

The ABYSS



Gaia
by Jason Thompson



The Abyss

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Recommened for Mature audiences.

www.kult-rpg.org

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Jason Thompson likes pre-'90s horror movies, Japanese and underground comics, and obscure fantasy and science fiction. He is a self-publisher ("<http://www.sonic.net/~jason/>"), and had drawn a comic book adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's THE DREAM-QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH. He has at various times worked as a video game magazine writer, comic editor, and freelance artist. As of 1999, he is typing up THE NEST, a KULT game set in Kosovo and influenced by Heironymus Bosch, and CLOSE TO HOME, a 1930s CALL OF CTHULHU adventure where horror writers get caught up in an improbably bloody plot out of an Italian _giallo_. He is currently working on a comic about zombies.

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A Publication from The Abyss Made for the Kult Roleplaying Game For Mature Readers

"The Abyss is a not-for-profit worldwide corporation whose aim is to encourage a new publishing company to buy the rights to the Kult role-playing game and bring it back into print. We run an extensive outreach campaign to attract new gamers, and we produce high-quality new material and distribute it for free on the Internet in order to keep gamers interested."

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KULT places most of its scenarios in cities, but in LEGIONS OF DARKNESS an alternative appears; Gaia, the unexplored wilderness, the green and unpleasant land. Although some may find it a compromise of the unforgivingly artificial horrors of Metropolis, Gaia shows another sort of dark universe. In Metropolis, the corruption is a result of urban decadence, of the dark side of knowledge and civilization. In Gaia, Nature turns out to be just as pessimistic, and eat-or-be-eaten is the rule. Identity is lost; time has no meaning; and gates open up to it in places far from the city, places where veteran KULT players expect to be safe (just let them move to the country!). The converse to urban horror -- gangs and brutality, mechanical monsters and the indifference of strangers -- is pastoral horror -- degenerate backwoods people and brutality, animal terrors and the isolation of being miles from where anyone can hear you scream. What could be a better change of pace?

Sources drawn on for this brief article include Italian jungle cannibal movies; Robert Holstock's MYTHAGO WOOD; assorted fairy tales; Harry Harrison's DEATHWORLD; Pliny's INVENTORUM NATURAE; and many other books and films. When in doubt, for Gaia the best source material is real books on nature, such as those published by National Geographic and Eyewitness Books. Short horror stories should provide many ideas as well.

Whether it is spoken of and never visited, whether it becomes central, or whether it is merely the setting for fast-paced races against time in a deadly environment, Gaia -- the rival and mirror image of Metropolis -- can be a useful part of a KULT campaign.

Summarizing Legions of Darkness...

Gaia was once our Garden of Eden, but like Metropolis, is now a forbidding and overpowering place to us. Gates to Gaia open in the unpeopled parts of the world; not only in forests and grasslands, but deserts (such as the Sahara), mountains (such as the Himalayas), and in the uncharted oceans (such as around the Bermuda Triangle, leading to an area of Gaia known as the Ancient Sea). In Gaia, nothing is certain except change: landscapes alter and change constantly, the very ground is alive, and everything fights, breeds, and eats. A billion kinds of crossbreeds and monsters, of which the beasts of the Illusion are timid descendants, sport and ruthlessly hunt. The civilized pretensions of Metropolis, indeed of any will or intelligence which thinks it can control Nature, break down just as steel and plastic do in the influence of Gaia. Nature as we know it in the Illusion exists only through the efforts of Malkuth -- efforts she has recently abandoned -- to make it seem rational and controllable.

When brought to Gaia, the human mind and body are overwhelmed by wildness. Our memories are lost in weeks or months, followed by the shapes we think of as our evolutionary peak, or as the Human Form Divine. De-evolving and degenerating, in a variable amount of time we return to our basic protoplasm, which then struggles back to human form, encapsulating the Circle of Life. The physical effect takes years; but as a basic rule of thumb, for every week in Gaia, one point of EDU is permanently lost.

Gaia In Human History

The original Illusion -- the world we live in, thinking it to be real -- was modelled after Gaia. The Demiurge knew that Metropolis would remind us too much of our mighty origins, and wanted to forbid us ever from constructing cities. But the Demiurge knew also that the true Gaia would be too inhospitable to our pitiable new forms, and worse still, might itself cause us to Awaken.

Thus Malkuth was conscripted to embody Nature. 'Nature' as humans think of it is a mental construct, an idea of

harmony and peace, which has little in common with the true Gaia. Chesed, the Archon of satisfaction and bounty worked with Malkuth to create an appealing face for Nature — the myths of the Garden of Eden, the Happy Hunting Grounds. When the lictor Rousseau spoke of the Noble Savage in the 18th century, he was describing Malkuth's version of Nature. By putting this face on Nature, humans could be tempted away from Metropolis. With preconceptions of orderly farmlands and 'natural' human dominion over 'lesser' animals, humans were unable to see the true Gaia before them. However, cities were built anyway; though the first few were destroyed and those who looked back on them turned to salt, humans continued to inch towards the model city they had known.



For millenia Nature was unchallenged. However, in the 19th century humans began to question the Demiurge, and a new face was put on Nature, one slightly closer to its true form. The licor Darwin and sociologist Herbert Spencer displayed the constant change and survival of the fittest behind the mask of the earlier Nature. 'Social evolution' was used as an excuse for changes taking place in the world, and theories about genetics were used as an excuse for racism and European domination. Malkuth started to chafe against some of the changes made without her consent. In addition, the growing human population put explorers and imperialists on a collision track with Gaia; in the 19th century alone several groups of human scientists disappeared into Gaia seeking proof of the theory of evolution.

At this point Gaia and Metropolis collided, resulting in wholesale pollution, and the Perverted Earth started to appear. The 'neutral' parts of the Illusion started to be composed less of Gaia and more of Phlegethon, the gray dimension of in-betweens, of asphalt and concrete, roads and waystations. The ancient Greeks and other cultures feared crossroads, because ghosts were said to lurk there; this is Phlegethon. (Phlegethon is one form of the 'shadow lands' where those of indeterminate beliefs and zero Mental Balance end up after death.)

Frustrated, Malkuth outright rebelled. She determined to make the Illusion more like Metropolis, and correspondingly our idea of what was 'natural' became more and more like the city. The new Nature became a place of poisons, toxins and gradual extinction of species which could not survive in Metropolis. The other licors, especially Binah, absorbed the sentimentalists and ecologists who continued to believe in the old Nature. Meanwhile, out beyond the Illusion, Gaia still existed as it always had. Now, however, when we entered its borderlands, we lacked Malkuth's protection and were easy prey to the things from beyond, our old hunting-partners and sparring-beasts, our old scavengers and cattle. Now, Gaia had been forgotten...and, forgetting the fairy tales, the tribal songs, the paths through the woods, we were less prepared for it than ever before.

This is the world of the GAIA SOURCEBOOK.

Why Enter Gaia?

If the players spend all their time in the city (the setting most often depicted by most horror and splatterpunk writers, not to mention KULT) and there is little opportunity for the Illusion to break in rural areas, how can you use Gaia in a campaign? And why would they risk entering an environment even more unpredictable and inescapable than Metropolis? The party, creatures from beyond the Illusion, and ritual magicians all visit Gaia for different reasons. It may be that the players never exactly enter Gaia, but simply encounter some of its creatures and surreal effects while passing through a wilderness area in the Illusion.

Accidental Breaks in the Illusion

This is the most common reason to enter Gaia, at the individual GM's discretion. The descriptions of the different areas suggest different ways in which Gaia could be entered.

Hunting and Gathering

Many herbs available only in Gaia have medical or magical value. Disease victims seek their cures here, drug addicts seek Verrucktpflanze and other hallucinogenic and addictive plants, and magicians seek reagents such as mandrake root or cockatrice's tongue. Some especially daring (or foolish) hunters try to kill Gaia's creatures for trophies or even capture them alive. More powerful organizations and individuals are able to fund large expeditions, although when the compasses stop functioning and the decay sets in, even the best-planned expedition can fail. Of course, side effects abound, and patients who use Gaian cures may become more -- or less -- than human.

Unlike Metropolis, Gaia can easily be rationalized off by scientists. What researcher, searching for the mysteries of

biology, zoology, botany and evolution, would not risk exploring the untamed jungle?

Gaia Attacks

Gaia is host to uncountable dangerous predators, some of which occasionally break through into the Illusion on their search for prey. When they enter our world, they leave trails of destruction later attributed to rampant tigers, serial murderers, or simply a mystery with "Croatan" scrawled on the trees. The players may be hunters trying to study or capture such creatures, or they may be innocents caught up in the slaughter. Some of the more powerful beings are intelligent enough to have other goals in our world besides hunger, and some act in collusion with human cults or animals from the Illusion.



Environmental Conflict

Are the characters environmentalists? Who will they side with -- the loggers, businessmen and hunters who want to stop Gaia, or the radicals, extremists and loners who wholeheartedly want it to spread? In places where terrible ecological disaster has eliminated Gaia (such as those left by Gamichicth's destruction of farmland), gates open to the Perverted Earth, and the characters may stumble through to the wilderness via a toxic waste dump, a DDT-laced field, or one of the other sores on Gaia's skin. But even "healthy" gates may spawn monsters which menace the Illusion. What side will the players take?

Escape From the Archons

In Gaia, the long arm of the Archons and Death Angels -- the forces that rule the Illusion -- is relatively weak. Ideology and control can make no footholds into the wild, and refugees from the lictors often unintentionally or intentionally come here. Nameless sailing ships skirt the borders of Gaia, using its gates to teleport thousands of miles in the Illusion within hours. Persecuted prophets flee from cities to the wasteland where they find an entirely different Reality waiting for them. Cults and well-meaning groups try to eke out an existence on the borders of Gaia, but failing to follow the examples of thousand-year-old tribes are usually overwhelmed.

Paganism, Shamanism and Other Magic

A hundred magical traditions ascribe power to Nature. How many dare to live out their theories? The Lukundoo, a secret society of indigenous magicians, wield some power over Gaia. Communes, tribal peoples and sexual fetishists try to make an example of the behavior of animals in Gaia, absorbing the totem-spirits into their bodies. Scholarly groups follow ley lines to their nexus in Gaia, and Wiccans and Druids know that some phases of the moon can only be glimpsed from inside the wilderness. Gaia holds a reservoir of power for those who know how to use it.

Exploration

Even today, optimistic travelers and naturalists seek lands not yet charted on a map -- and find them, in Gaia. Those who return with their minds unharmed have to live with skepticism, if not outright suppression of their discoveries, and some cannot forget the experience but determine to find Gaia again. Any place which is isolated and foreign can open up into part of Gaia. Will the characters run from the unknown, or see how far they can go before it's too late to turn back?

