her favorites — typically troublemakers, patricians, and iconoclasts — aren't taught the Aria; Zadaki says only that it's beyond them.

Cynis Bashura is the subject of a thousand tall tales, each grown in the telling until they couldn't possibly be true. Her office — crammed with a lifetime's trophies and knickknacks — says otherwise. She couldn't have fought off a tyrant lizard with only a dagger and a gardening spell, yet her chair's clearly carved from such a great beast's skull! Bashura doesn't dignify inquiries with a response, especially during lectures, but students who remind her of her younger self — brash, overconfident, convinced of their own immortality — she occasionally instructs in dread secrets. Better they learn the hard way that they lack her immortality, and the terrible price she's paid for that double-edged gift.

Sorcery and Other Schools

The other three great academies, as well as Pasiap's Stair, maintain limited sorcerous curriculums for those with the talent and inclination. Students at the House of Bells learn war-magic to decimate armies or turn storms against enemy fleets; the Spiral Academy teaches how to loose one's shadow as a spy or mesmerize with a glance.

The Cloister of Wisdom hosts the most advanced curriculum, teaching sorcery holistically in accordance with doctrine and the Immaculate Dragons' wisdom. Immaculate sorcerer-monks endure less of the Realm's prejudices and fears regarding sorcerers, provided they adhere to the Philosophy in all things — particularly in their sorcery.

The House of Bells

The House of Bells hammers young Dragon-Blooded into the elite officer corps of the Realm's legions, and it shows. Its fields are pockmarked by signs of student armies on the march; every fortification bears the scars of centuries of students' sieges. Cadets joke about other cadets' follies, often after the poor cadet serving as the butt of the joke is long dead.

There's nothing quite like a squad's camaraderie — even the fiercest rivals will unite against outsiders. For seven years, they learn, eat, sleep, and fight as one — nothing save death or grievous injury separates them. Serious intra-squad violence is rare; a fistfight is one thing, but an injured cadet drags down her fellows' grades far more than a healthy but underperforming one.

Students embrace their limited recreational opportunities, engaging in impromptu Gateway tournaments in the Hall of Sabers (the college of strategic studies); pursue furtive trysts in the library's musty stacks; or venture to the on-campus villages named Sword and Shield, offering a taste of seemingly ordinary life amidst the pressures of education and mock warfare. Shield houses peasant staff, while Sword serves patrician staff and faculty. Students are welcome in either when at liberty, but Sword's teahouse is of far higher quality than Shield's, and senior students gleefully run presumptuous juniors out of town for occupying their elders' seats.

Lesser Military Academies

Many military schools exist throughout the Realm, none the House of Bells' equal. Most, such as **The Hall of Steel Clashing**, near Myion, serve mortal Dynasts or the children of wealthy patricians — logistics and battlefield leadership is their stock in trade, though they also have a top-notch swordsmanship curriculum and a thriving underground dueling community. A rare few, such as Scarlet Prefecture's **Pearl Pillar Academy**, actively scout prestigious, well-to-do foreigners or immigrants.

The House of the Fulminant Stroke in Lord's Crossing Dominion is among House Tepet's great legacies, founded by one of Tepet's granddaughters centuries ago. Students — mainly patricians associated with House Tepet — receive instruction not only in battlefield tactics and leadership, but in charisma and loyalty. The school's ideal officer can forge a viable militia from peasantry at need.

Faculty

Dominie **Tepet Chayo** was once unquestioned in her prowess — as a spear-dancer, she was beyond compare, but with her great-grandmother's spear Eleventh Sunrise in her hands, she was indescribable. Honored to be granted authority over the House of Bells, she found satisfaction in training students from every Great House, but took especial joy in Tepet students' achievements. That's turned to ashes in her mouth, as her house's financial collapse affords few scions the resources to attend. Nonetheless, she remains too stubborn to step down, even as House Peleps lobbies the school's governing council to replace her with fellow professor Peleps Nalani (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 89). The council in turn is pressuring her to accede — only out of concern, of course, that she might mourn her kin. Once firm but fair, her fury is apparent to faculty and students alike; many believe it's only a matter of time until the Pavilion of the Honored Soldier is stained with *someone's* blood. Chayo hates being reduced to playing politics, especially in a time of crisis, but she knows this battlefield as well as any other, and quietly encourages like-minded students to lobby their families on her behalf.

Cathak Hetena is vicious in service of discipline and excellence, accepting only perfection from the students she instructs in physical fitness, swordplay, and small-unit tactics. Her voice cuts across the parade grounds like a razor-sharp blade, roaring loud enough to wake every student on campus who doesn't rise before dawn. She has no qualms about scarring students — physically or otherwise — toughening them up to improve their odds of survival upon meeting the enemy. She's far more personable with peers, standoffish but pleasant.

The Spiral Academy

The Spiral Academy sits near many Imperial City offices of the Thousand Scales, and often participates in its intrigues. Younger students serve as runners, meeting and making advantageous connections with highly placed ministers. Older students act as their professors' proxies, attending meetings and even salons in their name, the better to cement those political relationships. Upon graduation, students are well-versed in the interplay between official governance and decision-making behind closed doors.

The Academy's buildings are monumental without, but elegantly understated within. Students live in on-campus dormitories, two or occasionally three to a suite. Each has her own desk and wardrobe, and her own servant to launder her clothes and stock her desk with paper and ink. Unlike the other great academies, the campus is open; students frequently attend teahouses and

local businesses. Sixth- and seventh-year students may secure off-campus lodgings (typically a small townhouse), though many mothers and matriarchs won't countenance such an expense. These seniors must take out loans to secure such housing, a lesson in itself.

Students rise early at the Academy, attending lectures on subjects ranging from government ethics to calligraphy. Following lunch, practical work begins. Younger students process actual paperwork from the Thousand Scales; older students certify their juniors' work while also tackling higher-level bureaucratic duties. By their seventh year, students must reliably produce professional-quality work. Woe betide the senior student who returns erroneous paperwork to the Thousand Scales; the faculty descend with untold fury and a mountain of work in the same vein as whatever's botched, the better for the student to learn to do it right.

The Garden of Unheard Whispers

A secret curriculum open only to those who can discover it, the Garden of Unheard Whispers provides an entirely different experience for students. In addition to normal studies, the Garden's students meet after dark to learn advanced tradecraft and espionage. They wear masks or otherwise disguise their identity, a tradition hedging against the chance that two students might become foes in later life. The best way to recognize a fellow Gardener is to catch him attempting an "assassination" — subtly marking a target with a bit of ink, whether from a tiny brush or placed invisibly on a dark surface, a test frequently put to Gardeners.

The Outer Coil

If the Spiral Academy is the heart of finance, diplomacy, and intrigue in the Realm, then the Outer Coil forms its veins. Some of these schools match the Spiral Academy's scale; others comprise a single townhouse hosting a handful of students.

Flowering Vestibule, an ancient and respectable school of economics and finance, occupies a picturesque walled estate near the Imperial River. Once famous and well-regarded, it's fallen on hard times; several overgrown buildings stand disused and in disrepair, visited only by animals and by students engaged in private liaisons. Only the favor and largesse of a few influential alumni keeps the once-great school afloat.

Founded a decade ago by retired prefect Cynis Kentura, **the Kentura Institute** offers training in negotiation and social graces. A handful of Cynis scions (mostly mortal) attend, studying under the dominie and her handpicked staff amid Dynastic luxury; proximity to such connections tempts patrician matriarchs to send their own scions here. Cynis students pursue a second, secret curriculum: catching classmates in compromising positions to accumulate blackmail material.

While the Outer Coil cannot boast the Spiral Academy's opportunities for connections with Dynastic houses, these schools nonetheless provide the education in intrigue and society needed to thrive among Dynasts. Local teahouses and other entertainment establishments supplement their income through selling reports on which Dynastic students attend them, how often, and what topics they discuss, providing social climbers at the Outer Coil an opportunity to "accidentally" encounter a Dynastic scion and "just so happen" to be researching the same subject.

Faculty

Dominie **Rein Fenaar**, a Dragon-Blooded patrician, has held her post for thirty-eight years. Previously she served with distinction as an Imperial judge, blessed with connections through the Red-Handed Note Society that she once led. Upon becoming dominie, she relinquished leadership of that secret society as tradition dictates, but still calls on student members of the society to assist in her intrigues. The stakes of these have grown considerably as Dynastic agents increasingly mark out territory in the Thousand Scales in the Time of Tumult. A traditionalist at heart, Fenaar's watchful for an opportunity to place her knowledge and connections at the disposal of whatever faction in the nascent civil war will best keep those traditions alive — or, failing that, best protect her family.

Sesus Yabal heads the Garden of Unheard Whispers. Torn between loyalty to their house and to the now-vanished Empress, they cannot deny that they favor Sesus students, many of whom receive subtle hints from their family that lead them to the Garden. Yabal is well placed to pass along details hidden in the Thousand Scales' records to their house — but they also find themselves struggling against House Iselsi's efforts to subvert the Garden and its students. The games Yabal has been instructing students in for years are now deadly real.

Pasiap's Stair

Where the other great secondary schools are meant to refine Dynastic scions into proper aristocrats, Pasiap's Stair is a brutal hammer to forge Dragon-Blooded born as peasants, slaves, or barbarians into officers of the Imperial legions.

Lost eggs arriving at the Stair are expected to obey orders with the same immediacy as adult soldiers, and to learn with equal facility. Corporal punishment is frequent and severe, handed out at the slightest sign of intransigence or insubordination.

The Stair's student culture reflects legion culture. During their few opportunities to blow off steam, students find whatever amusement they can, from gambling on beetle fights to competitions of bawdy rhymes and wordplay. They sleep, eat, learn, and train in common, residing in rough-hewn quarters whose cavelike qualities the students are frequently too worn down to notice.

The Empress historically sponsored Stair graduates for commissions in the Imperial legions. Since the Great Houses usurped control over the legions, such commissions have ground to a halt. Unable to legally release graduates without commissions, Pasiap's Stair simply ignores the law. While these lost eggs are expelled on paper, the Stair's outcaste professors and alumni direct them into positions as bodyguards, mercenaries, or associate faculty; some even have marriage prospects arranged for them. This arrangement is grossly illegal, circumventing the mandatory fifty-year term of service, but as it doesn't currently threaten the Great Houses' interests, no action has yet been taken.

Faculty of Note

Dominie **Stone Mask** served the Empress loyally in the legions for a century and a half, refusing retirement when offered. Winning one bitter campaign earned her an audience with the Empress — a few minutes that affirmed everything she felt about that distant, magnificent woman. A century later, her idol's squabbling children threaten to undo everything she fought for, and she must swallow it all dutifully. Deeply attentive and inspiring in her prime as a teacher, the Imperial legions' dissolution and the current state of Pasiap's Stair has left her stretched almost beyond endurance. She fills every gap in the Stair's faculty she can, and coordinates the school's

efforts to connect graduates with outcaste alumni to secure their future. This, she hopes, is what the Empress would want her to do. Soon, out of love and grief for a woman she gazed upon but once, she thinks she'll gut at least one of that woman's descendants, and hopefully more.

A Stair graduate, **Nellens Spur** was adopted by House Nellens upon its elevation, securing him status and privilege few outcastes have the fortune to achieve. Now a teacher of siegecraft and battlefield geography, he arranges commissions for his best students in the Nellens legions. While he's aware of the illegal transfer of graduates, he hasn't reported it to his house, and has even helped connect a few students who didn't quite meet his standards with alumni capable of helping them. He's all too aware of how his life might have gone had not been adopted into House Nellens, and won't be an obstacle in his fellow outcastes' path.

Threshold Academies

Many secondary schools exist in the satrapies, typically for Dynastic Dragon-Blooded whose families reside in the Threshold or cadet house scions without the connections to attend Blessed Isle schools. These institutions provide a broader general education than schools on the Isle, given their students' lack of alternatives, though they often boast certain specialties. Where possible, they arrange for students to spend time around offices and members of satrapial government, both to instruct and to provide students with Dynastic connections despite their distance from the Isle.

The House of the Whispering Squall, built atop the ruins of a far more famous academy dating back to Grand Cherak, educates most of House Ferem's scions, as well as a handful from other nearby cadet houses and Dynastic households in the North. Formerly, this included a small but notable number of Tepets, but today they're outnumbered by Ragara and Sesus scions. This transition has been accompanied by a change in curriculum — while the House retains its naval focus, its martial curriculum has been largely sidelined in favor of focus on diplomacy and economics.

Aurora of Morning, built in the shadow of Kirighast's Fane of Upswept Horns, is the premier educational institution in the near Southern Threshold. Its students have the opportunity to participate in Harborhead's satrapial administration firsthand, ranging from preparing paperwork for the satrap's ministers to accompanying Immaculate monks for negotiations with Ahlat's priesthood.

Storytelling Secondary School Games

The Realm's secondary schools provide a rich environment for games centered on personal drama and nontraditional challenges. Young characters confront peers they can tackle head-on, powerful Exalted mentors who must be dealt with carefully to avoid expulsion, and even mortal teachers whose institutional power makes them formidable adversaries. Day-to-day student challenges may lack the high stakes of a Wyld Hunt or a bid for the Imperial throne, but meaningful relationships can make them just as exciting, while a twist of fate might still put Creation's future on the shoulders of a few students who happen to be in the right place at the right time.

Teenage Demigods

Students typically enter secondary school around age 15 and graduate at 21, surviving a rigorous education during an already-tumultuous time of their lives. Young Dragon-Blooded seek

approval or authority, experience elation and tragedy, and learn through trial and error what works and what doesn't emotionally, socially, and legally. Half the challenge their teachers face is taming the follies of youth, and students expend equal energy avoiding the rules set out for them.

Players should be encouraged to keep all this in mind when designing their teenage characters' Intimacies. It helps to take at least one Major or Defining Intimacy reflecting a petty ambition or insecurity. Principles like "I must prove I'm no coward" or "I need everyone to like me" provide hooks to drag a character into sticky situations, and lure her friends along to get her out of trouble. Likewise, young characters often cling to passionate and ill-advised relationships (and the Ties that go with them), with friend and foe alike becoming even more important through the lens of limited life experience and the walls of a closed, confined community. Players can pick a primary-school best friend, sworn family rival, beloved teacher, object of affection, or other meaningful personal connection within the school as a Major or Defining Tie, providing someone to worry about at all times.

Young Love

It isn't a secondary school game without teenagers falling in love — or lust! — quickly, and falling out of it just as fast. Torrid love affairs, Essence fever, and social influence make for a dangerous combination, full of hasty promises and sworn vengeance. Dynastic marriage is highly political; star-crossed lovers face an uphill battle against their families if they wish to wed. Still, school provides most Dynasts their best chance to find a marriage partner they actually like, before their parents find one they don't.

Passionate love creates drama when something keeps would-be lovers apart, be that social convention, unrequited feelings, or romantic rivals. Storytellers should challenge relationships in ways that force characters into conflict, whether against Storyteller characters or with their own Intimacies. Secret duels at dawn, families who'll only agree to a match if the would-be suitor can prove himself, and beautiful-but-treacherous lovers who use others' affections against them are all staples of romantic epics, for good reason.

While exploring young love, always remember the Red Rule (**Exalted**, p. 222) and keep an open line of communication with your players. Never force players to roleplay romantic or sexual situations that make them uncomfortable. In a game of demigods and magic, it should be easy to find excuses to redirect the scene and keep the story moving forward.

Great Expectations

Families, teachers, peers, and future employers all feel they have a right to tell students what to do and how to do it. Young Dragon-Blooded can't afford to ignore the expectations they've inherited, even as they try to fit in with people their own age and plan for the future. Something as simple as taking a written exam becomes complicated when your mother expects you to get a higher grade than that Cathak boy who turned down your cousin's proposal, your family friend in the All-Seeing Eye heavily implies that an above-average mark could make you stand out too much, and your teacher will host mandatory extra lessons for the ten worst students that would preempt a crucial social engagement next weekend.

Storytellers should work with players to give each character family, teachers, friends, and rivals who'll complicate the young student's life with additional expectations. They should also consider interesting story-driven consequences for failure. Making two people impossible to

please at the same time challenges players to find a loophole, or choose their character's true priorities.

Monsters and Mayhem

The Realm works to ensure students' safety, especially the best and brightest, but only so much can be done while training young Dragon-Blooded to master their Essence. The Heptagram has a reputation as the most dangerous secondary school, isolated on the Isle of Voices and open to the ocean's dangers. A botched summoning or an unexpected monster from sorcery-tainted waters calls for everyone — students and teachers alike — to help solve the problem. The Cloister of Wisdom, House of Bells, and Pasiap's Stair are safer, but training accidents and overexertion injuries aren't uncommon, and risk of sabotage or guerrilla attacks from the Realm's enemies — peasant rebels, Iselsi infiltrators, Lunar Anathema, and more — seems higher with the Empress gone and the legions divided. Though once counted the safe option by nervous students, the Spiral Academy is a fortified compound in a city that could plunge into civil war at any moment.

No matter its location or apparent civility, every secondary school trains students hard, with no pretense of perfect safety. Accidents happen, sometimes with help from an academic rival, and many teachers are inclined to step back and let children sort out their own problems. Blatant murder attempts aren't tolerated, but physical danger forces the best to rise to the top, and the best Dragon-Blooded are best for the Realm.

Incursions by Wyld-tainted monsters, desperate revolutionaries, or Anathema offer young students dangerous challenges to overcome. In a scenario where the whole school faces an attack — whether a coordinated assault from a Lunar and his beastfolk army or a botched summoning circle pouring out demons — try to find a chunk of the conflict that player characters must handle on their own. When they're ambushed by the Lunar warlord on the way back to their dormitory, or their detention in the North Tower places them nearest the summoning circle on its roof, players can take the spotlight without powerful Exalted teachers stepping in to help.

The excitement doesn't end after the fight. Family and teachers meet the characters' heroics with new expectations, ample praise, and questions about what the students were doing out on their own to encounter such a threat.

School Stories

The month ends at the House of Bells with a day of urban warfare, fang versus fang. Fights are meant to stop at first blood, with teachers acting as referees, but the opposing team's eldest member has sworn vengeance on a player character for some perceived slight to his family. He's ready to kill to regain his family's honor, and has talked the rest of his fang into covering for him while he pursues his personal vendetta during the training exercise.

Every year, as the Cloister of Wisdom's final examinations approach, rumors swirl up concerning secret, debauched end-of-term parties thrown by graduating students in years past. This year, a handful of secular students are preparing to emulate those tales. Sneaking food, drugs, and illicit literature past the monks is harder than the actual testing, and being caught risks expulsion, but some find it hard to resist the thrill of the challenge, the temptation of the event itself, or the bonds and prestige established among participating peers.

A teacher at the Spiral Academy issues a challenge to the player characters' class: "Cheat on your exam and don't get caught, and I'll connect you with a prestigious new apprenticeship." The victor must be able to prove she cheated, and get a perfect score. Worse yet, there's only one position on offer; if more than one student meets the requirements, no one gets it... unless one of the successful cheaters can take her rivals out of contention.

The Heptagram is known for secretive sorcerers, so when a well-liked professor insists on performing her rituals in private, people don't ask questions. The player's characters stumble upon her secret: Alone in her classroom, she's casting strange magic with an Anathema's sigil on her brow. Can they prove to the rest of the school that the kind woman is really a monster, or will she convince them to betray the Realm and keep her secret safe?

At their initiation into Pasiap's Stair, a fang of five is assembled from the weakest, least-educated outcastes, all from different peoples and cultures. The war games start in a week, and a rival fang led by a disgraced Dynastic scion plans to arrange an "accident" for the disgraceful rejects. If the player characters can't set aside their differences and work together, they may not survive.

Amilar Lukalo walked the decks of the *Jade Herald*, the most antiquated and battle-scarred of Lookshy's few functioning skyships, as it soared above the city. Beside her, Nefvarin Hikaru, acting captain for this test flight, assured her all maintenance protocols had been followed to the letter.

"Our engineers perform inspections daily since it's been brought back to active status," Hikaru said. "Next is the dorsal perceptor array—"

"Wait." Lukalo had started the tour with a vague, directionless apprehension. Now it congealed into *wrongness*: a nauseating throb through the deck, a sickly flicker in her peripheral vision. Her hand swung out of its own accord. "The engine room...it's that way, yes?"

"Yes, wai tan-junai. Is something wrong?"

"Show me now, haizei, if you please."

The pair stepped into the skyship's heart. Its original engine, a towering lotus-mandala of jade and orichalcum petals gently cradling the ship's hearthstones, was half-visible beyond cables, reliquaries, and other accretions of Lookshyan artifice — workarounds for irreparable or irreplaceable First Age components.

Several technicians worked intently at gleaming banks of valves, modulating the Essence flow. Lukalo leaned over the lead technician's shoulder. "What's the status of the primary epicycle impeller?"

"The accretion is outside of parameters, wai tan-junai," he replied nervously. "We're recalibrating the diaphane spindles to adjust."

"Good work," she said. "That should resolve it, if it's just an epicycle spike. Let me take a closer look..."

Sidling past the clutter, Lukalo placed her hand against the engine. She saw the flow of power through the ship with her inner eye, counted the beats of the engine's pulse.

"They're irregular..." she muttered. Perhaps a blockage in the impulsion mandala? No amount of maintenance could overcome centuries of wear. Probing deeper, she felt it — conduits lit up with Essence with no way towards its destination, all that stagnant power building, seething, coiling malignantly upon itself. No amount of recalibration could diffuse this — the blocked Essence was building into a cascade on the verge of criticality.

Lukalo swore. "We can't stop it. We're going to go down..." A tremor of panic filled her voice, as she imagined the skyship crashing down into Lookshy, the sheer number of civilians who'd be killed in the blast. "I could force a breach, try to vent it, but there's not enough time—"

Hikaru placed a reassuring hand on Lukalo's shoulder. "Maybe you can't, but we can. All hands on deck!" His voice stilled the panicked engine room. "Wai Tan-junai Lukalo has a plan. Follow her orders, and we needn't die in vain."

Lukalo willed herself calm before addressing the frightened crew. "The cascade is too far gone, but we can make sure it doesn't drop us out of the sky over Lookshy. Give me total manifold resynchronization before the next engine cycle, and bring the fore cannons to forty-seven degrees." The technicians, pale-faced but stoic, set to work with every ounce of focus and expertise they had, operating mechanisms and controls meant for the hands of Exalted geniuses.

As the technicians scrambled, Lukalo once again visualized the Essence flowing through the ship's structure as her hands danced across countless valves and levers to redirect it. It was a desperate plan, but it was working — the manifold was resetting, and the cannon was almost in alignment. All she had to do was...

An explosion rocked the engine room, feedback from the mounting cascade overloading the mandala array. Lukalo was knocked to the floor, but she was lucky — one technician lay dead, her face sloughed off in the Essence discharge; others were bleeding, burned, limping back to their consoles on broken bones.

Lukalo didn't hear Hikari rallying the technicians — her world had shrunk down to the ship, and the flow of Essence through it. They'd lost precious seconds; the manifold was still too unstable for her to properly route the cascade through the cannon. She'd have to do it blind, and pray to the Dragons.

Breathing ragged, Lukalo poured the last of her own Essence into the *Jade Herald*, driving the cascade through the impulsion conduits with brute force, rocking the ship with explosions. As the cascade passed the point of criticality, Lukalo fired the cannons, venting the Essence overload through them in a rupturous blast that threw the ship off course.

Lukalo didn't have the strength to stagger over to the porthole, but Hikaru was already there. "You've done it, shozei. At this trajectory, we'll fall well beyond the city's walls."

Lukalo let out a sigh of relief. "*We've* done it, haizei. Now, all hands, brace for impact!"

Chapter Two

Lookshy

Gens Amilar

Air that Rushes Toward Tomorrow

For Gens Amilar, expertise is everything. Whatever profession they pursue, Amilar scions are expected not only to excel, but to innovate. The gens produces some of Creation's premiere scholars in disciplines both mundane and esoteric; their research engendering greater crop yields, stronger steel, and better medicine. Amilars number among the Seventh Legion's leading strategists, specializing in logistics, battle sorcery, and innovative tactics like weaponizing disease. Even their sohei tread unorthodox ground in pursuit of insight. Prizing intellectual and academic achievements of every stripe, they deem nothing more vital than protecting their image of all-encompassing ingenuity.

This drive toward excellence and innovation extends beyond Lookshy itself. Amilars educate foreign princes and heirs, deploy experimental defensive sorceries and artifacts in allied polities, and fund affiliated scholars and academies. While this agenda politically supports Amilar and Seventh Legion interests, it also spreads Lookshyan ideology, culture, and agents throughout the River Province. For some, this is a moral imperative; for others, a means to burnish the gens' reputation. And for most, it's a means to establish hegemony without conquest.

Lookshy Lexicon

chumyo: Commanding officer of the Seventh Legion. Directs the General Staff.

directorate: A wing of the Seventh Legion's military bureaucracy. The seven directorates include the Directorate of the Adjutant-General and the Intelligence, Justice, Liaison, Operations, Security, and Stores Directorates.

field force: A Lookshyan military regiment, roughly equivalent in size and strength to a Realm legion.

General Staff: Lookshy's high command, comprised of the chumyo and six senior officers, and supported by the two dozen advisors of the Administrative Staff.

gens (plural **gentes**): One of Lookshy's ruling Dragon-Blooded families.

helot: A serf-like subordinate social class descended from peoples conquered early in the Seventh Legion's history.

imperator: Leader of a gens.

ranger: Member of a Seventh Legion unit tasked with reconnaissance, espionage, expeditionary warfare, and similar special operations.

redoubt: A fortified outpost and waystation in the Scavenger Lands, used by Seventh Legion forces for resupply, recuperation, coordination, and defense.

Seventh Legion, the: The military apparatus of Lookshy, considered by many to be synonymous with the city and its populace.

sohei: A chaplain of the Immaculate Faith.

sorcerer-engineer: A Seventh Legion sorcerer trained in artifice and First Age lore.

strategos (plural **strategoi**): An Operations Directorate officer handling military strategy, tactics, and logistics.

taimyo: Second-highest military rank in the Seventh Legion. Commands a field force or its equivalent.

Social Standing

Amilar's cachet is inseparable from its scions' preeminence as savants and teachers. Prestigious, expensive Amilar academies draw not only Lookshyan students, but savants, merchant princes, aristocrats, and their scions from throughout the River Province, both for the unparalleled education and the opportunity to forge alliances. In the Halls of the Red Poppy, students lounge on plush cushions while perusing dreamstone archives containing long-dead savants' memories. Firmament Academy offers rigorous training in piloting simulations for airships and warstriders, sending many graduates to the Sky Guard.

Gens Amilar draws additional prestige from philanthropic projects, foremost among them the Ten Thousand Tome Repository, one of Creation's largest libraries. Public stacks are available even for helots, though access to controversial, dangerous, or sensitive books is heavily restricted, and lending privileges extended only to established, prestigious citizens. Amilar physicians also operate clinics in Lookshy and abroad, treating the sick to better study local illnesses and develop effective treatments.

Gens Economics

Most of Amilar's wealth comes from tuition at its academies and the exorbitant honorariums its scions command as tutors, translators, mediators, and savants throughout the River Province.

This wealth is carefully reinvested, often funding promising scions' research. Competition for funding is a vicious game of politicking. Most see this as a necessary evil separating the great from the good. Nonetheless, this often leads to injured feelings, moral compromise, and — in extreme cases — storied vendettas.

Amilar also reaps considerable income from contracts with scavenger lords. Amilar archaeologists and occultists help plumb ancient ruins, dusty tombs, and forgotten kingdoms' relic-houses — for a price. Their fees include right of first refusal on the sale of any objects recovered. Through this policy, Gens Amilar has amassed numerous artifacts for study, trade, and its scions' use. Scavengers' reports also offer useful intelligence on the affairs of local polities.

Serving the Legion

Though Amilar sends its children to the Seventh Legion as readily as any other gens, it holds an unspoken belief that there are better ways to serve Lookshy than by sword or spear. Amilar sorcerer-engineers and sohei receive blatant favoritism, lauded as exemplars of the gens' values. Amilar in the military face a harder road — stereotyped as bookish and bloodless by fellow soldiers, and uncelebrated by their family unless they distinguish themselves as master strategists or battle sorcerers.

Many Amilars seek employment within Lookshy's directorates — especially Operations, Stores, and Liaison, where they've consolidated considerable authority and influence. Elders often direct young scions into fields of study that dovetail with these directorates, positioning them as talented administrators, cultural savants, and meticulous investigators.

Amilar logisticians in the Stores Directorate are paragons of efficiency and insight, drawing on a deep network of connections throughout the Scavenger Lands to keep troops provisioned in even the most protracted campaigns. Those who mock the gens may find supplies delayed or redirected to other, more vital initiatives.

Enemies and Alliances

Amilar's Interventionist politics and Karal's Mercenary agenda align more often than they conflict, though ideological clashes have historically soured efforts at strengthening the gens' relationship. However, many members of Karal's prominent Interventionist minority maintain strong ties with Gens Amilar, enrolling scions in Amilar academies and receiving generous scholarships and stipends.

There's little common ground between innovative, iconoclastic Amilar and conservative, pious Maheka. Unorthodox Amilar scholars, strategists, and sohei rub Maheka colleagues the wrong way; more vexingly, Amilar merchants ply traditional Maheka trade partners with new products and methods. This friction regularly provokes disagreements and political strife.

Scions of Note

Imperator **Amilar Tzo Li Shon**, a stern and reed-thin Fire Aspect just entering old age, remains vigorous and vital. A staunch Interventionist, he's pursued contracts with Nexus, Sijan, and other River Province states, entangling the gens in their affairs. These contracts oblige Amilar to take a more proactive role in the region, providing a useful pretext to reposition Lookshy as a hegemonic power that leads the Scavenger Lands from a position of prominence and strength. While successful, these contracts have proven divisive; many Amilars see the gens as apolitical

and strongly disagree with such involvement in foreign affairs. More than anything, the Emperor seeks a protégé amenable to his vision who he can groom as his successor.

Amilar Usekko is a soldier, but has distinguished herself in her family's eyes through a frighteningly comprehensive study of *The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier*, the seminal textbook of Shogunate warrior-philosophy. She seeks to reconstruct the “true” text, and eagerly authorizes any mission or action that might bring her a unique translation or original fragment. She's also a devoted Purist, adhering zealously to Immaculate tenets, and seeing *The Thousand Correct Actions* — predating this fallen age's corruption — as a handbook for holy war. She holds salons for officers who share her passions, offering subtle but undeniable favoritism both to those who impress her with knowledge of *The Thousand Correct Actions* and to fellow Purists.

Amilar Esoku is young but grim, presenting herself as the perfect picture of a dutiful sohei. As a member of Valkhawsen's Central Administration, she's vying for support to become the academy's commandant in the wake of the previous commandant's retirement. If she does, she aims to transform Valkhawsen into a bastion of Purist ideology — Esoku fervently wishes to return the academy to what she sees as its spiritual roots. She's gathered many sohei to her side, offering support and legitimacy to allies who exemplify the Purist path of piety, evangelism, duty, and resolve.

A peerless historian and archeologist, Sijan-born **Amilar Khesem** is also voraciously greedy. He's generated considerable wealth for the gens while leading its vanguard scavenging team, the Last Breath Brigade. One of Lookshy's greatest savants of the Underworld and the undead, he has a reputation for morbidity and eccentricity — but his family doesn't hold this against him as long as he delivers results. He specializes in salvaging artifacts from shadowlands, and he currently has his sights set on retrieving goods from a number of sites in and around Thorns.

Gens Karal

Fire Burning Brightest

Gens Karal has a reputation to maintain. Respected by even the other major gentes for loyalty to the Seventh Legion, martial triumphs, and deep roots in Lookshy's history, the gens goes to great pains to maintain this prestige. Its scions are inculcated practically from the cradle with the virtues of loyalty (to family, the polis, one's Sworn Brotherhood), dignity, prudence, industriousness, probity, and competence.

The emperor and her council of senior advisors labor to evaluate political stances, proposed military actions, and mercantile enterprises, ensuring that they're never seen as placing the gens' profits or individual scions' needs above the good of Lookshy as a whole.

Social Standing

Centuries ago, Taimyo Karal Lucar led his field force against Lookshy in what history calls the Wildfire Coup, only for his own gens to spearhead the opposition against him. Reputation and social status have preoccupied Karal ever since. Fretting over the slightest stains on the family's carefully maintained image, Karals will do whatever it takes to erase them. Normally this entails closing ranks to protect their own, downplaying or covering up fellow Karals' crimes or misconduct. But when circumstances demand, Karals sabotage, blackmail, or even — when all

else fails — kill problematic family members to prevent them from compromising the gens' reputation.

Internally, Karal's sharpest divisions are political. The eldest members, including the emperor and most of her senior advisors, adhere firmly to the Mercenary faction, favoring steady maintenance of Lookshy's eminence in the River Province via extensive diplomacy and carefully chosen military actions supporting the polis' allies. Many of these leaders are retired Legion officers managing the gens' political and diplomatic interests.

Those leaders face an insurgency in the form of a growing bloc of younger Karal officers on the front lines of a rapidly and dangerously changing situation. Karal's Interventionists argue that Creation is changing swiftly and the gens must change with it. The elders regard Interventionist juniors as insufficiently experienced hotheads at best, with insulting intimations of cowardice, disloyalty, and Imperialist sentiments reminiscent of the Karal coup that once divided the gens. The juniors deem their elders too calcified in their obsession with ancient history, too divorced from the realities of rapidly growing dangers, to competently guide the family into the future, a stance that those elders deeply resent. This quarrel's intensity hasn't broken the public perception of Gens Karal as a disciplined unit, but it's only a matter of time before their disunity becomes known.

The Flamebreak

In the aftermath of the Wildfire Coup, the gens' Emperor — facing intense pressure from her own family — assembled the Flamebreak, an advisory council comprised of the heads of Karal's ten most prominent households, with the power to overrule an emperor's decisions or unseat her by unanimous vote. Since then, the Flamebreak has served as a forum for resolving internal disputes while avoiding the outward appearance of conflict within the gens.

Current members of the Flamebreak include far-traveled **Karal Sakurai**, a retired ranger, diplomat, and Intelligence Directorate spy; **Karal Mazen**, once a kazei in Field Force Three, now a garrulous font of stories about her military adventures; **Karal Ren Zu**, a dashing junior admiral as much renowned for fiscal ingenuity as naval tactics; and Field Force One's illustrious taimyo, **Karal Linwei** (p. XX).

The body leans Mercenary despite Emperor Maiandrea's open-minded attitude toward Interventionism. When she steps down, they'll almost certainly name a more conservative successor.

Gens Economics

The gens' carefully selected mercantile interests include breeding many of the horses used in Lookshy and abroad by the Seventh Legion. In far-flung ranch-manses, Karal has carefully preserved God-Blooded lineages tracing back to the Shogunate, ranging from heavy war steeds to dainty palfreys. Recent successful experiments in hybrid vigor have leveraged ties to the Marukani horselords, who've provided equine breeding stock to enrich the Karal stables. Ongoing marriage alliances with the Marukani have facilitated these efforts while increasing tensions with the gens' detractors, who perceive this — not inaccurately — as an attempt to curry influence in Marukani society.

Similarly, the gens is deeply involved in weaponsmithing. Most customers are Seventh Legion officers seeking distinctive, personalized arms reflective of their rank and needs. Karal artisan-smiths are highly sought after; their in-depth training and immediately recognizable yet constantly evolving aesthetic has rendered them martial tastemakers for centuries. The smiths maintain deep ties to Gens Nerigus, whose merchants supply them with rare and exotic materials, and whose Interventionist politics are making inroads among Karal artisans.

Serving the Seventh Legion

Karals aim for high-profile or dangerous posts where they can win honor and prestige to burnish their gens' image. For many, this involves military roles where they can seek glory on the front lines. From these, the family desires victory, but also leadership skill and personal courage — and political savvy from those who ascend into the highest ranks.

But renown isn't found on the battlefield alone. The Liaison Directorate's diplomatic postings provide opportunities to achieve recognition while peacefully furthering Lookshyan interests. Meanwhile, the Justice Directorate attracts zealous Karals eager to flaunt their incorruptibility. And any other role that offers high repute — daring artist, charitable merchant prince, master surgeon — attracts its share of scions.

Enemies and Alliances

Gregarious and congenial, Karals maintain friendships within every major gens and most minor gentes — their doors are always open to boon companions, and they regularly host gatherings and celebrations to mark holidays, birthdays, and historic events. Politically, they're closely aligned with Gens Maheka, whose political conservatism parallels their own, and to a lesser extent Gens Yushoto, whom they consider the tragically under-credited backbone of many important humanitarian enterprises within Lookshy and beyond.

Publicly, Gens Karal doesn't consider any Lookshyan their enemy. They prefer diplomatic solutions to internecine conflict. While some of their ties with other Lookshyan groups are strained, they nonetheless maintain open lines of communication even with those whom they distrust or oppose, such as Amilar's Purists, Teresu merchant princes, and the most reactionary Mahekas.

Less openly, the gens' hardliners are prepared to strongarm, blackmail, frame, or — in extreme circumstances — assassinate troublesome individuals or households to preserve their vision of Lookshy, should the General Staff's politics shift against their preferred course. Hardliners embark on these actions subtly and cautiously lest the family's name be stained, and readily shoulder all blame should they be caught.

Prominent Members

Imperator **Karal Maiandreia** is a flame that's burned brightly for Lookshy, the Seventh Legion, and her family for centuries — centuries she knows are reaching the end of their span. A well-respected kazei and widely renowned master of war and politics, she came of age during Karal Lucar's uprising, which forever colored her political instincts. Achieving her current position in RY 615, she's governed her family with a steady and capable hand since. She lent common sense and wisdom to stabilizing her gens and rebuilding Lookshy's government following the Gunzota Incident, supporting a series of conservative chumyos but eschewing the reins of such power herself.

Maiandraia's wise counsel has served Lookshy well, guiding a measured course of intervention when necessary, a hands-off approach when not. Unlike many on the Flamebreak, she's willing to give fair hearing to Interventionist Karals' concerns, well aware that a generational shift is in progress within family and polis that may reshape Lookshy's destiny, and may mean embracing more radical change than her more deeply conservative advisors expect — or would accept. She treads lightly, knowing that efforts sufficient to change the gens' course may see her removed from office.

Ambassador **Karal Kallias**, a senior Liaison Directorate official, spent decades assiduously avoiding corruption and impropriety. But when visiting Great Forks after the Battle of Mishaka to discuss reconstruction aid, he found himself smitten by his opposite diplomatic number — Wisdom's Shining Promise, God-Blooded daughter of divine triumvir Shield of a Different Day. He gave her all she wanted and more, though securing significant concessions in turn. Courting her without his family's permission, he secured her hand with Dayshield's blessing. Gens Karal acknowledged the union to save face, but has since kept Kallias on a close rein.

Kallias joins Promise in Great Forks for a few months each year; she likewise visits him in Lookshy. Both accept that they're now as much spies as diplomats, expected by their families to gather information from their journeys and spouses. This is of little import while Lookshy's and Great Forks' interests remain aligned, but as tensions rise throughout the River Province, their circumstances grow strained.

Gens Maheka

Earth Unbroken by Armies

Gens Maheka is the bedrock upon which the Seventh Legion stands. Whether in the officer corps, the Directorates, the Shogunate Bureaucracy, or architecture and artisanship, its scions quietly support the Legion and its traditions, standing together against chaos, weakness, and unorthodoxy. For many, this unity is both uplifting and empowering. But for those who don't fit in, it's as smothering as being buried alive.

Where Gens Makeha once built fortifications to protect the last remains of the Shogunate, now it defends the Shogunate foundations of Lookshyan culture. When a Shogunate tradition falls out of favor, Maheka officers drill recruits in its practice. When discipline fails in a field force, a Maheka officer stands tall, a silent pillar of self-control. When the Shogunate Bureaucracy speaks out against the General Staff, Gens Maheka listens. Maheka upholds Lookshy as the Shogunate's last stronghold; without its ancient traditions, the Seventh Legion is nothing more than a mercenary legion.

Social Standing

Imparting Shogunate traditions and ideals to the next generation is paramount to the Maheka elders. They expect each scion to be an exemplary Seventh Legion officer — a disciplined warrior soul who knows when to draw a blade and when to leave it sheathed. Any Makeha written up for disciplinary action finds the Legion's punishment mild, compared to the disapproval of the gens' elders.

Gens Maheka tempers youthful exuberance with mature professionalism, assigning an elder to mentor each scion upon coming of age or adoption into the gens. This tradition bridges the gap between generations, allowing the student to become more comfortable with the gens' elders and

ensuring the elders don't isolate themselves from younger Dragon-Blooded. Mentors usually only take individual students, but an elder in charge of a major construction project may take many.

Maheka's conservative leaders draw a hard line on Interventionism within the gens, believing such foolhardy strategy would upset the delicate balance of River Province politics and waste resources better used to shore up weak points in Seventh Legion fortifications. Interventionist Makehas must act craftily to avoid censure or reassignment to insignificant postings.

Despite counting many gifted engineers, tacticians, artists, and scholars among their number, Mahekas have an undeserved reputation for being slow-witted and unimaginative. In truth, they understand well the unorthodox attitudes evinced by other gentes, the lower classes, and foreigners. Many Mahekas relish playing the stereotypically muleheaded role that others assign them, exercising tremendous patience before pulling the rug out from under a rival at a dramatic moment.

Serving the Seventh Legion

Master planners and researchers, Makehas study every text and consider every scenario before acting, often finding details and flaws others miss. The Seventh Legion values Mahekas as architects, generals, and sorcerer-engineers, knowing that Maheka-led projects will finish on time and on budget.

Gens Maheka's traditionalism leads many scions to become teachers, sohei, and drill instructors. Shogunate history provides subjects for Maheka artists; much of Lookshy's statuary is the product of Maheka stonemasons.

Enemies and Alliances

Gens Amilar's emphasis on innovation places it in direct opposition to Gens Maheka's ideals. Maheka administrators and educators dedicate much of their efforts toward undermining Amilar influence in Lookshy and the Seventh Legion.

The Karals are the Mahekas' strongest allies in River Province realpolitick. Equally dedicated to the Mercenary ideology, Karal's quick charisma balances out Maheka's caution. But the Karals' openness to changing traditions puts the two gentes at odds in internal Lookshyan politics, and disagreements with allies can be more infuriating than those with enemies. Karal and Maheka justiciars especially are known for fiery conflicts over legal philosophy and the disposition of individual cases.

Gens Maheka finds fault with Gens Teresu's extravagance, vanity, moral flexibility, and close ties with the Guild. Nonetheless, Maheka considers Teresu's military branch a reliable supporter of Seventh Legion interests, and relies on Teresu's merchant fleet for its own commercial and construction enterprises.

Scions of Note

Maheka Dazan, Chumyo of the Seventh Legion and Field Force Two's taimyo, strikes a delicate balance between conservatism and unpredictability. From hard lessons in his heedless youth, he understands that his decisions affect not just Lookshy, but the entire River Province. He deploys Seventh Legion forces carefully, accounting for economic, political, and ecological factors around potential contracts, but retains a penchant for unorthodox tactical decisions that

offer unexpected advantage. Dazan ignores his staff's attempts to keep him to a schedule, often rearranging his day without informing them. Much to the Legion's apprehension, Dazan appears in unexpected locations, ready to discipline any infraction.

Interventionist detractors say that Dazan wastes Seventh Legion forces on pointless peasant villages, but he knows from cruel experience that a fallen pebble in the wrong location may cause a landslide. Nonetheless, Interventionist and even Imperialist sentiments are on the rise in the officer corps and even the General Staff, inflamed by the potential opportunities of the Time of Tumult. Dazan finds his position tenuous, and spends more time than he likes politicking to prevent a vote of no confidence that would remove him from office. He's come to dread leading Seventh Legion forces in the field, as it isolates him from day-to-day General Staff interaction.

Imperator **Maheka Jitnas** is among her generation's greatest architects and geomancers. She's also the Shogunate Bureaucracy's Supreme Minister of Aesthetics and Recreation, a position she uses to disseminate traditionalistic values and Maheka's ideology through commissioning public art and funding select entertainers. She sees Maheka as the guardian of Shogunate traditions and midwife to a resurrected Shogunate. While she affects the demeanor of a doting grandmother, she's a calculating political strategist, and has never let sentiment stand in the way of her agenda.

Jitnas is particularly critical of Chumyo Dazan, whose personal unpredictability and unwillingness to submit to her authority rankles her. She'd support his ouster as chumyo, surrendering that post to another gens, so long as a more pliant Maheka replaced him on the General Staff.

A war orphan turned outcaste who found purpose among the gentes, the justiciar **Maheka Talyd** seems as cold and heartless as stone. Where others have friends, he has juniors too low-ranking to avoid his tirades and callous criticisms. He's ruthless in his investigations; compassion has no role in his judgments.

Young Maheka dread being assigned Talyd as their mentor. Talyd obsesses about their careers, often planning them out years in advance. Should a protégé reject the course Talyd sets for her, he does everything in his power to show her their errors of her ways.

Between his poor mentoring and his relentless quest to apprehend lawbreakers, Talyd has made many enemies, even in Gens Maheka. His own beloved niece — the only person who can soften his harsh personality — is a suspect in one ongoing espionage case.

Stubborn and rebellious, **Maheka Galith** couldn't be forced into the family mold by detentions, lectures, or even corporal punishment. A meeting with the family leadership ended with Galith disappearing from Lookshy and the gens declaring her a deserter. Now she wanders the River Province, plundering ancient ruins none other dares brave and recruiting other Seventh Legion deserters for expeditions. The General Staff wants to bring her back into the fold — or failing that, end her dealings with Lookshy's rivals, such as House Ragara and the Mask of Winters — but is wary of the possibility that she may be acting as a deep cover agent for Gens Maheka.

Maheka Nirita is a woman of incredible piety and faith — or at least she presents herself as such. Sensitive and high-strung, her overbearing family nonetheless maneuvered her to high rank in the Stores Directorate at a relatively young age, seeking to fulfill their own ambitions through her. Fearing herself unable to live up to her parents' expectations, unable to admit that she needs help, and lacking emotional support, she's developed an opium habit, and has recently sunk into a languorous depression. She's thus far successfully attributed failures to her subordinates, but

this has reduced morale and increased insubordination. Unless she overcomes her familial struggles, she's headed for a fall that could both leave Lookshy vulnerable and destroy her career.

Gens Teresu

Water Flowing with Jade and Silver

Appearance is everything to Gens Teresu. Its scions pour silver into parades and ceremonies, equip their men with exquisite uniforms, and boast of every achievement. Many of their peers think they flaunt wealth and care more for pomp and displays than results, but the truth is less obvious. Teresu scions are deeply concerned with cost, and for a military family the greatest cost is the loss of men and equipment. So they posture to appear strong and unassailable, making grand displays of power to discourage enemies without ever suffering the costs of engagement.

Being a Teresu is about knowing when to be the roaring wave and when to quietly ride the currents. No matter what position one serves in the house, the strategy is the same: loud, overwhelming successes, and unspoken withdrawal from danger and failure. A Teresu scion presents their best face and never lets anyone see their flaws.

Social Standing

Everyone knows Gens Teresu's triumphs, and its vast wealth and naval power make it an important force in Lookshy. As a result, the Teresus always have social coin to spend: their successes may seem overplayed and their pomp exasperating, but it's impossible to deny their contributions. Respect for Teresu may sometimes be grudging, but never lacking.

The gens' military and mercantile branches trace the length and breadth of the Scavenger Lands along rivers and coastlines, projecting power and influence with a swiftness that other gentes can only envy. But the two have very different interests and mindsets, and hold distinct reputations within Lookshy.

Military branch scions traditionally enter the Lookshyan Navy, where they predominate among the officer corps. They're known for dynamism and elan, and command as much respect as Field Force officers.

The smaller mercantile branch's scions devote themselves to commercial endeavors, command the gens' mercantile fleet and private military escorts, or hold Directorate posts (most often Intelligence, Liaison, and especially Stores). Some say they value wealth above allegiance to Lookshy. Nonetheless, they've gathered many clients who offer them favors in exchange for financial support.

Economics

Teresu's merchant fleet dominates Lookshyan trade, contracting with the General Staff to supply the city with raw materials and to provision field forces and redoubts throughout the Scavenger Lands. In turn, the Lookshyan Navy offers preferential treatment to Teresu vessels, speeding them through customs and providing escorts against river pirates.

Shipbuilding and warehousing trades in Lookshy also fall under the Teresu umbrella. The Seventh Legion contracts military ship construction to Teresu, whose master shipwrights seek

new innovations to improve naval power, speed, and efficiency. Most other merchant vessels purchased in and around Lookshy come from the Teresu shipyards.

All along the Scavenger Lands' rivers, Teresu merchants maintain warehouses, trading posts, and private estates. These double as stopping-points, residences, and unofficial embassies for Lookshyan travelers. Field forces often quarter troops in such locales, for which their owners are compensated handsomely.

The General Staff's approbation for Teresu profits comes in large part from the gens' opposition to the Guild. The Seventh Legion mistrusts that vast commercial conglomerate, which it sees as a significant threat to its hegemony over the River Province. Teresu mercantile interests work to ensure that Guild businesses don't gain inroads in and around Lookshy, fighting a shadow war amid bazaars and ledgers.

The gens is a major patron of the arts. Instead of profit, this offers opportunities to shape Lookshyan and River Province culture, emphasizing Teresu styles and playing up their prestige as seagoing heroes and princely magnates. Most Teresu scions — especially in the mercantile branch — study the fine arts, and a few make it their life's work.

Serving the Legion

Almost every Teresu serves at least one five-year stint in the Lookshyan Navy — and often more — whether for the honor of military service or in preparation for the family's mercantile ventures. During this time, a Teresu scion is expected to sail far and wide, learning her family's operations and trade routes while absorbing the diverse ideas and sights that such a tour offers. A Teresu who avoids naval service is mocked as seasick; she may bear that shame for the rest of her days.

Though the Teresu merchant fleet serves the gens' ambitions, those ambitions align with the Seventh Legion's needs. Teresu flotillas secure Lookshy's economic interests, warding away would-be competitors and ruthlessly eliminating pirates. Scions not directly involved with seaborne operations often serve in the Intelligence, Liaison, Security, and especially Stores directorates, putting their cosmopolitan experiences and entrepreneurial skills to good use.

Enemies and Alliances

Gens Sirel remains a loyal client of Gens Teresu. Sirels hold commissions in the Lookshy Navy, make investments on Teresu recommendations, and even foster heirs in Teresu households. But this relationship is not entirely one-sided. For all Teresu's prominence within the Navy, the fleet admiral is a Sirel scion, and the potential for reprisal has stemmed the worst of Teresu's plans to exploit its client gens.

Riverborne Teresu merchants deal closely with Gens Nerigus' landbound caravans. Teresu's financial strength generally makes it the patron, offering loans and investments, and acting as middleman to swiftly convey Nerigus merchants and cargoes through the Scavenger Lands' river network. Teresu merchants sometimes accompany Nerigus expeditions to offer financial backing and seek new commercial opportunities, only with Teresu taking the back seat.

Teresu's mercantile branch works to ensure that Guild enterprises, such financially potent Great Houses as Cynis and Ragara, and other rivals don't gain too much economic leverage over Lookshy and its neighbors. But it's willing to collaborate with one rival against another, making for complicated relationships. Last year's hated adversary is this year's cherished dinner guest,

and experienced Teresu merchants maintain uneasy long-term friendships with many foreign rivals.

Scions of Note

Teresu Mardun's recent rise to emperor represents a sea change in Teresu politics. His predecessor was a respected admiral with strong Mercenary leanings, while taciturn, shrewd Mardun is a staunch Isolationist. In his time as a sailor and merchant Mardun personally saw the thinly spread forces of Lookshy, and worries about Lookshy's ability to protect its own interests. He struggles to consolidate Teresu's might, recalling distant forces hired to foreign powers so that he can safeguard the shipping industry.

One of the gens' most renowned captains is **Teresu Mata**, the Dragon of the Yanaze. Flamboyant and terrifying, she enters battle in a dragon mask and scaled cape, staying in the thickest fray to satisfy her craving for blood and glory. Once a Lookshyan Navy captain, she transferred to the Teresu merchant marine, whose broader latitude for captains' initiative and reduced oversight allow her to more easily gratify these urges — and to more easily profit from captured pirate vessels.

Though her aggressive tactics stray from standard practice, Teresu applauds Mata for her success in drastically decreasing river pirate activity. She's accomplished this with a combination of ferocious combat and quiet deals. She serves bloody execution to pirates threatening Teresu merchants, ignores those who ignore them in turn, and secretly works with pirates who're willing to sell out rivals or lend aid to Teresu.

Indolent but clever, master merchant **Teresu Westwind** prefers working as an intermediary and manager, letting others handle the most difficult work while he directs from a position of comfort and reaps the rewards. He deals heavily with other gentes, mainly Karal and Maheka, arranging deals between them and foreign purchasers while taking a cut for himself and his shipping crews. He bases his actions on how they'll reflect on himself first and Teresu as a whole second.

Once a Guild merchant who'd reached the limit of what ambition the organization allowed to outcastes, Westwind sought further advancement in Gens Teresu. He retains Guild connections throughout the River Province, but doesn't deal with them directly so as to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Nonetheless, his subordinates and Guild merchants share contacts, trading posts, and investment opportunities.

Gens Yushoto

Wood Whose Roots Grow Deep

To the Yushotos, the Seventh Legion is a wild and wondrous garden, and they the gardener. Emphasizing individual needs and talents, the gens encourages diverse pursuits among its scions, aiming to nurture their strengths and allow them to branch out into every field. Likewise, they seek to support Lookshy as a whole, lending their aid to their peers outside the gens with little thought of recompense.

Yushotos like to see the best in others, both their kin and the Seventh Legion as a whole. Most are happy to do favors for fellow scions of Lookshy without thinking too hard about the consequences. And though rarely involved in corruption themselves, they can be quick to forgive and absolve their peers of impropriety and illegality in order to maintain a peaceful status quo.

The Changing Seasons Command — a council of Yushoto's eldest and most accomplished members — maintains the gens' neutrality, insulating it from political strife to sustain its role as a supporter of Lookshy as a whole. This detached stance pervades the gens' politics; Yushotos largely adhere to Mercenary ideology out of a desire for balance rather than dedication to its principles. Should Lookshy's political winds shift toward Interventionism, the Changing Seasons Command is ready to follow.

Social Standing

Yushoto's individualism makes it difficult for outsiders to view it as a monolith. This perception benefits the gens, as outsiders with grudges against individual scions rarely extend their enmity towards the gens as a whole, but where Yushoto scions share in this perception, cooperation and solidarity falters.

Insofar as Yushotos have a collective reputation, they're viewed as easygoing, supportive, and politically neutral. Some say they make excellent advisors and aides, but poor leaders — an unfair assessment, but one that occasionally influences promotions, transfers, and subordinates' morale.

The gens' ethos of nurture without judgment extends to the rest of the Seventh Legion. Their long history of serving as mediators between rival Lookshyan factions — such as diplomacy following the Spilt Tea War, or negotiating promotions to the General Staff after the Gunzota Incident — established a tradition whereby other gentes' scions ask Yushotos to arbitrate personal disagreements. For many, this makes the gens seem more trustworthy. Others resent Yushoto after feeling wronged by a scion's decision.

Gens Economics

Gens Yushoto maintains several highly profitable business ventures, encouraging young scions to explore and conquer new fields of commerce. The Changing Seasons Command uses the resulting income to support new ventures. Successful scions reap praise and political clout; those who fail to make a profit must labor for a time under more successful kin — both to repay the investment and to further their entrepreneurial education.

Agriculture is among Yushoto's most stable income sources, growing such cereals as rice and maize along the fertile riverbanks east of Lookshy. These crops supply Lookshy's massive military first and foremost, but are also sold independently to those who need food or animal feed. Yushoto also has a strong interest in textiles, its magnaneries producing large amounts of luxurious silk in high demand amongst the rich in the Scavenger Lands. The sale of these goods provides Yushoto with income, while guarding them in transit provides Yushoto scions with valuable experience as guards and sailors.

Serving the Legion

Yushoto scions spread through every element of the Seventh Legion apparatus. They're field force and naval officers, Directorate administrators, Shogunate Bureaucracy ministers, sohei, sorcerers, merchants, artisans, scholars, and more. Most pursue their own inclinations or follow the path of some respected family member or heroic figure. Elder Yushotos seek out and mentor young scions who still seek direction for their careers.

More specifically, Yushoto individualism often leads scions to seek out forms of military service that emphasize autonomy, flexibility, and spontaneity. Becoming a strategos or ranger is a

common dream among young Yushoto, who compete fiercely for attention and tutelage from elders in these fields. Retired strategoi and rangers often capitalize on their fame by taking on teaching posts or founding their own academies.

Another popular Yushoto career is sorcerer-engineer, following in founder Yushoto Baraka's footsteps. In addition to forming an excellent compromise for this nontraditional gens' more conservative scions, it presents the unique opportunity to pursue a centuries-old sorcerous tradition.

Admiration for the gens' own ethos leads a disproportionate number into the teaching profession or the Directorate of the Adjutant-General, where they can help members of other gentes find their own paths just as Yushotos do. Retired officers often capitalize on their fame by taking on teaching posts or founding their own academies.

Enemies and Alliances

Gentes Yushoto and Maheka disagree on how to best serve the Legion. Yushoto individualism irks more conservative Mahekas, who point to occasional turmoil between young Yushoto as proof that the gens' approaches are flawed. Meanwhile, Yushotos find Mahekas' approach stifling to innovation.

No gens is more closely tied to Yushoto than Gens Nefvarin. Since the Gunzota incident, Yushoto has offered financial support to Nefvarin, nominally to help it back onto its feet. Now, the Changing Seasons Command calls on Nefvarin scions for extended services to offset the resulting debts. Feeling owned by Yushoto, many Nefvarins feel resentful rather than grateful.

Yushoto finds itself deeply entangled with Guild mercantile endeavors. This relationship oscillates between partnership and fierce competition, trending more towards antagonism in recent years. Yushoto sees the Guild's vast financial powers as a potential threat to Lookshy, and collaborates with the Security Directorate in counterespionage operations targeting Guild spies within Lookshy's walls. Yushoto rangers and merchants spy in turn on Guild enterprises throughout the Scavenger Lands.

Scions of Note

Imperator **Yushoto Okani** grew up two centuries ago as corruption burgeoned among the Seventh Legion's officer class, and her sense of righteous purpose led her to join the conspiracy behind the Gunzota Incident. Today she's firmly dedicated to the Mercenary ideology, believing that as long as the officer class remains honorable and the Seventh Legion remains dedicated to its traditions, Lookshy cannot fail.

Okani watches Lookshyan political issues closely, but has a blind spot when it comes to the changing external circumstances of the Time of Tumult. She doesn't wish to meddle with other gentes' affairs; thinking of the horrors of the Gunzota Incident fills her with dread at the thought of harming her fellow Lookshyans again. But she also fears opening investigations that might inadvertently unearth the Gunzota conspiracy.

Yushoto Rilodan, also of the Changing Seasons Command, desires to see Yushoto take a less impartial role in Lookshyan politics and to see the Seventh Legion as the Scavenger Lands' hegemon. He commands loyalty amongst Yushoto Imperialists and Interventionists, and himself supports Amilar Chalo — the firmly Interventionist taimyo of Field Force Four — to be the next chumyo should Maheka Dazan step down. His upcoming marriage to Chalo's sister bodes to

further embroil him in Gentes Major politics. He's currently maneuvering to ensure that when Yushoto Ouhota retires, an Interventionist Yushoto takes her place.

Most know **Yushoto Dalaro** as Guild merchant Taltzen Linn of the Ivy Wheel trading company, his cover on his mission to infiltrate the Guild. Quietly plucked from the military at an early age in recognition of his skills and loyalty to the Legion, Dalaro has lived two lives for over a decade. His mission is to obtain rank and influence within the Guild sufficient to ferret out secrets and weaknesses of value to the Seventh Legion.

Dalaro has succeeded in the first half of his mission, standing at a merchant prince's right hand and romancing a Guild hierarch's personal assistant. But he grows hesitant as tensions escalate. He feels more connected to his life as Taltzen than as Dalaro, and his Guild paramour's love pulls him further from the Legion each day. This divided loyalty haunts him, driving him to occasional drinking binges and wanton brawling that may threaten his secret identity.

Once an outcaste Yellow River pirate, **Yushoto Kigiku** sought security and purpose — not to mention protection from the Lookshy Navy — with Gens Yushoto and the Seventh Legion. After a stint in the Navy, they gathered a new pirate squadron and placed it at the gens' disposal. Their Red Hawks were a point of pride for Yushoto for years, until they mistook a Sijanese funerary vessel for a pirate ship in a heavy fog and attacked. Sijan calls for Kigiku's punishment; some Yushoto close ranks to defend them, while others squarely blame Kigiku for failure to lead. For their part, all Kigiku wants is to return to favor. They're approaching young Yushotos with increasingly desperate and risky ideas to reverse their fortunes.

Seventh Legion Leadership

All of Lookshy's highest-ranking officials serve on the General Staff; their military and administrative roles are integrated with their governmental duties. The General Staff proper, consisting of the chumyo and six other members, sets policy for the Seventh Legion as a whole. The Administrative Staff, comprised of two dozen other Lookshyan notables, serves as an advisory body.

Vacancies on the General and Administrative Staffs are filled by majority vote of the General Staff; much favor-trading goes on behind the scenes. Likewise, a majority vote of the General Staff can replace the chumyo with any General or Administrative Staff member.

The General Staff's current roster includes:

Maheka Dazan: Chumyo; Field Force Two's taimyo. Mercenary; forced to compromise with rising Interventionist sympathies on the General Staff.

Amilar Chalo: Operations Directorate head. Interventionist; aggressively undermining Dazan's position. Moderately ambitious; wants Dazan's seat, but not at the expense of Seventh Legion stability.

Karal Linwei: Field Force One's taimyo. Officially Mercenary for family unity's sake, but privately open to Interventionist views if presented persuasively enough.

Sirel Sogrun: Admiral of the Lookshy Navy. Mercenary, but devoted to Gens Teresu; often backs Teresu Irongate on key issues. Old, well-respected, and conservative.

Teresu Irongate: Stores Directorate head. Isolationist, but prioritizes Teresu and Stores interests; readily sides with Interventionists or Mercenaries in exchange for concessions.

Yan Tu Weko: Field Force Three's taimyo. Leans Interventionist/Imperialist, but ambition comes first; maneuvering to gain power for Gens Yan Tu and to seize the chumyo's seat. Her recent elevation to the General Staff has destabilized the Mercenary status quo.

Yushoto Ouhota: Head of the Directorate of the Adjutant-General. Mercenary. Well-respected for wisdom, insight, and smoothing over the General Staff's internal conflicts. Elderly and in failing health; expected to retire shortly.

The Seventh Legion Military

The Scavenger Lands tremble at the sound of Lookshy's legions marching to war. Yet for all the Seventh Legion's magnitude, it's thinly stretched across the Scavenger Lands' vast area. The General Staff knows the Legion is barely sustainable despite heavy taxes, tariffs, and mercenary contracts that often amount to tribute. Threats to revenue are mercilessly dealt with, and Lookshyan propagandists spread tales of the Legion's might and prowess across the River Province. Many aggressors quit the field before facing the Seventh Legion in battle — victory before Lookshy musters a single fang.

The Seventh Legion

The Seventh Legion consists of numerous military branches. At its heart are the field forces, simultaneously its greatest weapon and strongest political tool. But it encompasses a range of other military branches, from garrison forces and rangers to the Lookshy Navy and the Sky Guard.

All Lookshyan land-based forces follow the same internal hierarchy: Five soldiers form a fang, five fangs make a 25-person scale, five scales a 125-person talon, five talons a 625-person wing, and two wings a 1,250-person dragon, with each sub-division under an officer. While guard and ranger hierarchies stop there, field forces unite five dragons under a kazei. Each dragon also has a "tail" — roughly a wing of support and specialist personnel including accountants, animal handlers, laborers, medics, messengers, scribes, servants, sohei, and sorcerers generally not expected to see combat, along with scores of oxen, mules, and other beasts of burden.

Legion strategic doctrine emphasizes unity and intelligence. Sworn Brotherhoods and heirloom artifacts are encouraged, and rarely separated. Battle formations reinforce unit strengths and protect weaknesses. Doctrine recognizes strength in diversity, as well as thoroughly understanding one's enemies. Rangers and spies constantly monitor the entire theater of battle and beyond — both for nascent threats and to seed propaganda. The best victories are won before battle is joined.

Soldiers are trained to follow orders without question, engaging the enemy with speed and precision. However, the legion recognizes that no battle goes according to plan, and rewards soldiers who seize opportunities — if they're successful.

Logistically, the legion depends heavily on riverine transport and the River Province's sometimes-unreliable roads and paths. Units forage to supplement rations of grain and dried meat. Legion contracts stipulate quantities of provisions the hirer must supply, based on distance from Lookshy and local hardships. Supply lines are considered vital; disruptions are dealt with urgently.

Legion discipline is harsh. Punishments range from beatings for insubordination, to whippings, torture, and death. Losing Legion artifacts through cowardice or carelessness is treason. Officers

deliver judgement and sentencing at their discretion, often after consultation with sohei, other officers, and the soldier's comrades. Many factors are weighed; Exalted are granted more leeway in adjudication, but face harsher punishments if found guilty.

Mercenary work is a regrettable necessity to fund the Legion's maintenance across the vast River Province. Lookshy hires out field forces and foreign legion units to any able to afford them. Prices vary with numerous factors, including how closely the purchaser's goals align with Lookshy's, the number of Exalted within the units hired, other military purposes for which Lookshy needs these units, other potential hirers, the distance to be traveled, the season and terrain, etc. Contract negotiations may take days or months, with chuzei and higher ranks authorized to initiate discussions. Every contract must be approved by a taimyo — or by the General Staff for an entire field force — with the negotiation period initiating Legion investigations, both subtle and overt, of the purchaser's true goals and needs.

Field Forces

The Seventh Legion is the glittering host common folk sing about throughout the Scavenger Lands. Field force soldiers wear their hair long, wrapped in intricate coils beneath polished helmets. They maintain their equipment with regimented discipline, under brightly colored pennants denoting their field force and unit. Before battle, sohei lead prayers to Lookshy's gods, during which time individuals take the opportunity to reinforce personal oaths of allegiance and honor.

Field forces, unlike the Realm's legions, aren't fungible. Each specializes in a distinct approach to war. Likewise, their dragons and wings are heterogeneous subunits, each dedicated to specific functions.

Field Force One is a highly mobile shock force composed of Lookshy's finest, its skirmishers and reconnaissance units surrounding a core of heavy cavalry and mounted infantry. **Field Force Two** is primarily infantry, aimed at open engagement against conventional Scavenger Lands armies. **Field Force Three** focuses on siege warfare and monster hunting. **Field Force Four** innovates new weapons and strategies to supplement Lookshy's dwindling occult arsenal.

Navy

Lookshy's navy is small, its rowers, sailors, and marines sailing under white and crimson pennants. Its commander, Admiral Sirel Sogrun, reserves the few artifact ships for Lookshy's defense, the rest guard against piracy, and ferry troops and supplies along the coast and rivers.

The Sky Guard

Taimyo Nefvarin Shou-Yu commands Lookshy's Sky Guard. On paper and in song, this is a great honor. In reality, she commands a mere handful of mothballed skyships and a small force of artificers, sorcerer-engineers, and sky-marines. As a further shame, the Sky Guard now lies under Navy command.

Still, the Sky Guard isn't wholly ceremonial. Each skyship takes a shakedown cruise every few years to ensure that it's functional and to give skyship crews practice for when their skills are needed. And in major crises — such as the war against Thorns a generation ago — aerial assets still deploy into the field.

Garrison Forces

Lookshy's guard units maintain order over the city and surrounding settlements, and provide training grounds for field force soldiers. When field forces require new bodies, they look to the garrison forces first. Many garrison-force soldiers grow bitter as the Legion passes them over for assignment in the more prestigious field forces year after year.

The **Home Guard** defends Lookshy above all else. This mandate includes policing, tax collection, and peacekeeping duties. Home Guard units mix novice recruits, ambitious idealists eager to prove their worth, and disillusioned veterans who didn't make the cut for field force deployment. Because foes rarely reach the city, the Home Guard tend towards complacency and arrogance. Rather than pennants, Home Guard units are signified by colored helmet plumes and ribbons woven into armor.

The prestigious, well-equipped **Manse Guard** secures Lookshyan manses both at home and abroad. The gentes sometimes try to place scions considered too valuable — or incompetent — for real combat with the Manse Guard for their mandatory Legion service. Taimyo Bukane Winter Rose considers such tricks and bribes an affront to the Legion's honor and to himself, purging recruits suspected of such from the ranks. Nonetheless, the field forces view the black-plumed Manse Guard as pampered and soft.

A reserve force, the **Gray Legion** encompasses the weak, infirm, or unfit for duty, and those retired from active service. In emergencies, Lookshy can muster an army of Gray Legion light infantry as large as all of the field forces combined. Gray Legion members train weekly, for which they receive nominal pay and time off from other occupations. Membership is a source of civic pride; it's also a channel by which members of diverse social classes come together as Lookshyans.

Rangers

The Seventh Legion's intelligence and espionage arm, rangers are drawn from the ranks of the field forces. Ranger command reports directly to the General Staff and is granted broad autonomy and authority to advance Lookshy's cause by any means necessary.

This freedom provides diverse assignments. Rangers act as advisors to both Lookshyan and allied commanders. They infiltrate, investigate, and assassinate enemy leaders. They hunt spies and traitors, and spread pro-Legion propaganda throughout the Scavenger Lands. Success, no matter how unorthodox, is rewarded with promotions, honors, and another mission.

All Seventh Legion units are expected to provide the rangers with sanctuary and support — albeit begrudgingly so when the two groups' tactical objectives conflict. Rangers also have authority to recruit anyone useful to their goal. Many recruits are expendable dupes kept ignorant of Legion involvement.

Security

Beyond the Legion's own might, the gentes employ their own loyal guards. Sometimes these private forces come from Lookshy's own Grey Legion. These troops make easy money guarding estates, caravans, ships, and traveling dignitaries. Wealthier families hire exotic foreign warriors, prioritizing loyalty to themselves should Lookshy endure another bout of internal strife.

Force Projection

The Legion has established fortified redoubts throughout the Scavenger Lands, reassuring allies and threatening potential rivals. Each is a self-contained fortress — some hold enough troops and supplies to launch major campaigns, while smaller, secret redoubts serve as ranger refuges and weapon stockpiles. The largest redoubts, built in strategically valuable locations on the River Province's borders, can support an entire field force and allied troops against protracted sieges.

Any attack on a redoubt is considered an attack upon Lookshy itself. The Legion's reprisals are famed as swift and unforgiving throughout the River Province, though the reality is tempered by concerns of logistics, diplomacy, distance, and perceived importance of the site.

Foreign Legions

Lookshy's foreign legions take in non-Lookshyan hopefuls seeking post-service citizenship. Some are seduced by Lookshyan propaganda; others enlist to escape justice or slavery; yet others are simply starving and lost — the foreign legions accept them all. Their training is unforgiving. Recruits live and die in service in exchange for basic rations and the promise of sins forgotten. For many, this is enough; for others, the reward of citizenship provides motivation. Many fail basic training — they die, are maimed, or desert. Those who pass serve in military campaigns far afield and guard remote redoubts. They know the field forces view them as expendable, and throw themselves into battle to prove their worth.

Artifacts

The Legion's First Age wonders are failing. Small faults accumulate, whether cascading into catastrophic failure or dead equipment to be cannibalized for parts. Maintaining an arsenal of lightning ballistae, implosion bows, warstriders, and more is staggeringly expensive. The General Staff knows Lookshy's success is partly attributable to fear of its artifact arsenal, and goes to extreme measures to hide this decline. Rangers spread propaganda throughout the land, while Security Directorate operatives mislead, suborn, or — in extreme cases — assassinate those who investigate too deeply.

Wonders forged, unearthed, seized in battle, or otherwise obtained by Lookshyan Dragon-Blooded — daiklaves, direlances, and the like — are theirs to keep, and often become heirlooms within their gens. Their ownership is taxed, however, while donating them to the Seventh Legion's arsenal yields handsome compensation. The Legion obtains other artifacts when Dragon-Blooded die intestate or as gifts from their heirs. It prioritizes assigning its artifacts to Dragon-Blooded who've awakened their Evocations, to maximize their strategic value.

Legion-sponsored expeditions scour the Scavenger Lands for materials and lore to maintain its sorcerous arsenal. Rangers seek caches of forgotten artifacts and raid First Age tombs, while the Liaison Directorate obtains others through bargains with princes and merchants.

Sorcery and Lookshy

Lookshyan sorcerers play a prominent role in the Seventh Legion. Battle sorcerers deployed alongside field forces reinforce military stratagems through occult tactics — manipulating weather ahead of a pitched battle, ambushing enemies with spells that scythe through entire battalions, or summoning whirlwinds to carry elite Dragon-Blooded soldiers to strategically vital locations. Sorcerer-engineers maintain and master the intricacies of the Legion's arsenal of

legendary First Age wonders. The Immaculate Faith's elite sorcerer-exorcists subdue foreign gods, bind demons, and lead the Wyld Hunt against terrifying Anathema that threaten the Legion's regional hegemony.

Though much of the Legion's sorcery is devoted to warfare and maintaining its arsenal, the city of Lookshy benefits as well. Infallible Messengers convey crucial correspondence for the gentes, General Staff, and Shogunate Bureaucracy. The sacred Spring of Danaa'd's Joy is warmed by the salubrious flame of a fire elemental sealed away centuries ago by a sorcerer-exorcist. Wooden posts strung with bells and carved with luminous symbols repel birds and vermin from the fields of gentry wealthy enough to retain a sorcerer's service.

Valkhawsen Academy

Lookshy's premier academy of sorcery and artifice occupies more of a fortified compound than a traditional campus. Surrounded by high outer walls, Valkhawsen is dominated by several heavy stone buildings, sturdy enough that even a massive explosion is unlikely to affect the surrounding city.

Students study a foundational curriculum of occult theory, engineering, philosophy, alchemy, and artifice. Those with the potential to initiate into sorcery pursue advanced courses of deep introspection, breaking down their egos and attaining true self-understanding through meditation — whether emptying the mind via ritualized tea ceremonies, memorizing volumes of poetry, immersing themselves in games of complex strategy, and even inhaling psychedelic fumes from a tectonic fault deep beneath Valkhawsen.

Not all who graduate from the academy become sorcerers; many acclaimed artificers, physicians, sohei, architects, and artists hail from its esteemed halls. Conversely, many Lookshyan sorcerers study at lesser academies or find some other path to power. But Valkhawsen sorcerers are renowned throughout the River Province for their uncanny power and understanding of Creation's mysteries.

The Valkhawsen Way

While Valkhawsen doesn't proscribe any form of sorcerous understanding, its sorcerous curriculum is designed to guide students along a path of meditation, ritual, and communion with Creation's Essence through dissolution of the self.

Shaping Rituals

- **Empty-Mind Enlightenment:** Once per day, the sorcerer may meditate or engage in a mind-clearing ritual, rolling (Intelligence + appropriate Ability) and banking sorcerous motes equal to her successes. Traditional meditation uses Integrity; tea ceremonies use Socialize; reciting poetry or performing ritual dances uses Performance; playing out complex Gateway scenarios uses War; and so on. These sorcerous motes last until the story ends or she uses this shaping ritual again.
- **Glimpse the Void:** Inhaling subterranean vapors, smoke from burning oleander, or other mind-altering fumes, the sorcerer glimpses truths beyond mortal ken. Once per story, she can enter such an ecstatic trance and describe the vision she receives, rolling (Essence + Willpower) and banking sorcerous motes equal to her successes, which last until the story ends. She can subsequently declare that her vision symbolized the events of the current scene as part of a stunt,

gaining (Essence x [stunt+1]) sorcerous motes for that scene. She can only make such a declaration once per story, and must base it on her most recent vision.

- **Talismanic Focus:** The sorcerer can prepare an ofuda, cloth-doll talisman, engraved curse tablet, or similar ritual implement with a difficulty 2 (Intelligence + [appropriate Craft or Linguistics]) roll; a difficulty 4 roll provides effectively as many talismans as the sorcerer requires. Once per scene, the sorcerer may incorporate a talisman into a Shape Sorcery roll, destroying it, to accrue an additional (higher of Essence or 3) sorcerous motes. Talismans can only be used by the sorcerer who created them, and only remain potent for a week.

Other Benefits

Ritual Master (•••): Once per week, the sorcerer can add (Occult) Charm dice on a roll to successfully perform a complex religious or social ritual, a roll based on strategy — including Strategic Maneuver rolls and rolls to play Gateway or other games of strategy — or a roll based on meditation, often made as part of a Charm.

Enlightened Contemplation (••••): Once per day, after spending an hour meditating, performing a tea ceremony or other ritual, playing strategy games, or a similar practice of this initiation, the sorcerer rolls (Intelligence + appropriate Ability) at difficulty 3. Success completely restores her Essence pools, and adds (Ability) to the number of motes she recovers each hour for the rest of the day.

Sorcerer-Exorcists

Sorcerer-exorcists are both devout sohei of the Immaculate Faith and master sorcerers, renowned for piety, devotion, and prowess much like grandmasters of Immaculate martial arts. Few attain this elite rank; they must complete the academic and spiritual training necessary to be recognized as a sohei, initiate into sorcery, and lastly, complete an apprenticeship under a veteran sorcerer-exorcist.

The position conveys few temporal benefits, but many duties. Sorcerer-exorcists are expected to serve as a constant example of spiritual purity for both sohei and the laity alike; to lead lives of austerity, forgoing the comforts sorcery offers and using their power only for selfless service; and, if they must, to lay down their lives to ensure that the Immaculate Faith triumphs over rogue gods, malign spirits, and the Anathema. There's one notable perk of the position, however: the Lookshyan law forbidding the summoning of demons and elementals doesn't apply to sorcerer-exorcists.

Not all sorcerer-exorcists live up to these ideals — they're as capable of self-interest, hypocrisy, cruelty, and other flaws as anyone else, and a bound retinue of demons and elementals can satisfy base and inhumane desires much more expediently than any mortal cronies. Without any formal religious institution behind the Immaculate Faith, such wayward sorcerer-exorcists answer only to prominent devotees' social censure and the self-policing efforts of other sorcerer-exorcists.

War Games

Stories set in the Seventh Legion showcase the glory and horror of war — the heart-pounding excitement of pitched battles, bloody victories, or ignoble defeat and desperate retreat. Warfare provides clear objectives and defined enemies. Lookshy's role as defender of the Scavenger Lands grants Storytellers an easy excuse to use a variety of foes, from Wyld mutant hordes, Fair

Folk incursions, fantastical monstrosities, and foreign Exalted to mortal nations vying for power and resources.

Remember that battle is visceral. Its details are harrowing and compelling — screaming charges; groaning casualties stinking of blood, sweat, and waste; medics fighting carnage and infection; monks blessing the living and cremating the dead; the same bland stew served for weeks on end; terrifying ambushes; the heartbreak of cowardice.

At the other extreme, Lookshy's gentes both oppose supernatural adversaries and wield occult might themselves. The Dragon-Blooded leave no battlefield untouched by their power. Forest fires ignite, the earth shatters, poisonous brambles impale enemy troops, and howling gales whip away screams amid floods and storms.

Between battles, units must scout, forage, manage logistics, restock redoubts, navigate Legion politics, and mediate between opposing parties who turn to the Legion for adjudication. Officers also work to recruit outcastes to their gens and to Lookshy's cause.

Field forces rarely go to war at full strength. The Scavenger Lands' sheer size demands deployment frugality. Often this leaves troops caught outnumbered and ill-equipped for unforeseen circumstances until reinforcements arrive. Initiative, infiltration, diplomacy, exploration, and individual heroics are expected of troops in these situations. Characters separated from Legion supply lines and support make for more personal stories, providing players with the tension of individual danger.

The Dragon-Blooded are equally potent in intrigue and politics. Lookshy's gentes vie for status, wealth, and power with as much zeal as any of the Realm's Great Houses. The gentes work to place their own scions in influential positions. Legionaries steal glory from rival families' commanders and intercept sealed orders for secret missions. Merchants cheat rival gentes and even Lookshy itself when they can get away with it, their revenues paying for new heirloom artifacts, private soldiers, and spies.

Yes, Commander

The Storyteller and players should discuss how to handle situations where one player character outranks another and may give orders, demand obedience, and punish disobedience. Such stories work well when everyone's on board with how player character officers choose commands and punish transgressions. While one *character* may make the final decision, all *players* might discuss the matter and come to an agreement as to what the ranking character's orders should be.

The Wyld Hunt

Wyld Hunts are part of the Legion's mandate to protect the River Province, just like its other military operations. Given the terrifying power of the Anathema, such missions accept only volunteers. Traditionally there's been no shortage of these, as joining the Wyld Hunt offers religious fulfillment, public glory, and opportunities for advancement within the Seventh Legion. In practice, certain Dragon-Blooded — Lookshyan and outcaste alike — have found themselves “volunteered” to join a Wyld Hunt against an Anathema nearby.

By longstanding arrangement, Realm Dragon-Blooded can freely enter the Scavenger Lands to accompany Lookshyan Wyld Hunts, so long as they leave their soldiers at the border. Dedicated

shikari on both sides have struck up friendships in this way over decades of shared hunts. But as the Realm falls into disarray, fewer Dynasts devote themselves to such efforts. This makes it more difficult to pin down Anathema crossing between the River Province and adjoining satrapies. Such delays make targets more powerful, placing shikari in greater danger.

Stories involving the Wyld Hunt showcase the terrible might of even nascent Anathema, along with the moral quandaries faced by the Hunt. Do the characters slaughter a village to slay the Solar Exalted child the villagers will die to protect? Or do they stay their hands, allowing the village to harbor the child until the Solar becomes unstoppable? These stories emphasize difficult choices that might conflict with characters' morals or strain their relationships. Yet they can equally demonstrate the Legion's heroism in facing down some of Creation's most powerful beings, and the glory that comes with such deeds.

Behind the Lines

Not all Seventh Legion need focus on military maneuvers. Lookshy's merchants and traders negotiate for vital supplies and report on the status of foreign nations and trade routes between them. Rumors they hear — and spread! — can also benefit the Legion.

Scavenger teams search for and explore caches of forgotten artifacts. Even the traps and wards surrounding such places are valuable. Access to some sites requires skilled diplomacy or larcenous aptitudes. Sorcerers scour Creation — and sometimes beyond — for means to maintain Lookshy's crumbling First Age infrastructure and artifacts, and craft new ones. Itinerant sohei promote the Immaculate Faith throughout the province, dealing with wayward spirits and officiating over festivals and private affairs.

Rangers infiltrate allied and enemy states alike, from the Realm to the Hundred Kingdoms, reporting on intrigues and threats. They spread Legion propaganda and suborn, threaten, or otherwise silence those too vocally opposed. Ranger cells sabotage enemy states and keep lines of communication clear across the Province

The Dragon-Blooded are equally potent in intrigue and politics. Lookshy's gentes vie for status, wealth, and power with as much zeal as the Realm's Great Houses. The gentes work to place their own scions in influential positions. Legionary officers steal glory from rival families' commanders and intercept sealed orders. Merchants cheat rival gentes and even Lookshy itself when they can get away with it, their revenues procuring heirloom artifacts, private soldiers, and spies.

Further Afield

Stories set away from the Seventh Legion open up different character and scenario options for players. Lookshyan merchants, scavengers, sorcerers, and spies roam Creation on the Legion's behalf. Those fleeing justice, like deserters and criminals — and those Lookshy sends after them — also have reason to be among foreigners far from home. Legion mercenaries may be stuck in remote locations on missions they refuse to fail.

If reports of lost lore or vital sorcerous ingredients are deemed credible enough, the Legion will risk expeditions to distant and wondrous lands — even into the deadly Wyld or Underworld. Expeditionary forces require means to send their discoveries back, and to return upon mission completion — which can be an odyssey in itself.

Foreigners

Foreign characters have many potential roles in Seventh Legion games. Some outcastes join a gens to gain Lookshyan citizenship. Happily independent outcastes (and other Exalts, such as Exigents) may work more loosely alongside Lookshyans, whether gathering intelligence in the field or joining a Wyld Hunt. Even Dynasts or Prasadi might appear as emissaries requiring Legion protection.

Outsiders under false pretenses — such as Dynastic spies or hidden Anathema — may also have their place in Seventh Legion games, disguising themselves as outcaste recruits or mortal aides. Such characters must conceal their true loyalties against discovery by Lookshyan peers. It's typically best to discuss such things at the table before play; it's the characters who should feel betrayed, not fellow players.

Smoke and ash choked the air. Screams and shouted orders rang out over the insistent crackle of the spreading savanna fire. Burano Heliu Barucha swung her axe, its wind dispersing the haze in a ring around her. Her scale had been scouting ahead of the Prasadi legion's main body, searching for ambushers in the grasslands. Barucha had to admit she'd found some.

Three enemy soldiers lay dead around her, armored in Volivat's style. Also fallen was Barucha's adviser and translator, a young and inexperienced scholar, now never to grow older. Barucha shook her head. Then she whistled, sharp and piercing, until her remaining soldiers appeared from the smoke to rally around her.

An impressive number of Barucha's troops had survived the initial ambush, but the battle wasn't done. She heard Volivati warriors darting through the haze of the fires they'd set, clearly outnumbering her unit. But she focused her hearing just so, and pointed her axe into the smoke where their commander hid. She issued an invitation, politely using his own ugly language: "Come and face me, jackal of dubious parentage, if you fear no gods."

A champion of Volivat strode into view, towering over his fellows. He wore profane tattoos, heavy iron armor, and cruel spiked gauntlets. "Ah-ha. I expected to catch a few mortals, not a well-spoken Dragon. Yet she confuses my pedigree for her own. I know well my parents, all ten of them."

Barucha grimaced in disgust and dismay. She'd hoped to frighten off a mortal commander and spare her soldiers a longer fight, but she ought to have expected one of the Yennin. She couldn't fathom their bizarre parentage, but their unnatural strength was real enough. Killing the perverse champion might not be easy.

But the dead scholar at her feet urged vengeance. Barucha sighed, carefully stepped over him, and gestured to her scale. They began quietly singing a familiar hymn in praise of her warrior-courage and strength.

The hymn helped focus Barucha's spirit, and she summoned a grin that would set any foe's blood boiling. "Are you Yennin all related?" she asked. "Because if so, I've killed two of your cousins. If I described them, perhaps you could tell me their names."

The Yennin warrior raised his chin and glowered down at her. "Perhaps we are. And perhaps there are five of us for each Dragon. Perhaps there are ten, each of us carrying the strengths of ten heroes!"

Barucha sank into a ready stance, axe poised across one shoulder, off-hand forward. Her jade-reinforced leather coat creaked. "I only see one of you here."

Volivat's champion growled and sprinted forward with shocking speed. By the time Barucha's axe left her shoulder, the Yennin had reached her and slammed a great gauntlet into her gut. The blow knocked the breath from Barucha, and she had no time to block his other gauntlet's follow-up strike across her face.

Essence suffused Barucha's skin at the point of impact, and the yennin's gauntlet rang like a bell striking stone, failing to move her even an inch. His eyes widened in surprise, and Barucha's anima flared, a pulse of seismic force flinging him back several yards.

As the Yennin found his footing, Barucha's soldiers found their voice. Their hymn rose, and the prayer's uplifting power filled Barucha's chest. She took a centering breath and spoke to her enemy: "You carry the strengths of ten heroes. I carry the faith of an empire. Hardly a contest."

Barucha rushed forward, axe descending like a meteor.

Chapter Three

Prasad

Clan Burano

Stone That Towers Towards the Sky

Stable but not stubborn, strong but not brittle, Clan Burano doesn't see itself as Prasad's foundation. Foundations stand fixed, immobile, unable to adapt to change. Rather, Burano raises up airy towers of society and law, forever rebuilding and reshaping, anchored in solid ground but always aspiring to new heights. The clan builds on Prasad's indigenous ways and the conquering Dynasts' disruptive traditions, aiming to harmonize and refine them into an ever more powerful and resilient whole.

Renowned for dedication and discipline, Buranos often serve Prasad and their clan as generals, bureaucrats, scholars, teachers, financiers, and artisans. Though disinclined to wanderlust, many journey abroad in pursuit of their duties and to master foreign ways, the better to help Prasad confront the challenges of a changing world.

Prasadi Lexicon

caste: The four broad social strata that make up Prasadi society. At the bottom, the Corporal Caste deals with menial and unclean labor. Above them, the Caravaner Caste deal in commerce, travel, and warfare, while the Sage Caste are intellectuals, advisors, bureaucrats, and mortal children of the Dragon Clans. The Dragon Caste encompasses Prasad's social elite — the Dragon-Blooded members of Clans Burano, Ophris, and Akatha.

clan: An extended Prasadi familial unit.

guru: A religious leader of *the Pure Way*.

jati: An ethnicity within the Prasadi empire. Jatis can overlap both *caste* and *clan*.

karta: The matriarch of one of Prasad's reigning Dragon Clans.

Pure Way, the: Prasad's state religion, a syncretic faith combining elements of the Immaculate Philosophy and traditional Kamthahari religion.

rani-satrap (masculine raja-satrap): The Prasadi empire's temporal leader.

tanist: The *rani-satrap*'s heir. The tanist is always elected from the Dragon Clan opposite the *rani-satrap*'s *clan*.

Social Standing

Burano scions enjoy a formidable reputation for being serious, disciplined, tenacious, patient, erudite, and wise. Their officers' unshakable drive inspires confidence among soldiers and fear

in foes; few dare bribe their seemingly incorruptible bureaucrats. Burano savants are a byword for perfect memory.

On the other hand, Clan Burano's discipline is often seen as stubbornness, and its orthodoxy as conservatism. While this is true more often than the clan might like, many remain deeply committed to critically examining and refining Prasad's traditions.

Ganden-Pa

When disputes arise, Burano scions engage in a ritualized debate originally practiced by local philosophers, called the ganden-pa. A panel of arbiters, chosen by lottery from interested individuals, hears arguments both for and against the tradition under review. When each side has exhausted its argument, the debaters exchange positions, and the arguments begin anew. While only experienced Buranos may argue in a ganden-pa, younger Buranos engage in mock debates prior to the ganden-pa and assist the debaters in preparing their arguments.

Growing Up in Clan Burano

Burano children face a highly structured upbringing, which can be stifling or liberating. Early tutelage focuses on self-discipline, etiquette, basic scholarship, and physical fitness, all in accordance with the clan's most recent educational consensus. This includes determining and fostering the child's useful talents, but doesn't consider their desires.

Clan Burano's private academies all share a monolithic, comprehensive core curriculum determined and occasionally revised through ganden-pa. Burano scions frequently face rigorous aptitude tests to determine how best they might serve and strengthen Prasadi society, with the expectation that they will pursue the path advised by their elders. Those who deviate from their elders' expectations risk a lifelong black mark on their names, but a scion who can justify her rebellion with a well-made argument citing the clan's traditions might gain more acclaim than if she'd simply followed her preordained path.

Clan Leadership

The clan is overseen and managed by a karta, in whom ultimate authority is vested. This is an elected official drawn from a candidate pool of the eldest and most experienced Burano Dragon-Blooded. Elections are held within the clan every twenty-five years, and kartas are expected to campaign for at least a second term before retirement.

Since rani-satrap Burano Rohavin's election, her expansionistic policies have been a wedge within the clan. While her agenda enjoyed majority support among her clan when she was elected as tanist, the margin was never overwhelming, and some supporters have reconsidered their views. Heated arguments have broken out everywhere from academy classrooms to the White Jade Table, and the ganden-pa has been held more often since Rohavin's ascension to rani-satrap than in many decades.

The White Jade Table

To assist her in leading the clan, the karta appoints a council of elders — the White Jade Table — typically drawn from prominent politicians, experienced bureaucrats, Pure monks, and legion veterans — to whom she delegates authority. Each Table member has a formal title that carries traditional privileges and responsibilities. For example, the Treasure-House Panjandrum is the

karta's financial minister, given wide latitude to set economic policy for the clan. The Ivory Spear Raja, commanding the Burano legions, holds the much-coveted power of appointing military officers. The Most Excellent Peacock is entrusted with arranging the clan's largest galas and negotiating Burano scions' marriages.

The Table meets twice a month at the karta's residence — the Spire of Perfect Reason, an austere granite edifice on a hill outside Kamthahar. Those unable to attend send representatives in their stead, offering opportunities for younger Buranos to demonstrate their political acumen. Councilors try to attend personally on the first meeting of a cycle and during crises, but otherwise, stand-ins constitute the majority of attendees. Steeped in formality, these meetings occupy much of the day, followed by dinner and dispersal into small groups for socializing and informal political discussion.

Since the election of the current rani-satrap, Burano Rohavin, her expansionistic policies have been a wedge within the clan. While her agenda enjoyed majority support among her clan when she was elected as tanist, the margin was never overwhelming, and some supporters have reconsidered their views. Heated arguments have broken out everywhere from academy classrooms to the White Jade Table, and the garden-pa has been held more often since Rohavin's ascension to rani-satrap than in many decades.

Economics

Throughout Prasad, Burano dominates the construction, metallurgical, mining and processing, and fine clothing and textiles industries, amassing immense wealth through a de facto vertical monopoly. Burano contracts with prestigious Caravaner jatis to guard and transport raw materials from mines and quarries to refineries and processing plants, and to transport the finished goods to construction sites, wholesale buyers, merchants, and markets in every corner of Prasad.

Burano remains traditionally conservative in investments and enterprises, focusing on tried and true products, techniques, shipping routes, and the like. The clan's merchants and financiers leave risky ventures for others, focusing on obtaining stable holdings during Prasad's conquests, then providing protection and careful oversight. The Table often asks scions to perform surprise inspections of key facilities, where they're authorized to eliminate both internal corruption and external threats such as banditry, wild beasts, or hauntings.

Military

For Clan Burano, military service is a prestigious career well-suited to the family's strengths — discipline, percipience, planning, and timing. Training in specialized academies, scions study formation-based tactics, logistics, strategy, and diplomacy, alongside heavy armor and weapons use, archery, and the like. Scions can expect to serve across numerous ranks throughout their military careers, beginning as commanders operating in the field with the potential to reach the highest ranks based on their merit. The clan emphasizes traditionalism in military doctrine, focusing on time-tested methodology while remaining flexible enough to avoid predictability.

Burano military doctrine once leaned heavily on *The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier*, but has evolved over time, adjusting to the circumstances of Dreaming Sea warfare. Unlike Ophris' legions, the four Burano house legions all follow the same structure and adhere to the same standards. Each comprises a range of heterogeneous units in order to function effectively in any theater of operations, with skirmishers, infantry, and cavalry accompanied by

specialist units ranging from sappers to mountaineers to war elephants. Though less numerous than the rani-satrap's Prasadi legions, they're largely considered to be of similar quality.

Enemies and Allies

Burano and Ophris remain tightly intertwined, their power and influence entangled within all levels of Prasadi government, economics, society, and culture. Collegiality between the eldest members of both clans helps maintain their longstanding alliance, as do their mutual entanglement with high-caste jatis and their shared drive toward expansion and conquest. Rivalries largely manifest at the level of individuals, families, and clan-dominated businesses and ministries.

~~[EM4]~~ The Guild draws a cautious response from Burano commercial interests, who enjoy the increased stability of working with Guild businesses but exercises caution due to the syndicate's economic and political influence. As such, Burano works to limit the Guild's access to Prasad's markets, with Dragon Clan merchants acting as brokers and distributors.

Major Holdings

The city of **Radiant Pearl**, upriver from Kamthahar in the fertile Candlefire River valley, was constructed from the ground up a century ago to exemplify Burano principles of social order. The Dragon Caste's palaces loom at the city's heart, encircled by tall, sleek ministerial buildings, Immaculate temples, and the elegant walled manors of the Sage Caste. Beyond that, rows of identical tenements for the Caravaner Caste rise among tree-lined avenues, sunlight gleaming from pale stone facades and illuminating interior courtyard gardens. At the city's periphery, a labyrinth of picturesque ivied streets holds the homes and businesses of the Corporal Caste. The street layout cunningly guides foot traffic, bringing each clan and jati together while keeping different castes apart.

Scions of Note

Rani-satrap **Burano Maharani Rohavin** is no longer a young woman, but the years she once thought she'd enjoy discussing the future of the empire with her heir have become painful and burdensome. Rohavin questions the motives of everyone, even her oldest and most-trusted advisors. Ophris nips at her heels, demanding a new heir be elected, and Burano reminds her that traditions must be followed, but Rohavin is not ready to cave to their demands. Until proof of her heir's demise is returned to her, Rohavin forges ahead undaunted with their shared vision for the future of Prasad, and places her own protection at the highest priority for the stability of the throne.

Karta **Burano Namika Endi** has led her clan for nearly a century. She expected her fourth election, nearly twenty years ago, to be her last, but with the current political instability in Kamthahar, she's already beginning her campaign for an unprecedented fifth term. A gregarious and thoughtful woman by nature, Endi feels certain that she is the clan's best option to lead them through the storms on the horizon.

Guru **Burano Maharani Marisha** plays a vital role in the Pure Way's Monastery of the Red Butterfly, where Anathema captured in Wyld Hunts are imprisoned. Having debated theology and ethics with Fair Folk, ghosts, and stranger things, Marisha's cultivated a reputation as an eccentric whose open-mindedness is counterbalanced only by his unwavering piety. On the rare occasions he leaves the Monastery to argue in a ganden-pa, Burano scions from across the

empire go to great lengths to ensure that they and their children can be in attendance. Marisha's recently taken up mentorship of **Lis of the Many Skins**, a newly-Exalted Lunar Anathema captured in a recent Wyld Hunt, in hopes of converting her to the Pure Way. Other Anathema in his care now plot to turn his distraction to their advantage.

Burano Raju Ananda appreciates the consideration both the rani-satrap and the Burano karta extended to her when she was promoted to her current position, but sometimes she wishes the elders had decided on a less bureaucratic path for her life. While nominally in charge of an entire ministry meant to oversee the finances of the empire, in practice Ananda is overworked, understaffed, and expected to stretch every obol to its breaking point. Expanding an empire is expensive, and Ananda struggles with making ends meet. Lenders from the Guild and Houses Ragara and Nellens circle her patiently, waiting for the moment she turns to their deep coffers, and places Prasad in their debt.

Burano Maharan Hassana, the Avalanche has never swayed from the path decreed by the elders at her childhood testing, and she has enjoyed a subsequently glorious career swiftly rising through the ranks of the clan's legions, which she now leads as the Ivory Spear Raja. Her reputation alone has often been enough to end battles before they could begin, sitting proud and tall astride **Tarresh**, her God-Blooded elephant familiar — and the legendary story of how their bond came to be has entertained generations of Prasadi villagers at feasts and festivals. She enthusiastically backs Rohavin's expansionist agenda, but bristles at the move toward the Dreaming Sea; Burano has no naval tradition, and she fears war with Ysyrr will slow Prasad's inland expansion.

Burano Namika Kesselek's aptitude tests evinced his promising potential as a mediator, and his elders tried to strongarm him onto that path. But driven by a fiery and contrarian temperament, he broke away from his elders' plans, using his comprehensive education in rhetoric and oratory to convincingly make his case. Now, he wanders Prasad as an itinerant apologist, taking up the cause of unpopular traditions and indefensible clientele across the empire. No matter the outcome — and loss is a frequent occurrence — Kesselek leaves towns and villages more enlightened and confident of their dearest traditions than they were upon his arrival.

Clan Ophris

Fire That Renews the Forest

Ophrises are stereotyped as passionate, individualistic, worldly, intense, and sensual. Their warriors are renowned for the boisterous camaraderie they inspire in their comrades, and storied for making friends out of enemies; their courtiers stir passions and seduce the stoniest hearts. But their reputation isn't all positive —they're also seen as capricious, mercurial, and easily bored, leaving trails of broken hearts and making enemies out of friends.

Renowned for charisma and sense of adventure, many Ophrises serve Prasad as politicians and ambassadors, or their clan as wandering heroes, explorers, ship captains, and mystics. These well-traveled scions return home bearing foreign ideas and aesthetics that are pursued with fervor at Ophris galas and galleries.

Social Standing

House Ophris is the flower of Prasad's empire, attracting and impressing visitors with grace and wit. Ophrises make excellent artists and better lovers, even if they do leave and forget lovers

eventually. They strike up friendships — though not always lasting — with those outside the clan who're given to a similar pursuit of experiences and beauty, while provoking hostility from those resenting their frivolous ways. When Prasad deigns to make diplomatic overtures in pursuit of peace or trade, Ophris lead the way.

Growing Up in Clan Ophris

Households manage their affairs and raise children largely independently. Children pursue whichever training they and their parents favor, whether that's attending Ophris schools, occasional Burano academies, home schooling, or traveling to foreign institutions — even on the distant Blessed Isle.

This independence is counterbalanced by older Ophrises meddling in their descendants' affairs — not to mention their siblings', cousins', and Hearthmates' descendants — and gossiping about those affairs with their peers. Known collectively as the byangomi (singular: byangoma), these elders form a mutual aid network, performing favors that are held in reserve against some dire moment of familial need.

The byangomi regard Clan Ophris, and their own jati specifically, as a garden to tend. The clan as a whole requires a plan where everything has its place, to create strength and harmony. Yet they know every individual Ophris has her own needs — one scion must be carefully nurtured and placed in the light, whilst another thrives under benign neglect and darkness. (Clan Burano, by this metaphor, is the sturdy trellis upon which Ophris grows tall; Burano fathers and husbands humanize the clan for Ophris.)

A young Ophris can win great freedom by persuading the byangomi that she isn't an errant weed in need of trimming, but rather a new bloom requiring a different care regimen. She'll do well to cater her appeals to a byangoma aunt or uncle who favors her personally, and letting them persuade the eldest byangomi in her stead.

Clan Leadership

As with Clan Burano, the Ophris karta — elected by the clan's adult members from among the byangoma for a nine-year term — holds ultimate authority within the clan. The karta may theoretically serve unlimited terms, but given the Ophrises' predilection for novelty, most are only intermittently elected. Only the first karta, who gained legendary stature by negotiating a favorable bargain with the Scarlet Empress, served until her death.

The Alkanet Pavilion

A thirty-member council called **the Alkanet Pavilion** elects and advises the Ophris karta. It's Clan Ophris in microcosm: sprawling talents pulled in countless different directions and prone to feuding, but ultimately one family against the interests of Burano, the lesser castes, and foreign powers.

Every year, each of the clan's dozen-odd jati elects one or more of its members, largely drawn from its byangomi, as representatives to the Pavilion. How many representatives any given jati sends is governed by a complex matrix of size and status, as well as fierce negotiations between byangomi.

The Pavilion meets for a full day monthly. The first hours are reserved for petitions, be it two hotheaded young Ophrises asking permission to duel to the death (almost never granted; the

Pavilion finds this wasteful) or a scion seeking financial backing for a mercantile enterprise. While in theory anyone may address the Pavilion unannounced, councilors casually dismiss any who didn't have a byangoma pave the way, deeming this arrogant and naive.

The daylong meeting is opened and interspersed with performances by young Ophrises reading their own poetry, engaging in battle dances, or otherwise displaying their talents. This is a great honor, affording gifted performers a chance to informally meet with councilors afterwards. Hosting the Pavilion is likewise a great honor.

While the council owns the physical Alkanet Pavilion — a white stone building wreathed in poisonous flowers near Kamthahar's center — they meet outside in especially pleasant weather, or in another city if military and economic matters warrant a personal visit. This is both for variety's sake and so scions can showcase organizational skills.

Aside from monthly meetings, councilors meet weekly in smaller groups, called symposiums, dedicated to specific goals. These groups attract and lose members based on what skills and resources the project needs in the moment, and many councilors assist more than one group. For instance, Ophris Jhata and his symposium dedicate themselves to stymieing diplomatic efforts between Ysyr and Volivat to prevent them from forming an alliance that would threaten Prasad's interests, and seek a team of saboteurs to carry out their plans. Meanwhile, Ophris Ahaju is preparing a sailing expedition into the Wyld, and requires a crew.

Social Standing

House Ophris is the flower of the Prasad empire, attracting and impressing visitors with grace and wit. Ophrises make excellent artists and better lovers, even if they do leave and forget lovers eventually. They strike up friendships, though not always lasting, with those outside the clan who're given to a similar pursuit of experiences and beauty, while provoking hostility from those resenting their frivolous ways. When Prasad deigns to make diplomatic overtures in pursuit of peace or trade, Ophrises lead the way.

Economics

An Ophris' heart yearns for adventure and beauty — talents that turn to profit in Prasad. Ophris artists, musicians, poets, dancers, and artisans are renowned across the Dreaming Sea, and sometimes even as far as the Blessed Isle.

Ophris' yearning for beauty sees them breed the most magnificent beasts, of which the delicate silver peafowl and ferocious black tiger fetch the highest price. Few Prasad's outside Clans Burano and Akatha can afford these creatures, but they find eager buyers in other Southeastern kingdoms. Occasionally Ophris gifts one to a visiting Dynast, both as a bribe and a token of goodwill.

Sea captains of Clan Ophris track the byzantine migration of the Dreaming Sea's legendary nacre whales. Ophris ships drag vast sheets of silk in the water of the Dreaming Sea to catch the fabled oils the whales leave in their wake. Auctions for these occult oils have steep starting bids.

Ophris sorcerers learn songs that calm the land, and shift fortunes so favorable roads present themselves. Some dark-hearted sorcerers weave songs of ill fortune in their wake instead, throwing off pursuers and cursing them to wander lost. Clan Ophris keeps both happy and well-paid, making their people the best — and most expensive — to hire on any travels in Prasad.

Many scions turn their wanderlust toward scavenging wondrous treasures from the lands around the Dreaming Sea. All Ophris scavengers must give the karta right of first offer on all finds, allowing her to select and distribute the most powerful items among favored clan members. The karta keeps a list of their value, and upon retirement may sell them to the current bearers if they impressed her.

For all that Ophris scions find themselves drawn toward exotic lines of business, the clan itself invests in more prosaic enterprises — mining, agriculture, craftsmanship, and the like — via Sage Caste and Caravaner Caste intermediaries. But they approach such businesses with the clan's usual flair for innovation. Ophris farms employ unusual fertilizers; mines establish strange pacts with earth elementals; textile workshops experiment with new dyes and spinning processes for textiles; and the like.

Military

Clan Ophris isn't as militaristic as its Burano cousin, but remains formidable. Its military doctrine, the Way of Ten Thousand Sighs, focuses on extemporaneous planning, situational awareness, attrition, stealth, and small-unit tactics. An Ophris officer studies the military traditions of many peoples, and is expected to synthesize these to apply their strengths to the current situation. Those who successfully master this regime are among the Southeast's finest generals. Those who fail find their careers plateaued, stuck serving more sharp-witted — or luckier — peers.

Ophris legionnaires favor light, graceful weapons, and make an art of warfare. Archers inscribe poems onto their arrow, prizing beautiful verse and elegant calligraphy as much as precise aim. Elegant martial arts such as Dreaming Pearl Courtesan style are favored by both Dragon-Blooded officers and mortal soldiers. Ophris cavalry rides war elephants into battle, mercilessly trampling lesser opponents while clan sorcerers unleash terrible spells on opponents worthy of such curses.

Ophris military doctrine makes extensive use of units deemed auxiliaries by the Realm. Elephant cavalry, firedust bombardiers, and adaptable skirmishers are common in Prasad's varied-yet-regimented military camps. The clan maintains four legions, each adapted to a different environment. The Sand Legion operates west of the Summer Mountains, its camel-mounted troops and light infantry trained for desert and mountain maneuvers. The Wind Legion's heavy cavalry duel with foreign nomads in the steppes south of Prasad. The Forest Legion's light infantry and ranger units patrol the jungles to the north. Lastly, the Divine Legion's light and heavy infantry, trained for urban warfare, guard Prasad's borders and support other forces.

Ophris also maintains a private navy. Historically riverine, it's enthusiastically constructing blue-water craft based out of Prasad's newly acquired Dreaming Sea ports.

Enemies and Allies

Forestalling the succession crisis that would come if Burano Rohavin died without an heir has leaped to the forefront of Ophris' varied political agenda. The Clan spends any and all clout it has with Burano to back their motion forcing Rohavin to elect a new tanist. They're also spending considerable resources on scouring the Dreaming Sea to find their lost tanist.

Meanwhile, Prasad's expansionist push continues, forcing Ophris to do all this amid quickly boiling tension with Champoor, and the nascent Ysyr and Volivat alliance. A more cautious clan

might counsel holding off and seeking peace with the other Dreaming Sea powers to allow time to solve its internal problems, but that is not Ophris' way.

Major Holdings

Askai is the name of both Ophris' greatest jade mine and the thriving mining town that abuts it. The mine yields less jade every year, and Ophris fears it'll soon be exhausted. Overseer Ophris Dalavi seeks Dragon-Blooded experts to direct the search for new veins in the Askai Mine. The work must be secret, lest it reveal the clan's vulnerability to its rivals and weaken its prestige. Success would win the Pavilion's enduring good will and a princely fortune from a cut of the profits. Askai Town, with teahouse, gambling hall, and seraglio, offers enough diversions for a pleasant stay.

Scions of Note

Ophris Namika Madhava, an elder politician and eccentric mystic from the prestigious Namika jati, has been karta for 14 years. A gifted mediator and negotiator, she focuses on maintaining the clan's wealth, prestige, and internal harmony, and is otherwise content to pursue philosophy and scholarship. But now she's agitating for a bold new agenda beyond anything she's sought before. She presses Burano Rohavin hard to allow the election of a new heir, appealing to their shared dream of a Greater Prasad Empire which requires the Twin Dragons to be at full strength. Madhava proposes Prasad conquer the length of the Dreaming Sea as Imperial legions stand to abandon the threshold, and hopes to become a legend rivaling even the first karta.

Ophris Katu Aarav joined the Pure Way as a monk shortly after his return to Kamthahar from study at the Blessed Isle's Cloister of Wisdom. Gregarious, charismatic, and highly knowledgeable about the Immaculate Philosophy, he enjoys engaging visiting Immaculates in theological debates. Aarav's sharp tongue is no less contentious with his fellow Pure Way monks, who're quickly souring on him. As Aarav continues to antagonize his brethren, some posit that his Realm education taints his loyalty to the Pure Way and Prasad as a whole.

Ophris Raju Vivaan is a famous rogue, who turned a crooked spine — a congenital disability — into a cover as Ysyri servant. She's provided the Alkanet Pavilion with information on Ysyr, its leading sorcerers, and its overtures to Volivat. Vivaan also fostered an underground insurgent cell among Ysyr slaves, and plans to direct them against select targets should Prasad ever go to war with Ysyr. But tales of her exploits, albeit under an alias, reached the sorcerers' ears, and they now search for her. Vivaan is committed to see her plans through, both out of loyalty to Prasad and — if she lives long enough — a wish to earn entry Alkanet Pavilion.

Retired sea captain **Ophris Tuchari Reyansh** is a hero for her crucial role in capturing the seaport of Madara, establishing a Prasadi foothold on the Dreaming Sea. Now retired, she's joined the byangomi and been elected to the Alkanet Pavilion. She trades on her acclaim to sway other councilors to her agenda of aggressive military expansion. She's cousin to Ophris Padhi, but gave up all hope for their return. The best way to honor the lost tanist, Reyansh insists, is by conquering the whole of the Dreaming Sea. A winged squirrel — taken as personal tribute during Reyansh's conquest of Madara — sits on her shoulder, screeching and snapping its jaws at all who come too close.

An exceptional physician, **Ophris Lasarat Shauryam** scavenges the Dreaming Sea for exotic medicinal herbs. Shauryam considers herself plagued by her jati's notorious bad fortune; she provides her services for free and gives away any treasures she finds, believing any wealth she

came by would only be lost, or worse. She considers establishing a wilderness hospital for treating the most desperate cases, far from more fortunate people who might catch her bad luck. Shauryam has a wonderful voice, a legacy from her divine parent Void-Singing Nightingale, and her songs soothe even the most grievous pains.

Ophris Qibin Padhi

Lost on a Dreaming Sea voyage, this former Ophris tanist was a renowned general who aggressively advocated formal secession from the Realm and the cessation of tribute. Padhi found their agenda countered by karta Ophris Madhava, who preferred not to add another enemy and instead focus on nearby targets. But with the Realm on the brink on civil war, Padhi's cry for independence would find much more purchase now.

Clan Akatha

Dragons Walking Among Gods

Ensnared within golden temples and heavenly sanctums heavy with fragrant incense, insulated from outside concerns, Clan Akatha dreams of lost glory. The clan traces its ancestry to the earthly divinities of Prasad. Today, both gods and clan are inextricably bound by obligation, privilege, and lineage.

Akatha comprises a complex hierarchy of mortals, God-Blooded, Dragon-Blooded, and gods. Clan members spend their days performing religious ceremonies, appeasing Prasad's gods, and advancing those gods' agendas. Few care to deal with secular matters. Dragon-Blooded take more dynamic and worldly roles in the world outside their divine kin's sanctums; they bridge the gulf between mortals and gods, maintain political ties with the other Dragon Clans, negotiate with and suborn foreign divinities, and battle those who reject their diplomacy.

An Akatha child is born — or adopted — into a life of obligation, veneration, and ritual. Surrounded by prayer and incense, she longs to demonstrate divine heritage or to Exalt, and pities those who do neither. If her godly bloodline manifests, her clan status increases; if she Exalts she joins the gods, and acquires autonomy previously withheld. If neither, she remains to obey the gods until death — and sometimes beyond.

Spirit Courts of Love and War

Two powerful spirit courts stand politically above the rest, dominating Prasad's religious landscape. Both courts' members intermarried among Kamthahar's Exemplar Caste ere the arrival of Burano and Ophris, and their God-Blooded progeny act as champions, priests, agents, and advocates. A god with many God-Blooded descendants, or especially puissant ones, gains prestige within his court. Many Akatha households affiliate themselves with one court or the other, but almost all can trace at least some of their ancestry to both.

The Fecund Court

Beautiful-Eyes, the Southeastern god of fertility, founded the Fecund Court in the wake of the Great Contagion, when loss of contact with the Celestial Bureaucracy left the terrestrial gods in disarray. Assembling scattered gods of fertility, love, family, domesticity, and the like, he

directed them toward gathering and nurturing both human and animal survivors of the disaster, speeding the region's recovery.

Gods of the Fecund Court include:

Beautiful-Eyes, the peacock-headed fertility god, is first among equals and prince of the Court. Proud and serene, charming yet vindictive, he commands — and thrives upon — the loyalty of the court's upper echelons and the wary devotion of its lesser gods and mortal scions.

Edri Shattering-Spears, a thunderstorm-god with eyebrows and beard of bushy clouds framing his bald head and mirthful eyes, is proud father of two Dragon-Blooded daughters, including the current karta.

Subtle Wood, the many-limbed jungle elemental, falls in love with a new hunter every year.

Othriti the Sickly, the cat-faced god of the sick, haunts her children, speaking to them from the tongues of lepers and the plague-ridden.

The Court of the Crimson-Tailed Banner

When the Contagion came, the Fair Folk followed on its heels, riding from the edge of the world to trammel Creation beneath their hooves. The war gods of the Southeast joined forces to oppose this invasion. Many surviving deities assembled under the banner of the charismatic Prikata Fang-Fall, war god of the city Kamthahar, to cleanse the region of plague-born hungry dead. Later they stood against the Realm's invasion, ultimately submitting in exchange for religious concessions from the Immaculates.

Gods of the Court of the Crimson-Tailed Banner include:

Prikata Fang-Fall is a mighty and charismatic warrior-general, admired by the court's war gods for his skill, proud demeanor, and calm in a crisis. He's also prickly and judgmental, and holds a grudge against anyone who tries to manipulate him — most notably Beautiful-Eyes.

Handsome Ashav, foul-mouthed guardian of camp followers, delights in brawling with “cultured” foes, be they fellow divinities, Dragon-Blooded, or Fair Folk princes. Though an incorrigible lout in the Court, his widespread worship — and mastery of Swaying Grass Dance, Dreaming Pearl Courtesan, and other martial arts of lowly origin — makes him difficult to gainsay.

Laughing-Rain Izu, an elemental storm bird, happily serves the court despite her disinterest in politics. When there's no war to be had, she wanders the Summer Mountains, terrifying passersby by starting impromptu, sophomoric philosophical debates. Her God-Blooded children, hatched from eggs and raised on raw meat in her mountaintop nest, have difficulty acculturating to life in Clan Akatha.

Blood-in-the-Furrow, a god of peasant levies, delights in liaisons with Corporal Caste laborers. He's even happier to rub holier-than-thou Akathas' noses in the earthy origins of his occasional outcaste by-blow.

Divine Politics

By and large, the proud divinities of Prasad's spirit courts respect the Exalted only as *nigh*-equals, despite the Pure Way's opinion. Dragon-Blooded Akathas join the courts and gain all due respect and worship upon taking their Second Breath. Even so, many gods subtly snub their

Exalted peers. The Dragon-Blooded rarely brook such treatment for long and are far less subtle in their insults; long-running feuds and grudges are common at the clan's highest echelon.

Other Prasadi gods and spirit courts largely approve of the central role that the Fecund Court, the Court of the Crimson-Tailed Banner, and Clan Akatha played in brokering their relative freedom and prestige under the Pure Way, as opposed to what they might have faced had Burano and Ophris imposed undiluted Immaculate doctrine. But centuries of Akatha and its divine patrons throwing their weight around has resulted in mixed feelings among many.

Gods of neighboring territories often join Prasad's spirit courts to escape worse fates as the Prasadi conquer their domains and worshippers. These foreign divinities negotiate with Clan Akatha for favorable marriages and for places in the Prasadi pantheon. And in times of war, foreign gods sue Akatha for peace — or occasionally find themselves targeted by the clan's assassins.

Social Standing

Clan Akatha's star is falling. The clan's insular nature wins them few friends among the other Dragon Clans, who largely consider it a relic irrelevant to Prasad's military and political ascendance. Among the lesser castes, Akatha remains highly respected as gods, demi-gods, and holy saints. The god-blooded were part of Prasadi culture long before the Realm armies arrived. Then as now, the people petitioned their gods with colorful festivals and prayers, and courted the God-Blooded for favors.

Brightly attired Akatha priests and priestesses preside over religious ceremonies, joyously play matchmaker, and sponsor vivid celebrations encouraging partnerships both sacred and profane. These sumptuous orgiastic devotions invite gods to mingle among mortals. Outsiders attend at great expense to petition the gods personally, with bribes ensuring the right introductions. Exhausted revelers wake later recalling blissful dreams, and owe the clan any God-Blooded offspring produced.

Prasad accords the few Akatha Dragon-Blooded prestige befitting twice-blessed champions. They're leaders, warriors, and gods in their own right. As shamans, oracles, and prophets, they influence the empire's diverse citizens from within incense-wreathed temples shaping Prasadi society for their own — and Akatha's — benefit.

Clan Economics

Clan Akatha sells favors, blessings, and curses to the devout, and worship to the divine. Much wealth streams in from worshippers' tithes — those desperate for children, good weather, or military victory court the clan with coin, treasures, food, and prayers according to their ability. While some of this tithing comes during sanctioned festivals, most is hidden within private worship.

All Akathas are trained in the ways of divine worship, and many charge for their professional services when petitioning gods for intercession. The clan manages orphanages, filled with unwanted, orphaned, or homeless street urchins, providing religious instruction until the child is adopted — at modest cost to adoptive parents — or joins the priesthood upon reaching majority. Rumors claim unscrupulous clan members abduct children to sell in slave auctions or to private buyers. In truth, the clan searches for children with powerful lineages, notable traits, or unusual appearances for adoption within the clan itself.

Clan Military

Akatha's military isn't limited to fanatic cultists, temple guards, and Dragon-Blooded warriors. The clan fields its own generals, strategists, and troops across two legions, each dedicated to one of its ancestral spirit courts.

The Fecund Court's Legion of Watered Fields is largely ceremonial. Most of its ornately armored troops have mediocre training, having been chosen for looks and endurance rather than martial aptitude. Their primary purpose is to guard the legion's specialists — hundreds of priests, exorcists, minor deities, and the like. Rarely fielded, the legion provides occult support against enemy armies that have spiritual backing.

The Crimson-Tailed Banner Legion, however, is a match for any other Prasadi legion. Its soldiers, drawn from various temple devotees and priesthoods, train as assiduously as any other standing army. Its senior officer corps is composed entirely of war gods and Dragon-Blooded Akatha. Prikata Fang-Fall himself remains its general, although an Akatha general sometimes leads it in his stead.

Allies and Enemies

Traditionalist and religious Buranos often admire Akathas' proximity, service, and devotion to Prasad's ancestral pantheons. Proud Buranos see the God-Blooded clan's high standing and links to the gods as an impediment to Burano's perceived role as the keeper of Prasadi tradition. These views are often held simultaneously.

Some Ophrises seek out Akatha's divine sactums and obscure rites in search of exoticism and intrigue, while the occasional Ophris priest or mystic seeks tutelage from the clan or an introduction to a particular god. It's not uncommon for such connections to lead to personal ties.

While clan members compete with outsiders for sacred commodities like dyes, incense, fabrics, and drugs, their most insidious enemies come from within. Jealous gods, including the Dragon-Blooded, feud over incorrect worship, petulant slights, and long-standing grudges, paying scant attention to the detriment to the clan.

The clan's largest allies spring from the common folk. Faithful congregations willingly assist the divine clan, heedless of privations. Few clan members recognize the power of this large-scale support.

Many foreign spirit courts resent Akatha and its divine patrons. Among the most troublesome of these is the **Court of the Lost**, whose misfit gods of hermits, vagabonds, exiles, outlaws, and other rogues now accept all minor divinities who seek a home. Gods of Prasad's conquests have been joining the Court of the Lost, swaying the court as a whole against Prasad and Clan Akatha. The court even has a handful of Exalted agents, such as the Lookshyan renegade Amilar Selia, capable of standing against Akatha scions on equal terms.

Akatha Specialties

Akatha Dragon-Blooded gain two specialties from among Occult, Performance, or Socialize during character creation (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 137).

Sanctums

Clan Akatha dwells among the divine. Openly, they dwell within the court's temples and manses, taking petitions and offerings as well as performing the necessary holy rituals their gods demand.

Almost every god has her own sanctum where she dwells in luxurious comfort according to her nature. Most are inaccessible to materialized beings, though the clan possesses artifacts, spells, and other magic that permit entry.

Every sanctum is different, and every Akatha family has unique traditions and customs, yet one thing remains the same — the veneration of, and devotion to, their divine ancestors.

Un-Exalted God-Blooded

Un-Exalted Akatha live in service to their families and to their gods, who lavish their divine children with attention, for good and ill. The clan elevates God-Blooded to important positions, binding them within chains of ritual and worship. The gods expect perfection from their favored children. They must be obedient, respectful, and despite the luxury they may never forget they aren't gods. Some turn this discipline into resentment; others grandstand in hubris.

Scions of Note

Karta **Akatha Manik Ebrama** grows weary of her role. Always reliable in her service to her clan and the gods, she devoted her life to those duties — mediating disputes between mortals and gods, battling foreign gods, and evangelizing her divine ancestors to peoples newly conquered by Prasad. But now age creeps up on her, old wound sting, and what does she have to show for it? Her divine husband, the mighty Beautiful-Eyes, cares little for her; her children are thankless; her peers jockey for her position.

Ebrama's once-unshakable calm now cracks daily in furious outbursts at whatever frustration currently plagues her. She's largely withdrawn from her husband's sanctum, dwelling instead in the Second Spring Temple, from which she sends younger Akathas and petty gods as envoys and agents. In more than one recent tirade, she's proposed abdicating without choosing a successor, and leaving to enjoy her last years alone. But no one takes such words seriously from reliable old Ebrama.

Ebrama's younger sister, **Akatha Manik Arama**, treks for months alone, preferring wilderness over her sister's concerns. As a child she denied her family, claiming herself an exiled fae princess. Now she suffers from fevered dreams impelling her search for prodigies around the Dreaming Sea. Arama wantonly expends clan resources in retrieving these wonders. She funds a network of contacts and traders to share rumors and uncover leads for her quixotic quest, and liberally pays for the assistance.

Orchid Harvest devoutly follows the Pure Way to escape her overbearing divine mother. Jade-Tongue — the opulent and devious Dyed Queen, Prasadi goddess of trade and marketplaces — has groomed her daughter for a mercantile life, and views entering the cloister as a broken contract. The Dyed Queen finds ways — cajoling or bargaining — to ensure her wayward offspring takes steps to stop her rivals' plans. Orchid Harvest despairs of escaping her mother's attentions, turning to the Pure Way texts for comfort and guidance. She needs help, and isn't too proud to ask for it, but faces paranoia that everyone she asks is part of her mother's schemes.

Akatha Junam Alearri spies for Clan Ophris, determined to free himself from his parents' control, selling out his family in exchange for favorable marriage into Ophris. He observes his family's antics with silent disdain, feeling shame to be among their number. The Ophris spymasters consider Alearri a useful tool, easily swayed by cheap courtesans and false promises. So far, the information has been of little importance — enough to cause the karta minor embarrassment. Now that his information has been confirmed true, the Ophris spymasters have begun pushing Alearri for more, and asking him to start unsavory rumors about his clan.

New Merit: Divine Heritage (•••••) — Innate

This Merit depicts Exalted descended from gods, demons, ghosts, fae, or other strange creatures who manifest supernatural power from that bloodline. The character's player should work with the Storyteller to define the nature and thematics of the Exalt's divine ancestor. The character receives one Eclipse Charm that fits their divine parent's thematics, and can purchase additional Eclipse Charms at character creation with bonus points, or subsequently with experience points. A character's divine lineage may have other manifestations, which can be represented with Flaws or other Merits.

Life in the Dragon Clans

Centuries of Prasadi assimilation separate the Dragon Clans from their Dynastic peers. Prasadi Dragon-Blooded rely heavily on ritual and law to manage lives complicated by competing loyalties and responsibilities.

Divinity Clothed In Flesh

The Dragon Clans assert that they are physical gods, a belief backed and enforced by Pure Way monks. Though the empire's gods — spirits and Dragon-Blooded alike — claim many of the same rights and privileges that Dynasts do, the perception of divinity fundamentally shifts the Dragon Clans' perceived role in Creation.

Prasadi Dragon-Blooded view spirits as peers, rather than inhuman and otherworldly entities to cow into submission. Members of the Dragon Caste value harmony with their own elemental divinity, and seek vital inspiration in the throes of Essence fever. Even as elders impart the importance of taming one's raging Essence, they rekindle their own elemental passions through competition, battle, and liaisons with spirits and younger Dragon-Blooded.

Prasadi Dragon-Blooded experience strong social pressures to worship within Prasad's own pantheon of gods. However, this pantheon includes every member of the Dragon Clans, so few Dragon-Blooded feel limited in their worship. Instead, they regularly show personal reverence to elders and loved ones, and wield the cult worship they receive as social capital.

While Prasadi Dragon-Blooded face expectations to avoid excessive personal investment in individual mortals, many take care to instill reverence in the mortal masses. Over time, Dragon-Blooded accumulate reputations as patron saints of particular professions and life circumstances, and receive worship from across the empire.

The power and ubiquity of worship grants influential Dragon-Blooded a degree of popular celebrity almost unheard-of elsewhere in the Second Age.

Popular myth states that through worship that suits their natures, Dragon-Blooded saints grow ever greater in those talents for which they're renowned. Unlike spirits, Dragon-Blooded aren't born knowing who they are and what they must be, and the lure of popular worship provides a powerful incentive for members of the Dragon Caste to devote themselves to specialties early in life. Those who stand out on their own terms can better define their public identities, and may take their success as evidence of reincarnation from a historical luminary.

The Hundred-and-Eight Ayamas of Adoration

Early in the empire's history, Prasad's religious scholars penned a text defining all accepted types of worship and ritualistic observances appropriate for each. Though the Hundred-and-Eight Ayamas have been revised repeatedly over the centuries, their purpose is unchanged: to enumerate the holy purposes for which gods may justly receive worship, and to deny as heretical any form of worship that doesn't support Prasad's social order.

The most broadly-defined ayama allows pleas and expressions of gratitude for fertility and good health. Ayamas for creative works such as epic poems and paintings emphasize the inspiration they bestow to better serve the gods and beautify the empire, and specifically deny the legitimacy of satire and representations that spoil mortal perceptions of Creation. Roughly half of the ayamas focus on skills and circumstances common to war, household management, or both.

Pure in Spirit and Form

As a syncretism between the carefully constructed Immaculate Philosophy, the foundational myths of Kamthahar, and morsels of religions swallowed by the growing Prasad Empire, the Pure Way evolves constantly. Its teachings, spread by gods' personal priests and the order's dedicated monks, emphasize the unalloyed divinity from which Prasad's rightful power flows. Though gods come in many forms and natures, their wisdom and grace can be muddled by undue exposure to less refined souls. To avoid this, and to reduce unseemly pandering to mortal cults, the Dragon Clans are insulated from personal and physical contact with the lower castes by layers of ritual and law.

When members of the Dragon Caste must interact with Caravaners and Corporals, they relay their commands through Scholars, who arrange for purifying rituals and the removal or concealment of undesirable elements to avoid exposing the Dragon-Blooded to undue contamination. As such, they're usually accompanied by at least one Scholar aide at all times. Dragon-Blooded who must directly supervise, investigate, or otherwise engage with less-pure entities undergo elemental cleansing rituals to preserve their holy spiritual bearing.

Foreigners and their influence threaten the Dragon Clans' purity, whether in a teahouse or on the battlefield. They're deemed to be spiritually tarnished due to ignorance of proper etiquette and cleansing rituals. This is largely allayed by taking necessary foreigners under one's wing as guests, guiding them in appropriate behavior and assuming spiritual and temporal responsibility for their misdeeds. But this isn't possible while traveling abroad. Upper-caste travelers retain a Corporal Caste aide as a liaison; Corporals are accustomed to unclean tasks, after all.

Some in the Dragon Caste view foreigners — especially strangers who linger in Prasad without a guarantor — with simple disgust. But many view encounters with foreigners as necessary and even exciting opportunities to showcase Prasadi purity and power. High-level mercantile negotiations provide as much opportunity as wars of conquest to polish away the grime of Creation's ignorance.

By contrast, the God-Blooded of Clan Akatha provide a template for spiritual purity. Often raised by and among true gods away from the daily concerns of mortal life, Clan Akatha's scions are known to be both wise and more relatable than spirits. The Dragon-Blooded may be the physical world's rightful and necessary rulers, but they pay special attention to the spiritual insights of Clan Akatha.

Dragons in Waiting

Members of the Dragon Clans who haven't Exalted form a small but prestigious subset of the Scholar Caste, and are brought up as such. This includes all children born to the Dragon Clans, which has drastically changed the Scholar Caste's role since the empire's founding. Though the old God-Blooded Exemplar Caste had minimal overlap with the Scholars, the Dragon-Blooded needed roles for their children and mortal cousins to fill that wouldn't interfere with the demands of rulership. As a result, Prasad's modern Scholar Caste — much like the Blessed Isle's patricians — provides much of the intense educational and financial infrastructure required to support the Dragon Caste, and provides avenues for profit, marriage, and social mobility among mortal members of the Dragon Clans.

Prasadi Dragon-Blooded rarely bother with the spiritual challenges and inconvenience of child-rearing. Instead, they send their children (and a generous living allowance) to stay with mortal Scholar cousins. Clan Burano is generally straightforward about this arrangement, but it's currently in vogue for Clan Ophris' foster parents to claim full parentage until Exaltation, to keep the shame of any offspring that doesn't Exalt away from the true parents. Regardless of a child's particular parentage, all Scholar households have the right to any education they can afford, and Dragon Clan Scholar households can afford the best.

Jati Names

It isn't possible to cover hundreds or even dozens of jatis, with their many names, origins, and cultural traditions. In general, jati names start as references to historical homelands or national identities, then transform through exposure to Prasadi language. When introducing themselves, Prasadi citizens give their clan name, jati name, and personal name in that order. Most jatis have collections of traditional personal names from their original homelands, as well as strong associations with specific castes.

The following guidelines may help Storytellers and players come up with jatis of their own:

Most Dragon Clan jatis hailed from specific regions of the Blessed Isle five centuries ago, and have names that may sound familiar but old-fashioned to modern Dynasts. Since their conquest of Kamthahar, the Dragon Clans have also inducted jatis from southeastern regions with strong outcaste bloodlines. Common linguistic inspirations: Hebrew, Mandarin, Japanese.

Scholar jatis often have significant overlap with the Dragons, or hail from cultures with old traditions of royalty and the arts. Common linguistic inspirations: Sanskrit, Tamil.

Caravaner jatis often hail from cultures with strong nomadic, mercantile, and warrior traditions. Common linguistic inspirations: Arabic, Hindi.

Corporal jatis often hail from cultures known for their manufacturing and agriculture, as well as traditions Prasadi find unsavory, such as ancestor worship and religious cannibalism. Common linguistic inspirations: Hindi, Punjabi.

Educating the Elite

When the Dragon Clans emigrated from the Blessed Isle, they brought the academic structure they knew — primary and secondary schools — to a culture that already had a thriving and influential Scholar Caste. With each jati added to Prasad's Scholar Caste, the academic options available expanded, competed, and evolved. Now the empire boasts a wide variety of educational traditions and institutions, including schools dedicated to preparing the Caravaner and Corporal Castes. Many schools and tutors traditionally associate with specific clans and jatis, while others are open to foreigners with appropriate resources and connections, such as Dynastic children or scions of other Dreaming Sea empires.

Academies founded by Clan Burano form the foundational curriculum against which all other educational options in Prasad are compared, and they compare most closely to the primary and secondary schools found on the Blessed Isle. However, only the empire's most secure cities maintain such institutions. Kamthahar itself boasts three “academies for flourishing youth” appropriate for adolescents and newly-Exalted Dragon-Blooded. These are the Rosewood Campus, which teaches legislation, finance, and espionage; Burano Netaru's Spire-Up-on-The-Bank, which teaches personal combat, military history, and navigation; and the Mandir of Sixfold Insight, a converted temple which teaches the principles of esoteric martial arts, geomancy, and sorcery. Burano students comprise the bulk of each academy's population, as Ophris households are more willing to trust their young to illustrious and iconoclastic tutors, or to foreign schools.

The most acceptable foreign schools are on the Blessed Isle. A few Prasadi youths make the long and perilous journey to the Blessed Isle each year, often as part of a deal or trade with one of the Great Houses. Certain Dynastic secondary schools in the southern and eastern Threshold, such as the mercantile academy called the Counting House and the harsh Jade Anvil, are also well regarded. Prasadi exchange students invariably serve as spies for their clans as they attend Realm secondary schools, and often must contend with Dynastic attempts to buy or manipulate their loyalties. Since many Dynasts view the Prasadi as strange, heretical, and untrustworthy, Prasadi exchange students usually return home with newfound gratitude for their place in the empire. Nonetheless, they also make many valuable connections.

Sorcerous Initiation: Student of the Sixfold Insight

The Mandir of Sixfold Insight's instructors utilize a variety of mind-bending methods to unlock mystical insight. Students employ psychedelics and austerities to break down mental barriers, and study spells trapped in memory crystals or the dreams of imprisoned raksha. By breaking down their minds, they break down the walls that keep them from perceiving the full breadth of sorcerous truth. Students

who attend the Mandir leave it with strange tastes and perspectives. They're exotic, scarred figures who draw the fascination and wariness all sorcerers inspire in Prasad.

Shaping Rituals

Enlightenment Through Adversity: Once per scene, when the sorcerer stunts a Shape Sorcery roll with a description of pain, hunger, emotional turmoil, or other immediate hardships, she accrues an additional (stunt) sorcerous motes. If the roll suffers a penalty due to that hardship, she accrues additional sorcerous motes equal to the penalty. Enhancing a control spell doesn't count against this ritual's once-per-scene limit, but it can only benefit a given casting of a spell once.

Truth Through Lies: The sorcerer grasps reality by confronting ignorance and illusion. Once per scene, when she introduces or challenges a fact or successfully asserts her Resolve, she gains (Perception + stunt) sorcerous motes, which last until the scene ends.

Clarity Through Discovery: Once per story, when the sorcerer studies, researches, or personally witnesses a wonder with which she is unfamiliar, she gains (Essence + Perception + Occult) sorcerous motes, which last until the story ends.

Other Benefits

Dream-Kin (•): Having partaken of fae strangeness, the sorcerer is marked by the Wyld. Fair Folk and other fae are treated as having a Minor Tie of familiarity toward her.

Oneiromantic Soothsayer (••): Once per story, after listening to a description of, or otherwise observing, a character's dreams, the sorcerer can introduce a fact about him or his immediate circumstances without needing an applicable Lore background, adding (Perception) Charm dice.

Lens of Austerity (•••): Penalties from wounds, deprivation, fatigue, poison, and other drugs don't apply to the sorcerer's Perception-based rolls or Shape Sorcery rolls.

Expanding the Nest

The Dragon Clans straddle the Scholar and Dragon Castes, resulting in a complex web of family relations built around maintaining the blood of the Dragons. Prasadi marriages require ritual permission and legal endorsement of good health and fertility from closely-related elders of both spouses, especially both spouses' parents. Dragon Clan households compete fiercely for potent bloodlines, and many long-running feuds arise from marriage agreements revoked at the last minute for a more favorable arrangement.

Since unchecked competition can push households — particularly Dragon Clan households — toward insularity and congenital instability, clan kartas regulate the process. First, they may annul marriages when spouses are too closely related, or when one spouse is infertile or permanently disabled. Second, kartas of Clans Burano, Ophris, and Akatha may grant married Dragons and Scholars permission to take on additional spouses. Common wisdom states that first marriages are for clan, and further marriages are for love and community.

Though the Dragon Clans retain a sense of superiority over outcastes, Prasad's needs nonetheless demand important roles for foreign- and low-born Dragon-Blooded. The empire's expansionist

agenda and competitive marriage pool require that the Dragon Clans expand by any means necessary, and outcastes are forbidden to serve in the Corporal or Caravaner Castes. Instead, outcastes may earn full citizenship and adoption into one of the Dragon Clans after completing three labors chosen by the clan's karta, aimed to test their loyalty, discipline, valor, and wisdom. These labors are often pretexts, excusing away failures and giving second chances.

Once adopted, outcastes often find themselves treated as second-class. Their unknown pedigrees leave them largely unable to marry except into other outcaste families, and their political prospects are few. Their best avenue to prestige is battlefield valor — a method with a high mortality rate.

The XXX, a Pure Way institution, traditionally oversees the adoption process and mediates disputes between the clans over adoptees. They also counsel all such outcastes, offering the opportunity to enter the monkhood instead, where citizenship may be earned through dedicated study and martial skill. Those who fail the kartas' tests must either enter the monkhood or leave Prasad.

Changing Households

In most cases, men maintain their caste and jati, and join their spouses' households and clans. A man maintains his responsibilities to his birth jati and is considered an "interested party" in his spouse's jati, able to contribute to its welfare and live within it, but ultimately still an outsider. A child, meanwhile, shares caste, clan, and jati with the parent who bore her. Exaltation outside of the Dragon Clans naturally changes all of this, and the newly Exalted youth has no true clan until one of the Dragon Clans adopts her.

But sometimes a child is born out of wedlock, and her proper jati won't have her. Sometimes a man would marry a lower-caste spouse or a non-citizen, or is himself a child-bearer. Sometimes a child feels that she was born into the "wrong" parent's jati. In each case, the one who would break the mold of proper family must seek out Clan Akatha, guardians of the soul behind the law, and earn their blessing to attain her proper household.

Life in Prasad

Society and Culture

Prasad's castes are separated and bound by layers of ritual, law, and competition, starting with introductions. Meetings between citizens involve traditional greetings intended to establish one's own social position, which often take the form of blessings bestowed (e.g. "wisdom" as a traditional blessing from a Scholar) or promised services (e.g., "a strong arm and fleet foot" from a Caravaner).

Once participants' relative social standings are established, they're expected to follow strict laws for appropriate speech and behavior toward each other. Lower-caste citizens face fees and humiliating punishments for untoward interactions with their superiors, such as informal speech, physical contact, and unauthorized use of the left hand in a superior's presence. Higher-caste citizens who interact too casually with lesser castes face public embarrassment from peers and avoidance from terrified inferiors.

Prasadi citizens learn early in life — or soon after induction to the empire — that any privilege not determined by their caste is afforded by the standing of their clan and jati. Clans within the same jati jockey against each other for advantage, then cooperate with each other to compete against clans of other jatis, all to secure opportunities for business and respect from higher castes.

Since Prasad assigns urban clans and jatis specific enclave-neighborhoods, most urban citizens' days are spent among their own people. This is especially true of Corporals, whose spiritually coarse duties mean they might spend weeks at a time moving from home district to work site and back with minimal attention from or interactions with outsiders. Caravaners have significantly more interactions with foreigners and exotic animals, while many Scholars spend their time supervising the lower castes and relaying orders from the Dragon Caste.

Though the Corporal Caste is entrusted with many of the empire's most crucial and thankless duties, its most spiritually significant role is completing funeral preparations. Pure Way texts insist that corpses be viewed with equal parts fear and respect; the greater the soul that once resided within, the greater the malice and corruption of its emptied vessel. Rather than cremating corpses and allowing their corruption to rise into heaven as smoke, Corporals prepare bodies for funeral services — with ritualistic safety measures, such as silken gloves for handling Dragon-Blooded corpses — and inter the dead in clan-owned tombs. Corporal funerists toil at society's edge to protect the empire from the undead, calling upon monks to assist their degrading work only when desperate.

Beyond the City

Though most Dragons and Scholars are found in cities or military encampments, most lower-caste Prasadi live in rural communities dominated by one or two jatis each, with proper boundaries maintained by Caravaner enforcers and local monks. Rural communities are assigned Scholar mayors, whose estates must be kept suitable to temporarily house high-caste visitors.

Following the Pure Way

The Pure Way's monkhood draws both spiritually minded citizens and those who struggle to find purpose in Prasad's communal approach to social mobility. Ambitious, isolated, and idealistic outsiders can find place and purpose in the monkhood. Pure Monks are fiercely and forcefully proselytic, trusted to enforce proper worship of gods and Dragon-Blooded. Dragon-Blooded monks retain their right to receive worship even as they wield the authority to enforce proper piety, a conflict of interest few citizens would describe as such.

Aside from worship, monks of the Pure Way forswear most rights and strictures of their caste and jati. Lower-caste citizens undergo lengthy spiritual purification prior to training, but monks who complete their training no longer bear a caste. Upon completing their training, monks may spend their limited personal time among their clans, though they're expected to avoid directly aiding their clans except through advice and advocacy. Nonetheless, outside of orders received from her superiors, a monk's understanding of society's needs is significantly informed by the problems her clan reports to her.

Foreign-born outcastes, Exigents, and God-Blooded may join the monkhood — a handful of mission temples abroad also serve to train novices — and receive citizenship without adoption

into any clan. Rare spirits pursue the disciplined and hard-working life of a monk, while far more hold honorary positions in the monkhood and provide vital spiritual training and insight.

The Pure Way shares the Immaculate Order's martial traditions and hierarchical structure. All monks graduate from training into the First Coil, after which they rise through obedience and accomplishment. Mortals rarely rise above the Third Coil, while Dragon-Blooded and rare God-Blooded grandmasters comprise the Fifth Coil (**The Realm**, p. 98). A nine-member Council of Judges determines policy and priority in the monkhood. By law, this council contains Prasad's rani-satrap and tanist; a Dragon-Blooded monk from each of the three Dragon Clans; three gods with fifty years of loyal service to Prasad; and one God-Blooded Akatha monk. Each judge gets one vote on changes in policy and revisions to sacred texts, and most changes require a simple majority. By tradition, the rani-satrap and tanist vote together, but the council has suffered several deadlocks since the last Ophris tanist went missing.

A Spiral Ever Outward

Prasad's borders have expanded rapidly over the past century, with each victory inspiring a push for greater glory still. This near-continuous rush of conquest means that the empire is in constant flux. At any given time, a city may need to feed and quarter a passing army, expand and redistrict existing enclaves to accommodate forcibly imported new citizens, export some of its *own* citizens to repopulate newly conquered territory, and redraw known trade routes and borders.

Life in Prasad would be even more chaotic if the Dragon Clans didn't ably keep the populace focused on Prasad's inevitable conquest over the Dreaming Sea coast. What order the Dragon-Blooded can't buy through patriotism-affirming displays of victory and the spoils of conquest, they enforce through strict laws and draconian punishments. But the empire's resources — including its Dragon-Blooded rulers — are increasingly spread thin, placing stress on its ambitious design.

One symptom of this stress is the use of protectorates: neighboring nation-states that aren't subject to the empire's laws or social structure, but have sworn to aid Prasad in exchange for protection from common enemies. While protectorates may offer some military or technical assistance, their primary contribution to the empire is tribute. Prasad expects less tribute from protectorates than from subjugated territories, but forestalls their conquest as a matter of expediency — conquest and integration are expensive and time-consuming. Bullying a nation into subservience is cheaper, for exactly as long as Prasad appears too strong to challenge.

Though Prasad's armies are awe-inspiring forces for expansion, the empire also uses other methods. Pure Way monks serve as advance scouts, spies, and dissidents in hostile nations, as well as envoys to protectorates. Prasadi traders have reputations throughout the region for ready wealth, as well as limitless access to (and hunger for) novelties. Prasad has also begun reaching into the Dreaming Sea itself, relying heavily on newly conquered coastal ports to help adapt the empire's riverine naval tradition to open-sea conquest. In all of these arenas, Prasad's aggression and ambition sometimes tip into rashness, for their means and appetites are in constant competition.

Prasad's Paths Outward

The Dragon Clans learned much about imperialism from the Scarlet Empress, but Kamthahar's rebellion and subsequent conquest convinced them that the satrapy system was inherently

unstable. The Empress wanted her satrapies productive, docile, and cooperative with the Wyld Hunt, but did not intrude on their culture beyond those wants. The Dragon Clans envision a Dreaming Sea more cohesive than the Blessed Isle itself. So conquests require enormous resources and attention, and protectorates are seen as temporary arrangements.

Upon becoming a Prasadi territory, a conquered nation is assigned a sabha — an administrative council answerable to the rani-satrap. A sabha is led by five Burano and five Ophris councilors, advised by an Akatha envoy and local leaders of lower-caste clans.

For local matters, oversight of each city or rural region is assigned to either Burano and Ophris. Burano traditionally assigns a single scion as governor. Ophris usually does the same, but occasionally experiments with city councils or other power-sharing mechanisms.

Foreign Relations

The Dreaming Sea region hosts many empires, young and old. The Dragon Clans have every intention of breaking and restructuring each according to the Pure Way's philosophy, in time, but even mighty Prasad must be strategic.

Even as **Ysyr** is the Dreaming Sea's preeminent naval power, its armies bear countless sorcerous workings, amulets, and minor wonders created by the empire's sorcerer-princes. Legends of Ysyr's mutated citizenry strike horror and righteous indignation in Prasadi hearts, and the Dragon Clans will go to extreme lengths to rid Creation of the sorcerers' corruption.

Some Prasadi strategists argue that a temporary alliance with **Volivat** would buy time to develop Prasad's own navy, but Prasad's growing admiralty board largely rejects the idea as heretical and cowardly. Volivat's ten-parented Yennin champions insult the natural order, and the Dragon Clans' place atop that order. Prasadi spies seek the secrets of Yennin creation — ostensibly to sabotage Volivat's champions, though more opportunistic spymasters wonder what ten Dragon-Blooded parents might give rise to.

Prasad's own ambitions have driven several lesser powers to band together. The most notable of these, the **Tiger's Nest Coalition**, has blocked expansion of Prasad's southeastern borders for decades. Originally a tentative alliance between four prideful and fractious nation-states in response to Prasad's aggression, it's drawn in neighbors that fear the loss of their autonomy, culture, and faith under Prasadi rule. The Nesters use an assortment of magics to breed viable lines of chimerical warbeasts, and trade prisoners of war to the Fair Folk for aid against Prasad. They're hardy and resourceful folk, well-suited to arid steppes and rocky hills that can exhaust armored infantry. Prasad has thus far refrained from committing its full force against the Coalition, seeing richer opportunities elsewhere.

Prasad's current highest-value target is **Y'danna**, which refers to a great walled metropolis and the tight-knit empire of island nations surrounding it. Y'danna was a greater power centuries ago, but though the empire wanes, the city has never fallen. Its seamless, hundred-foot-high walls are constructed of a First Age alloy that's weathered Wyld storms, raiders, and sorcerous attacks. Y'danna's Ageless Emperor controls sea lanes for dozens of miles around his city using a sizable fleet secured in hidden shipyards, supported by powerful tower-mounted lenses that focus sunlight into beams of ship-burning intensity.

Prasad currently lacks the naval power to claim any of Y'danna's territory, and instead seeks to infiltrate the city and overthrow it from within. Once they do so, Prasad will be able to invade the

surrounding territories, and its position as a naval power will be secured. Meanwhile, Ysyr also maneuvers for control of Y'danna, while Volivat makes overtures of alliance toward the Ageless Emperor.

Storytelling Prasadi Games

Prasad is on the brink of disaster. The tanist, next in line to succeed the throne, has been missing for ten years and is presumed dead, but the rani-satrap refuses to accept this and will not call for another election to replace her heir. Rohavin is elderly, and dying on the throne without a successor is a very real fear that threatens the stability of the entire empire. Despite the upheaval and uncertain future, Rohavin forges ahead with her expansionistic plans, determined to see Prasad's borders extend into the Dreaming Sea before her death.

For perhaps the first time in their long history, the Dragon Caste suffers widespread fractures of its relationships. Clan Ophris demands Rohavin call for the election of a new heir, and Clan Burano worries about what their rani-satrap seemingly rejecting one of their most respected traditions means for the future. Jatis harboring grudges against their oppressors for generations prepare in secret to take back their ancestral lands. Scenting blood, moneylenders, military leaders and ruthless merchants circle Prasad, waiting for the first sign of weakness.

But for all the chaos waiting in the wings, most Prasadi scions remain at center stage of their own stories. The Dreaming Sea remains a cauldron of wonders, filled with opportunities for glory and adventure. Even as disaster looms, Prasadi player characters can still explore ancient ruins; traffic with prehuman creatures; join the Wyld Hunt; and struggle against the empire's enemies via battle, diplomacy, or espionage to further extend its dominion.

Prasadi Dragon-Blooded

Burano and Ophris are in crisis, one without a clear successor to the throne, the other troubled by the deviation from established protocols. Both are burdened by the astronomical cost of Prasad's expansion rate, and struggle with managing the ever-growing empire. Games involving an all-Prasadi cast of characters can be played on any level, ranging from managing potential unrest in the streets, to expanding the empire, to sailing off into the Dreaming Sea.

The simmering pressure cooker that currently comprises Kamthahari politics makes for excellent intrigue and political maneuvering, with Burano seeking to re-establish the correct and traditional balance of power, and with Ophris scrambling to regain the power lost with their tanist. On the edges of the Empire, legions amass on the borders between Prasad and its neighbours, waiting for the orders to invade and annex as they have so many times before, highlighting the glories and horrors of colonization from the invader's perspective. In the Dreaming Sea, strange and wondrous objects and places lie in wait of those who will sail to their discovery, and the mysterious fate of the lost tanist is sure to be found, fostering the sense of rollicking adventure and mystery that only tales of seafaring daring-do can bestow.

Visiting Dynasts

Few Dynasts make the long, arduous trek to Prasad. Nonetheless, a handful visit this most distant of satrapies for various reasons. Scholars study Dreaming Sea architecture, history, and other fields of inquiry. Sorcerers probe prehuman mysteries. Theologians debate Immaculate doctrine with Pure Way gurus. But most Dynastic visitors come to broaden their horizons. Gourmands

salivate over Prasadi cuisine; explorers sail Wyld-touched waters; adventurers battle strange beasts and explore lost civilizations' ruins.

It's not unknown for Dynasts to go native. The allure of mortal worship has been known to tempt heterodox Dragon-Blooded, while distance from the Blessed Isle allows escape from political and personal entanglements while retaining much of a Dynast's wealth and prestige.

Now, with civil war brewing in the Realm, some ponder what role Prasad might play in the struggle. With their income dwindling, the ministries hope to ensure that Prasad continues to pay tribute. Meanwhile, the Great Houses consider directing that tribute into their own coffers — or procuring Prasad's support through alliance.

Dynastic visitors and expatriates make useful allies for a Prasadi Hearth. By and large, they lack contradictory loyalties, and they offer unusual perspectives on local politics and events. That they may be agents for the Realm and its feuding factions is hardly worth remarking on; after all, the Realm is far away, and Prasad reigns unchallenged on the shores of the Dreaming Sea.

Mixed Dragons

Games that mix Prasadi Dragon-Blooded with Dynasts, Lookshyans, or outcastes are slightly more difficult to manage than a game of exclusively one or the other. The trick is in finding common ground and common goals that can satisfy all characters.

While those who come into Prasad without invitation or being offered protection by one of the jati have no rights, clever (or desperate) Dragon Caste might find plausible reasons to officially invite their distant cousins into the empire. In such cases, favor-trading plays in both sides' favor, with Ophris and Burano both seeking to settle the question of succession, as well as finding sorely needed funds for Prasad's growth and allies to shore up thinly-stretched military forces along the border. In return, Lookshy' gentes find allies with which they can trade for jade and other goods, and the Great Houses gain a possibly deciding factor in settling their own question of succession.

Halcyon follows Laith through the forest. They walk the same path, yet Halcyon can't help but feel that also, they very much do not.

Laith is old, though Halcyon doesn't know her true age. She appears old enough to be Halcyon's mother, or perhaps her grandmother. Yet, during lessons, Laith speaks of centuries-old happenings as though she was present for them. As though she had a hand in shaping them. Laith's voice was one of the first human ones Halcyon heard, when Oreithyia (the mother whose vines sometimes cradled Halcyon lovingly, and sometimes grew thorns to prick and tear her skin) brought her near the Forest Witches' homes.

They wander through the forest now, bearing tithes for the Sea of Mind. Halcyon carries a pair of finely wrought orichalcum daggers — the offering that will gain her entry into the Sea and let her experience its splendors. She almost wishes she could keep them for herself, as spoils of a battle well-won.

Laith carries the Dawn Caste's heart in her still-bloody hands. Her clothing is ragged and torn from those same daggers' brutal slices. In places, the wounds he inflicted still seep. Halcyon splinted her mentor's leg, where the Dawn's kick snapped it and the bone pierced through Laith's skin. It's still broken, but Laith walks on it as easily as when they'd left the forest. Rust-brown streaks mar her lovely face where she's touched it. When Halcyon offered to wipe clean her cheeks, Laith only laughed and asked whyever she might do that?

The forest rustles around them, but they are alone. Still, Laith pauses on the path, as though she's met an old friend along the way. "Thank you," she says, to no one at all. "She's my prized student, and we're on our way to Atsiluth Eternal. Halcyon, show some respect when you receive such a kind compliment."

Halcyon, ragged herself and unsure where to look, bows deeply nonetheless and addresses a point just past Laith. "Your words bring me honor." She hopes it is enough.

Laith beams and caresses Halcyon's cheek. The blood on her fingertips is thick and cold, and it is all Halcyon can do to keep from scrubbing it away with her sleeve. "Come," says Laith. "We musn't be late."

They stop like this several more times, and Laith indicates that some of these absent passers-by have decided to travel *with* them. Halcyon sees only the forest, and the path, and Laith. She steps gingerly, afraid to tread on ephemeral toes. Along the way, Laith asks her to recount their battle with the Solar for this silent audience, and repeats questions her pupil cannot hear so Halcyon might respond to them. Halcyon isn't sure Laith is even aware she's speaking when she does this. Her lips move in a murmur, but her expression never changes.

At last, they stand before the forest pool. Laith picks her way carefully over the dirt, but her gliding gait is better suited to smooth-paved streets. They stand at the water's edge, and the forest holds its breath — even Halcyon senses the sudden quiet. Laith casts the Solar's heart into pool; for a moment, Halcyon glimpses a city reflected in the ripples.

Laith takes Halcyon's hands in her bloody ones, and draws her into the pool. The clear, cool water covers their knees, their waists, their chests. Then Laith takes Halcyon's shoulders, and pushes her gently down.

When she rises, she sees the city at last: Atsiluth Eternal, shining atop its hill. Laith is as clean and radiant as they day they left the forest, and Halcyon's own body no longer bears the scars

and bruises from the day they killed the Dawn. On the shore, surrounding them, stand half a dozen people as perfect as Laith herself. They bid Halcyon welcome, touch her hands, caress her cheeks.

“Now, pay your tithe,” says Laith.

Halcyon casts the orichalcum daggers into the water — which is no longer a tiny forest pool, but now stretches before her, a vast and beautiful Sea.

Chapter Four

The Forest Witches

She walks blindly along the edge of a forest pool, clad in rags yet standing proud as any prince. Before her inner eye unfold the shining streets of a perfected city that does not exist, where she speaks to the living and the dead without distinction; to her they are one and the same.

.....

He chooses a mossy hollow amid the forest to take his supper, and the forest obliges — roots bulging upward from the earth to form chair and table, boughs gathering overhead to ward off the rain, vines pulling forth fruit and greens and raw, bloody meat for his provender. He sees, smells, and tastes only the most marvelous of viands, and the screams of the hare torn apart for his meal do not reach his ears.

.....

She wears the flesh of a young Scavenger Lands princeling, stolen from him before he was born. Through scheming and murder she's claimed his mother's throne, and holds power and wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. But to her it is nothing. She dreams only of the day when she can return to the distant forest she called home before she took this body, to reclaim her birthright of perfection and immortality.

.....

He crouches in the deep forest, surrounded by mist without color or shape. With a knife, he cuts away at the parts of his nature that he rejects, reshaping himself in his own image. When he's finished, he no longer struggles against his own existence. He is no longer human. He is one with the mist. He is complete.

Humanity, the wise say, is a flawed creature inhabiting a blemished Creation. All things fade; all things decay. Nothing is perfect. Nothing lasts forever.

Lies, say the Forest Witches. Perfection is here, for those with the power and wisdom to claim it.

Seeking Perfection

A twisted, uncanny forest looms north of the Scavenger Lands, somewhere between Linowan lands and the Hundred Kingdoms. Neighboring peoples avoid it, for its reputation is inauspicious. They have many ominous names for the place. Its inhabitants call it only the forest; to them it is paradise, and paradise needs no name.

Thousands of mortal residents serve the mysterious outcaste cabal called the Forest Witches, who hold a reputation as sinister as the forest's. These immortal Witches send forth adventurers,

raiders, and missionaries to explore Creation's vistas, seize ancient treasures, slay Exalted rivals, and spread their esoteric gospel of perfection.

Founded seven centuries ago by Cevis Ghandarva — a renegade Dragon-Blood from the nascent Scarlet Realm — and his coterie, the Forest Witches have grown both strong and strange in their isolation. The forest they claimed as their refuge holds the lingering remnant of an ancient power that's taken root in their minds and souls.

The power within the forest seeks perfection, but it no longer recalls what that means. With no shape of its own, it found form in the stories of those who sought perfection here in ages past. The Forest Witches have seized upon these shapes to provide structure for their society and their selves. Each offers its own path to perfection.

RY 68: Ghandarva's Retreat

Half a century into the Empress' reign, a Fair Folk noble seeking to undermine the Realm approached Cevis Ghandarva — a gifted and ambitious Dragon-Blood — and showed him a vision of himself perfected. Embracing the vision, Ghandarva dubbed himself Mela's reincarnation, drawing followers to his hedonistic cult of personality with a message of power and enlightenment transcending ordinary Exaltation.

Ghandarva's cult thrived for a short while, until the Empress' agents turned public opinion against him through a campaign of defamation naming him the incarnation of Mela's Antithesis, the Sickly Whore. Soon enough, Dynastic high society began to snub and mock him. Infuriated, Ghandarva withdrew from the Blessed Isle accompanied by his inmost circle of 16 Dragon-Blooded, to establish themselves in an untrodden forest deep in the Eastern Threshold.

Mysteries of the Forest

The foremost of these shapes is the forest walker **Oreithyia** (p. XX). The forest itself is alive, taking its shape after a ghastly, yet magnificent artistic performance in a former age. Oreithyia tends to the Forest Witches' material needs, offering food, clothing, and shelter from its own substance, so that they need never want for any mundane thing.

More pervasive is the **Sea of Mind** (p. XX). Not so much a place as an idea, the Sea of Mind takes its shape after two young lovers' attempt to immortalize their idealized perceptions of one another, even beyond death. It's an image of Creation stripped of ugliness and flaws — a perfected Creation. Wherever they go, those immersed in it perceive the world through the Sea's lens, and in doing so, they experience Creation as a place wherein their power and desires can overcome any challenge. The Sea even transcends death; the unreal city of Atsiluth Eternal at the forest's heart offers sanctuary to those who died while immersed in the Sea.

Lastly, the mist waits in the forest's recesses for those who seek its promise. As alive in its way as the forest, it takes its shape from a misanthrope's pursuit of self-completion through self-mutilation. Witches who wish to change themselves can bargain with the mist to carve away undesired elements of their own nature. Known as **numina** (p. XX), these Witches are both Dragon-Blood and spirit, surrendering much of their humanity in order to strip away perceived weakness and imperfection. And from the mist, Cevis Ghandarva bargained for power over reincarnation, offering Witches immortality across countless lives.

Life in Paradise

The Forest Witches live a blessed existence. They need not toil day by day, for Oreithyia provides all that they require. They need not concern themselves with the ugliness of the world, for the Sea of Mind erases it from their sight. While they occasionally venture forth from the forest to seize those things needed to sustain their paradise or advance their own agendas, for the most part, their lives are spent in leisure. Creative endeavors, philosophical inquiry, courtships, games — the Witches have a veritable eternity to devote to these pursuits.

The Forest Witches dwell in sumptuous palaces of sod and living wood, wrought from the forest by Oreithyia. Temples, arenas, bathhouses, pleasure gardens, and theaters arise as the Forest Witches have need. Even without the Sea of Mind to remove all ugliness from their vision, they live in vivid splendor — colorful wildflowers flourish along every path, intricate patterns of ivy and moss adorn every building, and eerily lifelike topiaries arise in new shapes each day.

Among the Witches, marriage is largely nonexistent. Partners may couple or triad off for extended periods of time, but such exclusive relationships aren't the norm. While there's still an emphasis on selecting partners whose pedigree will likely result in Dragon-Blooded offspring, such liaisons rarely last past the child's birth.

The Forest Witches are broadly irreligious outside of the Cult of the Mist. Their afterlife is laid out for them in Atsiluth Eternal or among the numina, preempting Immaculate doctrines of reincarnation. With their power and passions unchallenged within the Sea of Mind, they see little cause to bargain with the divine — gods and other spirits may be ignored or bullied as suits the Witches needs, but few worship them. The Cult of the Mist's veneration and emulation of the numina is the Forest Witches' primary spiritual outlet, though some revere the Sea of Mind as a spiritual force, while others propound exotic heresies, such as viewing union with the Sea as the ultimate enlightenment promised by the Immaculate Philosophy.

Ways of the Witches

Though the forest's gifts bring the Witches together, its various manifestations pull them in different directions. Rather than a single unified band, they form a shifting assembly of factions and coteries, united by their desire to maintain and secure their forest paradise. Many are deeply individualistic and self-absorbed, occasionally to the point of solipsism.

A handful hardly stir themselves from the forest. Linger in Oreithyia's embrace or wandering the blessed streets of **Atsiluth Eternal** (p. XX), they follow their own idiosyncratic pursuits, whether that's physical pleasure, political machinations, or esoteric wisdom. Some join the **Mandala Guard** (p. XX), forgoing paradise to watch over it instead. Others join the **Cult of the Mist** (p. XX), the otherwise alarist Witches' primary spiritual venue, to venerate the enigmatic numina.

Still, every living Witch leaves the forest at some point, leading raids against neighboring peoples or otherwise adventuring to acquire things Oreithyia cannot provide. They especially seek jade, artifacts, and other supernatural prodigies with which to pay their annual tithe to the Sea of Mind and to expand the Sea's reach, but anything that can be sold or traded for such treasure is likewise valued. The otherwise fractious Witches find solidarity in organizing and participating in such banditry; the sect mounts several such actions every year.

Witches also labor to undermine opposition to them among neighboring peoples and polities, with the ultimate intent of ruling in all but name. Their foremost tool is the **Company of Thrones** (p. XX), a faction of Witches led by Ghandarva who reincarnate as the children of foreign elites. As royalty, merchant princes, and the like, they supply the Witches with intelligence and monies, while undermining or redirecting potential threats to the Witches and the forest.

Some range farther afield on other business. The proselyte **Company of Messengers** (p. XX), who wish to offer the Sea of Mind's perfection to the world, spread word of the blessings it offers. Members of the much smaller **Table of Fiends** (p. XX) — who deem the Sea too precious to open to the unworthy — oppose the Messengers, inspiring fear of the Forest Witches and doubt concerning the Sea's wonders.

Lastly, many Witches seek all manner of adventure in distant lands. All Creation is the Witches' paradise, drowned in glory by the Sea of Mind; it's a fitting stage for them to pursue their own goals and ideals.

The First Age: Kehiro and Cassandra

In the bright days at history's dawn, the young lovers Cassandra and Kehiro agreed to part forever before age or sorrow found them. "It is best," each told the other, "for I will wither and I will fade, and lines of suffering shall etch themselves upon my brow, and my heart may even grow untrue — but you shall remember a love forever young, forever joyous, and forever pure."

The next night, Kehiro, agonized by the loss even as he believed it best for Cassandra, drowned himself in a cold, dark pool. Cassandra, for her part, spent long months immersed in her sorrow before she, too, entered the forest and cast herself into the same pool.