Gamemastering in Gaia

It can be difficult to fit Gaia into an existing KULT campaign, but if it succeeds, the discover of a whole new world can provide hours of surprise (and horror) to the characters. Gaia is your tool, to be used as you see fit. Some GMs may prefer globetrotting wilderness adventures set in Gaia in far-off parts of the world. Others will prefer a more bare, bleak, cold depiction of the wilderness, where all the trees are leafless and bare, the sky is cloudy, and the animals are dark, scabrous and mutated. Such a setting fits in better with KULT's usual urban settings: places such as the Perverted Earth and the Cold make good crossover points between Gaia and KULT's Metropolis. Remember that Gothic literature is not exclusively urban; the vampire is originally a creature of the barren mountains, and werewolves fit naturally into the woods. A house, a remote town or some other outpost of civilization can be a crossover point between Gaia and other adventures ("West of Arkham the hills rise wild...").

Gaia can be a difficult setting. Even more than in Metropolis, encounters are prone to degenerate into fight-or-flight situations. It is easier to ad-lib the next house than the next tree. The emphasis will probably be less on the characters' immediate surroundings and more on the general environment, their goals (if any), and their predicament of trying to keep alive and sane. Finding food and water, and roleplaying the often unpredictable mental and physical degeneration of Gaia, can be very involving. Some parts of Gaia, such as the Empty Quarter, depend on a mood of isolation, alienation and infinity. Other places, such as the Jungle, are screaming pits of chaos where the characters are constantly in danger. A mixture of both elements is preferable. To describe the environment, keep books and photograph albums of plants, animals and landscapes handy. A few descriptive and weird touches can make an area or a creature memorable. When describing the life forms of Gaia, the GM is advised to follow an idea first set down in ARS MAGICA: if the player characters have never encountered a given creature before, and do not know what it can and can't do, you are free to make it capable of anything.

The KULT world can be compared to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. What we think is real is only the distorted shadow of the 'Truth, cast on the walls of the cave by flickering candle-light. Gaia is the capital-W Wilderness just as Metropolis is the capital-C City. For practical purposes, this means that most of the descriptions of Gaia used here are exaggerated versions of 'real' landscapes. It is up to each GM to determine how much is too much, and how realistic or far-out to make the characters' surroundings. In LEGIONS OF DARKNESS, Gaia is presented as a place of complete chaos which constantly changes. While that interpretation stands, for the purpose of writing this sourcebook I've had to group the chaos into specific landscape types and potential encounters. (I have intentionally followed the format of the METROPOLIS SOURCEBOOK.) The landscapes in this book are not regions on a map with exact boundaries; they are constantly shifting, changing and being replaced with one another, as the GM chooses. But areas of stability do exist, often centered around some powerful creature or phenomenon.

The de-evolutionary effects of Gaia make trips there necessarily shortlived, so adventures may have to be fast-paced and desperate as the characters' memory and sanity drains away (it can be aggravating to have to buy back 10 points of EDU after an adventure). However -- especially if the characters have never read about Gaia in the rules -- remember that this effect is the GM's tool and can occur as fast or as slow as wanted.

~ Locations ~
Gaia: The Elysian Fields

"They had been out of the movie for two hours, it was midnight, and they were lighting up in the park. A dog barked, far away and as if obscured by something. A soggy carpet of grass stretched out down to the duck pond, and through the dew they saw the lights of City College. 'There's something a little extra in these ones,' Eric said, and gave her the other cigarette.

"She felt a twinge of irritation at being experimented on. She'd always had a lower tolerance than him. The pot was good, though, and she inhaled as it burned down by her jaw. There was a smell like rosewater somewhere. He was bringing his hand around his shoulder towards the front of her shirt when she started to feel sick.

"Are you all right?' she heard him ask ludicrously before she stumbled away and ran towards the pond. Whatever was happening was not pot. She cursed him as she ran through the reeds at the end of the lawn, towards the water fountain she knew was there. She heard him yelling as she crashed through elephant grass and pampas into the ankle-deep water. A flock of ducks flew up from it, splashing with their wings. The dog barked again, coarser and nearer. She stopped and swayed, then looked at the lake. Mossy remains of enormous logs floated in the lily-coated water which stretched away for a quarter mile.

"Turning around, she saw that the lawn was empty. There were no lights from the college, no asphalt path lined with garbage cans. The vegetation everywhere was breathing with crickets, the grass swayed suspiciously. Had she gotten turned around? She heard the dog barking, growling even, and other sounds of great shapes moving in thick brush. She brushed back the vines and walked, spellbound, into the garden of night."

The Elysian Fields are the safest part of Gaia, and closest to our world. Our farmlands, gardens, and fields can open up to them. The general landscape is a grassland, which ranges from the prairies of the American Midwest to the African savannah. In other places are trees and rolling hills. Sometimes specific plants or crops mark the entrances to Gaia (such as four-leaved clovers or the rare Gahnesian Fern), other times the entrance is hidden behind the monotony of a seemingly endless landscape pattern. Homeless people on park benches may sleep and dream, and wake in Gaia. It is easy to get lost in such a place, precisely because it is so outwardly pleasant, and hours go by before people realize they are off the map, or that night is coming soon.

As one enters Gaia the plantlife grows wilder and more exaggerated. Fruit and vegetation grow everywhere, in green tangles only occasionally guarded by toxic milky secretions, ensnaring vines and inch-long thorns. Briar patches sprawl over the landscape, the ground underneath them infested with burrowing shrews and ratlike animals. The true shapes of ordinary animals can be glimpsed; owls' eyes now roam free of their sockets as they were intended to, and foxes peel back their lipline to reveal the extra rows of teeth. Dragonflies and fist-sized cicadas represent the insect kingdom. Panting and wagging their tails, stray dogs come back from feasting on the carcasses of Gaia's creatures, their mouths and fur soaked in blood.

In the Elysian Fields one can sometimes recognize pieces of the gardens and parks of our world, quilted together oddly. Instead of the Boulevard de Paix with its rows of elm trees, the same row of elm trees faces one another across a thicket. Cucumbers may vanish from a vegetable patch, actually the owner harvesting them from the safety of the Illusion. Birdseed appears for no reason as someone throws it for the pigeons in what to them is Central Park. But these areas are few, and so easy to slip back to the Illusion that it is difficult to walk along the borderline.

This is not to say that the Elysian Fields are harmless. Ravens nest here, enjoying the iron spikes in their claws that they possess in Gaia, and fly into the Illusion to pluck out the eyes of unattended babies. Wolves appear where wolves have been extinct for centuries, angry and savage. Sowbug-like, malicious insects dig for corpses in cemeteries, possess them, and force the bodies to hunt for their food. Familiar nuts and berries turn out to be poisonous, hallucinogenic or full of worms just as eager to leap inside a fresh throat. And there is competition for food and water by suddenly living plants; suddenly carnivorous versions of cows, horses, sheep, birds; and black, wart-skinned things which come from other parts of Gaia for food. After dark, disturbing things crawl from unexpected places to hunt by moonlight, and -- as

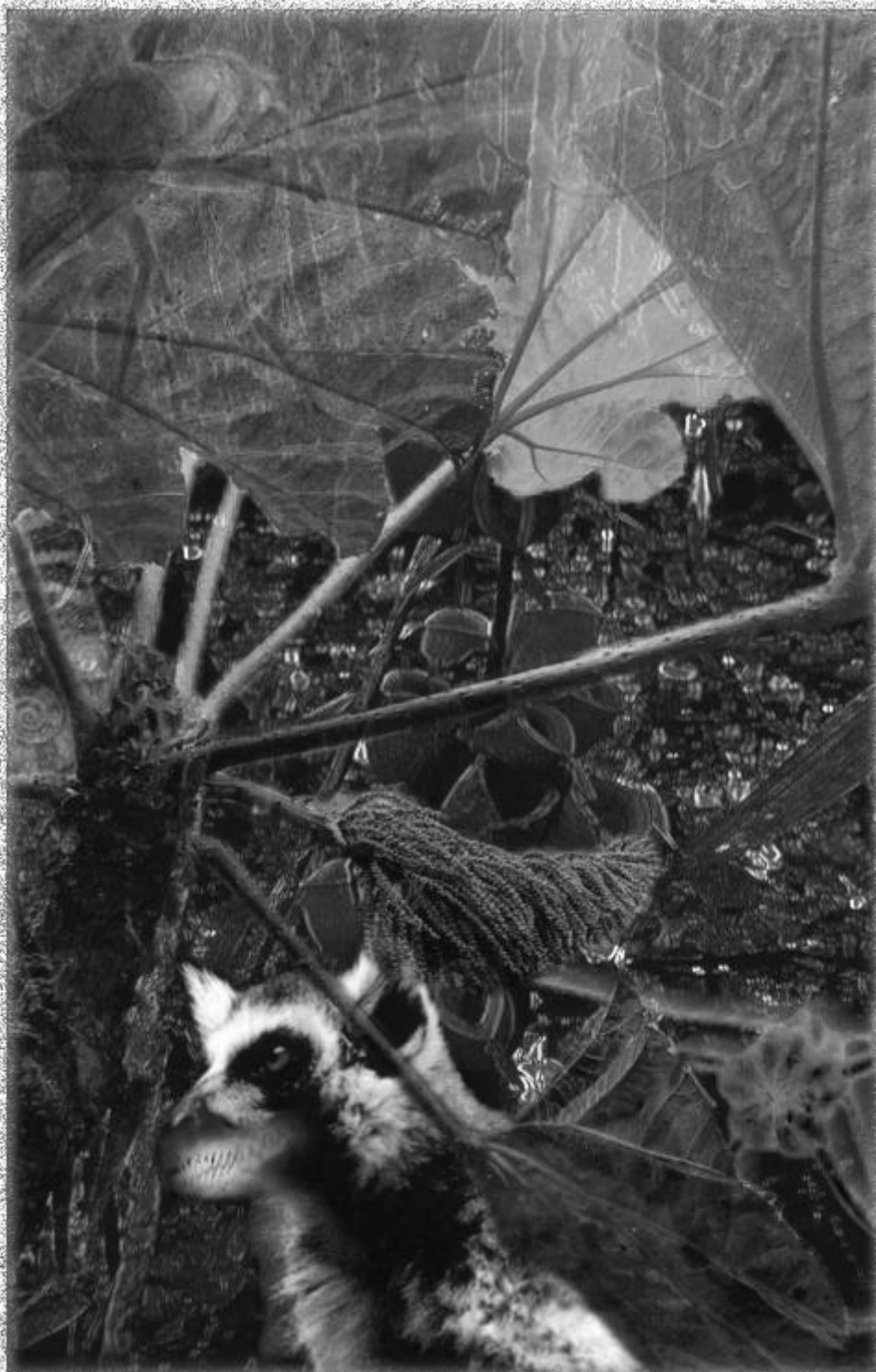
in all of Gaia -- the mood of the land changes utterly. Meek animals visibly swell to twice their size and go on rampages.

As one walks, one finds farmhouses and grain silos overcome with decay. Grass grows on their roofs, the entire buildings have become landscape features, and they may have been abandoned in the 18th century or yesterday. Sometimes people have held on and live blindly within such structures, believing themselves still within the Illusion, or entering and leaving it by a complicated series of movements. These people have compulsions of their own, from the long exposure, and families who grow up near these areas are especially prone to incest, wanderlust, and odd alterations.

Before they lose their learned skills and intelligence, humans in the Elysian Fields lose their memory. A childlike sense of exploration makes them less and less likely to return to the Illusion even if they know how. Humans in the Elysian Fields (without sinking into darker parts of Gaia) are called the Eloi. Knowing them to be easy prey, razides and other human-hating entities come here when they can.

The Gardens of Eden

Quite close to Metropolis are these gardens, a between-point created by the Demiurge or our old Awakened selves. A wall separates it from Metropolis, broken by baroque gateways like Victorian arbors forty feet high. Around the borderland, neither world is quite the same; slowness and age creeps into Gaia, and weeds grow in cracks in the sidewalks of Metropolis. Within, the Garden consists of an endless series of pleasant glades and lawns bordered by thick dark patches of tall trees. It is the sort of landscape that would have been drawn by Piranesi or Dore. Gates open infrequently here from the Palace of Versailles and other places.



The Gardens have few permanent inhabitants these days. It is visited by wild animals from Metropolis (such as ferocci) as well as by the more sophisticated beings of Gaia (such as those who like to play with their prey). The air smells of nectar and ambrosia. Paths lead to well-maintained flower-beds full of species unknown to science. Eroded monuments, gazebos and sundials are inscribed with everything from mathematical formulae to incongruously primitive cave-paintings. Greenery—including plentiful grape vines and other edible vegetation—grows on the remains of fallen tree trunks and Greco-Roman marble structures. In some places, the looming trees block the sunlight from dark clearings where bones lie in heaps.

The most dangerous things in the Gardens are the archangels the Demiurge left to guard it from us. They resemble giant winged marble statues whose faces are too bright to look upon, and they can set things on fire with their gaze. The wrathful archangels patrol the Gardens and keep them in a state of arrested decay. Some of them have become subsceptible to the influence of Gaia, and are beginning to go mad and regress into half-animal things.



Many Christians, Cabbalistic scholars, and others have died in this area searching for the Biblical Tree of Life, which was said to have existed here.

The Scarecrow

Walking in Gaia, the players see a scarecrow swinging from the remains of a wooden post. With ragged clothes, a blank

pillowcase for a face and a straw hat, the most surprising thing about it is that it is intact at all. As the players come close, however, the scarecrow begins to twitch and move (Terror throw at -5 to approach). Stuffing, mice and worms tumble from its stitches. If the players do not interfere, the scarecrow may break free from the rope, pull itself apart in the process (the individual pieces continue kicking), or simply give up and hang still again.

The thing has been animated by Gaia. Already a nervous system worms its way through the straw. Its consciousness is new, but the scarecrow has inherited an appalling amount of sentience, and partly believes itself to be a human, the (now dead) previous owner of its farm. It is confused, terrified, and partly retarded, and does not realize that it is not human. If it goes free, its mute efforts to communicate with the players may gradually turn to frustration and anger, directed either at itself or them.

Baleston

In a town in Kansas, America, a story familiar to places which have come too close to Gaia is carried out. Baleston is thirty miles away from Gove, the nearest large town. It is flat, empty country. Travelling on dusty, ill-kept dirt roads, the visitor observes how weeds and brush have crept over fences and infested the corn crops. Ruined farmhouses and mills are visible from the road, and every so often one hears a distant gunshot. There is a single telephone line, frequently collapsed after a hard rain. Baleston itself consists of several dozen houses arranged around a general store and jail.

Since the 1960s Baleston has been dangerously close to the Elysian Fields, and the population of 300 has been changing ever since. It began when the farmers on the outskirts of town stopped leaving their farms, and then were never heard from again. The survivors moved closer to the center of the ramshackle town. Illiteracy and ignorance have become the norm. A third of the births in the last thirty years have been congenital idiots. The citizens have begun to distrust the outside world, and their level of reactionarism approaches a Luddite's; outside of a few televisions, only simple machines such as pick-up trucks and guns are to be found in town. A vague sullenness and a sense that the old ways are better -- no one can say how old -- has possessed most of the citizens. Physically most of them look like normal people. However, the men are starting to grow notably stocky and hairy. They have abandoned most of their ties to the outside world -- relatives, friends -- and during the Winter the road is allowed to remain an impassable tract of mud, cutting them off entirely. Strangers who stay at Baleston's one boarding house encounter open suspicion, along with attitudes and superstitions thought to have died out in the 1920s.

The changes in Baleston have not gone unnoticed, and not all the citizens welcome them, but even their resistance to them has been tainted. If asked upfront, they would not realize how much things had changed in the last thirty years. They are afraid of wolves, and all believe in Bigfoot, werewolves, and other old legends -- unaware that the animal-like things some of them have glimpsed in the woods are only their old neighbours, physically changed from being in Gaia. The sheriff, Wayne Hudnall, openly wears a revolver and shotgun, and leads the men on punitive hunting expeditions which grow increasingly savage. It is behind closed doors that Gaia is appeased most strongly, however, as incest and bestiality become ways of life for many of the townsfolk. In some cases, bestiality has born children, and these half-human freaks are locked away, killed after birth, or let loose. Lately a former town councilman from Baleston has led expeditions into Gove and other towns to secretly erase Baleston from maps and remove it from city records. Within ten years, few people will remember that it ever existed.

The Veldt

The landscape becomes treeless, exposed to the sun, and the grass turns increasingly dry and yellow. The veldt is connected to Africa, Australia and other places; a grassland where fast beings run, chasing down prey with stealth and swiftness. The only visible traces of the superefficient predators -- besides the dark silhouettes on the horizon before they hunt again, possibly for the observer -- are the great piles of dung and rotting red meat, stripped to the bone by two-footed scavengers with ghoulish, decomposing flesh and the mouthparts of stag beetles. Pits are dug in the soil to

trap food by other things which resemble foot-thick acorn worms. Across all this, great herds of buffalo and extinct animals rumble ceaselessly, throwing the ground into an earthquake. The grass itself moves in spots, like a green blob rolling after its prey, picking them apart with wounds like thousands of papercuts. Humans abandoned on the plain become possessed with furtiveness, an urge to feel speed and rushing wind, and claustrophobia (or agoraphobia, depending on their reaction).

Locations in Gaia: The Jungle

"We'd been on the run for what seemed like weeks. Damn Kurt! It was all his fault. Each night over the campfire Norris blamed him more and more vocally; smart of him, because he was second in line for guilt. I should know; after all, I was the cameraman.

"'Cannibals won't perform for the camera,' I'd warned them. 'They're secretive people, and that's unmapped jungle down there. We have to be careful.' Norris and Kurt - all they wanted was an exploitation film, *FEROX 2*. They didn't take the time to learn the etiquette, the rituals. We spent two weeks camped sullenly outside their village, watching them walk past with their long earlobes, their coal-black skin, avoiding us. Kurt's background was in pornos. And that might have explained it, because after the rape they caught Kurt first, before they came hunting for us.

"'Damn savages,' Norris was saying. We hadn't had a tin of food in days, but we were around the campfire out of habit. Alan's face was a mass of mosquito bites, Terrence had been bitten by some fly and was having trouble waking up lately. 'They're not like us, you know,' Norris raved. 'We'll make our movie without those savages. We'll send the army after them from Cortazar.'

"The racist nonsense infuriated me into leaving the campsite. My stomach rumbled. I could hear Norris go quiet as I looked out over the palm trees. I hadn't told the others, but I was disturbed - shouldn't we have been able to see the mountains by now? Instead, in all directions stretched the green tangle of the forest, as if we were on a



continent no one had found before. We had to keep going west... Then I heard a sound like a strangled cry.

"I felt dizzy and I swore I smelled fat as I went back towards the fire. Norris and Alan were bent down over Terrence, and I assumed he had fainted. Then I saw Norris' mouth dipping over Terrence's arm and withdrawing covered in blood. Alan was waiting for his turn, picking at his face. Norris saw me approaching, and he said something, but his mouth was full. Alan reached for me, and I drew back, about to scream. But he was only trying to get the camera, which he grabbed from me and began to film."

Some people consider the jungle, which stretches over endless miles, to be Gaia in its purest form. In South America, in the African Congo, in India and the islands of Sumatra gates open to the primal wilderness of fighting, biting, breeding green. Not only a jungle, it also encompasses rain forests, mangrove swamps, and all sorts of thick vegetation. Entrances are often visible in extreme heat, concealed by ripples and distortions in the air.

Entering Gaia, a traveller sees the palm trees grow higher, and the ceiling of forest branches rise, often over 100' tall. There is a subtle change in the quality of light from the sun. The ferns and succulent plants become impossibly thick and high, while the ground underfoot becomes a brownish-black rot of fallen leaves, dirt and the semiliquid corpses of animals. Vines climb up the trees, with green creepers forming a web between them. The ten-foot-long roots of giant banyan trees sink into the humus. Decay and growth are rapid enough to be seen with the naked eye; dead matter rots visibly, sleeping animals wake up with moss in their fur, and plants never stop growing. Even with a machete it is difficult to hack your way through the undergrowth, and no tracks or paths can exist even for a minute; lacking instinct or the ability to track by smell, in Gaia you are always lost.

Those with botany skills notice the strangeness almost immediately. Ground, middle, and treetops ecosystems are incongruously mixed; layers of dirt and sod lie fifty feet up in the branches above, and on them grow bushes and grass. The solid trunks of the oaks melt and resolidify, twisting into new forms, coiling with other trees. Carnivorous plants large enough to injure a human are everywhere. Ordinary species appear in enlarged and mutated variations, crossbred with one another in disturbing ways. Plants generate wasps inside clusters of larvae-like seeds. Vines with the heads of blue snakes sway and flicker their tongues. Pitcher plants emit the smell of perfume and a slurred whisper like drunken speech. Fruiting bodies appear on the surfaces of giant slime molds like baseball-sized acne, then burst and spray everything nearby with sweet liquid. The characters would do well to watch the teardrop-shaped fruit, within whose translucent veiny surface can be seen something like a green, claw-handed mannikin.

The animals of the jungle are even stranger. Prehistoric things continue to live here; dinosaurs, fifty-foot crocodiles, giant lizards, the ancestors of dragons. Birds with colorful plumage, scales as well as feathers, or the heads of insects fly from tree to tree. Panthers, Ferocci and great cats with glowing tongues like anglerfish hunt here. Apelike, slothlike things which look natural from a distance turn out to possess elastic limbs, egg-laying ability, or dizygotic twins growing from weals in their chests. Shrewlike beasts, all mouth and stunted legs, chase their prey in groups of hundreds. Insects are everywhere. It is difficult not to get a parasitic infection. Thirteen-legged bugs, fist-sized flies, and eyeball-stabbing mosquitoes run wild. Army ants maraud over the landscape. Snakes with fishlike fins or razor blades for teeth slither along the branches. Slugs with four eyestalks spit poison. Monsters with sunken faces lined with spikes and limbs covered in fatty, excess skin grab their prey and suffocate them with their flesh. Orangutuan-like things with a distended abdomen full of tear-gas-like musk show their three-inch tusks as they haul themselves up the trees after you.