The Blood and the Spear

Some time after the Forest Witches first found their paradise, their leader Cevis Ghandarva pronounced two new doctrines: the Blood Sutra and the Spear Sutra. The Blood Sutra is a philosophy of aspiration. It posits that true enlightenment is the pursuit of self-perfection, sacrificing one's self to become something greater, and that those who follow this path will one day claim their rightful place as unquestioned Princes of the Earth, supplanting the Realm or building their reign out of its ashes.

The Spear Sutra is Ghandarva's plan for claiming that rightful place. One does not rule a place by conquest, it teaches — rather, the Forest Witches will rule from the shadows. Creation's princes and godlings will be made to recognize the Witches' worth, or to fear their power beyond any hope of resistance. Those who would stand against their rule without name, the Spear Sutra names Anathema.

Not all Witches subscribe to Ghandarva's doctrines, but he has been persuasive in spreading them. Most Witches have accepted the Blood Sutra, and many have accepted the Spear Sutra — particularly those in the Company of Thrones and the Table of Fiends.

Oreithyia and the Forest

Millennia ago, the ancient power behind the forest witnessed the magnificent and terrible artistry with which the Solar Pherenike dismembered her aide Oreithyia, sprinkling bone and viscera across the wood in a manner that perfectly disclosed every aspect of Oreithyia's nature and personality. That power has since manifested in the image of Oreithyia's remains — a living web of gristle, bone, and sinew that wears a yellowed skull for a face, winding through earth and water and wood, spanning the length and breadth of the forest. It is not Oreithyia, but it has taken her name for itself.

The forest walker provides all of the community's physical needs — food, clothing, shelter. She sinks wells and redirects streams, erects homes and fortresses from wood and stone, and the like. Even beasts of the wood serve her will. And her numberless leathery vine-tendrils can tangle, rend, and strangle trespassers.

Only the forest's gods and elementals aren't under Oreithyia's direct sway, and even they fear her power. Many a woodland spirit has had eyes or tongue torn away in punishment for crossing the forest walker's will.

To placate Oreithyia, the Witches provide offerings of beautiful youths captured in their raids or purchased from slavers. These the forest walker dotes on for a time, supplying them with every luxury and adoring them from afar with ancient eyes. But eventually she turns on each, rending them limb from limb.

Much as the Sea's perfected world gives the Witches arrogance, Oreithyia gives them certainty, supplying material needs more swiftly than even a pampered Dynast's. Without fear of want, they're free to pursue their own desires and ideals.

RY 71-145: Valentin and Oreithyia

Ghandarva took as his lover the beautiful youth Bidalaksa Valentin. The Fair Folk had claimed Valentin's passions; in exchange they gave him his mirrored eyes, in which others saw all the things that made them weak.

Oftimes Valentin sought solitude from Ghandarva's attentions in the forest. There his cold, vain perfection drew the attention of whatever thing wore long-dead Oreithyia's semblance. Valentin endured this for a time, eventually giving the creature the ultimatum he'd given Ghandarva: "I will never love you, for I do not understand what love means. If you wish to serve me and give me the things I desire, I am willing to tolerate your presence."

Oreithyia's yellowed skull stared Valentin down, but in his mirrored eyes saw all the things that made it weak. Submitting, it withdrew; and that night, a mansion of living wood arose where his tent once was. From that day, the forest walker gave Valentin — and by extension, the Forest Witches — clothing, food, and shelter, in exchange for his tolerating its presence.

Children of the Woods

By and large, the Forest Witches hold little interest in childbirth and child-rearing. When it's time to give birth, most simply wander into the forest, and return alone; the Sea drowns the pain while Oreithyia acts as midwife, taking the child away to raise it in the deep woods.

Suckled on Oreithyia's sap, raised among deer and wolves, these children are wild but not feral. The forest walker brings them in secret near the Witches' homes to hear human voices and learn human speech; they choose their own names from words gathered thus. As they grow, Oreithyia teaches them writing, arts, weapons, and other civilized ways, using pain as discipline; instead of providing food, she shows them how to hunt and kill.

Should a child of the woods Exalt, Oreithyia brings him before his parents to introduce him to the Witches' society. Otherwise, she eventually guides him to join the Witches' mortal followers, among whom they shine as scouts, hunters, and raiders.

RY 145: Oreithyia's Fury

During his frequent visits to the forest pool, Amiril Rurik found that within its paradise, he attained all desired qualities of strength and will. He soon saw himself in a state of perfection, and brought that arrogance to the outside world. One day he quarreled with Bidalaksa Valentin; looking into Valentin's mirrored eyes, Rurik saw nothing that made him weak, and slew Valentin without a qualm.

Oreithyia flew into a rage that night. Mightier than any spirit, it demolished the Witches' homes, hounded them with ravening beasts, turned food and water to ashes and mud, and twisted every path back on itself, trapping the Witches within. They might have died had not Ghandarva offered the forest walker a bargain: "Valentin was given me, and I shall give you others." Oreithyia took Ghandarva's tongue and one eye, but nothing more, sealing their pact.

By this bargain, as well as bringing treasures for the forest pool, the Witches bring beautiful captives as offerings for Oreithyia, releasing them into the woods. There the forest walker offers them every luxury, for a time, until she recognizes that they aren't Valentin, and slays them. In exchange, Oreithyia aids the Witches as she did when Valentin lived, supplying their every physical need.

[IF NEED BE, THE "RY 71-145: VALENTIN AND OREITHYIA" AND "RY 145: OREITHYIA'S FURY" SIDEBARS CAN BE PLACED IN THE SAME SIDEBAR BOX.]

The Mandala Guard

The Mandala Guard is made up of those Forest Witches who forgo the paradise of their brethren in order to protect it. They live on the forest's borders, beyond Oreithyia's reach. They deny themselves the Sea of Mind, for they must see even the most painful truths if they are to watch against all threats. Other Forest Witches may find their asceticism strange, but laud them nonetheless for their vital service.

Most Witches shun the manses within the forest's bounds, for the Sea of Mind is distorted in these places of power, and Oreithyia shuns them. Thus, their stewardship has fallen to the Mandala Guard. They tend the scenic, overgrown House Cleft Asunder; the Phoenix Tears Pagoda, whose eaves of living wood drip crimson sap; Rurik's Seal, a monolithic fortress rising amid picturesque ruins; Seven Strings, burbling with music from a stream flowing through its walls; and the asymmetrical gardens of the Star-Thistle Palace. The Guard also oversees the allocation of the manses' hearthstones, and arbitrates disputes over them.

By tradition, the Mandala Guard has nine members, rotating between the five manses and walking the forest's borders. Membership is voluntary; Mandala Guards may resign at any time. New members require majority approval. The faction is tight-knit and insular, entangled with quiet feuds and romances.

In addition to a cloak blazoned with the group's eponymous mandala, Guards traditionally hide their faces with masks, hoods, or veils. Revealing one's face is unusual — perhaps because, in their manses, the Sea can't perfect their features in fellow Witches' eyes.

The First Age: Lady Domnica and the Shape

Sleeping in the forest one night, Lady Domnica dreamed a shapeless thing of mist and memories. Thrashing in her sleep, beset by fear and a terrible sense of completion, she impaled her hand on a thorn; when she woke, there was no blood, only a hole filled with shimmering, misty gray. Inspired, she bid her manservant carve a pattern of her devising in her flesh while she slept. Night after night, the pattern grew, as more and more of her — and, eventually, her servant — disappeared as she slept. One night, Domnica didn't wake; all that arose was mist, all shimmering gray.

The Sea of Mind

Central to the Forest Witches' experience is the Sea of Mind. It is not a physical place, nor is it tangible in any traditional sense. Rather, it's a transformation of how the Witches perceive the world.

Those immersed in the Sea — requiring only baptism in the forest pool's waters — see Creation not as it is, but as it might be if flensed of flaws and imperfection. It's clean and austere, enhancing the natural world's beauty and wonder. Colors shine more vividly, flowers smell more fragrant, food bursts with rich flavor, people speak more eloquently and walk more gracefully, and so forth.

When possible, the Sea glosses over unpleasantness. Reeking garbage, buzzing flies, fatigue from a long march, disagreeable weather — if these things don't affect the Witch, she simply doesn't perceive them. Unavoidable discomforts reveal themselves as intriguing or beautiful; the flies' buzz forms delightful music, while scorching heat recalls the warmth of a lover's touch.

To prevent self-harm induced by such misapprehensions, the Sea can subtly twist an immersed character's actions. A Witch, kneeling to drink from a befouled pool she perceives as fresh, might in truth sip from her canteen instead. If a Witch thinks she's slain a foe, when he strikes at her again she perceives a new enemy she must fend off, rather than being blinded to his existence entirely. The Sea isn't intelligent; it merely acts to diminish differences between itself and Creation. Maintaining its alternate perspective of reality demands Essence, and these demands increase with greater divergences from Creation's actual state.

Most importantly, those who die while immersed in the Sea can choose to linger within it. Living persons immersed in the Sea still perceive them; they remain part of the Forest Witch community. Most dead Forest Witches retire to the unreal city of Atsiluth Eternal at the forest's heart. Others venture out into the world, but unless they inhabit a walking effigy (p. XX), their actions affect only the illusory Creation of the Sea.

Most Witches see the Sea as a sacred blessing, washing away imperfections to reveal Creation as a paradise. For some, it's a gift from the Dragons, whether to be shared with the world or hoarded for those whom Destiny has already led there; others posit alternate, perhaps heretical, theories of its origins. But many Witches see it merely as leisure, joyous but ultimately without meaning. And a few actively reject the Sea, deeming it profane, dangerous, or aesthetically objectionable.

RY 68: The Forest Pool

Ghandarva's lieutenant Peace of Song Forgotten — a heretical monk who trafficked with demons — sought to perfect his martial arts in the forest's depths. Encountering a dark, still pool, he called out to its spirit to rise and do battle. What emerged instead was an uncertain shape, flowing from dragon to centipede to vaporous shadows. "You shall do," the monk said. Peace's adversary cast him aside twice before he absorbed its blow into his watery Essence's bottomless depths.

Instantly, Peace found himself, as if in a dream, upon an endless sea's shore. There two young lovers each walked alone, lost in their own dreams of love and tragedy. Recalling the tale of Cassandra and Kehiro, the monk understood the pool's power: to sustain human minds within its dream.

Peace of Song Forgotten slew the lovers to free the pool for more useful dreams. He reported his discovery to Ghandarva thusly: "I have found a thing of use to us. None of us need ever die."

Transcending Reality

Through passion and will, a Forest Witch may impose her will more directly upon the reflected Creation, accomplishing most any task (p. XX). She might slay a hundred demons with a sword-stroke, shatter a city wall with a shout, or cure the Great Contagion with a touch. However, such changes aren't real. The Witch is as puissant as any Dragon-Blood, but cannot truly transform Creation this way.

Internal changes have more impact. A Witch, seeing herself as immune to carnal temptation, resists seduction more effectively. If the Sea shows her as dodging a blow that injures her in reality, the wound hampers her but not the pain.

Whenever possible, the Sea works to minimize the differences between a Witch's perceptions and Creation. A village she thought destroyed will be "rebuilt" by her next visit; the next time she crosses swords with a foe she thought she'd slain, she may think herself fighting his twin brother. But this can't always keep up with a Witch's changes; should she lose immersion in the Sea, she may find Creation much the same as she remembers, or vastly different.

There's only one Sea of Mind. Should two Witches seek to impose contradictory changes, they must contest one another. (Changes supported by a consensus, such as the structure of Atsiluth Eternal, can prove almost unshakeable.) One Witch's alteration to the Sea is perceived by all others who encounter it.

Appearance in the Sea of Mind

In the perfected vision of the Sea of Mind, a Forest Witch's self-image may take precedence over their actual body. Those Witches with an unusually strong

conception of their self-image may recreate themselves without thinking upon attuning to the Sea, recasting themselves in a perfected form. Gender, height, weight, and other physical traits all appear exactly as the Witch desires. Even if a Witch's self-image isn't so concrete as to immediately assert itself, she can work transformations within the Sea that would be impossible in reality.

Beyond Good and Evil

With the Sea muffling or erasing the world's resistance to their will, it's no surprise that most Forest Witches radiate self-assurance. The Sea hides their own failures, so they rarely experience self-doubt. The Sea hides others' suffering, so they have little cause to consider morality. Meanwhile, their own strengths and virtues shine brightly, while their deeds bathe them and the world in glory. With the Sea filtering out imperfection and weakness, it's easy for them to see the world in black and white.

Likewise, Witches demonstrate an unsettling ruthlessness. The Sea glosses over the effects of their actions, so they need not smell the rank stench of the dead, hear the lamentations of widowers, or see the ragged and starving folk left homeless in war's wake. If they do, it's couched amid profound, artistic beauty, or framed so as to be inherently and unquestionably just.

Shores of the Sea

When the Witches first found it, the Sea extended no farther than the forest pool's glade. It has since expanded to encompass Creation, yet still, it has its bounds. Where the world's Essence assumes an order alien to the Sea — demesnes, manses, shadowlands, bordermarches — the Sea becomes fuzzy and difficult to perceive, fading in and out to reveal the world as it is. In entirely other realms, such as Heaven, Hell, the Underworld, or the Wyld proper, the Sea fades entirely from the Witch's perceptions.

Such journeys don't end immersion. A Witch returning to Creation regains access to the Sea. One who perishes beyond the Sea's shores still lingers within it, awakening in Atsiluth Eternal among her fellow dead.

The Tithe

The Sea of Mind cannot maintain its vision of a perfected Creation indefinitely; it could not sustain the ever-increasing numbers of the dead of Atsiluth Eternal were it not sustained with Essence. The Forest Witches tend to it in the form of a yearly tithe, making offerings of supernatural puissance — magical materials, artifacts, the hearts of Exalted and other supernatural creatures, and similar prodigies, cast into the forest pool to feed the Sea.

While each living Witch is expected to pay their tithe annually, a Witch in good standing or with influence in the right places may go several years without a complete payment. Successful Witches often pay in advance, freeing them to leave the forest for years at a time without worry. Those not immersed in the Sea — largely Mandala Guards, or members of the Company of Thrones who've yet to return — needn't pay at all.

Dead Witches aren't subject to the tithe. This is occasionally a subject of rancor for living Witches, but there's little they can do about it.

Exile

Over the course of centuries, the dead of Atsiluth Eternal wove the Sea of Mind from the power within the forest pool. Their ruling council (p. XX) retains the power to close the Sea to those who offend them; this is their primary weapon in disputes between living Witches and the dead.

Exile serves primarily as a lever to ensure that living Witches pay the tithe. It's also a punishment for especially severe crimes, such as treason against the Witches or stealing treasures from the forest pool.

Temporary exile lasts for anywhere from one month to seven years. Permanent exile, an extremely rare punishment, is reserved for the most terrible crimes; being well-loved or despised by the dead can tip the balance one way or the other.

The Company of Messengers

Many living Forest Witches, enthralled by the glories of the Sea of Mind, wish to convey the message of the Sea far and wide. In this they are aligned with the dead elders of Atsiluth Eternal. With the elders' blessing, they serve as apostles of the Sea, ranging across and beyond the Scavenger Lands to spread word of paradise.

Of course, the Sea still has limits. All are welcome to stand at the gates of paradise, but until its power suffices to drown the world, only a select few may actually enter. Messengers make a point of seeking out amenable Dragon-Blooded, Exigents, and other heroes fit to gather more of the treasure that makes the Sea whole.

Like most Witches, the Messengers see the world in absolutes. The Sea's perfection is an unalloyed blessing. Therefore, all who stand in the way of its truth are evil. Those both willing and able to oppose the Messengers are deemed Anathema, subject to the Witches' own Wyld Hunt.

Messengers face opposition in their task. Their offer of paradise undermines Immaculate teachings, gods' control over their cults, and the common folk's obedience to temporal rulers. Confronted by opposing propaganda, legal sanction, and physical force — especially from the Realm in satrapies, or Lookshy in the River Province — they must be swift, stealthy, charismatic, or adept with violence.

The Table of Fiends

Smallest of the Forest Witches' factions, the Table of Fiends repudiates the Messengers' creed. Paradise, they say, belongs only to those worthy of it. A treasure earned through struggle by a destined few is cheapened when offered with open hands in exchange for mere jade.

Fiends spread dark rumors of the forest and its inhabitants, inspiring fear and doubt to undermine the Messengers' gospel. Some go farther, committing atrocities in the forest's name. Theirs is a religious mission; they see no evil in protecting the Sea from the undeserving.

The Fiends have never numbered more than half a dozen. All have strong personalities, and each works independently toward their shared goal. Fiends meet to boast, share information, and collaborate on specific projects, but they accept neither leadership nor hierarchy.

The Tax of Fading Embers

The conflicting ideologies of the Company of Messengers and the Table of Fiends led to considerable conflict and bloodshed between them until the dead of Atsiluth Eternal pronounced

the Tax of Fading Embers. Any Witch who kills another, they decreed, must pay that Witch's tribute to the Sea of Mind for the rest of their life. Since its institution, conflict between the Messengers and Fiends has largely cooled, with more conflicts resolved through words than blades. Some bold Witches still dare the Tax's consequences, but even the most aggrieved will typically employ indirect efforts — sowing distrust in a Messenger's path, warning princes and Immaculates of her coming, and the like. Hiring assassins technically invokes the Tax, but only if the perpetrator is caught.

The First Age: Pherenike's Garden

Long ago, the Solar Pherenike, the Harp of Morning, found that her Dragon-Blooded retainer Oreithyia had tread carelessly in her garden, disturbing its perfection. Enraged beyond reason, Pherenike set upon Oreithyia, and the two Exalted did battle. "I do not believe that you have mastered the fine principles of gardening," Pherenike said, as she struck Oreithyia down, and demonstrated by arranging the Dragon-Blood's flesh in aesthetically pleasing fashion over an acre of forest. Only after setting her eyes amid the flowers and her skull amidst the stones did Pherenike let Oreithyia die. The Solar's peers deemed this her masterwork, and artists came to study it for years as it decayed.

The Dead

Over 200 dead Forest Witches reside within the Sea of Mind. Most rarely — if ever — leave this afterlife, seeing it as retirement to a well-earned paradise.

It's unclear to what extent the dead exist as anything more than a dream shared by the living Witches and the Sea of Mind. Nonetheless, dream or no, they act upon the world to sustain their paradise, fulfill personal ambitions, and expand the Sea.

The dead largely subsist in a passive state. Even moreso than visiting Witches, their existence is a loose framework of concepts, a series of events sketched out without truly being experienced. Only when engaged with the living or pursuing their strongest passions do they exist in the moment.

The dead aren't ghosts in any traditional sense. They lack physical or spiritual form, are not undead, and have no connection to the Underworld. Nonetheless, when an immersed Witch dies and is reborn in the Sea, she leaves neither ghost nor hungry ghost behind.

Thousands of mortal servants also gave their minds to the pool upon death, but their existence is more tenuous. Only a handful exist at any given time, serving the dead Witches' will. The rest persist only in potential, summoned forth when a Witch remembers them, ceasing to be when no longer needed; such is the natural state of the pool's dead inhabitants, averted for the Witches themselves only through great occult effort at the sect's dawn.

Should a dead Witch "die," she ceases to exist. However, the elders' council may, by its decree, recreate her in Atsiluth Eternal.

The Elders' Council

A council of 25 rules Atsiluth Eternal. Vitali Proseria seized leadership of the council centuries ago, and still sets their agenda today. The council's membership, though largely static, intermittently changes as new luminaries and demagogues join the dead, or amid seismic shifts

in its neverending political dramas. Ousting or replacing a council member requires only a majority vote.

Living Witches occasionally find themselves dragged into the council's intrigues by dead mentors and allies. They may be called upon to deploy persuasion and threats, gather blackmail material, or even "assassinate" dead councilors at auspicious moments.

The council's politics remain obscure to outsiders. Broadly speaking, their conflicts center on divergent visions concerning such matters as the nature of a perfected Creation subsumed by the Sea of Mind; by what methods to extend the Sea's reach; how best to refine Atsiluth Eternal's perfection; and the living Witches' strategies and tactics within the imperfect Creation. Individually, they're also driven ambition, vendetta, romantic affairs, and similar consummate passions.

Laws of the Dead

Proseria holds forth four principles for the dead and their city:

- The councils of the dead are for the dead alone. Living witches may address the councilors and hear their response, but the council's deliberations are not for their ears.
- Atsiluth Eternal is sacred ground. Struggles between the dead must take place in the reflected Creation, lest they disturb the dream of the perfected city. The dead occasionally flout this law, ranging from theft to kidnapping or assassination.
- The dead must carefully limit their impact on the Sea beyond Atsiluth, as divergences between the real Creation and what Witches perceive sap the Sea's strength. This doesn't apply to those using a walking effigy (p. XX).
- All must support the Company of Messengers, to speed the day when the Sea subsumes Creation and the dead walk the world alongside the living.

RY 564: The Blessing of Awakening

Across the centuries, Witches came to the pool as their lives waned, giving their minds to its depths. There they constructed a world of their own devising.

When this paradise at last attained fruition, the dead Witches named it the Sea of Mind and welcomed their peers to swim within its depths. "In life and in death," said Vitali Proseria, "you may join us. We only ask that you divert some portion of your attention, now and again, to the flow of power on which this Sea depends."

The Witches came and baptized themselves in the pool. And now, instead of leaving their paradise behind when they went forth into Creation, it accompanied them. They saw the world perfected, and were blessed.

Atsiluth Eternal

The uninitiated see only trees surrounding an ordinary forest pool. But the Forest Witches, immersed as they are in the Sea of Mind, witness something transcendent. For them, a glorious city rises upon a hill above a shining sea, its beauty and perfection outshining anything in Creation. This is Atsiluth Eternal, the first and final city.

Since the beginning, Witches approaching the end of their lives gave their minds to the forest pool. Atsiluth took form from their dreams and desires, becoming the city-seed from which the Sea of Mind grew. Today, it remains the home and sanctuary of the dead, though its doors are open to the living via the Sea.

It's the heaven to which the Witches aspire. Creation in the Sea is a miracle, where they seek perfection amid ever-ascending glory. But when passion for life passes, Atsiluth welcomes them into its eternal, paradisiacal embrace.

Standing on the Shore

While Atsiluth Eternal and its dead exist outside of Creation, a visiting Forest Witch doesn't. She perceives and interacts with the streets and residents of the first and final city, but her body remains near the forest pool. Those not immersed in the Sea sees her wandering aimlessly, speaking to people who aren't there.

A Blessed Labyrinth

Largely untethered from reality, Atsiluth Eternal follows the logic of dreams. The city's streets may not be in the same place from visit to visit; hours flit by like minutes or stretch out like days. Without the need to synchronize with Creation, the Sea is free to abstract Witches' experiences.

A meal, debate, or artistic performance in Atsiluth need have no content. It simply *happens*, leaving only the memory of a mood felt or decision reached. One may wander through a district whose populace and architecture are ciphers, then enter a garden with flowers of no particular shape or color — unless an onlooker gives sufficient attention to fill in the gaps.

Still, some locales have received sufficient attention over the centuries to take on concrete, persistent form and detail. These include:

The District of Fallen Petals: A gentle hillside of switchback roads, where small picturesque villas stand among cherry trees forever shedding their blossoms. Its peaceful atmosphere draws artists, lovers, and penitents.

The Gallery of Ancient Dust: This broad, interminable corridor's flagstones and faded portraits are thick with dust. On one wall, grimy windows overlook the Sea; on the other, countless doors open on rooms crammed with books and curios symbolizing centuries of dead Witches' knowledge. Witches come seeking wisdom or to meditate on the transience of mortal things.

The Sea: A vast, shimmering ocean leading to Creation and imaginary shores. This is the forest pool as seen from Atsiluth Eternal.

The Street of Soup Vendors: This winding alleyway buzzes with common folk about their ordinary, lively business, sampling fragrant dishes hawked loudly at food kiosks. Witches come here to partake in such vibrancy.

The Street of Strangers: Near to the Western Quay, this broad avenue — with its hostelries and its storefronts dealing in peculiar services — throngs with unfamiliar faces from unknown lands. Witches visit to walk or connive unnoticed among crowds.

The Walk of Unforgotten Words: An esplanade along the Sea's shore, where the sound and scent of the crashing waves enthrall passersby. Here, every word and gesture seem freighted with

meaning. Witches visit to heighten the drama of their actions, from romantic gestures to secret duels.

The Western Quay: Grand barques of fragrant wood dock here, carrying strange goods and travelers from fictitious lands. Travelers between Atsiluth Eternal and Creation often envision themselves passing through here, as do those visiting the notional island fastnesses of the more misanthropic dead.

Circumscribed Journeys

While the Sea encompasses all Creation in theory, in practice it's rooted in the Witches' perceptions and knowledge. It has no independent awareness of Creation. This limits dead Witches' ability to travel unescorted to places that no living Witch has visited recently — or ever.

Dead Witches largely find themselves uninterested in such locales, as the Sea unconsciously discourages them from journeying there. Should a dead Witch reject such urges and visit a place the Sea doesn't know — or, indeed, a place the Sea doesn't extend, such as the Underworld or the Demon City — the trip lacks content, much like untethered adventures in Atsiluth. She recalls the gist of sojourning there, but specifics are abstracted away.

The Black Scale Embassy

Decades ago, the demon Eutychia, the Bull Slain on Stagnation's Altar, appeared in Atsiluth Eternal by unknown means. Naming herself emissary of the Ebon Dragon, she bargained with the dead for a seat upon the elders' council. The specifics of this bargain remain secret.

Bleak and forbidding, the Black Scale Embassy stands upon the Street of Strangers, staffed by demons and mortal dead. Occasionally a Second Circle demon emerges, bearing a token of Eutychia's authority to attend the elders' council on her behalf. Thankfully, these demons have shown no ability to enter Creation from the Sea.

The Embassy focuses on the Company of Messengers, offering infernal lore and dark pacts that might aid in their mission. Hell's attention unnerves some, but the Witches remain confident in their power and their devotion to their task.

The Mist

The mist is the most cryptic manifestation of the forest's power, and the one with the least impact on most Witches' lives. But for those who embrace its offer, it holds the power to transform one's life utterly.

In the First Age, Lady Domnica cut herself away to become the potential for something greater. Now, a Forest Witch can bargain with the mist that was — and, in some sense, still is — Domnica, sacrificing part of her nature to become an aspect of the mist, a numina (p. XX). Only four are known to have taken this step.

Any Dragon-Blood may bargain with the mist to become a numen, choosing what part of her nature she'll forsake. Changes in form, personality, and powers accompany this apotheosis. If an extant numen has perished, she may instead step into its place, taking on its name and nature.

Samathi Anja, first of the numina, appears to each new Dragon-Blood joining the Witches as a representative of the mist. She tells the mist's tale and offers its bargain of transcendence. Few accept this offer. Yet Anja persists, for it is her belief that the mist yet remains complete, and will remain so until seven and seventy Dragon-Blooded sacrifice themselves to it and become numina.

RY 72: Anja's Sacrifice

Born with severe congenital defects and suffering from suicidal depression, Kumari Samathi Anja was an outcast before Exaltation; even after, she found only marginal acceptance in the Scarlet Dynasty. But she found welcome in Ghandarva's sybaritic cult, and followed him into the East.

Like Valentin, Anja sought solitude in the forest, albeit in her case to cut her own flesh and ponder nonexistence. And like Valentin, she wasn't alone. What approached her came as a mist; inquiring about her motives for self-harm, it offered her the opportunity to remake herself, perfected, in her own image. Anja, disdainful of bargains with mysterious mists in forest clearings, declined.

Ghandarva, overhearing the conversation, sought his own bargain. Trapping Anja with the mist, he forced her to confront its offer and her own self-loathing — things it deemed one and the same. "I have been without form for a very long time," the mist said. "And if I am to have form, I must have a soul, and that soul must be a thing of its own shaping. Naturally, you must consent. However, is that consent not implicit in your pattern of activities?"

The mist took Anja's form as it spoke. Maddened, Anja struck at her own shape, and through it, herself. Thus she was remade as the first numen of the mist.

The Cult of the Mist

Many Forest Witches find themselves fascinated by the mist's potential, but few have the courage to follow through. Rather than natural evolution and growth, it promises perfection through one direct, final, irrevocable step — a step that the numina themselves don't seem entirely satisfied with. Witches caught on the threshold, enthralled by the prospect of metamorphosis but unready to proceed, join the Cult of the Mist.

Such a Witch studies one numina or another, cloaking herself in its symbols and imitating its mannerisms and deeds. Through this emulation, she hopes to discern both the intent behind its sacrifice, and in what ways it failed or succeeded to fulfill that intent. In doing so, she prepares herself for the day when she, too, will carve away part of her nature to join their ranks. She will do better than those who went before.

Reverence of the numina is more widespread among the Forest Witches' mortal followers. Hundreds worship the mist, offering regular prayers and gossiping over rare sightings of the numina amid thicket and glade. Witches who emulate the numina find willing devotees among mortal cultists, and can look forward to receiving worship themselves should they ever accept the mist's offer.

Iurka, the Autumnal Torrent cut away her stillness; she's ever-moving, like a river or a storm, knowing no rest. She cut away her uncertainty; she knows her destiny from now until death, without room for choice. She cut away her ugliness; she has eighteen legs, seven arms, and three

faces, yet is beautiful. She cut away so much that she sheds shining blood at every step. Stillness and choice, she says, lead to pain; cut these away, and you cannot be hurt more than you already suffer.

Menderes, the Face Behind the Sky, cut away everything about himself that he deemed ignorant and insignificant. Now, from his dreamlike vantage, he peers down on all Creation as though into a world under glass. Others sense him first as an oppressive presence. Those he focuses on see him in visions — cockatiel-headed, seven-tailed, clutching the crystal sphere that is the world in smoldering claws. At its most intense, his regard can shatter minds. Exalts can strike back, their blades cutting him in his seat behind the sky.

Samathi Anja, the Shadow of the Knife cut all of herself away, yet somehow remained; who but her could do the cutting? A creature of remnant things, she guards the cast-offs of the forest — trash, lost treasure, abandoned plans, forgotten memories, and the like. Her many forms include a seething heap of molted snake-skins, a cat with a broken spine, or a woman cut open from chin to groin. When visiting as a representative of the mist, she appears as she did in life, but sad and tired, with dead-black eyes.

Seven-Face Rèsja cut away who she was without knowing what she wanted to become. Now she's fluid and ever-changing, her faces and her memories too transient to hold onto for long. An artist of shape, she takes many forms, ranging from beauty to horror, every detail measured for the desired effect. She transforms others as well, often as part of bargains that slip her mind before she can fulfill her end of the deal.

RY 286-301: Death and Rebirth

As Ghandarva grew old, the Witches expected him to retire to Atsiluth Eternal. But he found another way.

In payment for Samathi Anja's soul, he claimed a cloak made from its substance, a thing to circumvent the mechanisms of death and reincarnation. Donning it, he engineered his own rebirth into the Scarlet Dynasty that mocked him. Born as Jurul Demyen, he Exalted young, and turned unexpected power and brilliance toward stealing House Jurul's fortune. He and the house underestimated one another; he largely failed but escaped, wealthy and whole, to the forest.

Besting several Forest Witch champions, Ghandarva forced the sect to acknowledge his rebirth. And, reenergized by physical youth and as embittered by the Realm as ever, he set forth a new agenda for the Witches. As seekers of perfection, they were owed the authority unrighteously held by the stagnant Realm. They would destroy any who were both willing and able to oppose them. Creation would be theirs.

Domnica's Mantle

Sacrificing Anja in a devil's bargain with the mist, Ghandarva obtained the nebulous, occult cloak known as Domnica's Mantle. It holds a unique power: One who wears it may exchange their life for one yet unborn, superseding the cycle of reincarnation.

The Mantle's wearer selects the nature of the new life into which she'll be born. This includes location, ethnicity, social status, and the like, and her physical appearance. She may be as broad or selective as she wishes, though at least one parent must be human. If circumstances determine

that no birth matches her criteria, she'll reincarnate under circumstances as close as possible to her desire.

Upon naming her desire, the wearer crumbles to dust. She's reborn within two years unless the Mantle itself is destroyed.

The reborn wearer lacks access to the Sea of Mind, and slowly recalls her former life during early childhood. If she was Exalted as a Dragon-Blood, she Exalts again at puberty, regaining her full supernatural puissance.

The Company of Thrones

Upon returning to the forest after his first reincarnation, Ghandarva proposed a new path for the living Witches. Called the Spear Sutra, his proposal was to rule Creation in all but name, by secretly undermining the will to oppose their power. Their primary tool would be reincarnation.

Called the Company of Thrones, Ghandarva's agents use Domnica's Mantle to be reborn into positions of power in neighboring lands. Upon Exalting again, some strike at the Witches' enemies from within, then return to the forest to renew their connection with the Sea of Mind. Others remain in place, marshaling power and influence on the Witches' behalf.

Active Thrones occupy a variety of roles, including princes, oligarchs, priests, bureaucrats, merchants, generals, and the like. Their methods encompass intelligence-gathering, blackmail, sabotage, preaching, assassination, and war.

Desire for the forest's blessings limits the Thrones' effectiveness. Craving the Sea of Mind, they return to the forest whenever possible — first to reimmerse, and later to enjoy the company of their own kind. And some join solely to renew their youth, doing the bare minimum as Thrones before ending their tenure.

Conquest in All But Name

Cevis Ghandarva's faction strives to subdue Creation, but not through force of arms. Better to remove all opposition, placing their own people and pawns in position of power. They will rule in the end, even if the ruled don't know it. They believe this to be their destiny. All who oppose them are Anathema.

Immortality underpins this grand scheme. Given time, the Witches' servants would form an empire under the Company of Thrones' sway, eventually rivaling the hated Scarlet Realm. But with the Empress' disappearance, the Witches find themselves unready.

Defeating the Realm would legitimize the Witches' professed destiny. It would also fulfill Ghandarva's ancient grudge. Sadly, his faction is centuries (at best) from being ready to usurp the Realm. Pressed for time, they've become more aggressive in their mission. Should they prove too incautious, their machinations may be revealed.

Noteworthy Witches

Though changed by death and reincarnation, **Cevis Ghandarva** remains at his core who he always was: a proud, arrogant visionary, never satisfied with his lot, forever seeking power and perfection. Many Forest Witches still revere him as the sect's founder, and he holds much sway over the living. As a political leader, his two goals — ruling the world in all but name, and

vengeance against the Realm that mocked him — are aligned, and the incipient Realm civil war offers long-awaited opportunity.

Amoril Rurik is a polarizing figure among the Witches. He slew Ghandarva and Oreithyia's favorite, Bidalasaka Valentin, enraging the forest walker and leaving Ghandarva maimed; he founded the Mandala Guard, securing their paradise's borders. Insightful, courageous, and strong, he's also swaggering, prickly, and unmerciful. Some ambitious or iconoclastic Witches support Rurik as a rival to Ghandarva, but he has few intimates — most of them among the dead.

A member of the Table of Fiends, Rurik sows terror across the Scavenger Lands, performing unhale deeds — profaning sacred places, brutally slaying princes and elders, raising insurrections — in the Forest Witches' name. Though he prefers sojourning abroad where no peers can gainsay his will, he occasionally returns to the forest to rabble-rouse and pursue old vendettas. He's yet to resolve the conflict between his loyalty to Ghandarva, resentment over their longstanding feud, and ambition to take Ghandarva's place.

Few question **Vitali Proseria**'s rulership of the dead council. A ruthless authoritarian, she maintains peace and order with an iron fist. She's also a true believer in Atsiluth Eternal's paradise. To share that perfection, she aims to strengthen the Sea of Mind until it wholly subsumes Creation, dreaming of a world where the dead walk freely among the living. She maintains an uneasy and distant alliance with Ghandarva, concerned that his ambitions might someday place them at cross-purposes.

Systems

The rules for the unique mysteries of the Forest Witches are below.

The Sea of Mind

Immersion in the Sea of Mind is represented with a three-dot Story Merit. Player characters who don't begin with it can subsequently gain it, although they'll have to pay a suitable tribute before being allowed to do so. In addition to altering the character's perceptions as detailed above (p. XX), it also confers the following benefits:

- When she takes an action that upholds one of her Intimacies, her roll is used to determine its outcome in reality — but within the Sea, she succeeds automatically, unless she is opposed by another attuned character acting in furtherance of an Intimacy. When two attuned characters come into conflict, each multiplies their total rolled successes or applicable static value by (Intimacy) to determine its effects within the Sea. If a character takes an unopposed action that solely effects the Sea, such as building a palace that has no equivalent in Creation, no roll is necessary.
- Tasks can be completed far more quickly than normal within the Sea, decreasing the necessary time by one step: from years, to seasons, to months, to weeks, to days, to hours, to minutes. This is only reflected in the Sea; in reality, the attuned character's progress corresponds to the actual time they have spent at work.
- Her actions within the Sea are not impeded by injuries, poison, disease, shaping magic, curses, or other unwanted effects. Even if she dies, she persists within the Sea.
- If an attuned character activates a Charm in a way that has no impact on reality outside the Sea, she waives its cost.

- If an attuned character crafts an object that exists only in the Sea, she waives all craft point costs. Likewise, if she performs a sorcerous working that exists only in the Sea, it costs no experience.
- While the Sea of Mind cannot impact Creation directly, an attuned character's idealized experience of reality still conveys some benefits, guiding her towards the best ways of achieving her goals. When she spends Willpower to add a success to an action that upholds one of her Intimacies, she may add (Intimacy) non-Charms dice instead of a success.

The Sea of Mind is weak in demesnes, manses, shadowlands, and Wyld zones, and the benefits of this Merit may likewise be unreliable in such places. Outside Creation, it offers no benefits at all.

Walking Effigies (Artifact ...)

Death may not impede a Forest Witch's ability to act within the Sea of Mind, but without a body, she can no longer interact with Creation's reality. Walking effigies are artifacts that allow the dead to circumvent this, faceless statues graven from jade that the dead may inhabit to interact with Creation.

A dead Forest Witch may attune to a walking effigy for five motes. Once she does, she bonds with it, and can act through it as though it were her own body. She uses all of her own traits — including Essence and Charms — except that the walking effigy has its own health track of two –0 levels, three –1 levels, three –2 levels, and three –4 levels. Walking effigies are immune to poison and disease, and have no need to eat, drink, sleep, or breathe.

Walking effigies don't heal naturally — repairing a single health level is a difficulty 4 major craft project (**Exalted**, p. 240) that takes one day. If a walking effigy is incapacitated, a superior project with goal number 30 is required to repair its Incapacitated health level.

Walking effigies are unreliable in demesnes, manses, shadowlands, and Wyld zones, imposing a –3 penalty on any action the Witch takes that interacts with the real Creation. They cannot function at all outside of Creation.

Playing the Dead

Dead Forest Witches are viable player characters, although it's probably worth discussing with the Storyteller in advance so she can take that into consideration. Virtually all dead player characters will need a walking effigy to meaningfully interact with the game. The Storyteller has the option to give them a walking effigy for free, although if she does, she should give other characters a similar benefit at character creation. If being dead causes significant obstacles for a player character, she may gain experience points from it as though it were a Flaw (**Exalted**, p. 167).

If a dead player character being unable to enter realms of existence outside of Creation would be unnecessarily disruptive to the game's narrative, the Storytellers should let them develop walking effigy Evocations to circumvent this limitation, or simply handwave it entirely, whichever best fits the needs of her game.

The Numina

A Forest Witch who wishes to become a numen must spend time secluded amid the mist, communing with it in preparation for her eventual apotheosis. The mist inquires how she wishes

to change herself, and her answer forms the basis of the transformations apotheosis works on her body and spirit. She must spend 20 experience points to undergo apotheosis, although the Storyteller may allow her to take on experience debt instead if necessary to give the transformation suitable dramatic timing.

Becoming a numen confers the following traits:

- They are spirits as well as Exalted, which renders them vulnerable to certain magical effects. If they are killed without the use of magic capable of permanently killing spirits, they reform within the mists (**Exalted**, pp. 508-509), typically within a month.
- They gain six dots of mutations, reflecting the changes wrought upon their bodies by their apotheosis, and can go into experience debt to gain further mutations.
- They are capable of hearing prayers directed to them. Most of the time, these prayers are an indistinguishable susurrus at the edge of the numen's perception; focusing enough to hear their contents imposes a -3 penalty on all non-reflexive actions.
- They can spend thirty motes and one Willpower to dematerialize, as a miscellaneous action that can't be flurried. They do not dematerialize until their next turn begins. Rematerializing costs fifteen motes, and is likewise a miscellaneous action that can't be flurried. Motes spent to dematerialize or rematerialize aren't committed.
- They can learn Eclipse Charms that fit the nature of their apotheosis for eight experience points each. This doesn't require a teacher. They can spend additional experience points during apotheosis to immediately learn such Charms.

If a player wishes to make a numen in character creation, they can purchase the above benefits as a four-dot Merit. This doesn't grant mutations; those must be purchased separately with her starting Merit dots or bonus points. The numen can take Eclipse Charms in place of her starting Dragon-Blooded Charms.

Domnica's Mantle

The formidable powers of Domnica's Mantle are conceptually Evocations that Cevis Ghandarva has awakened from it, but the precise mechanics are unimportant for the role it plays in Forest Witch games. If a player wants her character to employ the Mantle to reincarnate, she should ask the Storyteller first, and see if there's an opportunity to work the significant downtime necessary to speed past her new incarnation's early years can be worked into the game without disrupting its ongoing narrative — playing a baby offers few opportunities for adventure. Once the reincarnation comes of age, she retains all the traits she possessed formerly, in addition to any she's gained since being reincarnated, either through story developments or spending experience points.

Storytelling the Forest Witches

Theme: Pursuing Perfection

Forest Witch stories concern themselves with the pursuit of perfection through transformation, both within and without. This manifests most clearly in the Sea of Mind, where characters and players alike can explore the boundaries between the world as it is and the world as we wish it to be. What does it mean to see the things you desire even if they aren't real, while things you deem ugly simply... disappear? What happens when you can describe the world *as you desire it to be*

so strongly and so clearly that you — and those who see the world as you do — take it for the truth?

Atsiluth Eternal's dead explore concepts ranging from artificial intelligence and brain mapping — see the *Black Mirror* episode “San Junipero” — to the impact of the real world's dead on us today, where we can call up our memories of lost loved ones, deceased writers seem to come alive when we read their works, and politicians put dead statesmen's old words in new contexts. Atsiluth's dead hold a similar liminal role. If we create an idealized reflection of someone who's died, is that truly the same person?

In the *Company of Thrones*, a character donning Domnica's Mantle abandons her old life and begins anew. But what does it really mean to wipe the slate clean and get a fresh start? How much of our personality comes from our memories, and how much from our bodies and our environments?

Those who'd join the numina embark on an even greater transformation, cutting away all that they are to become something irrevocably new, without certainty as to what they'll become. To follow the Cult of the Mist is to teeter on the doorstep of personal transformation, constantly questioning exactly what steps to take and why, and wondering whether it'll be worthwhile. To become a numen is to take that final step, and to forever wonder if it was the right choice.

The Mandala Guard set such ambitions aside. Rather than pursuing their own perfection, they labor to ensure the safety of their fellow seekers on the path. Is it right that those who perform ugly, thankless duties can't share in the earthly paradise that their labors make possible?

Mood: Idyllic Amoral

The Forest Witches live in paradise. Oreithyia tends to their every physical need; the Sea of Mind fills their minds with splendor and glory, offering a world rife with adventure and pleasure; the mist offers the prospect of sudden, radical completion.

All of this comes at a cost. The Witches must steal from others and slay irreplaceable champions in order to pay their tithes to the Sea; they must offer up young foreigners to Oreithyia's possessive, unpredictably violent grip to retain her services. The Sea glosses over the harm they do, making the suffering of others invisible to them.

Much of the tone of a Forest Witch story comes from addressing this incongruity. No matter how long the characters remain oblivious to the evils they perpetrate, the truth still lies in wait. And if one or more characters look past the Sea's artificial perfection to acknowledge the consequences of their actions, they must confront their peers' dedication to maintaining and expanding the Sea despite its human cost.

Thick forests lined the road to Delem. Once, bandits had used the trees for cover, dropping down from overhanging branches to raid passing merchant caravans. Then Chalima turned the forest against them, launching her own assaults from thick stands or luring bandits deep into the woods. The road from her principality to the outlying towns was much safer these days, and Chalima prided herself on knowing the places unsavory sorts might hide.

Which was why, when the woman landed lightly in her path, katana and wakizashi drawn, admiration warred with alarm.

“You should know,” Chalima said, resting one hand on her devil caster’s grip, “that I’m the one who rid this route of thieves and murderers the first time around. Whatever you’re about to do, perhaps you’d like to reconsider.”

“And go home empty-handed? No. The Grass Spiders are collecting quite the hefty price for your head, Left Hand Chalima.” She raced forward, swords flashing. Chalima brought the devil caster up and fired twice, her finger a blur on the trigger. Her would-be assassin swerved and darted away, blasting Chalima with an icy wind as she went.

The Grass Spiders? Chalima had heard word of the outcaste assassins. She must have finally angered the right person, to be on their kill list. “You know my name,” she said, drawing her daiklave. If Simhata’s Roar ran out of firedust, Chalima wouldn’t have time to reload; her foe moved as swiftly as a Northern wind. “It’s only polite to tell me yours, if you’re aiming to spill my blood.”

Her smile was as cold as a Northern wind, too. “Cutting Frost.” Uninterested in further pleasantries, the assassin leapt high into the air and dove down, both blades ready. Chalima cursed and brought her daiklave up just in time to knock the longer sword aside. The other stung as it sliced her cheek.

Chalima shoved Cutting Frost backwards, buying herself room to swing. Flames licked the air as her daiklave arced toward the assassin. The clang of clashing blades echoed through the forest, setting a flock of startled raitons to wing. “Would you at least do me the courtesy of telling me who’s put the bounty on me?”

Cutting Frost considered this a moment, then shrugged. “I see no harm in it. He called himself Garan.”

Oh, that name Chalima knew. She’d driven the Solar Anathema’s zealous followers from the village of Rise a year ago, scattering them across the Hundred Kingdoms. She’d planned to write to her Hearth and ask for their help hunting the Anathema down, but other matters had required her attention, and all reports of Garan trickled to a stop. She’d begun to hope he’d left the region entirely. *Should’ve made time for that letter.* “So the Grass Spiders willingly do an Anathema’s bidding? You should be ashamed.” She lunged, forcing Cutting Frost to catch the daiklave on her swords. They stood inches apart, staring one another down over their blades.

“Coin is coin,” said Cutting Frost. “The source doesn’t matter, only the job.”

“That attitude will be your downfall.”

That icy smile again. “How sad for you, then, that you won’t live to see it.” Cutting Frost broke the stalemate, dodging Chalima’s ensuing swing and whirling in with one of her own. Rime

gathered in the assassin's footsteps, then dissipated as tongues of fire dripped from Chalima's daiklave.

Chalima couldn't help but grin as she readied for another strike. It had been too long since she'd been in a good fight.

Chapter Five

Outcastes

The Cult of the Violet Fang

The landscape surrounding the fortress-cathedral of the Cult of the Violet Fang's lands still display traces of its past — salted fields, unmarked graves, mounds of rubble from once-mighty walls. Hazana Redoubt stood here during the Shogunate, both a strategic defense and a watchful eye on the nearby Wyld. When the raksha invaded in the Great Contagion's wake, they assailed the fortress with nightmarish weapons and impossible armies, yet its Dragon-Blooded guardians held the line, deploying awful relics of the First Age and sacrificing their lives to drive back the chaos.

With neither side able to achieve clear victory, and both incurring ruinous losses, Hazana Redoubt's commander eventually negotiated a ceasefire with the raksha nobles leading the siege. For a time, the surviving Dragon-Blooded and the Fair Folk lived together in a tenuous harmony. When the Sword of Creation was unleashed on the Blessed Isle, the redoubt's Fair Folk fled back into the Wyld before its awful might — but the Cult of the Violet Fang, the Fae-Blooded lineage born out of this strange truce survives even to the modern day.

The dark star at the Cult's center is its pilgrimage into the Wyld. The pilgrimage calls Cult zealots to quest against its raksha ancestors, offering great rewards at a terrible cost, and members spend their whole lives preparing for it. When they Exalt in their grand Cathedral of Opal Dreams, they seek out their raksha ancestors to acquire great boons — or, for the unlucky or foolish, curses disguised as boons. Members who don't Exalt dedicate themselves to the Cult's secular existence, trading with the Guild and recruiting new members.

Storyteller Advice: Themes and Genre

The Cult of the Violet Fang offers dark adventure and horror within the twisted trappings of the Cult. The Cathedral sits geographically isolated in the Northwest, separated from its neighbors by the Wasting Tundra, to render escape near-impossible. Beauty and suffering become one in the Fair Folk's hands, and Dragon-Blooded must endure both to return from the pilgrimage.

The Pilgrimage

The pilgrimage into the Wyld is the heart of the Cult's spirituality and society. It's both ancient tradition and uncanny obsession, an all-but-inescapable drive to venture out into chaos and confront the ancestral monsters of the Parliament Amethystine.

Only the Dragon-Blooded may partake in the pilgrimage. Sometimes this is a personal matter — faced by an impossible decision or laden with guilt for some crime, one might seek answers or

atonement in the Wyld. At other times, perhaps following a beloved comrade's lead or gathered by signs and portents, groups of pilgrims assemble to challenge the Fair Folk together.

From the moment of Exaltation, a Dragon-Blood faces great pressure to undertake the pilgrimage. It may be forestalled for a time, even for years, but the longer they delay, the more and more coercive the efforts of their peers will become. Those who have no wish to undertake the pilgrimage often leave the Cult entirely to escape such demands.

Cult members traditionally begin their pilgrimage route through Whitecrown's Gate, a bordermarch encompassing a long, winding mountain pass in the Wyld-warped mountains north of the Cathedral. Shadows here seem thicker than normal, and colors brighter, while objects feel curiously light; falling snow hovers for hours, never quite touching the ground. Fae guardians of all sorts haunt the Gate, sent by the Parliament Amethystine's princes to test pilgrims to see who's worthy of patronage. Some pilgrims traverse other bordermarches, such as the eye-rimed tundra of the Freezing Vigil, where one is never alone, or the fleshy, pulsing tunnels that form the ever-shifting Lindworm Maze.

Pilgrims who endure the gauntlet of the bordermarches enter the middlemarches of Irrian-Ves, where the Parliament resides. A dreadful violet aurora illumines the forever-midnight sky. Beneath its glow, vertiginous peaks capped with Fair Folk palaces shine with a thousand colors; between them, sheer cliffs descend into lightless abysses where other faerie lords make their grim abodes. Islands and skerries float in midair, haunted by monsters and pilgrims' ghosts; great serpents swim through the sky between them, willing to carry travelers in exchange for a bite of frozen flesh.

In Irrian-Ves, the Fair Folk noble whose minions have tested and assailed the pilgrim throughout the bordermarches now confronts the aspirant directly, overseeing the pilgrimage's final ordeals in accordance with the inscrutable laws of their nature. Most pilgrims draw a single raksha noble's attention — either through heroic deeds in the bordermarches, direct descent from that fae, or some incomprehensible quality of mind or spirit — but some in the Cult tell of pilgrimages they've undertaken where faerie nobles competed and schemed against each other for the right to judge the pilgrim, or where none in the Parliament would judge the pilgrim, who instead found their ordeal in the crucible of the vasty depths beneath Irrian-Ves.

At ordeal's end, the pilgrim emerges anew, bearing gifts and scars from their raksha patron. Some receive artifacts, whether new from faerie dream-smiths' forges or heirlooms lost to the Wyld in a long-ago pilgrimage. Others are bodily transformed into shapes wondrous and terrifying. Still others learn forbidden secrets or mind-warping insights into some abstruse enlightenment. It isn't always easy to tell whether these are punishments or rewards — even the most desirable boons aren't without cost, and even the worst curses aren't without benefits.

The Parliament Amethystine

The raksha court that Cultists quest against is comprised of the same fae who first sired the Cult's otherworldly bloodline, as well as raksha who've won a place among the court's nobility in the intervening centuries. The Cult worships them, but doesn't understand them fully — the court's political structure is an ever-shifting cauldron of chaos, and even the most studious pilgrim's observations may be out of date by the time they return to the Cathedral.

The Parliament, for its part, views the Cult of the Violet Fang with what seems like benevolence. They show their Dragon-Blooded descendants much warmer hospitality than other guests, and the pilgrimage is as central to the Parliament's culture as to the Cult's. A pilgrim who's successfully completed their trials might share mead with the same monster that harried them on their pilgrimage, seek inspiration from a lorelei muse, or linger with a fae paramour before setting out to return to the Cathedral. Yet wary pilgrims don't mistake the Parliament's hospitality for safety — their fae ancestors' nature isn't to nurture their children, but to flense away weakness until only strength remains.

Diermedel Rime-Crowned is the Parliament's current leader; the only commonality of her many shapes is the miniature golden cage dangling from her necklace, containing her predecessor's shriveled but still-living body. Her voice is a killing gale that freezes all who hear it, and so she communes with pilgrims in synesthetic whirlwinds of flashing color and pleasing aromas. She seeks to consolidate her newfound power, yet her nature demands that she love most those who pose the fiercest threat to her. She often asks pilgrims to take on certain unpleasanties that her own heart cannot bear to enact firsthand.

Calt o' the Quest wears most often the shape of a snow-white stag with a man's face and a lion's paws, challenging pilgrims to track him through miles of windswept snow. The only safe path is that marked by his pawprints; all others lead inevitably to acidic snowmelts, the dens of predatory mirages, voice-stealing winds, and other perils.

When **Osiyan Voice-of-Iron** speaks her poems aloud, her words become marching armies arrayed in ice-crusted steel. Those who face her challenge must endure her rhymed legion, forcing their way through its ranks until they stand face to face with the black-visored poet and can recite her poem back to her perfectly.

Clad in hues warm as firelight, **Magnanimous Gwenyant** seems a beneficent host. He welcomes pilgrims as honored guests to his Palace of a Thousand Bounties, seating them beside him at banquet and offering luxurious private bedchambers. But the palace is a labyrinth of deception and treachery, where vassals and servants jockey to suborn the pilgrim into intrigues against their master and one another. A pilgrim must choose the winning side and successfully "overthrow" Gwenyant to win his favor.

The savant and trickster **Emeyun Whom-You-Do-Not-Know** tests pilgrims by trapping them in illusionary worlds that embody intellectual puzzles or philosophical paradoxes that must be understood before they can be escaped. A shapeshifter, they can take any form unfamiliar to the pilgrim; they never appear to one in the same shape twice.

Life in the Cult

The Cult imposes a stark division between its Dragon-Blooded and mortal members. Those who've drawn their Second Breath reside in the splendors of the Cathedral of Opal Dreams, among the first and greatest prizes won from the Fair Folk. A palace of vibrant gemstones forged around the ruined shell of Hazana Redoubt, it grows like a living thing, passages twisting into new rooms while opal walls shed gems like dead skin. Stained-glass windows of gemstone

depict Dragon-Blooded pilgrims' deeds, even those they might wish to conceal. Spires catch the aurora's pale light and bright hues, carrying their warmth down through the Cathedral into the earth to make the surrounding land habitable.

Mortal Cultists, forbidden from entering the Cathedral, reside in an outlying ring of buildings erected from the rubble of Hazana Redoubt. These include relatives of the Cult's few dozen Dragon-Blooded, from spouses and children to kin so distant that the Cult no longer believes they can produce Dragon-Blooded scions. They tend crops and livestock, carve artistic and household items from stone and wood, and occasionally dare the bordermarches in search of treasures and lesser wonders that might fetch a handsome price from visiting merchants.

The Cult's leadership is likewise divided. Within the Cathedral, Dragon-Blooded affairs are governed by the Council of the Returned, wherein every Dragon-Blood who's completed a pilgrimage has a vote. Despite the substantial prestige that accompanies a successful pilgrimage, a pilgrim's reputation is vulnerable to rumors and gossip of how their pilgrimage changed or warped them; public displays of emotional volatility, trauma, or instability risk darkening their star. The Council's cliques and voting blocs shift as reputations rise and fall, and conspiracy thrives within the Cathedral's halls.

The Cult's mortal members are overseen by the Gray Assembly, upon which any mortal who's reached age sixty may claim a seat. In principle, the Gray Assembly's purpose is solely to promulgate and enforce the Council of the Returned's edicts. In practice, the Council has delegated considerable authority to the Assembly in areas such as agriculture, trade, and punishment of crimes between mortals, so that Dragon-Blooded may focus on loftier matters. While direct conflicts between the two bodies are rare, the Gray Assembly's oversight of Cult granaries and coffers lends considerable leverage — more than once, the Council has ceded to its inferiors' demands, lest Dragon-Blooded be forced to toil in the field or parley with merchants to survive.

Children of the Wyld

The Cult of the Violet Fang descends from the raksha, and most members are Fae-Blooded. Many possess Supernatural Merits or other mutations reflecting fae ancestry, but lack any greater magics. A rare few possess supernatural power — thaumaturgy, sorcery, or Charms evoking Fair Folk magic. Exalted of Fae-Blooded descent use the Divine Heritage Merit (p. XX) to represent its benefits.

New Recruits

Legends of the Cult's secrets and power draw recruits from across the Northwest and beyond. Dragon-Blooded aspirants, ranging from lone outcastes to renegade Dynasts, are welcomed into the Cathedral and trained for the pilgrimage. Lacking the Parliament Amethystine's fae lineage, they must be accompanied on their first pilgrimage by a born member of the Cult; a successful pilgrimage sees them adopted into the Cult's bloodline.

The Cult believes that only the Exalted have the physical and spiritual strength to endure the pilgrimage. Even Fae-Blooded or descendants of other supernatural beings simply aren't fit to the task. Mortals may nevertheless serve the Cult both as laborers and potential spouses to expand the Cult's bloodlines, and find spiritual reward in veneration of raksha ancestors — even if they never set foot in the Cathedral or bear witness to its horrible glory.

It's rare that Exalted other than Dragon-Blooded seek admission to the Cult; in such cases, the Council of the Returned determines their fate. Often they'll spend time in service, working under a Dragon-Blooded Cult member or even serving the mortal populace, proving both loyalty and worth. Others — especially Anathema postulants, toward whom some Immaculate prejudice yet remains — face harsher tests, contending against great Northern beasts or Wyld perils. Those who find favor with the Council may undertake the pilgrimage under Dragon-Blooded guidance.

Northern Relations

A caravan of the Guild's **Company of Northern Twilight** visits the Cathedral yearly. Three siblings lead the Company, each out to prove they should inherit their wealthy mother's family business. Bjorn, Saska and Jora maintain a united front when dealing with outsiders, but their rivalry is clear to astute observers. The siblings, keen for the Wyld prodigies the Cult offers, are frustrated by the slow pace at which the Cult collects them. They bring livestock to replace animals who died in the hard winter, firewood, and various metal items.

The **Audhild** are Northern nomads following mammoth-spider migrations. Their path takes them close to the Cathedral, where they strike up temporary trade encampments. It also takes them through the Tethra Plains, a tundra bordermarch rich with strangely colored animals and plants on which the mammoth-spiders prey. Audhild religion centers around worship and propitiation of Fair Folk princes who occasionally descend from the mountains to hunt or meddle with mortals, and occasional Fae-Blooded offspring are revered as spiritual leaders.

Through their travels, the Audhild know much about the state of Northern Realm satrapies and independent cities. The Cult also pays Audhild bards to sing the Cult's praises to the extended North and Northwest whenever it needs new recruits. Dragon-Blooded seeking to leave the Cult, either surreptitiously or after a successful pilgrimage, may travel with the Audhild, who consider an unstable mind in their midst a fair trade for having someone who can treat with raksha.

Scions of Note

In the Cult, family names are only borne by outsiders who join during adulthood; children born into the Cult don't receive them. Cult members who share a name differentiate themselves with epithets.

True Ingrid prepares for her thirteenth pilgrimage. Her hollow eyes, blind to mundane things, perceive the eddies of glamour with impossible clarity; her blade-turning skin of sapphires feels neither pain nor pleasure. A diadem of stars glows between her upswept horns, their radiance invoking awe and despair. Weird and distant from her kin and her own humanity, she still seeks to share the strange wisdom she's earned from her quests, but she and her students must struggle to bridge the gap sufficiently to communicate her insights.

Oroshi the Spear-Bearer, a renegade Realm outcaste who fled the purge of the Imperial legions, returned from his first pilgrimage with a foe-shattering lance in his hand and undying wonder in his heart. Filled with the zeal of the newly converted, he wishes to share the pilgrimage's horrors and beauty with all Northerners. He proposes more aggressive recruitment of Dragon-Blooded and mortals alike, to build the Cult into a grand army. But if he's to lead an army, why stop there? He's started dreaming of himself as Emperor of the North, and seeks ambitious young Dragon-Blooded as lieutenants in his cabal.

Dagna emerged from her pilgrimage mentally broken, barely remembering her own name. It took her years to regain some semblance of self; now, she's an outspoken opponent of the pilgrimage, striving to save her kin from the torments that befell her. Dagna seeks Dragon-Bloods who want to escape the pilgrimage, then bribes merchants or nomads to smuggle them away. She's quiet and observant, but her scattered mind makes her unreliable; characters might find Dagna speaking gibberish in her rooms when she was supposed to bring them to the smugglers.

Honey-Voiced Hetta, mortal cult member, has continued a relationship with Magnanimous Gwenyant for twenty years and counting. They met when Hetta secretly ventured into the middlemarches, seeking out treasures normally reserved for pilgrims. She's since borne her lover twins, and now carries their third and fourth child. Hetta dreams of a Cult where mortals and Dragon-Blooded alike may undertake the pilgrimage; she believes that gifted kinfolk can win renown, while the foolish and arrogant will perish — strengthening the Cult either way. But the rule against mortal pilgrims is strong, and she knows she needs powerful allies to enact change. She seeks out young Dragon-Blooded amenable to a more equal Cult.

The Grass Spiders

A Scavenger Lands fable describes the Grass Spider as a shadow who lopes across the tangled branches of the East so deftly that her legs seem eight in number, her daggers dripping with lethal venom. A real Grass Spider is all the more dangerous for concealing her true threat behind a veil of normalcy.

For over a century, the outcaste assassins known as the Grass Spiders have operated from their hidden fortress-manse, the Unrepentant Sinner Palace, where they train in every manner of killing. Each Grass Spider lives her life in accordance with the instruction of the Three Elite Fiends, three mysterious elder outcastes who tolerate little dissent. The Fiends demand strict adherence to tradition, and enforce highly regimented training that consumes the entire day when not on assignment.

The assassin clan encompasses a score of Exalted and several dozen mortals. Mortal Grass Spiders often accompany Exalted colleagues on difficult and dangerous contracts or take on lower-priority jobs solo. The Grass Spider who draws her Second Breath finds her training accelerated, and is expected to train twice as hard as mortal peers.

Storyteller Advice: Themes and Genre

The Grass Spiders provide a venue for tales of spycraft, the criminal underground, and assassins' intrigues. They're narratively well-suited to games that will traverse many locales; a series of assassination contracts could provide the basis for a Grass Spider to join with other player characters on such a journey.

The Art of Death

The Grass Spiders consider themselves artists of death, expressing themselves aesthetically through murder — whether bloody and macabre, or subtle and silent. Moreover, it's their tradition to share that expression with the clan through other media, whether oratory, poetry, song, sculpture, dance, painting, or the like. For the Spider, assassination doesn't begin and end

with her knife piercing the mark's heart. Her art begins with accepting a contract and ends when the last note is composed or the last brushstroke is made.

The clan gathers annually at the Unrepentant Sinner Palace to share performances and artwork inspired by recent assassinations with the Three Elite Fiends and gathered clanmates. The prestige earned from an impressive presentation yields not only respect from one's peers, but the clan elders' favor; this can translate into training in secret techniques, access to artifacts in the Grass Spiders' vaults, or other boons.

The Unrepentant Sinner Palace

At the River Province's eastern edge stands a large temple to Ring-Tailed Karaxi, a major River Province harvest goddess. Few would suspect the Grass Spiders' headquarters lay hidden below.

The temple's monks are known to practice martial arts and to produce medicines and perfumes for sale in neighboring village markets. Many from the surrounding farmlands make seasonal pilgrimages to pray and make offerings for bountiful yields; the Grass Spiders use this traffic to mask their travels.

Behind Karaxi's altar stands an unmarked door through which only temple leaders go, purportedly to speak with the goddess. A trapdoor in the room beyond opens on stone steps that wind down to the subterranean fortress-manse.

The stairs open onto an esplanade alongside an underground lake that encircles an island with a bone-white tree. Growing without light, fed with flesh and blood, this tree is the manse's beating heart. Grass Spiders gather its sap, which runs down into basins at its roots, to make a deadly paralytic poison, as well as medicines the temple sells. When necessary, the Three Elite Fiends address the clan from here.

Branching from the esplanade are smaller caverns, connected by narrow tunnels leading to many dead ends. These serve as gathering areas, storerooms, and dormitories for resident Grass Spiders. The walls are decorated with Spiders' statues, paintings, tapestries, and calligraphy. Several times a year, these pieces are moved about at random, lest intruders attempt to use the decorations as directions.

The Three Elite Fiends' council chamber stands behind a jade-banded door. They convene here to meet with one another or with individual Grass Spiders. Inside the chamber are three thrones — one of oak, one of elm, and one of ash — illumined by a perpetual blue-green glow from naturally luminescent rocks set into the walls.

Ring-Tailed Karaxi

Clad in elaborate white robes embroidered green and gold, carrying a jade staff carved to resemble an oversized rice stalk, Karaxi appears a kind, motherly figure. But she's feared among the Scavenger Lands' harvest gods. She schemes with the Grass Spiders to undermine or destroy rival spirits and broaden her worship. Indeed, she's an honorary Grass Spider herself, a master of the White Reaper and Crimson Killing Field styles, and on rare occasions repays the organization by accepting a contract.

But their relationship isn't entirely amicable. Karaxi once sought to suborn the Spiders, and the Fiends dealt her an injury that has never healed; bandages beneath her robes are soaked with amber blood, and the wrinkles around her eyes show not

wisdom but pain. Her resentment offers leverage in manipulating her against the Spiders.

Recruitment

The Grass Spiders recruit mostly from the students of Karaxi's temples throughout the River Province. Promising initiates are offered special training in martial arts to progress beyond their peers, often in subtle styles such as White Veil, Ebon Shadow, or Phantom Talon. When their teachers deems them ready, they're brought to the Palace for presentation to the Three Elite Fiends.

The Grass Spiders focus on recruiting outcaste Dragon-Blooded and others with supernatural talents. These occasionally include Exigents, God-Blooded, spirits, or stranger entities. All that concerns the Fiends is loyalty.

When word reaches the Grass Spiders of a newly Exalted outcaste within their sphere of influence, the Fiends dispatch an agent to recruit the outcaste and bring her back to the Unrepentant Sinner Palace. These missions require a silver tongue and a keen understanding of human nature. Successful recruiters receive rich rewards from the Fiends.

The Grass Spiders' Code

Upon initiation, Grass Spiders swear an oath to obey the following rules. Each rule takes precedence over the ones that follow it.

- First and foremost, always obey instructions from the Three Elite Fiends.
- Never reveal the clan's inner secrets to outsiders.
- Never break a contract.
- Never hinder another Grass Spider's pursuit of a contract.
- Never kill or maim another Grass Spider.

The Fiends have full authority and discretion to adjudicate and punish code violations as they see fit, though they often delegate this authority to older, respected Grass Spiders. The same applies to assigning contracts.

Enemies and Allies

Mendicant monks of the tiny, obscure **Order of the Wren** wander the River Province, preaching and doing good works. Few know that the Order is a cover, its Wrens intermediaries between the faraway Grass Spiders and potential employers. Almost none know that the Order is the brainchild of Lookshy's Security Directorate, its agents only passing along contracts that serve Lookshy's interests. The Three Elite Fiends know and accept this; the Wrens remain useful to them despite Lookshy's leash.

Scions of Note

The Three Elite Fiends — Crimson Weaver, Emerald Widow, and Pallid Wolf — rule the Grass Spiders with absolute authority. None know for certain if they're the same three who seized control of the clan shortly after its founding, though their eldest peers might hazard a guess. Only rarely do they accept contracts personally, at extortionate rates. They never go unmasked.

Crimson Weaver has mastered countless weapons and martial arts; it's their hallmark to perform assassinations using obscure styles and exotic armaments from faraway lands. They offer special training to the clan's most martially talented students, but show little patience for distraction or failure, cheerfully leaving scars to add gravity to lessons. The Weaver is equally passionate about the creative impulse, demonstrating tremendous aptitude with a range of visual and performing arts, though in discussion they draw no distinction between artistic disciplines and methods of violence. They crave notoriety for the Grass Spiders, an impulse their peers must rein in to protect the clan.

Emerald Widow speaks in macabre parables and allegories to convey her points and make her threats. She disciplines students through fear, traumatizing those who fail to meet her exacting standards. A rare Dragon-Blooded necromancer, she sends Grass Spiders to shadowlands or First Age tombs seeking such texts as *The Pale Journal of Whispers*, purportedly the most complete work on nephwracks ever compiled. She's also a master poisoner, adept with unhale toxins distilled from corpses or procured from shadowland ghost-merchants. She hopes to learn secrets of the Underworld's utmost depths and bargain with ancient forces interred within.

Pallid Wolf prefers the company of beasts to humans, and keeps his snow leopard familiar at his side even in the Unrepentant Sinner Palace. He's trained dozens of beasts to serve the clan, leaving them to wander the wilderness miles from Karaxi's temple until needed. But he nonetheless possesses a keen understanding of humans as social animals. His students learn how to blend into crowds, stir up mobs, and even incite peoples to war, using these distractions to provide openings for assassination. He sees the Grass Spiders as his legacy, and keeps careful watch for traitors and fools who might betray the clan and its secrets.

Nari Soon-ae serves as a face for the Grass Spiders, visiting noble courts throughout the Hundred Kingdoms and subtly arranging contracts. She's a master of disguise, effortlessly adopting a region's customs, mores, and dress, and carries an arsenal of poisons concealed in her perfume case.

At the Unrepentant Sinner Palace, Soon-ae is a far cry from the socialite she is abroad. As a child, she never felt as skilled as her peers in the art of murder. Now she draws into herself when at home, observing and mimicking her peers' expressions and body language, though rarely interacting directly. In the field she draws on these studied mannerisms as though they were naturally hers. She enjoys missions, where she can become anyone other than the shy and withdrawn Nari Soon-ae who always stumbled and fell short.

In her surreptitious observation of her peers, Soon-ae has recently overheard dangerous things — intimations of strife between the Fiends, and a cryptic conversation between two assassins suggesting an incipient coup. She wishes to stem any potential bloodshed within the Grass Spiders, but knows she can't do it alone, and isn't sure who she can trust to help her.

While the clan's reputation is of silent killers that operate unseen, **Mountain Rains** prefers a more direct approach. Favoring physical strength and explosive passion over elaborate schemes, he employs his grimcleaver Adjudicator and powerbow Silken Walk to cut down foes in the open. This brazenness brings unwanted attention; some who have reason to hate the Grass Spiders, such as the self-exiled legion officer Tepet Akede and the outcaste warrior Kamuro of the Vengeful Lance, now hunt him.

All is not well for Rains within the clan, either. As punishment for murdering a fellow Grass Spider without cause, he's spent three years assigned only the most perilous or humiliating missions, always solo. But he has friends among the clan who deem this punishment excessive. He bides his time, planning to return to the Unrepentant Sinner Palace when he has more friends and more strength. When that day comes, only one Fiend will lead the clan.

Heaven's Dragons

Amid the Divine Revolution, Dragon-Blooded entered the celestial city as warriors, spies, and diplomats. Some remained after war's end, whether captivated by Heaven's impossible splendors; seeking glory and wealth through alliance with mighty gods; rejecting their old lives; or for any other number of reasons.

Their descendants take pride in their millennia-long bloodlines and their abode among the gods. While they have little opportunity for advancement in the Celestial Bureaucracy — few gods wish to employ and train a subordinate who'll retire after a couple of centuries at most — they wield their very status as outsiders to their advantage, performing tasks for which low-ranking gods are ill equipped and that high-ranking gods cannot officially touch. Many are employed by powerful gods or Sidereals, hold a position or contract (or an off-the-books agreement) with a department within one of the heavenly bureaus, or carry on a family business in Heaven that's existed for thousands of years.

Storyteller Advice: Themes and Genre

Heaven's Dragons offer an excellent entry into games that center around the politics of the Celestial Bureaucracy and its countless scheming gods, or that emphasize the otherworldly wonders and horrors of realms beyond Creation. They can easily be inserted into a group of Sidereal player characters, stand on their own in a Kinship made up entirely of Heaven's Dragons, or join forces with other Dragon-Blooded while on assignment in Creation.

Walking with the Gods

Heaven's Dragons mostly dwell in Yu-Shan's slums — parts of Heaven avoided by wealthier and more powerful gods. Some of these regions were shattered in ancient wars; others have been cut off from vital services by greedy celestial landlords or through simple disrepair. Millennia of cracks and stains obscure once-shining facades of marble and chalcedony. Fountains and canals stand dry and empty. Feral beast-spirits infest overgrown parks and gardens.

By and large, only unemployed gods inhabit the slums, many of them criminals and rogues. Heaven's Dragons have carved out safe and comfortable enclaves amid the slums over the millennia, maintained by the diligent effort of mortal families and sustained by the wealth of successful Dragon-Blooded scions. Many unemployed gods regard these havens with an envious eye, sometimes boiling over into harassment, feuds, or crime.

Children of the community are raised in groups by mortal relatives or family friends, who also serve as teachers. Such friends often include celestial gods, employed or otherwise, whose natures are suited to the task. Heaven's Dragons make much of their ancestry, proud of long and unbroken bloodlines traceable to the dawn of history. Nearly every family has a god or two

somewhere in its ancestry; keeping track of lineage isn't just a matter of pride, it teaches who to lean on for favors later in life.

As soon as a young Dragon-Blood comes into her power, her family encourages her to find a job. Serving as a low-level functionary gives her valuable experience and connections within the Celestial Bureaucracy. If her family has a business of its own, the new Exalt might start work there instead, learning the trade from her relatives. The occasional layabout avoids getting a job at all, living on the community's largesse. Such miscreants often find themselves "volunteered" for exciting character-building opportunities, like a trip down to Creation. Favors and obligations are passed down through the family, allowing Dragon-Blooded to compete against gods with hundreds of lifetimes of social capital.

Heaven's Dragons who don't Exalt are more numerous than those who do. Many spend their entire lives within a few miles of the enclave they were born in, working as caretakers, household managers, scholars, or craftspeople for family elders, Dragon-Blooded kinfolk, spirits, or Sidereal Exalted. Others venture further afield as scribes, couriers, or personal servants to the gods or to their Exalted brethren. Some God-Blooded scions wield sufficient divine power to thrive in Yu-Shan, acting much like their Exalted relatives.

From a very young age, Heaven's Dragons grow up with gods as their parents' peers, due respect but not worship. Romantic entanglements, rivalries, and other interactions with the divine are the stuff of daily life, even for the un-Exalted. The gods, inhuman and immortal, may never fully understand the perspective of Heaven's Dragons, yet they are personable enough, if forgiven the occasional eccentricity. Most Heaven's Dragons won't even blink when a divine friend calls them by a parent's name, or asks about some millennia-old incident.

Heaven's Wildcards

While gods in Yu-Shan can derive sustenance and all manner of extravagant — albeit evanescent — luxuries from prayer, Heaven's Dragons are not so fortunate. Instead, ingenuity and effort, enhanced by Dragon-Blooded and divine magic, enables Heaven's Dragons to survive. Cisterns catch rainwater; abandoned gardens become farms and orchards, enhanced by fertility gods' blessings. Employment further enriches the Dragons, whether this takes the form of a favor owed by a harvest god stockpiled against future shortages, exotic treasures and prodigies of Yu-Shan, or puissant artifacts forged by the gods.

Dragon-Blooded are largely exempt from the bureaucratic regulations governing both gods and Sidereals, and use this freedom to fill gaps in the Celestial Bureaucracy left by years of internal rivalry, corruption, and divine disinterest. Their Exalted might levels the playing field when competing against minor gods and functionary spirits for positions as retainers, spies, professional confidants, bodyguards, and advisors. This novelty also makes them popular as entertainers and artisans — even if a novice Dragon-Blood's technique falls short of that of an ancient god of art, she brings a unique life experience and perspective that tantalizes divine audiences. Some pursue other skilled trades: personal accountants, bankers, artificers, assassins, and the like.

Old family businesses compete with gods who've practiced the same craft for hundreds of lifetimes, trading on the Heavens' Dragons reputation for discretion and quick thinking to remain competitive. Dragon-Blooded employed by the Celestial Bureaucracy often find niche roles between bureaus as interdepartmental liaisons beholden to no one single employer.

Heaven's Dragons also own a significant share of Heaven's black market, which offers an alternate path to obtain wealth for their communities. Though lacking the unique gifts of gods of crime, Dragon-Blooded con artists and thieves can master a broad range and depth of useful abilities. Moreover, Heavens' Dragons criminal operations are run by families. This offers all manner of accomplices and resources, and — should the celestial lions who police Heaven catch the operation's ringleaders — a clear chain of succession.

Criminal Dragon-Blooded are particularly adept at smuggling things and people into and out of Yu-Shan: wide-eyed mortal monks to feed gods with prayer, magical oddities not easily forged out of divine essence, secrets of terrestrial spirit courts. Crime families donate generously to maintain and improve their neighborhoods, ensuring their peers' goodwill even when their actions bring scrutiny and distrust down upon the entire Heaven's Dragons population.

In the end, every Dragon-Blood finds opportunities for wealth unimaginable for their mortal kin. Few pass up the opportunity to use at least some of their riches for themselves — for comfort, to flaunt their wealth, and to better fit in among the gods. Many become accustomed to more luxurious food, clothing, and bedding than even decadent Dynast.

On Assignment

Most gods who reside Yu-Shan have little desire to abandon its sublime luxuries to walk Creation on errands. Even among those willing to do so, not all can easily afford a sabbatical from their position in the Celestial Bureaucracy, and some business is better conducted with the benefit of plausible deniability. Thus, Heaven's Dragons often find themselves retained to carry out the work of the gods in Creation. Travel to Creation is usually business-related, assigned to the Dragon-Blooded by her employer or family, though leaving Heaven out of personal curiosity or punitive banishment isn't unheard of.

Moreover, Heaven's Dragons are more in tune with Creation's human cultures and society. Celestial divinities find Creation a strange place. Everything moves slowly; people walk or ride mundane animals instead of being conveyed by sorcery, while ships and caravans are archaic shadows of Heaven's yachts and chariots. Amenities like running water and Essence-fueled lights are rare, communication systems practically nonexistent, people speak a mosaic of different languages, and all the clothes are scratchy. But Yu-Shan's human communities already deal with such hindrances, and even their most jaded Dragon-Blooded recall their roots.

Nonetheless, even Heaven's Dragons must learn new skills to survive in Creation, from traversing the wilderness to playing the expected role of Prince of the Earth in whatever society she'd like to visit. Dealing with gods is another cultural challenge; terrestrial divinities are used to being treated as awe-inspiring and powerful. Coming from Yu-Shan, the pomp and posturing of the terrestrial courts can be frustrating, humorous, or simply baffling to a Dragon-Blood who doesn't expect it.

Dragon-Blooded who return from Creation often find themselves assigned to repeat the journey again and again — they've clearly got a knack for it. Long-term assignments are generally seen as undesirable, but some Dragon-Blooded develop a taste for being treated like queen and kings. No matter who commands the trip, there are plenty of reasons to send someone through the celestial gates.

Heaven's bureaus often need to communicate with the terrestrial spirit courts, ideally through agents who can see past political lies to the truth. Gods displeased by the Immaculate Order's

latest revision to the prayer calendar might retain a deniable agent to interfere in the Order's affairs. Self-employed and family-employed Dragon-Blooded seek rare materials irreproducible in Heaven, legal and otherwise, stealing or trading for simple Yu-Shan luxuries that the Creation-born regard with awe.

Notable Scions

Silent Curator of Harmony spent most of his life in the Celestial Bureaucracy, becoming an invaluable attaché to the Golden Barque of the Heavens — headquarters of the Division of Journeys — and forging connections across Yu-Shan. He's since retired to live out his last few decades surrounded by friends and family. He likes to say he's working on a book now, a history of his community, but really spends most of his time mentoring and assisting younger Dragon-Blooded. Curator still has the ears of several prominent deities, and uses favors owed him by a handful of Sidereals to help Heaven's Dragons facing undue hardship or discrimination.

A romantic at heart, Curator has a soft spot for star-crossed matches, and is particularly inclined to help young Dragon-Blooded whose love is thwarted. But he also has a mean-spirited, cruel side that emerges on dark days or when he's in his cups. Dragon-Blooded protégés who fail at the tasks he sets for them or otherwise prove unworthy of his mentorship risk see this wrathful side, suffering ferocious upbraiding or vindictive reprisals.

Red Field Vivacity Exalted at age 14, and got her first job running errands for the Bureau of Destiny shortly thereafter. She soon decided this was dull beyond belief and quit, but not before stealing a sackful of treasures from a celestial vault to sell on the black market. With the celestial lions in hot pursuit, she skipped town, fleeing to Creation with her haul. Unbeknownst to Vivacity, one of the baubles she stole was the Reliquary of Bleak Tomorrow, an artifact sealing away a thread of destiny that never should have been woven. Wherever Vivacity travels, the Reliquary subtly poisons fate around her, twisting events into foreboding alignments. The only thing more dangerous than the Reliquary left unsealed is someone who discovers how to command its power.

Laska Ozarun serves Bitter Hyacinth, God of the Realm's Deliberative. On paper, Laska is the steward of her heavenly estate, a sprawling miniature city near the heart of Yu-Shan, but his real tasks are off the books and often borderline illegal. For the last decade and a half, he's been on a covert mission to Creation as V'neef Imaien, an adopted outcaste, interfering in the machinations of both Gri-Fel, God of the Imperial City, and Jagalza, God of the Realm itself. Originally, Laska's mission was primarily focused on surveillance of the other gods' efforts, reporting issues to Bitter Hyacinth, but since the Scarlet Empress's disappearance, Bitter Hyacinth has tasked him with taking a more active hand in furthering the Deliberative's power at the cost of the throne's.

Subtle Triumphs conveys messages and arranges meeting between the Celestial Bureaucracy and Creation's spirit courts. His kinfolk — couriers for six generations — have made steady side income as spies. Triumphs sells delays, miscommunications, and secrets to the highest bidder, while using those secrets to blackmail or bribe anyone who discovers the secret of his family's wealth. For the right price, he can stall trials, ensure favorable appointments, or blacken a superior's name to make room for promotion. Though his late father taught him not to take business personally, Triumphs never listened. He loves the rush of holding power over Heaven's arrogant spirits; more than once he's ruined an eternal life over a perceived insult, endangering himself in the process.