The jungle is never quiet. Under the leaves, things crawl; branches crack as large predators move through; screeching bats, birds and insects fly through the upper levels. The rustling, shuffling, dripping and mating calls can drive sensitive people mad. A cracking twig or a sudden breeze may be the only sign of an impending attack. At night, the darkness is almost absolute, and the truly awful predators come out, turning the world into a feeding frenzy in which the only goal is to survive until dawn.

Although always tropical, the jungle's weather is unpredictable. Fogs make the forest damp and dim, then vanish revealing the hot sun. Monsoons and storms send huge amounts of rain crashing against the treetops, changing the landscape into a new, foreign form when the water clears. Seemingly stable trees crash to the ground, struck by lightning or simply sinking with ponderous rotten weight. It is very hot, and humans may collapse with heatstroke in the muggy air. Sometimes the air fills with so much oxygen that one or more trees will spontaneously burst into flame - but the fires, floods and constant changes only make Gaia healthier.

The jungle inspires strange lusts and hungers. Humans kept there quickly develop Cannibalism, if not worse disadvantages and limitations. They become afraid of technology and fire. Changing rapidly, they revert to apes or (if their Mental Balance is low enough) to what their own neuroses imagine to be the ultimate predator. Gorilla-like brutes, covered with gaping, bleeding wounds and callouses, are the end result of many soldiers who have disappeared into Gaia in wars such as Korea and Vietnam.

Green Hell

The plantlife becomes thicker and moister. Enormous ferns, plantains and elephant palms compete for space. A rank vegetable smell fills the air, but no animal life is visible -- although the jungle is still full of the sounds of rustling and twitching. The landscape is covered with rivers of kudzu and ivy, and moss hangs from the trees.

Gaia's tracts of carnivorous plants are dangerous indeed. In addition to normal pitcher-plants, sundews and flytraps, many of the species are large and specialized enough to kill humans. The Cnidarian plants (q.v.) grow here, huge pitcher-plants that spit gallons of acid. In the water grow pseudopods of concealed, strangling seaweed.



Skunk cabbages knock out their prey by emitting toxic gas, then send out roots to grab the unconscious bodies. Mandrake roots grow here; they are a powerful magical reagent, but when plucked from the soil their dying shriek will kill human beings or drive them mad. Propellor-like seeds with insects' legs float through the air. Slime molds and jellies creep about. A humanlike figure approaching from a distance turns out to be a biped made of vegetable matter, with green arms, legs and a flytrap head; within its transparent stomach can be seen the remains of a child from Brazil who has not yet been reported missing. In holes inside trees snap wooden teeth, chewing the corpse of an ape or lemur who strayed too near. The most intelligent plants are the Gaian Flytraps (q.v.).

Few people or beings enter this area if they can help it, though the plants are able to dine on a steady stream of insects, stray animals and when necessary each other. Atypically, the area is safer at night than during the day, as many of the lifeforms are dormant.

The Fountain of Youth

Ponce de Leon searched most of his life for this Fountain, a bubbling pool of murky mineral liquid which connects at its far end to the Primal Sea. Those who drink from it grow younger, and if not stopped drinking will gradually become self-mobile embryos, slipping away into the Primal Sea to be reborn.

The Dark River

Through the jungle flows a great river, combining elements of the Mississippi and the Amazon, and wider than either. The water is black with particles of dirt and dead life vented into it by Gaia. At points it becomes a waterfall; at other points it widens into huge freshwater lakes. Frogs croaking, crickets, running water and leaping fish give it a recognizable noise. It has no source, and no destination. Whirlpools and eddies indicate possible breaks in the Illusion. Over the still parts drift clouds of flies. When the river recedes seasonally, it leaves acres of black mud and dead fish in a gluey mass.

The river conceals many forms of life. Foot-long tadpoles with breasts and humanlike ears lurk in the water, staring upward with unblinking eyes and occasionally beckoning someone downward. Fish ranging from salmon to great gars swim in it, though the most common by far are the ubiquitous pirahna. Some types of mutated pirahna, with legs like mudfish, can crawl miles inland after prey. The evolutionary milestone of animals moving from water to land is constantly repeated, as fish crawl up onto the bank, convulse, and grow lungs, legs, and useless appendages making them resemble early-stage fetuses. Other fish walk on stiltlike fins. Newts with forked tongues sit smiling blindly on the black rocks. Fearsome Jub-jubs, flat-skulled birds whose stare can hypnotize, swoop down to feed on the frogs.

Needless to say, it is dangerous to swim in the water. Even drinking it is a sure cause of severe parasitic infection. Where the water is deeper, larger predators live; the beings which inspired the myths of the hippo-like Catoblepas and the carnivorous, skinless Nuckelavee. Coalacanth (q.v.) sun themselves on mud banks, and prehistoric alligators forty feet long sit with only their encrusted eyes peering out over the water.

The dark river is sometimes the destination of boaters and canoeing explorers. Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald's doomed paddleboat/opera house, lost in the Amazon, turned to rotten wood on these shores. Occasionally when mist rises from the water a cloaked figure poling a dark ferry is seen in the distance, but it rarely answers calls from the shore.

Landslide

This event, although fairly common in the jungle, might occur after a character seriously failed a Terror Throw.

The earth shakes, and only seconds afterward the ground begins to rock up and down like a roller coaster. It suddenly takes a putty-like texture and the plants begin to sink into it. The characters must make a STR roll with greater effect than a roll by the earth's STR of 10 or they are caught in the ooze. Great blobs of earth start to reach for everything

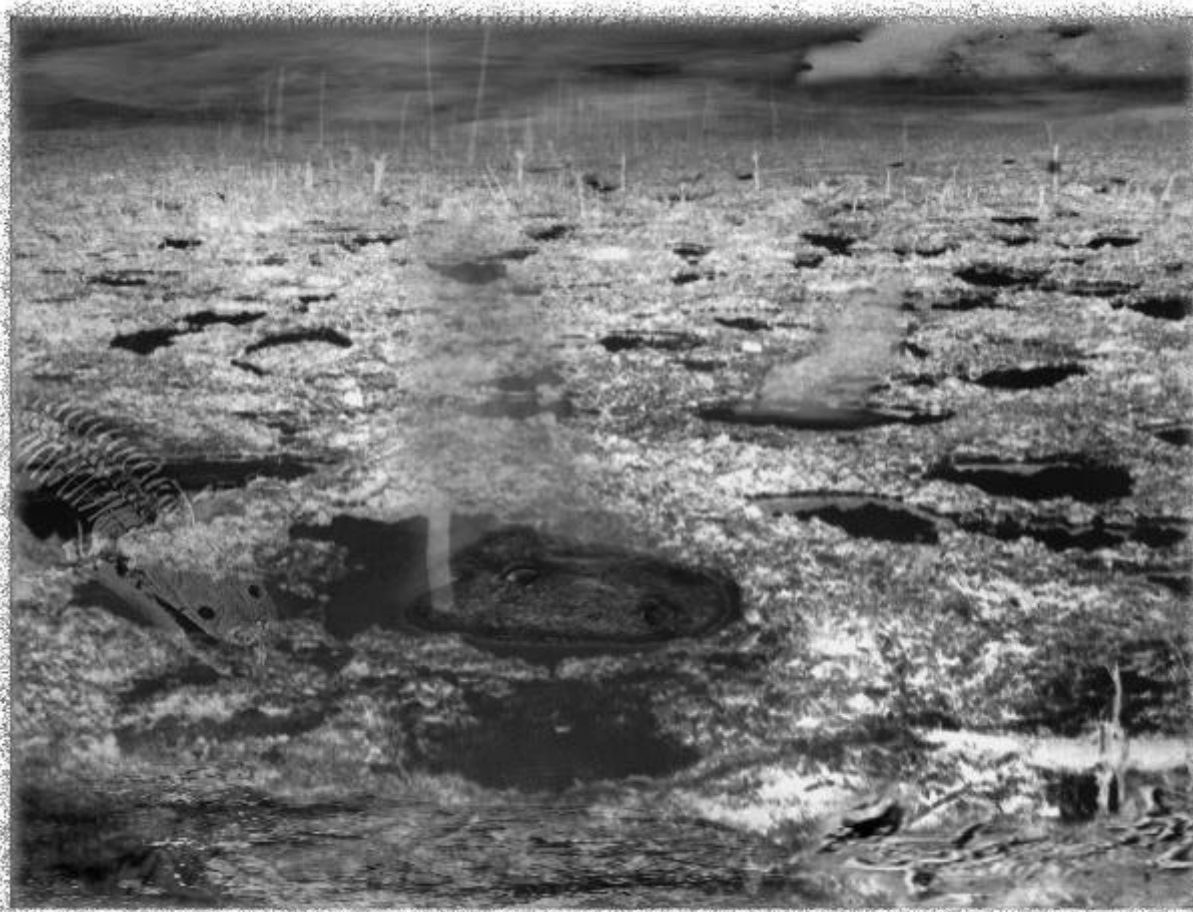
alive, and there is a 1 in 10 chance each round (or use Luck/Bad Luck) that any given character is grabbed by one of the foot-thick pseudopods which rises up from the soil. If the characters are grabbed by the Living Earth, they have one additional round to save themselves -- whether by outside aid or chopping off their own limbs -- before it envelops them and they are swallowed. The safest place is to climb the trees -- if the characters make at least one Climb roll every two rounds, they are able to stay out of the ooze. The earth's STR increases by 5 each round.

The effect lasts for 1d10 rounds, after which the now-barren earth settles, 10 to 20 feet higher than it had been. A few seconds later, the indigestible parts of the corpses float up to the surface, covering the ground with bones and rancid tissue. Within an hour, the earth sinks slightly and everything looks as it did before.

The Tar Pits

A thick, sulfurous smell starts to overwhelm the characters, and the air grows even hotter. Gas vents in the ground expel carbon dioxide with a regularity suggestive of breathing. Within a wide clearing, lake-sized pools of black tar bubble and expel poisonous gases. Periodically the tar recedes slightly, and giant skeletons of hideous animals can be seen soaked in the mire. The smell is nauseating.

The tar pits are the digestive organs of the Living Earth. They seep across the landscape digesting animals, particularly the largest and fiercest; and the most invulnerable creatures are brought here, carried in streams of oily earth, to be immersed for months in the boiling tar. Sometimes their partially-fleshed skeletons can be seen splashing and fighting out in the pools. Wise magicians bring things here which cannot be destroyed any other way: artifacts and certain Living Dead. The tar periodically overflows its banks and detaches into separate wriggling fragments which ooze after



prey or lie quiescent in bodies of water like patches of glistening oil. The smell of the tar pits is so noxious that humans who stay too close to it may faint or asphyxiate.

Pangaea

All times are encapsulated in Gaia. The myth of evolution is so well accepted that the areas of Gaia which resemble what we think of as the 'past' can come as a shock.

Pangaea is one of the lushest parts of the jungle. Enormous dragonflies and other invertebrates crawl and fly in the thick, sweet-smelling air. Primitive plants such as ferns, horsetails and club mosses dominate, growing more than ten feet tall. Lily-like plants choke the banks of broad swamplands. The forests are comprised of giant cycads and conifers with scaly bark.

The dinosaurs hunt here. They are not quite as scientists have conditioned us to expect them. On ground, blunt-faced things wearing armadillo-like armor waddle and hiss aggressively. Thin saurians with fast running legs and perpetual smiles of interlocking teeth race on two feet over the landscape. Scaly, nimble crossbreeds of iguanas and snakes climb through the trees. In the water, enormous Diplodocuses with sagging, fatty skin devour mouthfuls of weed; the extra mouth at the end of their tail indicates the use to which their hindbrain is put. Archaeopteryx-like birds flap their wings from tree to tree, and things like pteranodons with the heads of fish hang upside down from the branches. The largest bipedal carnivores, thirty-foot Gorgosaurs and Tyrannosaurs, are extremely dangerous, and many have advantageous mutations.

Pangaea is not its own place as much as an element of Gaia as a whole, where it is incongruously side-by-side with "modern" areas. It evokes a primitive reaction of fear in human beings, who, if they believe in evolution, may dwindle and shrink into rat-like, hairy beasts.

The Wild Boy

This event only happens once. The characters have noticed that they are missing some small items, perhaps having lost them overnight while camping. Good PER rolls notice the bare, and apparently human, footprints of the thief. Over the next few hours, however, the presence of someone following them becomes even more obvious. Finally, they are able to catch sight of a dark-skinned boy with long black hair, who is skittish and scared of loud noises, and seems to have the intelligence of an animal.

The characters (particularly if they have high MB or Animal Friendship) may befriend the boy. His eyes sometimes wander and he has difficulty making eye contact, but he has a full range of emotion and will smile and even show affection, for example if they feed him. It is difficult to tell exactly what age he is, with his child's face, somewhat muscular body, and the dark, liverish spots in places on his brown skin. They can observe him catching small animals to eat, and sometimes he will make cooing sounds or noises which may resemble human speech. He may help them fight predatory opponents.

There are several ways for this friendship to end. If the characters take the boy out of Gaia into the Illusion, he may adapt well, and even learn to wear clothes and speak over a number of years. However, come puberty his body changes alarmingly, and he will prove to be a Bete Noir, a crossbreed of a human and some Gaian creature. Alternately, he could be a normal human but an exceptional medium, whose lack of normal human knowledge renders him susceptible to magic cast either by the characters or their enemies. Or, when the characters wake up one morning, they may find nothing left of him but his skin, pitted with small holes in the places where his liver spots had been. The wild child should remain an enigma.

Locations in Gaia: The Weir Wood

"As she ran, she remembered the look in his face as he turned the rifle on him and fired. He'd only got what he deserved, she thought; her jaw still clenched at the thought of the drinking, the beatings. When she'd asked to go on the hunting trip he hadn't suspected a thing. Nor would anyone suspect her, she knew. Three to four hunters were accidentally shot each hunting season, no one had known she'd gone with him; and in packing their bags, she'd left no traces of herself.

"They said the forests up there were the last virgin woods in England. Still, running through the hollows and the mounds of sour-smelling oak leaves, she knew she would come to a road if she just kept to the same direction long enough. But the full moon and her beating heart dizzied her. When she ran out of energy she collapsed in a pile of leaves and went to sleep.

"When she woke, it was still night. She had to brush more leaves off herself than she'd remembered lying in. Checking her watch, it took her awhile to realize that it had stopped. It was because the light was bad -- was it cloudy? How long had she slept? Then she looked up and saw that the moon was a perfect crescent. The trees looked larger than they had before, but that was because she hadn't noticed their size in the moonlight. In the woods, creatures hissed and stirred. She saw something with skin like a porcupine's, but at shoulder level. As she started to walk faster she tried not to look closely at the faces she thought she saw inside hollow trees.

"Finally she saw the cottage. It looked like something from an Arthur Rackham illustration -- the gambrel roof, the bottle-glass windows with drawn curtains. There was the risk the inhabitant would identify her. But anything was better than being outside. She ran up and pounded on the door, and the door opened. Inside was a woman who looked four feet tall and eighty years old.

"You look lost, my dear," said the woman, with an accent that Sara couldn't place. Inside, the cottage had a smokehouse scent, and in the corner burned a fire in a stove. As the woman closed the door Sara swore that something hissed on the other side. 'Come in. Take off those damp things,' the old woman said. 'You must be hungry. Sit with me by the fire.'

"She removed her jacket and let the warmth and the meat-smell comfort her. Everything in the cottage looked like it was hundreds of years old. 'Thank you,' she told the woman. 'I lost my way. I was off the road.'

"There are no roads here,' the woman said, rubbing her fingertips together. 'But there are many hunters. How has your hunting today?'

"I haven't caught anything,' Sara answered, thinking of how he landed on his neck, the trickle of blood around his ear. She'd buried the rifle in the woods, bought it illegally; no one could pin it to her. Still it made her uneasy. 'Yes you did,' the woman said. 'You did hunt. I found it for you.' She pointed towards what was on the fire.

"Sara tried to turn, to run away, but the woman stood instantly and grew, as if she had been hunched double all that time. The woods howled, the twelve-inch hands grabbed hers; from their fingers grew three-inch nails. The flames flared. Then the crone pushed her backwards, and her hands slipped on her husband's roasting body as the door slammed and trapped her in the stove."

Temperate and coniferous forests open up onto the woodlands of Gaia. Centuries ago, gates to the Wood were common in Europe and Russia. In the 20th century deforestation and urbanization have sealed many of them off, but stories of them have been passed on in oral legends throughout Western civilization. Gates open at certain times of the year, such as Samhain and the Equinoxes, and are often visible to children and animals. Where the perspective makes the trees appear to repeat infinitely, or the wanderer feels them growing and growing, the wanderer has entered the Weir Wood -- Weir in the antique meaning of "Prophecy."

The woods are lonely, dark and deep. Little sunlight filters through the incredibly thick trees, and particles of dust and fiber hang in the air. Rich scents of peat, lichen and musk play with the visitor, luring them on. Most of the wood appears to be in perpetual autumn; the dominant colors are brown, yellow and russet, and the earth is two feet thick in dry, fallen leaves. In other places the leaves are green, and damp moss coats the trunks of the enormous, dirt-black trees. Great oaks, maples, and elms grow intertwined in a way that seems to suggest a pattern. Visibility is poor, either because of the great shadows of the hoary trees or the mist that creeps around everything. The forest is built on layer after layer of death -- hollow stumps, deadfalls of jagged broken branches, and rotten logs are everywhere. In some

places trees two hundred feet tall rise like the pillars of a great abandoned building. In other places the tight, claustrophobic brush suggests an animal's warren, and visitors must go on their hands and knees.

After a few hours in the wood, the strangeness begins to gather. The trees rearrange themselves when no one is looking, and grow at odd, bent angles; certain species have carapaced branches resembling the limbs of giant insects. Some trees drip sap which smells like and has the effects of wine. The mushrooms and shelf fungus which cling to the trees will grow on anything they touch. Grubs fighting under rotten bark prove to have the teeth of lampreys. The branches are grafted together as if they had been made of rubber, melted and refixed. Serrated edges and thorns defend innocuous trees, making it even harder to force your way through the overgrown areas. Gross phallic and vaginal symbols, gaping mouths and idiot faces shape themselves from the branches in response to human apprehension. The mounds of leaves tremble and move slightly, and if they cover you, you may never awake.



Although most of them are hidden by day, many creatures live in the Wood. Wolves range through it, large and proud, hunting prehistoric boar and deer-like things with the multifaceted eyes of flies. Bears with sharks' jaws walk on two or four legs through the wood, their battle scars visible behind their lice-ridden, stinking black fur. Many species of birds make their nests here, improbable specimens with figure-eight beaks or hair-like feathers or great claws as large as their bodies. In melodious or shrieking notes, they gossip about which visitors they bet will survive, or which they should sell out to the lictors. Subtly altered versions of hedgehogs, beavers and foxes creep about. Marrow-eating squirrels defend their treetop stash of human bones. In the ground burrow moles with porpoise-like features or blind, tendril-covered faces. Nine-inch larvae spin cocoons and gestate into clumsy fluttering butterflies with hypodermic syringes for mouths.

Shaggy gray bipeds whose hair is covered with briars climb the great trees to try to see through to sunlight. A visitor to the wrong clearing is warned away by a choked growl from a predator which hangs by a gluey strand of web-like saliva in its mouth.

In the Wood also dwell the things which are the originals of many Western legends, particularly from tribal and Greco-Roman times. Satyrs originate here, lecherous half-goat things covered in wiry hair and reeking of sex, with foot-long tongues and fingers and an affinity for flute-playing. Sharp-winged harpies -- no more able to fly than chickens -- coo softly to lure prey into their throats where they remain being digested for weeks. Crossbreeds of humans and other animals -- usually mammals -- manifest in arbitrary cut-off points where the distended animal parts meet the human. Minotaurs and fawns are other examples, while centaurs prove different than expected with their solid, gleaming black eyes and the distinctly caterpillar-like nature of their 'horse' parts. The attitude of these creatures varies from amused disinterest in humans, to vengeful cruelty, to a desire to change normal humans into creatures like themselves. (Sometimes the alterations are contagious during sex.) In the dark parts of the wood, swine-bellied predators with rats' feet and heads resembling sneering old men do not look up from guzzling the raw meat of their catch. All these halfbreeds are overseen to an extent by the Hesperides (q.v.), whose loyalty to humans is offset by their self-pity for their corroded bodies.

Strange effects of time distortion are reported in the wood. Sometimes humans spend only a few hours there, but years have passed when they return to the Illusion. The wood is quiet, but occasionally a bird hoots, or a rustling and crackling resolves into the sound of something chasing the visitor -- hundreds of somethings with glinting eyes, wedge-



shaped furry faces and sharp teeth. The sound of footsteps and nearby breathing is not uncommon. The weather is usually dry, but sometimes rain falls heavily, flooding the dark hollows of the trees and causing green plants and oozing mold to sprout for a few hours. Tadpoles and swimming rats take advantage of the stagnant water.

At night, the wood is dark except for the phosphorescence of dead wood, bioluminescent creatures, and strange fungus growths which emit blue-black or pink glows. However, sometimes one sees the moon -- a white one similar to ours, not the black moon of Metropolis -- which rises unusually commonly and unusually fully over this part of Gaia. Its white glow mesmerizes animals and humans with low EGO, driving them to acts of savagery and revelry they repress when the moon wanes. The moon appears to be made of the Living Earth itself, and sometimes its craters rearrange and shift like scar tissue; at times it even shoots beams of light which transform creatures, or drips white, pasty material onto the earth. Sometimes this material takes animal form and enters the ecosystem; other times it allows itself to be eaten, perhaps by its worshippers. Perhaps the moon is an entity with independent consciousness.