Virania sails Heaven's quicksilver sea in a blue jade cutter, escorting cargo and people who shouldn't be in Heaven to the private island estates of the wealthy and powerful despite divine blockades and the occasional mercurial leviathan. A Sidereal, Midnight Tiger Killer, helps keep the celestial lions off her trail in exchange for the occasional favor. The two have been in bed together — literally and metaphorically — for over a century, and Virania has been back and forth to Creation many times as a deniable asset for the Division of Secrets.

Once a cold-blooded smuggler loyal only to kin and coin, Virania has grown more sentimental than is healthy for a woman in her career, swayed by her starry-eyed lover's vision of Creation restored to its past glory. Her crew of wayward elementals and younger Dragon-Blooded eye her with suspicion as she takes new risks to forward Midnight Tiger Killer's cause.

Scions of the Wanasaan

Wanasaan Kemra seized control of the Nameless Isle thirty years ago from the family's former leader — her brother Shiga, who as the eldest sibling inherited the title. Their disagreement had been brewing since childhood, with Kemra and their mother upholding the Wanasaan's traditional isolation, and Shiga insisting upon dramatically increasing the family's intermarriage and diplomatic involvement with outsiders. Days after Shiga's ascension, his blood and that of his closest confidants lay steaming on the cold tiles of the Hall of Whispers Consumed.

For all that her hands are stained with fratricide, Kemra rules fairly, rebuilding the family's power structure and regional influence. Scarcely past her first century, Kemra intends to rule for many years and restore faith in the old ways. She takes a direct hand in educating Wanasaan children, nipping disobedience in the bud, the better to command their personal loyalty. When such sentiments arise in adulthood — especially in Dragon-Blooded scions — she runs them ragged with assignment after assignment, allowing no time to ponder the logistics of rebellion.

Thus far she's been successful, drawing no Wanasaan blood since the duel. She focuses instead on crushing other Northwestern exorcists and necromancers — from lone outcastes and far-wandering Immaculate monks to the terrifying Lunar shahan-ya Smiling Rat — who seek to exploit the slackening of Wanasaan authority over the dead. Worse, the activities of the dead have risen sharply in the last few years, abetted by the sinister Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible and his deathly apostles.

Firm, unyielding, and unfailingly regal, Kemra commands the family through a close-knit handful of advisors and lieutenants. She hasn't raised her voice since the coup, speaking in a low whisper; some suggest that inhaling her brother's soul damaged her voice permanently.

Shiga's daughter **Wanasaan Perga** had no choice to save her life but to submit to her aunt's rulership. Perga is certain that, had she failed to do so, she'd have been cast to the waves long ago as a liability; indeed, she's been under Kemra's watchful eye ever since she Exalted. Now in her prime, Perga is a rising star among the Wanasaan, lauded by those she aids for her warmth and generosity, a rarity among her traditionally laconic kin. What kindness she shows to outsiders, though, she withholds among her own — she cannot afford anything but cold and clinical words in that den of ice vipers.

For all her bitterness, Perga is loyal to the family, and counsels patience to what remains of her father's defunct faction. The Wanasaan blood runs thin, with only a dozen or so Dragon-Blooded survivors of Kemra's coup, and she won't countenance any action that makes it run thinner — at

least, not until their numbers have been restored. She plans to bide her time, slowly gathering supporters within and without the family until she can best her aunt at her own game. But Perga is too pragmatic to pass over a perfect opportunity should one arise, and not temperate enough to wait forever.

Wanasaan Omorga is among the youngest Dragon-Blooded Wanasaan, having Exalted some ten years ago. According to tradition, on his twenty-fifth birthday, his family will drown him in the Spring of Echoes, and (if he survives) he'll gain the sorcerous power that's kept generations of his ancestors strong. The idea terrifies him; something inside him recoils at the thought of a lifetime of ghost-eating and cutthroat family politics. He doesn't hate his family — to the contrary, he loves them dearly — but virtually every member of the family loathes one side in the coup or the other, and once he's drowned and reborn he'll have to choose.

Already, representatives from both sides bend Omorga's ear night and day. He already knows whose side he'd take in an argument — Perga, only a decade or so older than him, often looked after him when she was younger, before she too Exalted and was drowned for it. Only out of loyalty for his cousin will he submit himself to the ritual, for as lonely as he worries he'll be as a Wanasaan, he cannot bear to leave Perga lonelier than she already is. Thus far, all she's asked of him is that he pass on anything he learns of Kemra's plans. Should she ask for more, he's not sure how far he'll go.

Distant cousin and sometimes lover to Shiga, **Wanasaan Yeleto** only narrowly avoided death in the coup thirty years ago. Having visited the lavatory moments before the blades came out, he fell with a knife between his ribs, left to die on the cold floor. Instead he dragged himself to a window, plummeting to the cold sea below, and from there swam to safety. Cold water means nothing to a Wanasaan who's endured the Spring of Echoes.

Yeleto has wandered the Northwestern mainland ever since, staying far from the familiar sea, alternately despondent and furious at Kemra's coup. For his own safety, he's never identified himself as Wanasaan, but occasionally uses his sorcery to destroy or banish some undead creature threatening a mortal village — the guilt of failing to protect Shiga won't permit him to stand idly by. Rumors have spread of a wandering ghost-consuming sage; Kemra doesn't know who's responsible, and directs family members to hunt down this "rogue exorcist." Meanwhile, agents of the deathknight The Celebrant of Blood seek to bring Yeleto into the fold, using his hunger for revenge against Kemra and her faction to help destroy the exorcist clan that's put down many of the Abyssal's necromantic creations.

Scions of the Temple of the Reverent Whisper

The Temple's headmistress for the past century, **Riela Tenan** first won acclaim for feats of spiritual purity — howling a beast-god's name for three days without pause, knitting smoldering votive incense into her hair without singeing a single strand, and spending a night entombed alive with the guardian spirit Sachra Awaits-the-Dawn, whose body consists of thousands of skittering scarab beetles. Now well into her third century, she rarely engages in contracted prayer anymore. Such is her legend that many gods pay merely for her company; her wit has only grown with age, while her calm beauty hasn't diminished — it's simply matured.

Tenan keeps a watchful eye over the Temple's monopoly in Great Forks. She prefers to bring worthy rivals into the fold, absorbing their competing efforts into the Temple's own — amicably or otherwise. Competitors who fail to match the Temple's standards instead face the full power

of its divine influence. She's equally ruthless within the Temple, having ground three challengers for headmistress into the dust in as public a fashion as she could manage.

Tenan's connections throughout Great Folks are legion. She's on friendly, even intimate, terms with much of the divine population; the remainder are largely small gods who cannot afford her time. She knows many outcastes as well, and has recruited several herself. Occasionally she chooses a favorite to train personally. Kind but firm, she particularly stresses decorum, taking any behavior that diminishes the Temple's reputation as a personal affront.

The headmistress' granddaughter, **Riela Sevan**, is scarcely more than thirty and already well-known in Great Forks — though not so much for her services to gods. For all that she's won fame for appeasing Stands-Between-All-Things, the mirrored god-goddess of boundaries, she specializes in retrieving precious treasures and rarities prized by certain gods — gods willing to pay dearly to have such items sacrificed in their names.

Though she serves as a priestess on her rare visits to Great Forks, she spends most of her time ranging across the Eastern Threshold. She's always felt a deep wanderlust, and though she loves her service, she can't bear the Temple's cloistered lifestyle — or her grandmother's domineering personality. She's seen Sijan's towers and retrieved black opals from ancient kings' tombs; climbed Palanquin's uncountable steps and stolen diaphanous wisp-fabric worn only by the highest cloud-people priests; and bargained with raksha princes for flowers that bloom not in Creation's soil.

Sevan's work is dangerous. She often travels with others — her favorites include Teruhi Haruno, an outcaste martial artist and fellow wanderer with whom she's crossed paths many times, and whose flames have saved her more than once; and the legendary courtesan Orchid-Drips-Honey, whose gossip surrounding Nexus high society never fails to enthrall. Such partnerships rarely last long, however. Sevan, though charming, can be as arrogant and overbearing as her grandmother, and most traveling companions need respites from her company.

Mnemon Koborase has resided at the Temple for three years — still a novice by its reckoning, but a fast and enthusiastic learner. Fresh from the Cloister of Wisdom, he traveled far and wide to experience the magnificent breadth of Creation. His journey was arrested in Great Forks by the sight of fellow Dragon-Blooded hanging blue lanterns outside a temple that, for all its grandeur, seemed more akin to a bordello. Infuriated, he made a scene on the temple steps until the priestess Yura Konma invited him to share tea in the temple's atrium.

Learning the true nature of the temple's work — the strenuous ritual and endurance demanded of acolytes, and the sacred nature of the actions they undertook — Koborase asked to remain a while and observe. Soon thereafter, he requested a contract under the temple's auspices. Three years on, he lives and works hand in glove with the other acolytes.

For a time, Koborase permitted himself to think himself one of them, deep in contemplation of service to the divine. But his family has contacted him, calling on him to supply House Mnemon with information on River Province activities from well-connected gods. His work suffers as he struggles between family loyalty and devotion to his new calling.

Falling-Star-Thunder was born in the Temple, raised according to its strictures, put to work making tea and carrying messages, and celebrated when he Exalted and rose to become a priest. His handsome face, taut body, and perfect hair make him extraordinarily popular among gods intrigued by the mortal body; one in particular, Riverbanks Shaded by Alder, has moved beyond

patronage to become Star's lover. They meet in secret whenever Star can get away, lest Star's other divine patrons take offense at his special treatment of Alder.

Alder has spent the last year and a half trying to convince Star to run away with him. Star has thus far demurred; though his feelings for Alder are genuine, he's called to serve in the temple, which sheltered him and gave him everything he has. He feels tremendously indebted, and fears both disappointing his peers and tarnishing the Temple's reputation. Though he struggles to endure the status quo, at some point he'll have to make the hard choice between his love and his calling.

Other Outcastes

Mija is a brawler and sellsword, known in the trade as Ironskull. Originally a derisive allusion to her intellect and bullheadedness, Mija took a liking to it, reforging the insult into a unique martial style based in tenacity, brawn, and brutal headbutts to drive her rivals into the dirt. Now she wanders the Scavenger Lands, hungry for the thrill of combat and the chance to test her strength.

One of many children in a poor Sijanese family, Mija was a fighter even as a youth, getting into scraps to win bets, defend herself, or protect her honor. While Exaltation opened her horizons and gave her a new future, she's still a product of that childhood — illiterate, more at ease among commoners than nobility, and very much a daughter of Sijan. Ritual and respect are ground into her. She honors her ancestors each night, treats dying requests as sacred, and challenges enemies to duels rather than simply starting fights. She also knows River Province shadowlands like the back of her hand, using the Underworld to escape, follow others unseen, and sometimes to speak with the dead.

These days, Mija is a bounty hunter, prizefighter, and mercenary. She's eager to fight, dueling and sparring under any excuse, but her desires go deeper. The common thread in her deeds is her love of Sijan and partisan devotion to its poorest. She wears simple and patched clothing, handing her wealth to beggars and the needy. When criminals prey on the poor, she hunts them without mercy, and when the poor steal or strike at those above them, she doggedly protects them. And as the Age of Sorrows waxes, she joins Wyld Hunts to put down anything that threatens the common folk.

Deep in the Summer Mountains stands the sandstone throne of **Prince Gaznai**. Stories of her city, Refuge, struggle across the vast wastelands that separate her from greater civilization, spreading despite all barriers. Her territory seems barren and inhospitable, far to the South where raindrops boil and all life hides from the merciless beat of the sun. Even so, straggling lines of the desperate and daring make the journey, drawn by the promise of freedom.

Gaznai's people have always lived in the mountains, using their remote and harsh environment to shield them from the reach of grasping nations and wealthy slavers. When Gaznai was born, her people were poor nomads eking out an existence from the scorching wastes. Now, centuries later and under her rule, most are settled and organized. Life in the mountains still harsh, but it is improving little by little as the prince expands the groves of well-trees and guards against predatory Fair Folk.

Stern-eyed and grim, Gaznai's joyless demeanor is tempered by patience and mercy. She welcomes anyone into her city who's willing to work hard and respect their fellows. Escaped slaves who reach her territory are freed, heretical faiths are given refuge, and criminals and

outlaws are accepted. Her patience only shortens for those who attempt to wrest control from her and her citizens, whether they're slavers, priests demanding conformity, envoys of foreign powers requiring tribute, or heroic visionaries. These are quickly quashed, or thrown out into the wastes if they prove too troublesome or insistent.

One weight is heavy on Gaznai's shoulders: succession. Old age doesn't press down on her yet, but she can feel its grip beginning to tighten. Worse yet, she sees tumultuous times approaching. Without a capable ruler to guide her city through the oncoming storm, she worries that her works will erode and fall to outside forces. She hunts for potential successors even as she redoubles her efforts to support her people.

Jaeyun is a terror of the Western islands, a fearsome bandit who takes what he will and suffers no opposition. Between his Exaltation and beastfolk features, many think him an angry spirit rather than a man; he has hooklike teeth, tough gray skin, and a long eel's tail in place of legs. When his volcanic anima rages, the water around him boils and hisses. Only a few favored islands know him as more than a monstrous god, and even their fearful respect of him verges on worship.

The strange realms beneath the waves are Jaeyun's true home. A hidden vent deep in the sea is actually a crack in Creation, a vent that releases the Wyld instead of heat. Raksha, Wyld mutants, warped spirits, and lesser fae all mingle in the unnatural pocket the vent creates, forming a community of riotous diversity and unpredictable dangers. Lustrous pearl-like bubbles of air contain structures and weird earthly terrain, nestled among palatial coral catacombs where Jaeyun and many others make their home. Jaeyun was born here and raised by beastfolk, Wyld-touched peoples, and a raksha godmother who follows his exploits with interest.

In the prime of his life, Jaeyun desires to revel in his strength, amass wealth, and earn glory. He's begun laying claim to territory, starting with Embouche — one of his favorite islands — and expanding outwards as he cements his hold. He demands respect and tribute from anyone who plies his waters or lives on his land, and assaults those who don't acknowledge him. Only those who can hold him at bay earn his respect and forbearance. No one yet has matched or overpowered him, and the outcome is anyone's guess; he might reluctantly give way to a victor, see a potential ally, or hatefully nurse a grudge.

When the Northern tribes have questions that must be answered, they turn to the **Voice of Storms**, an oracle who keeps eternal watch from a glacial manse north of Tusk. Voice never leaves the grounds of his manse, but within its confines he wields prodigious power. His territory is known to all as sacred ground. He doesn't welcome everyone, but guests are protected and expected to keep the peace. Sometimes he uses this neutrality to broker peace or offer sanctuary, but only according to his divinations' enigmatic designs.

The title he bears is both literal and metaphorical. His oracular proclamations resound, thrumming in the bones of all who hear them. He is thunderous in anger, and soothing when peaceful — a scion of wind and sky.

Voice and his manse are both disabled in their own way. Voice needs a cane to walk, struggles with fatigue, and has muscle spasms and seizures that make daily life difficult, all symptoms of multiple sclerosis. The manse's surviving conveniences help him manage his condition, providing food, shelter, and comfort in the harsh climate.

The manse — carved into the heart of an unmelting glacier — is a remnant of Bagrash Köl's empire. Once it fed on and analyzed Air Essence from all over the North, deciphering patterns and giving information to its operators. But it's suffered degradation over the centuries, and its ability to organize incoming data has been lost. Now anyone who accesses its higher functions experiences a tempest of visions and impressions without context or order. Voice has spent years learning to decipher these fragments, and spends days meditating to compose coherent insights from them, giving him a bird's-eye view of the North.

The Guild merchant prince **Andira Rupa** travels between the Scavenger Lands and the Far East, leaving business ventures behind her to grow like seeds. She rarely stays anywhere for long, preferring frequent travel to settling down. Astride her horse, bearing her banner-draped spear, and accompanied by a caravan filled with goods and assistants, she seeks out uncontacted territories, untapped resources, and potential bargains. Driven by instinct, flashes of inspiration, and whims, Andira follows only loose plans on her expeditions, rarely plotting out concrete ventures but instead pursuing whatever opportunities or ideas come her way.

Born to wealthy Hundred Kingdoms merchants, Andira learned the trade through their tutelage and her own observations. By the time Andira Exalted, she was already a Guild merchant in good standing, and it didn't take her long to climb the ladder of wealth and rank through a series of daring-yet-profitable ventures. Today she's a powerful agent of the Guild, a merchant prince who brings in tremendous wealth but has little time for internal Guild politics. She's learned to enjoy the position, relishing the freedom and personal profit her distance buys her.

Backed by the vast wealth of astute Guild factors, her Rupa Caravan overwhelms tiny communities in the East along her route. She dominates their markets, buys their leaders' loyalty, enslaves resistance, and conscripts the desperate. Andira sees herself as a visionary, imagining and plotting grand projects that she leaves others to realize. She rarely has the patience to finish any given plan but has a knack for picking the right person to finish the job, allowing her to set up and orchestrate far more than she could handle on her own. In this manner she's seeded a network of subservient traders across the East, watered it with blood and strife, and reaped the profits for herself and the Guild.

In one swath of the Far East, scattered tribes and villages all give praise to **the Mother**. They maintain miniature shrines, each containing a single insect or arachnid treated with great deference. Some say these peoples worship the insects themselves, but in truth the insects are mere heralds who connect the Mother and her worshippers. When a devotee prays to a spider hanging in a golden web, the Mother hears. When the Mother wishes something, priestesses known as Daughters gather around a beetle's emerald dais to interpret its movements. When her people beg for aid, the swarms in the forest around them respond according to her will.

The Mother seems an eternal guardian, distant but devoted to her people. In truth, she's the latest in a long line of sorceresses. Each Mother was once a Daughter, trained and selected by the previous Mother to take up the role. The current Mother is newly ascended, and though she's still uncertain of her place, her Dragon-Blooded might is raising her to greater heights than any of her predecessors. Full of vigor and earnest desire to help her people, she tirelessly forges alliances with spirits, pursues threats, and spreads her influence. Few can enter her territory unnoticed, and truly peculiar sorts will find themselves welcomed — and questioned — by a Daughter attended by one of the Mother's swarms.

Traditionally, a Mother secludes herself in an underground lair shot through with roots from a grove of ancient redwoods and is rarely (if ever) seen by her people. The current Mother, however, is restless. After years spent in the lair at her predecessor's feet, she's tired of being cooped up, and now that she bears the mantle she's beholden to no one. She ventures out more and more frequently, taking an active role in her people's lives. Lately, she dreams of uniting her disparate worshippers and expanding their territory, forming a unified state with the power to treat equally with neighboring Ixcoatli and the distant Hundred Kingdoms.

Running Outcaste Games

All-Outcaste Groups

Outcaste-focused chronicles encourage play in remote locales beyond the Realm's far-reaching influence. Outcastes can act independently of the Realm without responsibilities toward the Dynasty or the Imperial Service, albeit without a Dynast's wealth and influence.

The easy thing about running an outcaste story is that it can be set anywhere, for the blood of Dragons has spread across Creation. Dragon-Blooded families outside the Realm may share little resemblance to one another, for all that each proclaims itself heir to the Shogunate. Use this to your advantage when planning your all-outcaste story. Play with players' expectations whenever they visit a new area.

Threshold societies can vary wildly in how they view the Dragon-Blooded. One people, long oppressed by Dragon-Blooded despots, hate and fear all such Exalted. In another land where passing Immaculate monks once subdued tyrant gods, outcastes find themselves venerated as authorities in spiritual matters, and petitioned to exorcise hungry ghosts or negotiate with fractious deities.

Unlike Hearths based in regions where Dragon-Blooded authority is ingrained into local culture, all-outcaste groups provide roleplaying opportunities unavailable to Dynastic or mixed groups. Outcastes' independence from the Realm and Lookshy grants unparalleled freedom. They're acknowledged in most places as Princes of the Earth, yet lack obligations to hegemonic powers. No Wyld Hunt pursues them. Barring immediate personal and familial ties, they can act as they please.

On the other hand, no outcaste clan has the resources or wealth of the Realm, Lookshy, or Prasad at its disposal. Often, the only ones outcastes can turn to for help are each other; they may never even have seen Exalted other than their kindred. When trouble rises, outcastes don't have backing from a Great House on which to rely. They have only their Hearth.

All Exalted are larger-than-life figures with the potential to shape history. While it's tempting to show the outcastes' actions reflected across all of Creation, the Storyteller should have a firm idea of the scope of the game she's telling. Though worthy of grand epics and Creation-spanning effects, outcastes provide the Storyteller and players an opportunity to tell smaller-scale stories that might otherwise be overlooked. A Dynast or Lookshyan scion, while able to engage in personal stories or deal with local threats, will always act within the context and shadow of their culture.

Mixed Groups

Outcastes and members of established Dragon-Blooded groups might come together for any number of reasons. A Grass Spider is hired by a Lookshyan aristocrat to infiltrate a rival gens. A heretical Immaculate monk travels to Prasad, seeking insight in Pure Way theology. Threatened by the Imperial Navy, outcastes from a remote Western island find themselves aided by a V'neef scion. The Storyteller and players should collaborate on details to integrate the outsider into the group.

When an outcaste is brought into a Hearth of other Dragon-Blooded, it can be hard to balance the spotlight each receives. A chronicle focusing on Realm realpolitik might see an outcaste overshadowed by her Dynastic peers. In a chronicle centering around an outcaste Hearth in the River Province, the Lookshyan's connections and prestige may give her disproportionate influence over her fellows. The Storyteller should ensure that she gives enough attention to outcastes and non-outcastes both, and should offer narrative beats that accommodate every character, just as she'd build mechanical challenges that reflect their unique strengths.

Mathar ran a hand over the intertwined tree trunks that formed the manse's walls. The power of this place called to him, though the forest outside seemed to reject it: Surrounding trees leaned *away* from the structure. Inside, it smelled of sap and fresh-cut wood, though the Phoenix Tears Pagoda had clearly been standing for hundreds of years.

Perhaps he should have pressed harder for information on the Forest Witches' domain. The Intelligence Directorate gave him little to go on, aside from saying that Lookshy and the Witches mostly left one another alone. He felt certain this was not so much truth as politics — the official who'd compiled the dossier was Vaya's protégée. She'd stymied his career at every turn, so why not encourage her underlings to do the same?

His best intel came from the blind outcaste Little Tsunami, who spoke of a dream-like city, of long-dead Dragon-Blooded walking the world, and of a hidden purpose behind the Witches' raids on nearby towns and caravans. Chalima complained of those raids sometimes, close as the Witches' domain was to the Hundred Kingdoms.

Mathar wandered the Pagoda's chambers — chambers that coiled in tangles like roots, and hallways fanning out like branches, every wooden surface weeping red sap. Some were stockpiled with supplies, from dried fruits to vellum to weapons. Others were adorned with the Witches' strange art — portraits of faceless figures; sculptures depicting monstrous forms wreathed in mist; tapestries embroidered with a mandala whose meaning escaped even Mathar, far-traveled as he was.

The absence of guards surprised him. Though he'd spent an hour watching, no patrols came by. Still, he moved cautiously. Just because he *hadn't* seen a guard didn't mean there *weren't* any. A chamber with an open window overlooked the forest, but dense foliage blocked the view. So much for getting a look at the layout from above.

When he pulled back into the room, a woman stood in the doorway, watching. She wore a black cloak blazoned with that same unknown mandala; beneath it, gold and silver accented the black jade links of her chain shirt. The cloak's hood hid her face in shadows.

"Ah," said Mathar softly. He kept his tone affable but not irreverent. "I'm here under the banner of peace. I intend you no harm." Most people, when Mathar turned his smile on them, couldn't help but smile in return. Judging by the nimbus of icy razors that swirled into being around her person, he suspected she wasn't favorably inclined.

With a flick of a gloved hand, one of the darts flew at Mathar. He dropped into a crouch and the dart embedded itself deep into the wall. Thick red sap oozed from the puncture.

"I know a ranger when I see one," she said. "I can't let you bring our secrets back to Lookshy."

"Take me to someone, then. Let me explain to your... council? Your queen? And we can smooth things over."

"I've a better idea." The ice shards spun faster. "I'll throw your heart into the Sea."

It wasn't an idiom Mathar had ever heard, and he hoarded phrases and lyrics like the Guild hoarded coins.

He suspected it wasn't an idiom at all.

Thorn-tipped vines burst from Mathar's wrist and wrapped around his direlance's shaft, securing the weapon to its wielder. He lunged at the guard. Several shards consolidated, turning its point aside. She didn't budge a step, didn't so much as flinch. She wasn't going to let him leave.

Only one way out, then.

Mathar dove for the window. He was weightless for a moment, then hit the ground hard and rolled to his feet. The guard flung more shards as he ran, but soon the Witches' forest swallowed him, covering his retreat.

Chapter Six

Charms

Archery

Grasping Vine Shot

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Archery 3, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Wood

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Harvest of the Hunter

The Dragon-Blood's arrow grows and extends into a sturdy, flexible vine. This rope attaches itself to a surface within short range. Flame weapons instead discharge braided ropes of semi-tangible smoke. She treats the rope as exceptional equipment (**Exalted**, p. 580), and can use reflexive move actions to climb it, ascending or descending one range band, or to swing along it, moving one range band forward and, optionally, one range band down. Other characters don't gain the movement benefits, but still treat the rope as exceptional.

Alternatively, the Dragon-Blood may fire at an unattended object within short range that she's capable of holding in her hands. The Storyteller may require a (Dexterity + Archery) roll in the case of very small objects or poor visual or weather conditions. If successful, the line attaches to the object and retracts, dragging it to the Dragon-Blood's feet undamaged.

If the Dragon-Blood has a relevant Craft, like ropemaking, she receives craft points for meeting objectives with this Charm as though she'd completed a basic project (**Exalted**, p. 240).

Backer: David "Weimann" Karlson-Weimann

Landslide Missile Attack

Cost: 2m, 2i; **Mins:** Archery 3, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Decisive-only, Earth

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Death From Nowhere

The Dragon-Blood wreathes her arrow in earthen Essence, building momentous force as she aims, then releasing it to strike like a rolling boulder. This Charm can only enhance a **decisive** attack that benefits from aiming. An enemy hit by it is knocked back one range band. If this movement leaves him on an earthen surface, he also falls prone as the Dragon-Blood's arrow seeks to return to the earth.

Five-Dragon Arsenal

Cost: —; **Mins:** Archery 4, Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Earth

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: None

A master of countless weapons, the Dragon-Blood's Essence is inextricable from her arsenal. As long as she has one full-cost attunement to an artifact weapon, she reduces the attunement cost of further artifact weapons (regardless of the Ability used to wield them) by three motes each, to a minimum of one mote. This doesn't stack with other discounts. If the Dragon-Blood ends her full-cost attunement, she must commit enough motes to bring another attunement to its full cost, or all discounted attunements end.

Special activation rules: This Charm may alternatively be learned as a Brawl, Melee, Thrown, or War Charm.

Nightshade's Deadly Bloom

Cost: 5m, 1i; **Mins:** Archery 4, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Decisive-only, Wood

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Arrow Thorn Technique

Cruel thorns grow from the Dragon-Blood's arrow, dripping deadly venom. To use this Charm, she must have Initiative 10+. Her **decisive** attack carries a poison with Damage 2i/round (L in Crash), Duration (Essence + attack roll extra successes) rounds, and a –3 penalty.

An Archery 5, Essence 3 repurchase lets the Dragon-Blood pay a one-Willpower surcharge to use this as a Simple-type Charm, firing an arrow at any point within her weapon's range, instead of targeting a specific enemy. The arrow grows into a thicket, exposing all characters within close range to a one-time environmental hazard with difficulty (Dragon-Blood's attack roll successes) and damage (Dragon-Blood's Initiative / total number of enemies, rounded up)L; those who take damage also suffer the poison above, with Duration 5 rounds. The thicket remains on the battlefield as difficult terrain for the rest of the scene; characters entering or moving through it are exposed to the poison. This resets the Dragon-Blood to base Initiative.

Backer: Michael Brewer

Thousand Thorn Artillery

Cost: —(+1m, 1wp); **Mins:** Archery 4, Essence 3

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Wood

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Arbor Sentinel Technique

Planting her weapon in the soil, the Dragon-Blood bids it grow into a sprawling arboreal engine of war. She may pay a one-mote, one-Willpower surcharge when she uses Arbor Sentinel Technique to cause her weapon to grow into a siege weapon (**Arms of the Chosen**, p. 127): bows and crossbows become ballistas, while flame weapons become fire cannons. The siege weapon still retains the normal benefits of Arbor Sentinel Technique, granting heavy cover to the artillerist and crew and producing its own ammunition (though it must still be reloaded normally).

Rolling Stormcloud Approach

Cost: 2m, 2i; **Mins:** Archery 5, Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Air, Aura, Perilous

Duration: One turn

Prerequisite Charms: Drawing Lightning Style

The Dragon-Blood sweeps across the battlefield like a swift-moving storm. She may aim and take a move action in the same turn, and can flurry an aim with a rush or disengage. If she successfully rushes or disengages, she ignores the Defense penalty from flurrying.

Athletics

Ice-Slick Tread Technique

Cost: 2m, 2i; **Mins:** Athletics 3, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Air, Perilous

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Bellows-Pumping Stride

The air chills at the Dragon-Blood's passage, smoothing her movement and leaving behind an icy trail. When she crosses a range band by walking or running (but not jumping, climbing, or so on), she freezes the ground as she moves across it, leaving a patch of difficult terrain (**Exalted**, p. 199) that extends along the path she traveled. If she makes a roll with any Ability as part of the movement action, she adds an automatic success and ignores any penalties for difficult terrain based on ice or snow. This Charm can also be used to walk over bodies of water, freezing their surface as the Dragon-Blood moves.

Crashing Tide Advance

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Athletics 4, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Dual, Water

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Bellows-Pumping Stride

Like the relentless tide that erodes the shore, the Dragon-Blood's advance is inevitable, her momentum undeniable. She adds an automatic success on a rush. If she successfully rushes her enemy and he subsequently provokes her reflexive movement, she inflicts a –1 onslaught penalty on him, and if she attacks him from close range on her next turn, she adds one die of **decisive** damage or post-soak **withering** damage.

Flying Dagger Leap

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Athletics 4, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Air, Dual

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Soaring Leap Technique

The Dragon-Blood blurs through the air, descending on her foe in a mighty bound. To use this Charm, she must either move into close range with an enemy by leaping and attack him on the same turn, or reflexively pursue him by leaping with a rush and then attack on her next turn. She adds (Essence) bonus dice on the attack roll, and adds an automatic success on a **withering** damage roll or a bonus die on a **decisive** damage roll.

Awareness

Victory-Seeking Insight

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Awareness 2, Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Air, Perilous

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Anticipating how a fight will unfold in the blink of the eye, the Dragon-Blood directs her allies into advantageous positions and warns them of potential threats. After rolling Join Battle, the Dragon-Blood may transfer up to (highest of Intelligence, Wits, or War) total points of Initiative to any number of allies, dividing up the transferred Initiative however she chooses. She can't crash herself this way. If she transfers Initiative to a Hearthmate, that character gains an additional point of Initiative.

Pasiap Preempts Haste

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Awareness 3, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Earth

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: All-Encompassing Earth Sense

The Dragon-Blood is as patient and still as a mountain, waiting for the perfect moment to act. She doubles 9s on a Join Battle roll. If she wins Join Battle, she waives the Initiative cost of delaying her action (**Exalted**, p. 196) on the first round, and adds (Perception) bonus dice on her attack roll if she delays it until after an enemy acts.

Distant March Intuition

Cost: —; **Mins:** Awareness 5, Essence 3

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Earth

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Feeling the Dragon's Bones

The Dragon-Blood attunes herself to the vibrations and Essence that pass through the earth, sensing the marches of distant legions or a behemoth's footfalls. When she uses Feeling the Dragon's Bones, she detects the movement of battle groups, Legendary Size characters, or anything similarly large moving across the earth within (successes rolled) miles. She can't pinpoint their precise location, but has a general sense of distance and direction, doubling 8s on Survival rolls to navigate towards them.

If the Dragon-Blood knows Sense the Hidden Ember, she also detects the presence within this range of any trace of magic that Charm is capable of sensing, as above.

Backer: Charles Lovett

Skyward Eye Vigil

Cost: 8m, 1wp; **Mins:** Awareness 4, Essence 4

Type: Simple

Keywords: Air

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: All-Encompassing Earth Sense (Air), Feeling the Dragon's Bones

The wind bears the Dragon-Blood's sight aloft, elevating her perspective. She sees the world around her from a bird's-eye view, as though she were looking down from a point at long range above herself. She can see her surroundings out to long range horizontally from herself, unless environmental conditions or obstructions block some or all of this range. She cannot see from her normal perspective, but neither does she suffer any penalties that only apply to it rather than her line of sight from above — a blindfold or a maimed eye would be no obstacle, nor would a stone wall as long as the other side were within her vision's range. However, she may still suffer penalties or be unable to see certain areas entirely as a result of obstructions to her bird's-eye perspective: dense fog, low-lying clouds, foliage, roofs, and the like (though she may use magic

like Cloud-Piercing Focus to negate applicable obstacles). The Dragon-Blood's other senses aren't affected.

The Dragon-Blood adds an automatic success on any Perception-based rolls she makes to look for or examine anything larger than a single person from this perspective, such as spotting a concealed battle group or surveying the architecture of a palace. When making command actions (**Exalted**, p. 209), she can roll with (Perception + War) as long as she's able to perceive the battle group she's commanding, and adds an automatic success on such rolls.

Brawl

Flotsam-and-Jetsam Approach

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Brawl 1, Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Uniform, Water

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

Like the tide, the Dragon-Blood gathers up whatever comes to hand and smashes it against the shore. She waives the Initiative cost for attacking with improvised weapons using any combat Ability, and may use Strength instead of Dexterity to attack with them. Bonus dots of Strength conferred by magic don't add to these attack rolls.

Backer: Nik May

Twisting Vicious Tide

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Brawl 3, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Uniform, Water

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Pounding Surf Style

Having worn down her foes with an unrelenting offensive, the Dragon-Blood finds their feeble strikes all too easy to overpower. When she clashes an attack, her enemy's attack roll loses dice equal to the onslaught penalty that wore off at the start of his turn (or his current onslaught penalty, if he's attacking outside of his turn).

Tireme Strikes the Rocks

Cost: 3m, 1wp, expend Water Aura; **Mins:** Brawl 5, Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Aura, Clash, Decisive-only, Water

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blade-Deflecting Palm, Twisting Vicious Tide

Moving without thought, the Dragon-Blood brutally wrenches an attacker's limb or weapon aside. When an enemy with lower Initiative attacks her, she may reflexively clash with a **decisive** attack or a disarm gambit. This doesn't count as her attack for the round. The Defense penalty imposed by a successful clash (**Exalted**, p. 202) counts as an onslaught penalty for the purposes of the Dragon-Blood and her allies' offensive Charms.

If the Dragon-Blood knows Currents Sweep to Sea, she may use this Charm to clash attacks from out to medium range as long as there is a source of water on the battlefield, striking with a watery tendril.

Magma Hell Upheaval

Cost: 15m, 1wp, expend Earth or Fire Aura; **Mins:** Brawl 5, Essence 4

Type: Simple

Keywords: Aura, Decisive-only, Earth/Fire

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Fist-Spinning Maelstrom, Rolling Boulder Blow

Slamming a fist or heel into the ground, the Dragon-Blood drives a pulse of pyroclastic Essence into the earth beneath her, forcing a surge of molten lava forth from the depths. To use this Charm, she must have Initiative 20+ and be standing on bare soil or stone. This eruption is represented as an unblockable **decisive** attack against all characters, friend or foe, within medium range, with the Dragon-Blood applying a single attack roll against all of them. She may exempt her Hearthmates from the attack.

The Dragon-Blood divides (her Initiative + the lowest number of attack roll extra successes she received against any hit target) evenly, rounded down, among all hit characters to determine the lethal damage the lava rolls against them. Trivial opponents are incapacitated automatically without detracting from the Dragon-Blood's total damage, and scenery is damaged at the Storyteller's discretion.

If a crashed enemy takes 3+ levels of damage, the eruption leaves a lava hazard (difficulty 5, damage 6L/round) on the ground beneath him. These hazards cool and solidify into obsidian when the scene ends; characters might cool or disperse them earlier with clever stunts or magic.

This Charm can only be used once per day, unless reset by gaining 20+ Initiative from a single **withering** attack made from base Initiative, and then incapacitating that enemy on the next turn with a **decisive** attack.

Backer: Nathan Henderson

Bureaucracy

Sink-or-Swim Discernment

Cost: —; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 2, Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Water

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Finding the Water's Depths

Gauging the bureaucratic merit of those around her, the Dragon-Blood distinguishes those who've risen to the top from the dregs. She can use Finding the Water's Depths to assess a character's bureaucratic standing, gaining a general sense of what kind of bureaucratic organizations, if any, he belongs to, as well as his approximate rank within those organizations. For example, using it on a Guild factor could reveal that he belongs to a mercantile enterprise and holds a high position, but wouldn't provide the specifics of his membership in the Guild.

Charting Unfamiliar Tides

Cost: —; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 3, Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Water

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Confluence of Savant Thought

Even at Creation's farthest shores, where strange people follow stranger customs, a bureaucracy is a bureaucracy. The Dragon-Blood can use Confluence of Savant Thought to introduce facts about bureaucratic and mercantile organizations she *isn't* familiar with, as long as she's spent at least a scene interacting with or eavesdropping on members of that organization acting in their official capacity.

Meddling Bridge-Burner Approach

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 4, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Fire

Duration: One story

Prerequisite Charms: Thrashing Carp Serenade

The Dragon-Blood's incendiary rhetoric turns her political rival's bases against them or drives a wedge between even the closest of business partners. After spending at least a scene interacting with a character in his official bureaucratic capacity, she rolls ([Manipulation or Intelligence] + Bureaucracy) opposing his ([Charisma or Intelligence] + Bureaucracy).

If she succeeds, she may assail her target's position within a bureaucratic organization. Any rolls that character makes to carry out the official business of that organization or to influence his subordinates within the bureaucracy to perform their official duties lose successes equal to the 1s on the roll. Additionally, for the purpose of the victim's influence rolls, any positive Ties towards him or towards the organization possessed by organization members are treated as one step lower.

Alternatively, the Dragon-Blood may attack one of her victim's business or political relationships with another character. To do so, that other character must be present when the Dragon-Blood uses this Charm. If she uses this variant, any influence roll her victim makes against his partner in the context of their business or political relationship lose successes equal to the 1s on the roll, as do any read intentions rolls he makes against the partner. Additionally, the

victim suffers –1 Resolve and Guile against his partner. Any positive Ties the partner has towards the victim or any organization the victim belongs to are treated as one step lower for the purpose of the victim's influence rolls.

The victim may free himself from the effects of the first version of this Charm by completing a project to advance or reestablish his position with an organization, or the second version by completing a project to fulfill the requests or agenda of a business or political partner. Either version can be negated by magic such as Woe-Capturing Web (**Exalted**, p. 288).

Once anyone uses this Charm against a member of an organization, members of that organization can't be targeted with it until the start of the next story.

Growth Investment Propagation

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 5, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Wood

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Sprouting Bamboo Cultivation

A savvy player of the market, the Dragon-Blood conceals funds in profitable investments and revenue-earning ventures, ensuring she always has savings to draw on for unexpected expenses. When she makes a purchase using her Resources rating (**Exalted**, p. 578), she may expend these saved funds, treating her Resources rating as though it were two dots higher for purposes of that transaction, and doubling 7s on any bargain roll involved in the transaction. If this would raise her effective Resources rating above 5, she can instead make a Resources 5 purchase without incurring any debt.

Using this Charm entails revealing the existence of funds the Dragon-Blood has acquired off-screen, not creating money ex nihilo. In circumstances where it wouldn't make sense for the Dragon-Blood to access her investments, the Storyteller may require an appropriate stunt to justify using this Charm — a Dragon-Blood marooned on a far-off Western island can't call in her savings, unless she reveals she's been funding trade with the island's natives.

This Charm can only be used once per story, unless reset by completing a project with a primary goal of amassing wealth or creating a profitable investment.

Pearl-and-Coral Diadem

Cost: 7m, 1wp; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 5, Essence 5

Type: Simple

Keywords: Psyche, Water

Duration: One story

Prerequisite Charms: Flowing Authority Insinuation

Flowing with the tides of a bureaucracy, the Dragon-Blood rises effortlessly to the top. She makes a special ([Appearance or Manipulation] + Bureaucracy) instill roll, ignoring the penalty for group influence, against all members of a specific organization present in a scene. A character whose Resolve is beaten will perceive the Dragon-Blood as either someone who holds

a position of superior rank within that authority or as someone whose credentials make them a natural choice for filling such a role, depending on which option is more plausible. The Dragon-Blood gains the benefits of any positive Ties those characters have towards the organization in question, and affected characters will carry out any inconvenient tasks (**Exalted**, p. 216) she assigns them without requiring an influence roll if they have such a Tie.

While this Charm is active, the Dragon-Blood may use Flowing Authority Insinuation for only five motes if she targets an affected character, and such characters can't resist with Willpower unless they first resist this effect. She waives Thrashing Carp Serenade's Willpower cost when she uses it against an organization she's used this Charm to secure a position of authority within.

This effect can be resisted for one Willpower, but only when a character is confronted with evidence that the Dragon-Blood doesn't actually hold a position within the organization or is unqualified to do so, when he's mistreated by the Dragon-Blood, or when another organization member succeeds on an instill roll to turn him against the Dragon-Blood. Characters who resist realize they've been deceived, but not that mind-altering magic is involved.

When this Charm ends, all affected characters that didn't resist gradually begin to realize that they'd mistaken the Dragon-Blood for someone in authority, though they don't realize they were deceived. Depending on how the Dragon-Blood acted on the group's behalf, they may form positive Ties towards her and offer her a formal position within it.

Backer: Mackenzie Belmont

Craft

Dragon-Ancestor Bequest

Cost: 15m, 1wp, 10wxp per Evocation; **Mins:** Craft 5, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Wood

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flawless Facet Realization, Stoking Inspiration's Forge

The wonders born from the Dragon-Blood's forge desire worthy masters, flourishing in the hands of their maker's heirs and comrades. Activating this Charm entails a ritual ceremony in which the Dragon-Blood presents an artifact she's crafted to a blood relative or a Hearthmate. She awakens up to (recipient's Essence) of the artifact's Evocations for the recipient at no experience point cost, spending ten white points for each Evocation awakened.

Dragon-Ancestor Bequest can only be used on any given artifact once.

Dodge

Nimble Zephyr Defense

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Dodge 4, Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Air, Uniform

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flickering Candle Meditation

Gracefully maneuvering around her attackers, the Dragon-Blood lets the force of their blows disperse into the wind. She must use the Charm before an attack roll. On a successful dodge, her attacker loses a point of Initiative. If the attack roll contains any 1s, she may dodge the attack even if its successes equal her Evasion.

In Air Aura, the Dragon-Blood gains the lost Initiative.

Ascending Ember Trick

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Dodge 3, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Air/Fire

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Heat-of-Battle Advance

A burst of superheated air propels the supine Dragon-Blood back onto her feet. She makes a rise from prone action (**Exalted**, p. 198) reflexively, and can do so outside her turn. This still counts as her movement action for the round.

Light-as-Clouds Method

Cost: —(+4m); **Mins:** Dodge 3, Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Air/Fire

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Hopping Firecracker Evasion

The Dragon-Blood takes advantage of her enemy's lust for battle, turning the wasted momentum of his attack into a burst of wind that carries her out of danger.

When she uses Hopping Firecracker Evasion, she may pay a four-mote surcharge to reflexively roll to disengage, adding bonus dice equal to the Overwhelming rating of her enemy's weapon. If successful, in addition to Hopping Firecracker Evasion's usual effects, she can reflexively move away if any enemy moves towards her before her next turn, as per a standard disengage. This doesn't count as her move action for the round. Such uses of Hopping Firecracker Evasion are both Air- and Fire-aspected.

In Air or Fire Aura, the Initiative cost to disengage is waived.

Salvo-to-Silt Technique

Cost: 2m, 1i; **Mins:** Dodge 3, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Uniform, Perilous, Water

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flickering Candle Meditation

The Dragon-Blood's anima thickens to a viscous liquidity, slowing or even stopping projectiles in mid-air. She imposes a –(Anima) penalty on the attack roll of a ranged attack with a physical projectile or flame-based ranged attack against her Evasion. If the attack hits, up to (Anima) 1s on the damage roll subtract successes, or (Anima) 1s and 2s for flame-based attacks.

If the Dragon-Blood successfully dodges an attack with a physical projectile, the projectile becomes caught in her anima banner. She can pluck these suspended projectiles from her anima for her own use. If her anima fades to dim, all suspended projectiles fall to the ground.

Stone-Sculpting Fortification

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Dodge 4, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Earth

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flickering Candle Meditation

The earth rises to enfold the Dragon-Blood, ensuring she has a place of safety to move into as she evades her foes. As long as there is any earth, stone, or similar material within close range, she can attempt a take cover action, creating an earthen barrier that provides light cover (**Exalted**, pp. 198-199) if she succeeds. Alternatively, if she can take advantage of earthen or stone scenery that would normally provide light cover, a successful roll upgrades it to heavy cover, drawing loose soil or stones to fortify it. The environmental changes made by this Charm are permanent, and other characters can gain cover from the barrier created.

In Earth Aura, the Dragon-Blood doubles 9s on enhanced take cover actions.

Heart Like Water

Cost: 4m, 3i, 1wp, expend Air or Water Aura; **Mins:** Dodge 5, Essence 4

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Air/Water, Aura, Balanced, Counterattack, Decisive-only

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Safety Among Enemies

Light as air, fluid as water, the Dragon-Blood flows around hostile force with infinite grace, letting her enemy defeat himself. After successfully dodging a **decisive** attack, she turns it back on her attacker, rolling a **decisive** counterattack with (Wits + Dodge). All Charms that the attacker used to enhance his original attack also apply to this counterattack at no additional cost. If it hits, it uses the attacker's Initiative to determine damage (before he loses any due to missing), and resets him to base Initiative, not the Dragon-Blood.

The Dragon-Blood can enhance this counterattack with any Water Dragon style Charms she knows, regardless of the Ability it was originally made with.

This Charm can only be used once per day, unless reset by incapacitating a non-trivial enemy with an attack redirected either by it or by Safety Among Enemies.

Backer: Michael Maitan

Integrity

Moon-and-Earth Marriage

Cost: —; **Mins:** Integrity 2, Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Air

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Oath of the Ten Thousand Dragons

In the Age of Sorrows, there has been only war between the Dragon-Blooded host and the Lunar Exalted, but it was not always so. This Charm is a secret that might have been, and may yet be. The Dragon-Blood must spend this Charm's training time interacting with a willing Lunar who she has a positive Defining Tie towards, and who has a positive Defining Tie towards her. Their interactions culminate as the Charm is learned, creating a Terrestrial Bond between the Dragon-Blood and the Lunar. The Dragon-Blood treats the Lunar as one of her Sworn Kin for all purposes. This effect doesn't extend to the Dragon-Blood's Hearth, if she has one; the Terrestrial Bond is a separate affinity. Her Tie for the Lunar is permanently protected as per this Charm's prerequisite.

The Lunar gains the ability to sense the Dragon-Blood, as usual for Sworn Kin (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 154), and treats her as a Solar mate for all purposes. If her Tie towards him is ever fully eroded, she immediately forms a new Minor Tie towards him after the scene's end. A Lunar can only have one Terrestrial mate at a time, and vice versa, and this bond can be broken only by death.

Backer: Moral Wiz

Rot-Pruning Conviction

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Integrity 4, Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Wood

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Heart-Hardening Meditation

The Dragon-Blood prunes the garden of her own heart, removing diseased buds to make room for new growth. When she spends Willpower to resist an influence roll that aligned with one of her Major or Defining Intimacies, she may shed that Intimacy entirely. In its place, she forms a new Minor Intimacy that reflects her reasons for resisting the influence. She can't shed Intimacies to her Hearthmates this way.

Ten Thousand Dragons Stand Together

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Integrity 5, Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Earth

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Ten Thousand Dragons Fight as One

None can put asunder the sacred oath of a Sworn Kinship. When a character that isn't part of the Dragon-Blood's Hearth makes an influence roll targeting her or any of her Sworn Kin, they may combine their will against it. If any Hearthmate who witnesses the influence has an Intimacy opposing it, it becomes available to all members of the Hearth, either to bolster their Resolve or to use in Decision Points. A Hearthmate who does so gains the borrowed Tie at Minor intensity.

If a Hearthmate already has two opposing Defining Intimacies — either ones he possesses naturally, or ones borrowed from a Hearthmate — each additional Hearthmate who possesses an opposing Defining Intimacy instead grants him +1 Resolve each.

If the Dragon-Blood uses this Charm multiple times in the same scene, the Willpower cost of all activations past the first is waived.

Backer: Demstyx NN

Investigation

Goblin-Thwarting Hunch

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Investigation 5, Essence 3

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Balanced, Earth, Mute

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Scent of the Stranger's Threshold

The eerie touch of the Wyld is like a film of pollution to the Dragon-Blood's keen eye, an unsettling sign that the enemies of Creation are at work. She doubles 9s on a profile character roll or read intentions roll against a Fair Folk or other creature native to the Wyld, a case scene roll to find clues left behind by such creatures or by the influence of the Wyld itself, or on any Awareness, Lore, Occult, or Survival rolls to detect the influence of the Wyld.

Larceny

Veiled Dragon's Secret

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Larceny 3, Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Flowing Body Disguise

Manipulating the Essence of the five elements that flow through her, the Dragon-Blood conceals her true Aspect. Upon using this Charm, she chooses an element, and the cosmetic appearance of her anima banner and Aspect markings change such that her elemental Aspect appears to be the chosen element. She can't use this Charm to imitate the anima banners or Aspect markings of

other Dragon-Blooded — rather, her disguised anima and Aspect markings are still reflective of her own personality and nature.

This Charm's Aspect is the same as the elemental Aspect that the Dragon-Blood emulates.

Hundred-Devil Masquerade

Cost: —; **Mins:** Larceny 5, Essence 3

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Wood

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Terrifying Forest-Devil Mask

The legends of fearsome monsters, noble outlaws, and ancient heroes take on a life of their own through the Dragon-Blood. She waives Terrifying Forest-Devil Mask's Willpower cost if she uses it to assume a role that she's previously taken with it.

Additionally, the Dragon-Blood's masks draw power from their legend, slowly transforming into artifacts. This transformation is represented by the mask gaining *Mystique*, which occurs under the following circumstances.

- Once per session, when the Dragon-Blood upholds the Intimacy conferred by the mask, it gains 1 *Mystique*.
- Once per session, when a narratively significant character forms or upholds a Major or Defining Tie towards the role embodied by the mask, it gains 1 *Mystique*.
- When the Dragon-Blood completes a major character or story goal that aligns with the Intimacy conferred by the mask, it gains 1 *Mystique*.
- When the Dragon-Blood achieves a legendary social goal (**Exalted**, p. XX) that aligns with the Intimacy conferred by the mask, it gains 5 *Mystique*.
- Once per story, when the Dragon-Blood defeats an enemy in a fashion that aligns with the Intimacy conferred by the mask — potentially in combat, but including other forms of defeat such as humiliating him in front of his admirers or driving his merchant enterprise bankrupt — it gains (his Essence) *Mystique*, maximum 5.

Once a mask accrues 50 *Mystique*, it becomes a three-dot artifact, with Evocations based on both the legend that's formed around the role it depicts and any magical materials it's composed of. The Dragon-Blood may incorporate jade or another magical material into the mask to complete this process to gain greater resonance with its Evocations; this requires no roll. She immediately awakens one of the mask's Evocations at no experience point cost.

The Dragon-Blood can only have one mask in the process of accruing *Mystique* at a time.

Backer: Brian Rivers

Kinship's Shadow Subterfuge

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Larceny 5, Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Fire/Water, Mute

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Investigation-Deflecting Current

The Dragon-Blood conceals her soul's depths from even her own Sworn Kin, twisting their oath to blind her brothers to her true self. When one of her Hearthmates rolls against her Guile, she adds any positive Tie that Hearthmate has towards her to her Guile as a non-Charms bonus.

Additionally, when a Hearthmate attempts to sense her with his anima power, she's aware of it and may attempt to deceive him. He rolls (Perception + [Awareness, Investigation, or Socialize]) opposing her Guile; if he fails, she causes him to sense her as being at a point within long range of her. Should she die, she may conceal this from her Sworn Kin as well.

Should the Dragon-Blood betray a Hearthmate, she loses only one point of Willpower, not all of it.

Backer: Josh Raveling

Linguistics

Root Tongue of the Dragon's Stemmata

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Linguistics 3, Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Wood

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Language-Learning Ritual

Immersing herself in the shared lineage that unites the Terrestrial host, the Exalt transcends all boundaries of language that would divide her from her kinsfolk. Her spoken words can be understood by any Dragon-Blood, regardless of language, and she may likewise understand them. She can also read anything written by another Dragon-Blood in any language, although her own writings are not translated for other Dragon-Blooded. Her keen affinity for the psyche of her Terrestrial kin lets her reroll 1s on rolls to read the intentions of Dragon-Blooded or break ciphers created by Dragon-Blooded.

A scene spent using this Charm to communicate with a Dragon-Blood speaking an unknown tongue can substitute for the (6 – Intelligence) days of study needed to use Language-Learning Ritual for that language.

Rose's Secret Petal

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Linguistics 3, Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: Wood

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Cryptic Essence Cipher, Wind-Carried Words Technique

The Dragon-Blood buries a written message in the soil and suffuses it with Wood Essence, bidding it to grow and blossom into a small but colorful flower. The arrangement of petals and leaves on the flower acts as a cipher created with Cryptic Essence Cipher, conveying the contents of the message, which can be up to one page. The Dragon-Blood rolls ([Intelligence or Manipulation] + Linguistics), doubling 9s, to determine the strength of the cipher, but few realize the code is there to be broken — the plant cannot be distinguished from ordinary flowers except by actions enhanced with magic. However, to the intended recipient of the flower, it's immediately recognizable that the plant contains a message.

Shared Breath Understanding

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Linguistics 4, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Air

Duration: Varies

Prerequisite Charms: Thousand Tongues Meditation

Drinking in a person's breath, the Dragon-Blood steals his voice. She rolls ([Manipulation or Wits] + Linguistics) against the Resolve of a character within close range to breathe in his exhalation. If successful, she draws out his fluency in a single language, gaining the ability to speak and comprehend it as per Language-Learning Ritual for (Essence + extra successes) days. She suffers no penalties on influence rolls made with that language, speaking with the accent and dialect of the character she stole it from, and can mimic his voice flawlessly.

This Charm's victim doesn't lose fluency in the chosen language, but his voice is unnaturally quiet whenever he speaks in it, imposing a -3 penalty on any spoken influence rolls he makes in that language. He can reclaim his stolen voice by breathing in the Dragon-Blood's exhalation while at close range. This requires a difficulty 6 gambit in combat, but can potentially be achieved outside of combat through social influence, Larceny, or other means.

With Linguistics 5, Essence 3, the Dragon-Blood may steal up to (Intelligence) languages with a single activation, committing an additional two motes for each language past the first.

Backer: Mark Hales

Lore

Deadly Essence Flashpoint

Cost: 1m per die; **Mins:** Lore 3, Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Balanced, Stackable

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Elemental Concentration Trance

The Dragon-Blood inverts the destructive force of her anima banner, drawing it inward and letting it build unto a terrifying strength. Whenever she would roll anima flux, she may instead

commit one mote to hold her flux in abeyance. She may have up to (higher of Essence or 3) activations of this Charm stacked.

When the Dragon-Blood makes a **decisive** attack, she may release all motes committed to this Charm to add one die of **decisive** damage per mote as her unleashed flux wreathes the attack. If she enhances an Elemental Bolt Attack this way, its range is extended by one range band, maximum long.

This Charm's Aspect is the same as the Dragon-Blood's.

Mantle of Elemental Power

Cost: 3m, 1a, 1wp; **Mins:** Lore 3, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Elemental Bolt Attack

The Dragon-Blood channels her anima into a puissant manifestation of her Aspect's element. An Air Aspect might surround herself with a nimbus of crackling lightning; a Wood Aspect could conjure a swirling vortex of cherry blossom petals; an Earth Aspect might be orbited by countless fragments of stone. Drawing from this manifestation enhances her Elemental Bolt Attack when she uses it with her Aspect's element:

- Its cost is reduced by three motes.
- When a Simple or Reflexive Charm lets her make an Archery or Thrown attack, she can reflexively use Elemental Bolt Attack to make it.
- She can use Elemental Bolt Attack reflexively to defend against an attack with a display of elemental power, applying a Parry rating of $([Dexterity + [\text{higher of Archery or Thrown}]/2, \text{rounded up}] + 1)$.
- In her Aspect's Aura, she waives the anima cost to extend the range of her elemental bolts.

Backer: Matthew

As in the Beginning

Cost: 30m, 3wp (expend Aura); **Mins:** Lore 5, Essence 5

Type: Simple

Keywords: Aura, Perilous

Duration: Five hours

Prerequisite Charms: Dragon Vortex Attack

Embodying the creative and destructive power of the Five Elemental Dragons, the Dragon-Blood unleashes a primal force not witnessed since Creation's birth. Her anima banner flares to bonfire, straining with barely-contained force that mounts over the course of five hours. During this time, the Dragon-Blood can't take any non-reflexive actions or movement actions. Anyone who can

see her anima banner can tell that disaster is imminent; a difficulty 2 ([Intelligence or Perception] + Occult roll) reveals exactly how much time remains. The Dragon-Blood's anima collapses, dispersing harmlessly, if she leaves Aura or is crashed, incapacitated, or forcibly moved.

After five hours uninterrupted, the Dragon-Blood expends her Aura and rolls (Intelligence + Lore), unleashing a blast that extends (successes/2) miles outwards. She and her Hearthmates are immune to the blast's immediate consequences; she can use Enfolded in the Dragon's Wings (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 282) to grant the same protection to all allied characters within medium range. The Storyteller determines how much damage the blast inflicts on mundane scenery and trivial opponents, up to uncountable damage. Affected battle groups must check for rout against difficulty 4. The blast's other effects depend on its elemental aspect:

Air: The sky darkens, pouring down harsh rain or heavy snowfall accompanied by gale-force winds and flashing lightning.

- Precipitation imposes a –2 penalty on all vision- or hearing-based rolls.
- Winds impose a –3 penalty on movement actions, ranged attacks, and similar rolls.
- Airborne characters and trivial opponents treat all movement as difficult terrain.
- Characters exposed to the storm suffer an environmental hazard with difficulty 2, Damage 10L/hour; a failed roll indicates they've been struck by lightning.

The storm lasts (Dragon-Blood's successes / 2) hours, but can be dispersed earlier through magic or the creative actions of characters.

Earth: The land shakes and grinds horrifically as seismic tremors shudder through it.

- All characters within range must make a difficulty 3 (Dexterity + Athletics) balance roll or fall into a yawning chasm, suffering a falling damage as per a short-range fall (**Exalted**, p. 232) unless they find a way to mitigate it. Climbing out requires a difficulty 3 ([Dexterity or Strength] + Athletics) roll, although characters may escape by other means, such as Monkey Leap Technique.
- The damage wrought by the earthquake renders the entire area difficult terrain (**Exalted**, p. 199), and the speed of any long-range travel through the affected area is halved.

Fire: A roaring conflagration engulfs the land, setting the world ablaze.

- All characters suffer a one-time environmental hazard with difficulty 5, Damage 6L.
- Forests, grasslands, wooden structures, and other flammable terrain catches fire and continues to burn with a lesser intensity (difficulty 5, Damage 4L/round) until they are extinguished or no fuel remains.
- A haze of smoke and ash hangs over the affected area, imposing a –2 penalty on any vision- or scent-based rolls. This lasts (Dragon-Blood's successes / 2) hours, unless dispersed earlier by natural weather, magic, or the creative actions of characters, and may last longer if large regions remain ablaze.

Water: A swirling pillar of water descends from the sky or rises from the sea, before dispersing in all directions as a crushing tidal wave.

- Depending on a character's proximity to the Dragon-Blood, the amount of time they have to prepare for the wave's impact varies — those within long range are struck by it instantly,

without an opportunity to seek cover, while someone miles away from her might have minutes to prepare.

- Characters unable to reach a place of safety before being hit must make a difficulty 5 ([Strength or Stamina] + Athletics) roll to avoid being carried away. If they fail, they're knocked one range band away from the Dragon-Blood per success they failed by. If this movement is interrupted by hitting a barrier, the character takes damage as though he'd suffered a fall from a height equal to the number of range bands of movement prevented.
- The blast is also likely to cause mass flooding in valleys and similar areas.

Wood: Gigantic vines burst from the ground, bearing vibrant flowers that bloom with toxic pollen.

- The overgrowth renders the entire area difficult terrain and halves the speed of long-term travel through it, although travelers can potentially bypass this by setting fire to the vines or destroying them through other means.
- Pollen imposes a -3 penalty on scent-based rolls.
- The pollen is also an inhaled poison. The first time a character breathes in the affected area, and after each hour of exposure thereafter, they must roll against a poison with Damage 1B/minute, Duration 10 minutes, and a -3 penalty.

The vines remain until destroyed, but their flowers wilt after (Dragon-Blood's successes / 2) hours, ending the pollen haze. It can be dispersed earlier by natural weather, magic, or the creative actions of characters.

The Dragon-Blood's Hearthmates can contribute their Auras to this Charm, as long as they remain within short range and abide the same restrictions she does. Only one Aura of each element can be contributed, adding a non-Charm die on the Lore roll and conferring that element's effects on the blast. The effects of different elements will combine without cancelling each other — Water and Fire, for example, would combine to unleash a scalding tsunami hot enough to set the battlefield afire.

After using this Charm, the Dragon-Blood and all Hearthmates that contributed Auras suffer a -4 fatigue penalty on all rolls. Each full night's rest lowers the penalty by one; until it's fully removed, affected characters can't regain Willpower from rest.

This Charm can only be used once per story or year, whichever is longer.

Backer: Ashley Thompson

Medicine

Flesh-Sealing Flame Technique

Cost: —(+2m or 2i); **Mins:** Medicine 3, Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Fire

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Wound-Closing Technique

The Dragon-Blood cauterizes wounds with flame-wreathed hands, searing flesh and saving lives. When she uses Wound-Closing Technique to convert lethal damage to bashing, she may pay a surcharge of two motes or two Initiative to complete the treatment instantly, doubling 9s on the roll. Her cauterizing touch also automatically staunches her patient's wounds (**Exalted**, p. 174) and prevents his wounds from becoming infected (**Exalted**, p. 235). However, the pain of this procedure increases her patient's wound penalty by -1 for (6 - patient's Stamina) rounds.

Alternatively, the Dragon-Blood may pay a two-mote or two-Initiative surcharge to use Wound-Closing Technique to make a rally for numbers roll with (Intelligence + War), adding (Medicine) non-Charm dice, quickly patching her soldiers' wounds to get them back on their feet.

Uses of Wound-Closing Technique enhanced by this Charm are Fire Aspected.

Melee

Oncoming Storm Stance

Cost: 1a, 1i per two motes; **Mins:** Melee 3, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Air, Perilous

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Crimson Fang Bite

Lightning arcs across the Dragon-Blood's weapon as she hones her deadly focus. When she aims at an enemy within close range, she may spend up to (Perception/2, rounded up) Initiative to gain two motes for each point of Initiative spent. These motes can only be used to enhance a Melee attack that benefits from that aim action, and are lost if the Dragon-Blood doesn't attack the enemy she aimed against on her next turn.

Unerring Lightning Razor

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Air, Uniform

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Oncoming Storm Stance

Honing her focus and concentration beyond the limits of human perception, the Dragon-Blood unleashes arcing lighting along her blade's edge, guiding it to strike true. When she makes an attack that benefits from aiming, she rerolls (Essence) non-1 failures on both an attack and damage roll. If her enemy is wearing metal armor (including artifact armor made from the five magical materials), she adds its mobility penalty to the number of failures she can reroll.

A Melee 5, Essence 3 repurchase lets the Dragon-Blood pay a one-Willpower surcharge while in Air Aura to reflexively aim against an enemy wearing metal armor before attacking with this Charm.

Backer: Quinn Radich

Wrath-Grounding Guard

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Melee 3, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Balanced, Earth

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flame-Borne Interception

Whether it be lightning crackling from a sorcerer's fingertips or the very fires of Hell, the Dragon-Blood diverts deadly energies into her weapon, grounding them harmlessly. She gains +1 non-Charmed Parry against an attack made up entirely of Essence or other magical energy with no physical component, such as Elemental Bolt Attack, and 1s on the attack roll subtract successes. She can parry such attacks even if they are unblockable.

In Earth Aura, when one of the Dragon-Blood's allies within medium range is targeted with an attack made up entirely of Essence or other magical energy, the Dragon-Blood may expend her Aura to reflexively protect that ally as per a defend other action, diverting the flow of energy towards herself. Even if her Parry is beaten, the attacker must target her, not her ward.

Lightning-Drinking Blade

Cost: —; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Earth

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Wrath-Grounding Guard

When the Dragon-Blood successfully blocks an attack with Wrath-Grounding Guard, she gains motes equal to the 10s on the attack roll, maximum (higher of Essence or 3) motes, strengthening herself with her enemy's power. If the attack was made against a character the Dragon-Blood was protecting with a defend other action, she gains an additional mote.

With Melee 5, Essence 3, if the Dragon-Blood would receive motes from parrying an attack based on one of the five elements, she may instead forgo the mote reward and pay one Willpower to enter the Elemental Aura that matches the attack's element.

Dragon-Scale Shield

Cost: 1m, 1i; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Perilous, Uniform

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flame-Borne Interception

The Dragon-Blood channels the force of her elemental Aspect into her defense, wreathing her blade or shield in anima. She gains a benefit based on her Aspect:

Air: The Dragon-Blood's weapon unleashes a blast of air as she defends, adding +1 Parry as a non-Charm bonus against any ranged attack with a material projectile.

Earth: The Dragon-Blood's weapon takes on the weight of mountains, adding +1 Parry as a non-Charm bonus against a disarm gambit. If she blocks with a heavy weapon, she can apply this bonus against any attack, and increases the bonus against disarm gambits to +2.

Fire: The Dragon-Blood's defense radiates fiery intensity. A successful block against an attacker at close range causes him to lose one Initiative, plus one Initiative for every 1 he rolls (which she doesn't gain).

Water: A swirling ribbon of water coils around the Dragon-Blood's weapon, lashing out at attackers. If she successfully blocks an attack from close range while benefitting from a Full Defense, her attacker incurs a -1 onslaught penalty.

Wood: Vibrant flower petals trail behind the Dragon-Blood's weapon, as beautiful as they are deadly. If she successfully blocks an attack from close range, her attacker is exposed to a poison with Damage 1i/round (L in Crash), Duration (the Parry applied against his attack) rounds, and a -1 penalty.

The Dragon-Blood may purchase additional elemental variants of this Charm for three experience points each. She can activate this Charm multiple times against a single attack to stack the benefits of different elemental variants. The Air variant can be used against attacks from close range if combined with another element.

Rumbling Earth Rebuke

Cost: 4m, 1wp; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Decisive-only, Earth

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blinding Spark Distraction

The stalwart force of the Dragon-Blood's defense is like a seismic shockwave as her attacker's blades rebound off her weapon. After successfully blocking or clashing an attack made from close range, she may reflexively attempt a disarm gambit against her attacker.

In Earth Aura, a successful gambit inflicts an additional point of onslaught penalty, and destroys mundane weapons rather than disarming them.

Fulminating Thunderclap Surge

Cost: 6m, 1a; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Air, Decisive-only

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Unerring Lightning Razor

Unleashing the tempest within, the Dragon-Blood channels her Essence through her weapon and into a deadly levinbolt. She makes an unblockable **decisive** attack against an enemy within short

range, and halves Hardness from metal armor (including armor made from the five magical materials).

In Air Aura, the Dragon-Blood can attack out to medium range without needing to aim. If she aims before attacking, she adds the aiming bonus to her **decisive** damage as well as the attack roll. Aiming before using this Charm counts as aiming at an enemy within close range for the purpose of other Dragon-Blooded Melee Charms, like Oncoming Storm Stance (p. XX).

This Charm can only be used once per scene unless reset by dealing 5+ **withering** or 1+ **decisive** damage to a non-trivial enemy with an attack from close range.

Spilling the Mountain's Blood

Cost: 8m, 3a, 1wp, expend Earth or Fire Aura; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 4

Type: Simple

Keywords: Aura, Decisive-only, Earth/Fire

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Burning Pinnacle Strike

Channeling her anima banner into a murderous blow, the Dragon-Blood marks her enemy with lines of red-hot Essence that spread from the point where her weapon struck him. Her killing intent inflames these molten wounds, causing the blazing meridians to pulse and writhe until they finally erupt. She makes a **decisive** attack, adding (higher of Essence or Strength) attack roll extra successes as dice of damage.

If the attack deals any damage, an eruption begins mounting within the victim, culminating at the end of his next turn. He suffers dice of lethal **decisive** damage equal to the Dragon-Blood's successes on the attack's damage roll, ignoring Hardness. If this inflicts 3+ levels of damage or the victim is incapacitated before the eruption, the ground beneath the victim's melts into lava for the rest of the scene, an environmental hazard with difficulty 5, Damage 6L/round.

If the Dragon-Blood is incapacitated before the eruption occurs, her killing intent fades, making it possible to prevent the eruption. If the victim or one of his allies succeeds on a difficulty 5 (Intelligence + [lower of Medicine or Occult]) roll, the eruption is averted as the magmatic anima is shunted harmlessly away.

Backer: Bryant Devillier

Thousandfold Tempest Strike

Cost: 8m, 1wp, expend Air Aura; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 4

Type: Simple

Keywords: Air, Aura, Decisive-only

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Mela's Flashing Tongue, Oncoming Storm Stance

Driving her lightning-wreathed weapon into the ground at her feet, the Dragon-Blood unleashes a spectacular burst of flashing lightning and deafening thunder, directing the storm's fury against her foes. To use this Charm, she must first take an aim action enhanced with Oncoming Storm

Stance, and must have Initiative 12+. She rolls a single **decisive** attack against all characters within close range, friend or foe, making a single attack roll that benefits from aiming and apply it against the Defense of all targets within the range. Her attack carries a base damage against each hit target equal to the number of motes from Oncoming Storm Stance that she spent enhancing the attack, and she divides her Initiative evenly among between all hit characters, rounding up, to determine the total damage. This attack ignores Hardness from metal armor (including armor made from the five magical materials).

If the Dragon-Blood knows Fulminating Thunderclap Surge, she may use it reflexively with this Charm to instead strike all characters within short range.

This Charm can only be used once per scene, unless reset by crashing an enemy with Mela's Flashing Tongue.

Occult

Elemental Bond Meditation

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 3, Survival 3, Essence 3

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Beast-Taming Aspect

The Dragon-Blood has cultivated an affinity for Creation's elementals, those spirits closest in nature to her own Essence. She may take elementals with Essence 3 or less as familiars, up to a maximum of (her Essence) such familiars. She may claim as her familiars elementals that she has sorcerously summoned — sustaining their existence indefinitely beyond the spell's end — but not those summoned by others.

The Dragon-Blood may use Beast-Taming Aspect and Animal Empathy Technique to enhance influence rolls against elementals with Essence 3 or less as though they were animals. Such uses of those Charms have the same aspect as the elemental targeted.

Dragon's Egg Hatched

Cost: 1m, 1a, 1wp; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: (Essence + Intelligence) days

Prerequisite Charms: Fivefold Resonance Sense

The Dragon-Blood bids Creation serve her, and the elements answer the Prince of the Earth. To use this Charm, the Dragon-Blood must be within close range of a dramatic and significant manifestation of an element, such as a windstorm, grove, cliffside, or river. She draws up its Essence and shapes it into a weak elemental servant with the following traits.

- The base traits of either an elite troop or an assassin (**Exalted**, pp. 497, 499).
- Up to (Dragon-Blood's Essence) dots of mutations that represent its elemental nature.

- A Defining Tie of loyalty to the Dragon-Blood and, optionally, a Major or Defining Principle chosen by the Storyteller based on the element it's created from.
- Essence 1, an Essence pool of sixty motes, and the Hurry Home Charm (**Exalted**, p. XX), allowing it to return to the Dragon-Blood's side for ten motes and one Willpower.
- The elemental is more intelligent than most animals, though not as intelligent as the average human. It isn't capable of speech and can't understand complex commands or statements.
- If the Dragon-Blood knows Elemental Bond Meditation, the created elemental counts as a familiar, although it does not count towards the maximum number of elemental familiars she can have.
- If the elemental travels more than (Dragon-Blood's Essence) miles from her, the elemental dissipates into nothingness and this Charm ends.

While the elementals created by this Charm cease to exist once this Charm ends, if any of the players are particularly invested in an elemental as a character, its consciousness, personality, memories, and Intimacies may carry over to subsequent uses of this Charm to create elementals of the same element.

This Charm's aspect is the same as that of the elemental created.

Mutations

Mutations are Innate or Purchased Merits (**Exalted**, p. 158), mundane or supernatural, that alter or improve a character's physical body, such as Ambidextrous, Giant, or Wings.

World-Weaving Dragon Demiurge

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 4

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: None

Duration: One working

Prerequisite Charms: Dragon-Sorcerer Puissance, any five Terrestrial Circle spells

The Dragon-Blooded sorcerer shapes Creation's elemental Essence by will alone, drawing forth miracles worthy of the Elemental Dragons. This Charm enhances a sorcerous working that creates, strengthens, or controls the elements, such as creating a wall of sorcerous flames, granting a bodyguard a lightning-spitting eye, purifying a river, merging two elementals into a gestalt hybrid, or similar. She gains the following benefits:

- She adds (Essence) dice on each roll.
- The first botch her working suffers has no negative effect.
- If one of her Hearthmates provides Means for the working—either as a cooperating sorcerer or offering a complementary Ability—she adds an additional +1 to the working's terminus. She can only gain this benefit once, even if multiple Hearthmates provide Means.

- If the working is Terrestrial, she adds (Essence/2, rounded up) to the maximum number of dice she can add to each roll, and decreases the working's experience point cost by two, minimum 1.

Backer: Jordan Goldfarb

Performance

Enticing Paramour Passion

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Performance 3, Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Mute, Fire/Wood

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: None

The flames of passion nourish the seeds of lasting relationships, be they bonds of pure-hearted love or rivalries of hatred and attraction. To use this Charm, the Dragon-Blood must engage a character in a voluntary act of physical intimacy — sex, a kiss, a passionate embrace — after successfully seducing him with an influence roll of any Ability, or being seduced by his own influence roll. She stocks a pool of non-Charm dice equal to (her Appearance + her positive Tie towards the target + his positive Tie towards her). She may add up to (Essence) non-Charm dice from this pool on:

- Influence rolls made with any Ability against the target alone that inspire an emotion, or instill or leverage a Tie towards the Dragon-Blood.
- Read intentions or profile character rolls against the target.
- Resolve or Guile against the target, raising them by +1 for every two dice she expends.
- Rolls to introduce or challenge facts related to the target.
- Strategic Maneuver rolls against the target.

This Charm can only be used once per story, unless reset by achieving a major character or story goal or accomplishing a legendary social goal by seducing someone.

Backer: Jordan N

Presence

Heart-Conquering Prowess

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Presence 3, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Balanced, Dual, Fire

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Eternally Argumentative Flame

Such is the elegance and beauty of the Dragon-Blood's martial prowess that even her staunchest enemies must respect it. She adds (Appearance/2, rounded up) bonus dice on an attack roll. If the enhanced attack is **decisive** and deals damage greater than its target's Resolve or incapacitates him, the Dragon-Blood can forgo inflicting one level of damage to erode a negative Tie her victim has towards her by one step. If he has no negative Ties to her, she can forgo a level of damage to instill him with a positive Tie for her, with an emotional context chosen by his player. Treat this as an instill action that succeeds automatically without a roll, although it must still leverage a supporting Intimacy to strengthen an Intimacy to or weaken it from Major or Defining intensity (**Exalted**, p. 215). If an attack enhanced by this Charm incapacitates an enemy, he can't spend Willpower to resist, but is left merely unconscious, not dying.

Backer: Michael Brewer

Resistance

Dragon-Graced Raiment

Cost: —(4m); **Mins:** Resistance 3, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: None

Duration: One scene *or* Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Elemental Aegis

The Dragon-Blood adorns herself with the elements themselves, donning armor whose plates are frozen lightning, elegant many-layered dresses woven from varicolored flame, and hauberks resplendent with fragrant blossoms. When she recalls armor banished with Elemental Aegis, she can don it in (mobility penalty + 1) rounds, and it is wreathed in the element she summons it from (or her Aspect element, if she recalls it by spending anima) for one scene.

She can also use Elemental Aegis to create any type of mundane armor out of the elements, donning it as above, or to create clothing from the elements that provides no defense benefits but counts as exceptional equipment (**Exalted**, p. 580) for social rolls where the Exalt's garb is relevant. Created armor or clothing normally lasts until the scene ends, but the Dragon-Blood can commit four motes after that to maintain it indefinitely.

Regardless of the option the Dragon-Blood employs, she gains benefits based on the invoked element:

Air: Air-wreathed armor is nigh weightless, gaining the Buoyant and Silent tags (**Exalted**, 593). Additionally, its mobility penalty is reduced by one when applied to the Dragon-Blood's Evasion. Light armor or clothing instead adds an automatic success on Stealth rolls where moving silently is a factor.

Earth: Earth-wreathed armor gains +1 soak. This increases to (higher of Essence or 3) soak against smash attacks and other attacks that would forcibly move the Dragon-Blood. Artifact armor gains +1 Hardness against such attacks, while mundane armor provides Hardness 4 against them. Earth-wreathed clothing doesn't provide a soak bonus or Hardness against normal attacks and doesn't count as armor for purposes of Martial Arts and other incompatible effects, but it does provide soak and Hardness against smash attacks and the like.

Fire: Fire-wreathed armor or clothing deals one die of lethal **decisive** damage, ignoring Hardness, to any enemy who hits the Dragon-Blood with an unarmed or natural attack, or who spends a round physically grappling her. Her flaming raiment also adds an automatic success on Appearance-based threaten rolls.

Water: Water-wreathed armor is slick and easily hidden, gaining the Concealable tag (**Exalted**, p. 593) and adding an automatic success on rolls to oppose being grappled, escape physical restraints, or move through tight spaces. Armor that already has the Concealable tag adds an automatic success on disguise rolls, as does water-wreathed clothing.

Wood: Wood-wreathed armor or clothing is adorned with vibrant flowers with fragrant aromas, adding an automatic success on inspire rolls, instill rolls to create Ties of attraction or lust towards the Dragon-Blood, and persuade or bargain rolls to seduce characters.

Backer: Déan Pijpker

Apocalypse-Outlasting Prana

Cost: 7m, 1wp; **Mins:** Resistance 5, Essence 4

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Decisive-only, Earth, Perilous

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dragon's Unfailing Vigor, Earth Bears Witness

Embodying the eternal Essence of the Imperial Mountain, the Dragon-Blood becomes nigh-invincible. She may use this Charm after being hit by a **decisive** attack or failing a roll to resist an environmental hazard or trap, but before damage is rolled. She rolls (her Hardness), subtracting one die from the damage roll for each success. This can't reduce the total dice of damage below half the original number, rounded up (although other defensive effects can subsequently do so).

Additionally, uncountable damage (**Exalted**, p. 205) is reduced to 10 dice of **decisive** damage before the Dragon-Blood rolls her Hardness.

Apocalypse-Outlasting Prana can only be used once per scene.

Ride

Rearing Stallion Provocation

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Ride 3, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Fire

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dance of the Jade Bridle

With a rousing shout, the Dragon-Blood agitates an enemy's mount, driving it to flee or charge unwisely. She makes a (Charisma + [Presence, Survival, or Ride]) threaten roll against an animal mount, doubling 9s. If successful, the mount reflexively moves one band in a direction of the Dragon-Blood's choice, taking its rider with it. It won't move into obvious danger, such as off a

cliff or into a bonfire, but it can be made to move within range of perils it's unaware of. Mounts can't spend Willpower to resist this influence unless they've been trained for battle or have a Major or Defining Tie that opposes this influence.

Special activation rules: This Charm can be placed in a flurry.

Sail

Sea Dragon's Cunning

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Sail 3, Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Balanced, Pilot, Water

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Skilled in the ways of war on the seas, the Dragon-Blood executes a peerless naval strategy. She doubles 9s on a Naval Maneuver roll (**Exalted**, p. 245). If she succeeds, she gains one Momentum.

In Water Aura, the Dragon-Blood gains one Momentum even if she fails.

Trial-by-Fire Imperilment

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Sail 4, Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Fire, Pilot

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Sea Dragon's Cunning

The ocean boils as the Dragon-Blood's ship rains fire down on enemy fleets. She adds (Anima) dice on a broadside stratagem and deals an additional level of damage if she succeeds. This Charm lets the Dragon-Blood attempt a broadside even if her vessel lacks anti-ship weaponry or crew to man it — she might cast a spray of embers to set an enemy ship's sails afire, set part of its hull ablaze with a bolt of fire, or lend a spark to the firedust in her enemy's cannons.

This Charm can only be used once per scene unless reset by gaining 3+ Momentum from a successful positioning stratagem.

Mountain-Hull Meditation

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Sail 4, Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Earth, Pilot

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Sturdy Bulkhead Concentration

The Dragon-Blood's ship is as tough as she is, suffused with the unyielding Essence of stone as she sails through perilous storms, enemy fire, or other terrors. She reduces the difficulty of a roll needed to avoid damaging her ship by one, or subtracts one success from another character's roll to damage her ship. This explicitly includes both feats of demolition and offensive Naval Maneuvers.

A Dragon-Blood with this Charm treats the decks of a ship that she pilots as earthen surfaces for the purposes of other Dragon-Blooded Charms.

Socialize

Impeccable Purity Lavation

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Socialize 3, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Mute, Water

Duration: (Essence + Appearance) days

Prerequisite Charms: Friend-to-All-Nations Attitude

Submersing herself in cleansing waters, the Dragon-Blood washes away all imperfections. After spending at least an hour bathing, she emerges resplendent and pure. Her cleanliness transcends the world; she cannot be stained or dirtied by any mundane material. Any character that interacts with her is treated as having a positive Minor Tie towards her, with an emotional context chosen by that character's player. A fellow Dynast might respect her faultless grooming and manners; a peasant might be awestruck by her impossible purity; an assassin sent to kill her might fall in love as he smells the perfume she bathed in. Characters who already have a positive Tie for the Dragon-Blood instead suffer -1 Resolve against her. A character can spend one Willpower to become immune for this Charm's duration; if the Dragon-Blood treats someone offensively or demandingly, no Willpower is necessary to resist.

With Essence 3, the Dragon-Blood reduces the costs of Auspicious First Meeting Attitude, Enticing Paramour Passion, Heart-Conquering Prowess, Hot-Blooded Ardor, Vivacious Dragon Beauty, and Warm-Faced Seduction Style by one mote each.