Humans in the Weir Wood may be scared by the wood and its inhabitants themselves, but also tend to develop a form of schizophrenia which damages their ability to make generalizations or assumptions based on logic. Once in this state they are better suited to deal with the Wood's neurotic structure. Humans with very low MB grow grotesquely short, deformed and often hairy; hunched and twisted, with two-toed feet, snoutlike noses, or elongated ears, they themselves become the goblins and dwarves of legend.

Ley Lines

A person with Magical Intuition within the Illusion, perhaps one of the player characters, may under some conditions make a PER roll to notice glowing, luminous lines under the ground. The lines (which resemble the aura of a living creature) thicken under heavily rural areas. Magic performed over one of the lines has +1 to its Effect, and -1 on the sorcerer's roll to cast the spell properly. However, odd images enter the sorcerer's visualization, making emotion overcome their intellect and suggesting a tangle of great tree roots, possibly concealing a hidden pattern. The magician must make an EGO roll or they feel inclined to seek out the source of the energy.

Ley lines have been found under Stonehenge in England, in Alaska, and in many other places. They are a lure which tricks human magicians into Gaia. Some think they are created by spells cast by beings on the other side of Gaia; others think they are a spiritual part of the Living Earth itself. Tidal forces increase and decrease the ley lines' strength. Humans who pass over the junction of one or more ley lines suffer strange effects, such as increased sex drive or an ability to see in the dark. These effects are usually temporary, unless the contact is prolonged. When a human follows a ley line to its nexus, they invariably enter Gaia, and are then at the mercy of its inhabitants; it is always much harder to follow a ley line out. The nexus of lines is usually around giant trees or in quiet, moon-haunted clearings.

In Norse legend the lines are linked with the idea of Yggdrasil, the world tree which connects heaven and hell. This may be the reason why around ley line nexuses, beings which remain close together for very long time may physically merge. Former human beings half-melted into the brown bark of trees give testament to the ley lines' power.

The Subterranean Wood

In certain parts of the wood the lack of sunlight is more oppressive than others, until it is impossible to tell whether you are underground or above. Piles of pine needles, rotten leaves and decaying organic matter heap around the bases of twisted trees until the soil becomes a black, tarry muck of indeterminate depth and solidity. Gradually the trees themselves seem to be a maze of white roots, dirt-covered tendrils forming impenetrable walls and tunnels. The only light comes from phosphorescent fungus. Filmy mold hangs between the branches. Maggots consume the caps of giant mushrooms and morels. The bark of trees is liable to rot away with a touch, sinking your fingers into something unpleasant. The dark, the black ground, and the pale blue glows makes the forest look like the bottom of the sea.

It is easy to be lost in the quiet burrows of the subterranean wood, where even up and down is hard to determine. Sly, creeping animals which cannot survive in the more violent parts of the wood lurk here, waiting to steal light sources from human visitors. Giant earthworms swim in the black ground. Mycelites (q.v.) contribute to the spread of rot and sticky-sweet gray fungus, and staggering corpses animated by Mycelite puffballs crawl out of burrows towards sounds. Where the water from the roots collects, shy albino herd beasts with eyes on their flanks go to drink. By following a trail of leprous skin a human can always come upon a Hesperide (q.v.) -- one of Gaia's shunned groundskeepers -- where they often lair here, surrounded by the severed heads of baby birds and other tokens of their hatred for other animals.

The Black Forest

Parts of France, Germany, and Russia border on the Black Forest of Gaia. Here, giant oak and beech trees (or pine and birch trees, in some parts) grow in somber stands over thick undergrowth. Trails and footprints lead back and forth in the wood, promising a way out, but leading only to shifting, unpredictable destinations. Sometimes the roof of a primitive lean-to or a cottage is even visible, but is usually gone when a visitor arrives. Thick walls of greenery bearing deadly nightshade, monkshood and sour fruit tempt wanderers to stay and eat. Some of the animals look normal, but are unafraid of people; others have a strangely baroque look, such as the rooster-like firebirds with their feather mosaic, or the eohippi, two-foot-tall horses with a painful-looking horn-like swelling between their eyes. It often snows in the Black Forest. As night approaches, the howling of wolves becomes audible, and the moment the sun goes out of sight packs of them sweep through the forest, eager to feed.

If visitors here survive the wolves, they can meet many unique and powerful creatures. A dwarf wearing torn stockings and a jesters' cap made out of fetal skin sits before a fire, throwing knots of hair into it, each one of which he addresses by name. The sound of a young woman's scream, abruptly cut off, rises over the landscape. At the crossroads of trails are encountered tall, arrogant, modernly-clothed men with the heads of wolves, their behavior a combination of masculine charm and predatory murderousness. The characters may briefly understand the speech of the birds. A gaunt gray-skinned figure with an Indian headdress stalks the woods, eating the livers of sleeping humans, causing them to suffer a slow death. The characters hear a man cry out, but by the time they arrive in the clearing all they see is a four-legged thing trying to shake its way out of a baggy suit.

All intelligent things in the Black Forest speak and think in riddles, their speech patterns elusive at best. If the player characters remain long, soon their thoughts too will become circular and cryptic, a mask for the primitivism overtaking their bodies. The forest is one of the few parts of Gaia in which lasting human habitations can exist, but even then are usually the lairs of powerful sorcerors, such as Magyar and gypsy magicians or Lukundoo, who do not wish to have visitors unless they are hungry. Bone fences testify to some of these inhabitants. Other houses are themselves alive. In one part of the wood a hut rises on giant-taloned chicken legs, which sometimes pursues prey through the woods.

The Pine Barrens

Gnarled pine trees, moss on their north sides, climb forty feet high in the quiet forest. The ground underfoot is dry and sandy except for the rustling piles of pine cones and needles, and occasional stretches of grass and rough underbrush. In swamplike areas, water pools around the base of the trees. Heaps of dead branches, covered with mold, make other areas impassable. The weather is usually gray and cloudy.

The Pine Barrens open onto the Illusion in New Jersey, where they form an area of unbroken wilderness remarkably close to New York. The Barrens often entrap visiting tourists as well as the "Pineys," poor, desperate locals who have lived close to Gaia all their lives. At night will-o-the-wisps and strange lights move out among the cedar trees, and the few roads which twist through the Barrens alter their routes.

The main threat, however, is the Jersey Devil, a half-human creature which has been rumored since the 18th century. Supposedly the bastard child of a family living in a cabin in the woods, the thing is a sharp-toothed, bat-winged

monstrosity with a roughly horse-like, elongated face. A cannibal, it feeds on human flesh. The Devil may either be a single entity or one of a species of monsters.

The Old Growth

An area of giant trees and great stillness, which can be reached in a forest in England. Dry river-beds half-blocked with fallen branches cut through the forest, and huge lichenous rocks lie about, vaguely resembling petrified giants (the occasional stone eye or nose does little to correct this superstition). Wild boar, bears, and pheasant are common. The forest is cold, and the trees are enormously large, their bark alone often three inches thick. In truth, they are thousands of years old, and have absorbed the legends of the human inhabitants of the land.

As one goes deeper in the wood, one follows a spiralling trail past increasingly aged trees. Some of the trees grow over low regular hills which resemble the burial mounds of dead pre-Celtic kings. In other places, primitive axes and stone clubs can be found buried. (These artifacts quickly disintegrate if removed from the wood.) Time distortions are common; the characters may come upon their own footsteps before they have made them, or be pursued by an enemy they killed days before.

After a little time in the wood, the characters will encounter anachronistic people; men and women in furs with bows and arrows, primitive hunters and gatherers, who speak archaic languages or no recognizable language at all. They behave like real people, are not aware of their anachronisms, and are as surprised as the characters. Giant, extinct species of elk and game also live within. The deeper one goes into the wood, the more primitive the people are; foresters, Druids, and finally Cro-Magnons. The wood shapes itself to human thought, and if the characters fear it, the people they encounter in it will be increasingly bestial, ugly and finally inhuman, with brutal teeth, nonexistent foreheads and fingernails stretching up to the knuckle. On the other hand, if the characters have a positive Mental Balance, the wood could produce people who resemble friends and loved ones of the characters. If killed, the wood people decompose completely within two days, becoming something resembling leaf mulch more than a human corpse.

There is no way out of the center of the wood, which is a gateway to Gaia.

The Wild Hunt

This event could take place anywhere either within or outside the Illusion, but always at night on the full moon. As the range of the forests decreases, the wild hunt increasingly passes through lonely highways, biker rallies, industrial yards and the outskirts of cities. For several minutes before the onslaught, people in the vicinity hear a dog howling, and may see a shadow pass over the moon.

Then, from a point on the horizon or around the corner, a pack of hounds starts to run -- great hunting dogs, baying seemingly endlessly, without ever drawing breath. They seem to float over the ground as they run. They do not attack, but anyone in the way is at least injured, possibly crushed. The flood of dogs draws shocked attention and stops traffic if it is in a populated area. Witnesses feel an erotic and aggressive charge and, if they have appropriate Disadvantages, may need to make a Terror throw.

After what seems like hundreds of dogs, a thundrous clatter announces the arrival of giant stags, who with muscled flanks, hooves and six-foot hornspans trample by. Sweat and froth pours from the stags, and a cold light shines from their eyes. Riding and running along with the pack can be seen hunched, many-toothed once-human things.

Moving along at the speed of a train, a single figure finally makes its appearance. Nine feet tall, it rides a great stag which it pulls with leather bridles and cuts with spur-like growths on the heels of its feet. It resembles a massively powerful nude man whose body is so crisscrossed with scars as to resemble different pieces sewn together from a corpse.

Curled, wiry hair grows from it and a great beard covers most of its chest and back. Its face seems partly to be made of exposed bone, and the top of its head grows into gigantic ram's horns. Mute, the Master of the Hunt leads his pack with gestures and the sound of his fists striking the stag's back.

People are driven mad or exhilarated by the Hunt's appearance, and some try to hitch a ride or follow it. They are either torn apart by the hunters or end up in faraway places, or in Gaia, naked and lost and soaked in other peoples' blood. People who lack Enhanced Awareness and have a Mental Balance close to zero will forget the Hunt after it happens.

Alternately, the person or thing that is being hunted could pass through the scene before the Hunt does, panting and clutching their chest as they run from inevitable doom.

Locations in Gaia: The Empty Quarter

"Our schoolmistress would never have permitted us to go to the Rock if she had known. Lila was more than willing, with her adventurous nature, the time she had spent in New Zealand; quiet Amy eventually agreed, more because of Lila than anything else; Patricia thought it would make a good story. As for myself, if I hadn't been able to use the carriage, we would never have been able to make it there. We left at 10 a.m. after church, leaving the eucalyptus groves and the grass and our parents behind, Patricia sitting in the back with the picnic basket and Amy looking out in the distance while Lila and I watched the horses gallop and sweat.

"Over the desert it rose like a piece of the first Creation, as the reverend at church used to describe it, or more like a piece of another world entirely. The Rock is the largest thing in all of Australia, they say. It was all desert and dry earth and weeds when we got there, and you could have looked for miles in any direction and thought we were the only people in the world. Like Lila, I wanted to explore, and I could not disguise my joy as we parked the horse in the shade and started to climb. I wanted to travel out over that endless emptiness, where Queen and Country had no reach, out into the world.

"I told my mother I was going to study today,' Patricia confessed as we sat on the top of the Rock, eating sandwiches and drinking mugs full of tea. 'She won't expect me back until four o' clock.' Lila laughed and entertained us all with tales about the Maori who wear bones through their nose and paint spirals on their cheeks and head. While we talked I noticed how quiet Amy was being; she looked out to the northwest, into the outback. Even through the umbrellas it was hot, and my hair had begun to stick to my head with sweat. My head ached slightly, so that I heard a distant drumming. Then when I saw everyone looking around I realized it was not in my head.

"Amy got up, but she didn't seem to be listening. She only walked over to the trail and began to head down. Lila asked her what she was doing. 'I'm going to see the horses,' she said, but she said it with her eyes unfocused, and her head was tilted towards the distant drums. She climbed down the slope and out of sight. Patricia tried to change the subject, but I felt uneasy about Amy. I ran after her, down the red rock slope, telling her she had forgotten her hat.

"When I got to the bottom there was no sign of Amy. I could hear my heart beating to the pace of the drums, and I saw the horses had the same look that Amy had, with froth on their flanks and their muscles squirming under their skin, wanting to move, to enter the heat, as I had wanted to do. Crushed in the dirt was Amy's necklace. The drums became louder and off to the northwest I saw a figure dancing, or not dancing but instead swaying like a piece of flame -- swaying inside a pillar of sand that dissolved and changed into great bird's wings. The heat was inside me as well as without, and I wanted to run towards the figure, until I felt Amy's crumpled hat in my palm. I held it to my face to protect me from the stinging sand as I called Amy's name, but soon she had vanished behind the dunes."

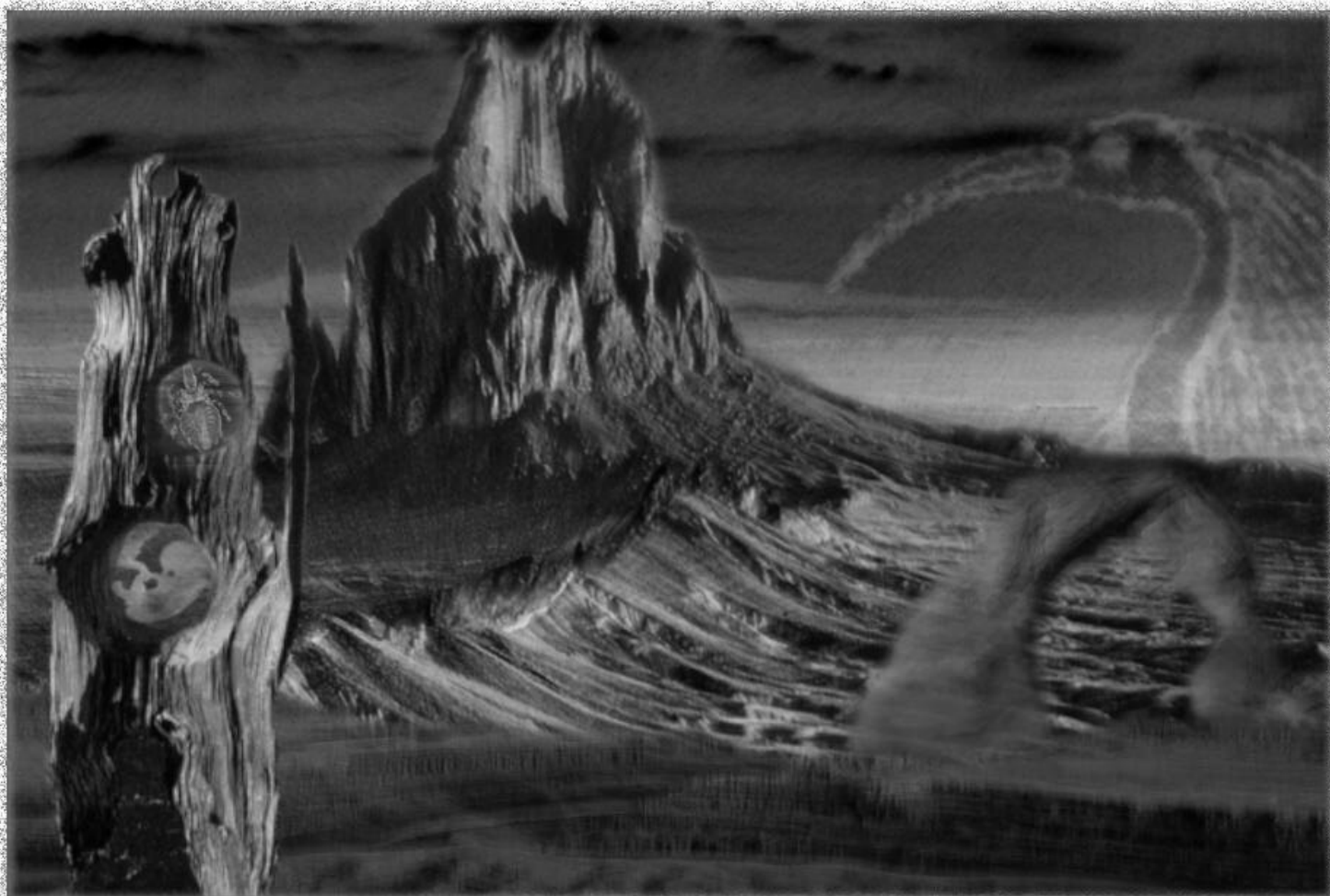
Cultures in Arabia, Egypt and Mongolia have long feared the desert parts of Gaia. Today, the desert of Gaia -- the endless wasteland -- is as powerful as it ever was, challenged only by rusty oil wells and Middle Eastern warfare which drags more humans into its realm. A tank division was lost here through a gate in Ethiopia during World War II. Shimmering heat-distortion in the air often conceals a gateway, wind-carved formations of rock and sand are the sacrificial shrines to Gaia, and sandstorms may carry people between the worlds into the Empty Quarter.

Visitors find that water evaporates at more than the normal rate, leaving canteens empty if they are opened only for a short time. Sand stretches as far as the eye can see, yellow or tan-gray. It is difficult to walk over the silty desert without sinking. Dunes range from small, rippling patterns to enormous, rounded hills. A hot wind whips along the sand, creating abrasive clouds and blowing sand into the faces of human travellers. To humans, the wind may sound like whispering or distant gunshots.

In other areas, the desert hardens into a flat plain of cracked, dry dirt, like a lake bed, often encrusted with white masses of salt. The earth rises at each footstep, creating a choking brown cloud. Plains of dry shale and pebbles make the landscape even more difficult to traverse; giant steppes and pits of boulders give the impression of a landscape disturbed by earthquakes and disasters. In some places, the sand has fused together into miles of glass, either slippery and blinding or cracked into hundreds of deadly shards. In every case, though, one's current landscape seems as if it

will never end; most adventures in the Empty Quarter should concentrate on this feeling of endless nothingness.

Only a few landmarks disturb the monotony. Irregular, oblong rocks, seemingly sculpted by the wind, sometimes break open revealing white cocoons. Mountains or pyramids appear on the horizon, then vanish. The landscape sometimes turns into maze-like rock gulleys, where dead-ends lead to walls of rock spikes or grotesque formations resembling staring eyes. Pillars of hardened sand rise sixty feet. A purple-gray glow comes from the black, pitted exterior of a fallen meteorite. Sometimes glittering pieces of quartz or diamond are mixed with the sand. The sand may sink, revealing a buried, Ibis-headed statue which opens its gummy eyes in search of worshippers or food. The only signs of humans are a few discarded bullet casings from pre-Civil War revolvers, or the occasional trails of dry blood which end at a corpse in white rags, face down where they had crawled. Western ghost towns pass into Gaia before disintegrating utterly. The bones of camels, cracked open for their marrow, can be found. Gray-blue sands in the Rub Al Khali of the Arabian Peninsula are said to conceal Irem, City of Pillars (possibly a gate to Metropolis), which only materializes at night.



Although it seems lifeless, the Empty Quarter hosts animals, like all of Gaia. Crossbreeds of scorpions and centipedes march across the sand. At night the ant lions come from their hideouts, and bite their prey while secreting an anesthetic substance, such that they can chew through to someone's ribs before the person wakes and the pain begins. Birds also dwell here; blackbirds whose rows of eyes are on the underside of their wings, vultures which blacken the sky with their carrion-eating flocks, and six-foot-tall awk-like birds which shift from leg to leg on the sand, the upper half of their body already so corroded from the sun as to be little but red translucent meat over bones. Beasts wait in the sand in ambush; buried below are another layer of plump, atavistic creatures whose legs dwindle away into roots, and who can

be dug up and eaten for what little moisture they contain. Sometimes the sand itself comes to life and drags travellers down (q.v. LEGIONS OF DARKNESS). The most intelligent inhabitants are either the reclusive kangaroos or the carnivorous ghouls. Ghouls, with their mummified skin, sharp teeth and claws, were feared in Arabia centuries ago. Now they skulk among the quarries of the Empty Quarter, dressed in rags, and sometimes cross over the Illusion into our cities.

Almost nothing grows here. The sight of a few shrubs, plants and a pool of water often indicates a departure to another part of Gaia, or is an oasis guarded by some dangerous entity. Small, rock-hard red growths line the desert in some places, but are so bitter they actually drain the moisture from animals as a touch, withering their fingers and lips. Sinewy cacti covered with spines take shapes reminiscent of barbed wire or frozen figures, waiting to leap. More frequently one encounters only the dead husks of lifeless black trees. On the borders of the desert are occasional sere, barren grasslands ('The Veldt,' q.v.) or, more incongruously, green lawns maintained by expensive sprinkler systems and frequent watering, in parts of the Illusion such as Southern California.

By day, the sun always shines over the desert, and temperatures climb to 150 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Mere exposure to the sun leads to painful sunburns which can develop into cancer. The desert floor often becomes as hot as a skillet, frying exposed human skin; before dying, many people look as if they have been half-roasted, with the blackened remains of their burnt limbs trailing beneath them. The reflection of the light sometimes leads to a physiological mirage where the blue sky seems to be on the ground; the sufferer then mistakes it for water. At times sandstorms rage across the landscape; great bipedal horrors stalk through the darkness of the storm, hunting for prey which they lick clean of sand with their great tongues. At night, however, the desert floor quickly cools, and it is unpleasantly cold. Travellers may have to race as far as they can during the night before the sun turns the rocks red hot under their feet. Some parts of the empty quarter (those close to Tibet and Mongolia) are cold, gray and oppressive instead.