Backer: Wern212

Still Waters Mask

Cost: 1m, 1wp (3m, 1wp); **Mins:** Socialize 5, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Mute, Stackable, Water

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Implacable Dragon Mien

A consummate deceiver, the Dragon-Blood can live as countless false selves. Using this Charm, she devises a fictitious identity over the course of at least an hour, gaining a temporary specialty that applies on Larceny rolls to disguise herself as that identity, to her Guile against rolls that

would contradict her disguise, and on influence rolls made to convince others of her disguise or explain away discrepancies or inconsistencies in her portrayal of that identity.

When a character makes a roll opposing the Dragon-Blood's disguise as that character, she can pay three motes and one Willpower to make a special (Manipulation + Socialize) instill roll against his Resolve, which can't be resisted with Willpower. Instead of a normal instill roll's effects, success imposes a penalty of (1 + threshold successes) on his roll. If multiple characters roll against the Dragon-Blood's disguise simultaneously, she need only pay the Willpower cost once, and makes a single roll against all of them.

The Dragon-Blood may stack this Charm to maintain up to (higher of Essence or Manipulation) cover identities.

Backer: Eleanor Saxton

Stealth

Blood-Chilling Strike

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Stealth 3, Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Air, Decisive-only

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

The icy sting of the Dragon-Blood's murderous intent freezes her victim's blood in his veins. When she lands an unexpected **decisive** attack with any Ability against an enemy who hasn't acted this round, he loses one Initiative, or (Essence) Initiative on an ambush, which she doesn't gain. If this deals 3+ levels of **decisive** damage to him, the chill prevents him from taking a movement action that round, except to rise from prone, and from taking any movement created by Charms even if it doesn't count as a movement action.

In Air Aura, the Dragon-Blood gains any Initiative her victim loses.

Foe-Blinding Venom

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Stealth 3, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Balanced, Decisive-only, Wood

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blood-Chilling Strike

The Dragon-Blood distills her Essence into a venom that burns her presence from the senses of her enemies. While in concealment, she makes a **decisive** unexpected attack that conveys a poison which must be resisted with ([lower of Perception or Stamina] + Resistance). It has Damage 2i/round (L in Crash), Duration (her current Stealth successes) rounds, and a -1 penalty. This penalty increases to -4 on rolls opposing the Dragon-Blood's Stealth.

Backer: Sunny Springs

Quicksand Tomb Burial

Cost: 5m, 1wp, expend Earth Aura; **Mins:** Stealth 5, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Aura, Decisive-only, Earth, Mute

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Sleeping Dragon's Lair

The Dragon-Blood rises from the depths of the earth to drag her victims down into the endless dark. To use this Charm, she must be using Sleeping Dragon's Lair. She makes an unexpected grapple gambit against an enemy who's unaware of her, without leaving concealment. If she successfully establishes control of the grapple, she drags her victim back into the earth with her, as per Sleeping Dragon's Lair. This disappearance goes unnoticed, and the entombed character can't be detected or perceived for the grapple's duration unless a character successfully detects the Dragon-Blood.

The Dragon-Blood can make savaging attacks, slams, or throws against a grappled victim without breaking concealment, instead rolling (Dexterity + Stealth) reflexively with an additional -1 penalty after the attack. Enemies whose (Perception + Awareness) rolls beat the Dragon-Blood's successes are able to detect her presence underground, even if they lack the magic normally required to contest Sleeping Dragon's Lair.

If the grapple ends, the Dragon-Blood's victim may reflexively emerge from his burial. If the Dragon-Blood incapacitates him before that, his body will rise from the earth after (Dragon-Blood's Essence) rounds, although this is insufficient for onlookers to pinpoint the Dragon-Blood's current location.

Backer: U. Kaya Yavuz

Explosive Decoy Technique

Cost: —(6m); **Mins:** Stealth 5, Essence 4

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Counterattack, Decisive-only, Fire, Mute

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Burning Shadow Double

The Dragon-Blood's shadow conceals a secret flame. When an enemy attacks a duplicate created by Burning Shadow Double, she can pay six motes to detonate that duplicate in a burst of flame as a **decisive** counterattack, rolled with (Wits + Stealth). If the Dragon-Blood is concealed from the attacker, it's a surprise attack. It deals (Essence) dice of lethal damage, ignoring Hardness. The Dragon-Blood's Initiative isn't included or reset to base.

This counterattack doesn't break the Dragon-Blood's concealment. Instead, if her attack roll is lower than her current concealment successes, it becomes her new concealment total, and all enemies may roll (Perception + Awareness) opposing it to detect her. If her attack roll is higher or equal than her current concealment successes, then all enemies roll against her concealment successes instead.

The Dragon-Blood may expend her Fire Aura to add her Initiative to the damage roll of a counterattack made with this Charm. Doing so resets her to base normally if the attack hits.

Survival

Dragon-Beast Transformation

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Survival 3, Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Animal Empathy Technique

The Dragon-Blood draws from her bond with a familiar to emulate its nature, her aspect markings transforming into a more bestial appearance. To use this Charm, she must touch one of her familiars. She gains (higher of Essence or 3) dots of mutations that reflect that familiar's physical form, behavior, or traits. Once she has chosen a set of mutations that a familiar grants her, all subsequent uses of this Charm drawing from that same familiar will grant her the same mutations. This Charm is Wood Aspected when used on an animal familiar; when used on an elemental familiar acquired through Elemental Bond Meditation (p. XX), its aspect is the same as the elemental's.

Thrown

Sand-Scourge Feint

Cost: 1m, 1wp; **Mins:** Thrown 4, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Decisive-only, Earth

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Elusive Zephyr Strike

A sandstorm spits forth to swirl around the Dragon-Blood's weapon in flight, harrying her foe. She makes a distract gambit. If successful, the gambit's victim loses Initiative equal to the gambit's Initiative cost. If this crashes him, the Initiative Break is awarded to the beneficiary of the gambit, instead of the Dragon-Blood.

In Earth Aura, the Dragon-Blood may expend her Aura in lieu of paying the gambit's Initiative cost.

War

Swift Rain, Fierce Storm

Cost: 3m per battle group, 1wp; **Mins:** War 3, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Air/Water

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Tireless Footfalls Cadence

The Dragon-Blood's archers sweep across the battlefield like gathering storm clouds, unleashing volleys that darken the sky and fall like rain. She enhances allied battle groups for three motes each, granting them an automatic success on movement rolls and ranged attack rolls made from medium range or further, and +1 Evasion. If an enhanced battle group has elite Drill, the dice bonus it provides on command actions to rally it or order ranged attacks or movement actions increases to three non-Charm dice.

If the Dragon-Blood is fighting under a stratagem she successfully enacted, she can use this Charm reflexively.

Backer: Brian Jenkins

Tiger-and-Dragon Combination

Cost: 7m, 1wp; **Mins:** War 3, Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Balanced, Decisive-only

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any combination of five Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee, Thrown, or War Charms

Acting in perfect harmony with a steadfast ally, the Dragon-Blood coordinates a deadly finishing blow. She must spend this Charm's training time practicing with an ally, developing a signature combination move that requires both of them to perform. A brawler might deliver a crushing uppercut that pushes an enemy into the downswing of her ally's goremaul; a Righteous Devil stylist might use a firewand to wreath her partner's daiklave in flames; a pair of assassins might unleash a storm of throwing knives that comes from all directions.

When this Charm is used, the Dragon-Blood and her ally each make a **decisive** attack with any Ability against a single enemy. Her ally can move up to one range band in any direction before making the attack. If this is insufficient to bring him within range, or if he's crashed, this Charm can't be used. Such is the effectiveness of their combination that both attacks' onslaught penalties are applied to the enemy's Defense before the attack rolls are made, and they both use the higher of their two Initiatives to determine the damage rolled. This Charm doesn't count against the ally's attack or movement actions for the round, although it does count as the Dragon-Blood's attack.

A character can only participate in this Charm's combination attack once per day, whether by using this Charm or participating in it as an ally.

This Charm can be repurchased to develop signature combinations with different partners.

Backers: Tim Aumônier and Greg Stayner

Twin Dragons Dancing

Cost: —(both characters expend Aura); **Mins:** War 4, Essence 4

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Aura, Decisive-only

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Tiger-and-Dragon Combination

Drawing power from the bonds of Sworn Kinship, the Dragon-Blood and her oath-sibling attain an incomparable battle-unity. When she uses Tiger-and-Dragon Combination to unleash a signature move with a Hearthmate, each of them may expend their Elemental Auras to transcend their limits, adding a free full Excellency on both attack rolls. If the two Auras were of different elements, both Dragon-Blooded count as being in those elements' Auras for purposes of determining what Charms they can activate to enhance the attacks (although they can't use other Charms that require them to expend Auras), and they can use Charms of both elements together on the attack as though they were Balanced.

A Dragon-Blood can only participate in a combination attack enhanced by this Charm once per story, regardless of whether he activated it or not, unless reset by achieving a major character or story goal as a result of protecting a Hearthmate from physical danger, or by working together with a Hearthmate to defeat a foe more powerful than either of them alone.

Backers: Tim Aumônier and Greg Stayner

Caldera Battlefield Approach

Cost: —; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 4

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Earth/Fire

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Magma Hell Upheaval, Ramparts of Obedient Earth

Reshaping the battlefield to her will, the Dragon-Blood calls great pillars of stone up from the earth, only to strike them with such tremendous force that they shatter and melt into lava. When she uses Ramparts of Obedient Earth, she can create a lava hazard (difficulty 5, damage 6L/round) filling the space of an enemy battle group by spending (higher of its Size or 3) points.

Additionally, if the Dragon-Blood employs the Reshape Battlefield option, she can create lava hazards that extend out to close range from a given point on the battlefield for one point each, so long as no non-trivial, non-battle-group enemies are caught in the hazard's area when it forms.

If the Dragon-Blood wins Join Battle, she can use Magma Hell Upheaval without needing to be in an Aura or expend one.

Once the scene ends, lava created with this Charm cools and hardens into obsidian.

Backer: Nathan Henderson

Supreme Dragon-General's Presence

Cost: 5m, 1a, 1wp; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 4

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Fire

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Indomitable Flame of Valor

The Dragon-Blood's anima blazes across the battlefield as enemy armies break before her legion's might, its glorious radiance calling retreating foes and deserters to fight beneath her banner. When an enemy battle group is routed, the Dragon-Blood may reset her rally for numbers action (**Exalted**, p. 210), as deserting enemy soldiers may potentially be won over to her cause. If she rallies for numbers on or before her next turn, she rolls an additional non-Charms die for each 10 rolled.

In Fire Aura, the Dragon-Blood may expend her Aura to reflexively make a rally for numbers roll upon using this Charm.

Enemies won over to the Dragon-Blood's side will fight for the duration of the scene, but do not immediately gain any lasting loyalty — good treatment or social influence are necessary to secure their permanent allegiance.

This Charm can only be used once per scene.

Divine Wind Approach

Cost: 5m (+10m, 1wp); **Mins:** War 5, Essence 5

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Air

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blessed Dragon Champion, Changing Winds Cunning (x2)

Drawing on peerless tactical brilliance, the Dragon-Blooded general deploys her troops in an unstoppable fast attack. She Joins Battle with (Intelligence + War), which also counts as an order command action (and can be enhanced with Charms that enhance orders). She must order a battle group to make an attack. It does so reflexively, before any character takes his turn that round, and can advance one range band towards its foe. This doesn't count as that battle group's attack or movement action for the round. Alternatively, the battle group can reflexively aim at the target, and then make a ranged attack that benefits from the order action on its turn.

Using this Charm requires the Dragon-Blood to forgo her turn entirely on the first round, and counts as her attack and movement actions that round. If she enhances the Join Battle roll solely with Air or Balanced Charms, she enters Air Aura.

Once per story, when the Dragon-Blood wins Join Battle, she may pay an additional ten motes and one Willpower to enact an ambush stratagem (**Exalted**, p. 212), resetting her to base Initiative. If she is already fighting under a successfully enacted ambush stratagem, this instead renders all attacks her battle groups make for the entire scene surprise attacks, and doesn't reset her Initiative. This effect can be reset by winning a Strategic Maneuver roll against a general who poses a significant threat.

Backer: Robert "Jefepato" Dall

In the hour before sunrise, the governor's estate was cruelly cold. A hundred mortal laborers and artists had gathered on the estate grounds, carefully respecting its ancient trees and stonework, to bear witness to a formal duel. Tisara of House Ferem and Erober of House Japor didn't need many witnesses, but the nation of Cherak did — the two distant cousins fought over a piece of Grand Cherak, an imperishable remnant of the empire both houses had lost.

Japor Erober was young and ambitious, an honor to his family's name. He wore leather armor fit for a cavalryman; his firewand was customized for reload speed, with a bayonet on its muzzle. Where he walked, grass parted, and the estate's stray leaves trailed in his wake.

Ferem Tisara was rough around the edges, but she had a ready laugh and the mortal witnesses' loyalty. Her thick breastplate and heavy maul were scorched with the heat of many battles against the Fair Folk. She sported a brilliant red jade chevron at her waist, like an oversized belt buckle: the subject of this duel, the legendary Blazerider.

With the first light of dawn, the duel began.

The two Princes of the Earth rushed each other, and Erober led with a bayonet-thrust to test Tisara's defenses. The daughter of House Ferem trusted her armor to blunt the blade, swinging her maul with such speed and ferocity that her opponent fell to his back foot. Erober's parries lacked confidence, and he resorted to ducking and weaving as he searched for an opening in her aggression. When Tisara over-reached, Erober brought his blade up into her exposed arm.

Tisara saw this and knew no fear. Focusing diamond-hard Essence into her flesh, she brought her arm down and clenched the blade against her side. Then, as Erober pulled in vain against her, she head-butted him in the face.

"Ready to surrender, cousin?" Tisara asked, loud enough for the mortal observers to hear.

"Blazerider rightfully belongs with House Japor," Erober snarled, "and it has been too long kept from home!"

Erober snapped a cleverly designed catch on his firewand and detached the bayonet. He kicked Tisara in the gut and used her bulk to flip back and away from her. Before he touched the ground, he took aim and shot a gout of flame laced with Wood Essence. Tisara struck the flame aside with her maul out of reflex, but from the sparks grew tenacious vines to lash her to the ground.

Tisara fought the vines to chase down her opponent, but Erober was always a step ahead, reloading with lightning efficiency and raining fire upon her from every angle. Her frustration grew, and with it, her fiery anima.

"If you want Blazerider so much," bellowed Tisara, "then you will see its glory! House Ferem ascendant!"

She grasped the chevron at her waist, and the red jade sang harmoniously with her will. It unlocked like a wondrous puzzle, blade-wings extending greater than her own armspan. Tisara flung the artifact at Erober, low along the ground, and it trailed fire behind it. Erober dove to the side, rolling away from blade and heat, and Blazerider returned to obediently to Tisara's outstretched hand.

Tisara grinned and hopped aboard the weapon, balancing upon it with ease. Then she leaned forward. Blazerider surged ahead eagerly, trailing flame behind it, as Tisara raised her maul for a telling strike.

Erober grinned too, seeing Blazerider rushing toward him. “Bring it to me, then!” he exclaimed as he took aim at the Ferem. “House Japor for a thousand more years!”

Chapter Seven

Heirlooms of Power

The Dragon-Dancer’s Wings (Blue and Red Jade Typhoon Fangs, Artifact •••)

Once, the air dragon Rekal, a diligent censor, found him at odds with the fire dragon Banu, an indolent spirit who shirked his duties to luxuriate in splendor. The two quarreled, and ultimately fought, and in the end, a victorious Rekal feasted on Banu’s fiery Essence. He’d thought to use that power to fulfill the fire dragon’s responsibilities as well as his own, but the smoldering remnants of Banu’s spirit overwhelmed Rekal, driving him to unrestrained fury.

The dancer-diplomat Nalako Jathri learned of Rekal’s plight. Some of her Sworn Kin argued that they should slay the tormented dragon, but Jathri spoke against it, fearful of what havoc a battle might wreak upon a land still struggling to establish itself. Instead, she sought out two famed smiths, sisters with clashing temperaments, and secretly commissioned one fan from each. The jade she provided came from two veins within the same mountain, one red, the other blue. From these emblems of division and reunion, the Dragon-Dancer’s Wings were forged.

It was no difficult thing to find the berserk Rekal along his path of destruction. Wielding the Wings, Jathri danced alongside Rekal — when he breathed out tempest winds, she whirled within them; when he spat flame, she promenaded through the smoke. Some of her Hearth stood beside her, fending off Rekal’s claws and fangs; the others worked to draw a great binding diagram about him. Finally, the dance drew to its close, and the circle was completed. The ritual’s power brought peace to the warring Essences of Banu and Rekal, and from their union was born a new dragon of air and fire.

Jathri’s lineage was brought into the Scarlet Dynasty centuries later as part of the newly formed House Jurul, along with the Dragon-Dancer’s Wings. When the Empress struck Jurul from the Imperial ledgers for its founder’s treachery, Jathri’s descendants were among those cast out, while the remainder was reborn as House Ledaal. For centuries, they languished in relative obscurity as a patrician family, but when the Empress elevated House V’neef, they were among the outcastes brought into its fold, bringing their treasured heirloom with them.

The Dragon-Dancer’s Wings are a matched pair of jade war fans named for the dragons. Etched into the folded face of the red jade fan are designs of garda birds in flight, curling orange flame trailing behind them. The blue jade fan is coated with rime that creeps along its ribs like a frozen delta, winged serpents gliding across its leaves. In battle or in dance, the patterns come alight, giving off wisps of fire and ice.

Backer: Nathan Henderson.

Attunement: 5m

Type: Light (+5 Acc, +10 Dmg, +3 Ovw)

Tags: Lethal, Martial Arts, Disarming

Hearthstone slot(s): 2 (one on each fan)

Era: The Year of Seven Shoguns

Evocations of the Dragon-Dancer's Wings

The wielder of the Dragon-Dancer's Wings adds a non-Charisma die on dance-based Performance rolls.

Fire-and-Ice Pavane

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: One turn

Prerequisites: Soul-Stirring Performance

Shimmering heat-haze and whirling snowflakes surround the wielder as she dances, fending off her foes. She suffers no penalties for flurrying a full defense with a dance-based Performance action.

Resonant: If the wielder's Performance roll beats the Resolve of at least one nontrivial character, the Initiative cost of the full defense is refunded.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens at no cost when a Dragon-Blooded V'neef scion attunes the Dragon-Dancer's Wings.

Passion-Flaring Flamenco

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Fire-and-Ice Pavane

The Dragon-Dancer's Wings stir the flames in the heart of the wielder's audience, rousing them to ardent passions. She makes a dance-based (Appearance + Performance) inspire roll with (higher of Essence or 3) bonus dice to rouse desire, anger, excitement, or other active emotions. In addition to inspiring that emotion, this influence also instills each affected character with a Minor Intimacy that relates to that emotion, chosen by the character's player.

If a Dragon-Blood uses Falling Leaves Sway, Swaying Boughs Arabesque, or Waltz of Honeyed Wine (**Dragon-Blooded**, pp. 241-242) with this Evocation, such uses are Fire aspected.

Soothing Snowfall Waltz

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: None

Shimmering snowflakes fall from the air and chime with soft melodic tones as the wielder moves with languorous, captivating grace. She makes a dance-based (Appearance + Performance) inspire roll with (higher of Essence or 3) bonus dice to calm her audience. The pleasant reverie inspired by this dance grants an additional +1 Resolve against influence that would inspire or exploit strong emotions, but imposes a -2 penalty on influence rolls that express emotion and non-reflexive physical actions

If a Dragon-Blood uses Falling Leaves Sway, Swaying Boughs Arabesque, or Waltz of Honeyed Wine (**Dragon-Blooded**, pp. 241-242) with this Evocation, such uses are Air aspected.

Blazing Summer Samba

Cost: 4m, 2i; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Perilous

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Passion-Flaring Flamenco

The wielder dances as if fire licked under her every step, and leaves a blazing path in her wake. She converts any bonus dice from her Appearance on a dance-based Performance roll to non-Charm successes. If she rolls 3+ successes, she ignites a fiery environmental hazard within close range that has Damage (Essence/2, rounded up)L/round and difficulty 3. The flames subside at the end of the wielder's next turn unless she successfully uses this Evocation again. The wielder is immune to these flames.

If the wielder flurries the enhanced Performance roll with an attack, she catches the ignited flames on the Dragon-Dancer's Wings, adding +1 Overwhelming on **withering** attacks and doubling 10s on **decisive** damage rolls.

This Evocation is incompatible with Boreal Winds Grace and Soothing Snowfall Waltz.

Boreal Winds Grace

Cost: 4m, 2i; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Perilous

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Soothing Snowfall Waltz

Stirring the air with the Dragon-Dancer's Wings, the wielder lulls the world to sleep beneath a freezing wind. When she makes a dance-based Performance roll, her targets treat their emotion-based Intimacies as one level lower for purposes of adding to Resolve or resisting in Decision Points. If she rolls 3+ successes, she may freeze the ground beneath her, creating a patch of difficult terrain, or raise up a wall of ice within close range that counts as heavy cover (**Exalted**,

p. 199). The wielder isn't impeded by this difficult terrain, though enemies can benefit from the cover against her.

If the wielder flurries the enhanced Performance roll with a full defense, ice limns the fans, adding +1 Parry against the next attack against her before her next turn.

This Evocation is incompatible with Blazing Summer Samba and Passion-Flaring Flamenco.

Banu and Rekal Dancing as One

Cost: 10m, 2wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Blazing Summer Samba, Boreal Winds Grace

Resonant: This Evocation can only be awakened by a wielder resonant with the Dragon-Dancer's Wings.

Reenacting the famed dragon-dance of Nalako Jathri, the wielder brings peace to troubled minds just as Jathri reconciled Banu and Rekal. This Evocation can free a character from a Psyche effect or cause a Derangement to subside. The wielder must first use either Passion-Flaring Flamenco or Soothing Snowfall Waltz on her target — Passion-Flaring Flamenco for Psyche effects or Derangements that cause unnatural passivity, languor, or emotionlessness; Soothing Snowfall Waltz for those that provoke the victim to irrational action or fill them with uncontrollable emotions.

The wielder makes a special (Appearance + Performance) inspire roll. Against Psyche effects, this follows the rules for overturning influence (**Exalted**, p. 221), requiring the target to call upon a Defining Intimacy in the Decision Point. If he does and spends one Willpower, the Psyche effect is terminated. Against Derangements, the roll is made at difficulty (Derangement x 2), with success lowering its intensity by one step (or suppressing Minor Derangements entirely) until the story's end.

This Evocation can only be used once per story.

Empyrean Aegis (Blue Jade Thunderbolt Shield, Artifact ...)

Aria Skysinger forged Empyrean Aegis from blue jade and feathersteel, with the Tyrant Glacier's frozen heart for her anvil and her fallen mother's goremaul, stained with Solar blood, for her hammer. The Shogunate's early days were marred by internecine conflict and civil war, and Aria sought a shield to defend her gens through the fray.

Empyrean Aegis was passed down along Aria's descendants. Ikke the Bastion-Breaker fended off the spears of the Storm That Rode. Madrigan Azure, honor guard to the shogun, wielded it to thwart a Silver Pact assassination attempt against her, though it cost him his life. Opatha Kopal wielded it alongside her great-uncle, Tepet, when he challenged the Scarlet Empress' claim and laid siege to the Imperial City. Kopal fell in her great-uncle's war, but her daughter, Opatha Zari,

lived to see the Scarlet Empress proclaim House Tepet's ascension and bore her mother's heirloom with her.

Backer: Eric Deans

Attunement: 5m; **Type:** Medium (+3 ACC, +12 DMG, +1 DEF, OVW 4)

Tags: Bashing, Melee, Shield

Hearthstone slot(s): 1

Era: Shadows of the Usurpation

Evocations of Empyrean Aegis

The wielder can use Empyrean Aegis as a medium Thrown artifact weapon (+12 DMG, OVW 4) with the Bashing, Thrown (Medium), and Special tags. When thrown, the shield returns to its wielder's hand if there's a clear path.

Guardian Gale Technique

Cost: 3m (1i per attack); **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: None

Empyrean Aegis flies from its wielder's hands to shelter her allies. She can take a defend other action to protect an ally within short range. Each time her ward is attacked, she must pay one Initiative to extend her protection to him unless he's within close range. If an attacker beats the wielder's Parry, he can only direct his attack against the original target, rather than her.

Resonant: With Essence 2, the wielder can protect allies out to medium range.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens at no cost when a Dragon-Blooded Tepet scion attunes Empyrean Aegis.

Crushing Glacier Strike

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Dual

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Guardian Gale Technique

Empyrean Aegis strikes with numbing cold. It gains +1 Overwhelming on a **withering** attack or ignores 2 Hardness from metal armor on a **decisive** attack. If it deals 5+ **withering** damage or 1+ **decisive** damage, ice rimes her target. Until the wielder's next turn, that character can't attack her or any ally protected by her defend other actions unless he first pays 2 Initiative.

Sudden Squall Interception

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Guardian Gale Technique

When an ally protected by the wielder's defend other actions make a disengage roll or a roll opposing an enemy's rush, the wielder may throw Emyprean Aegis between the two characters, adding a non-Charm success on her ally's roll. If she has a positive Tie towards her ally, she adds an additional non-Charm die as well. If she's using Guardian Gale Technique to protect her ally from beyond close range, she must pay one Initiative, as though he were being attacked.

Freezing Rime Barrier

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Uniform

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Guardian Gale Technique

Emyprean Aegis exudes a chill that numbs enemies and comforts allies. She imposes a -1 penalty on an attack roll against her Parry. If she successfully blocks the attack, her attacker loses one Initiative. She gains this Initiative if the attack was directed against her; if the attack was against a character protected by her defend other action, he gains the Initiative.

Thunder Follows Lightning

Cost: 6m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Decisive-only, Dissonant, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Crushing Glacier Strike

Emyprean Aegis flies from foe to foe, toppling them in a dynamic whirl of violence. The wielder makes a single **decisive** Thrown attack. If it hits, before rolling damage, she may have Emyprean Aegis rebound to strike another enemy within close range of the first, making another attack roll, and can continue to rebound it until she either misses, hits (Dexterity) enemies, or has no more targets in range. She divides her Initiative evenly among all hit characters to determine the damage rolled against them, ignoring Hardness. Trivial opponents don't count towards the maximum number of enemies that can be hit and suffer the wielder's full Initiative in damage.

Attack-enhancing magic need only be used once to apply to all attacks made as part of this Evocation, with the exception of Excellencies, which must be paid separately for each attack roll.

Dissonant: The wielder can't continue rebounding once she's hit (lower of Essence or Dexterity) enemies.

Resonant: The wielder can rebound Empyrean Aegis to strike enemies within short range of a hit enemy.

Whirling Shield Tempest

Cost: —(+5m, 1wp or +5m); **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Guardian Gale Technique

Empyrean Aegis flies across the battlefield, ricocheting off walls to interpose itself between countless attacks. When she uses Guardian Gale Technique, she may pay a five-mote, one-Willpower surcharge to extend her protection to all allies within range, rather than just one. If she uses this Evocation subsequently in the same scene, the surcharge is reduced to only five motes.

Majestic Nightmare Visage (Green Jade Devil Mask, Artifact •••)

When Gerold Bronze-Arm set out from the Cult of the Violet Fang's cathedral to quest against his fae ancestor, Magnanimous Gwent, he donned the mask of a raksha prince, proclaiming himself the Childe of Midnights Unremembered as he stole into Gwent's court. Living and scheming alongside the Fair Folk, Gerold unraveled the court's deepest secrets, and forged a conspiracy against Gwent through blackmail, intrigue, and backroom dealing. When Gerold ousted the raksha noble from his throne, he won Gwent's favor and boon, for such has e'er been the compact between Gwent and his children in the Violet Fang.

Returning to Creation, Gerold doffed his mask, setting it aside as he took his place on the Council of the Returned. But the Childe of Midnights Unremembered was not ready for their tale to end so soon, and Gerold's mask had grown heavy with the Childe's legend, becoming the Majestic Nightmare Visage.

Gerold's granddaughter, Ardent Leonore, donned the Childe's visage to drive away a Wyld Hunt that declared the Cult of the Violet Fang's adherents Anathema, sowing chaos and discord among the shikari's ranks. Finn the Whale-Singer stole Majestic Nightmare Visage from the Cult's vaults when he fled from it, seeking a life away from the Wyld and the uncanny Northwest — though in time, he would lose himself within the Childe. The Cult has hunted after it since, considering it to be a sacred relic to be reclaimed, but it has thus far eluded them.

Majestic Nightmare Visage is a full-face mask of oak heartwood with a glossy green jade lacquer, threaded with moonsilver inlay evoking the thin, cruel features of a raksha prince. When the mask is attuned and worn, the inlay dances across the masks's surface in an eerily lifelike motion, reflecting the wearer's own expression. It radiates the mien of an all-conquering monarch, a prince whose will cannot be denied.

Backer: Brian Rivers

Attunement: 2m

Era: The Second Quest Against the Parliament Amethystine

Evocations of Majestic Nightmare Visage

Majestic Nightmare Visage's wearer adds a non-Charm success on rolls to disguise herself as the Childe of Midnights Unremembered, and +1 non-Charm Guile against any action that would contradict her disguise as the Childe. If a Dragon-Blooded wearer uses Terrifying Forest-Devil Mask to disguise herself as the Childe, its cost is reduced by two motes, and the mask can't be removed with gambits.

A Stranger in the Court

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: None

The courts of chaos are blind to what lies behind Majestic Nightmare Visage. While the wearer is disguised as the Childe, fae automatically fail any rolls opposing her disguise or rolls against her Guile that would contradict the disguise unless their efforts are enhanced by magic. Even if it's enhanced by magic, 1s and 2s subtract successes.

If a Dragon-Blood uses Terrifying Forest-Devil Mask to disguise herself as the Childe, she is immune to exposure to the Wyld for that Charm's duration. **Special activation rules:** A Dragon-Blooded scion of the Cult of the Violet Fang awakens this Evocation at no cost upon disguising herself as the Childe.

Becoming Midnight's Childe

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: Mute

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: A Stranger in the Court

Subsuming herself in the Childe of Midnights Unremembered's mythos, the wearer becomes the mask. She gains one of the Childe's Intimacies, listed below, and suppresses one of her own Intimacies of equal intensity. If the Childe's Intimacy has been fully eroded, the suppressed Intimacy returns; until then, the wearer can't voluntarily strengthen it or a substantially similar Intimacy.

If a Dragon-Blood uses Terrifying Forest-Devil Mask to disguise herself as the Childe, she may use this Evocation reflexively to take on *all* of the Childe's Intimacies, as above, in place of the Defining Intimacy that Charm normally confers. None of those Intimacies can be weakened or changed for that Charm's duration.

- **Defining Principle:** I must be in control.

- **Defining Principle:** Subtlety and deception are my first instincts.
- **Defining Principle:** Trust is a thing for fools.
- **Major Tie:** Other fae (Rivalry)
- **Minor Tie:** Creation's peoples (Contempt)

Endless Dreaming Masquerade

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: A Stranger in the Court, any Charm that this Evocation enhances.

Caged within the heartwood and lacquer of Majestic Nightmare Visage sleeps a dream of infinite deception. This Evocation enhances the following Dragon-Blooded Charms as described below:

- When she uses Instant Disguise Prana (Dragon-Blooded, p. 205) to disguise herself as the Childe, she can complete the disguise instantly, counting Majestic Nightmare Visage as suitable equipment.
- When she uses Auspicious First Meeting Attitude (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 261) against fae, she adds (Essence) non-Charm successes.
- When she uses Smoke-Wreathed Mien (**Exalted**, p. 261) against an effect that would contradict her disguise as the Childe, up to (Essence + Manipulation) 1s and 2s reroll successes.
- When she uses Still Waters Mask (p. XX) to adopt the Childe as a cover identity, she waives its Willpower cost and may do so instantly.

Cup-and-Staff Trickster Saga

Cost: 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Becoming Midnight's Childe

Clothed in myth and legend, the wearer embodies the Childe through her deeds. When she upholds an Intimacy gained with Becoming Midnight's Childe with an influence roll, read intentions roll, Larceny roll, or an application of Resolve or Guile, she adds (Intimacy) non-Charm dice, or +(Intimacy/2, rounded up) non-Charm Guile or Resolve. She can't voluntarily erode that Intimacy for the rest of the story.

Resonant: If an opposing character has a positive Major or Defining Tie towards the wearer, she may use this Evocation even if it doesn't uphold an Intimacy from Becoming Midnight's Childe.

Raiment of Sundered Truths

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Dissonant, Mute, Psyche, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Cup-and-Staff Trickster Saga

The Childe of Midnights Unremembered is a creature of countless lies, gestating within dreams and delusions. When the wearer makes an influence roll to lie about the the Childe of Midnights Unremembered's identity, history, or agenda, the cost to resist is increased by one Willpower. Affected characters automatically fail any rolls against the wearer's Guile that would contradict the lie for the rest of the scene.

Against fae, this Evocation can enhance any lie the wearer tells.

Dissonant: This Evocation doesn't increase the Willpower cost of resisting against non-fae.

Resonant: This Evocation can contest lie-detecting magic like Judge's Ear Technique. Such contests are resolved by opposed rolls, with the wearing rolling (Manipulation + the Ability used to make the influence roll) with (Essence) bonus dice. If successful, her statement appears true.

Fourfold Maw Enlightenment

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Any four Evocations of Majestic Nightmare Visage

The Childe of Nightmares Unremembered creates itself from errant scraps of dream and from fantasies torn from its prey, forging its legend like a bird building a nest. The wearer may learn raksha Charms with the Eclipse Keyword from willing teachers for eight experience points each.

Additionally, upon accomplishing a major character or story goal by defeating a raksha — in combat, intrigue, or some other venue — the wearer may instantly learn one of his Eclipse Charms, going into experience debt if necessary. She can't benefit from this effect while already in experience debt.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens at no cost once the wearer meets its prerequisites.

Experience Debt

Certain effects let player characters increase or gain new traits by incurring experience debt equal to the normal cost of purchasing those traits. Any experience points she subsequently receives go towards paying off the debt, until it's paid in full. Until the debt's fully paid, the character can't benefit from other effects that cause experience debt. Storyteller characters never go into experience debt.

Shadow Prince Cabal

Cost: 10m, 1wp (+7m); **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Dissonant, Mute

Duration: One project or plan

Prerequisites: Raiment of Sundered Truths

Majestic Nightmare Visage hides countless faces, casting its shadow over the wearer's scheming. Upon undertaking a project (**Exalted**, p. 226) or a similar plan involving the actions of multiple characters that she wishes to keep secret, she may use this Evocation. The wearer and all others who are a party to her secret agenda gain +1 Guile against any effect that would compromise the plan's secrecy. Against fae, this bonus is non-Charm.

The wearer can use Raiment of Sundered Truths to enhance any lie she tells to further her secret agenda. When a character that is a party to her secret agenda tells a lie to further it, she may pay a seven-mote surcharge to use Raiment of Sundered Truths to enhance that lie.

Dissonant: The wielder can't use Raiment of Sundered Truths to enhance lies told by other characters.

Ring-and-Sword Intrigues

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Dissonant, Mute, Resonant

Duration: One story

Prerequisites: Conspiracy of Whispering Princes

Majestic Nightmare Visage ever schemes against its wearer's superiors, whispering of how they might be toppled from their thrones and made to bow before her. The wearer spends a scene plotting to depose, overthrow, or otherwise remove a character that she has a negative Major or Defining Tie towards — this Evocation's target — from a position of political, social, or military authority. She rolls (Manipulation + [Bureaucracy, Larceny, or Socialize]), gaining betrayal points equal to her successes. She may spend them on the following effects:

- **1 Point:** Waive Becoming Midnight's Childe's cost.
- **3 Points:** Add an automatic success on a roll opposing this Evocation's target.
- **3 Points:** Gain +3 Guile against this Evocation's target for one scene.
- **5 Points:** Waive the Willpower cost of resisting influence that opposes a negative Tie to this Evocation's target.
- **5 Points:** Treat the intensity of a positive Tie this Evocation's target has towards the wielder as one step higher against a single influence roll.
- **5 Points:** Treat the intensity of a positive Tie a character has towards this Evocation's target as one step lower against a single influence roll.

- **5 Points:** Waive Raiment of Sundered Truths' Willpower cost when used against this Evocation's target.
- **7 Points:** Waive Shadow Prince Cabal's cost to enact a secret agenda against this Evocation's target.
- **7 Points:** When this Evocation's target makes a roll opposing the wearer's Guile, a roll contesting her disguise as the Childe, or an Investigation roll to uncover evidence left by her, he automatically fails. The wearer's player may use this effect even if the character is unaware.

This Evocation can only be used once per story, unless reset by upholding a Major or Defining Tie gained from Becoming Midnight's Childe.

Dissonant: The wearer can't use the seven-point effects.

Resonant: The wearer doubles 9s on this Evocation's activation roll.

Sunset Blaze (Red Jade Direlance, Artifact ...)

Commissioned by Cathak herself from the renowned smith and sublime armiger Tepet Sothal, the direlance Sunset Blaze, adorned with a banner of cloth-of-jade, accompanied her in many of her famed battles. She wielded it in the Realm's war against the Blood-Sand Sultan, burning the man who feared no flame; in the great Siege of Houshou, when she seemed to slay the Anathema Sha'a Oka; in her famed duel with Ahlat.

In the hands of Cathak, and of her children, Sunset Blaze has become an emblem for her Great House's martial prowess and emulation of Hesiesh in war. In the Wyld Hunt against the Lady of Crimson Nector, Cathak Meti Lonova rallied her shikari with the sight of its flaming banner after the Anathema filled their minds with rot and death. Cathak Orina bore it in suppressing the Amaranth Uprising and in the execution of the revolt's instigator, the renegade magistrate Haruka Mir. Cathak Fari defended Fajad's gates from the army of the heretical Abhari prophet Kigal Whose-Name-Cuts, and burned away the rogue god's blasphemous tongue.

Traditionally, Sunset's Blaze has been bequeathed to young Cathak scions taking their first command in the house legions when its current wielder decides to pass it on — though in practice, the new wielder is almost always a descendant of the current one, or of a Cathak she owes favors to.

Backer: Jamie Michaels

Attunement: 5m; **Type:** Heavy (+1 ACC, +14 DMG, +0 DEF, OVW 5)

Tags: Lethal, Melee, Piercing, Reaching, Two-Handed when on foot

Hearthstone slot(s): 2

Era: Reign of the Scarlet Empress

Evocations of Sunset Blaze

When readied by an attuned wielder, Sunset Blaze's banner bursts into flame, adding an automatic success on her Appearance- or Charisma-based command actions and threaten rolls. However, it impedes stealth as a glowing anima banner (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 154). Its wielder may extinguish it as a miscellaneous action, but doing so denies her the above benefits. Reigniting it is also a miscellaneous action.

Scarlet Banner Inspiration

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: None

Soldiers see fire on the horizon and know that their general stands with them, Sunset Blaze in hand. To use this Evocation, Sunset Blaze's banner must be ignited. Its wielder adds (higher of Essence or 3) dice on a rally or rally for numbers action, and gains Initiative equal to the 10s on her roll.

Special activation rules: A Dragon-Blooded Cathak scion awakens this Evocation at no cost upon attuning to Sunset Blaze.

Dragon-General Puissance

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Scarlet Banner Inspiration, any Charm this Evocation enhances

Sunset Blaze bears the legacy of some of the Scarlet Dynasty's greatest generals, imparting them unto its master. This Evocation enhances the following Dragon-Blooded Charms as described below:

- When she uses Burning Dragon Mien (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 242), the success added by Sunset Blaze's attunement effect is non-Charm.
- She can use Flame Warden Stance (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 226) reflexively to protect a battle group.
- When she uses Roaring Dragon Officer (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 279), the flurry penalty on both actions is reduced by one.
- When she uses Blazing Courageous Swordsman Inspiration (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 279), the success added by Sunset Blaze's attunement effect is non-Charm.

Streaming Flames Spear

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Dual

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Scarlet Banner Inspiration

Brandishing Sunset Blaze, its wielder spins its banner in a fiery spiral that sears her foes. To use this Evocation, Sunset Blaze's banner must be ignited. Its wielder adds her (Charisma) to the raw damage of a **withering** attack, or adds (lower of Essence or Charisma) attack roll extra successes as dice of damage on a **decisive** attack.

General-Demoting Joust

Cost: 4m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Decisive-only, Dissonant, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Streaming Flames Spear

Bringing Sunset Blaze's fiery reproach to bear against an enemy general, the wielder proves her superiority to the armies on both sides. To use this Evocation, Sunset Blaze's banner must be ignited. She adds dice equal to the (Size) of the largest allied battle group in the fight on the attack and damage roll of a **decisive** attack. An enemy damaged by this attack suffers a penalty on his command actions and influence rolls equal to the levels of damage dealt for the rest of the scene. This ends if he crashes or incapacitates the wielder.

Dissonant: This Evocation doesn't add dice of damage.

Resonant: A damaged enemy can't make any command actions or influence rolls until the end of his next turn.

Rally the Upright Soldier

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Scarlet Banner Inspiration

The sight of Sunset Blaze's flaming banner streaming across the battlefield brings renewed courage. To use this Evocation, Sunset Blaze's banner must be ignited. Its wielder grants +2 Resolve to a character that can see Sunset Blaze (including herself) or any number of allied battle groups against a fear-based influence roll, an influence roll that would cause them to refrain from hostilities or impair their ability to fight, or a Psyche effect.

Alternatively, this Evocation can add (Essence) dice on a rout check made by a battle group that can see Sunset Blaze.

Rising Phoenix Banner

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Rally the Upright Soldier

Even as things seem darkest, Sunset Blaze's master lights the way to hope. To use this Evocation, Sunset Blaze's banner must be ignited. When the wielder makes an influence roll to overturn influence (**Exalted**, p. 221) that Rally the Upright Soldier applies against, she waives the Willpower cost to do so and adds (Essence) automatic successes. This doesn't allow her to overturn Psyche effects with her influence unless they are normally susceptible to being overturned.

Resonant: The added successes are non-Charms.

Safety in Numbers

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant, Uniform

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: Rally the Upright Soldier

Forming an impregnable formation centered around Sunset Blaze's burning banner, its wielder leads her forces undaunted through even the fiercest battles. To use this Evocation, Sunset Blaze's banner must be ignited. All allies within close range of her gain +1 Parry, or +2 Parry for battle groups with elite Drill. She gains +1 Parry as long as there are three allies or one allied battle group within close range.

Pride of the Greatest General

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Perilous, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: General-Demoting Joust, Rising Phoenix Banner, Safety in Numbers

Bearing the banner of Cathak herself in hand, Sunset Blaze's master enacts a peerless strategy. To use this Evocation, Sunset Blaze's banner must be ignited. Allied battle groups with elite Drill gain the following benefits:

- They treat their effective Size as one dot higher (maximum 5).
- They can use the wielder's Initiative in place of their own, if higher, to determine when they act in combat.
- The wielder's rally for numbers action restores an additional (Essence) Magnitude to them.
- Scarlet Banner Inspiration's cost is waived when used to rally them.

If the wielder is fighting under a stratagem she enacted, these benefits apply to all allied battle groups, even those without elite Drill.

Resonant: Affected battle groups gain perfect morale (**Exalted**, p. 208).

White Lizard's Tongue (White Jade Direlash, Artifact •••)

Sesus Dejeni, the Nine Bones Thief, amassed great wealth for herself and her house wrangling a thousands of head of cattle in the Southern steppes. Small herding tribes and local cattle barons alike forfeited their herds to Dejeni, and she went to great lengths to ensure she never had to pay a fair price, employing fraud, blackmail, and violence when needed. All the while, White Lizard's Tongue was at her side, a humble whip of ivory-colored jade and the flayed hide of some unknown beast. Its jade surfaces are engraved with images of horses and cattle, with acrobatic riders dancing atop them and flipping over them.

Dejeni wasn't the first of her house to wield the direlash, but few dispute that the artifact's infamy was greatest in her hands. Keeping her hold on the vast herd she acquired was but the least of its feats: she drove back the hundred-eyed lions unleashed by the Fair Folk prince Glimpse-of-Evermore, tamed the aurochs-dragon of Hellbender Mesa, and struck out the eye of her business rival, Nellens Padano, when he sought to steal her cattle, leaving her brand in its place.

Dejeni has retired from the steppes to enjoy her fortune and serve her house as a political luminary on the Blessed Isle. While she no longer has need of her famed direlash, she has a vested interest in those Sesus scions who take up, meddling in their lives to ensure that no unworthy successor takes up her legacy.

Backers: Little Wolf and Angry Jackal

Attunement: 5m

Type: Light (+5 ACC, +10 DMG, +0 DEF, OVW 3)

Tags: Lethal, Melee, Disarming, Grappling, Flexible, Reaching

Hearthstone slot(s): 1

Era: Reign of the Scarlet Empress

Evocations of White Lizard's Tongue

White Lizard's Tongue is exceptional equipment (**Exalted**, p. 580) for Survival rolls to train animals and influence rolls against animals. Its wielder adds an automatic success on gambit attack rolls and on any rolls to perform rope tricks or otherwise manipulate objects with it, as the lash moves with their will.

Master Herder's Brand

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: Decisive-only, Resonant

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisites: None

Where White Lizard's Tongue strikes its wielder's foes or kine, it marks them with a chalky white brand, Old Realm glyphs spelling out the wielder's name. Branding an enemy requires a difficulty 2 gambit; branding willing characters or unwitting cattle outside of combat requires no roll. Branded characters suffer -1 Resolve against the wielder. Additionally, the wielder can

reflexively cause a character's brand to weigh him down under the spiritual pressure of Earth Essence, imposing a –1 mobility penalty until she ends it as a reflexive action or he moves to further than long range from her.

Normally, a brand can't be removed while this Evocation remains active. If a branded character crashes or incapacitates the wielder, his brand vanishes.

A single use of this Evocation can brand a enough willing or unwitting animals to form a Size (wielder's Essence) battle group. This requires no roll. Familiars and other magical animals can't be affected by such uses.

Special activation rules: A Dragon-Blooded Sesus scion awakens this Evocation at no cost upon attuning to White Lizard's Tongue.

Resonant: Each 10 on the gambit Initiative roll also inflicts a level of **decisive** damage. The wielder loses Initiative equal to the levels of damage dealt this way in addition to the gambit's Initiative cost.

Aurochs-King Prowess

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Master Herder's Brand, any one Charm this Evocation enhances

White Lizard's Tongue learned much from its time in the the Nine Bones Thief's Hand, and is eager to share with its wielder. This Evocation enhances the following Dragon-Blooded Charms as described below:

- Scent-of-Crime Method (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 198) lets her detect anyone who's ever attempted to steal an animal belonging to her, regardless of how long ago it was done. She can distinguish such characters from other criminals by the earthy scent that clings to them.
- When she uses Nimble Thief's Fingers (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 202), she can pay a one-Willpower surcharge to take the enhanced action out to short range using White Lizard's Tongue.
- Beast-Taming Aspect (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 271) allows her to claim familiars in (familiar's Resolve – wielder's Charisma, minimum 1) weeks.
- When she uses Rearing Stallion Provocation (p. XX), the equipment bonus from White Lizard's Tongue is converted to a non-Charm success.

Demon-Wrangling Rope Trick

Cost: —(+1wp); **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Decisive-only, Resonant

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Master Herder's Brand

Once White Lizard's Tongue is coiled around its wielder's foe, its weight might as well be that of a mountain. When the wielder uses Master Herder's Brand, she may pay a one-Willpower surcharge and raise the gambit's difficulty to 5 to combine the effects of a grapple gambit with that Evocation's gambit.

Resonant: Instead of inflicting damage, each 10 on the Initiative roll adds an automatic success on the grapple control roll. This doesn't cost the wielder Initiative.

Find the Stray Calf

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Master Herder's Brand

Herds branded by White Lizard's Tongue's are not easily stolen from its master, nor do her foes easily escape her. The wielder adds (highest of Ride or Survival) dice on a roll to track a branded character, or half that many dice, rounded up, on an Awareness or Investigation roll to detect a branded character or evidence left by one.

Resonant: The dice added on tracking rolls are non-Charm, and the bonus on Awareness and Investigation rolls isn't halved.

Stampede-Quelling Assurance

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Find the Stray Calf

The whipcrack of White Lizard's Tongue sounds out over the din of the battlefield, steeling its wielder's herd against panic. When a character makes a fear-based influence targeting one or more animals, the wielder may make a special (Charisma + [Ride or Survival]) inspire roll with double 9s. All targeted animals may use this result in place of their base Resolve against the influence. Branded animals are treated as having a Minor Tie of loyalty to the wielder, or treat the intensity of an existing positive Tie to her as one step higher. Intelligent and magical animals can benefit from this Evocation, but it doesn't apply against any influence that would be incomprehensible to normal animals.

Alternatively, the wielder can use this Evocation when a battle group made up entirely of animals makes a rout check to add (higher of Ride or Survival) dice.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens for free once the wielder owns enough animals to form a Size 2+ battle group. Animals with Tiny Creature or Minuscule Size don't count towards this.

Resonant: With an Essence 3 repurchase, the wielder may pay a one-Willpower surcharge to extend this Evocation's benefits to non-animals.

Scourge of Rustlers

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Dual, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Master Herder's Brand

White Lizard's Tail moves like a vast and deadly serpent, striking at its wielder's foes. The wielder adds (Essence) dice of post-soak damage to a **withering** attack, an automatic success on the damage roll of a damaging **decisive** attack, or (Essence) automatic successes on a gambit's Initiative roll. If any branded enemies are hit, the wielder divides her Initiative evenly among them, rounding up, to determine the damage rolled against them, adding (Charisma) additional dice against each of them.

Each branded enemy hit by the attack also suffers a (Charisma) dice of damage, and the wielder

Resonant: The dice added against branded enemies are non-Charm.

World-Shaking Whipcrack

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Decisive-only, Dissonant, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Scourge of Rustlers

The earth shakes and rumbles like a bucking stallion when White Lizard's Tongue strikes it, sending the wielder's enemies into upheaval. She makes an unblockable **decisive** attack roll against all enemies standing on the same surface as her within medium range. All hit enemies fall prone. If any hit enemies carry brands, the wielder also divides her Initiative among them evenly to determine the **decisive** damage rolled against them, adding an additional (Charisma) dice against each. The wielder's Initiative only resets if she makes at least one damage roll. Stone and stronger substances aren't damaged by the shockwave, but soil, wood, or the like may be, creating difficult terrain (**Exalted**, p. 199) at the Storyteller's discretion.

This Evocation can only be used once per scene, unless reset by branding a nontrivial foe or crashing a branded foe.

Dissonant: The attack is limited to short range.

Resonant: Against characters that aren't branded, this attack still deals (Charisma) dice of **decisive** damage.

Blazerider (Red Jade Windblade, Artifact §••••)

Forgotten wonders of the First Age, windblades are personal-scale flying transports. Each is a narrow, aerodynamic platform about a yard across, wrought from magical materials and sorcerous constructs of solidified Essence. The art of creating new windblades is lost to the Second Age's artificers; the few that remain, scattered across Creation, are prized by Chosen, scavenger princes, and savants.

The Solar Indeshi Twice-Anointed forged Blazerider for his champion and confidante Lacquer Gannet, to aid the Dragon-Blood in her siege of Frozen Star Parapet. Gannet scaled the Parapet's glacial fortifications atop Blazerider, then wielded it as a burning blade against the Children of the Frozen Star, breaking their infectious dominion.

In the Shogunate, Gannet's great-granddaughter Perehun flew atop Blazerider in pursuit of the fabled Siramarg That Opens The Way — and though she never captured the elusive bird-spirit, her battles against the bandits and raiders who assailed her along her hunt helped pave the way for the Mountainbreaker Legion's pacification of the Blue Glass Uplands.

When Bagrash Köl's empire threatened to expand across the borders of Grand Cherak, Ferem Cinel was among those Cheraki Dragon-Blooded who rode against the sorcerer-emperor in the ill-fated Six Dove Siege, flying Blazerider through the doors which opened to permit the sun and moon to pass through Köl's vast towers. Cinel ultimately fell to one of the incomparable horrors created by the Eye of Autochthon, but the lone survivor of the Siege bore it back to House Ferem.

Blazerider's red jade exterior is engraved with ornate arabesque designs resembling countless tongues of dancing flame, twisting to encircle the windblade's hearthstone slot. When wielded as a weapon, it's thrown like a skycutter, albeit longer and less curved.

Backer: David Bufkin

Attunement: 5m

Speed Bonus: +2

Hearthstone Slot: 1

Era: The Frozen Star Incursion

Evocations of Blazerider

When attuning to Blazerider, the wielder awakens Flying Dragon Fang for free.

Windblades

All windblades allow the attuned wielder to fly while standing atop them for five motes per hour of flight. They travel at a speed of thirty-five miles per hour, but can't ascend more than medium range above the ground. Aerial movement on a windblade uses the same dice pools as ordinary movement, but the windblade adds its Speed Bonus to the roll as non-Charisma dice. The Speed Bonus is halved, rounded down, if the windblade is weighed down by anything more than the wielder and her personal possessions, such as a second person being carried by her or unusually heavy cargo.

A windblade's wielder can take a miscellaneous action to collapse it, rendering it nonfunctional but reducing it to the size of a heavy belt buckle. She can return it

to full size with another miscellaneous action. A windblade's Evocations can't be used while collapsed unless they specify otherwise.

Blazerider's attunement cost and Speed Bonus are typical of most windblades. All windblades are First Age artifice and have a minimum Artifact rating of four dots.

Flying Dragon Fang

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: None

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: None

The same speed that bears Blazerider's master through the sky also makes the windblade a deadly weapon against her foes. The wielder can use it as a heavy artifact Thrown weapon (Damage +14, Overwhelming 5) with the Cutting, Lethal, Special, and Thrown (Medium) tags. It returns to the wielder upon being thrown.

If the wielder attacks with Blazerider while flying on it, she falls one range band downwards before it returns to her, positioning itself perfectly to catch her.

Swift Flame-Rider Spirit

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Flying Dragon Fang, any one Charm this Evocation enhances

Blazerider and its master burn with the same fire. This Evocation enhances the following Dragon-Blooded Charms as described below:

- When the wielder uses Bellows-Pumping Stride (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 168) to rush an airborne enemy, she rolls additional dice for her target's 2s in addition to his 1s.
- If she uses Hopping Firecracker Evasion (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 191) to move towards a nontrivial opponent, she waives its Initiative cost and can use it against any attack she dodges, regardless of how many successes it missed by.
- When she uses Blinding Spark Throw (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 275) to attack with Blazerider, she can make a damaging **decisive** attack instead of a gambit, blinding her foe as long as she deals 3+ levels of damage.
- She can use Smoke Burst Eruption (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 276) to enhance a move action, leaving a trail of smoke behind her as she flies, and can use the Essence 3 repurchase to conceal herself in the smoke after completing her movement if she has it.

Racing Flame Method

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Dual, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: Flying Dragon Fang

Flames stream from Blazerider as it flies, driving it forward at incredible speed. This Evocation increases its Speed Bonus by +1, and the flames that wreath Blazerider's edge grant +1 Overwhelming on **withering** attacks and double 10s on **decisive** damage rolls.

Resonant: A Dragon-Blooded Ferem scion may pay a one-Willpower surcharge to extend this Evocation's duration to one hour, increasing her flight speed to seventy miles per hour in addition to the above. Other wielders may gain access to this benefit with a repurchase of this Evocation.

Searing Afterimage Evasion

Cost: 3m, 1i (+2m); **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Dissonant, Perilous, Uniform

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Racing Flame Method

Blazerider's speed bears its master out of harm's way, moving faster than the eye can see. Its wielder adds Blazerider's (Speed Bonus/2, rounded up) to her Evasion as a non-Charm bonus.

If Racing Flame Method is active, the wielder may pay an additional two motes to make a **decisive** counterattack against an attacker at close range with the flames wreathing Blazerider, using (Dexterity + [Athletics or Dodge]) for the attack roll.

Dissonant: The wielder can only make the counterattack if she successfully dodges.

Dragon's Blazing Wake

Cost: 1i per range band + 5m; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Decisive-only, Dissonant, Perilous

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Racing Flame Method

Blazerider ignites a swath of smoldering destruction across the battlefield, raining fire down upon its master's enemies. To use this Evocation, the wielder must be at least short range above the ground or a similar surface. She can use it to enhance either a **decisive** attack or a move action, igniting a trail of flames behind Blazerider that descends from the sky for five motes, plus one Initiative for each range band Blazerider crosses as part of the supplemented action. This is a one-time environmental hazard with difficulty 4 and Damage (Essence)L. It spans the entire length of Blazerider's movement, is wide enough to encompass only a single character, and descends all the way down to the ground, or similar surface. This always includes the target of an

enhanced attack. Any flammable objects in the hazard catch fire and burning until the end of the scene, with the above hazard traits.

A Dragon-Blood with the Essence 3 repurchase of Bellows-Pumping Stride may use it to enhance this Evocation, paying three motes and expending her Fire Aura to increase the hazard's traits to difficulty 5 and Damage 5L.

Dissonant: This Evocation can't enhance attacks beyond short range, or movement that crosses multiple range bands.

Devastating Fire-Vortex Blitz

Cost: 12m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 4

Type: Simple

Keywords: Decisive-only, Perilous, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Dragon's Blazing Wake, Searing Afterimage Evasion

Resonant: This Evocation can only be awakened by characters resonant with Blazerider.

Wheeling through the sky, Blazerider's master ignites a deadly tornado of fire. To use this Evocation, she must have Initiative 20+ and be at medium range above the ground or a similar surface. She flies in a wide circle around a point within short range, whipping up a fiery vortex. This counts as her move action, although her movement ends where she began. This environmental hazard extends out to short range from the central point on the ground, and out to medium range at short and medium range above that point, and it burns until the end of the round. Other than this, the hazard is identical to that created by Dragon's Blazing Wake, including the ability to enhance it with Bellows-Pumping Stride. The wielder is immune to this hazard.

If Flying Dragon Fang is active, the wielder may make **decisive** attacks against up to (Essence) enemies that fail their roll against the hazard, dividing her Initiative evenly among each hit enemy to determine the damage rolled against them, ignoring Hardness. These attacks can be made against enemies at medium range or further without aiming.

For each nontrivial enemy incapacitated by this Evocation — either by the hazard or the wielder's **decisive** attacks — the fire tornado continues to burn for an additional round.

This Evocation resets the wielder's Initiative once completed, even if she didn't make a successful **decisive** attack.

This Evocation can only be used once per day.

Conquering Tide (Black Jade Warship, Artifact ••••)

The Dragon-Blooded shipwright Zhalk Zhova built *Conquering Tide* for his lover, the justiciar-prince Wind-on-Cresting-Foam, instilling it with his beloved's famed zeal for justice. Pirates, criminals, and corrupt officials learned to fear the sight of the warship's sails, knowing whose coming they foretold — she who sank the serpent-fleet of the corsair Malkin Stormtooth; who wrung truth from the lips of the Demon of Hollow; who captured the barque of the renegade sorcerer Orrey before he could flee to the Wyld's waters.

In the Shogunate, numerous gentes claimed *Conquering Tide* as their own, citing their descent from either Wind-on-Cresting-Foam or Zhalk Zhova. It was lost to all of them in the aftermath of disastrous Second Campagin against Bluehaven, remaining in Lintha hands for centuries until Peleps Dafan seized it after a decisive sea-battle.

Peleps Lai captained *Conquering Tide* into the heart of Jill-of-the-Nine-Lives' living ship to rescue those enslaved within. Peleps Lymidia commanded it at the Battle of Frozen Sails, driving back the forces of the Anathema Fever Stone. Peleps Arakari brought judgment to the Avata pirate family, ending their bloody dominance of the Quiver Coast.

Conquering Tide is a huge triple-masted man-of-war. Nigh-imperishable timbers from long-vanished islands comprise the hull, masts, and deck, all of which have been lacquered with black jade. These stand in brilliant contrast to stark white sails laced with orichalcum thread.

Backer: Matthew Parker

Attunement: 10m

Speed: Current +1, empty cargo holds +1, legendary sails +8

Maneuverability: +2; **Hull:** -0/-1x3/-2x3/-4/Incap.

Cargo: *Conquering Tide* can carry up to 200 crew in its belowdecks quarters, and has cargo holds capable of carrying several hundred tons.

Era: Dreams of the First Age

Evocations of *Conquering Tide*

Conquering Tide's captain adds one die on Investigation rolls and on read intentions rolls that would uncover deception. While aboard *Conquering Tide*, she adds a non-Charisma success instead.

In Search of Justice

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Dissonant, Resonant

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite: None

Conquering Tide yearns to carry its captain toward those who've thwarted justice. When the captain pursues a character whom she believes has committed a crime, the ship's Speed Bonus increases by +1, and adds (higher of Essence or 3) non-Charisma dice on rolls to navigate marine hazards between her and her quarry. If the crime she believes was committed opposes one of her Intimacies, *Conquering Tide*'s Speed Bonus increases by (Intimacy + 1) instead.

Special activation rules: A Dragon-Blooded Peleps scion awakens this Evocation at no cost upon attuning to *Conquering Tide*.

Resonant: Once per session, when the captain brings a criminal who's played a significant part in the story to justice, she gains one Willpower. Additionally, when she sleeps aboard *Conquering Tide*, it whispers to her in dreams of foul deeds committed at sea. This information

is rarely detailed, but sufficient to provide guidance on where to begin; the Storyteller should use this to provide plot hooks at whatever frequency best suits the game.

Salt-Water Dragon Spirit

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite: In Search of Justice, any one Charm this Evocation enhances

Conquering Tide's captain is a legend upon the seas. This Evocation enhances the following Dragon-Blooded Charms as described below:

- When she successfully uses Permeating Insight (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 198), the specialty granted also applies on Sail rolls against the profiled character and to pursue him.
- When she uses Heart-Maze Navigation (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 198) or Foul Stench of Lies Discernment (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 201) aboard *Conquering Tide*, she waives their Willpower costs.
- Dragon Mariner Attitude (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 257) extends its duration to Indefinite. She can change between its different effects at no cost as a miscellaneous action.

Darkness-Drowning Whirlpool

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite: In Search of Justice

The waters around *Conquering Tide* churn as the lawless are drawn toward the warship on currents of their own misdeeds. When an ship makes a roll to outrun *Conquering Tide* in a pursuit (**Exalted**, p. 244) or for a Concealment, Escape, or Positioning naval stratagem, the captain can inflict a (higher of Essence or 3) penalty on that roll. If the enemy ship carries a character whom she believes has committed a crime that opposes one of her Intimacies, this subtracts successes instead of dice..

If *Conquering Tide's* captain is in regular combat aboard *Conquering Tide* or an enemy ship that she's boarded (**Exalted**, p. 245), this Evocation can impose a -2 penalty on a movement action taken by an enemy aboard that ship, stirring the waters to rock the ship slightly or calling up wind and seaspray to distract him. If she believes the penalized foe has committed a crime that opposes one of her Intimacies, this subtracts successes instead of dice.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens at no cost when the captain enters naval combat or a pursuit with *Conquering Tide* against a ship carrying a character whom she believes has committed a crime that opposes one of her Major or Defining Intimacies, or when she Joins Battle against such a character aboard *Conquering Tide* or a boarded ship.

Resonant: While in combat aboard *Conquering Tide* or a boarded ship, this Evocation can penalize attack rolls.

Hallowed Court of the Sea

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Mute, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite: Darkness-Drowning Whirlpool

Conquering Tide will not allow the decks where Wind-on-Cresting-Foam once stood to be sullied by the footsteps of the guilty. While this Evocation is active, all characters aboard *Conquering Tide* suffer –1 Guile and a –3 penalty on all Manipulation-based rolls. However, they add one automatic success added on all Investigation rolls, rolls opposing disguise, read intention rolls that would uncover deception, and influence rolls that would cause their target to confess to a wrongdoing, and the cost of any effects enhancing such rolls are reduced by one mote each.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens for free when a character whom the captain believes has committed a crime that opposes one of her Major or Defining Intimacies comes aboard *Conquering Tide*. The captain need not be aware of that character's presence.

Resonant: Using this Evocation resets In Search of Justice's once-per-session Resonant effect.

Sea Queen's Judgment

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Dissonant, Psyche, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite: Hallowed Court of the Sea

The verdicts passed on the wicked by *Conquering Tide*'s captain are as divine writ, a law beyond even those of Heaven and Hell. To use this Evocation, Hallowed Court of the Sea must be active, and the captain must witness a character truthfully confessing to an act that the captain considers a crime. The captain may use this Evocation to impose a geas on the confessing character, a task that he must complete in order to absolve himself of his crime. The difficulty of the task (**Exalted**, p. 216) she can command depends on the severity of the transgression: inconvenient tasks for crimes that oppose one of her Minor Intimacies or no Intimacy at all; serious tasks for crimes that oppose one of her Major Intimacies; and life-changing tasks for crimes that oppose one of her Defining Intimacies.

If misunderstanding or some other circumstance causes the captain to believe that the crime was more egregious than it actually was, then the Storyteller should mitigate the geas to the level of task appropriate for the actual act committed, rather than what the captain believes the act entailed, while preserving as much of the intent of the captain's player as possible. Likewise, if

the geas would constitute unacceptable influence (**Exalted**, p. 220), the Storyteller should mitigate it to render it acceptable while retaining as much of the geas' intention as possible.

The geased character is treated as having a Defining Intimacy towards fulfilling the task, which can't be weakened or altered. He need not spend his every waking hour devoted to his geas, but he must make a good faith effort towards making progress on it each day. He can spend one Willpower to suppress this Psyche effect for one scene. Once he fulfills the geas, this Psyche effect ends.

This Evocation can only be used once per story, unless reset by uncovering evidence of a crime that opposes one of the captain's Defining Intimacies.

Dissonant: Characters dissonant with *Conquering Tide* can't awaken this Evocation.

Resonant: The captain need not have a confession from her culprit to use this Evocation as long as she possess overwhelmingly convincence evidence of his guilt (potentially including testimony from other characters). The culprit must still be present on *Conquering Tide* to be sentenced. If this evidence is inaccurate, the captain's judgment is mitigated to a level appropriate to the culprit's actual conduct, as above.

Fivefold Dragons' Grasp (Green Jade Smashfist, Artifact)

Earth nurtures wood. Wood fuels fire. Fire becomes smoke, diffusing into air. Air condenses, and rains down as water. Water enriches the earth, beginning the cycle anew. Thus do the elements of Creation proceed, the foremost among the many elemental cycles studied by savants and occultists. Jurul Koba Kiriji forged Fivefold Dragons' Grasp to further his understanding of this cycle, creating them not as a weapon, but a tool to understand and wield elemental Essence.

This pair of gauntlets is fashioned to resemble a dragon's claws, with each finger composed of a different color of jade. Each gauntlet's palm houses a lens of flawless adamant, a prism through which the five elements become one.

Kiriji died before his house was cast down and replaced with House Ledaal, slain in the Wyld Hunt against the blasphemous Eater of Tongues. His daughter, Ledaal Koba Mukar, took up Fivefold Dragons' Grasp to avenge him, the first of many deeds in her career as a storied monster slayer. In some generations, the gauntlets have been inherited by a sorcerer or savant — Ledaal Vuyen used them to unravel the elemental enigma-vaults of the Court of Dark Skies' spirit prince, while Ledaal Pakayu, the Winter Flame, averted a potential schism within the Immaculate Order by drawing on her insights into the cycle to pen the Sutra of Reconciliation. In others, their masters have been warriors devoted to the Great House's Shadow Crusade — Ledaal Remanis, who burned the Voice Serpent to death from within; the outcaste Ledaal Empty Chamber, scourge of the fae Court of Formless Dancers; and Ledaal Kebok Adenu, who slew the Anathema Helltusk in the Second Siege of Garianghis.

Backer: Richard Javier Stephenson

Attunement: 5m; **Type:** Light (+5 ACC; +10 DMG; +0 DEF; 3 OWV)

Tags: Bashing, Brawl, Grappling, Smashing, Worn

Heartstone Slot(s): 2

Era: Reign of the Scarlet Empress

Evocations of Fivefold Dragons' Grasp

The wielder adds +1 Accuracy on **withering** attacks with Elemental Bolt Attack (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 214) and elemental spells.

Elemental Lens Refraction

Cost: —(+1m); **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Elemental Bolt Attack

Grasping one element with each of her gauntleted hands, the Dragon-Blood weaves them together into a deadly display of power. When she uses Elemental Bolt Attack, she may pay a one-mote surcharge to enhance it with the effects of two of the elemental variants she knows, as long as they are next to each other in the cycle — **earth**, then **wood**, then **fire**, then **air**, then **water**, then **earth** again. If she combines variants that deal bashing or lethal damage, she may choose which type of damage is dealt. Such uses are aspected towards both elements.

Upon awakening this Evocation, the Dragon-Blood automatically gains one of Elemental Bolt Attack's elemental variations. If she already knows all five, this Evocation's experience point cost is instead discounted by three experience.

Walking in the Dragons' Footsteps

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Any ten Charms of one element

The cycle of elements moves through all things, within and without. When a Dragon-Blooded wielder would enter an Elemental Aura, she may pay two motes to instead enter the Aura of the next element in the cycle — e.g., when she would enter Air Aura, she may instead enter Water Aura. This doesn't let her avoid the restriction on her Aura while at bonfire anima (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 162).

A Dragon-Blood who's awakened Ascendant Omphalos Avatar waives this Evocation's mote cost.

Inverted Cycle Attainment

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: None

The wielder can use Walking in the Dragon's Footsteps to enter the Aura of the *previous* element in the cycle — e.g., entering Fire Aura instead of Air Aura.

Special activation rules: Dragon-Blooded Ledaal scions may awaken this Evocation at no experience point cost.

Radiant Dragon Mandala

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Elemental Lens Refraction, Mantle of Elemental Power

The Dragon-Blood beckons forth blazing mandalas of five-colored light, wreathing Fivefold Dragons' Grasp with mystical diagrams of the cycle that empowers it. She waives Mantle of Elemental Power's (p. XX) anima cost, and enhances all of Elemental Bolt Attack's elemental variations. She chooses which element it counts as when she activates it.

Five-Dragon Harmony

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Walking in the Dragon's Footsteps

Recognizing her place in the elemental cycle, the Dragon-Blood gains deeper insights into what she might become. Being at bonfire anima doesn't prevent the Dragon-Blood from remaining in the Aura of the element that follows her Aspect in the cycle.

Ledaal scions who've repurchased Walking in the Dragons' Footsteps extend this benefit to the element preceding their Aspect in the cycle.

All-Under-Heaven Unity

Cost: —(+1wp); **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Five-Dragon Harmony

Even antithetical forces are reconciled in enlightened hands, their opposition resolved in synthesis. While in Aura, a Dragon-Blooded wielder may pay a one-Willpower surcharge to grant the Balanced keyword (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 163) to all Charms of the next element in the cycle that she uses in one instant.

Ledaal scions who've repurchased Walking in the Dragons' Footsteps can instead grant Balanced to Charms of the previous element in the cycle (but not both at once).

Ascendant Omphalos Avatar

Cost: 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: None

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: All-Under-Heaven Unity

Bringing the cycle to its completion within her soul, the Dragon-Blood embodies its totality. To use this Evocation, the Dragon-Blood must progress through three Elemental Auras in the order of the cycle within one scene (wielders who've awakened Inverse Cycle Attainment may instead use it by progressing through three Auras in reverse order). Leaving Aura doesn't interrupt her progress, but if she enters an Aura that's not next in the cycle, she must begin anew. She gains the following benefits:

- While she's in an Elemental Aura, she also counts as being in the Aura of the next element in the cycle. Wielders who've awakened Inverse Cycle Attainment may instead extend this to the previous element in the cycle when they enter Aura (but not both).
- Bonfire anima doesn't prevent her from entering any element's Aura. Each time she enters an Aura, she may automatically flare to bonfire.
- When she expends her Aura as part of a Charm's cost, she adds a free full Excellency.
- She adds (Essence) dice of post-soak damage to **withering** attacks with Elemental Bolt Attack and elemental spells, and (Essence) dice of damage to **decisive** attacks with the same.
- She can waive All-Under Heaven Unity's Willpower surcharge once per round.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens for free when the Dragon-Blood progresses through three Auras in order (or reverse order, with Inverse Cycle Attainment) while fighting against at least one nontrivial enemy, and can be used immediately.

Glacial Mantle (Blue Jade Articulated Plate, Artifact ••••)

It was the Anathema Wilting Taiga who forged Glacial Mantle amid the mountain fastness of the Three Diamonds, but the armor's boreal power could not temper the young Solar's impetuous Essence fever. While his early raids proved fruitful, he caught the attention of the Lookshyan ranger Maheka Katsuro. Far from home, he turned to a nearby satrapy for aid, joining forces with a Sworn Kinship of Dynasts to prosecute a Wyld Hunt against Wilting Taiga. They ultimately slew the Anathema, but not before Taiga killed Katsuro, impaling him on a spike of ice.

Iselsi Ofava, Peleps Tarik, and Jerah Valen all coveted the Anathema's puissant armor, but when Tepet Rekal declared that she would go on a pilgrimage to the River Province to bring Glacial Mantle to the honorable Dragon-Blood's family, none of her Hearth could disagree with her. Even today, Lookshyans allude to the story of the four Dynasts' journey as a reminder that the Realm's Dragons can at times be worthy allies.

Glacial Mantle is a suit of articulated plate forged from blue jade, and inlaid with black jade mined from an underground river and unmelting ice from the North's far reaches. When attuned, a cape of frost crystallizes across the wearer's back, displaying the mons of the wearer's gentes or some other personal symbol.

Backer: Seth Landry

Attunement: 6m

Type: Heavy (Soak +11, Hardness 10, Mobility Penalty -2)

Tags: None

Hearthstone slot(s): 2

Era: Year of the Snake, Mercury Era of the 6th Epoch of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate

Evocations of Glacial Mantle

Glacial Mantle's wearer is immune to mundane environmental hazards based on cold, and adds (Essence) non-Charm dice on rolls against magical hazards based on cold. Glacial Mantle gains +(Essence) soak and +1 Hardness against cold-based attacks.

Frozen Aegis

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Perilous, Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite: None

The inexorable cold that radiates from Glacial Mantle numbs those who stand against its master, leaving their weapons rimed with ice. After an enemy hits the wearer with an attack from close range, she can use this Evocation to unleash a wave of numbing cold against him, causing him to lose one Initiative (which she doesn't gain). Against **decisive** attacks, this Initiative is taken before calculating damage, not from the attacker's base Initiative after resetting.

This Evocation can also be used while grappling or being grappled by a character at close range. The wearer may use it once on each of her turns to drain one Initiative from the opposing character (which she doesn't gain).

Resonant: The wielder gains the lost Initiative.

Unleashing Winter's Heart

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite: Frozen Aegis

Slamming a mailed fist into the ground, Glacial Mantle's master unleashes a wave of freezing Essence to sculpt the battlefield to her will. She rolls (Intelligence + War) to freeze the battlefield with one of the following effects, at the listed difficulty.

- **Ice Platform** (Difficulty 1): The wearer freezes the surface of a body of water to create a platform of ice within close range that's capable of bearing her weight.
- **Ice Slick** (Difficulty 3): The wearer rimes over a surface within close range of her, creating a patch of difficult terrain (**Exalted**, p. 199) large enough to encompass a single character. If she uses this Evocation to create an ice slick directly beneath an enemy, the roll's difficulty is (higher of his Evasion or 3).
- **Ramp/Bridge** (Difficulty 4): The wearer creates a bridge or ramp of ice within close range, providing unobstructed passage over pits, difficult terrain, and the like. The bridge or ramp is only a single range band long. There must be a significant source of water she can draw from to create it, such as a barrel or stream. An enemy can destroy it with a difficulty 4 gambit against its Parry of (higher of wearer's Essence or 3). The gambit's difficulty is reduced to 2 if performed with a fire-based attack.
- **Wall** (Difficulty 4): The wearer creates a barrier of ice within close range, capable of providing light cover (**Exalted**, p. 198-199). If there is a significant source of water, such as a barrel or steam, this provides heavy cover instead. An enemy can destroy this barrier with a difficulty 4 gambit against its Parry of (higher of wearer's Essence or 3). The gambit's difficulty is reduced to 2 if performed with a fire-based attack.

If the wearer is fighting under a stratagem enacted with Winter Brings Death, she adds an automatic success on rolls to use this Evocation, and her ice constructs can't be destroyed with gambits.

Special activation rules: A Dragon-Blooded Maheka scion awakens this Evocation for free upon meeting its prerequisites.

Resonant: This Evocation can be placed in a flurry.

Tundra-Conquering Strategos

Cost: 5m (+1m per additional battle group); **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: None

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite: None

Glacial Mantle's master and her armies are undaunted by even the harshest winter, marching implacably through snow and ice. The wearer isn't affected by difficult terrain or other movement penalties due to snowy or icy terrain. She can also extend this Evocation's benefit as well as the attunement benefit of Glacial Mantle to battle groups within long range. She can enhance one battle group this way at no additional cost; each additional battle group requires an additional mote.

If the wearer is fighting under a stratagem enacted with Winter Brings Death, this Evocation's cost is waived.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens at no cost when the wearer successfully enacts a Strategic Placement stratagem (**Exalted**, p. 212) to force a fight to take place on icy or snowy terrain.

Harvest-Killing Frost

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Perilous, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite: Unleashing Winter's Heart

An eerie chill falls over the battlefield as Glacial Mantle's wielder advances to the frontlines. She exudes supernatural cold out to short range, an environmental hazard with difficulty (higher of wearer's Essence or 3) and Damage 1B/round. Allied battle groups that benefit from Tundra-Conquering Strategos are immune to this hazard. If this depletes an enemy battle group's Magnitude, the rout check is made at +1 difficulty.

Additionally, while this Evocation is active, when the wearer uses Frozen Aegis against an attack, she can make an unblockable **decisive** attack with sheer cold, rolling (Intelligence + War). Success inflicts one die of bashing damage, ignoring Hardness. This doesn't reset the wearer to base Initiative.

If the wearer is fighting under a stratagem enacted with Winter Brings Death, the damage inflicted by both the environmental hazard and counterattacks increases to (Essence) dice.

Resonant: The wearer's allies are immune to this hazard.

Glacier Bulwark Fortification

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Simple

Keywords: Dissonant, Perilous, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite: Harvest-Killing Frost

Dense layers of ice freeze over Glacial Mantle, reinforcing the armor with impervious strength. She gains (Essence) temporary -0 health levels. These temporary levels are the first to be filled when she's damaged, and vanish when damaged. Additionally, each temporary health level remaining grants Glacial Mantle +1 soak. Fire-based attacks ignore this bonus soak.

The wearer can use this Evocation reflexively, waiving its Willpower cost, when she activates Harvest-Killing Frost.

This Evocation can only be used once per scene.

Dissonant: This Evocation can't be awakened by characters dissonant with Glacial Mantle.

Resonant: For every two temporary health levels remaining, Glacial Mantle gains +1 Hardness. Fire-based attacks ignore this Hardness bonus.

Winter Brings Death

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Dissonant

Duration: Until stratagem is completed

Prerequisite: Harvest-Killing Frost, Tundra-Conquering Strategos

An icy wind heralds the arrival of Glacial Mantle's master and her army, plunging the battlefield into an unseasonable winter. This Evocation creates a unique magical stratagem with threshold 3. If successful, upon Joining Battle, heavy snowfall, sleet, or hail descends upon the battlefield, inflicting a -2 environmental penalty on enemy's ranged attacks, movement actions, and vision- or hearing-dependent Awareness rolls. Additionally, the intense cold increases any **withering** damage dealt by allied battle groups by one point. This damage bonus doesn't apply against characters immune to environmental penalties.

Dissonant: This Evocation's effects only apply against enemy battle groups.

Mela's Frozen Legion

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Simple

Keywords: Dissonant, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite: Glacier Bulwark Fortification, Winter Brings Death

Glacial Mantle's master blesses her soldiers with boreal might, encasing their weapons and armor in ice as strong as jade. She grants an allied battle group within medium range the following benefits:

- They gain Might 1.
- Their attacks gain +1 Accuracy and Overwhelming 5.
- They gain +1 Parry. Fire-based attacks ignore this bonus.
- They gain +2 armored soak and Hardness (her Intelligence + War). Fire-based attacks ignore this soak bonus and Hardness.

If the wearer is fighting under a stratagem enacted with Winter Brings Death, she can use this Evocation reflexively upon winning Join Battle.

Dissonant: This Evocation can't be awakened by characters dissonant with Glacial Mantle.

Resonant: The enhanced battle group gains Might 2.

The Revelation Sphere (Blue Jade Puzzle, Artifact)

Amilar Mia awoke in the frozen North, a sphere of dreams clutched in her fist. She knew not how she'd found it, had no memory of her journeys over the last months, but she could feel the power slumbering within the fist-sized orb of rune-etched jade, banded with orichalcum rings. Though seemingly solid, an attuned wielder can twist and manipulate segments of the sphere like a puzzle-box, manipulating it into various configurations of uncertain purpose.

It's since been passed down through the generations, along with the study of its ancient origins, whether researched in the ruins of Shogunate archives or translated from archaic runes that occasionally drift to the puzzle-sphere's surface. Amilar Borulan speaks of how the Widow Daimyo, in her folly, created it to seek out the tombs of the Anathema and despoil their treasure-laden graves; his great-niece Veja calls him a fool, and insists the ancient Dragon-Blooded hero Ophalon ra-Vamaja plucked it from the eye socket of a titanic sorcerer-behemoth.

Whatever the Revelation Sphere's true origins, it's a powerful relic in the hands of those seeking after the truth, lending supernal percipience and a clarity as cold as the land in which it was found. Sorcerers can tap its power to fuel scryings and divinations. Amilar Nefa made her fortune locating jade mines with its power; Amilar Kopal cast open a window in time to find the lost panoply of the Scarecrow Prince, scattered across the Scavenger Lands. Those who've truly bonded with the sphere begin to dream of icy labyrinths, feeling a subtle call towards the North and the ends of the earth beyond it. Loyalty to the Seventh Legion and the watchful eyes of their kin have thus far ensured no Amilar has deserted Lookshy in search of this maze, but perhaps someday...

Backer: Alex Godofsky

Attunement: 2m

Era: Disputed

Evocations of the Revelation Sphere

The Revelation Sphere is exceptional equipment (**Exalted**, p. 580) for rolls to navigate to a manse, demesne, or similar place of power; rolls to track a character bearing an artifact, hearthstone, or similar magical object the wielder knows of; and Investigation rolls to find hidden artifacts, concealed entrances to manses or similar places of power, and the like. If an enhanced roll upholds a Major or Defining Principle, the wielder doubles 9s.

A Dream of Ancient Ice

Cost: 2m, 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: Dissonant, Resonant

Duration: One day

Prerequisites: None

Holding the Revelation Sphere to her chest as she sleeps, the wielder dreams of an otherworldly maze of ice, chasing her unknown goal through its gelid passageways. She rolls (Perception + [Integrity, Lore, or Occult]) and banks her successes. She can add up to (Essence) of these successes on any of the following rolls:

- Any roll enhanced by the Revelation Sphere's equipment bonus.

- Introduce fact rolls.
- Shape Sorcery rolls.
- Any spell effect roll made as part of casting a spell that enhances the sorcerer's senses, series on distant things, or divines the past or future.
- Any roll (or her Resolve) to see through illusions.
- Any roll to endure cold temperatures or cold-based magic.

This Evocation can only be used once per day.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens for free when a Dragon-Blooded Amilar scion attunes to the Revelation Sphere.

Resonant: The wielder may spend banked successes in place of motes when paying the costs of Instant-duration Charms enhancing the above rolls. Successes spent this way don't count towards the limit that can be added on the roll.

Horizons Beyond Horizons

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: A Dream of Ancient Ice

Visions, waking dreams, and hidden portents reveal Creation's secrets to the Revelation Sphere's master. She can make an introduce fact roll regarding the existence or details of a manse, demesne, spirit sanctum, shadowland, Wyld zone, deposit of magical materials, or similar place of power without needing an applicable Lore background. Any successes added on the roll with A Dream of Ancient Ice are non-Charm. If she has an applicable Lore background, a successful roll grants her one Willpower.

This Evocation can only be used once per story, unless reset by successfully navigating to the introduced location and achieving one of the wielder or her allies' goals.

Dreaming Dragon's Eye

Cost: —; **Mins:** Essence 2

Type: Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisites: Fivefold Resonance Sense

Manipulating the Revelation Sphere's puzzle-mechanisms as she meditates, the Dragon-Blood's consciousness sinks into deeper contemplation. She reduces the cost of Fivefold Resonance Sense (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 231) by two motes, and applies its bonus on Awareness, Investigation, Occult, or Survival rolls to detect any artifact or place or power. On rolls to detect

jade artifacts, elemental demesnes or manses, or places of power otherwise linked to elemental Essence, any successes she adds with A Dream of Ancient Ice are non-Charms.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens for free when a Dragon-Blooded Amilar scion attunes to the Revelation Sphere.

Unyielding Obsession Aegis

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Horizons Beyond Horizons

Having glimpsed the promise of the unknown, the seeker will not abandon her quest no matter how much it may cost her. She adds (Perception) non-Charms Resolve against an influence roll that would cause her to cease seeking out an artifact or place of power or instill her with any Intimacy that opposes such a pursuit.

This Evocation can only be used once per story, unless reset by upholding a Defining Intimacy by successfully navigating to a place of power or obtaining an artifact.

Resonant: The wielder treats the influence as unacceptable (**Exalted**, p. 220).

At the Labyrinth's Frozen Heart

Cost: 10m; **Mins:** Essence 3

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Unyielding Obsession Aegis

Resonant: Only characters resonant with the Revelation Sphere can awaken this Evocation.

As the wielder deftly twists the Revelation Sphere to solve its puzzle, the orichalcum bands locked around it slide and retract, their bindings no longer fettering the dreaming power that lies within. The runes etched on its surface drift into the air as shimmering patterns of azure light, surrounding her with ancient words of power. She gains the following benefits:

- Any successes she adds on Shape Sorcery rolls or spell effect rolls with A Dream of Ancient Ice are non-Charms.
- When she casts a spell enhanced by A Dream of Ancient Ice, its Willpower cost is reduced by one. This applies regardless of whether she enhanced a Shape Sorcery roll or a spell effect roll, or whether she added successes or spent them in place of motes.
- At the end of each of her turns, if she succeeded on a Shape Sorcery roll or cast a spell, she gains one Initiative.
- She doubles 9s on spell effect rolls for spells that enhance her senses, scry on distant things, or divine the past or future.

- While shaping a spell, the runes grant Hardness (Perception + [Integrity, Lore, or Occult]).

A Dragon-Blooded Amilar scion who's awakened this Evocation can use the Revelation Sphere as a Means for sorcerous workings that involves enhancing her senses, scrying, or revealing the past or future, adding +2 terminus. Other wielders may gain access to this benefit with a repurchase of this Evocation.

Gunzosha Armor (Artifact § •••-•••••)

Ancient wonders of the First Age, gunzosha armor are more akin to Essence-powered armored exoskeletons than the artifact armors donned by the Second Age's Exalted. They're puissant relics in the hands of the Chosen, but can also be attuned by mortals, allowing the First Age's warlords to field entire armies of gunzosha. But this power carries a high price. Before a mortal can attune to gunzosha armor, she must have jade amulets surgically implanted across her body, allowing her to control the armor and draining her Essence to power it. As long as the amulets remain implanted, the rate at which she ages is doubled.

Lookshy's arsenal boasts dozens of suit of gunzosha armor, more than any other single power in Creation. Seventh Legion military doctrine deploys gunzosha as elite troops reinforcing the Field Forces, attaching a fang of five gunzosha to a dragon, while also occasionally fielding smaller gunzosha detachments to support Dragon-Blooded officers. However, Lookshy's store of gunzosha armor is too small to allow every Field Force to have a full gunzosha complement; the Stores Directorate and the Directorate of the Adjutant-General coordinate unit allocation. The Stores Directorate is keenly aware of gunzosha armor's irreplaceability, and are loathe to deploy gunzosha in circumstances where a fallen warrior's armor might not be able to be retrieved.

Lookshyan Gunzosha candidates are selected from the Field Forces by the Directorate of the Adjutant-General, though service has not been compulsory outside of some of the darkest times in Lookshyan history. Given the severe toll the armor takes from its wearers, the General Staff's current policy sets a ten-year maximum term of service, after which the gunzosha's amulets are surgically removed. Gunzosha and former gunzosha hold considerable prestige in Lookshyan culture; their sacrifice exemplifies the Immaculate Faith's Pillar of Conviction. The Seventh Legion's Dragon-Blooded may not consider the gunzosha their equals, but few are without a healthy respect for them.

Gunzosha armor is heavy and ornate, made up of bulky, overlapping plates that cover the wearer's entire body. These plates are inlaid with flowing script spelling out prayers for victory in battle and protection. The underside of each plate is covered with fine capillaries that act as an extension of the wearer's musculature and route Essence from her implanted amulets to the armor — wonders beyond the Second Age's artificers. Most of the gunzosha armors in Lookshy's arsenal are primarily constructed from jade, but suits forged from five magical materials still exist today.

Gunzosha armor is heavy artifact armor (**Exalted**, p. 599). Mortals must pay five Willpower to attune to it, in place of committing motes. All of them share the universal gunzosha Evocations below, depicting the wearer's proficiency with the armor's integrated mechanisms, but each is still a unique and storied treasure, with unique Evocations reflecting its specific legend. Like any other artifact armor, its rating can range from three dots to the fabled Artifact N/As, determining the power and number of that armor's unique Evocations.

Becoming a Gunzosha

Creating the jade amulets necessary for a mortal to attune to gunzosha armor is a major project (**Exalted**, p. 240) that requires Craft (Artifact). Surgically implanting them is a difficulty 3 (Intelligence + Medicine) roll that inflicts a level of unpreventable lethal damage.

Gunzosha Evocations

The following Evocations are possessed by all gunzosha armor.

Integrated Essence Musculature

Cost: 3m or 3i; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Withering-only

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: None

Gunzosha armor amplifies the strength of its wearer, giving her the strength of ten. She adds (Strength) dice on a Strength-based roll, or (Strength) to the raw damage of a **withering** attack. If she uses this Evocation to enhance a feat of strength, she adds +1 to her effective Strength to determine what feats she can attempt.

Internal Life-Support Systems

Cost: 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: One day

Prerequisites: None

Automated systems within gunzosha armor monitor the wearer's health, deploying the armor's integrated medical equipment as needed. The wearer adds an automatic success on rolls against poison and disease, triples the rate at which she heals damage naturally, and triples her effective Stamina for determining how long she can go without food, water, and air (**Exalted**, p. 232).

Kinetic Armor Reinforcement

Cost: 1m or 1i per success; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Perilous, Uniform

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: None

Infinitesimal fibers of the magical materials are woven throughout the gunzosha armor, reinforcing it against attack when charged with Essence. After a damage roll against her, she can

use this Evocation to subtract a number of successes up to the 1s on the damage roll, paying one mote or Initiative per success subtracted.

Mobility Augmentation System

Cost: 3m or 3i; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: None

Gunzosha armor propels its wearer's every movement, allowing her to keep pace with the fastest of rival despite her armor's weight. She adds an automatic success and ignores the armor's mobility penalty on a rush, disengage, contested roll in a race, or a roll to accomplish a challenging climb, jump, or the like.

Sensory Augmentation Visor

Cost: 4m or 4i; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Uniform

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: None

The gunzosha armor's visor provides drastically enhanced vision and integrated targeting systems. She ignores one point of penalty from visual obstruction, such as darkness or fog, on an action. If she enhances an attack roll or Awareness roll, she also adds two successes.

Gunzosha and Resonance

For artifacts such as gunzosha armor that allow mortals to attune them, mortal wielders are considered dissonant regardless of the materials the artifact is made from.

Seralawi, the Earth's Beating Heart (White Jade Gunzosha Armor, Artifact §•••,)

A suit of alabaster white gunzosha armor distinguished by a single gauntlet of red jade and orichalcum, Seralawi was not among the Seventh Legion's initial arsenal when it encamped at Deheleshen. Instead, it was the scavenger prince Geshel Reave who discovered it in the Tomb of Ten Thousand. The fragmentary First Age texts he recovered along with it showed how to create and implant the attunement amulets, but contained no mention of the toll gunzosha armor took on its wearer. Geshel entered old age a decade too early, believing his unnatural aging to be some curse left upon the Tomb.

Geshel sought the counsel of countless savants to free him of this curse, but it was not until he met Amilar Hakala of Valkhawsen Academy that he learned the truth. Crushed by this

revelation, Geshel offered the armor to Hakala in exchange for a sorcerous working that would restore the semblance of his youth, if not his lifespan.

Seralawi's design is configured for defense, and the Seventh Legion deploys it to take maximum advantage of its Evocations. Anado Kurun held her dragon's line against the Tungapi horse archers after their arrows slew the dragon's kazei. Spindrift Unaki rode with Karal Nevak in the Wyld Hunt against the Hellion Flower, and saved the Dragon-Blood's life from the Fair Folk's lash of tears. Mizura the Hammer held the Jaguar Pass against Lin the Betrayer's army with but a dozen soldiers.

Attunement: 6m

Type: Heavy (Soak +11, Hardness 10, Mobility Penalty -2)

Tags: None

Hearthstone slot(s): 1

Era: Dreams of the First Age

Evocations of Seralawi, the Earth's Beating Heart

Seralawi's wearer lowers the Initiative cost of full defense actions by one point.

Iron Will Aegis

Cost: 5m or 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Resonant, Withering-only

Duration: Instant

Prerequisites: Kinetic Armor Reinforcement

Seralawi draws from its master's will, becoming as unbreakable as her spirit. After a **withering** attack roll hits the wearer, she may activate this Evocation to add (Willpower/2, rounded up) armored soak. If this reduces the attack to its minimum damage, she gains one Initiative.

If the wearer uses Kinetic Armor Reinforcement after this Evocation, she can penalize the damage roll for its 2s as well as its 1s.

An Essence 2 repurchase of this Evocation extends its duration to last until the wearer's next turn.

Unfaltering Sentinel Attitude

Cost: 5m or 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Dual, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: Kinetic Armor Reinforcement

Seralawi's master stands like a mountain between her ward and all enemies. She can flurry a full defense with a defend other action, ignoring flurry penalties. Additionally, any character protected by her defend other gains +2 armored soak and Hardness 4.

Earth's Heart Awakens

Cost: 5m or 1wp; **Mins:** Essence 1

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Dissonant, Resonant

Duration: One scene

Prerequisites: Iron Will Aegis, Unfaltering Sentinel Attitude

Serawali recalls countless battles, empowering its master to take her place in the armor's legend. To use this Evocation, the wearer must be hit by a **withering** or **decisive** attack from a nontrivial opponent without taking any damage. She rolls Join Battle with (Stamina + Resistance). Each 10 on the roll increases Serawali's soak by +1 for the scene.

This Evocation can only be used once per scene.

Special activation rules: This Evocation awakens at no cost when the wearer is hit by a **withering** or **decisive** attack from a nontrivial opponent without taking any damage.

Resonant: The wielder can use this Evocation when her soak reduces a nontrivial opponent's **withering** attack to minimum damage.

Righteous River sat on the veranda, watching the ships on Arjuf's harbor. No clouds marred the blue sky. A gentle sea breeze stirred the air. It was a perfectly lovely day, and Coren was talking about shadows.

Coren was young yet, fresh from the House of Bells. She'd spent the morning peppering River with questions about the Wyld Hunts the former Immaculate had participated in, focusing on one Hunt in particular. Coren cared most about the Anathemas' strategies: How had they wiped out all but three of the shikari? What had River, Swift, and Eshuvar done that let them survive? How did her trio, joined by Chalima and Mathar, track them down? What was it like to kill one? What was it like to drag the other back to the Imperial City in orichalcum chains?

River couldn't help but feel a twinge of bitterness as she told the story. Once, she'd been lauded in Dynastic circles. She'd never cared for the glory, but she'd commanded the respect of her peers, of her house. Yet today, she was an embarrassment, a scion of House Ledaal who'd chosen love over obedience. The house tolerated River for her past successes, but had quietly stripped away much of her clout as an example to its younger Dynasts.

Still, she had some few friends within the family, and Coren was one of them. The young woman believed wholeheartedly in carrying out the Shadow Crusade's mission. River couldn't publicly mentor her, but she could help here, from the shadows, as it were.

"You'll need to keep an eye on Ragara's movements," River said.

Coren frowned. "I've heard whispers about the house's darker side, but little more. Tell me."

In this, River could help. She'd known magistrate Ledaal Isolde since childhood, before Isolde left for the Spiral Academy and River shipped off to the Cloister of Wisdom. Isolde paid little mind to how much of the house shunned River, and often came by to drink tea and discuss her investigations into Ragara's unusual activities.

"They're moving money to fund expeditions to First Age ruins, then hiding the results. Or they say they found nothing of value, yet our informants mention wagons under heavy Ragara guard leaving the sites. They're stockpiling relics, things the Empress kept stored away for *good reason*."

A cloud passed over the sun. "To what purpose?" Coren asked, though her scowl said she knew.

"We think they're dabbling in dangerous sorceries. Might be making deals with fiends that will grant them power."

"But that's... that's what happened with House Jurul."

"Ragara's nothing if not arrogant. They think they can avoid our ancestors' mistakes. But power is seductive. If it goes wrong for them, *when* it does, you need to be ready."

The pleasant afternoon was gone now. The sea breeze carried a chill to it, and thunderheads piled up in the steel-gray sky. Thunder rolled in the distance, and River realized Coren was growling right along with it. "And they have their hands on the Realm's purse strings, so no one can stop them without risking retribution."

"Not without unquestionable proof. Until then, it's our duty to make sure they don't destroy the defenses and let in all the horrors their mechanisms holds at bay."

It grew dark as dusk. Fear swept across Coren's features. River let her imagine it: the Fair Folk swarming across Creation unchecked once more, and no Empress in place to stop them. But, ah, *there* came the young woman's storied temper. Terror lapsed into fury on Coren's features, and the thunder rolled. "Thank you for your hospitality, cousin," she said, setting her teacup down. "It seems we have work to do."

River remained on the veranda as Coren departed. She called for more tea, and waited for the skies to open up.

Chapter Eight

Blood of the Dragons

Cathak Setod

For more than two centuries, Cathak Setod faithfully served the Realm. Chosen of Pasiap and freshly graduated from the House of Bells, he went forth as a newly minted officer of the Legions to bring the Empress' peace and order to the lawless and unruly Threshold. Afire with the idealism of callow youth, he believed his path a righteous one.

He was a fool.

It didn't take two centuries for Cathak Setod to conclude that the Empress he had sworn to faithfully serve was a grasping tyrant whose rule was not one of peace and justice but fear, cruelty, and avarice. The Bloodied Scythe Uprising and its equally bloody aftermath destroyed the last of his faith in the Realm's moral rectitude. From that moment, despite his lauded position as a general of the legions and a hero of the Realm, the trajectory of his life arced downward.

His enemies counted it a victory when he resigned his commission in favor of a position with the Breath of Mela, the Immaculate Order's administrative wing for military training and defense. There, among devotees of the Immaculate Philosophy, he found something of the man he'd once been, a hint of the righteousness he had once believed in so fiercely. He found it in the care and teaching of a girl less than half his age.

Peleps Najah had herself looked upon the worst that the Realm had to offer and, instead of being disillusioned, grew stronger in her devotion to the Immaculate Philosophy and the responsibilities it inculcated into her: The responsibility of the strong to protect the weak, to heal the sick, to guide the lost, to nurture the abandoned. Najah astonishes Setod on a regular basis with both her kindness and her ferocity. Setod knows that she regards him not only as a lost soul in need of guidance, but also as a friend, and he cannot resent her for either perception. She is, after all, correct.

Of late, Setod has taken to accompanying his wandering troublemaker companion on her travels, both on the Blessed Isle and in the Threshold, where rumors swirl of growing threats from the mighty Solar Anathema. At some level, Setod hopes that those rumors are true. What better way to wash the stain of murdering the helpless from his soul than to die in glorious battle, defending the innocent against a monster of legend?

Backers: Joakim Aske and Lars-Henrik Eyjan

Aspect: Earth

Essence: 4; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal Essence: 15; **Peripheral Essence:** 28

Health Levels: -0/-1x7/-2x7/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Feats of Strength: 11 dice (+6 for 6m, may attempt Strength 5 feats); Investigation: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Medicine: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Mysticism: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Read Intentions: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Resist Poison/Disease: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 8 dice (+4 for 4m), Tracking: 8 dice (+4 for 4m).

Appearance 2, Resolve 5 (+2 for 4m), Guile 3 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Unarmed): 13 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 12B)

Attack (Hundredweight, white jade goremaul): 12 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 17B/4)

Attack (Grapple): 9 dice (+4 for 4m; 10 dice to control, +4 for 4m)

Combat Movement: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 1; **Parry:** 6 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 16/10 (Faith Like Steel, white jade articulated plate)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: The Realm is hopelessly corrupt.

Defining Tie: The Immaculate Order (Loyalty)

Major Tie: The Breath of Mela (Devotion)

Major Tie: House Cathak (Complicated Loyalty)

Major Tie: Peleps Najah (Paternal Affection)

Minor Principle: I am willing to die to wash the blood of the innocent from my hands.

Minor Tie: The Imperial legions (Despair)

Escort

Setod is often found with Peleps Najah (p. XX). His entourage may also include monks (**Exalted**, p. 499) and Dragon-Blooded shikari.

Offensive Charms

Earth Dragon Form (9m; Simple; One scene; Earth, Form): Add +3 dice on smash attack rolls and attack rolls against prone enemies, and gain +5 natural soak. Can use reflexively if hit by an attack from a lower-Initiative enemy. *Perfection of Earth Body*: For a six-mote, six-Initiative, one-Willpower surcharge, add +5 damage dice on **withering** and **decisive** smash attacks and attacks against prone enemies, and ignore wound and crippling penalties.

Force of the Mountain (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Earth): Add five dice of raw **withering** damage or double 10s on a **decisive** damage roll. Unarmed attacks gain the Smashing tag.

Hungry Earth Strike (10m, 6i, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Earth, Perilous, Withering-only): Double 8s on the damage roll of a **withering** smash attack or a **withering** attack against a prone enemy. If this crashes an enemy on an earthen surface — or, in Earth Aura, if it lowers her Initiative from higher than Setod's to lower — she's swallowed in the earth: she can't take movement action, she suffers the penalties for being prone, and she takes one die of Hardness-ignoring bashing damage on each of his turns. Breaking free is an extended (Strength + Athletics) action with difficulty 5 and goal number 9. Any character can roll to help free the victim, but the roll can't be flurried. Once per scene, unless reset by incapacitating a nontrivial foe with a **decisive** attack from 20+ Initiative.

Defensive Charms

Earth Bears Witness (5m, 3i; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Earth, Perilous): Reduce **decisive** damage by 3, or 5 if there's a large earthen structure within short range.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +5 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Stone Dragon's Skin (5m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Dual, Earth, Perilous): Ignore up to three points of wound penalty to Parry. Add +4 natural soak or +1 Hardness.

Weapon-Breaking Defense Technique (10m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Earth): Clash an attack from close range with a disarm gambit, adding attack roll extra successes to the Initiative roll. A successful gambit destroys mundane weapons. In Earth Aura, Setod can add an artifact's rating to the gambit's difficulty to break the wielder's attunement and render the artifact unusable until repaired. Once per scene, unless reset by dealing 7+ levels of **decisive** damage to a nontrivial enemy with one attack.

Social Charms

Flawless Diamond Heart (7m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth): Lower the cost to reduce influence that opposes a Major or Defining Intimacy by two Willpower. Once per story unless reset by upholding that Intimacy.

Miscellaneous Charms

Quarry Revelation Technique (2m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Wood): Reroll 6s on Tracking and can contest magical concealment.

War Charms

Roaring Dragon Officer (3m; Reflexive; One turn; Balanced, Earth): Flurry a command with a non-attack action. In Earth Aura, lower penalty on rolls to -2, and negate Defense penalty.

Blessed Dragon Champion (5m, 1wp; Reflexive; One scene; Aura, Earth): When leading under a successfully enacted stratagem, double 9s on all Command rolls, gain +2 Defense against battle groups, and add non-Charm dice equal to (the Size of the largest battle group under her command) to all attacks she makes against enemy battle groups.

Cathak Urima

Urima is one of the rare Dynastic wives overshadowed by her husband — Cathak Cainan, who currently leads the house. The relative anonymity afforded by a famous spouse suits Urima just fine. She uses her husband's position to divert attention from her own achievements, preferring a

life of service to her house over personal glory. Honor is all well and good, but someone has to take a pragmatic hand in dealing with important matters.

The diversion is necessary: If she'd married anyone else, Urima would be the talk of the Imperial City. Though from a modest bloodline, she's a distinguished general and soldier, a veteran of the Wyld Hunt and the Cathak house legions. She's also found time to involve herself in Dynastic politics, especially Cathak internal politics, earmarking young adults for military or civilian roles. While Cainan has final say in the house's marital matches, she has long advised him on this diplomatic facet of house leadership, suggesting most of the matches he approves. Urima pays particular attention to intra-house pairings, shaping Cathak's character and strengthening its power.

Although Urima is mostly retired from the battlefield, younger generals seek her out for advice. Her lectures at the House of Bells are well-attended, and her occasional courses at the Spiral Academy on the subject of combat administration and resource management always fill up days after being announced.

Cainan and Urima have made an excellent team for centuries, bound by mutual respect rather than romantic love. Urima is glad of a partnership that requires nothing from her but a mildly uncomfortable night every few decades to conceive children. She's never felt any need for romantic or sexual relationships outside of conceiving offspring, preferring to spend time with her platonic friends and political allies.

Urima's many close friends within the family include general and distant cousin Cathak Risaria, whom she's known since their school days at the House of Bells; sister-in-law Cathak Garel, whom she once mentored and now sees as a respected equal; and numerous former students, now many of them officers in the Cathak legions or administrators of Cathak satrapies.

Urima is reaching the end of her life. Her once vibrant green hair is now tinted autumn orange, her bark-brown skin beginning to gray like old wood. She should be slowing down, mentoring the next generation, bequeathing her artifacts to children or grandchildren who'll carry them into battle, but can't quite bring herself to take those last few steps. Leaving her post in the house legions never sat well with her, and she saw to it that the general who replaced her would gladly step down if she ever wanted her old army back. Now she sees the shadows of civil war on the horizon, and has once more taken up her favorite armor and famous daiklaive. If her husband goes to war over the throne, his wife intends to play her part on the battlefield personally.

Backer: Geoff Kincaid

Aspect: Wood

Essence: 4; **Willpower** 8; **Join Battle:** 12 dice (+6 for 6m)

Personal Motes: 15; **Peripheral Motes:** 28

Health Track: -0/-1x4/-2x8/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 12 dice (+6 for 6m); Dynastic Education: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Feats of Strength: 8 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Read Intentions: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Senses: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 12 dice (+6 for 6m)

Appearance 3, Resolve 5 (+2 for 4m), Guile 6 (+3 for 6m)

Combat

Attack (Hesiesh's Crucible, red jade daiklaive): 12 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 16L/5)

Combat Movement: 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 2 (+1 for 2m); **Parry:** 6 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 13/10 (The Ablative Scales, green jade articulated plate)

Intimacies

Defining Tie: House Cathak (Unwavering Dedication)

Major Principle: Never make an enemy when you can make a friend.

Major Principle: If you want it done right, do it yourself.

Major Tie: The Realm (Soldierly Devotion)

Major Tie: Cathak Cainan (Respect)

Minor Principle: The public eye should be avoided.

Minor Tie: Cathak Garel (Respect)

Minor Tie: Cathak Risaria (Friendship)

Minor Tie: The Immaculate Order (Sincere Piety)

Offensive Charms

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or double up to four 10s on a **decisive** damage roll.

Demon-Crushing Wolf Bite (4m, 1i; Supplemental; Instant; Perilous, Withering-only, Wood): Add +3 Overwhelming. In Wood Aura, add +3 raw **withering** damage as well.

Dragon Soul Burst (8m; Simple; Instant; Decisive-only, Fire): After taking an aim action, make a **decisive** attack with base damage 6, not including Urima's Initiative, that ignores Hardness. An enemy that takes 3+ levels of damage is set afire, suffering 4 dice of lethal damage on each of his turns until the flames are extinguished. In Fire Aura, may add Initiative to damage roll, but reset as normal.

Defensive Charms

Aura of Grasping Branches (5m, 3i, 1wp; Simple; One scene; Perilous, Wood): Ignore up to 4 points of onslaught penalties to Parry per round, which may be divided between multiple attacks. In Wood Aura, doesn't suffer onslaught penalties from attacks she successfully parries.

Graceful Flowing Defense (2m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Perilous, Uniform, Water): Ignore one point of penalty to Parry (4 points in Water Aura).

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** attack. Counts as her action for the round unless she expends Fire Aura.

Root-and-Hand Merging (5m, 1wp; Reflexive; One scene; Balanced, Wood): Gain +1 Parry (non-Charm in Aura) and add +2 to difficulty of disarm gambits against her.

Social Charms

Rumor-Dredging Gaze (6m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Mute, Water): Read Intentions with double 9s to uncover the Intimacy target most wishes to keep hidden from her. Using it to blackmail target in the same scene doubles 9s on a bargain or threaten roll; success grants one Willpower.

Smoothing-Over-the-Past Technique (5m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Water): Roll Social Influence against one character to make him forget a past incident of misconduct by Urima for one scene. If this would make him act against a Major or Defining Intimacy, he may resist for one Willpower.

War Charms:

Blessed Dragon Champion (5m, 1wp; Reflexive; One scene; Aura, Earth): When leading under a successfully enacted stratagem, double 9s on all Command rolls, gain +2 Defense against battle groups, and add non-Charm dice equal to (the Size of the largest battle group under her command) to all attacks she makes against enemy battle groups.

Roaring Dragon Officer (3m; Reflexive; One turn; Balanced, Earth, Perilous): Flurry a command with a non-attack action. In Earth Aura, lower penalty on rolls to -2, and negate Defense penalty.

Evocations (Hesiesh's Crucible):

Mounting Bonfire Concentration(4m; Supplemental; Instant; Dual): If Urima didn't make any attacks from her last turn until the current turn, add +3 post-soak **withering** damage dice or +3 **decisive** damage dice.

Phoenix Crucible Conflagration (3m, 1ahl, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Perilous): Roll Join Battle and add to Initiative. Once per scene unless reset by landing a **decisive** attack from Initiative 20+.

*Evocations (The Ablative Scales):***Defense of the Heartwood:** (2m, 2i; Reflexive; Instant; Decisive-only, Perilous): After a damage roll, negate one level of **decisive** damage. Decreases her soak and Hardness by one each until end of scene.

Greenwood Resurgence (Permanent): When Urima's soak lowers a **withering** attack to minimum damage or her Hardness negates **decisive** damage, she gains 1 Initiative and reduces soak and Hardness penalties from Defense of the Heartwood by one.

Cynis Megara

Where her Cynis kin showed more concern with galas and gossip than with the mysteries of Creation, Megara's only passion in life was her books and puzzles. When she graduated from the Heptagram, she was honored for her brilliant intellect, but felt that her mind was muddled by the formal parties she was expected to partake in. Her efforts to devote herself to her studies were stymied by her mother's demands for sorcerous displays to curry favors within the house.

Finally, Megara found freedom from her mother's demands in an ancient Shogunate treatise, speaking of a lost arsenal-manse in the distant West. Offering promises of great riches to her house, she secured funding for an archaeological expedition that has increasingly become her life's work. Though she's sent home many artifacts and treasures to her mother since, the manse she seeks still eludes her.

Megara commands the blue-water warship *Tsunami of Roiling Waters* and its escort of four merchant ships — gifts from her mother. Misliking the company of sailors almost as much as that of her kin, she keeps on as few crew as possible, binding demons to fill such posts as she can.

Still sailing from island to island, Megara makes deals with gods and locals for maps and secrets. Her crew has been willing to put up with her eccentricities and sorcerer's ways in exchange for a steady salary, but their dissident whispers have been growing louder, and many long for home.

Backer: Sam Gulliver-Goodall

Aspect: Water

Essence: 2; **Willpower:** 7; **Join Battle:** 7 dice (+3 for 3m)

Personal: 13; **Peripheral:** 26

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x6/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Crafting: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Dynastic Education: 11 dice (+6 for 6m); Investigation: 10 dice (+6 for 6m); ; Medicine: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Mysticism: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Read Intentions: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Resist Poison/Disease: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Seafaring: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Sorcery: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Strategy: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 3, Resolve 3 (+1 for 2m), Guile 3 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Siaka's Bite, black jade daiklave): 9 dice (+4 for 4m, Damage 14L/5)

Attack (Unarmed): 9 dice (+4 for 4m, Damage 9B)

Attack (Grapple): 5 dice (+2 for 2m; 4 dice to control, +2 for 2m)

Combat Movement: 6 dice (+2 for 4m)

Evasion: 2 (+1 for 2m), **Parry:** 4 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 7/0 (Reinforced Buff Jacket)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: My intellectual pursuits are more important than small talk and similar trifling matters.

Major Principle: I must see my expedition through to the end.

Major Tie: Her mother (Resentment)

Minor Principle: The world is built upon lies.

Minor Tie: House Cynis (Wary Kinship)

Minor Tie: Demons (Familiarity)

Escort

Megara commands four blue-water merchant ships (**Exalted**, p. 246), each carrying a Size 2 unit of battle-ready soldiers (**Exalted**, p. 496) with average Drill.

Tsunami of Roiling Waters is a large yacht with a Size 1 battle group of blood apes (**Exalted**, p. 525) with average Drill, an assortment of other demons, and a Size 2 unit of elite troops (**Exalted**, p. 497) with elite Drill.

Social Charms

Finding the Water's Depths (3m; Simple; Instant; Water): Roll Read Intentions to determine what payment it would take to convince a character to do something with a bargain roll, and his strongest Intimacy related to that price.

Thoughtful Gift Technique (4m; Supplemental; Instant; Water): After using Finding the Water's Depths, double 9s on a Social Influence roll to make that bargain.

War Charms

Army-to-Mob Assault (3m, 2i; Reflexive; Instant; Perilous, Water, Withering-only): When a battle group attacks an enemy battle group under Megara's orders, convert 3 of the dice added by her command roll to successes. If this empties the enemy battle group's Magnitude track, add +1 to the difficulty of the rout check.

Roaring Dragon Officer (3m; Reflexive; One turn; Balanced, Earth): Flurry a command with a non-attack action. In Earth Aura, lower penalty on rolls to -2, and negate Defense penalty.

Miscellaneous Charms

Hurricane-Predicting Glance (5m; Simple; Instant; Air): Roll Seafaring to predict the weather. If Megara predicts hostile weather, she gains +1 non-Charms die on Seafaring rolls to avoid or navigate it.

Sorcery

Shaping Ritual: Once per story, Megara may research arcane texts and roll Sorcery, gaining (successes) sorcerous motes that last until the story ends.

Beckoning That Which Stirs the Sky (Control Spell) (Ritual, 2wp; 1 + (Threshold Successes) hours) Huge chitinous limbs emerge from the sky and weave the weather. Roll Sorcery, adjusting the difficulty depending on how drastic a change or storm is desired. If successful, weave the desired weather in an area out to (Essence + threshold successes) miles from the caster. Weather reverts to normal after (1 + threshold successes) hours.

Death of Obsidian Butterflies (15sm, 1wp; Decisive-only; Instant): Roll Sorcery as an undodgeable **decisive** attack against everyone in a line out to medium range (battle groups take -2 Defense). Roll (5 + threshold successes)L damage, or (10 + threshold successes)L damage against battle groups. This doesn't reset Initiative.

Demon of the First Circle (Ritual, 2wp; Instant): Summon a First Circle demon in a night-long ritual, rolling Sorcery against its Resolve to bind it.

Infallible Messenger (5sm, 2wp; Control): Conjure a cherub to deliver a message up to five minutes long to a single individual anywhere in Creation, reaching him within a day. Can convey social influence, but not social Charms. For a one-Willpower surcharge, Megara may extend her senses through the cherub and make Senses rolls through it.

Keel Cleaves the Clouds (25sm, 1wp; One day): Ship can travel over mist, fog, and vapor as if it were water, but can't gain Speed bonuses from oars or currents while doing so.

Ledaal Kebok Coren

Almost thirty years ago, for the third time on record, the House of Omens — ancestral home of the Ledaal Kebok family — was engulfed by an unnatural storm that blew in off the Inland Sea. For three days and nights it raged, until on the third morning, a child's cries broke the storm.

A quiet, intense child, Ledaal Kebok Coren didn't excel in primary school. She performed adequately, albeit her performance suffered from occasional bouts of volatile emotions or foul moods. Pressure to control herself grew; tutors enforced harsh discipline. In those days, the House of Omens was wracked by storms often.

Only when Coren Exalted at age twelve did the family elder, Ledaal Kebok Sulco, take her granddaughter into her confidence. Their line contained stranger blood than that of the Dragons. For three generations they'd borne the lineage of the storm demon Yan, the price that the household's founder Ledaal Kebok had paid for his assistance in her occult experiments.

Upon finishing primary school with increased marks in all categories, Coren requested permission to attend the House of Bells. While all acknowledged her mastery of swordplay and mind for tactics, she faced pressure from her mother and aunts to attend the Heptagram as they had. Though Coren got her way, the family remains divided over the issue, and some cousins have become hostile to her over her decision to join the legions.

Now in a post-Empress Realm, the untested young officer seeks opportunities to travel beyond the Blessed Isle. Coren feels beset on all sides. Former schoolmates encourage her to join them in the legions, the Flashing Tempest Council wishes her to devote herself to the Shadow Crusade. It's only loyalty to her house that keeps her from leaving to wander Creation on her own.

Coren is a slim young woman in her late twenties with pale, angular features and ash-blond hair bordering on gray. Her large eyes are an indeterminate shade of blue-gray that shifts to match the weather. She dresses soberly and conservatively in dark colors, the better to maintain emotional distance. Since her graduation from the House of Bells, she's taken to wearing an enameled breastplate in Ledaal blue and gray, embossed with the family mon.

Backer: Rand Brittain

Aspect: Air

Essence: 2; **Willpower:** 6; **Join Battle:** 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 13; **Peripheral:** 26

Health Levels: -0/-1x2/-2x6/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 8 dice (+4 dice for 4m); Read Intentions: 7 dice (+2 successes for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease (7 dice, +2 successes for 4m); Senses: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 6 dice (+1 success for 2m); , Stealth: 9 dice (+2 successes for +4 motes)

Appearance 3, Resolve 3 (+2 for 4m), Guile 3 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Devil Render, blue jade daiklave): 11 dice (+6 for 6m,, Damage 14L/5)

Attack (Unarmed): 9 dice (+4 for 4m, Damage 9B)

Attack (Grapple): 5 dice (+4 dice for 4m; 5 dice to control, +2 for 2m)

Combat Movement: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 4 (+2 for 4m), **Parry:** 7 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 6/0 (Breastplate)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: None must know my heritage

Minor Tie: House Ledaal (Begrudging Loyalty)

Minor Principle: My skill with a blade is unmatched.

Minor Principle: I have no time for the squabbings of my family

Major Principle: I prefer to drown my worries in practice.

Major Tie: Grandmother Sulco (Trust)

Major Tie: Yan (Wary curiosity)

Offensive Charms

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +2 raw **withering** damage or double up to two 10s on a **decisive** damage roll.

Oncoming Storm Stance (1a, 1i+; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Perilous): Upon aiming at close range, may spend up to 3 Initiative, gaining 2 motes for each point spent. These motes can only be spent to enhance a Melee attack that benefits from that aim action.

Unerring Lightning Razor (6m; Supplemental; Instant; Air, Uniform): Reroll two non-1 failures each on the attack and damage rolls of an attack that benefits from aiming. Add enemy's mobility penalty from metal armor to the number of dice she can reroll.

Defensive Charms

Dragon-Scale Shield (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Perilous, Uniform): Gain +1 non-Charm Parry against a ranged attack with a material projectile.

Flame-Borne Interception (4m; Reflexive; Until next turn; Balanced, Fire, Uniform): Gain +1 Parry. Increases by one for each attack blocked; resets back to +1 if he's hit or dodges.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +3 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Lineage Charms:

Coren possesses several Eclipse Charms reflecting her demonic heritage, per the Divine Lineage Merit (p. XX).

Storm's Caprice (Permanent; Eclipse; Essence 1): Coren unconsciously alters the weather out to (Essence) miles based on her mood. When she's happy, the sun shines; when she's angry or upset, storms break. This effect is usually subtle, but heightened emotion — such as from an inspire action — may, at the Storyteller's discretion, inflict penalties, create environmental hazards, or cause other complications. She adds (Essence) non-Charm dice on rolls to find

shelter from storms or resist environmental hazards created by them — even storms not created by her moods.

Wind-Dancer's Art (4m; Reflexive; Until next turn; Eclipse, Essence 2): Ignore penalties from weather and difficult terrain caused by weather conditions. In weather severe enough to impose penalties, add one die on movement actions; in weather severe enough to cause difficult terrain, add three dice instead.

Peleps Deled

Even as a youth, Peleps Deled was ferociously pious. Guided by his uncle Deham into a religious education rather than one of the Realm's primary schools, the young Dynast studied Immaculate doctrine, mathematics, history, philosophy, and the martial arts before furthering his studies at the Cloister of Wisdom. When classmates or cousins failed to demonstrate proper piety, blasphemed, or mocked Deled's monkish devotions, he dealt out lectures with his fists. Joining the Immaculate Order didn't temper this penchant for violence; Deled took pride in dueling monks who disagreed with his interpretation of the Texts or showed hypocrisy in their personal lives.

The Order hoped to channel Deled's wrath towards better ends by assigning him to the Pinnacle of the Eye of the Hunt (**The Realm**, p. 159), a cold and foreboding Northern manse. The Pinnacle's master, Mnemon Jorun, and his second-in-command, the former soldier Cathak Titus, helped redirect Deled's passion from the lapses of fellow monks to greater heresies committed in the Threshold.

Deled traveled the Northern satrapies on missions from the Pinnacle, rooting out heresy and illegal worship and prosecuting Wyld Hunts against Anathema. He gained considerable experience in ignoring pleas for mercy from the lips of illicit cultists, and in dispatching truculent gods, fae, and the undead with his direlance. His travels bred a somewhat cosmopolitan character — while no Threshold barbarism could equal the glories of the Realm's culture, he had a certain fondness for foreign arts and delicacies, and an almost morbid curiosity for witnessing their primitive customs.

When Mnemon Jorun retired, Cathak Titus was his natural successor. Deled had fought alongside Titus and respected his martial prowess, but the former soldier had never paid more than lip service to the Immaculate Philosophy, and Deled could not abide him ascending to Jorun's position. Reaching out to a number of prominent Peleps monks in the Order's Breath of Sextes Jylis, Deled secured enough pressure to convince Titus to step aside in his favor, though the Cathak remained at the Pinnacle as Deled's subordinate, a pragmatically secular counterbalance to Deled's fanaticism.

Deled ceaselessly drills the Pinnacle's shikari in martial arts and Immaculate doctrine, and he's redoubled his efforts since the Solars' return. He takes pride in leading Wyld Hunts personally, and takes particular pride in telling how he singlehandedly slew Bosk of Sijan before the newly Exalted Solar could plunder his past life's tomb for artifacts.

Deled rails at the Great Houses for struggling over the throne rather than sending him the resources the Wyld Hunt desperately needs. Deled wrings supplies out of the nearby fishing villages to make up the shortfall. Monks keep the locals in line with stories of vicious Anathema. Outcastes are conscripted into the Order, swearing fealty to Deled. Should the surrounding satrapies' cadet houses discover Deled's actions, they may move against him.

Aspect: Water

Essence: 4; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 9 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 15, **Peripheral:** 30

Health Levels: -0/-1x6/-2x6/-4/Incap.

Actions: Administration: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Command: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Feats of Strength: 8 dice (+4 for 4m; may attempt Strength 3 feats); Investigation: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Mysticism: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Read Intentions: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Senses: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Stealth: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Tracking: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 2, Resolve 6 (+3 for 6m), Guile 3 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Sting of Danaa'd, black jade direlance): 12 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 18L/5)

Attack (Unarmed): 15 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 11B)

Attack (Clinch): 11 dice (+6 for 6m; 10 dice to control, +6 for 6m)

Combat Movement: 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 6 (+3 for 6m), **Parry:** 6 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 9/4 (Calm the Seas' Rage, black jade breastplate)

Intimacies:

Defining Principle: The Immaculate Philosophy is the truth of this world.

Defining Tie: The Immaculate Order (Devotion)

Defining Tie: Anathema and heretics (Murderous Hatred)

Major Principle: My interpretations of the Immaculate Texts are always correct.

Major Tie: The Scarlet Dynasty (Disappointment)

Major Tie: Cathak Titus (Exasperation)

Minor Principle: The Dynasty's children are the future of the Realm

Minor Tie: House Peleps (Disdain)

Minor Tie: Threshold cultures (Voyeuristic Curiosity)

Offensive Charms

Falling Scythe Flash (5m; Supplemental; Instant; Dual): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or add +2 **decisive** damage dice against a lower-Initiative enemy.

Greatest Killer Attitude (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual): Convert four dice **decisive** damage or post-soak **withering** damage to successes. Each halo from White Reaper Form adds +1 die of post-soak **withering** damage. After attack, all halos fade away.

White Reaper Form (8m; Form; One Scene; Simple) Double 10s on **decisive** damage rolls. Incapacitating or crashing a nontrivial enemy grants one halo, maximum 3; each adds +1

Resolve. Deled treat battle group's Drill as one step lower for determining their Defense bonus against him, and can move though the battle group without spending Initiative. Can use reflexively upon beginning a turn within close range of 3+ nontrivial opponents or in space filled by a battle group.

Defensive Charms

Blade-Deflecting Palm (1m per die, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Perilous, Uniform, Water): Up to three 1s on an attack roll against Deled's Parry let him pay one mote to reroll a successful die, starting with 7s and moving up.

Eternal Tide Endurance (2m; Reflexive; Instant; Water, Withering-only): Each 1 on a **withering** attack roll adds +1 soak against it.

Golden Janissary Form (8m; Simple; One scene; Form; Scene): Gain +2 soak and +2 dice on rushes; gain 1 Initiative upon a successful rush. Against creatures of darkness, gain +1 Parry and additional +3 soak, and +1 base Initiative when resetting after **decisive** attacks against them. Can use reflexively upon landing a **decisive** attack against a creature of darkness.

Impenetrable White Shroud: (4m, 1wp; Reflexive; One scene): Gain (2 + [halos x 2]) soak. Battle groups don't add Size to damage against Deled.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m, Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): +4 natural soak. In Earth Aura, can use after being hit.

Light-on-Dark Shield (5m, 3i; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Withering-only): Reflexively clash with a **withering** attack. This can't deal more than 5 damage, and Deled doesn't gain Initiative from it. Against creatures of darkness, also deal one die of aggravated **decisive** damage, ignoring Hardness. This counts as Deled's attack for the round.

Revolving Crescent Defense (4m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Uniform) Cancels onslaught penalties to Parry, converting each point of penalty into +1 Parry.

Ripples-on-Water Defense (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Dual): Against a **withering** attack roll, up to four 1s subtract successes. Against a **decisive** attack roll, up to four 1s reroll successes, starting with 7s and going up.

Social Charms

Heart-Hardening Meditation (6m; Reflexive; One scene; Earth): +2 Resolve (non-Charm in Earth Aura) against inspire rolls and influence that leverages inspired emotions or emotion-based Ties.

Unquenchable Battle-Passion (5m; Reflexive; Instant; Fire): When targeted by influence that would make him stop fighting or hinder his ability to fight, automatically inspires himself with an emotion opposing that influence. If she spends Willpower to resist that influence, he gains 4 Initiative per Willpower spent.

Miscellaneous Charms

Quarry Revelation Technique (2m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Wood): Reroll 6s on Tracking and can contest magical concealment.

Peleps Najah

Where most magistrates were once criminals or malcontents, Peleps Najah was always known as a genuinely pious and idealistic itinerant monk. Even by the Empress' impenetrable standards, the choice of Najah seemed odd, evoking gossip among her fellow magistrates — and, later, concern for her welfare.

The Empress' pet monk, as it turned out, was entirely too idealistic for her own good. She was well-suited for wandering the Blessed Isle and the Threshold, slaying monsters, fairly adjudicating disputes, and protecting the interests of impoverished peasants and wealthy nobles alike. But she approached the thorny complexities of corruption in the ministries with the same ingenuous bluntness, unconcerned with subtlety or guile or the necessity of picking one's battles. For a time, the Thousand Scales' diffuse ire toward magisterial meddling focused primarily on her. A not-insubstantial number of high-ranking ministers were quietly plotting her death and pondering how to avoid official censure for it when, miraculously, the Scarlet Empress disappeared.

Knowing herself hemmed in by peril on all sides, much of it political and all of it contemptible, Najah took refuge in what she always considered the first and most important of her duties: her service to the Immaculate Order. The Breath of Mela opened its doors to her, embracing the purity of her passionate devotion to the Immaculate Philosophy, as well as her decades of experience hunting and slaying Anathema and their minions, both useful skills for the Wyld Hunt to possess. Najah's kindly heart and gentle care for the suffering and dispossessed made her a welcome addition to the fold — a sharp contrast to her harsh, uncompassionate kinsman Deled.

Her brilliance drew the spiritually needy to her like moths to a flame that transfigured rather than consumed. One such moth was her senior colleague Cathak Setod, retired legionary general, living hero of the Realm, whose bitter disillusionment had hollowed his soul and broken his heart. He's spoken, haltingly, to Najah of the horrors he's witnessed and the grief those horrors caused, and she knows that he still shelters an ember of faith beneath the duty he wears like armor. It needs only the proper encouragement to flare to life again. To provide that encouragement, she's coaxed him into the field with her, chasing tales of Anathema and their cults. Whether they find anything or not, she thinks it'll do Setod good to be out in the world again, where he can be the hero she knows that he truly is.

Backers: Joakim Aske and Lars-Henrik Evjan

Aspect: Fire

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 7; **Join Battle:** 11 dice (+6 for 6m)

Personal Essence: 14; **Peripheral Essence:** 25

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x4/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Dynastic Education: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Feats of Strength: 10 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Read Intentions: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Social Influence: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Stealth: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Tracking: 6 dice (+2 for 2m).

Appearance 3, Resolve 5 (+2 for 4m), Guile 3 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Unarmed): 12 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 11B)

Attack (Ashen Forgiveness and Purifying Conflagration, red jade short daiklaves): 12 dice (+6 for 6m; Damage 14L/4)

Attack (Grapple): 10 dice (+4 for 4m; 9 dice to control, +4 for 4m)

Combat Movement: 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 5 (+2 for 4m); **Parry:** 6 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 12/7 (Ardent Mantle, red jade reinforced buff jacket)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: Defend the weak from the terrors of the world with the strength of my faith and my blade.

Defining Principle: I must devote myself entirely to the Immaculate Philosophy

Major Principle: Slay the Anathema wherever they appear.

Major Principle: Bring the unrighteous to justice, regardless of their station.

Major Tie: The Immaculate Order (Belonging)

Major Tie: Fellow magistrates (Exasperated Admiration)

Major Tie: Ministerial and prefectural officials (Mistrust)

Major Tie: Cathak Setod (Filial Affection)

Minor Tie: The Scarlet Empress (Concern)

Charms

Offensive Charms

Fiery Blade Attack (5m, 4i; Simple; Instant; Decisive-only, Fire): Make a **decisive** attack. If it deals damage, it ignites the victim in a bonfire (Damage 4L/round, Difficulty 5) that burns as long as he remains in it. Leaving the bonfire requires a successful disengage, even if no enemies are in close range (difficulty 2 if no characters oppose it).

Fire Dragon Form (7m; Simple; One scene; Fire, Form): Lower-Initiative enemies suffer onslaught penalties from Najah's attack before her attack roll. Enemies double the Initiative lost for missing a **decisive** attack if she parries. Can use reflexively upon winning Join Battle.

Perfect Blazing Blow (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Decisive-only, Fire): Double up to three 9s on a **decisive** attack against a lower-Initiative enemy. Against crashed enemies, can double 8s as well. In Fire Aura, each doubled success also adds +1 damage die.

Searing Edge Attack (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Fire, Withering-only): As long as **withering** damage roll receives at least one success, target loses 3 additional Initiative, which Najah doesn't gain.

Defensive Charms

Flame-Flicker Stance (3m; Reflexive; Instant; Fire, Perilous): Each 1 on an attack roll adds +1 Parry. If she successfully blocks a lower-Initiative enemy's attack, she doesn't suffer onslaught penalties from it. In Fire Aura, this Charm can be used after the attack roll.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): +4 soak. In Earth Aura, can use after being hit.

Overwhelming Fire Majesty Stance (6m, 3i; Reflexive; Until next turn; Fire, Perilous): Attacks against Najah take a -3 penalty. Enemies that hit from close range suffer one die of Hardness-ignoring lethal damage. Enemies may pay one Willpower to become immune to the penalty for the scene. In Fire Aura, waive Initiative cost and Perilous keyword.

Mobility Charms

Dancing Ember Stride (4m, 2i; Simple; Instant; Fire, Perilous): Rush from short range with double 9s (medium range if she pays one Willpower and expends Fire Aura). If successful, instantly move into close range of target.

Inescapable Blazing Advance (5m, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Fire): Add 3 non-Charm dice on a rush. Up to three 1s on opposing character's roll cause him to lose 1 Initiative each, which Najah gains. If this crashes him, he catches fire, suffering (Initiative lost) dice of Hardness-ignoring lethal damage on each of his turns until extinguished.

Miscellaneous Charms

Quarry Revelation Technique (2m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Wood): Reroll 6s on Tracking and can contest magical concealment.

Ragara

A meteor shower heralded Ragara's first breath, an omen promising greatness. Ruthlessly brilliant and of limitless ambition even as a child, he soon came to enjoy the Empress' favor, to his rivals' detriment.

He was not yet thirty when his investigation into House Jerah's corruption brought it down and raised his household up in its place. Further deeds cemented his place among the mightiest Great House magnates. Within two centuries, he'd established his mastery of Realm finance and subdued his political rivals, making himself a force to be feared upon the Blessed Isle and beyond.

For two centuries, Ragara held the Empress' personal favor. But that wasn't enough. He wanted the throne, and for all her affection, the Empress refused to name him as her heir. So he sought to force her hand with a variety of schemes, from elaborate political machinations to unearthing forbidden relics from the First Age. Forestalled in all nonviolent approaches, he ultimately escalated to a brief but terrifying assassination spree against rival siblings and ministers, with the aim that no other suitable heir would remain.

The Empress didn't kill him outright, whether out of love or for fear that he'd tear down the Realm's economy from beyond the grave. Instead she tied his life to that of his sister Sesus, promising death if he further pursued his vendetta. Thwarted, his aspirations turned inward and festered. For a time, he sought power and immortality through occult secrets, hoping to outlive or overcome his mother. But as the centuries passed, even his vaunted ambition gave way to lethargy and defeat.

Few would say that Ragara has fallen from grace — and fewer still would dare breathe such offenses in his presence — but he needs no one to tell him what he already knows. His stature has diminished over the centuries, rival Great Houses seizing the power that once was his. The dynamic Ragara of yesteryear has grown old, his life stretched thin beyond its natural span.

Ceding control over his house and the Imperial Bank to his adopted son Banoba, Ragara retired decades ago to a life of piety in the holy Threshold city of Pneuma. There he donated vast sums to the Immaculate Order, venerated the Dragons, tutored young scions, and entertained surviving old friends and Hearthmates in his luxurious palace-manse, the Diamond Phoenix Retreat. With the strength of will he once used to achieve temporal power, he struggled to come to terms with his own mortality and with his past crimes.

But he's not dead yet. With the Empress gone, everything has changed. Now Ragara is a man at war with himself. Old ambitions have surfaced, bare and raw. But he's not the same man he once was. Can he set aside the rectitude that he's spent his final days cultivating, for no better cause than to seize the throne?

Aspect: Earth

Essence: 5; **Willpower:** 10; **Join Battle:** 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 16; **Peripheral:** 32

Health Levels: -0/-1x7/-2x12/-4/Incap.

Actions: Administration: 14 dice (+6 for 6m) Command: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Crafting: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Disguise: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Dynastic Education: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Investigation: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Mysticism: 11 dice (+6 for 6m); Resist Disease/Poison: 12 dice (+6 for 3m); Senses: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 12 dice (+6 for 6m); Stealth: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Tracking: 8 (+4 for 4m); Wilderness Survival 8 (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 2, Resolve 6 (+3 for 6m), Guile 5 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Blood Zenith, black jade reaper daiklave): 16 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 12/4L)

Attack (Unarmed): 10 dice (+4 for 4m, Damage 9B)

Attack (Grapple): 6 dice (+2 for 4m; 6 dice to control, +2 for 4m)

Combat Movement: 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 3 (+1 for 2m); **Parry:** 7 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 16/10 (Eon Bastion, white jade articulated plate)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: I'm still bitter over being denied my birthright to the Scarlet Throne.

Major Principle: I'm not sure what sort of man I am anymore.

Major Principle: I can find peace and absolution in the Immaculate Philosophy's precepts.

Major Principle: Wealth and power are everything.

Major Tie: The Scarlet Empress (Resentment)

Major Tie: House Ragara (Pride)

Minor Tie: Ragara Banoba (Confidence)

Minor Tie: Anathema and their longevity (Fascinated Jealousy)

Minor Tie: The Blessed Isle (Homesickness)

Minor Tie: His Hearthmates (Affection)

Minor Tie: The Immaculate Order (Solidarity)

Minor Tie: Mnemon (Guilt-ridden Fear)

Escort

Ragara is often attended by several of his Exalted grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It's not uncommon for one or more of his Hearthmates to be visiting him at any given time, each an experienced Dragon-Blooded of comparable power.

Offensive Charms

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +5 raw **withering** damage or double up to five 10s on a **decisive** damage roll.

Spilling the Mountain's Blood (8m, 3a, 1wp, expend Earth or Fire Aura; Simple; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Earth/Fire): Make a **decisive** attack, adding up to 5 attack roll extra successes as dice of damage. If it deals damage, on victim's next turn, she suffers dice of Hardness-ignoring lethal damage equal to successes on damage roll. If this inflicts 3+ levels of damage or victim is incapacitated before her next turn, ground beneath her melts into lave (Damage 6L/round, Difficulty 5) for rest of scene. If Ragara is incapacitated, eruption can be averted with a difficulty 5 (Intelligence + [lower of Medicine or Occult]) roll.

Defensive Charms

Earth Bears Witness (5m, 3i; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Earth, Perilous): Reduce decisive damage by 3, or 5 if there's a large earthen structure within short range.

Flame-Borne Interception (4m; Reflexive; Until next turn; Balanced, Fire, Uniform): Gain +1 Parry. Increases by one for each attack blocked; resets back to +1 if he's hit or dodges.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): +5 soak. In Earth Aura, can use after being hit.

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** attack. Counts as his action for the round unless she expends Fire Aura.

Rumbling Earth Rebuke (4m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Decisive-only, Earth): After successfully blocking or clashing an attack from close range, make a reflexive disarm gambit.

Mobility Charms

Earth-Moving Kata (10m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Earth): Move aside any natural earthen obstacle that blocks his path, or create a stair or bridge up to three range bands long out of earthen substances.

One-With-Earth Embodiment (10m, 1wp; Simple; One round; Aura, Earth): Can move through earthen substances. If he doesn't emerge from at the end at the end of the move action, must use this Charm again on his next turn, waiving its Willpower cost, or be ejected from it, falling prone and taking a level of bashing damage. He has full cover while doing so unless enemies can create a opening to attack from.

Social Charms

Finding the Water's Depths (3m; Simple; Instant; Water): Roll Read Intentions to determine what payment it would take to convince a character to do something with a bargain roll, and his strongest Intimacy related to that price.

Smoothing-Over-the-Past Technique (5m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Water): Roll Social Influence against one character to make her forget a past incident of misconduct by Ragara for one scene. If this would make her act against a Major or Defining Intimacy, she may resist for one Willpower.

Thoughtful Gift Technique (4m; Supplemental; Instant; Water): After using Finding the Water's Depths, double 9s on a Social Influence roll to make that bargain.

Miscellaneous Charms

Following the River's Course (5m; Reflexive; Instant; Mute, Water): Roll Administration with double 9s to read the intentions of a character transacting in currency or physical goods to discern how that character obtained them, or evaluate the credit quality and intent to repay of a character transacting on credit.

Evocations

Heart-Seeking Rapacity (2m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant): Ragara's daiklave is drawn to blood and power. Reflexively aim at an enemy with a wound penalty of -2 or greater, Essence 5+, or a burning or bonfire anima. If an enemy meets two or more conditions, waive the Willpower cost.

Life-Sipping Blade (2i; Supplemental; Instant; Decisive-only): For each 10 on a **decisive** damage roll, Ragara gains one mote, and his target loses one if they have a mote pool. May forgo gaining five motes to heal one level of non-aggravated damage.

Reap the Soul (—; Reflexive; Instant; Decisive-only): Upon incapacitating and killing an Exalt or other supernatural creature, roll (that character's Essence) and heal that many levels of non-aggravated damage, as well as any crippling effects Ragara suffers. Killing an Exalt this way adds one-tenth of their remaining natural lifespan to Ragara's own; other supernatural creatures grant (their Essence) years.

Righteous River

Ledaal Sivarin Indri was always meant for a monk's robes. She joined the Immaculate Order immediately upon graduating from the Cloister of Wisdom. Though her full monastic name is Righteous River Overflows its Banks, most know her as River. Once she took her vows, she rarely returned home to her family's home in Arjuf. Instead, she used her new status to travel the world. River has served in temples throughout the Realm and outside of its reach, studied Immaculate Texts in ancient monasteries, and brought the Dragons' wisdom to far-off villages.

She also answered the Order's call on several Wyld Hunts, including the fateful hunt where her Hearth took shape. She misses Mathar's laughter and Chalima's teasing competition; even their

age is subject to rivalry, as both women approach a century. Kingfisher Swift's letters are light on sentiment but lift River's spirits all the same. River is closest to Sesus Eshuvar, whose sorcery gave River and her patrician wife Jihe the child they so dearly wanted.

River fell in love with Jihe while helping to rebuild a flood-damaged temple in Incas Prefecture. Her elders balked at the match, which offered neither political nor financial gains. Her superiors in the Immaculate Order sought to keep her on the road to ward off the temptation of a physical relationship. River did what neither her house nor her fellow monks expected: She chose Jihe. She left the Order, and accepted her reduced status within House Ledaal. The partnership makes her happy, and she and Jihe dote on their son Adan.

Though her reputation as a competent fighter prevent other Dynasts from mocking her for choosing love over duty, River struggles to have a say in Ledaal affairs. Today she operates out of Arjuf, working behind the scenes for the house's Shadow Crusade. River helps author proposals to the Flashing Tempest Council, but keeps her name off of them. Though it chafes, she lets those in better standing take credit.

Despite leaving the Order, River's faith remains strong. She has amassed a respectable collection of copies of the Immaculate Texts, which she's happy to let monks passing through Arjuf peruse.

River is a woman of few words and stern delivery. She's tall and athletic, and wears her dark hair in a long braid. In battle, she displays the Ledaal mon in silver. When unarmored, River indulges in a love of richer fabrics.

Aspect: Water

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal Motes: 14; **Peripheral Motes:** 25

Health Levels: -0/-1x3/-2x3/-4/-Incap.

Actions: Command: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Dynastic Education: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Feats of Strength: 7 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Investigation: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Medicine: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Read Intentions: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Senses: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 2, Resolve 5 (+2 for 4m), Guile 2 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Heartslicer, black jade razor claws): 12 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 13L/3)

Attack (Grapple): 9 dice (+4 for 4m; 7 dice to control, +4 for 4m)

Combat Movement: 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 3 (+1 for 2m), **Parry:** 5 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 10/7 (Obsidian Reef, black jade reinforced buff jacket)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: The Immaculate Dragons offer us wisdom, if only we're willing to listen.

Defining Tie: Jihe and Adan (Love)

Major Tie: House Ledaal (Thankless Loyalty)

Major Tie: Sesus Eshuvar (Fondness)

Major Tie: Left Hand Chalima (Love of Debate)

Major Tie: Kingfisher Swift (Camaraderie)

Major Tie: Yushoto Mathar (Trust)

Minor Principle: If I start something, I must see it through to its conclusion.

Minor Principle: I find solace in the Immaculate Philosophy

Minor Tie: The Immaculate Order (Frustration)

Offensive Charms

Drowning-in-Blood Technique (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Decisive-only, Water): Double 10s on damage roll. In Water Aura, add (enemy's wound penalty/2, rounded up) dice of damage. If she deals 3+ levels of damage, enemy's wound penalty increases by one until the scene ends or he crashes River.

Essence-Dousing Wave Attack (5m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Decisive-only, Water): If **decisive** attack against crashed enemy deals at least (his Essence) damage, end one of his ongoing combat Ability Charms or physical Attribute Charms. Can expend Water Aura to affect non-crashed enemies.

Flow Reversal Strike (7m, 1wp; Simple; Instant, Decisive-only, Water): Make a **decisive** attack. On hit, enemy must roll (Stamina + Resistance) opposing River's attack roll extra successes. If he fails, each success he failed by adds one die of **decisive** damage, and after the attack, he loses (wound penalty) Initiative, which is added to River's base Initiative.

Water Dragon Form (10m; Simple; One scene; Form, Water): Add dice on attacks equal to target's wound penalty. Gain +3 soak. Can use reflexively upon dealing enough **decisive** damage to a nontrivial enemy to increase his wound penalty.

Defensive Charms

Blade-Deflecting Palm (1m per die, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Perilous, Uniform, Water): Up to three 1s on an attack roll against River's Parry let her pay one mote to reroll a successful die, starting with 7s and moving up.

Bottomless Depths Defense (5m, 1ahl [+1wp, expend Water Aura]; Reflexive; Instant; Decisive-only, Perilous, Water): Roll 6 dice, reducing damage of **decisive** attack by one per success, minimum one. If she pays one Willpower and expends Water Aura, negate all damage. Once per day unless reset by being hit with three **decisive** attacks from nontrivial foes without taking damage.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +3 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Eternal Tide Endurance (2m; Reflexive; Instant; Water, Withering-only): Each 1 on a **withering** attack roll adds +1 soak against it.

Ripples-on-Water Defense (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Dual): Against a **withering** attack roll, up to three 1s subtract successes. Against a **decisive** attack roll, up to three 1s reroll successes, starting with 7s and going up.

Social Charms

Heart-Maze Navigation (1m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Water): Against an Investigation roll to profile a character, relevant Intimacies penalize his Guile as though it were his Resolve. Can expend Water Aura to complete a profile character action instantly.

Waves-Swallow-Mountains Persistence (5m; Reflexive; Instant; Water): Up to two 1s on an influence roll against River's Resolve subtract successes. Each subsequent use in the scene increases the maximum number of dice affected by one and affects the next-highest dice number (e.g. up to three 1s and 2s on the second use, and up to four 1s, 2, and 3s on the third). Can only be used against one character per scene.

Sesus Eshuvar

Wealth and charm have gotten Sesus Eshuvar just about everything he's ever wanted. Once, he took it simply as his due: He was a Prince of the Earth, a scion of the Scarlet Dynasty, and the world *ought* to bend to his whims. But just a few months out of the Heptagram, Eshuvar accompanied a Wyld Hunt in the River Lands. The mission changed him; he returned to the Realm determined to be a better person. Yet his family's privilege, combined with his own arrogance and vanity, make changing hard. Letting go of his own comforts and the access he enjoys with his station has severely slowed the process.

Eshuvar served as a weather-sorcerer in the Imperial Navy for twenty years. While a capable seaman, his disdain for authority eventually cost him his commission, though hefty bribes kept Eshuvar's final confrontation with a superior out of naval ledgers. He took a position in the Thousand Scales and married Mnemon Rela, an Imperial Assessor. While the union satisfied both houses politically and has produced two legitimate children, the match is an unhappy one. Eshuvar resents his un-Exalted wife, and pursues affairs with men and women as much to spite her as to make himself happy. Rela is clever and ambitious, adept at navigating Dynastic politics like a good Mnemon ought to be. Were she anyone other than his wife, Eshuvar might even like her.

Although he's used his sorcerous talents on behalf of several prominent Dynasts, Eshuvar frequently downplays his Heptagram training. Instead, he presents himself as a businessman, throwing his backing — and his wealth — behind other Dragon-Blooded's risky ventures if he deems them worthy. The gambit pays off; Eshuvar's peers frequently request his charming presence in their salons, and the professional contacts he's made have proven quite profitable. Eshuvar frequently attends parties in the Imperial City, the more luxurious, the better. When he's not pursuing a new conquest, he can often be found surrounded by young Dynasts eagerly pitch their adventuring plans, in the hopes he'll help fund their expeditions.

Despite his large social circle, Eshuvar only truly feels at home in his Hearthmates' presences. Most of all, he misses Yushoto Mathar. The Lookshyan ranger makes Eshuvar's heart race.

Eshuvar is tall, slim, and handsome. One look at his fine clothing and jewelry confirms his wealth.

Aspect: Air

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 7; **Join Battle:** 9 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal Motes: 14; **Peripheral Motes:** 35

Health Levels: -0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/Incap.

Actions: Administration: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Dynastic Education: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Mysticism: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Read Intentions: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Seafaring: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Social Influence: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Sorcery: 11 dice (+6 for 6m); Stealth: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Strategy: 5 dice (+2 for 2m).

Appearance 4, Resolve 2 (+1 for 2m), Guile 4 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Windshear, blue jade infinite chakram): 9 dice at close range (+4 for 4m, Damage 11L/3)

Combat Movement: 6 dice (+2 for 2m)

Evasion: 4 (+2 for 4m), **Parry:** 1

Soak/Hardness: 2/0

Intimacies

Defining Principle: I want to be better than I am.

Major Tie: House Sesus (Guilt-Ridden Loyalty)

Major: Righteous River (Friendship)

Major Tie: Yushoto Mathar (Romantic Affection)

Major Tie: Kingfisher Swift (Respect)

Major Tie: Left Hand Chalima (Bemused Affection)

Minor Principle: I will carry out my duties to my house, but I'll do it on my own terms.

Minor Tie: Mnemon Rela (Resentment)

Minor Tie: His children (Distant Interest)

Minor Tie: House Mnemon (Distrust)

Offensive Charms

Persistent Hornet Attack (5m, 1wp, expend Air Aura; Simple; One scene; Air, Aura, Withering-only): Make a **withering** attack, transferring all Initiative from it to Eshuvar's chakram, which gains a place in Initiative order and can begin acting the next round. It can aim, take reflexive move actions, and make attacks against enemies within close range using Eshuvar's dice pools. It loses three Initiative at the end of each round it doesn't aim or land an attack, and this Charm ends after it makes a **decisive** attack. It has Defense 4 and soak 4, can be targeted by **withering** attacks, and can be knocked out of the air with a disarm gambit, ending this Charm.

Winter Fang Attack (4m; Supplemental; Instant; Air, Balanced, Decisive-only): Every 10 on a **decisive** damage roll or gambit Initiative roll causes target to lose one Initiative, maximum three. Eshuvar doesn't gain it.

Defensive Charms

Elusive Crosswind Defense (4m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Aura, Perilous, Uniform): +1 non-Charm Evasion against an attack from medium range, or +2 non-Charm Evasion against an attack from long or extreme range.

Flickering Candle Meditation (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Fire, Perilous, Uniform) (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Up to three 1s on attack roll negate one point of penalty to Evasion each.

Nimble Zephyr Defense (1m; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Uniform): Successfully dodging an attack causes attack to lose 1 Initiative, which Eshuvar doesn't gain unless he's in Air Aura. If the attack rolls any 1s, Eshuvar can dodge even if its successes equal his Evasion.

Safety Among Enemies (5m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Aura, Decisive-only, Perilous): After dodging a **decisive** attack, redirect it against another character within range, rerolling the attack roll. Eshuvar's Initiative must exceed (attacker's Initiative + new target's Initiative).

Sorcery

Shaping Ritual: Once per scene, when Eshuvar stunts the first Shape Sorcery roll of a spell with invocations or mudras, he gains (stunt rating + 2) sorcerous motes towards completing the spell.

Dragon-Sorcerer Puissance: Gain one sorcerous mote per round while shaping an element-based spell; three per round in the appropriate Elemental Aura.

Beckoning That Which Stirs the Sky (Ritual, 2wp; [1 + threshold successes] hours; Control): Roll Sorcery to alter the weather, with difficulty based on degree of change and climate. Altered weather extends out to (5 + threshold successes) miles. Eshuvar can expend half his extra successes, rounded up, to make the weather follow him as he moves.

Cirrus Skiff (15sm, 1wp; Until ended): Summon a flying cloud capable of traveling at 18 miles per hour, using Sorcery for movement rolls. The spell ends if Eshuvar spends more than a scene off the cloud.

Death of Obsidian Butterflies (15sm, 1wp; Decisive-only; Instant): Roll Sorcery as an undodgeable **decisive** attack against all characters in a line out to medium range (battle groups take -2 Defense). Roll (3 + extra successes)L damage, or (8 + extra successes)L against battle groups. This doesn't reset Eshuvar's Initiative.

Demon of the First Circle (Ritual, 2wp; Instant) Summon a First Circle Demon in a night-long ritual, rolling Sorcery against its Resolve to bind it.

Keel Cleaves the Clouds (25sm, 1wp; One day): Ship can travel over mist, fog, and vapor as if it were water, but can't gain Speed bonuses from oars or currents while doing so.

Tepet Arada

A hellraiser and a hooligan in his youth, Tepet Arada's early education in the Palace of the Tamed Storm alloyed his fierce temper with enough cunning to ensure he could get away with his indiscretions, while the House of Bells forged him into a shrewd tactician and formidable

warrior. Though never one for house politics or courtly etiquette, his defeat of the Anathema Jochim saw him rise to almost unassailable prestige within the house, earning the sobriquet of “the Wind Dancer.”

Soon, Arada was a general in the Tepet legions — a position that would see him leading them in the ill-fated campaign against the Bull of the North. Despite Arada’s personal accomplishments, including slaying the Bull’s ally Fear-Eater, his forces were bloodily routed, and his fame and glory turned to disgrace.

Arada led his surviving troops on a long, costly retreat. Once they were safe, he resigned his commission, becoming a hermit living in embittered seclusion. He hated himself for his own failure, hated the Scarlet Empress for her sabotage of the Tepet legions, and hated the other Great Houses for not doing anything to help his own.

Despairing for the state of the Realm, Arada decided to while away his days in contemplation, drinking wine and composing poetry about the Realm’s lost glory. Even when the Scarlet Dynasty slapped House Tepet in the face by appointing the incompetent Tepet Fokuf regent to the throne, Arada refused to let it bait him out of his hermitage.

Between his humiliating defeat and his subsequent retreat from public life, Tepet Arada’s fame has turned to infamy. He cares little — the Realm is a pack of squabbling children, the Great Houses little more than vultures, cowards, and sybarites in varying measure. Perhaps the only thing that might rouse him from seclusion is House Tepet’s survival. Arada has no delusions of saving his house himself, but he believes in the younger generation — in the family’s mercantile branches, skilled warriors like Tepet Ejava, and a few others who’ve shown promise.

Aspect: Air

Essence: 4; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 11 dice (+6 for 6m)

Personal: 15; **Peripheral:** 39

Health Levels: -0/-1x7/-2x7/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 12dice (+6 for 6m); Dynastic Education: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Feats of Strength: 8 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Read Intentions: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Resist Poison/Illness: 11 dice (+6 for 6m); Senses: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 12 dice (+6 for 6m); Tracking: 6 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 2, Resolve 5 (+2 for 4m), Guile 2 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Relentless Wind, jade daiklave): 13 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 15L/4)

Attack (Composite bow): 12 dice at short range (+6 for 6m, Damage 9L)

Combat Movement: 9 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 5 (+2 for 4m), **Parry:** 6 (+2 successes for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 12/7 (Icy Rampart, jade lamellar armor)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: The Realm is beyond salvation.

Defining Tie: House Tepet (Mournful Regret)

Major Principle: Honor is more important than survival.

Major Principle: My failure has dishonored me and my family.

Major Principle: House Tepet's future lies in the hands of the young.

Major Tie: Himself (Self-loathing)

Major Tie: The Scarlet Dynasty (Contempt)

Minor Principle: The Realm is worth defending.

Minor Tie: The Thousand Scales (Disgust)

Minor Tie: Tepet Fokuf (Contempt)

Merits

Sobriquet: Once per story, when Arada makes an influence roll that aligns with his image as a legendary warrior and general, the level of the stunt she's awarded is increased by one.

Offensive Charms

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or double up to four 10s on a **decisive** damage roll.

Fulminating Thunderclap Surge (6m, 1a; Simple; Instant; Air, Decisive-only): Make an unblockable **decisive** attack against an enemy within short range, halving Hardness from metal armor (rounded down). In Air Aura, can attack out to medium range without aiming, and add dice from aiming to damage roll as well as attack roll.

Mela's Flashing Tongue (10m, 1wp; Simple; Instant, Air): Arada makes a number of **withering** attacks against a single opponent equal to his onslaught penalty at the time he activates this Charm. Each **withering** damage roll only grants Initiative equal to half the damage inflicted, rounded down. In Air Aura, he may use this Charm's final attack for a **decisive** attack instead. This attack resets him to base Initiative even if it misses.

Oncoming Storm Stance (1a, 1i+; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Perilous): Upon aiming at close range (or further, if enhancing Fulminating Thunderclap Surge), may spend up to 3 Initiative, gaining 2 motes for each point spent. These motes can only be spent to enhance a Melee attack that benefits from that aim action.

Steel Tempest Strike (4m, 1wp, expend Air Aura; Simple; Instant; Air, Aura, Decisive-only): Move one range band towards an enemy at short range, ignoring difficult terrain and skimming over chasms or pits, and make a **decisive** attack. This counts as a movement action, but not his attack for the round. Once per scene, unless reset by gaining 15+ Initiative on one tick.

Thousandfold Tempest Strike (8m, 1wp, expend Air Aura; Simple; Instant; Air, Aura, Decisive-only): To use, must have Initiative 12+ and take an aim action enhanced with Oncoming Storm Stance. Make a single **decisive** attack against all characters in close range (can use Fulminating Thunderclap Surge reflexively to extend to short range). Each hit character suffers base damage dice equal to the number of motes from Oncoming Storm Stance spent on this attack, and Arada divides his Initiative evenly among them, rounding up to determine total

damage. Ignores Hardness from metal armor. Once per scene, unless reset by crashing an enemy with Mela's Flashing Tongue.

Unerring Lightning Razor (6m; Supplemental; Instant; Air, Uniform): Reroll four non-1 failures each on the attack and damage rolls of an attack that benefits from aiming. Add enemy's mobility penalty from metal armor to the number of dice he can reroll. In Air Aura, may pay one Willpower to reflexively aim at enemy before attacking if she's wearing metal armor.

Defensive Charms

Body-Like-Clouds Meditation (8m; Simple; Aura; Air, Aura, Withering-only): **Withering** damage rolls against Arada take a -4 penalty. If a **withering** attack hits but deals no damage, Arada steals 2 Initiative from his attacker.

Dragon-Scale Shield (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Perilous, Uniform): Gain +1 non-Charm Parry against a ranged attack with a material projectile.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m, Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): +5 soak. In Earth Aura, can use after attack roll.

Flame-Borne Interception (4m; Reflexive; Until next turn; Balanced, Fire, Uniform): Gain +1 Parry. Increases by one for each attack blocked; resets back to +1 if he's hit or dodges.

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** attack. Counts as his action for the round unless he expends Fire Aura.

Social Charms

Ascendant Ideal Inspiration (6m, 1wp; Simple; Indefinite; Air): Arada dedicates himself to a Defining Principle. Influence to weaken it must be rolled twice, using the lower result. Double 9s on influence rolls to instill the Principle in others or persuade them to act on it.

Dragon's Voice Mastery (5m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Air): Add 2 non-Charm successes on a Social Influence roll that aligns with one of Arada's Major or Defining Principles and increase the cost to resist by one Willpower. Once per day, unless reset by upholding a Major or Defining Intimacy.

Wind-Carried Words Technique (3m [+1wp]; Simple; Instant; Air): Send a message of up to a few sentences to a character within 40 miles. For a one-Willpower surcharge, extend range to 400 miles.

War Charms

Enfolded in the Dragon's Wings (3m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Earth, Perilous, Uniform): Make a Command roll when a battle group in short range is attacked; every two successes grant +1 Defense and soak. Once per scene, unless reset with a successful rally.

Indomitable Flame of Valor (1m [+1wp]; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Fire): Rally with double 9s; can pay one Willpower to grant elite Drill troops perfect morale for one round.

Roaring Dragon Officer (3m; Reflexive; One turn; Balanced, Earth): Flurry a command with a non-attack action. In Earth Aura, lower penalty on rolls to -2, and negate Defense penalty.

Storm-Calling Strategos (10m, 1wp [5i]; Simple; Until stratagem is completed; Air): Roll Strategy to enact a threshold 3 stratagem. If successful, harsh weather imposes a -3 penalty on physical

actions by enemy battle groups, and may impose a -1 penalty on actions of non-battle-group enemies. At the beginning of each round, if at Initiative 12+, can spend 5 Initiative to create a one-time environmental hazard against a battle group with Damage 8L, Difficulty 4. Once per story, unless reset by accumulating +4 situational bonus on Strategy roll.

V'Neef

Not long ago, V'neef looked upon the wilderness of her Dynastic ambitions and saw any number of mountains that she might climb, given time. But now the empty throne looms over her like the Imperial Mountain, and she sees little choice but to climb it or die.

Talented and gregarious, the young V'neef blossomed in the hothouse environment of the Dynasty's imperial household. Service as the Empress' own cupbearer and lessons at the Spiral Academy taught her the subtleties of intrigue, while unauthorized ventures into the Blessed Isle's wilderness taught her that any obstacle — whether the perils of untamed nature or her exasperated tutors' rules — could be overcome through tenacity, daring, and charm.

Measuring her worth against her elder siblings, V'neef readied herself to challenge them as the master of her own Great House. She served stints as a satrapial advisor, a minister, and even a senator in the Deliberative, honing her skills and developing connections and fiscal resources. Marrying into prestigious House Tepet secured support from that house's unparalleled private military. And when House Iselsi's fall opened a gap among the Great Houses, she was ready to press her claim before her mother's judgmental eye.

All things seemed possible for a time — growing the wealth of a Ragara, the navy of a Peleps, the masterful legions of a Tepet. She would bind her mismatched collection of outcastes and patricians into a unified house that would match the greatest the Realm had ever mustered, and all would acknowledge her gifts.

Then the Empress vanished.

She should have had decades, even a century or two, to fortify her positions, strengthen her House and stabilize her alliances. Her mother's disappearance took with it the shield on which she had counted to keep her protected from her elder siblings' ruthless malice during the critical early years. She knows Mnemon and Ragara, amongst others, will eventually turn their attention to her, and that many from Peleps already circle, ever-desirous to reacquire the Merchant Fleet.

The Empress had always seemed immortal, so for all of V'neef's youthful ambitions, she'd never set her sights on the throne itself. But if she wishes to survive to see her seventh decade, she may have no choice but make a bid for it.

Aspect: Wood

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 14; **Peripheral:** 26

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x6/-4/Incap.

Actions: Administration: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Command: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Disguise: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Dynastic Education: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Investigation: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Medicine: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Seafaring: 5 dice (+1 success for 2m); Senses: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 13 dice (+6 for 6m); Stealth: 7

dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Tracking: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Wilderness Survival: 10 dice (+4 for 4m):

Appearance 5, Resolve 4 (+2 for 4m), Guile 5 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Season of Falling Leaves, jade powerbow): 10 dice at short range (+4 for 4m, Damage 14L, Overwhelming 4)

Attack (Unarmed): 8 dice (+4 for 4m, Damage 9B)

Attack (Grapple): 4 dice (+2 for 2m; 4 dice to control, +2 for 2m)

Combat Movement: 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 6 (+3 for 6m); **Parry:** 2 (+1 for 2m)

Soak/Hardness: 9/4 (Assassin Dancer, green jade silken armor)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: The bold and the adaptable are best suited to weather unexpected adversity.

Defining Principle: My path to power will be secured by quick wits and charm.

Defining Tie: House V'Neef (Reliance)

Major Principle: I desire the renown that my talents and deeds have earned.

Major Tie: Her blood family (Love)

Major Tie: Her husband Tepet Igan (Respect)

Major Tie: House Peleps (Antipathy)

Minor Principle: The Threshold offers us a cornucopia of wealth and culture.

Minor Tie: Eagle's Launch (Pride)

Minor Tie: Merchant Fleet (Pride)

Minor Tie: Mnemon (Apprehension)

Escort

Tepet Citan, a cousin of V'neef's husband who's married into her house, serves as both personal secretary and covert bodyguard at all times (use Immaculate of Air traits, **Exalted**, p. 541). She typically has a contingent of elite troops (**Exalted**, p. 497) within earshot; these have Size 2 and elite Drill. Other members of her house are often close at hand, as is her husband Tepet Igan.

Offensive Charms

Arrow Thorn Technique (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Dual, Wood): +1

Overwhelming on a **withering** attack (+3 with aim) or add two **decisive** attack roll extra successes as dice of damage (3 with aim).

Blossom Hides Thorns (6m, 1wp, expend Wood Aura; Simple; Instant; Aura, Mute, Wood): While performing, roll Social Influence against one character's Resolve. If successful, battle

begins, and V'neef or one of her allies receives a surprise attack against that character on their first turn. If the attacker beat the target's Join Battle, the attack becomes an ambush.

Heartbeats Before Death (1m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Uniform, Wood): Aim reflexively at a living or undead enemy before making an attack, and ignore light and medium cover. If she previously aimed, can ignore full cover, though it grants target +3 Defense. Once per scene, unless reset by aiming normally against an enemy before hitting him with a **decisive** attack.

Spring Follows Winter (2m [1i per die]; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Perilous, Uniform, Wood): Reroll up to three non-1 failures on an attack roll for one Initiative each.

Defensive Charms

Fearsome Dragon Presence (5m; Reflexive; One tick; Fire, Perilous): Attack rolls, influence rolls, and rushes against V'neef take a -2 penalty (-3 in Fire Aura). An enemy may spend one Willpower to become immune for the scene.

Swaying Grass Elusion (2i per +1 Evasion; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Perilous, Uniform, Wood): Increase Evasion dice cap to +5, and can add +1 Evasion for two Initiative. Upon successfully dodging a lower-Initiative enemy's attack, can expend Wood Aura to regain half the Initiative spent on this Charm, rounded up.

Social Charms

Auspicious First Meeting Attitude (5m; Simple; Instant; Balanced, Water): Upon meeting someone for the first time, roll Social Influence against his (lower of Guile or Resolve) to both read his intentions and instill a positive Tie towards V'neef.

Seizing-the-Tongue Technique (6m; Supplemental; Instant; Air, Balanced): Reroll up to three non-1 failures on a Social Influence roll. In Air Aura, can use after rolling.

Poisonous Sneer Reproach (2m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Wood): V'neef speaks out against someone else's attempted social influence, rolling her Social Influence pool. Each success imposes a -1 penalty on the speaker's influence roll.

Sweeten-the-Tap Method (5m, 1wp; Simple; Scene; Fire/Wood): Those partaking in alcoholic beverages V'neef supplied are treated as having a positive Minor Tie towards all other partygoers and suffers -1 Guile.

Vivacious Dragon Beauty (6m; Reflexive; One scene; Aura, Wood): Gain a bonus dot of Appearance.

Miscellaneous Charms

Quarry Revelation Technique (2m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Wood): Reroll 6s on Tracking and can contest magical concealment.

Karal Linwei

Full of fiery passion and steely resolve, Taimyo Karal Linwei of the First Field Force is the epitome of what a Karal should be. On campaign, she's rarely far from the soldiers under her command — whether leading from the front in battle, or drinking and sharing war stories at the night fires. In Lookshy, when she's not drilling the First Field Force or in her office, the taimyo can be found drinking in a rowdy tea house frequented by Seventh Legion veterans, both mortal and Dragon-Blooded.

As a youth, Linwei was always a favorite of her elders, an attentive listener who took readily to their inculcation. After graduation, her loyalty was rewarded with a prime posting where she distinguished herself in early battles, having taken in Karal military doctrine as thoroughly as her gens' ideology. Her eventual promotion to the First Field Force's command surprised few, and pleased elder Karals with the assurance that the field force would be under an unquestioningly steadfast scion of the gens.

In the War of Thorns, the First Field Force cut a swath through the Realm's forces until it reached Mishaka. Outnumbered by two Realm legions, the taimyo engaged an ancient and poorly provenanced artifact, unleashing an unexpected cataclysm that devastated both sides, securing a pyrrhic victory. While others consider her a hero, Linwei is haunted by her actions. Each night, she dreams of Mishaka, walking among the corpses.

Linwei struggled with life in Lookshy after returning from the War of Thorns, frustrated with the slowness of the General Staff's administration compared to battlefield decision-making. Without any recent major deployments, she's had ample time to become well-versed in bureaucracy, and has aggressively pushed for several reforms that would expedite the provision of supplies and aid to Lookshy's soldiers in the field.

To all appearances, the steadfast Linwei remains a politically conservative Mercenary. But in private moments, she wonders whether a more dynamic foreign policy might better secure the Seventh Legion's safety, preventing conflicts from escalating to the point where the field forces suffer losses as extensive as at Mishaka. Where once she gave Interventionists on the General Staff the cold shoulder, now she listens, though she's yet to promise any support.

Linwei has three surviving children: twin middle-aged sons, the Dragon-Blooded Voss and the mortal Kalim, and her oldest child, her mortal daughter Fire Orchid. Linwei recently lost contact with Fire Orchid while the younger Karal was away on patrol in the Scavenger Lands. When the regular correspondence between the two first halted, Linwei feared her daughter dead — yet rumors of a Lookshyan soldier with the mark of the Anathema on her brow have given Linwei a strange combination of hope and fear.

Aspect: Fire

Essence: 4; **Willpower:** 7; **Join Battle:** 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 15, **Peripheral:** 39

Health Levels: -0/-1x3/-2x3/-4/Incap.

Actions: Administration: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Command: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Feats of Strength: 8 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Lookshyan Education: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Read Intentions: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Resist Poison/Disease: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Senses: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Social Influence: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Stealth: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Strategy: 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 3, Resolve 5 (+2 for 4m), Guile 4 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Unimpeded Flame, red jade daiklave): 12 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 15L/5)

Combat Movement: 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 2 (+1 for 2m), **Parry:** 7 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 11/7 (Molten Poise, red jade lamellar)
Intimacies

Defining Principle: Seventh Legion lives shouldn't be wasted.

Defining Tie: Gens Karal (Loyalty)

Major Principle: Bureaucracy is the Seventh Legion's greatest enemy.

Major Tie: The First Field Force (Responsibility)

Major Tie: Karal Fire Orchid (Uneasy Hope)

Major Tie: Karal Voss (Pride)

Major Tie: Karal Kalim (Love)

Minor Tie: The Realm (Enmity)

Escort

Linwei is often accompanied by elite troops (**Exalted**, p. 497) as well as Dragon-Blooded officers.

Offensive Charms

Burning Pinnacle Strike (3m; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Fire, Uniform): After making a **withering** attack that raises her Initiative above all enemies, reflexively make a **withering** or **decisive** attack. Once per round.

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or double up to four 10s on a **decisive** damage roll.

Harnessed Firestorm Assault (10m, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Simple; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Fire): Make three **decisive** attacks, each with (Initiative/2, rounded up) damage. Once per scene unless reset by landing a **decisive** attack in Fire Aura and building to Initiative 12+ without leaving Fire Aura.

Smoldering Essence Attack (5m, 1a; Simple; Instant; Aura, Fire, Withering-only): Make a **withering** attack. Enemy loses extra Initiative equal to damage roll 10s, which recurs on each of his next four turns, or until he deals **withering** damage to Linwei. She doesn't gain this Initiative.

Defensive Charms

Blinding Spark Distraction (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Blocking or winning a clash from close range blinds attacker until end of his next turn unless he succeeds on a (Stamina + Resistance) roll at difficulty (4 + attack roll extra successes).

Crossfire Flash (5m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Fire, Uniform) Rerolls four non-1 failures on a clash attack roll. Each rerolled die that shows a 10 subtracts a success from enemy's attack roll.

Dragon-Scale Shield (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Successfully parrying at close range causes attacker to lose Initiative equal to (1 + his attack roll 1s), which Linwei doesn't gain.

Fearsome Dragon Presence (5m; Reflexive; One tick; Fire, Perilous): Attack rolls, influence rolls, and rushes against Linwei take a –2 penalty (–4 in Fire Aura). An enemy may spend one Willpower to become immune for the scene.

Flame-Borne Interception (4m; Reflexive; Until next turn; Balanced, Fire, Uniform): Gain +1 Parry. Increases by one for each attack blocked; resets back to +1 if she's hit or dodges.

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** attack. Counts as her action for the round unless she expends Fire Aura.

Mobility Charms

Dancing Ember Stride (4m, 2i; Simple; Instant; Fire, Perilous): Rush from short range with double 9s (medium range if she pays one Willpower and expends Fire Aura). If successful, instantly move into close range of target.

Inescapable Blazing Advance (5m, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Fire): Add 4 non-Charm dice on a rush. Up to four 1s on opposing character's roll cause him to lose 1 Initiative each, which Linwei gains. If this crashes him, he catches fire, suffering (Initiative lost) dice of Hardness-ignoring lethal damage on each of his turns until extinguished.

War Charms

Deadly Wildfire Legion (5m, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Fire): Add +4 non-Charm dice on Command roll to order an attack; battle group may immediately take its turn if it hasn't acted this round. Every two Command roll successes add one die of damage. Once per scene unless reset by ordering a battle group to attack and deal enough damage to incapacitate a nontrivial foe or rout a battle group.

Indomitable Flame of Valor (1m [+1wp]; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Fire): Rally with double 9s; can pay one Willpower to grant elite Drill troops perfect morale for one round.

Roaring Dragon Officer (3m; Reflexive; One turn; Balanced, Earth): Flurry a command with a non-attack action. In Earth Aura, lower penalty on rolls to –2, and negate Defense penalty.

Yushoto Mathar

Yushoto Mathar has a long and storied career with the Seventh Legion. His skill on horseback earned him a position in the field as a cavalry officer. He's run reconnaissance on the Realm legions' movements, infiltrated smuggling rings, and intercepted messages between enemies intent on bringing harm to Lookshy and the Scavenger Lands. Once he left active duty with the Seventh Legion, he brought all the skills he cultivated in the army to bear as a spy for the Intelligence Directorate.

During his time as a ranger, Mathar heard tales of a wandering hero named Left Hand Chalima. Their paths crossed when both responded to a call for aid from the people of Yerath. Together, Mathar and Chalima helped the villagers make a stand against a neighboring warlord, and became fast friends in the process.

When they learned of a Wyld Hunt on the trail of the Anathema who'd been fomenting rebellion in small settlements, they sought out the Realm forces to offer their aid and swore Kinship. He grew fond of his Hearthmates River and Swift in short order, and over the years, he's felt romance blooming between himself and Eshubar. Some of his Lookshyan rivals have used his

loyalty against him, sabotaging his career and ending his climb up the Directorate ladder. He has no regrets. His choices let him sleep at night.

People often can't help but like Mathar. He's handsome and charming, and commands attention with his gregarious nature. He's good at reading a room, and inspires positive feelings with his mere presence. Mathar is a skilled musician; his biwa is never far from reach. Animals respond to his training — he's particularly fond of birds, and has had several avian familiars over his lifetime. His current companion is a bluejay.

Mathar travels the River Province on missions for the Directorate, seeking information on existing or imminent threats to Lookshy. He cultivates as an eyes-and-ears network separate from the Directorate's, as some of his colleagues attempt to pass along incomplete and often inaccurate information to him. Mathar prefers to meet his informants at The Dancing Blossom, a teahouse in Lookshy's Fourth Ring.

Aspect: Wood

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 11 dice (+6 for 6m)

Personal Motes: 14; **Peripheral Motes:** 23

Health Levels: -0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/Incap.

Actions: Disguise: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Feats of Strength: 7 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Investigation: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Lookshyan Education: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Read Intentions: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Senses: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Stealth: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Tracking: 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 4, Resolve 3 (+2 for 4m), Guile 4 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Ageos' Thorn, green jade direlance): 9 dice (+4 for 4m, Damage 17L/5)

Attack (Dawnbreaker, green jade short powerbow): 14 dice at short range (+6 for 6m, Damage 13L/3)

Combat Movement: 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 3 (+2 for 4m), **Parry:** 4 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 10/7 (Xarym, green jade lamellar)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: Loyalty above all.

Major Tie: Lookshy (Duty)

Major Tie: Left Hand Chalima (Friendship)

Major Tie: Sesus Eshuvar (Romantic Interest)

Major Tie: Kingfisher Swift (Respect)

Major Tie: Righteous River (Loyalty)

Minor Principle: Music and laughter cure many an ill.

Minor Principle: I long to find meaning in the Immaculate Faith.

Minor Tie: Gens Yushoto (Kinship)

Minor Tie: The Realm (Distrust)

Offensive Charms

Arrow Thorn Technique (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Dual, Wood): +1

Overwhelming on a **withering** Archery attack (+3 with aim) or add two **decisive** Archery attack roll extra successes as dice of damage (3 with aim).

Death From Nowhere (4m; Supplemental; Instant; Air/Water, Balanced, Withering-only):

Withering attack ignores 3 points of armor soak (5 with aim).

Five-Dragon Arsenal: Reduce weapon attunement costs by three motes.

Heartbeats Before Death (1m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Uniform, Wood): (1m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Uniform, Wood): Aim reflexively at a living or undead enemy before making an Archery attack, and ignore light and medium cover. If he previously aimed, can ignore full cover, though it grants target +3 Defense. Once per scene, unless reset by aiming normally against an enemy before hitting her with a **decisive** attack.

Spring Follows Winter (2m [1i per die]; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Perilous, Uniform, Wood): Reroll up to three non-1 failures on an Archery attack roll for one Initiative each.

Defensive Charms

Aura of Grasping Branches (5m, 3i, 1wp; Simple; One scene; Perilous, Wood): Ignore up to 4 points of onslaught penalties to Parry per round, which may be divided between multiple attacks. In Wood Aura, doesn't suffer onslaught penalties from attacks she successfully parries.

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** Melee attack. Counts as his action for the round unless he expends Fire Aura.

Root-and-Hand Merging (5m, 1wp; Reflexive; One scene; Balanced, Wood): Gain +1 Parry (non-Charms in Aura) and add +2 to difficulty of disarm gambits against him.

Social Charms

Auspicious First Meeting Attitude (5m; Simple; Instant; Balanced, Water): (5m; Simple; Instant; Balanced, Water): Upon meeting someone for the first time, roll Social Influence against his (lower of Guile or Resolve) to both read his intentions and instill a positive Tie towards Mathar.

Foul Stench of Lies Discernment (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Mute): Roll Investigation with three non-Charms dice against a character's Guile when he speaks to determine if he's lying. Waive Willpower cost for subsequent uses once a lie's been found.

Sanxian-Charming Fingers (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Wood): Double 9s on a Social Influence roll with an instrument.

Soul-Stirring Performance (3m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Wood): Roll Social Influence with +3 non-Charms dice to inspire an emotion. Resisting requires entering a Decision Point and calling on an Intimacy of any level.

Miscellaneous Charms

Bloodhound's Nose Technique (4m, 1wp; Simple; 3 days; Water/Wood): Roll Investigation with double 9s to examine evidence, with base difficulty 3. If successful, pick up scent of character who left the evidence, identifying her if Mathar already knows her. Double 9s on rolls to detect or track that character by scent.

Instant Disguise Prana (1m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Water): Roll Disguise in one minute, ignoring penalties for lacking equipment. With equipment, double 9s.

Quarry Revelation Technique (2m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Wood): Reroll 6s on Tracking and can contest magical concealment.

Cevis Ghandarva

Child of the Scarlet Dynasty. Self-proclaimed avatar of the Immaculate Dragon Mela. Exile from the Realm. Luminary among the Forest Witches. Child of a god. Cevis Ghandarva has lived many lives, both figuratively and literally. From the days when a young Ghandarva was first enthralled by a Fair Folk prince who showed him how he might be perfected, the Dragon-Blood has striven in pursuit of transcendence and enlightenment. Though the Realm rebuffed his early pretensions and his proclamation of himself as Mela returned, Ghandarva's obsession with self-perfection would not be easily extinguished, and ultimately led to the emergence of the Forest Witches as they are today.

There is little room for compassion or compromise on the path to perfection, Ghandarva reasons. Yes, he has betrayed his closest companions, lost those that he has loved, and been maimed at the hands of the forest's mysteries — but has it not been worth it? Is the Sea of Mind not a paradise for the living and the dead? Did the sacrifice of his flesh not appease Oreithyia, who now loyally serves the Forest Witches? And has he not mastered Domnica's Mantle, and transcended the cycle of death and rebirth thereby? Surely, such accomplishments prove the necessity of the costs he has paid in pursuit of them.

Ghandarva strives to conquer without conquest, the ideology of ruling from the shadows espoused in his Spear Sutra. He envisions the end of the Realm, and the rise of his loyal Company of Thrones to establish the empire that will come after. In pursuit of this goal, he has undergone multiple reincarnations with the power of Domnica's Mantle. In his most recent, Ghandarva was reborn as the child of Spinner of Glorious Tales, one of the three gods who rule Great Forks (**Exalted**, p. 88). However, his efforts at suborning the City of Temples have been complicated by the unexpected formation of a familial bond between himself and Spinner of Glorious Tales. The god does not fully trust his strangely canny son, nor would Ghandarva allow sentiment to come between him and his conquest — yet neither can deny that they love each other as family.

Aspect: Air

Essence: 5; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 16; **Peripheral:** 37

Health Levels: -0/-1x5/-2x8/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Dynastic Education: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Investigation: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Feats of Strength: 6 dice (+2 for 2m; may attempt Strength 3 feats); Medicine:

5 dice (+2 for 2m); Mysticism: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Read Intentions: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Social Influence: 12 dice (+6 for 6m); Stealth: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Tracking: 5 dice (+2 for 2m);

Appearance 4, Resolve 5 (+2 for 4m), Guile 3 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Unarmed): 14 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 11B)

Attack (Grapple): 10 dice (+4 for 4m; 10 dice to control, +4 for 4m)

Combat Movement: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion 1; Parry 5 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 16/10 (Immaculate Husk, blue jade articulated plate)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: The Blood Sutra and the Spear Sutra are the Forest Witches' only path forward.

Defining Principle: No sacrifice is unthinkable in pursuit of victory.

Defining Tie: Himself (Pride)

Major Principle: The blessings of the forest free us to pursue self-perfection.

Major Tie: The Company of Thrones (Trust)

Major Tie: The Realm (Bitterness)

Major Tie: Vitali Proseria (Distrust)

Minor Tie: Bidalaksa Valentin (Grief)

Minor Tie: Spinner of Glorious Tales (Affection)

Escort

When not under cover, Ghandarva may be attended by Dragon-Blooded of the Company of Thrones.

Merits

Immersed in the Sea of Mind

Offensive Charms

Essence Venom Strike (6m, 3i, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Aggravated, Decisive-only): Make a **decisive** attack. If it deals damage, it inflicts a poison with Damage 1A/round, Duration (One round per two dice of damage, maximum, 5), and a -2 penalty. Crashed don't get a roll against the poison.

Feather-Stirred Arrow Deflection (2m [+1wp]; Reflexive; Instant; Uniform): When counterattacking a ranged attack, extend counterattack's range to that of the original attack (maximum long). May spend one Willpower to direct counterattack at a different enemy.

Humbling Enlightenment Commentary (1m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Decisive-only): Add stunt bonus to **decisive** counterattack's damage roll as well as attack roll. If damage exceeds

target's Resolve, instill a positive Tie to a group or a philosophical or ethical Principle. If she resists with Willpower or already has that Intimacy, she instead loses 5 Initiative (which Ghandarva doesn't gain).

Kindly Sifu's Quill (5m; Supplemental; Instant; Decisive-only): Double 10s on **decisive** damage roll. Positive Ties to groups and philosophical or ethical Principles penalize target's Defense if exploited with an appropriate stunt.

Mournful Crane's Cry (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Decisive-only): **Decisive** counterattack knocks enemy back two range bands to fall prone.

Striking Cobra Technique (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Dual): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or one die of **decisive** damage. Against crashed enemies, instead add +4 post-soak **withering** damage or one success on **decisive** damage roll. **Wisdom of the Celestial Crane** (7m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Decisive-only): **Decisive** counterattack against a damaging **decisive** attack adds (lower of Ghandarva's or attacker's Initiative) to damage. Upon incapacitating a foe, can raise a positive Tie to a group or philosophical or ethical Principle to Defining. Once per scene, unless reset by going three rounds without being hit or attacking (not counting counterattacks).

Defensive Charms

Blade-Deflecting Palm (1m per die, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Perilous, Uniform, Water): Up to five 1s on an attack roll against Ghandarva's Parry let him pay one mote to reroll a successful die, starting with 7s and moving up.

Body-Like-Clouds Meditation (8m; Simple; Aura; Air, Aura, Withering-only): **Withering** damage rolls against Ghandarva take a -5 penalty. If a **withering** attack hits but deals no damage, Ghandarva steals 2 Initiative from his attacker.

Countless Coils Evasion (7m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Decisive-only, Perilous): After **decisive** attack roll, roll (5 + Initiative). Each success subtracts one die from damage roll. Reset to base Initiative. Once per scene.

Crane Form (8m, Simple; One scene; Form): Gain +1 Parry, and reduce Initiative cost of full defense by one. When he takes a full defense, can make a **withering** or **decisive** counterattack against each attack against him until his next turn. Can use reflexively upon causing an enemy's Initiative to fall below his own by defending against one of her attacks.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +5 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Revolving-Hurricane-Force Defense (5m, 1wp; Reflexive; Aura; Air, Aura, Withering-only): Roll 13 dice and gain soak bonus equal to successes. Drops by one each time an attack hits him. Once per scene.

Snake Form (8m [+1m, 1wp]; Simple; One scene; Form): Gain +4 soak, and inflict -1 penalty on attacks against him (-3 against lower-Initiative enemies). Can use reflexively upon lowering an enemy from an Initiative higher than his own to one lower than him with a **withering** attack. *Essence Fangs and Scales Technique*: Pay a one-mote, one-Willpower surcharge to gain an additional +5 soak and +2 raw damage on **withering** attacks.

Mobility Charms

Cloud-Treading Method (5m; Supplemental; Instant; Air, Mute): Ignore five points of penalties on movement roll and can walk over surfaces that can't support his weight, as long as he ends on solid ground. In Air Aura, can walk on liquids and vapors.

Social Charms

Ascendant Ideal Inspiration (6m, 1wp; Simple; Indefinite; Air): Ghandarva dedicates himself to a Defining Principle. Influence to weaken it must be rolled twice, using the lower result. Double 9s on influence rolls to instill the Principle in others or persuade them to act on it.

Dragon's Voice Mastery (5m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Air): Add 3 non-Charm successes on a Social Influence roll that aligns with one of Ghandarva's Major or Defining Principles and increase the cost to resist by one Willpower. Once per day, unless reset by upholding a Major or Defining Intimacy.

Puissant Precursor's Monologue (8m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Air): Roll Social Influence with double 7s to persuade characters to take action that supports one of Ghandarva's Defining Principles. Characters that share that Principle must pay an additional Willpower to resist. Once per scene unless reset by upholding a Defining Principle with a legendary social goal.

Seizing-the-Tongue Technique (6m; Supplemental; Instant; Air, Balanced): Reroll up to five non-1 failures on a Social Influence roll. In Air Aura, can use after rolling.

Smoothing-Over-the-Past Technique (5m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Water): Roll Social Influence against one character to make her forget a past incident of misconduct by Ghandarva for one scene. If this would make her act against a Major or Defining Intimacy, she may resist for one Willpower.

Wind-Carried Words Technique (3m [+1wp]; Simple; Instant; Air): Send a message of up to a few sentences to a character within 50 miles. For a one-Willpower surcharge, extend range to 500 miles.

Lineage Charms:

Ghandarva possesses several Eclipse Charms reflecting his most recent incarnation's descent from the god Spinner of Glorious Tales, per the Divine Lineage Merit (p. XX).

Haled to the Horizon (5m; Simple; Instant; Eclipse; Essence 2): Roll Social Influence with 5 non-Charm dice to inspire wanderlust (Eclipses roll [Manipulation + Presence] with [higher of Essence or 3] non-Charm dice. If not resisted with Willpower, the inspired emotion doesn't subside until an affected character has completed a narratively significant journey to a locale she's never been to before.

Legends Become Truth (8m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Eclipse; Essence 4): Roll Social Influence to introduce a fact by telling a story, subject to normal limits on introducing facts (Eclipses roll [Charisma + Performance]). If Ghandarva wishes, this can also count as a Performance-based influence roll. No Lore background is necessary, but the introduced fact must uphold or align with one of Ghandarva's Intimacies, or an Intimacy of an audience member whose Resolve is beaten by the roll.

Kumari Samathi Anja

Anja's early years were nothing but miserable. Her aristocratic parents had little desire for a daughter born physically disabled and subject to dark moods, and made this clear to Anja from

an early age. Her unexpected Exaltation did little to improve her life — her parents took a renewed interest in her, but she was no naïve fool to believe they'd changed, and her young peers heaped yet more abuse upon her. Perhaps this early misery is what made Ghandarva's sybaritic cult — and its departure into the Threshold — so appealing to her, or perhaps she was simply seeking any escape from Realm society that could be had.

Anja found acceptance and hedonistic pleasures among the Forest Witches, and enjoyed them both, but still she fell back into depression at times. Hoping to conceal this from her fellows, she secluded herself in the forest to carry out her self-mutilation. It was here that Ghandarva spied her, and set in motion the machinations that resulted in Anja's unwilling apotheosis.

The numen Anja wears several shapes — a woman, cut in half down the center; a cat without eyes or skin; a seething heap of sloughed-off snakeskins. When she walks among the Forest Witches, she wears the shape she had in life, save that she appears sadder, more tired, and has pure black eyes. She is a spirit of cast-off things and refuse, of that which has been lost or forgotten within the forest. Alone among the numina, Anja evangelizes the Cult of the Mist, hoping to convince more of her brethren to join her in apotheosis, and bring the mist closer to its completion. Whether this is her own will or the voice of the mist speaking through her, even she does not know.

Aspect: Air

Essence: 4; **Willpower:** 7; **Join Battle:** 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 15; **Peripheral:** 39

Health Levels: -0x6/-1x5/-3/Incap.

Actions: Esoteric Lore: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Investigation: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Read Intentions: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Resist Poison/Disease: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Social Influence: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Stealth: 11 dice (+6 for 6m)

Appearance 3 (Hideous), Resolve 4 (+2 for 4m), Guile 2 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Knives): 12 dice at close range (+6 for 6m, Damage 9L)

Attack (Unarmed): 9 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 9B)

Attack (Grapple): 7 dice (+4 for 4m; 4 dice to control, +2 for 2m)

Combat Movement: 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 4 (+2 for 4m); **Parry:** 4 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 6/0

Intimacies

Defining Principle: I am she who cut away Anja until nothing beside remained.

Defining Principle: I will guide those who wish to be remade to their apotheosis.

Defining Principle: I must spread the Cult of the Mist until the mists are complete.

Major Tie: Other numina (Kinship)

Major Tie: Cevis Ghandarva (Hatred)

Minor Principle: I will not blind myself in the Sea of Mind.

Minor Tie: The Forest Witches (Beneficence)

Merits

Cult 2

Pain Tolerance

Unnatural Hide 2

Offensive Charms

Invisibly Hidden Chakram Method (2m [1m]; Simple; Indefinite; Air, Balanced, Stackable): Banish a knife Elsewhere (or multiple knives with one activation in Air Aura), maximum 5. Knives past the first cost only one mote to banish.

Mela's Twin Fangs (4m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Air, Aura, Withering-only): While Anja has a knife Elsewhere, she makes two **withering** attacks, one with a readied knife and one with the knife from Elsewhere. Only the attack that deals the highest damage grants Initiative.

Thousand Razor Wind (1m, 1wp, expend Air Aura; Simple; Instant; Air, Aura, Decisive-only): Make a **decisive** attack with a readied knife and with each knife in Elsewhere, rolling separately for each. Divide Initiative evenly among all attacks, rounded up, to determine damage, and ignore Hardness.

Defensive Charms

Flickering Candle Meditation (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Up to four 1s on attack roll negate one point of penalty to Evasion each.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +4 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Nimble Zephyr Defense (1m; Reflexive; Instant; Air, Uniform): Successfully dodging an attack causes attack to lose 1 Initiative, which Anja doesn't gain unless she's in Air Aura. If the attack rolls any 1s, Anja can dodge even if its successes equal her Evasion.

Social Charms

Dragon's Voice Mastery (5m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Air): Add 2 non-Charm successes on a Social Influence roll that aligns with one of Anja's Major or Defining Principles and increase the cost to resist by one Willpower. Once per day, unless reset by upholding a Major or Defining Intimacy.

Puissant Precursor's Monologue (8m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Air): Roll Social Influence with double 7s to persuade characters to take action that supports one of Anja's Defining Principles. Characters that share that Principle must pay an additional Willpower to resist. Once per scene unless reset by upholding a Defining Principle with a legendary social goal.

Numen Charms

As a numen (p. XX), Anja counts as a spirit, can hear prayers to her, and reforms after a month if killed without magic capable of permanently destorying spirits. She also has the following Eclipse Charms:

Dematerialize (30m, 1wp [15m, 1wp to rematerialize]; Simple; Instant): Anja dematerializes at the start of her next turn. She can materialize with a second use for fifteen motes, one Willpower.

Beckon Back the Lost (2m or 5m, 1wp; Simple; Instant *or* Indefinite; Eclipse; Essence 3): For two motes, Anja can reanimate the corpse of anyone who's died in the forest as a zombie (**Exalted**, p. 502). Alternatively, for five motes and one Willpower, she can create an illusionary replica of anyone who's ever died in the forest. It's not an independent character nor is it capable of rolled actions; Anja can use its senses and make social influence rolls through it with her own traits, though she can't enhance them with her Charms. A character can recognize the replica for a fake with a read intentions roll or (Perception + Awareness) roll against her own Guile. The replica's behavior, knowledge, and memories are limited to Anja's knowledge of the deceased, although she can introduce facts to establish this knowledge. Normally, Anja can only reanimate corpses or create replicas within close range of herself, but if a character prays to her and makes a request that could be literally or figuratively fulfilled with this Charm, she may use it with unlimited range to do so.

Festering Rot (4m; Supplemental; Instant; Aggravated, Decisive-only, Eclipse; Essence 1): Anja's **decisive** attack against a living character deals aggravated damage. If it deals any damage, at the end of that character's next turn, unless he or an ally successfully treats the wound with an (Intelligence + Medicine) roll at difficulty (Anja's Essence), he suffers an additional level of aggravated damage, ignoring Hardness, and contracts infected wounds (**Exalted**, p. 235) without a chance to resist, even if he has Exalted healing.

Fourfold Embodiment of Anja (5m; Simple; Instant; Eclipse; Essence 1): Anja may vary between the four forms described above. The above traits reflect her form as a woman cut in half. In the shape of her former life, she loses Hideous. In her feline shape (**Exalted**, p. 560), she may use a cat's traits in place of her own if they are better, treating any dice over her own pools and any dice from Merits or special abilities as Charm dice, but is blind (**Exalted**, p. 168). As a heap of snakeskins, she can't speak or take any non-reflexive physical actions, but suffers no impediments to conveying social influence nonverbally.

Keeper of Forgotten Things (3m; Simple; Instant; Eclipse; Essence 2): Anja can summon object that has been lost or forgotten in the forest to her, as long as no one is currently aware of its location and she is able to carry it. Alternatively, she can summon a heap of refuse, sufficient to create a patch of difficult terrain large enough to encompass one character within medium range and capable of providing light cover. If she tries to summon refuse beneath a character, he may roll (Dexterity + [Athletics or Dodge]) at a difficulty of her Essence; successes forces her to instead summon the refuse at a point within close range of him rather than directly beneath him.

Stirring Ancient Remembrances (4m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Eclipse; Essence 3): When Anja introduces or challenges a fact, she's treated as having a Lore background in all knowledge and memories that have ever been forgotten by someone while in the forest, and the knowledge and memories of those who've died in the forest.

Things Best Forsaken (10m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Eclipse, Psyche; Essence 3): Roll Read Intentions against a character's Guile; success reveals what that character most desires to remove

or be rid of about himself, even if he hasn't consciously realized this desire. If Anja's Read Intentions successes exceed his Resolve, he is confronted with a visceral awareness of that trait or quality's presence in him as a Psyche effect. He loses one Willpower and must react to his self-revulsion with a course of action that rises to the level of a serious or life-defining task (**Exalted**, p. 216), chosen by his player. Resisting requires entering a Decision Point and calling on at least a Major Intimacy. This Charm can't be used against the same character more than once per story.

Vitali Proseria

Among the first outcasts to join Cevis Ghandarva's band of Dynastic renegades, Vitali Proseria has cast a long shadow over the Forest Witches ever since. While it was Peace of Song Forgotten who discovered the forest pool that would become the Sea of Mind, and the dead prophetess Evelina who first envisioned how the Sea's boundaries might be expanded, it was Proseria who led the Witches' efforts in plumbing the Sea's depths and forging the afterlife of Atsiluth Eternal. After her death, Proseria called upon the many allies she'd made among both the living and the dead to launch a bid to usurp Evelina, establishing the Council of Atsiluth Eternal with Proseria at first among equals.

The dead have always been Proseria's foremost priority. For the living, the Sea is a paradise, but for the dead, it's all that sustains their existence — and if the necessary tribute of treasures rich in Essence is not rendered unto the Sea, it's the dead who will cease to be. Her every policy and pronouncement, from the first opening of the Sea to the living to the Tax of Fading Embers, has been for the goal of ensuring a steady procession of offerings so that Atsiluth Eternal may endure forever.

Few of Proseria's fellow councilors are so fixated on a single issue. In matters of politics unrelated to the tithe and the persistence of the dead, she'll often espouse a fellow councilor's agenda with the expectation that he'll return the favor in the future. Her fellow dead remain divided on the issue, and even the greatest savants of the Sea's nature remain unable to reach any consensus on whether her ambition can be made real.

Aspect: Earth

Essence: 4; **Willpower:** 9; **Join Battle:** 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 15; **Peripheral:** 23

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x4/-4/Incap. (Walking Effigy: -0x2/-1x3/-2x3/-4x3/Incap.)

Actions: Administration: 11 dice (+6 for 6m); Ancient Lore: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Disguise: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Feats of Strength: 7 dice (+4 for 4m; may attempt Strength 3 feats); Investigation: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Mysticism: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Read Intentions: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 12 dice (+6 for 6m); Sorcery: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Tracking: 5 dice (+2 for 2m)

Appearance 3, Resolve 4 (+2 for 4m), Guile 5 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Surgeon and End to Morning, blue jade smashfists): 13 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 14B/3)

Attack (Grapple): 8 dice (+4 for 4m; 10 dice to control, +4 for 4m)

Combat Movement: 6 dice (+2 for 2m)

Evasion: 1; **Parry:** 4 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 14/10 (Walls of Atsiluth, white jade articulated plate)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: The dead of Atsiluth Eternal must endure forever.

Defining Principle: I will make the Sea of Mind into the one true reality.

Defining Tie: Atsiluth Eternal (Possessiveness)

Major Principle: Perfection arises from conviction, compassion, temperance, and valor, but can only be fully realized in the Sea of Mind.

Major Principle: Those who defy my laws shall not know the Sea of Mind's paradise.

Major Tie: Cevis Ghandarva (Wariness)

Minor Principle: The Blood Sutra and the Spear Sutra have their validity.

Minor Tie: The Black Scale Embassy (Cautious Cooperation)

Escort

Proseria may be accompanied by other dead Forest Witches while in Atsiluth Eternal, and by an honor guard of living Witches on those occasions she leaves.

Merits

Immersed in the Sea of Mind

Walking Effigy: Proseria can only interact with the real world while attuned to a walking effigy (p. XX). While she inhabits it, she uses its health track, is immune to poison and disease, and has no need to eat, drink, sleep, or breathe.

Offensive Charms

Crater-Making Impact (5m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Aura, Earth, Decisive-only): Make a **decisive** smash attack against a crashed enemy or a **decisive** throw against a grappled enemy. If it hits, he falls prone and is knocked back one range band, creating difficult terrain where he lands. With 3+ levels of damage, she can knock him to medium range, inflicting damage per a short-range fall. With 7+ levels of damage, she can knock him to long range, inflicting damage per a medium-range fall.

Hammering Wave Technique (5m; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Water): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or double 10s on **decisive** damage roll. In Water Aura, if she deals 3+ **withering** damage or 1+ **decisive** damage, the onslaught inflicted by the attack doesn't fade on her enemy's next turn.

Pounding Surf Style (2m; Supplemental; Instant; Balanced, Water, Withering-only): Add target's current onslaught penalty to Overwhelming. In Water Aura, also add to raw **withering** damage.

Rolling Boulder Blow (5m; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Earth): Add up to four attack roll extra successes on a smash attack as dice of **decisive** damage. May both knock enemy prone and smash him back one range band.

Unfeeling Earth Meditation (3m; Reflexive; Instant; Earth): Ignore wound penalties on one action. In Earth Aura, ignore wound penalties as long as she remains in that Aura.

Defensive Charms

Blade-Deflecting Palm (1m per die, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Perilous, Uniform, Water): Up to four 1s on an attack roll against Proseria's Parry let her pay one mote to reroll a successful die, starting with 7s and moving up.

Earth Bears Witness (5m, 3i; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Earth, Perilous): Reduce decisive damage by 2, or 3 if there's a large earthen structure within short range.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +3 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Social Charms

Flawless Diamond Heart (7m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth): Lower the cost to reduce influence that opposes a Major or Defining Intimacy by two Willpower. Once per story unless reset by upholding that Intimacy.

Grinding Millstone Argument (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Earth): Reset a failed persuade. If a target uses the same Intimacy to bolster Initiative against the new roll as he did against the original, its bonus is reduced by one. Once per scene.

Heartstring-Pulling Approach (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Fire): Add a non-Charm success on a single-target Social Influence roll. If the target's Resolve is lowered by a Major or Defining Intimacy based on passionate emotion, the cost to resist the influence increases by one Willpower.

Seizing-the-Tongue Technique (6m; Supplemental; Instant; Air, Balanced): Reroll up to four non-1 failures on a Social Influence roll. In Air Aura, can use after rolling.

Unfaltering Pillar of Unity (10m, 1wp; Simple; Instant; Earth, Mute): Roll Social Influence with double 8s, ignoring multiple target penalties to instill members of a culture or social group with a Tie of loyalty to that culture or group. Resisting requires entering a Decision Point and calling on at least a Major Intimacy. An affected character can't erode the Intimacy for (6 – his Integrity) weeks or act to oppose it as long as he has it, unless failing to do so would threaten a Defining Intimacy. Other characters' efforts to weaken the Intimacy use the rules for overturning social influence. Once per story, unless reset by accomplishing a major character or story goal that benefits the Forest Witches or a subculture thereof.

Virtuous Mountain's Shadow (8m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Earth): Dispute an influence roll by citing a Major or Defining Intimacy that opposes it. All characters who hear her may use that Intimacy to bolster their Resolve or in a Decision Point; those who do gain that Intimacy at Minor intensity.

Sorcery

Shaping Ritual: If Proseria would gain Willpower from sleeping, she can forgo it to have a cryptically prophetic dream, rolling Sorcery and gaining sorcerous motes equal to her successes, which last until the next time she sleeps. Each counts as two sorcerous motes if spent on her control spell. Once per story, she can stunt a description of how her dreams foretold current events to gain $([\text{stunt level} + 1] \times 4)$ sorcerous motes, which last until the scene ends.

Death of Obsidian Butterflies (15sm, 1wp; Decisive-only; Instant; Control): Roll Sorcery with +4 bonus dice as an undodgeable **decisive** attack against all characters in a line out to medium range (battle groups take -2 Defense). Roll $(4 + \text{extra successes})L$ damage, or $(9 + \text{extra successes})L$ against battle groups. This doesn't reset Proseria's Initiative.

Demon of the First Circle (Ritual, 2wp; Instant) Summon a First Circle Demon in a night-long ritual, rolling Sorcery against its Resolve to bind it.

Infallible Messenger (5sm, 2wp; Control): Conjure a cherub to deliver a message up to five minutes long to a single individual anywhere in Creation, reaching him within a day. Can convey social influence, but not social Charms.

Kingfisher Swift

Growing up, Kingfisher Swift imagined she'd never get closer to the Blessed Isle than her home in the Tongma Archipelago off its western coast. She expected to work the land until she died, as her peasant family had for generations. Any loftier goals were little more than a child's idle daydreams. Then she Exalted, and was haled away to the Obsidian Mirror. One more lost egg, found.

Swift graduated from Pasiap's Stair and enrolled in the Imperial legions. Swift's superiors quickly noticed her penchant for command, and promoted her through the ranks until she became a winglord. In her youth, she participated in a Wyld Hunt where she met her Hearthmates — their oath was Swift's idea — and captured an Anathema and slew his Wretched companion. She married into the small but prestigious patrician Tereya family, and thought she'd done quite well for a Tongma peasant.

Yet, when the Scarlet Empress disappeared and the Great Houses divvied up the legions, her honorable service and respected family name meant little. The commanders trumped up an insubordination charge and let some Cathak pup bark the news to her. Swift was humiliated, and angry, and bitterly sad to see the Realm she loved so fiercely set to infighting. The jockeying for position among those who were supposed to lead infuriated her, but she had no power to stop it.

The Tereya matriarch — Swift's own aging niece, Tereya Seren — offered her charge of the household guard. She accepted, aware that the position might someday pit her against the very legions she'd served. Some days, she's almost glad she's a widow: Her husband always worried when she was called off to fight. Her three living children have given her half a dozen grandchildren so far, one of whom Exalted as an Earth Aspect like herself. She dreads what it will mean for her family, should the Realm descend into civil war.

Swift is blunt and direct, and writes letters to her friend Righteous River laying out her concerns for the Realm's future. River never judged her by the red-haired icon of Daana'd that Swift wears on her belt, which marked her as a peasant from the backwaters of Tongma. Her Hearthmates know her as thoughtful, perceptive, and stubborn, and she counts Sesus Eshuvar as one of her closest friends.

Those who served with Swift recall her devotion, and despite her dishonorable discharge often send young recruits to her for mentoring. She maintains contacts with the other patrician houses' militias in the Imperial City, and still has friends among the Great Houses' officers. A letter of recommendation from Kingfisher Swift carries significant weight for those who have earned her respect.

Swift is short and muscular, with brown skin and pale violet hair she keeps cut short.

Aspect: Earth

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal Motes: 14; **Peripheral Motes:** 24

Health Levels: -0/-1x3/-2x3/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 9 dice (+4 for 4m); Feats of Strength: 7 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Read Intentions: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Resist Poison/Disease: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Senses: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Strategy: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 2, **Resolve** 3 (+1 for 2m), Guile 2 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Stone Eater, orichalcum goremaul): 11 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 16B/5)

Combat Movement: 6 dice (+3 successes for 3m)

Evasion: 3 (+1 for 2m), **Parry:** 5 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 15/10 (Bones of Verity, white jade reinforced breastplate)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: The Realm must endure.

Major Principle: Found family is as important as blood relations.

Major Principle: My loyalty lies with the Scarlet Throne, not the Great Houses.

Major Principle: The Immaculate Philosophy guides me in life.

Major Principle: Anathema are a danger to us all.

Major Tie: Sesus Eshuvar (Friendship)

Major Tie: Righteous River (Respect)

Major Tie: Left Hand Chalima (Friendly Rivalry)

Major Tie: Yushoto Mathar (Admiration)

Major Tie: Her children and grandchildren (Love)

Major Tie: House Cathak (Resentment)

Minor Tie: House Tereya (Loyalty)

Minor Tie: Tereya Seren (Respect)

Offensive Charms

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or double up to four 10s on a **decisive** damage roll.

Pasiap Preempts Haste (3m; Supplemental; Instant; Earth): Join Battle with double 9s. If Swift wins Join Battle, she waives the Initiative cost for delaying her action, and adds +5 dice on her attack roll that turn if she delays it until after an enemy acts.

Unfeeling Earth Meditation (3m; Reflexive; Instant; Earth): Ignore wound penalties on one action.

Defensive Charms

Earth Bears Witness Reduce decisive damage by 2, or 4 if there's a large earthen structure within short range.

Fearsome Dragon Presence (5m; Reflexive; One tick; Fire, Perilous): Attack rolls, influence rolls, and rushes against Swift take a -2 penalty (-3 in Fire Aura). An enemy may spend one Willpower to become immune for the scene.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +4 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** attack. Counts as her action for the round unless she expends Fire Aura.

Rumbling Earth Rebuke (4m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Decisive-only, Earth): After successfully blocking or clashing an attack from close range, make a reflexive disarm gambit.

Social Charms

Burning Dragon Mien (4m; Simple; Instant; Fire): Roll Social Influence with double 9s to threaten a single target. If his Resolve is beaten, he loses 1 Initiative (which Chalima doesn't gain).

Flawless Diamond Heart (7m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth): Lower the cost to reduce influence that opposes a Major or Defining Intimacy by two Willpower. Once per story unless reset by upholding that Intimacy.

Thicker Than Stone (4m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Earth): Against influence that opposes a positive Tie to another Dragon-Blood, a family member, or a subordinate under her command, add (Intimacy/2, rounded up) non-Charms Resolve. Successfully resisting grants one Willpower. Can only protect a Tie once per story.

Virtuous Mountain's Shadow (8m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Earth): Dispute an influence roll by citing a Major or Defining Intimacy that opposes it. All characters who hear her may use that Intimacy to bolster their Resolve or in a Decision Point; those who do gain that Intimacy at Minor intensity.

War Charms

Enfolded in the Dragon's Wings (3m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Earth, Perilous, Uniform): Make a Command roll when a battle group in short range is attacked; every two successes grant +1 Defense and soak. Once per scene, unless reset with a successful rally.

Roaring Dragon Officer (3m; Reflexive; One turn; Balanced, Earth): Flurry a command with a non-attack action. In Earth Aura, lower penalty on rolls to -2, and negate Defense penalty.

Miscellaneous Charms

Deep-Listening Palm (5m; Simple; One scene; Earth): Hear through a barrier as though it were not there. Stone, wood, and weaker materials don't require a roll; metal and stronger materials require a difficulty 3+ Senses roll. On failure, Swift only hears fragments of what's on the other side.

Left Hand Chalima

Left Hand Chalima grew up an orphan in the Scavenger Lands city of Gentian, where the dead walk among the living. Chalima never knew where her next meal might come from, or who'd try to take it away, and prayed daily in the hopes that whichever ghosts were her parents would help her. After her Exaltation, she became a champion of the weak and impoverished, targeting bandits and petty warlords. She left Gentian and became a wandering hero, ridding beleaguered villages of beasts, monsters, and human predators alike.

In her adventures, she befriended the Lookshyan ranger Yushoto Mathar and traveled with him for some time. The two offered their aid to the three survivors of a Realm Wyld Hunt, and the Sworn Kinship they formed survives to this day.

In the Hundred Kingdoms, she tore a cloak from a tyrant-king's shoulders and settled it upon her own, making her queen of the small principality of Achus. She rules there still, aided by her living husband Xocha. Chalima's Immaculate faith is unshakable, though to Righteous River's mild consternation, she adheres to the Intou heresy, which weaves ancestor cult worship into the Immaculate creed. Thus does Chalima also seek counsel and comfort from the ghost of her husband Itzli.

Chalima is the Hearth's contrarian, arguing about the Realm's and Lookshy's policies, forcing her friends to reexamine their stances. Communications with her Hearth are sparser and more fraught lately, as Achus demands Chalima's attention and Realm troubles occupy her friends' time. She hears from Mathar the most, and looks forward to his occasional visits.

Chalima takes a personal interest in Achus' day-to-day affairs. She frequently goes out among her people, working alongside them and hearing their concerns. When the mantle of leadership chafes, Chalima returns to her wandering hero roots. She gladly signs on with like-minded adventurers intent on helping the downtrodden in the Hundred Kingdoms, sometimes recruiting others to aid in her causes.

Her red hair is long on top, though she keeps the sides shaved close. She's of average height and heavily built, and her clothing and armor reflect the places she's been. She doesn't adhere to any one region's style: If she likes a piece, she adds it to her wardrobe with little regard to whether it matches anything else. She's particularly fond of a many-pocketed gray duster she picked up in Nexus.

Aspect: Fire

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 6; **Join Battle:** 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal Motes: 14; **Peripheral Motes:** 28

Health Levels: -0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/-Incap.

Actions: Administration: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Command: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Feats of Strength: 9 dice (+4 for 4m; may attempt Strength 3 feats); Investigation: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Read Intentions: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Senses: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Social Influence: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Tracking: 5 dice (+2 for 2m)

Appearance 3, Resolve 2 (+1 for 2m), Guile 3 (+1 for 2m)

Combat

Attack (Seethe, red jade daiklave): 11 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 15L/5)

Attack (Simhata's Roar, red jade devil caster): 9 dice at short range (+4 for 4m, Damage 16L/4)

Combat Movement: 10 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 4 (+2 for 4m), **Parry:** 5 (+2 for 4m)

Soak/Hardness: 6/0 (Buff jacket)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: I must protect the weak and impoverished.

Major Tie: Yushoto Mathar (Friendship);

Major Tie: Righteous River (Respect)

Major Principle: The Wyld Hunt is essential to ending threats from Anathema.

Major Principle: It's wise to heed our ancestor's guidance and wisdom.

Minor Tie: Xocha and Itzli (love)

Minor Tie: Sesus Eshuvar (Fondness)

Minor Tie: Kingfisher Swift (Admiration)

Minor Tie: Lookshy (Wary Respect)

Minor Tie: The Realm (Scorn)

Offensive Charms

Blazing Phoenix Pinion (8m, 1a, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Simple; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Fire): After aiming, make a **decisive** Archery attack, adding +3 dice of damage. On a hit, if she rolls at least one 10 on the attack or damage roll, her shot erupts in a blast out to short range from her target, rolling dice of lethal damage equal to her attack and damage roll 10s to her original target and each character whose Evasion is lower than her attack roll, ignoring Hardness. Characters damaged in the blast are knocked prone and suffer 3 dice of lethal damage, ignoring Hardness, on each of their turns until they extinguish themselves.

Boughs of Burning Autumn (2m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Fire/Wood, Perilous): Reloads her dragon sighwand reflexively.

Burning Pinnacle Strike (3m; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Fire, Uniform): After making a **withering** Melee attack that raises her Initiative above all enemies, reflexively make a **withering** or **decisive** Melee attack. Once per round.

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +4 raw **withering** damage or double up to four 10s on a **decisive** damage roll on a Melee attack.

Death From Nowhere (4m; Supplemental; Instant; Air/Water, Balanced, Withering-only): **Withering** Archery attack ignores 3 points of armor soak.

Five-Dragon Arsenal: Reduce weapon attunement costs by three motes.

Harnessed Firestorm Assault (10m, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Simple; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only): Make three **decisive** Melee attacks, each with (Initiative/2, rounded up) damage. Once per scene unless reset by landing a **decisive** attack in Fire Aura and building to Initiative 12+ without leaving Fire Aura.

Moth to the Candle (2m, 1wp; Simple; One scene; Fire): As long as Chalima is in the fight, enemies can't attack targets other than her. Resisting for the scene costs one Willpower.

Smoldering Essence Attack (5m, 1a; Simple; Instant; Aura, Fire, Withering-only): Make a **withering** Melee attack. Enemy loses extra Initiative equal to damage roll 10s, which recurs on each of his next four turns, or until he deals **withering** damage to Chalima. She doesn't gain this Initiative.

Defensive Charms

Blinding Spark Distraction (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Blocking or winning a clash from close range blinds attacker until end of his next turn unless he succeeds on a (Stamina + Resistance) roll at difficulty (3 + attack roll extra successes).

Dragon-Scale Shield (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Successfully parrying at close range causes attacker to lose Initiative equal to (1 + his attack roll 1s), which Chalima doesn't gain.

Fearsome Dragon Presence (5m; Reflexive; One tick; Fire, Perilous): Attack rolls, influence rolls, and rushes against Chalima take a -2 penalty (-3 in Fire Aura). An enemy may spend one Willpower to become immune for the scene.

Flame Borne Interception (3m; Reflexive; Until next turn; Balanced, Fire, Uniform): Gain +1 Parry. Increases by one for each attack blocked; resets back to +1 if she's hit or dodges.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +3 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** Melee attack. Counts as her action for the round unless she expends Fire Aura.

Social Charms

Blazing Heart Ascendancy (6m; Supplemental; Instant; Fire): When Chalima takes a persuade or threaten action, if her target has any emotion-based Intimacies, they're the only ones he can invoke in the Decision Point.

Burning Dragon Mien (4m; Simple; Instant; Fire): Roll Social Influence with double 9s to threaten a single target. If his Resolve is beaten, he loses 1 Initiative (which Chalima doesn't gain).

Eye-for-Passions Scrutiny (2m; Supplemental; Instant; Fire): A successful Read Intentions roll also reveals an emotion-based Intimacy related to the motives or other Intimacy discerned.

Smoke Without Flame (4m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Fire): +1 Guile (non-Charm in Fire Aura). Characters who fail believe they succeeded, but instead read an exaggerated version of Chalima's emotional state or one of her emotion-based Intimacies.

Miscellaneous Charms

Speech Without Words (5m; Reflexive; One scene; Air;): Chalima and up to three others can communicate silently. Hearthmates don't count towards this limit.

Saloy Hin

Saloy Hin doesn't speak of where he came from, only where he's going. A headstrong young shepherd from the western Blessed Isle before he Exalted, he was tempered into a soldier in the crucible of Pasiap's Stair. He took well to military discipline, but never lost his intrepid spirit. He earned acclaim in the Imperial legions for his daring tactics and charismatic leadership, and was ultimately promoted to command of the 17th "Sirocco" Legion.

When Hin received the message calling his legion to return to the Blessed Isle after the Empress' disappearance, he balked at what he saw for a naked power grab, and his troops stood with him. Instead, they abandoned their posts, vanishing into the night. Now they're building a power base in the central South near Chiaroscuro, seizing firedust caches, manses, artifacts from Anathema tombs, and other strategic assets. He's raised his banner to welcome all Southern peoples, promising glory to the young, power to the ambitious, vengeance to the downtrodden, and hope to the disillusioned. More prosaically, he also offers coin, with which he's bought out the contracts of a handful of Southern mercenary companies. He particularly values outcastes, Exigents, and God-Blooded, accepting all such who swear themselves to his service.

Hin spends his days within the fortress-manse called the Steel Tower. There he mulls over strategy, corresponds with potential confederates for his so-called "Second Alliance of Tigers," and consults with astrologers and seers. His current target is Chiaroscuro, with its vast wealth, bustling shipyards, and strategic location on the Inland Sea. He's sent envoys to Delzahn nomad bands who've grown discontent with the Tri-Khan's authority, bidding them to join him and reclaim their people.

Hin hasn't yet formulated his endgame, thinking it premature. He and his inner circle of outcaste captains have discussed ambitious strategies — burning the Lap's fertile fields to disrupt the Realm's Southern supply lines, besieging a satrapy disguised as a Great House's troops, reaching out to Prasad's Dragon Clans or even the Lunar Amatha Kinslayer as allies. These remain no more than plans until the right opportunities arise. For now, Hin seizes on any opportunity to amass more power and troops — today Chiaroscuro, tomorrow, even he doesn't know. All the while he watches the Realm's deterioration towards civil war, and considers what the world might look like from the Scarlet Throne.

Aspect: Fire

Essence: 3; **Willpower:** 8; **Join Battle:** 9 dice (+4 for 4m)

Personal: 14, **Peripheral:** 39

Health Levels: -0/-1x5/-2x5/-4/Incap.

Actions: Command: 12 dice (+6 for 6m); Feats of Strength: 7 dice (+4 for 4m, may attempt Strength 3 feats); Read Intentions: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Resist Poison/Disease: 6 dice (+2 for 2m); Senses: 7 dice (+4 for 4m); Social Influence: 8 dice (+4 for 4m); Strategy: 10 dice (+4 for 4m); Tracking: 5 dice (+2 for 2m); Wilderness Survival: 7 dice (+4 for 4m)

Appearance 4, Resolve 4 (+2 for 4m), Guile 4 (+2 for 4m)

Combat

Attack (Audacious Victory, red jade daiklave): 13 dice (+6 for 6m, Damage 15L/5)

Combat Movement: 8 dice (+4 for 4m)

Evasion: 2 (+1 for 2m), **Parry:** 6 (+3 for 6m)

Soak/Hardness: 11/7 (Blessed Ember, jade lamellar)

Intimacies

Defining Principle: Never hesitate to seize the moment.

Defining Principle: I am destined for greatness.

Major Principle: Leadership is about being someone others aspire to be.

Major Tie: The 17th “Sirocco” Legion (Pride)

Major Tie: The Great Houses and their legions (Disdain)

Minor Principle: Foreknowledge is the greatest weapon.

Minor Principle: The Scarlet Dynasty must be burned away for the Realm to be reborn.

Minor Tie: Pasiap’s Stair (Bitter Memories)

Escort

Saloy Hin is almost always accompanied by a Dragon-Blooded officer, an elite bodyguard (**Exalted**, p. 497) and a Size 2 battle group of battle-ready soldiers (**Exalted**, pp. 496-497).

Offensive Charms

Burning Pinnacle Strike (3m; Reflexive; Instant; Aura, Fire, Uniform): After making a **withering** attack that raises her Initiative above all enemies, reflexively make a **withering** or **decisive** attack. Once per round.

Crimson Fang Bite (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Dual, Fire): Add +3 raw **withering** damage or double up to three 10s on a **decisive** damage roll.

Harnessed Firestorm Assault (10m, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Simple; Instant; Aura, Decisive-only, Fire): Make three **decisive** attacks, each with (Initiative/2, rounded up) damage. Once per scene unless reset by landing a **decisive** attack in Fire Aura and building to Initiative 12+ without leaving Fire Aura.

Smoldering Essence Attack (5m, 1a; Simple; Instant; Aura, Fire, Withering-only): Make a **withering** attack. Enemy loses extra Initiative equal to damage roll 10s, which recurs on each of his next four turns, or until he deals **withering** damage to Linwei. She doesn’t gain this Initiative.

Defensive Charms

Aura of Invulnerability (5m, 1wp; Simple; Aura; Aura, Fire, Perilous): Roll (current temporary Willpower) and gain that many temporary −0 health levels and +4 soak.

Blinding Spark Distraction (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Blocking or winning a clash from close range blinds attacker until end of his next turn unless he succeeds on a (Stamina + Resistance) roll at difficulty (3 + attack roll extra successes).

Dragon-Scale Shield (1m, 1i; Reflexive; Instant; Fire, Perilous, Uniform): Successfully parrying at close range causes attacker to lose Initiative equal to (1 + his attack roll 1s), which Hin doesn't gain.

Fearsome Dragon Presence (5m; Reflexive; One tick; Fire, Perilous): Attack rolls, influence rolls, and rushes against Hin take a −2 penalty (−3 in Fire Aura). An enemy may spend one Willpower to become immune for the scene.

Flame Borne Interception (3m; Reflexive; Until Next Turn; Balanced, Fire, Uniform): Gain +1 Parry. Increases by one for each attack blocked; resets back to +1 if he's hit or dodges.

Impervious Skin of Stone (4m; Reflexive; Instant; Balanced, Earth, Withering-only): Add +3 soak. In Earth Aura, can be used after attack roll.

Portentous Comet Deflection (3m, 1wp; Reflexive; Instant; Clash, Decisive-only, Fire): Reflexively clash with a **decisive** attack. Counts as his action for the round unless he expends Fire Aura.

Social Charms

Auspicious First Meeting Attitude (5m; Simple; Instant; Balanced, Water): (5m; Simple; Instant; Balanced, Water): Upon meeting someone for the first time, roll Social Influence against her (lower of Guile or Resolve) to both read his intentions and instill a positive Tie towards Hin.

Heartstring-Pulling Approach (3m, 1wp; Supplemental; Instant; Fire): Add a non-Charm success on a single-target Social Influence roll. If the target's Resolve is lowered by a Major or Defining Intimacy based on passionate emotion, the cost to resist the influence increases by one Willpower.

Unquenchable Battle-Passion (5m; Reflexive; Instant; Fire): When targeted by influence that would make him stop fighting or hinder his ability to fight, automatically inspires himself with an emotion opposing that influence. If she spends Willpower to resist that influence, he gains 3 Initiative per Willpower spent.

War Charms

Deadly Wildfire Legion (5m, 1wp, expend Fire Aura; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Fire): Add +3 non-Charm dice on Command roll to order an attack; battle group may immediately take its turn if it hasn't acted this round. Every two Command roll successes add one die of damage. Once per scene unless reset by ordering a battle group to attack and deal enough damage to incapacitate a nontrivial foe or rout a battle group.

Indomitable Flame of Valor (1m [+1wp]; Supplemental; Instant; Aura, Fire): Rally with double 9s; can pay one Willpower to grant elite Drill troops perfect morale for one round.

Roaring Dragon Officer (3m; Reflexive; One turn; Balanced, Earth): Flurry a command with a non-attack action. In Earth Aura, lower penalty on rolls to −2, and negate Defense penalty.

Once, the sight of the Imperial City from a ship's deck filled Sesus Eshuvar with pride. On several occasions, he'd sailed into the harbor while citizens stood on the docks, welcoming heroes home from hard-won battles. Today, the figures held weapons, ready to fight once the ships drew close.

Patrician forces held the Imperial City. Perhaps the Great Houses should have seen their uprising coming, but they'd been so focused on bloodily whittling away one another's resources — their wealth, legionnaires, contenders for the throne — that they'd ignored the families comprising the Thousand Scales and *their* forces. Even now, it seemed unreal to Eshuvar — that mere patricians could take the splendid city from the might of the Great Houses. He cringed even as the thought crossed his mind; that type of haughty sentiment would certainly have earned him a lecture from Chalima, if she heard it. She'd be right.

Beside him stood Ledaal Chapet Hansei, a young officer fresh from the Heptagram. Sesus and Ledaal's current alliance bemused them both, but war made strange bedfellows. The Ledaal sorcerer reminded Eshuvar of himself at that age. He'd only been a few months out of the Heptagram when he'd sailed on the Wyld Hunt. How his Hearthmates would laugh at Eshuvar, the youngest of them, waxing nostalgic. Mathar would laugh loudest, but there'd be no cruelty in it. Eshuvar missed them all, hoped they were safe, wherever they might be. Letters had been scarce these last few years.

A runner passed a message to Hansei, who turned to Eshuvar. "Their leader wants a word. She's waiting on the docks."

Eshuvar nodded. Perhaps she'd tender her side's surrender, and this would be over without bloodshed.

He called a cloud from the sky, and rode it to where a lone figure stood at the end of a pier. She carried an orichalcum goremaul, though she held it at ease. Her white jade breastplate bore the sigil of her patrician house. After a moment, Eshuvar remembered which it represented: Tereya.

No. Please, Blessed Mela, don't let it be her.

But he knew. He sensed her presence, usually such a comfort, the closer he drew. His heart soared with joy even as it plummeted with despair. The woman removed her helm as the cloud set him on the dock. Before him, his own horror mirrored on her dear, familiar face, stood Kingfisher Swift. His friend, his sister-in-arms, his Sworn Kin.

In charge of the enemy's forces.

"You've done well for yourself," she said, breaking the heavy silence. "A command in the Navy."

"And you. Leading an army." He swept his gaze over the troops. "I had hoped you wanted to discuss your terms for laying down your weapons."

She shook her head. "I wanted to look my opponent in the eye."

"Surrender, Swift," Eshuvar said softly. "I can protect you."

"You know I can't. No more than you could turn the fleet around and sail away."

They could do neither of those things. Maybe once, they could have disappeared into her command tent and hammered out a peace. Maybe they still could, even now. Perhaps he could convince her to come with him, join her rebel force to his own patchwork navy. It might give Sesus' unlikely contender for the Scarlet Throne a chance.

But, no. He saw the determination in the set of Swift's jaw, and knew she read something similar in his stiff-backed stance. No matter their own friendship, circumstances across the Realm had deteriorated too sharply to end this war. Eshuvar believed in the fleet's cause. Swift wouldn't have taken *the damned Imperial City* if she didn't think it was the right course of action.

"Fight well," she said.

"And you."

As the cloud returned him to the ship, Eshuvar thought how River would never forgive them for taking up arms against one another. He might never forgive himself.

Out in the harbor, a battle horn blew.

Chapter Nine

The Center Cannot Hold

For eight centuries, the Scarlet Empress held a tiger by the tail, raising a great Dynasty and setting them about the task of ordering Creation. Hers was the burden of rule, the task of upholding the Perfected Hierarchy. Her blood flows in the veins of a Dynasty of godlings raised believing they were chosen to rule.

Small wonder that, when their divine mother vanished, her children would begin to eye one another with redoubled jealousy, anticipating the day when the blades come out and blood stains the gilt-marble floors of palaces and manses throughout the Blessed Isle.

When civil war engulfs the Realm, the result won't be clean or orderly. Organs of state fail, pulling apart into factions unable to stand on their own. Alliances, some frantic and hastily made, other planned for decades, then come to the fore. Only then does the chaos settle into something resembling a "normal" war. The Realm's future isn't set, and the civil war to come may take any form.

This chapter discusses how that war might begin, how it might affect the world, and what shape it might take. This isn't divine writ or metaplot; rather, it outlines a variety of possible futures to aid Storytellers in crafting stories centered on the Realm civil war. This encompasses both conflict on the Blessed Isle and the collapse of order throughout the satrapies. It also presents a detailed scenario in which the West becomes a theatre of war all its own, perhaps even the center of the conflict, as V'neef and Peleps fight for the future of an entire Direction.

Civil War in the Realm

Though the Empress' reach extended across Creation, the true base of her power was the Blessed Isle. Apart from the ancient sorceries wrought upon the land, entire networks of manses fueling their terrible might, it's gifted with great seams of metal, rich and fertile earth, navigable waterways, and imperishable roads that have lasted for an Age. It has fortresses built atop fortress, expertly crafted over eons, and armies drilled according to methods that have held true

for centuries. Now, though, those armies, those fortresses, those manses and ancient wonders, are all split between rival houses.

Beyond the Blessed Isle, the satrapies become staging grounds and proxies in the conflict between Great Houses. Imperial garrisons and satrapial militaries mobilize for war as the houses seek to cut their rivals off from the treasure, resources, and janissaries that their satrapial holdings provide. As the satrapies bear the cost of the Dynasty's war, unrest boils over into public dissent and outright revolt, fraying the edges of the Realm's empire as conquered peoples struggle to throw off their yoke, potentially aided by their native gods, Exigent champions, or Lunars of the Silver Pact. Local powers seek to profit from the Realm's instability. House Ferem might unify its former holdings and fellow cadet houses of Grand Cherak into a powerful coalition; Rankar VII might seek to expand his Southern empire amid the turmoil; Lookshy moves to subordinate the Confederation of Rivers to Seventh Legion to command in the name of defending the River Province. Victory on the Blessed Isle is key to seizing the throne, but a new Empress may find her Realm greatly diminished if she fails to take the Threshold.

Decisions, Decisions

The civil war doesn't exist in a vacuum. The Storyteller determines how the player characters interact with the progression of events as they unfold, which will shape the flow of the war as the characters experience it. To ensure that the player characters are active participants in the events of the Realm Civil War rather than mere bystanders — even if they play a relatively small role in the war's Creation-spanning geopolitics — the Storyteller should make sure either that player characters are involved in key events throughout the war, or that the important events they aren't directly engaged in hold personal meaning for them.

Only one empress may sit atop the Scarlet Throne, setting the stage for war. However, the flashpoint that sees this tension escalate into outright war may seem comparatively small or out of place in the historical view. It could be an assassination — perhaps of one of the player character's favored ancestors, one who's previously played a major role in the campaign. It could be triggered by the formation of an alliance between Great Houses planning for war, perhaps one that sets a player character against her spouse's house.

Wars don't emerge from nowhere. People don't just decide to cordially arrange affairs, make a date, and meet upon the field of battle. Wars happen when two states (or state-like actors, like Great Houses) have vital needs or wants that are at odds with one another; in this case, only one contender may sit upon the Scarlet Throne. The pressures created by the empty throne are what sets the stage for war, while the direct cause may be an event that, in the historical view, seems strangely out of place.

Make the players part of key events, and set up the stakes beforehand so when they're revealed, they pack an emotional punch. Important figures in both diplomacy and warfare may have close personal ties to one or more player characters — an enemy general might be an old friend of one of the player characters from their time together in the House of Bells; a potential ally might clash with a player character over her family rejecting him as a wedding match for her years ago. Elder Dynasts who act as mentors and patrons to the player characters may be the victims of assassinations that serve as flashpoints for the civil war, while a player character's home prefecture may become a battlefield. Personal vendettas and rivalries are pursued even in the midst of all-out war, while loyalties are strained to their utmost.

Every Storyteller character, every salon, every conversation is an opportunity for the Storyteller to apply leverage and emotional weight to the events surrounding the player characters, to drag them into events by the force of loyalty, friendship, duty, and blood.

The Council of the Empty Throne

Two years after the Empress vanished, a council of Dynasts, Immaculate monks, and Thousand Scales ministers convened to negotiate the fate of the throne, appointing Tepet Fokuf as regent and declaring that after seven years, the Scarlet Throne would be declared officially empty. For games beginning at the default time of RY 768, only four years remain before this comes to pass. If civil war doesn't break out before then, the official pronouncement of the Scarlet Empress' abdication will almost inevitably set it in motion.

Candidates for the Throne

Many in the Dynasty, and some outside it, seek the Scarlet Throne, but desire alone isn't enough. To stand a chance, one needs not only a great name, but power to back that name up, ties to call on allies, and the determination to see one's allies, friends, and children slaughtered on the battlefield. None of the following candidates are guaranteed the throne (else there'd be no civil war over the question), but all things being equal, they have a better chance than most.

Mnemon

If there's one woman in the Realm thought a leading contender to succeed the Empress, it's Mnemon (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 351). Even before the Empress vanished, many saw her as heir apparent, despite her mother's largesse aiding her siblings and relations who competed against her. It suited the Empress to have her children at each other's throats — and it suited Mnemon to stand above the rest so far as she was able. Eldest of the Empress' living daughters, she considers the throne hers by right, and will countenance no other to sit upon it.

Few passionately support Mnemon, but she has many fair-weather allies eager to win her favor. Likewise, few wish to be first to stand against her. Her candidacy seems inevitable — until a critical mass of opposition peels away her provisional support.

Sesus Raenyah

A retired general renowned for competence and integrity, house matriarch Sesus Raenyah (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 65) doesn't start out seeking the throne. Rather, she's put forward by her house as a compromise candidate — a figurehead to oppose Mnemon's ascent to the throne, one more easily controlled than V'neef. Raenyah, for her part, accepts this role to protect and strengthen her house and stabilize the Realm, believing her competent, moderate reign is ultimately the best way forward for both.

Her primary backer is her influential husband Oban, son of the Scarlet Empress, who's vested his own ambitions in placing her on the throne. Others include House Sesus' military and mercantile wings, her protégés from the House of Bells and Spiral Academy, and ministers and senators seeking to maintain the status quo. In addition to their own political goals and personal loyalty, many such backers expect to be handsomely rewarded once Raenyah sits the throne.

Raenyah's experienced leadership and strategic proficiency will serve her faction well, and her house's numerous loyal legions offer military might that Mnemon and V'neef can't match alone.

However, her distaste for corruption turns away many potential supporters, and her reflexive rejection of Sesus' espionage assets is a blind spot that leaves her faction vulnerable.

V'neef

Youngest of the Empress' Exalted offspring, V'neef (p. XX) believes her days are numbered if civil war breaks out unless she plans wisely how to use the few assets she has. One key advantage is that she *isn't* Mnemon, who's spent 400 years making enemies who fear what she might do with the throne's power. Those enemies court V'neef, who seeks the throne not solely for power's sake, but to safeguard her family's future — and her own.

For all her courtly grace, V'neef is a survivor. She genuinely loves her family and the Realm, but she'll sacrifice anything and abandon any ideal when her own life is on the line and there's no other choice.

Waiting in the Wings

Beneath the frontrunners are those who suffer some disadvantage — not severe enough to outright disqualify them, but certainly an obstacle to the throne. Their chances are proportional to the Storyteller's desire to offer them as contenders.

Cathak Cainan

Cainan is an old man — that's two strikes against him, which he both knows and accepts. Cainan (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 345) doesn't *want* the throne, and would prefer to stand back and play queenmaker. Even if he were to gain the Scarlet Throne, his remaining years are few, and he dies before cementing Cathak rule, the civil war that follows may well obliterate his house. Nonetheless, he might be convinced that his stewardship is all that'll preserve the Realm (or his house) in the face of chaos, civil disorder, and collapse. Should he make a bid for the throne, his military acumen and the loyal, well-trained Cathak legions will lend strength to his claim.

Cynis Petalin

Cynis Petalin (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 43) is a formidable commander of her house's legions, with a warm charisma and easy laugh that have won her many friends and admirers. While she has no imperial ambitions, her lover Cynis Wisel, one of the house's three presiding matriarchs, whispers to Petalin of all the good that a Cynis empress might do for both the house and the Realm. Petalin loves Wisel deeply enough to go to war if she must, though she nurses secret hopes that a civil war might yet be averted.

Petalin's greatest weakness as a candidate is her house — Cynis' infamy within the Scarlet Dynasty stains her reputation, despite her lack of personal involvement in any of its blackmail operations or more decadent debauches.

Peleps Lai

Ancient and now largely retired, Peleps Lai (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 58) nonetheless leads House Peleps, and commands the Rightly Guided Admiralty Board in all but name through sheer force of personality and legend. She remains loyal to the missing Empress; while she'd love to magnify her house's power and prestige, she'll make no move for the throne unless convinced the Empress is permanently gone — she'd consider it a terrible betrayal.

Instead, Lai aims to establish a Western empire, to secure her house's prospects in the short term and maintain control for when the Empress returns. This will pit Peleps against the rest of the Dynasty. Once Lai rules the West, the only way to protect Peleps' new empire may be to claim the Scarlet Throne.

Ragara Banoba

Banoba (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 62) excels as a businessman and administrator. Logistics are child's play to someone who's spent the better part of two centuries balancing ledgers of the size and complexity House Ragara commonly handles. Lacking in martial power, he nonetheless wields immense financial might and is highly motivated to use it — especially before civil war leaves the Realm's financial systems in tatters. His inner circle also commands a secret hoard of occult resources, many of them sufficiently heretical as to make their use a last-ditch option.

Banoba's first priority is to keep Mnemon from claiming the throne and using it to destroy his house. He'd rather back another candidate and wield his power from the shadows, but will step forward if no one else will defend House Ragara. His second priority is to maintain and amass more power. Should Mnemon fall and no other strong candidate present herself, Banoba might act more directly to obtain leverage over the future Empress — or become Empress himself.

Mothers of Houses

Virtually any other Great House matriarch could conceivably declare for the throne. But not all can match their ambition with ability, or their funding with fortitude. Such ventures are most likely to succeed after war has already taken its toll on the strongest claimants.

Mourning Husbands

A candidate's death can fracture her coalition as elements unwilling to support her successor pull away, but it could leave a healthy and powerful infrastructure of warfare behind as well. In such cases, there'd be a great many warriors, functionaries, and hangers-on without a prospect to attach themselves to. The nearest legitimate figure might fill the gap, taking on the weight of the fallen candidate's bid for the throne — publicly out of piety and respect, though as likely to be founded in personal ambition. Husbands, children, siblings, lovers, or lieutenants of sufficient charisma might fill the role.

Dark Horses

Beyond unlikely contenders, there exist long shots whose chances of becoming Empress are scant indeed. In the civil war's early stages, none of these named merit consideration — but, as the conflict escalates and spreads, laying waste to the Realm and slaughtering more likely candidates, their odds improve. Ultimately, one should only take the stage if the Storyteller finds her candidacy especially compelling, or a player takes deliberate action to support her claim.

Bal Keraz

The Imperial Treasury's senior official, Bal Keraz (**The Realm**, p. 50) is far from a likely prospect, but may be the patrician with the best chance of ending up on the throne. Having spent the years since the Empress' disappearance struggling against the Realm's corruption, Keraz has made allies within both the Thousand Scales and the All-Seeing Eye. If a patrician uprising challenged the Dynasty or the Imperial ministries made a bid for control of the Realm, Keraz

could offer them the Treasury's financial power and the All-Seeing Eye's intelligence-gathering network, perhaps providing the crucial edge needed for such an unlikely contender to prevail.

Berit

Berit (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 342), daughter of the Empress, legendary general, sorcerous adept — yet without a Great House to bear her name. In frustration and fury, she went into self-imposed exile — but now, with the Empress gone, her name has begun circulating again. She holds no significant military or financial resources, but if she were to secure backing from elsewhere — taking leadership of a military coalition of weaker houses, perhaps — the Isle itself would tremble. Few have ever stood against Berit when a legion carried her mon. And once she has the power she always sought in her hands, she's unlikely to let go.

Cevis Ghandarva

Leader of the Forest Witches, Ghandarva (p. XX) has nursed his grudge against the Scarlet Dynasty for centuries, dreaming of building the empire that will succeed the Realm. The Realm Civil War offers fertile soil for this ambition, but Ghandarva's greatest asset — Domnica's Mantle, an artifact capable of reincarnating him and his Company of Thrones amid the houses of his enemies — doesn't lend itself to swift responses. Even if Ghandarva seeded the Great Houses with his own agents as soon as he learned of the Empress' disappearance, it would still be years before his Thrones came of age and Exalted. A short civil war that ends with the Realm's power consolidated behind a new Empress or governing body will likely rebuff Ghandarva's ambitions for the moment — but if the war stretches on, or leaves behind a fractured Realm, Ghandarva's machinations may bear fruit.

Ledaal Yasmeth

The Ledaal matriarch Yasmeth (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 46) has no ambitions of sitting the Scarlet Throne — even amid the chaos of a civil war, she believes that House Ledaal's Shadow Crusade must be placed above power struggles, and that the best way to ensure its survival is through an alliance with the strongest candidate. But should the Realm find itself facing an existential threat from Anathema as the war rages on — if a contender for the throne allies with a Deathlord, or is replaced or has her coalition infiltrated by Silver Pact shapeshifters, for instance — she may see no choice but to fulfill her duty to defend the Realm by taking the throne.

Ledaal's legions are formidable, though no match for those of Cathak or Sesus, and its chief financial asset, Arjuf's port, could easily be cut off by a Peleps or V'neef blockade. If Yasmeth is to prevail, she'll need to win over allies to her cause — potentially even turning to Lookshy, if the other houses can't be convinced of the Shadow Crusade's importance. But House Ledaal boasts secret strengths — salvaged First Age artifacts, ancient sorceries, and the elite shikari created in Howling Heart — that may catch its enemies unawares.

The Mouth of Peace

The spiritual leader of the Immaculate Order, the Mouth of Peace (**The Realm**, p. 91) is disinterested in matters of temporal authority, and unlikely to even consider making any moves to consolidate the Immaculate Order's power while pious contenders like Mnemon remain viable. But unlike the Great Houses, the Mouth of Peace is deeply concerned for the peasantry's well-being, and could be pushed to action if the war's toll on the common people became too much to bear. And if the course of war sees Mnemon fall out of contention, the Mouth of Peace

may yet consider her own bid if it's the only way to prevent the Realm from splintering into warring states or to keep a heretical Empress from taking the throne.

Nellens Ikona

Nellens Ikona (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 51) doesn't consider herself a contender for the throne, but she keenly appreciates her own unique strengths. While her mercantile operation lacks the wealth and influence brought to bear by Ragara Banoba and his ilk, Ikona is well-loved throughout the patriciate and the wealthier strata of the peasantry. While her peers on the Most August Conclave believe the house's best path forward is by securing an alliance with a stronger candidate, Ikona has the potential to become the flashpoint of a popular uprising against the Dynasty, supplementing her house's meager legions with patrician forces and peasant militias.

Ragara

Ragara (p. XX) is deeply conflicted. He wants to continue the spiritual pursuits of his retirement, to trust that his successor Banoba will lead their house through the civil war — but after spending so much of his life obsessing over the throne, it's not easy to simply stand back as an unprecedented opportunity to seize it arises. But by the time Ragara chooses to take an active role — if he ever does — Banoba will most likely already have his own plans in motion, and Ragara isn't fool enough to split his house against itself. Should Banoba die, though, Ragara may step forward to reclaim the house's leadership. Alternatively, should a strong Immaculate bloc emerge, the newly pious Ragara might be better posed to broker an alliance between it and his house, an eventuality that would likely see Banoba step aside or be forced aside in Ragara's favor.

Saloy Hin

As the civil war first breaks out, Saloy Hin (p. XX) is focused on the South, not the Blessed Isle. While the Great Houses make their first moves, he'll continue to consolidate his rogue legion's military power, preying upon any opportunities that arise in the Southern satrapies as a result of the Realm's growing instability. Pragmatic as it may be to let the Realm fall apart, though, Hin's loyalty to the Scarlet Empress makes it hard to bear the squabbling and corruption of her children. If the throne goes to a contender Hin sees as unworthy to succeed his Empress, he may take his legion across the Inland Sea to make his own bid for the throne.

Tepet Ejava

Tepet Ejava, the Roseblack (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 357), is a skilled general, devoted to military honor and defense of the Realm. She may seek the throne to prevent the Blessed Isle from devolving into chaos as unworthy claimants lay waste to her homeland — or to prevent her own execution should an enemy of her house become the new Empress. However, she commands but the single Vermillion Legion — theoretically in service to House Tepet, but fiercely loyal to her alone. Such a force could rule a Threshold kingdom, but on the Isle, a single legion scarcely compares to the armies of other candidates.

House Tepet might support Ejava, but in its diminished state, the house's leadership might see an alliance with another candidate as a safer bid for its own survival — and even if her house did support her, its forces aren't what they were. Ejava's best shot is to seize the capital in a quick coup, or wait out the bloodshed to even the odds.

Other Candidates

The Dynasty is both broad and deep, populated with thousands of Dragon-Blooded and hundreds of luminaries who stand out even from their heroic cousins. Many Dynastic characters mentioned elsewhere would make serviceable dark-horse candidates for the throne. Storytellers may design their own candidates or solicit suggestions from players. A dearth of likely candidates from any given Great House needn't be a barrier; it will be an individual, not a house, who sits upon the Scarlet Throne.

In the Ashes of Empire

There is an alternative, should no victor emerge — the prospect of a Realm *without* an Empress. The Deliberative, the patrician families of the Thousand Scales, or the Immaculate Order might emerge as a ruling body if only to restore some semblance of order, unsure of its new (and finally *real*) power and legitimacy.

The Deliberative might rule alone, or in coalition with a few of the Thousand Scales' great patrician houses — or perhaps those houses, or a single talented demagogue and her handpicked associates, might rule *through* the Deliberative. The Immaculate Order can call upon the loyalty of virtually every peasant on the Blessed Isle, establishing through them theocratic rule in the Realm, with the Mouth of Peace occupying the throne.

Even outsiders can enter the fray as central authority fades. Strong cadet houses such as House Ferem proclaim independence, building coalitions to take control of swaths of the Threshold. Eastern satrapies seek protection with Lookshy under the umbrella of the Confederation of Rivers, or fall under the Forest Witches' sway. Anathema carve out Threshold empires or worse, invade the Blessed Isle itself.

And the Realm might splinter outright, leaving no central authority at all. The resulting state would more closely resemble the Shogunate than the Realm — fractured, unstable, plagued by internecine strife, wracked with intrigues and regular changes to the power structure. This could accompany even a successful bid for the throne, if a weakened Empress or other junta is unable to control the whole of the Isle. In such chaos, one house will be the real winner — with the Scarlet Empress gone, and without the threat of retaliation from powerful Great Houses to hold them back, House Iselsi will pursue its Vendetta in grand style, becoming a scourge unlike any the Blessed Isle has ever known.

Power Blocs

No Great House can claim the Scarlet Throne on its own — even Mnemon, considered the strongest candidate for her mother's throne, needs allies to make her ambitions real. Virtually any civil war will be fought between power blocs that form as the civil order comes crashing down — which means at the heart of every army, every battle, and every negotiation between these blocs, there will be politicking and intrigues, perfect for players to become involved in.

The following descriptions of possible power blocs are among the most likely and significant of possible combinations. Don't take these as inevitable, but as suggestions and inspiration. Any one of these power blocs could rise or fall through player action or through the demands of the narrative.

Power Overwhelming

For a single Great House to unilaterally seize power would require unprecedented supernatural aid. The most obvious method would involve control of the Imperial Defense Grid, although other mechanisms could conceivably come into play if the Storyteller desires — such as the Scarlet Empress' personal arsenal of warstriders, the Eye of Autochthon's world-shaking magic, intervention by an Incarna or similarly puissant being, or untold prodigies such as the mythical Final Realm-Controlling Utterance sought by Ragara Banoba's inner circle. Any such power would have unique properties, reshaping the civil war in idiosyncratic ways.

The War of Two Sisters

In this scenario, Mnemon and V'neef are twin poles of a conflict between two great alliances. It begins genteelly enough —the scheming and (occasionally literal) backstabbing among Dynasts increases only slightly as Mnemon openly speaks of declaring her mother deceased and ascending to the throne. She's constrained only by the Council of the Empty Throne's timeline for acknowledging the Empress' death. Barred from the throne room by the Silent Legion and unwilling to storm the Imperial Palace, she instead lays the groundwork for the day, two years hence, when the throne stands open.

Houses Ledaal and Peleps, eager to avoid war and successfully negotiate support for the Shadow Crusade and the Navy from the successor Empress, consent to publicly back Mnemon. V'neef, fully aware of what this alliance means for her family, turns to her eldest brother Ragara, whose house officially backs her both out of spite for Mnemon and to finally gain leverage over the youngest Great House. House Tepet is notionally aligned with V'neef by marriage, but given its tenuous position and its divided leadership, it's not yet willing to act in support of V'neef's claim to the throne when doing so might shackle it to the losing side.

This standoff persists for months as each candidate maneuvers toward a bloodless victory, hoping to avoid a military response or breakdown of civil order should she claim the throne.

House Cathak demurs from any alliance, for though Cainan has no great love for Mnemon, neither will he countenance a hasty decision. House Sesus holds back in response, believing that House Cathak will declare for the opposite of whoever they back. The remaining Great Houses — Cynis, Nellens, Sesus, and Tepet — remain neutral, biding their time and building their own forces and alliances, until that choice is made. All the while, Mnemon shores up power, making her victory all the more certain.

Cainan's primary concern is maintaining order; if he's certain V'neef would make a better Empress, he'll feel obliged to support her. House Sesus' best reason to declare for V'neef is a gamble to secure preeminence in military affairs under her rule, displacing House Cathak's influence.

If either House Cathak or House Sesus declares for one candidate, its rival house declares for the other. With both great military houses in the field, civil war is all but certain. The combined power of the Imperial Navy and either of the Cathak or Sesus legions would pose a formidable obstacle to any one house's legions on the field of battle, but this doesn't guarantee Mnemon the throne. With Ragara providing financial backing, whichever legions fight for V'neef will be well-supplied and consistently paid through even the worst of the war, keeping morale high as opposing forces potentially falter. The one certainty is that open war between these coalitions of Great Houses would stain the Blessed Isle with the blood of legions.

If neither house makes the hard choice, Mnemon takes the Scarlet Throne unchallenged. Though perhaps the least bloody resolution, people will die nonetheless — whether in minor clashes as Mnemon consolidates power, through intrigues during the process, or amid the purges that follow. Mnemon isn't quite so bloodthirsty as her cousins believe; she may allow V'neef to survive if she accepts disinheritance, exile, and the striking of her house from the Imperial ledgers (though she and her progeny will be watched closely forevermore by Mnemon's All-Seeing Eye).

This configuration of power blocs is easily modifiable. House Sesus could take Peleps' place as Mnemon's backer in this scenario, aligned via marriage bonds, economic concessions, and military primacy under the new regime. This changes some details, and prompts terrible tension between the Realm's rival maritime houses of the Realm if Peleps throws in its lot with V'neef. Other candidates may also serve as the anti-Mnemon candidate; Sesus Raenyah, Cathak Cainan, and Peleps Lai all have the pull to serve in that role, allowing V'neef to fade into the background (and avoid being the primary focus of other claimants' assassins) — though she might re-emerge later.

A Throne of Debt

House Ragara may not be a great military house, but every great military house owes Ragara a tremendous amount of money. With promises of debt forgiveness and ongoing fiscal support, Ragara Banoba could easily broker an alliance with Sesus Raenyah or Peleps Lai, financing their bid with the mutual understanding that he'd be the power behind the throne. An outright bid for the throne by Banoba is less likely, but he could secure backing from Houses Peleps and Sesus by the same means.

The coalition would all but rule the seas and have a strong army backing it, making it the focal point of rival coalitions. Mnemon would almost certainly be the figurehead of that anti-Ragara coalition, or perhaps V'neef. Such a war would have little chance of an amicable outcome, for Mnemon would never stand aside and allow another to sit upon a throne she sees as hers.

It's entirely possible that the tensions within the anti-Ragara alliance could cause it to split, creating a three-way war for the Scarlet Throne that would tear the Isle apart. Alternately, House Ragara's alliance could split, as Peleps, Sesus, or both disengage from their Ragara patrons. Banoba's death would certainly cause a struggle for control in his inner circle.

Without a candidate with as strong a position as Mnemon in the War of Two Sisters scenario, this would be a war of rapidly shifting allegiances, where one faction momentarily allies with another to oppose whichever faction seems dominant, almost certainly causing the war to drag on much longer than a two-sided war would. Offers of amnesty and other enticements to defect would be a near-constant source of intrigue and paranoia, and when they enjoy success it would totally disrupt the war, at least until someone else defects. Assassins would enjoy a vogue unlike any they've ever known, and House Iselsi would seize on the chaos to play their cousins against one another, marking them off one by one as their blood stained the earth of the Isle red.

If House Ragara should find itself on the verge of defeat, it may bring about the war's worst horrors. Banoba's inner circle has dedicated decades managing the house's darkest projects, and while exposing them to the light would outrage the Dynasty, they remain as a final option. Sorcerous plagues sweep the Blessed Isle; First Age weapons are unleashed with devastating collateral damage; sleeper cells of mind-controlled agents are activated within opposing factions

to sow chaos; and imprisoned Anathema are freed to pursue their vengeance against the Scarlet Dynasty.

The War in the West

In this scenario, Houses Peleps and Cathak agree to split Creation between them, with House Peleps ruling the West and Southwest as a de facto empire under the pretext of an Imperial protectorate while Cainan rules as Empress over the Isle and the rest of the Threshold. While initially successful — House Cathak's military preparation and might allow them to seize the Imperial City and place Cainan on the throne in short order, while Peleps' grand armada crushes V'neef's Western holdings — this lightning coup provokes a storm as the rest of the Dynasty puts aside their differences to tear Cainan down and break Peleps' iron hold on the seas. This coalition is fractious and given to splintering, its houses' diverse interests and ancient enmities only reluctantly suspended — and encouraged by Cathak and Peleps with every bit of intrigue and bribery they can muster.

More detail on the War in the West can be found on pages XX-XX.

A Wedding and a Murder

Cainan's first priority, above all else, is to maintain order in the Realm — and in this scenario, he sees no better approach than to support the front-runner for the throne. He and Mnemon meet in secret to hammer out an alliance, sealed by a marriage exchange — a son and daughter from each house, wed in a single grand gala. The Great Houses make their obeisance, accepting invitations to the wedding gala — even those, such as Houses Ragara, Sesus, Tepet, and V'neef, who can hope only for mercy. As the day of the gala arrives, the Scarlet Dynasty assembles in the Imperial City, gathering at the Deliberative's Garden of Peace and Law to wait for the ceremony to begin. That's when the assassins strike.

The assassins' identity is a variable in this scenario. Perhaps House Iselsi saw their chance to wreak havoc, turning the Scarlet Dynasty against itself. Perhaps Ragara or V'neef sought to remove the greatest threat to themselves and their houses. House Peleps might worry that a reconciled Mnemon would favor House V'neef in maritime matters, while Houses Sesus and Tepet could fear dissolution in favor of a pure Cathak military. The order may even come from within Houses Cathak or Mnemon, a bid to secure sole power. Every house — and other parties, such as the Deliberative, the Immaculate Order, or foreign powers like Lookshy or the Forest Witches' Company of Thrones — has cause to order the attack.

The war may go one of many ways, depending on who dies in the attack, and possibly on how exactly the assassins carry it out. Mnemon herself and Cathak may both survive — in which case the offending parties have two furious matriarchs to contend with, especially if any of the brides or grooms die. If only one of the matriarchs dies, their house will be thrown into chaos; the alliance may hold, even if only to spite whoever set the attack in motion, but the mourning house may find itself subordinated amid last-minute renegotiation of terms. Eventually, there may come a split as the scions of the now-client house seek independence, or the greater house may absorb the lesser.

In either of these cases, the most likely outcome is a Cathak-Mnemon coalition relentlessly hunting down the assassins — and, as suspicion becomes paranoia, they find countless enemies to hold culpable, escalating from groups of armed guards making arrests to armies ousting the governments of cities or prefectures sympathetic to the assassins' cause. Even factions with clean

hands begin conducting espionage and preparing countermeasures against the Cathak-Mnemon coalition in anticipation of being the next before the chopping block. The least bloody path forward lies in the coalition finding those behind the assassinations — or at least a scapegoat acceptable to a preponderance of the coalition — but even then, Houses Cathak and Mnemon's efforts in finding the assassins may leave them in a poor position to claim the throne.

Should assassins claim both Cathak Cainan and Mnemon herself, the situation grows much more chaotic, as scions on both sides point fingers at virtually everyone without firm leadership to rein them in. If either house fails to quickly institute new leadership and bring their households into line, scions may lash out against purported assassins in the other house or elsewhere in the Dynasty, starting a chain reaction of vendettas disruptive to everyone's plans.

Ten Thousand Wolves and the Fatted Calf

In this scenario, each Great House stands alone, or with only one or two allies of lesser stature seeking protection under its auspices, pulling away from the Realm's governmental apparatus to rule as independent fiefdoms. Mnemon declares for the throne backed only by House Ledaal, or by no one; Peleps most likely allies either with Ragara, Sesus, or Cynis, seeking the naval funding that it desperately needs.

Mnemon needn't be the spark that ignites this war; any contender who declares prematurely, hoping to succeed through sheer audacity, could set things off. An assassination might spark it, particularly if it targets one of the front-runners. Any of the scenarios described above might degenerate into this one as alliances split under pressure. The most likely outcome of this scenario is a stalemate, with a fractured Realm whose surviving factions each bow to their own claimant Empress, while the Threshold lists toward self-rule.

Long Shots and Faint Hopes

The following scenarios illustrate ways in which dark horse candidates could become relevant and even potentially seize the Scarlet Throne. None are obvious to observers or likely to occur — in RY 768, few would consider any of the following within the realm of possibility. Still, the above scenarios could potentially lead into one of these situations, leaving Dynasts scrambling to combat a threat they never planned for.

The Prodigal Daughter

Berit's best hope of becoming Empress is to lead a coalition of houses desperate to survive. Tepet, Nellens, and V'neef all stand deeply imperiled, and any other house might find itself in such straits. Initially, their worthies are unwilling to cede authority to a woman who — for all of her acknowledged greatness — turned her back on her responsibilities to the Realm to indulge in all manner of rumored wickedness. But such concerns are a luxury that they cannot afford amid open war. These houses may see themselves as safer and freer to pursue their ambitions under someone like Berit, who lacks personal backing, than under a powerful Great House.

Berit must contend with intrigues from those of her allies who fear that her ambition might outstrip the role they've laid out for her. Her backers will aim to limit her authority lest she consolidate her own stable power base at their expense, and work to marginalize or even assassinate her once her usefulness is over. This might drive her back into self-imposed exile, finding nothing to save in her mother's Realm, or it may push her to strike back, eliminating her most personally powerful supporters for the Dynasty's sake.

Berit's isolation within the Dynasty makes her an ideal candidate for player characters to build strong relationships with, precisely because her lack of connections is her greatest weakness. If they're chosen to enlist Berit on behalf of their house or houses, they'll be familiar to her. Defending her against assassins or countering other intrigues against her will earn her respect and gratitude. She may take them under her wing, promote them rapidly if they demonstrate sufficient competence, and place them in demanding and dangerous roles — on the battlefield or elsewhere, as their talents indicate.

Characters who back Berit and use their leverage appropriately can play an instrumental role in helping her seize the throne. She'll honor them, but won't consent to be anyone's puppet; the wrong choices may shift her from ally to opponent. However, if the player characters can outmaneuver both external enemies, the intriguers within Berit's own faction, and the elder Dragon-Blood herself — no mean feat! — they may reap the spoils of Berit's coalition.

The Renegade Who Would Be Empress

An outcaste general in the Imperial legions, Saloy Hin remains loyal to the woman who took him in, gave him purpose, and made him part of something greater than himself. But ultimately, he's ruled by the same ambition that drove him to outpace his peers in climbing the legion's ranks. Seizing the throne would put the Empress' petty, feuding children in their place and prove his own worth to the world.

Hin cannot hold the throne while a legitimate contender remains on the field — the rest of the Dynasty would turn against him in a heartbeat, and there's no way he could hold them all off without some unprecedentedly powerful advantage. His best chance is in an appeal to order, to the way things were when the Empress ruled, garnering support from patrician houses, the Immaculate Order, other outcaste veterans of the legions, and especially the peasantry.

Hin's greatest obstacle is Mnemon, who many in the halls of power see as the Scarlet Empress in miniature, a sure thing set against chaos. Unlike her, he cannot secure legitimacy through blood, but if he can secure legitimacy through restoring order, especially where Mnemon has tried and failed to do so, it could be all that matters. That's the thing about peasants: Dragon-Blooded are all the Empress' children as far as they're concerned.

Rise of The Vermillion Empress

House Tepet enters the civil war in the worst shape it's been since its founding. It doesn't pin its hopes on Ejava, for its few hopes are invested solely in surviving the bloody strife of the civil war and the almost-certain purges to come in the aftermath of a new Empress' ascent. No one in House Tepet or the rest of the Scarlet Dynasty — including Tepet Ejava — anticipates a Tepet Empress.

But, broken though House Tepet may be, Ejava's blood grants her a legitimacy that Saloy Hin, ostensibly her equal as a general, can't match. If she seizes the Imperial City and claims the throne, she'll have enemies, certainly, but she'll also have allies — mainly those looking to curry favor and seeking protection. But House Tepet's allies are precious few, and she'll take what she can get.

Still, these advantages won't suffice to hold power against the likes of Mnemon, V'neef, or Raenyah — or against any coalition of Great Houses still healthy enough to mount a serious campaign. Assassins will come for Ejava in droves, and armies will besiege every city foolish enough to declare for her — for unlike many other contenders, her claim and the threat her

legion poses dies with her. Ejava's best chance of taking and holding power comes in a Realm already broken by years of war, a Realm that will accept a Vermillion Empress because the alternative is drowning in a torrent of blood and chaos.

The Ten Thousand Enlightened Stewards

Where Dynastic claimants to the throne threaten blood and chaos, the Deliberative offers a veneer of legitimacy and supports the comparatively bloodless status quo.

The Realm's major powers have yet to take the Deliberative seriously beyond lip service, but they ignore it at their peril. Without the Scarlet Empress to veto its proclamations or sow chaos among senators, its legislative machinery has now absorbed much of her role in the Realm's executive functioning, giving it unprecedented sway — at least until civil order breaks down.

With only the Empress empowered to appoint new senators, the trickling of senators from the Greater Chamber to serve their houses' interests may make it impossible to reach quorum. But as house partisans leave and power blocs shift, those who remain may reach an accord, voting together to achieve mutual interests. Whether that's to preserve the status quo, protect the common folk, or enrich themselves depends on who's most effective at wrangling votes through eloquence, deal-making, blackmail, or extortion.

The Lesser Chamber's traditional intransigence may likewise deadlock the Deliberative indefinitely. But should the two chambers work past their differences — whether through shared ideals, finding opportunities to enrich both — the Deliberative may produce legislation more efficaciously than any thought possible.

It's also possible that the Deliberative prevails, but doesn't come through the civil war intact. A coalition of Great Houses might break the Lesser Chamber's power, exiling or purging its delegates to cement the Deliberative as a seat of Dynastic power. Conversely, a peasant uprising backed by the patriciate and its Dragon-Blooded scions could potentially capture the Imperial City. Assuming the uprising has supernatural allies powerful enough to let it stand against the Scarlet Dynasty — whether a united front of patrician Dragon-Blooded, House Nellens or another Great House breaking with its peers, cadet house allies, a vengeful House Iselsi, Lookshyan agents, or the like — they could oust the Greater Chamber, likely resulting in a fragmented Realm where the patriciate-led Deliberative and the remaining Great Houses carve up the Blessed Isle.

Without a military arm to enforce its dictates, and with tax-gathering hamstrung by recalcitrant prefects, the Deliberative must rely on persuasion and diplomacy. On the one hand, a Dynastic coalition may support it as an alternative to a widely hated or feared frontrunner; this leaves it dependent on its backers' legions, a figurehead for squabbling matriarchs. Alternatively, if years of war leave Dynasts, patricians, and peasants alike craving antebellum peace and stability, the Deliberative may successfully bring military forces under its own banner, allowing it to cement its authority.

A Realm, Once Corrupt, Now Pure

While war always causes suffering, the Blessed Isle's peasantry will suffer as it never has before in the event of civil war. If left unchecked for long enough, this may lead the Mouth of Peace or others within the Immaculate Order to declare an Immaculate Regency, especially if the Deliberative fails to step in and govern in the absence of Dynastic authority.

An Immaculate-ruled Realm would likely absorb Imperial infrastructure into the Order's bureaucracy to better ease the transition. Martial orders would take the place of the Imperial legions, bivouacking in Great House fortresses claimed for the Order. The Breaths of the Immaculate Dragons would integrate the Thousand Scales into their own functions. Itinerant monks could replenish the much-thinned herd of Imperial magistrates, dispensing the Mouth of Peace's justice. The Deliberative might be stocked with monks, or its powers absorbed into the Immaculate Regent's executive authority.

The Great Houses, broken by the war, would be subordinate to the Order, if not restructured or dissolved outright. Houses with strong ties to the Order, such as Mnemon and Cathak, might retain more of their former glory than the rest, while Cynis and Sesus might suffer more under Immaculate rule than their kin. Immaculate authorities would distribute power only to those deemed both competent and morally pure (in itself a highly political decision). Ostensibly meritocratic, advancement through the Coils of the Immaculate Dragons would become a deadly serious game of power — many would enter the priesthood solely to enrich themselves and their families. Such a cynic might well ascend into the highest reaches of the Order, perhaps even becoming the new Immaculate Regent.

Those Who Serve None but Themselves

Many other Realm power players will influence the war's course. Every Great House envies the All-Seeing Eye's espionage network, and many seek to suborn it — but it may well determine its own fate. Outcastes once cashiered from the legions, now pursued by Great Houses needing more Dragon-Blooded for the front lines, can leverage their service for great gain — if they and their patrons survive. Criminal enterprises flourish in the chaos, smuggling goods (and people) in and out of war zones. Cadet houses eye the Dynasty, looking to back contenders who'll be sympathetic to their needs or elevate their standing further. House Iselsi revels in the bloodshed, pursuing their bloody Vendetta as never before with the civil war as a pretext.

External forces may also play a role. Lookshy might intervene to weaken its old adversary, but only if its conservative Mercenary faction can be convinced to support such a venture. The Mask of Winters plans to seize more of the River Province, but a collapsing Realm might tempt him to secure a foothold in the eastern Blessed Isle, dangerously close to the Imperial City. A peasant Anathema might lead an uprising and carve out an empire even as the Realm tears itself apart — perhaps abetted by Dynasts seeking to use her as a tool against their rivals.

As the Silver Pact senses blood in the water, its centuries-long guerilla campaign may escalate into all-out war against the Realm, especially in the case of a lengthy and bloody conflict. Though this offers the potential for a great victory, it also threatens to reunify the Realm in the face of Lunar aggression.

The Pact may also escalate its campaign of infiltration and espionage. As the Realm splinters into factions, mechanisms to keep Lunar agents out — the All-Seeing Eye, the Bronze Faction, and the like — begin to falter, their resources taxed and their attention scattered. Undermining allegiances, assassinating peacemakers, and engineering betrayals, they'll accelerate the Realm's breakdown into small warring states, ripe for the picking.

Sidereal Involvement

The Sidereals of the Bronze Faction Sidereals have covertly aided and reinforced the Realm since its inception. The Realm Civil War represents one of their

greatest failures, and leaves their ranks in disarray as too few Sidereals hasten to put out too many fires. As the Scarlet Dynasty turns on itself, the Bronze Faction triages the crisis unfolding across the Blessed Isle and beyond, allocating its extremely limited resources with the goal of ensuring that whatever remains of the Realm can maintain Dragon-Blooded hegemony and Immaculate orthodoxy.

Civil war could serve the Gold Faction's competing agenda, but chaos and bloodshed are hardly an unmitigated good for them. Gold Faction Sidereals might seize upon opportunities to coordinate and support Solar insurgencies against the weakened Realm, fill power vacuums left in the civil war's wake with the Lawgivers, or pursue individual agendas opposed to the status quo embodied in the Realm, but they're spreading their resources as thin as their Bronze Faction counterparts in the process.

Storytelling the Civil War

Rather than a sudden, unexpected outbreak of bloodshed, most civil war scenarios involve steady ratcheting-up of tensions. This can begin with a hostile glare at a salon and end with swords crossed on a smoldering battlefield surrounded by shattered remains of armies.

Few wish to openly acknowledge war's seeming inevitability, so these early stages rely on the application of soft power — negotiations and mingling in public and private. Each house wishes to have its allies lined up firmly behind them, while keeping as much information from its rivals as possible. Beneath the surface, operatives of houses or alliances of houses conduct quiet missions, arranging things behind the scenes to be ready for war — possibly even eliminating important figures in deniable ways.

Early signs include the amassing of military supplies, foodstuffs, and hard currency, as well as troop movements to hold strategic positions both on the Blessed Isle and in the satrapies. House legions conduct wargames against other houses' favored tactics — this is both an exercise in combat readiness and a clear threat.

Salons and galas become social weapons, with targeted snubbings or occasions held on the same date as a rival's; targets must choose who to offend, unmaking potential alliances before they're cemented or unmasking hidden allegiances in putative allies. Blackmailers deploy decades-or-centuries-old secrets as leverage against vulnerable officials or Dynasts, causing seemingly indelible agreements to crumble at unexpected moments. Sides are taken, divisions deepen, and as threats and pressure mount, anything could spark open conflict.

Player characters, regardless of their backgrounds, may become involved on their own initiative or at a patron's behest. They may not see the full picture, and early on it's useful to keep characters (not players) in the dark. Forcing decisions based on incomplete information is a recipe for tension, drama, and touching off other events that players must deal with. No operation should ever go entirely to plan — don't force failure, but be ready to exploit the slightest complication in the future.

For example, the player characters may be sent to intercept "bandits" — what a tragedy that another house's soldiers were conducting exercises outside their territory, and that important documents were "lost" (quietly recovered and analyzed for intelligence) in the scuffle! The other house in question, of course, won't take this lying down.

As tensions mount, houses may entrust player characters with brokering secret alliances with potential allies, carrying out espionage against potential enemies, guarding strategic sites or stockpiles of vital resources, and the like. Such efforts will see them pitted against not only the agents of the other Great Houses, but of the Thousand Scales, the All-Seeing Eye, and other organs of the Realm's government.

The war's consequences extend beyond the battlefield. Foraging armies and conscription of farmers and artisans cause shortages, sickness, and failed harvests, sending shockwaves throughout the economy. Even Dynasts feel the pinch, though they stubbornly deny it even as living standards drop precipitously. Commerce plunges as fewer merchants make costly and dangerous voyages; luxuries previously taken for granted will vanish.

As war goes on, culture changes. Production and effort goes towards warfare instead of the civilian economy, exacerbating shortages. Houses institute rationing, favoring farmers slightly (they produce the food), but giving short shrift to anyone not immediately involved in the war. Every Great House has a vested interest in putting down the resulting peasant revolts — possibly sending the player characters to do so! — but they'll certainly advantage of such revolts in rivals' lands, both via propaganda and on the battlefield.

Player characters living through all of this may need to solve problems, stave off uprisings, or stop defections to houses promising better living standards. Solutions shouldn't be simple or easy to stomach — war breeds hard choices. Player characters' patrons and allies may find other, more dangerous tasks for them, or cut them loose entirely, if they can't solve problems decisively.

Characters needn't be wholly selfless, though, and wartime offers endless opportunities for profit. Forward-looking Dynasts can secure their post-war lifestyle and position by being in the right place at the right time.

An Elegy for That Which Was

Even a short, relatively bloodless war's consequences stretch down the line for centuries. The new Empress may pardon her former foes, or she may ring in her reign with purges unknown since the annihilation of House Manosque. Yet even should she cut down every Dynast who opposed her, grudges — carried by spouses, children, friends, lovers, Hearthmates — linger for centuries.

Between famine, disease, and bloodshed, the population of the Realm drops significantly, more so the longer the war. Agricultural heartlands lie fallow, their peasantry fled or slain, or their soil contaminated by ancient weapons and unhale sorceries deployed in desperation. Harvests are seized by force of arms and stockpiled for military use. Trade collapses; many currencies become worthless; loaning diminishes sharply. Hunger remains constant for years, possibly decades.

Surviving player characters may be well-placed in the aftermath as the new elite who must help build a new Realm, reestablishing central authority over the Blessed Isle and the Threshold. Following a shorter war, that work will tend to be more political. But after prolonged strife, reuniting the Realm may entail further wars against holdouts, upstarts, and opportunists, with player characters potentially on either side.

The player characters may find themselves uniting a divided Isle, enthroning one of their own as Empress or governing as a tightly-knit council. This gives players the broadest scope to shape the

Realm to their characters' desires, and offers the Storyteller myriad ways to set further decisions before them — some with consequences so far-ranging, it might well change the course of Creation's destiny.

The campaign's end can even form the foundation of a generational game. As children of the civil war's heroes, the new player characters compete with one another for power even as they try to hold together the empire their parents created.

The War in the West

The West has ever been a place of great promise. Creation's most sparsely populated corner still boasts thousands of islands, both inhabited and not, and myriad cultures, states, and kingdoms, each with their own rich history, fertile lands, and dark secrets.

The Imperial hand has yet to fully grasp the West, though it lies heavy across many archipelagos. This is largely a matter of history and distance. Weather, currents, hostile spirits, and sea monsters made Western trade routes difficult to reestablish after the Contagion, despite the islands' exotic promise. The Silver Pact also took pains to harass and bleed the Realm's initial attempts at expansion.

The Empress was slow to turn ambitions of conquest Westward, preferring to cement control of the Inland Sea coast. As Western routes progressed from being accessible only through rare feats of Dragon-Blooded naval prowess to being open to regular mortal mercantile traffic, House Peleps — now fully invested in the Imperial Navy — established footholds there. But the Empress reined in its efforts to unite the archipelagoes under the Imperial banner.

Her reasons grew more transparent. A Peleps-controlled West would be prosperous enough to survive without Realm aid, rich enough that it could harm the Realm's economy by blocking trade, and distant enough that no navy could challenge Peleps rule. Nor would Peleps ever permit another house a foothold in its territory. Lest the West become a greater Imperial rival than even Prasad, the Empress discouraged and disincentivized expansion, and the idea of a united West slipped from the minds of Peleps scions.

Secure manses along Voice-of-the-Tides Prefecture's churning coasts held yellowed scrolls detailing invasion plans, forgotten by all but the occasional Peleps elder. Their ambition of a new empire lay dormant. It could never be realized so long as the Scarlet Empress sat the throne.

But now the Empress is gone.

About This Adventure

As much a setting piece as an actual adventure, **The War in the West** presents several major elements of House Peleps' incursion into the West and suggests how a Storyteller can incorporate these elements into her game. This adventure isn't targeted at any specific Exalt type; each has a place and a stake in the West, and everyone stands to gain or lose in the coming war.

The war revolves around House Peleps' bid to create an independent imperial entity: The Western Imperial Protectorate, a satrapy in name only. Much like Prasad, the Protectorate claims legitimacy through descent from the Empress and the Dynasty.

The sections of this adventure break down as follows: **Major Players** describes Peleps' imperial ambitions and the scope of the Western powers who see profit or peril in the crusade of a thousand Exalts. It also describes the Western elements of House V'neef — who face the choice between the yoke or the daiklave — and the West's regional powers. **The Neck** details one of the war's primary theaters. **The War in the West** outlines the conflict caused by Peleps' imperial incursion into the West and Southwest, and the stiff resistance their warmongering inspires from native, foreign, and spiritual forces.

The Aftermath of Civil War

The **War in the West** follows a particular power bloc of the Realm Civil War: a Peleps-Cathak alliance. After difficult negotiations and enmity on both sides, both houses agree that Peleps will rule the West, the Southwest, and the seas — retaining only Voice-of-the-Tides Prefecture as embassy and trading port — while Cathak rules the Blessed Isle and the rest of the Threshold. Better two dragons stand astride Creation and rule absolutely than a single dragon standing alone with ten thousand daggers at her throat. Despite intense pressure from the other Great Houses, the alliance gains the upper hand. Three of Peleps' four legions immediately decamp for the West after the Imperial City is secured, as does the bulk of the Imperial Navy's Water Fleet (**The Realm**, p. 79).

While this is the basic model for the War in the West, Peleps' Western push can be triggered by all manner of other scenarios involving alternate power blocs. For instance, a cadre of Peleps officers concludes that Air Fleet grand admiral Ragara Feria — the only remaining non-Peleps admiral in the Imperial Navy — is disloyal and try to have her killed; thinking the Admiralty Board is purging her, Feria and her most loyal captains break from the Navy to join Ragara; Ragara and Peleps go to war, with other houses crystallizing around them. The Storyteller can concoct any number of such personalized incidents, and in mixed-house games, she's encouraged to make these incidents meaningful to the player characters.

The War at Home

The civil war's actual details shouldn't be the Storyteller's primary focus in a chronicle featuring the War in the West, although aftershocks and second- and third-order effects will doubtless have an impact. What ultimately matters is that House Peleps survives the civil war with resources and legions intact, allowing it to focus upon — and serve as a credible threat to — the West and Southwest.

House Peleps has forsaken its homeland for blue waters and rich islands. Within a few years, its scions will suck every last obol and artifact from their Blessed Isle holdings, retaining what manes they can and selling or razing what they can't. Even if they're mouthing the fiction of a Protectorate in the Cathak Empress' name, every Peleps scion knows that the War in the West is an all-or-nothing gambit to rule an entire Direction. No other fleet in Creation can challenge them, and even if the civil war's tides turn against them or Cathak falls, they won't waver from their plans.

Major Players

House Peleps

Moving slowly and deliberately, Peleps has established footholds from which to strike at the West and consolidate power — rich holdings on Wu-Jian and business interests with its gangs; ties to numerous Southwestern satrapies; and a major anchorage on **Black Gannet Rock**, a small island equidistant between Voice-of-the-Tides Prefecture and Wavecrest, for drydocking huge ships and projecting naval power throughout the West should Wu-Jian suffer invasion or blockade.

The Empress undercut Peleps' Westward expansion 14 years ago by appointing House V'neef to oversee the Merchant Fleet. This both limited House Peleps' ability to finance expansion of the Imperial Navy, and ensured that if the house ever attempted to seize power by force, it would have a rival naval house to contend with. Since then, the Rightly Guided Admiralty Board has been wargaming and strategizing to improve on centuries-old invasion plans. The house is eager for war.

More numerous and powerful than any individual Western power, House Peleps can crush rivals piecemeal. Its strength draws in allies willing to accept subordination rather than risk destruction. But the vast expense of maintaining and reinforcing the Imperial Navy — not to mention the Peleps legions — demands quick and decisive moves to seize and hold enough shipyards and provisions to sustain it throughout the campaign.

The Peleps Forces

Among the most militaristic of the Great Houses, Peleps holds the following assets on the eve of civil war:

The Water Fleet numbers over 1,200 warships, though the actual number fluctuates — climbing to 1,800 early on due to reassigned Air Fleet vessels, then dramatically decreasing over the war's course. As the campaign begins, the Admiralty Board removes grand admiral Ledaal Calin, either by persuading him to retire or through attempted assassination. This significantly impairs fleet readiness and efficiency, but is considered necessary to ensure Peleps control over the fleet. The majority of the fleet ventures between Wu-Jian (**The Realm**, p. 172), Black Gannet Rock, Huang Hei (**The Realm**, p. 171), and Wavecrest when the war begins, protecting the trade routes necessary for the House's imperial ambitions.

Pelep's admirals command the **Earth, Wood, and Fire Fleets**, and hold high rank in the **Air Fleet**. Each Peleps admiral has spent the last several years identifying loyalists among the captains; when the deal between Cathak and Peleps occurs, hardline opposition is rapidly purged. Other than the Air Fleet, these fleets consist of galleys unsuited to the Great Western Ocean. Unable to participate directly in the War in the West, they sweep rival houses' ships from the Inland Sea and battle Merchant Fleet assets in the Southwest.

The **Pelep's legions** are four in number, each battle-hardened and ready, albeit initially unused to marine operations and compromised by the purging of outcaste leadership in favor of house loyalists. Still, they've grown more seasoned as time goes on. Peleps also commands garrison forces stationed in Western satrapies, supplemented by continental garrisons and auxiliary troops redeployed to support the Western campaign.

House V'neef

House V'neef is a fairly young house with a still-active founder. It's invested more heavily in the West than any other Direction, seeing it as a valuable source of untapped riches, albeit one

whose exploitation would seriously aggrieve House Peleps — necessitating fortification of its Western satrapies and Merchant Fleet depots. When the Empress disappeared, V’neef realized these Western assets would become a priority target for House Peleps. As the war begins, V’neef forces are largely scattered across the West and Southwest, though the house holds a few scattered satrapies elsewhere and maintains a presence on the Blessed Isle.

Far smaller and weaker than the Imperial Navy, the Merchant Fleet nonetheless presents a resilient obstacle to Peleps expansion. For the Western powers, alliance with V’neef is more a partnership between equals, tempting those unwilling to sacrifice freedom for security.

The V’neef Forces

Though young, House V’neef is nonetheless a Great House of the Realm. Its military forces, while no match for those of House Peleps, are considerable. Its other, less tangible strengths lie in commerce and politics. The Empress created House V’neef as a check against Peleps’ power, and the house has spent years developing and cultivating an economic hold upon the West and growing rich off Merchant Fleet customs taxes.

Numbering over 900 ships, the **Merchant Fleet** is something of a misnomer. This full-fledged war fleet serves as the Realm’s customs police and the Imperial Navy’s chief pirate-hunting apparatus. It’s largely free of Peleps influence, purged when V’neef took possession.

Despite recent efforts to construct more blue-water vessels, two-thirds of the Merchant Fleet consists of galleys better suited to the Inland Sea’s calmer waters. Many of these are assembled to defend V’neef’s Southeastern holdings. Still, the house controls a sizable flotilla of deep-sea vessels. Their crews are experienced in navigating the Great Western Ocean between the West and the Blessed Isle.

House V’neef is largely comprised of former patricians and outcastes assembled by the Empress. A few of these outcastes originated among the Western archipelagoes. They haven’t forgotten their origins, and many possess ties to their former lives that give them unique powerbases.

Other Great Houses supply House V’neef with economic and political backing. Concerned by Peleps’ ambition and threatened by its maritime might, its rivals supply V’neef with much-needed loans and shipbuilding facilities, as a naval counterbalance to the Imperial Fleet. Even as other Great Houses falter before the Cathak-Peleps alliance, their anchorages and storehouses remain open to Merchant Fleet use.

Notable Figures in the West

Any number of ambitious and powerful individuals may become involved in the War in the West, potentially shaping the conflict in dramatic ways. Storytellers should use them as wild cards in the grander story of the war. A handful of potentially relevant characters are listed below.

The Realm has few foes more ardent than the Lunars of the Silver Pact, and many call the West their home. **Leviathan (Lunars, p. XX)** is among the eldest Lunars, holding the ancient sunken city of Luthe and disrupting Realm naval operations in the West. **Sha’a Oka (Lunars, p. XX)** leads the war against the Realm on the Caul, but he and his adherents may seize upon the War in the West to continue their campaign of open war. Other prominent Lunars in the west include **Ūl the Burning Eye (Lunars, p. XX)**, the **Black Wave Reavers (Exalted, p. 107)** and **Wings of Ivory (Lunars, p. XX)**.

Tepet Ejava, the Roseblack (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 357), recently finished a campaign against pirates in the Southwest, but even if the Blessed Isle offered safe haven under Cathak rule, she cannot safely return while the War in the West rages and Peleps controls the routes from An-Teng. While she's decidedly removed from the main conflict, the Roseblack possesses a full legion at her command. If House V'neef — its founder-matriarch wed to a Tepet husband — persuades her that its cause is noble, she might intervene on its behalf. If Peleps offers to bring her army back to the Isle after a decisive victory, she might find that persuasive as well.

Skullstone's Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, also called the Silver Prince, has several Abyssal Exalted in his service. These include the **Drowner of Saints**, the restrained yet ferocious admiral of the Skullstone fleet, whose massive goremaul has shattered many an enemy ship's hull; and the **Knight of Ghosts and Shadows**, a Northern warrior-poet and budding necromancer often sent forth as a diplomatic envoy. The Solar **Moray Darktide**, a former pirate born in Skullstone, also serves the Prince, having become a true believer in the Deathlord's philosophy of ennoblement through death.

Grandmother Cuong Sa Fey is an ancient and puissant matriarch of the Lintha pirate family. Cruel, cannibalistic, and heir to a dozen bloodlines of supernatural puissance, Sa Fey surprises foes with necromantic bone amulets and dizzying swordplay. She leads a sizable pirate fleet from several small island lairs with a sadistic fist, always moving and seeking new prey. Seeing profit in the civil war and opportunity to weaken antipirate operations, she'll escalate raids on lightly defended mercantile traffic and satrapies — even seizing tribute shipments or torching unprepared naval depots — thus undermining Peleps and V'neef alike.

Sea Lord Ryu Jinsu commands the Fifth Fleet of Azure's navy. A seasoned privateer, he patrols the Neck's waterways, raiding merchant ships and resource-rich islands. Likely the first Azurite to encounter House Peleps' forces as it pushes West, he can't help but respect the Imperial Navy's might; but he shares in Azure's ancient fear of Dragon-Blooded rule, likely souring any efforts at diplomacy before they begin. Should Jinsu fall in battle, his clansfolk on Azure will agitate the other Sea Lords to embark a war of vengeance against House Peleps, potentially drawing the entire Azurite navy into the conflict.

Odara, Chosen of Ash, a dead volcano god's Exigent, carries a vendetta against Peleps-ruled Wavecrest. House V'neef secretly funds her pirate fleet, the **Bloodthirsty**, sending them against Peleps plantations and other targets protected by the Water Fleet. For more on Odara and the Bloodthirsty, see their respective entries in **Adversaries of the Righteous**.

Other Dynasts in the West

A freethinking monk with a rakehell past, **Cynis Adran** was sent to Wavecrest as a missionary. A true believer in the Immaculate Philosophy, he'd rather persuade using honeyed words than employ Immaculate martial arts. But his genuine passion to help ordinary folk will be tested as the Dynasty unleashes war upon the West.

Ledaal Catala Kar'theil Exalted late in life after a serious illness that kept her from attending secondary school. Her parents sent her to the West's tropic clime in hopes of improving her still-fragile health. It's been working, just in time for Catala to be caught up in the feud between V'neef and Peleps, potentially

involving House Ledaal if she's taken hostage or feared dead in their fighting, or if she promises her house's aid to one side or the other.

Peleps Danin works for his family as a deep-sea artifact hunter; he's rarely without his glowing cuttlefish familiar, carried in an enchanted jar of seawater when on shore. Well-connected with Western scavenger lords, he's highly knowledgeable about the artifacts deployed in the ancient Niobaran War.

Merchant Fleet captain **V'neef Rabatsu Mikal** is famed both for pirate hunting and for smuggling luxury goods. He knows every pirate and smuggler's port in the West, or near enough to make little difference. On his hands is the mighty Osprey's Grasp, a set of black jade razor claws that also function as grappling hooks.

After joining the Vermilion Legion in disgrace, **Cynis Fia** has risen to winglord and joined Ejava's inner circle. Her kind heart and youthful exuberance belie her true motives: She's actually Iselsi Phaedra, a spy for the All-Seeing Eye. With her handlers going silent amid the growing chaos, she's tempted to become the mask she's worn for so long.

The Neck

Encompassing the swath of lesser archipelagoes southwest of the Coral Archipelago, the Neck serves as a juncture for maritime traffic between Wu-Jian and the broader West. Historically a target for conquest by this Western power or that over the centuries, it currently contains the largest expanse of Realm-controlled Western territory outside of Wavecrest, but only a fraction of the Neck bows to the Realm. Politically, the archipelago is a factitious region of disparate polities and tribes.

Islands of Note

The Cowries

An impoverished but strategically placed island chain, the Cowries offer anchorage to vessels traveling to and from Wu-Jian. The satrapy of **Amphiro** is the largest island in the chain, whose elites have grown wealthy by exploiting neighboring Cowries.. Other than merchants' profits and trade goods, Amphiro's most notable sources of material wealth include fertile volcanic valleys supplying much of the Cowries' grain, and a small Shogunate city's ruins, where scavengers still unearth occasional treasures.

Amphiro hosts the Cowries' nominal capital and most populous city, **Solid Shell**. Traditionally, Amphiro's chieftain dwells there within the Shelled Palace, a manse carved from the dead shell of a behemoth war-crab slain by some ancient Sidereal hero. The manse itself carries with it the weight of destiny and authority. The Neck's various peoples revere Solid Shell, deeming it neutral ground; the Realm is happy to keep this peace.

The Realm is slowly incorporating more of the Cowries into a second satrapy, **the Lesser Cowries**, its satrap coequal to Solid Shell's. The dual satraps — the foppish Cynis Purasan of Amphiro and the aging martinet Mnemon Rofar of the Lesser Cowries — inhabit lavish apartments in Solid Shell. The two share a mutual loathing, taking every opportunity to snipe at and snub one another at Solid Shell galas.

Generations ago, Amphiro ruled the Cowries as a petty empire, and even today its chieftain claims rightful dominion over the outer islands — a dominion that monarchist islanders regard fondly as a desirable ideal. For decades, that fiction served the Empress' will. Were that claim extended beyond the Cowries, unifying the Neck, that would serve House Peleps well. But as the war heats up, the Cowries see a chance to become truly free.

The Crescent Archipelago

The Crescent Archipelago has a long and storied history. **Moonglory**, the largest and central island, hosts the city-port of Port Monarch, protected by a vast chain that defies invaders. The outer islands are **Pearl Reef**, **Wavelet**, and **Albatross**. Crescent's current governor is a puppet under control of Amphiro's chieftain, though the office has played host to imperial ambitions in the past — the remains of a dozen past glorious kingdoms crowd the archipelago's shores, leaving them studded with ruins of different architectural styles and hidden secrets.

Crescent, alongside Coral and Wavecrest, hosts much of the West's Guild activity. The various merchant princes active in the West and their enterprises compete with **the Western Trade Alliance**, a well-established consortium of traders ensconced in the many old forts built on various Western islands' shores to withstand pirate attacks. Such walled compounds lie scattered across numerous islands, packed with barracks, watchtowers, warehouses, refineries, manufactories, and marketplaces. Businesses and villages accumulate around them, forming the seeds of towns and cities.

Kerkeis

A century ago, refugees from the shadowland-swallowed island of Cormorant discovered forested Kerkeis and enslaved its native people. The conquerors learned from the island's shamans the art of carving whole keels from its mightiest trees, indwelt by elementals lulled to sleep with thaumaturgic songs. As each figurehead is completed, the elemental fuses with the hull, awakening as a living ship with unique elemental blessings — whether expertly crewing itself, immolating its timbers with sacred fire that only burns trespassers, or sailing across land or air. The conquerors have used these rare, powerful boleships to establish Kerkeis as a regional military and economic power, supporting their small conventional fleet in exploration, trade, and war.

Okhiro

Okhiro matches its neighbor Kerkeis' military strength in a different way. Cliff-girt and studded with mountainous ridges, the island's ruling ephors maintain a small, well-disciplined army, modeled after a Shogunate legion as remembered in the island's oral history. The Okhiroan army raids weaker neighbors for food and other vital resources, defends the island from reprisals from a dizzying array of small highland fortresses, and occasionally serve as mercenaries aboard Kerkeisian vessels.

Tylo

Tylo is a truly cosmopolitan island satrapy, befitting the Western Trade Alliance's former central hub. Calm seas surround it, providing easy access to sea routes. Tylo rules several surrounding islands whose slave plantations supply the Neck's lumber, sugar and tobacco trades.

Once a major independent mercantile power, Tylo's wealth and influence diminished once it submitted to the Realm, and the Western Trade Alliance shifted much of its activity to

Wavecrest. Today, Tylo's prince phlegmatically plots a course to welcome whichever Realm faction proves strongest, unaware of plots against him and the satrap Ledaal Murino by resentful lesser nobility.

Suadela

Currently the Neck's breadbasket, pleasant **Suadela** was once a shogun's private preserve, full of fertile lands, dense forests full of game, and gorgeous vistas. Today, powerful God-Blooded heroes hold court in manorial hunting lodges that dot the countryside, ruling the peasantry in a feudal state with few large-scale battles and only the occasional duel. Natives conduct secret rites to the heroes' divine ancestors in ancient shrines carved into Suadela's coastal cliffs.

The Realm has made few inroads into Suadela. The Immaculate Order appears content with the single temple permitted by the local princes, set atop the island's highest hill. But none could miss House Peleps' hunger for Suadela, whose surplus alone could fill the Peleps legions' bellies.

Utahi

The city-state of **Utahi** (**The Realm**, p. 175) stands at the Neck's southern tip, and serves as a jumping-off place from the Neck to points south. Once rich and powerful, its island empire has largely dissolved over the centuries. Since leasing the satrapy a decade ago, House Peleps has worked to reclaim Utahi's former vassals and support Immaculate proselytization through the region.

Changing the Board

The Storyteller should feel free to tailor the geopolitical climate of the Western satrapies for her game by changing which Great Houses control which satrapies.

The Western Campaign

With the Realm collapsing, the Rightly Guided Admiralty Board presents House Cathak with an audacious offer: House Peleps will split Creation between itself and a Cathak Empress. In exchange for the new Empress removing his protection from House V'neef and safeguarding Voice-of-the-Tides Prefecture, Peleps would lend Cathak naval support while removing itself to the West, which it would conquer under Cathak suzerainty.

This is a fiction. In truth, like Prasad, the Imperial Western Protectorate will be a satrapy in name only. House Peleps intends to carve out a permanent stronghold in the West and Southwest from which it can never be dethroned. Should the Scarlet Empress return, Peleps will present the new holdings to her as a *fait accompli* — or if she takes long enough for the Protectorate to entrench itself, Peleps will simply ignore her. Either way, the house is gambling everything on the West.

The War in the West builds off the details of House Peleps in **Dragon-Blooded** and **The Realm**. Peleps aggression meets resistance from House V'neef, Azure, Skullstone, Wavecrest partisans, and other Western factions, turning the Neck into a warzone. Meanwhile, Lintha freebooters and native pirates seek to capitalize on the bloodshed, emboldened by divine support from Siakal, the Western god of battle and bloodshed. Seeing that the oncoming war will greatly increase her power, Siakal begins making aggressive moves against the divine Ocean Father and his Azurite priesthood.

Regional Reactions

The Western Imperial Protectorate doesn't go unnoticed or unchallenged. Most of the powers of the West react negatively to the sudden arrival of thousands of Dragon-Blooded and ships heavy with jade and treasure.

The Wavecrest Archipelago

The West's largest satrapy, Wavecrest (**Exalted**, p. 103) is overseen and garrisoned by House Peleps, and serves as a major Imperial Navy depot. As House Peleps pursues its imperial ambitions, its grasp on Wavecrest becomes a stranglehold, no longer fettered by the Imperial Service's oversight or the political ambitions of rival houses, and ever in need of ships, resources, soldiers, and jade to sustain their war effort.

Wavecrest's ruler, the Feathered One, has long endured the Peleps regime even as the archipelago's royal families clamor for him to take action, but this posture will soon grow unsustainable as Wavecrest bears more and more of the war's costs. Wavecrest lacks military might to equal Peleps' troops, but a mass revolt could turn what was once House Peleps' seat of power in the West into an interminable quagmire — especially if the Wavecrest rebels can find allies among those Dynasts forced out by House Peleps as it assumed control like garrison commander Sesus Vevera.

Azure and the Coral Archipelago

One of the Neck's greatest maritime powers, Azure has established its own empire throughout the breadth of the Coral Archipelago and beyond. Its navy boasts more ships than any other Western power and military discipline to rival the Imperial Navy's. And while ancient Azurite law forbids Dragon-Blooded from holding political offices, many outcastes have found a place in its navy.

Azure's leaders, the Sea Lords, view the Imperial Western Protectorate's encroachment as nothing less than an existential crisis for their own authority, and rally to hold off House Peleps' forces. While Azure's navy, mighty as it is, may not be able to singlehandedly drive back the Imperial Navy, it could position Azure as a key player in a coalition opposing the Imperial Western Protectorate. But Azure also faces unrest among its own imperial holdings, and can't commit its entire navy to repelling House Peleps without risking its empire. As the war progresses and the Azurite navy's losses grow, the Sea Lords become reluctant to involve Azure further, seeking any excuse to extricate themselves from the conflict.

The Skullstone Archipelago

The Silver Prince doesn't dream of vast military conquests or ostentatious displays of necromantic power. He dreams of walking through an Imperial City remade in Onyx's aesthetics. His victory and eternal rule are inevitable, he believes, because Skullstone's society — which ennobles the dead as its transcendent, immortal elite — is culturally superior to any other in Creation. Through regional hegemony and zombie labor, Skullstone maintains an economy largely independent of the Guild, Azurite slave-traders, and other foreign powers, one that the West grows increasingly reliant upon. Assimilating all Creation into his perfect society would take centuries, if not millennia, but what span of years means anything to a Deathlord?

House Peleps' Imperial ambitions threaten this dream, jeopardizing Skullstone's cultural hegemony by unifying the West under Dynastic rule and undermining the Deathlord's economic

power by securing trade routes to the Blessed Isle and the continental Threshold. Moreover, the Silver Prince fears that Immaculate monks will aim to eliminate Skullstone's heretical notions of coexistence between the living and the dead at their source — himself. Consequently, he appeals to the beleaguered House V'neef as allies against House Peleps, despite the risks an ascendant House V'neef in the West might pose to Skullstone.

Skullstone's Black Fleet is the backbone of its military, economic, and political strength, captained by puissant nemissaries and crewed by zombie marines who neither break nor waver. Any ship might hold one of the Silver Prince's dread Abyssals — terrifyingly powerful warriors, mariners, necromancers, and diplomats. Should the need arise, Skullstone's shipyards can produce new vessels impossibly swiftly, undead laborers working tirelessly day and night.

Still, Skullstone's navy is more kingmaker than king. Its fleet — focused on anti-piracy and defense rather than conquest — is currently smaller than those of the region's other major powers, its growth restricted by Skullstone's timber supplies. And even puissant deathknights face their match in Peleps' and V'neef's more numerous Dragon-Blooded champions. But the Prince remains uninterested in military dominance, seeing Skullstone's superior way of life guaranteeing ultimate victory.

The Silver Prince considers allying with Azure against the Western Imperial Protectorate, and remains sensitive to the war's shifting power dynamics. In the meantime, he offers protection, funds, and supplies to satrapies in the Neck. He does not seek repayment in coin, but instead asks that his newfound allies conduct mass executions of condemned criminals and war prisoners, opening new shadowlands across the Neck.

Western Spirit Courts

Any number of Western divinities might find themselves drawn into the conflict. The Ocean Father, a prominent sea god and one of Azure's foremost divine patrons, takes a long view of the war. He'll aid in the Coral Archipelago's defense to ensure Azure doesn't fall, but refrains from wielding his wider influence among other ocean deities against the Imperial Western Protectorate. Not only is he hesitant to risk drawing House Peleps' ire down on Azure, but he also wishes to keep open the possibility of peaceful negotiations with the Immaculate Order if the Protectorate's influence cannot be entirely kept out of Azure.

Siakal, Western Goddess of War and Bloodshed, revels in the strife stirred up by House Peleps' advance, enjoying a resurgence in her cult's prominence. She favors no faction, seeking only to prolong the war and see it spread throughout the entire West. Siakal's once-forbidden priesthood in the Coral Archipelago courts the Sea Lords with offers of divine blessings in exchange for blood spilled in the sea; revolts and uprisings throughout the West are aided by Siakal cultists; ships sailing under a flag of parley or peace are attacked by bloodthirsty siaka.

Wu-Jian's Court of Drowned Secrets (**The Realm**, p. 173) has fallen far from its ancient status as part of Luna's coteries. Under Immaculate suppression, its members' cults have dwindled, and now they turn on each other for what few scraps of prayer can be had. While this disarray leaves them in a poor position to oppose House Peleps, they could prove useful allies to the Western Protectorate's enemies — be they the Thirteen Schools, the Silver Pact, or even House V'neef, it is willing to advocate on the court's behalf with the Order.

The Silver Pact in the West

Western Lunar activity is focused primarily around Sunken Luthe (**Lunars**, p. XX), Leviathan's stronghold and a safe meeting ground for the Pact, and the Caul (**Lunars**, p. XX), where Sha'a Oka's forces wage war against the Realm. Other Lunar dominions dot the West — Wings of Ivory's Star Jasmine Pavilion, the wandering Fortress of the Fulgurite Spire, and more (**Lunars**, p. XX).

Direct Lunar intervention in the War in the West is limited, at least at first. Those Lunars committed to a strategy of asymmetric warfare don't engage directly, but encourage conflict between Peleps and V'neef and opportunistically hunt passing Dragon-Blooded. Those who prefer open war are largely united around Sha'a Oka's crusade for the Caul and unwilling to pull their forces away from the sacred conflict, though some join in the initial stages of the conflict disguised as rebels, dissidents, or opportunistic pirates. Silver Pact partisans may play a key role in the escalation of the conflict towards all-out war. As conflict intensifies, the Pact's shahan-yas may join in as well to make bolder and more aggressive moves if they see an opportunity to irrevocably maim one or more Great Houses.

Beyond the Neck

The West is, geographically speaking, both massive and somewhat small. Trade routes are well-mapped internally, extending from one end of the archipelago to the other, and beyond to Fajad and Goldenseal. But these routes cover huge swaths of ocean containing thousands of islands with their own political issues and cultures. Vast societies exist underwater, with their own regional worries largely divorced from the battles going above except for the occasional disruption in trade.

This campaign initially focuses on the Neck, and to a lesser degree Wavecrest. The Western powers discussed below, among the most politically and economically significant in the region, don't necessarily get involved at the war's outset. But as time goes on, Azure's domestic intrigues and proximity to the Neck draw it into the bloodshed, while Skullstone and local Lunar elders meddle in any major Western political upheaval. There's room for other Western powers to become involved, potentially turning the tide before war engulfs the entire Direction. The Neck section of this chapter addresses smaller regional powers that might influence the war.

As war progresses, it draws in local factions for various reasons. The Sisterhood of Pearls (**Dragon-Blooded**, p. 128) views House Peleps' Westward expansion as an existential threat, fearful that the Protectorate's Immaculate Order will besiege the Isle of Fevers. House Zihao (p. XX), a Peleps cadet house, sees the Protectorate as a chance to rise high; its longtime rival House Yueh, tied to fallen Tepet and now-precarious V'neef, fears being supplanted. Many others exist, and Storytellers are encouraged to fill their own Wests with life, war, and politics not detailed here.

A Possible Future

The following timeline details one possible path the War in the West might take. Depending on how far away characters are, they might not hear of the Peleps invasion until it's well underway. It's important to note that these events only unfold as written if player characters don't get

involved. The Exalted work wonders, and changing the war's course — even in the face of rival Exalted — is well within a determined Circle's purview.

The Storyteller should only use as much of this timeline as suits her needs. As written, House Peleps successfully conquers Wavecrest early in the campaign, then settles in for a war of attrition against V'neef holdouts. If this conflicts with ongoing campaign elements or character ideas, the Storyteller should change as much or as little as she wants to fit her story arcs. Perhaps V'neef herself comes to aid her besieged children, sailing at the head of a mercenary battle fleet bought with her vineyards; or sudden reversals on the Blessed Isle force Peleps to recall much of its forces to support beleaguered Cathak legions.

This timeline is divided into four significant stages (although the first is largely prologue), with recommendations for player involvement at each stage.

Stage One: The Dragon Grasps Her Destiny

The War in the West begins in the Realm's bureaucracy as a rapidly implemented series of secret treaties and long-laid plans.

Concluding that the Empress isn't coming back, the Rightly Guided Admiralty Board persuades Peleps Lai to implement a generations-old plan to conquer the West. If the Empress does return, the Board reasons, only House Peleps will have expanded its holdings and incomes dramatically, rather than destroying the Realm squabbling over scraps. It can present the conquered West as a *fait accompli*, too strong to be gainsaid even by the Empress.

Lai reaches out to her former Hearthmate, Cathak Cainan, forging an agreement to transform the world: Peleps rules the West, the Southwest, and the seas, while Cathak rules the Blessed Isle and the remaining Threshold. Cainan agrees, and Peleps begins consolidating resources — artifacts, heirlooms, ships, food, all four legions — in Voice-of-the-Tides Prefecture, under the guise of preparing against civil war, without supporting an obvious side. Peleps elders court allies falsely, accept gifts, and take out massive Ragara loans intending to default. Once the West is theirs, they can bargain for forgiveness against those they've wronged, negotiating for more favorable terms.

The Peleps-Cathak alliance is only uncovered months later. By that time, Scavenger Lands mercenary companies are already en route for the Blessed Isle's shores.

Player Involvement

The player characters can take point in negotiating the Cathak-Pelep's alliance, acting as diplomats, liaisons, or advisors — or they might carry out espionage or sabotage against the negotiations.

If a spy from another faction — House Sesus, the All-Seeing Eye, Ragara's financiers, or the like — uncovers evidence of the ongoing negotiations between Cathak and Peleps, or of the Admiralty Board's plans, the player characters might be sent to hunt the spy down, whether on behalf of Houses Cathak or Peleps, or in service of a different faction seeking that information for itself. If they assist the spy, they may instead find themselves pursued by Cathak and Peleps agents seeking to silence her. The spy's efforts to go to ground could lead the pursuit into such perilous locales as Bittern's undercity, Eseon Forest, or the Isle of Smoke.

At a gala sponsored by House Peleps, intrigue abounds as its scions court potential allies, backers, and proxies, speaking in half-truths about their house's plans for the future. The player

characters might be entrusted with carrying out this charm offensive, or might be guests to the gala, with an opportunity to piece together clues of House Peleps' true ambitions.

The Glister Hawk Vanguard mercenary company, led by Shala Assai, the Exigent Chosen of Daggers, assembles in a city on the Eastern Threshold's shore in preparation of sailing for the Blessed Isle to fight for House Peleps. The player characters might be tasked with gathering information on the mercenaries' activities and preventing them from crossing the Inland Sea, or may be entrusted with fending off Dynastic spies and saboteurs to safeguard House Peleps' investment in the Vanguard.

It's possible that the player characters' actions avert civil war altogether. House Peleps most likely still commits to its plan of Westward expansion, but it must do so with much greater secrecy and subtlety lest the new Empress rally a unified Realm against it.

Opening Gambits

In the final months before the civil war begins in earnest, Houses Cathak and Peleps go from backroom dealings to making overt moves against their enemies. House Peleps' harassment of the Merchant Fleet intensifies as Imperial Navy ships disguised as pirates raid V'neef ships. Peleps subtly removes officers of questionable loyalty from garrisons and drydocks at Black Gannet Rock, Wavecrest, and Wu-Jian, primarily through transfers but occasionally via cashiering or "accidents."

House Peleps' assaults on V'neef ripple through the West. Pirates across the Neck and the Azurite navy begin follow the house's lead, launching increasingly daring attacks on the Merchant Fleet. Amid the tumult, several wary satraps — sensing what's coming — begin withholding tribute in order to bankroll military engineers, mercenaries, and Exalted champions, or to pay off pirates and local spirit courts. In the major Neck port of Tylo, a cabal of minor aristocrats secretly bargain with Grandmother Cuong Sa Fey to overthrow their prince and eject the Realm, placing them in power in exchange for the city's loot and a promise of safe harbor. Lintha ships disgorge ferocious reavers onto silent shores, clashing with the Ledaal garrison in a hard-fought battle.

Several Great Houses realize what's going on, but nobody grasps the full scope of Peleps' plans. V'neef leaders hastily fortify their Western holdings and acquire mercenary forces. Their efforts are effective, but hampered by Peleps' centuries of planning and by the broader Cathak-Peleps offensives tying up the other Great Houses. But House V'neef is full of ambitious scions eager to prove their worth. Acknowledging their peril, they fall back to their Western and Southwestern strongholds, choosing to dig in and fight rather than roll over and die.

Some Peleps commanders still seek a future with the Realm. They too don't realize the scope of the Admiralty Board's plan.

Player Involvement

The player characters may find themselves on either side of a naval battle between Peleps' ships and the Merchant Fleet — or between the Merchant Fleet and the Azurite navy, Lintha pirates, or other opportunistic raiders.

Spycraft is no less significant as this stage, with abundant opportunities to surveil troop movements and the amassment of resources, head off Peleps' raids before they happen, or uncover vulnerable targets.

As V'neef scrambles to fortify its Western holdings, player characters might join them on the front lines, act as emissaries and envoys between House V'neef and neutral forces in the Neck, or insinuate themselves among V'neef's ranks to spy on them from within.

The Lintha siege of Tylo presents a dramatic confrontation no matter which side of the battle the player characters find themselves on. It's but one of many battles breaking out across the Western satrapies as House Peleps, House V'neef, and other regional powers ready themselves for war.

Long Live the Empress

The Imperial City erupts into battle. Columns of smoke stretch miles into the sky, perverse reflections of the Imperial Mountain. House Cathak battles all Imperial comers, and at the bloodshed's end, Cathak Cainan most likely sits the Scarlet Throne. If Cathak prevails, House Peleps leaves one of its four legions to help garrison the Imperial City; within the week, the rest set sail for the West along with most of the house's paramilitary forces. Should Cathak be defeated, Peleps withdraws all four legions Westward, hoping that the remaining Great Houses will feud over the Blessed Isle, but preparing for the worst.

Even if Cathak Cainan can take the throne, the Scarlet Dynasty refuses to surrender easily, uniting against Cathak and Peleps. But this coalition threatens to splinter whenever it seems it's winning, as members that hate each other wait for a chance to slip the knife in. Cathak is well positioned, its numerous well-trained legions settling in for a protracted war of consolidation. If Cainan's bid for the throne fails, then the most likely outcomes are the ascendancy of a Mnemon-led coalition or an uneasy stalemate where no one faction possesses the strength to seize the throne, unless the player character's actions or other narrative developments have advanced another candidate's position.

Assuming the war turns in Cathak's favor, House V'neef formally submits to Empress Cainan in exchange for retaining its Blessed Isle holdings, placing itself under Cainan's nominal protection. This bargain allows Cathak to use the Merchant Fleet as a pawn against Peleps' naval monopoly, although the War in the West itself occurs beyond Cainan's reach. If Cainan fails, V'neef will seek an alliance with the strongest possible allies, desperate to ensure its own survival.

Player Involvement

In the Imperial City and throughout the Blessed Isle, the Cathak and Peleps legions, reinforced by mercenaries drawn from the Threshold, enter battle with the other houses, presenting ample opportunities for conflict. Even if the player characters aren't directly enmeshed in the fighting on the Blessed Isle, they may be involved in espionage, fortifying prefectural holdings on the Blessed Isle, negotiations among the other Great Houses, or tending to the countless wounded in the fighting's wake.

Battle on the Blessed Isle has little direct impact on the West, but if news from the front reaches the player characters ahead of other forces in the region, it may pose an opportunity to exploit that information in formulating their battle plans or negotiating alliances, not to mention seeking personal advantage through favor trading or economic manipulation — or they might try to ensure that news doesn't reach enemy factions, or spread false news of their own.

Stage Two: The Dragon Strikes like Lightning

The initial stages of the war involve Peleps securing the staging grounds of Wu-Jian and Black Gannet Rock while moving to pacify key Western and Southwestern satrapies. For the first time in centuries, the West sees the entirety of the Water Fleet, bearing the 19th “Maelstrom” Legion and the 31st “Adamant” Legion with them. The 6th “Ironroot” Legion stays behind on the Blessed Isle to safeguard Peleps’ prefectural holdings; the 22nd “Ox-Dragon” Legion goes to the Southwest.

The Conquest of Wu-Jian

Wu-Jian is the first battleground in the War in the West. A detachment of the Water Fleet, backed by two legions, disembarks and begins a bloody campaign of pacification. Within a few hours, the battle is liable to set fire to much of the ramshackle lower city, killing thousands. Dynasts of other houses who refuse to go quietly into arrest risk being killed by Peleps Dragon-Blooded.

If Peleps succeeds in establishing control over however much of the city remains intact — particularly the docks, which the Navy will take every effort to preserve — it makes it known that only the satrapy’s flag has changed, and that it’s business as usual in Wu-Jian. Negotiations with House Nissar over their role in the Protectorate begin — on fairly friendly terms, assuming Nissar didn’t suffer notable losses in the battle and hasn’t been turned against House Peleps.

With Wu-Jian subdued, the bulk of the Water Fleet sails for Black Gannet Rock — already firmly held by House Peleps, it is but a stopover on the way to Wavecrest.

Wu-Jian’s strategic significance means that House Peleps can’t simply cut and run if the city holds out against them. The Peleps legions will settle into a protracted, bloody quagmire against insurgent forces. Eventually, House Peleps may withdraw the 19th Legion to deploy elsewhere in the Neck, leaving the 31st legion to occupy Wu-Jian — but either way, House Peleps’ timetables for the war will have been set back significantly.

Player Involvement

House Peleps’ initial assault on Wu-Jian is a dramatic conflict. Legionnaires flood the city, prioritizing Dynastic estates and governmental buildings, but not passing over any opportunities to pillage, despoil, and spread terror. Resistance is sporadic, but between the Thirteen Schools and whatever weird, supernaturally talented outlaws lurk unknown in the lower city, Peleps detachments may unexpectedly find themselves out of their depth.

Once House Peleps settles into prolonged occupation, the player characters may be tasked with enforcing order throughout the city and rooting out pockets of insurgency — or they may find themselves on the rebels’ side, leading raids against the Peleps legions, tending to those wounded in the initial assault, and negotiating with House Nissar, the Thirteen Schools, and other regional forces in a bid to turn them against Peleps.

The Wavecrest Campaign

The Water Fleet’s flagships cruise to a satrapy that appears to be mostly pacified. Wavecrest needs only accept the new Imperial yoke. Peleps diplomats meet with the Feathered One to negotiate a bloodless transition of power, and most likely succeeds in doing so. But securing the Feathered One’s concession isn’t the end of House Peleps’ conquest.

Many of the archipelago’s royal families are outraged by this show of submission to an already familiar oppressor, and agitate against the Protectorate’s rule with methods ranging from subtle

politicking to outright revolts. They aren't the only ones; the Peleps garrison is tasked with suppressing public opposition against the Protectorate on Abalone, while the Peleps legions are dispatched to rein in other major inhabited isles of the archipelago that don't easily submit. Prominent political prisoners are jailed aboard floating prison-ships offshore, as are any Dynasts from other houses captured by the Peleps forces. Meanwhile, the Water Fleet blockades shipping in and out of Wavecrest, seeking to secure it against outside forces and to prevent news of the Protectorate's ambitions from spreading ahead of them.

Another stumbling block comes in the form of Hamoji — chief volcano god of the Wavecrest Archipelago — and his spirit allies. Peleps monks and diplomats seek to establish communication with Hamoji through his priestesses, offering him a prominent position in the Western Imperial Protectorate's Immaculate prayer calendars in exchange for his sanction. However, Hamoji ill trusts the offers of Immaculates, suspecting that their promised worship will be withdrawn as soon as they need some other god's favor more. Unless the Peleps negotiators can win over the volcano god, negotiations sour and the diplomats are expelled. If that happens, House Peleps deploys seasoned Immaculate martial artists and other Dragon-Blooded to subdue Hamoji, eliminate his priesthood, and cow his spirit allies across the archipelago.

Between the violent suppression of the royal families' dissent and the blockade, the Feathered One is almost certain to turn against House Peleps sooner or later, uniting the rebellious royal families and vowing to fight the Peleps invaders to the bitter end. But Wavecrest's military is no match for the Peleps legions in open battle. Without aid from powerful allies or decisive intervention by player characters, the rebellion is most likely crushed, with the Feathered One either retreating into Abalone's interior to continue leading a guerrilla insurgency or being captured by the Peleps forces and tossed into his own volcano. In the Feathered One's absence, House Peleps may appoint a puppet Feathered One, or break with satrapial convention altogether and place Wavecrest directly under the house's rule.

In the aftermath of a failed rebellion, the surviving royal families most likely begin secretly sheltering members of House V'neef, other Dynasts, and priests of Hamoji. But, shaken by Peleps' brutal retribution against the Feathered One's rebellion, they're unlikely to take up active resistance for some time.

Player Involvement

Player characters may take a key role in the initial negotiations with the Feathered One to secure his surrender and in subsequent efforts to enforce order over Wavecrest. This may be through negotiation with royal families or leading Peleps forces to suppress dissent, either on Abalone or the other islands of the archipelago. Player characters aligned against House Peleps might carry out their own negotiations with the royal families and provide support to their opposition efforts or battle against the Peleps forces deployed throughout Wavecrest.

The Water Fleet's blockade poses an opportunity for intrigue — enemies of House Peleps might attempt to smuggle secrets out of Wavecrest, or smuggle resources in to help support insurgent groups. Peleps-aligned player characters might be tasked with hunting down spies who make it escape past the blockade before they can deliver their vital information, or with hunting smugglers and blockade runners.

The player characters can also take point in both House Peleps' negotiations with Hamoji at his open-air temple on the volcano's lip, and the potential violent subjugation of the volcano god if

negotiations fall through. Even after the volcano god is bested, his priestesses and spirit allies remain spread across the archipelago to be subdued. Alternatively, player characters may try to conduct their own negotiations with Hamoji beforehand to bring him into a coordinated anti-Peleps coalition, or offer support and defense to his allies.

The Feathered One's rebellion doesn't qualitatively change the nature of the action in Wavecrest, but intensifies the conflict to new heights. Open warfare, espionage, assassination, negotiation, and propaganda all play a vital role in determining the revolt's outcome.

The Zhaojūn Campaign

With An-Teng lightly garrisoned due to its longtime acquiescence to Realm control, the Imperial Navy's capture of Dragon's Jaw and the City of the Steel Lotus is likely to succeed with little opposition. If successful, Water Fleet ships link up with allied cadet houses among the Baihu satrapies and attempt to subdue the northern Meiyu Coast, then convey the 19th "Maelstrom" Legion to Zhaojūn, which is expected to put up more of a fight.

The Lintha pirate family has a strong presence in these waters, and seizes on the opportunities left in House Peleps' wake. Imperial Navy and cadet house ships weakened in battle, hard-hit coastal cities in An-Teng and the Meiyu Coast, the Merchant Fleet — all of these are potential targets of opportunity.

If the early conquest of An-Teng and the Meiyu Coast goes well for House Peleps, then Zhaojūn will likely pose their first major obstacle in this region. Zhaojūn's satrap V'neef Boru, garrison commander Sesus Chay Darim, and crown princess Zhao Mnemonrai Faiyen plan to lead the V'neef garrison into the farming villages and outlying wilderness surrounding the city, and the Maelstrom Legion may well spend the next several months running into traps and ambushes laid by the insurgents. Peleps also suffers more subtle economic sabotage from V'neef merchants. Even if House Peleps eventually succeeds in pacifying Zhaojūn, pockets of heavy military and merchant resistance persist.

V'neef's performance in the Western theater influences how long the insurgency lasts. A bloody campaign there leaves the Southwestern insurgents unsupported, while successfully reinforcing V'neef positions in the West — or being so decisively routed that they abandon the West entirely — means more support available to the Southwest. A strong performance in the Southwestern theater offers the Merchant Fleet safe harbor, dramatically strengthening V'neef's position.

Player Involvement

An-Teng's fall isn't a sure thing; the intervention of the player characters, charismatic Tengese resistance leaders, or foreign allies could potentially thwart House Peleps' efforts. Likewise, there'll still be ample battle and negotiations for Peleps-aligned player characters to take part in to secure An-Teng.

Likewise, the conquest of the Meiyu Coast presents opportunities for numerous conflicts involving player characters on either side. The Baihu cadet houses also prevent an opportunity for intrigue and diplomacy; House Peleps has strong ties to some of them already, but the player characters could change that.

Once the conflict reaches Zhaojūn, the player characters can take on key leadership roles within the rebellion, or in leading the fight against it.

Coronation

If House Peleps successfully pacifies Wavecrest and Zhaojūn — or at least, if it's able to make a plausible claim of having done so — it moves forward in establishing the Imperial Western Protectorate proper with the coronation of a new Empress in the West. A massive parade fills every street in Abalone. The Western Empress takes her throne in the old satrapial palace, calling herself the Protector of the Realm, heir to the Scarlet Empress' imperium.

The new Western Empress will almost assuredly be a female Peleps Dragon-Blood. Peleps Lai is the strongest contender, though which of the numerous qualified candidates ultimately takes is up to the Storyteller's decisions and the player character's actions.

Player Involvement

Pelep-aligned player characters may play a part in the political maneuvering and intrigues to determine who takes the Western Throne, and in fending off the inevitable assassination attempts against the new Empress.

For player characters opposing House Peleps, the coronation is a high-risk, high-reward opportunity. Peleps will take pains to ensure the security of the new Empress, and her personal puissance will ensure that she's no pushover in any case. But a successful assassination could potentially fracture House Peleps' unity as potential successors squabble for the throne.

Stage Three: The Dragon Nests

Having declared the Western Imperial Protectorate, House Peleps moves to consolidate the remaining Realm territory in the West, and the war for the Neck begins. Working from its base in Utahi, the Water Fleet sets out to systematically conquer the surrounding islands, while hunting down the Merchant Fleet with orders to capture or kill. House V'neef, unable to match the Imperial Navy's might alone, seeks all the allies it can from among the Western peoples, and makes House Peleps fight for every inch it takes.

Conquest of the Neck

As the Imperial Navy shifts the preponderance of Water Fleet forces into the Neck, the Sea Lords of Azure can't ignore the implicit threat they pose, drawing the Azurite navy into the war if it hasn't already entered and seeing increasing military buildup throughout the Coral Archipelago. The Water Fleet's presence also lends force to House V'neef's rhetoric. Few of the Neck's peoples believe House V'neef has their best interests at heart, but in the face of the Protectorate's expansion, it's a pragmatic alliance.

Just who House V'neef is able to bring into its coalition varies with the player characters' actions and the war's progress up until this point. Kerkeis, Okhiro, Tylo, Suadelo, and Skullstone are all likely candidates. Mercenaries, privateers, and pirates — even the infamous Lintha family — could be brought into the fold, agitated by the Imperial Navy's pirate hunting and potentially paid off from V'neef or Skullstone's coffers, or with offers of amnesty and letters of marque. Azure's ancient fear of Dragon-Blooded rule complicates any negotiations between it and House V'neef, but the Sea Lords may prefer to partner with one Dragon-Blooded house to avoid being conquered by another. And while it would be almost unthinkable for the Silver Pact to outright join forces with a Great House, Lunars may offer covert assistance.

At this stage, the war's outcome can vary greatly depending on the Imperial Navy's remaining strength after its previous conquests, the might of the alliance V'neef is able to assemble, and the actions of the player characters. If House Peleps claims enough victories against minor polities, it

sends diplomats throughout the Neck to persuade other islands' leadership to abandon the cause. Should Peleps prevail, the Imperial Western Protectorate will see most of the Neck conquered and brought under its authority.

Player Involvement

Sea battles, diplomacy, island sieges, espionage, assassinations — there are abundant opportunities for player characters to engage in this stage of the war, and potentially set their own endgames in motion.

The Aftermath

Even if House Peleps is able to successfully bring the Neck into the Imperial Western Protectorate, there's still conflict aplenty to be had. Insurgent forces within Wavecrest, Wu-Jian, Zhaojūn, or other holdings remain a thorn in the Protectorate's side — burning Imperial Navy ships in the harbor, freeing political prisoners, and assassinating Protectorate officials. Azure's tributaries in the Neck are increasingly unable or unwilling to pay tribute, either conquered or denuded by the Protectorate's growth. This likely leads to the Sea Lords declaring their opposition to House Peleps, embarking on a war of expansion. The Silver Pact raids Protectorate holdings with the same zeal as it does Realm satrapies, and the Western Empress' proximity may stir the likes of Leviathan or Sha'a Oka to audacious action.

It's also most likely at this time that House Peleps' holdings on the Blessed Isle are lost, with the Cathak and Sesus legions ousting those scions unwilling to go quietly. Even if House V'neef can't find allies among the rest of the Scarlet Dynasty, it can still paint House Peleps' withdrawal from the Isle as a betrayal of the Realm. Peleps scions remaining on the Isle risk being imprisoned and ransomed in exchange for the Protectorate's Dynastic prisoners, while Peleps-controlled prefectures are absorbed into the holdings of whichever Great Houses hold the most power on the Isle.

Player Involvement

At this stage, the War in the West is essentially over, leaving behind a changed Creation in which the campaign continues. The Imperial Western Protectorate is established as a new geopolitical force like unto Lookshy or Prasad — although depending on the player characters' actions and other events, the Protectorate's reign may not necessarily be a long one. Intrigue, rebellion, warfare, politics, and espionage flourish in both the Protectorate and the Realm.

The Shape of the War

This timeline of the War in the West is premised on the assumption that House Peleps is able to accomplish enough of its goals to continue making progress towards its imperial dream, even if it doesn't win every conflict or maintain the position of power it has at the outset. If your chronicle breaks from this assumption — either because the player characters successfully intervene at key moments, or because you want to tell a story where some other faction overshadows House Peleps — then it will diverge from this progression. A few examples of how this might play out are presented below.

If House V'neef can gain the upper hand — most likely with the aid of powerful allies, such as a coalition of other Great Houses, the Silver Prince, a coalition of Western peoples, or the like — then the War's focus turns towards House V'neef

deploying its power to force House Peleps out of strategically positioned islands and deny it key resources. Depending on how events unfold, House V'neef may seek to raze the Imperial Western Protectorate while consolidating as much power as it can on the Blessed Isle, or it may seek to usurp the Protectorate from Peleps' hands.

If a powerful outside force — the Silver Pact, Skullstone, an alliance of islands unified behind Azure — intervenes in the War and secures the upper hand, Houses Peleps and V'neef may find themselves united against a common foe. This scenario can unfold in a number of ways, depending on who this enemy is and what part the player characters take in the War. Lunar player characters might lead an island-hopping campaign of raids against Realm strongholds in the West, liberating long-held satrapies such as Wavecrest and Wu-Jian. Dragon-Blooded player characters facing down a mass uprising throughout the West incited by the Silver Prince might fight to maintain their houses' hold on whatever strategic assets haven't already been lost while seeking to break apart the coalition rallied against them through diplomacy, naval raids, assassinations, or other bold moves.

Storytelling the Endgame

Depending on the player characters' actions, the War in the West can go in any number of possible directions at this point — or earlier, if circumstances take a sharp turn. Likely outcomes include:

Peleps Victory

The Protectorate crushes all major resistance within its sphere of influence. Aiming to avoid overextending itself against any remaining Western powers, it cites Shogunate-era treaties to legitimize its rule, then settles in to consolidate its gains. Peleps-aligned characters find opportunities for heroic deeds, political advancement, and personal profit in the new regime, as well as avenues for military, diplomatic, and espionage efforts against the Protectorate's neighbors.

V'neef-aligned characters must ingratiate themselves with their victorious foes; commit themselves to guerilla war; or go on the run, taking refuge with Skullstone, among the remaining independent islands, or beyond. There's much to do outside the Protectorate's borders, including gathering new allies and financial backers, succoring refugees, restoring broken trade networks, or battling rapacious pirates, Coral privateers, and Silver Pact raiders.

V'neef Alliance Victory

House V'neef and its allies break the Protectorate's main forces, forcing Peleps to fall back in disarray to key strongholds such as Wavecrest. V'neef-aligned characters must work hard to maintain their alliances once the Protectorate's immediate threat dissolves, while keeping Peleps and the Silver Pact alike at bay.

Peleps-aligned characters confront power struggles over the rump Protectorate's throne. Meanwhile, they must work to stave off further defeats while seeking opportunities to reclaim the initiative and strengthen their nascent Western empire. They may instead fall back to the Blessed Isle, beseeching aid from the new Cathak regime.

Stalemate

The Protectorate and the V'neef alliance wear each other down until, faced by threats from the Silver Pact, Skullstone, a coalition of mortal Western polities, or the like, they establish a wary peace. Characters on both sides work together to strengthen ties by cooperating against mutual enemies, engaging in diplomacy, or forming marriage alliances, though mistrust and vendetta may scuttle such efforts.

Characters may also seek advantage to break the stalemate, such as by recruiting foreign allies, spying on their peers, or covert raids against the other side's shipping or remaining Blessed Isle holdings.

A United Western Realm

Confronted by overwhelming opposition from mutual enemies, the various Western Realm factions — the Protectorate, House V'neef, the Caul's martial orders — unite under a single banner. Play resembles the “Stalemate” outcome in many respects, but offers additional political drama as the various factions seek ways to function together, with leaders of every group jockeying for position in the new hierarchy.

The Realm Defeated

Peleps and V'neef suffer such losses that they can no longer withstand the Realm's Western adversaries. With the Imperial Navy and Merchant Fleet scattered and broken, the characters must flee their enemies' wrath. Whether and where they can find safe haven depends on the civil war's progress elsewhere.

Leaving the West Behind

Character will have many reasons to depart the West — temporarily or permanently — at various points in the campaign. They might seek aid for their Western faction, or simply flee the chaos engulfing the islands.

A largely intact Realm, its new Empress secure on the Scarlet Throne, offers opportunities to join or rebel against the new hierarchy. Should the Great Houses divide the Realm into scattered fiefdoms, serving or seizing one such state offers great opportunity for a Hearth. And if the Realm collapses entirely in the face of Silver Pact aggression, Solar empire-building, or the like, fleeing Dynasts may find themselves on the run or carving out their own enclaves from nothing.