Humans in the Empty Quarter may develop agoraphobia as the sky and the sand bears on them relentlessly. The fear of the vast, open spaces causes them to shrink and dwindle, just as their skin tightens and their bones protrude to conserve water more effectively.

The Anthills

The hardened red-brown soil starts to give off a curious smell, and the number of insects increases, until the earth is covered with ants, termites, and locusts crawling, hopping and flying along. They seem to be streaming away from a point on the horizon; it is impossible to go closer without being covered with the swarm. As visitors approach, a lumpy mountain rises to block the sun, the earth contorted into intestinal and egg-like shapes. Parts of it seem to change color, but this is only the motion of the ants, red and black, moving over the mound which is hundreds of feet tall.

In this place the consciousness of Pazuzu (q.v. LEGIONS OF DARKNESS), lord of flies and insects, resided before it was imprisoned in the Illusion. Now the remainder of its body carries on automatically, fighting itself, defending against outside threats and breeding ceaselessly. The granular earth is composed of sand, spit and the corpses of dead insects. Parts of the hive occasionally collapse from the weight of the insects above, revealing sticky chambers full of white larvae and pupae, or bloated honey-sucking ants, or what appears to be an exposed, blood-slick brain. At times it rebuilds itself into shapes almost like skyscrapers, complete with windows and chimney-like vents from which fly hordes of winged ants. If necessary, the hive can create anything it needs for defense, even simple machines, out of the bodies of willingly participating insects. Out of sight live the queen ants, their taut, stretched thoraxes the size of trucks, communicating with a solid line of saliva which flows between the queens' mouths along lightless passages underground.

Oversized insects resembling potato bugs, long-legged spiders or a thousand other combinations of virtually

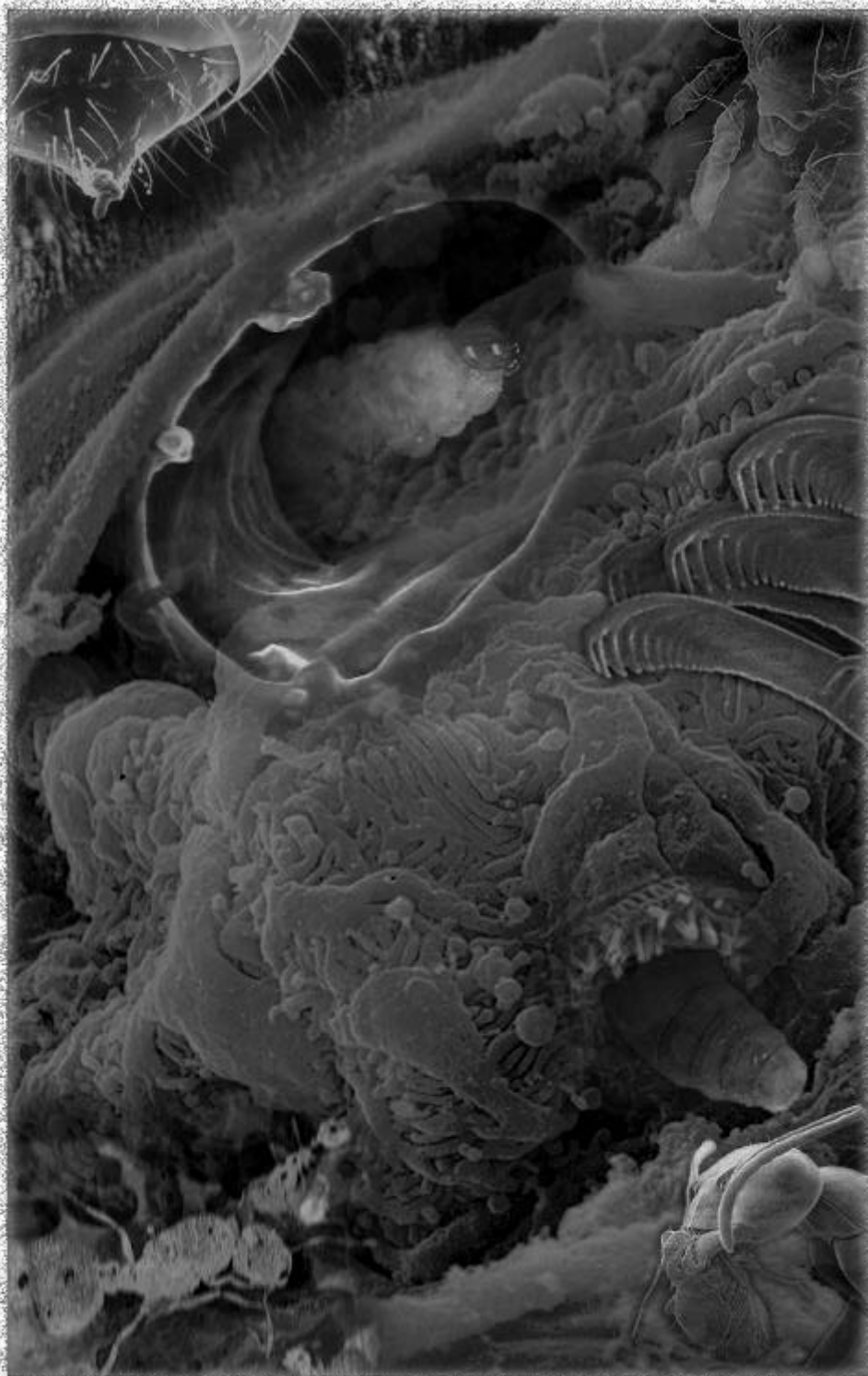
interchangeable limbs come to the defense of the anthills when needed, erupting from the ground. The sight and smell of the anthills can hypnotize humans, who are eaten when they pass a certain point. Others are kept alive to be gradually used as building material for the piecemeal structures.

The Cartographer

From a distance, the characters see a human figure walking over the sands. Periodically it stumbles, then gets up and continues walking. If the characters investigate, the figure resolves into a tall, thin, approximately thirty-year-old man in the middle stages of dehydration, wearing the remains of a khaki shirt, pants, and a backpack. His skin is tanned brown and he smells of sweat. Over his head, to block part of the sun, he holds a broad, worn but intact paper map.

The man is desperately grateful to see anyone. His name is Jack Perry, and he is an American photographer who was on an African land surveying expedition when the group became lost. The jeep broke down, hysteria overtook the group and finally everyone became separated. As Perry speaks with the characters, however, he will continue consulting his map and scribbling on it with the stubs of several pencils. If asked for an explanation, he says that he has been trying to find where he was on the map and since he is in uncharted territory, he has decided to map it. The map, and several notebooks in his backpack, are now covered with scrawled writing and symbols, and his right hand is gray from constantly rubbing against pencil-lead. Perry has gone mad and will resist any efforts to remove his map. If the characters are about to leave Gaia, he will stay behind, saying he cannot until the map is finished. About all other subjects he is relatively sane.

People with Enhanced Awareness or Schizophrenia may actually see a path to something they seek, such as



an exit from Gaia, in the shifting maps. If the characters and Perry sink into even worse circumstances, Perry will injure himself in order to continue writing in blood.

The Outback

Through gates in Australia, a strange area of Gaia can be found. The aborigines there have many rituals and poems which they use to enter and be safe in what they know as the Dreamtime. The land is dry, flat earth broken with occasional shrubs and bushes. Occasionally water holes even lie in ditches surrounded by grass and solemn trees. The sounds of strange birds can be heard in the trees, and when they take flight it can be seen that some of them are luminous. At night, many things take on strange, starry glows, and the auras of humans become visible. Herbs and plants which are important to magical rituals grow here, although they must be picked with the proper respect and ritualism or they will turn into slugs, or even twist and bite the picker's hand. Many foods which are normal in the Illusion are narcotic here, and vice versa.

The outback is not especially dangerous by Gaia's standards, but contains many odd creatures, including beings from Australia's past (the continent was mostly forested before the arrival of humans). The water holes are guarded by the bunyip, large seal-like carnivores with clawed flippers and a chilling howl that can be heard by miles. Sloths with hands and elbows bent backwards lie curled on the ground, dreaming their own dreams which sometimes effect those of human sleepers. Two-foot-wide tunnels are bored in the ground by horned, hungry creatures with screw-shaped fists. Agoura (q.v. LEGIONS OF DARKNESS) hunt for human and animal prey. Reptilian creatures and things like frogs with tentacles sometimes seem to swim through the air. Kangaroos no longer bother to conceal their contempt for humans. Tall, skeletally thin monkey-like things with long claws hunt the other animals; they can be approached with the right obeisances, and even provide information for witch doctors and sorcerors.

According to some sages, the Outback is centered around Thuwathu, also known as Minyindagarr, an immense tortoise-god with Dreaming ability, whose sleep and dreaming makes the area both more surreal and more stable than the rest of Gaia. The turtle's body occupies the area corresponding to Ayers Rock in the Illusion. (This is a reference to the Dreamlands material by Matthew Boronson.)

The Sea of Sand

Beneath the red sand of some areas creatures swim, moving through the sand as fish move through the sea. Some can detect vibrations as sensitive as a person's footsteps from miles away; others instead rely on periscope-like eyestalks which rise from below. An entire ecosystem lives this way; wormlike, silvery creatures which only rarely surface for air; predators with bear-trap teeth who attack from directly below, biting the feet of walking humans; and porous, fungus things which release a substance into the soil which turns it into quicksand. It is difficult to defend oneself from any of these unseen opponents, and even more damaging to morale is the habit of some of them of tossing the half-digested bodies of their prey through whale-like flukes back above ground.

The Conscious Sand

Like an endless beach, the flat, sun-parched sand stretches on forever. In some areas the allure of this emptiness are more pronounced, and visitors must make an EGO throw. Failing this (or an appropriate role-playing test), they start to be obsessed with the sand, spending more and more time touching it, rubbing it and even carrying it, while letting their clothes and belongings fall and rot away. They find its warmth reassuring; they will begin to sleep immersed in it. Eventually they lose all interest in everything else, and will lie in the sand for days, staring at the sun, dehydrating and seeming to age rapidly. The sand will cling to their skin, and before the end, they may even begin to swallow sand, bloating them and causing severe medical problems should they be rescued at this point.

If this fails, the sand becomes less subtle. It will gradually insinuate itself into everything, invading sealed containers and pneumatic suits, and destroying machinery. It will start to move and take humanlike forms. Mounds of it will

slither by. Arms will reach up and caress the sand-hypnotized. Ugly, malformed faces and beautiful women will appear in the shifting fields of sand, forming themselves out of separate grains as if from static on TV screens. The aim is not to outright eat prey, but to entice them to join the desert in its embrace. These sand-ghosts sometimes follow humans back into the Illusion.



Locations in Gaia: The Carpathians

"We had gone to find the Lord, to defeat him and put an end to his evil. Baron Szygany's castle was high up in the mountains, like a nail thrust out of the barrier wall over our village. There were twenty of us, the men of Grosgeret, and we all bore muskets and torches as we climbed the three-hour path.

"Our flames comforted us as the wind and rain fell from above, but many still made the sign of the cross. I looked back. Below I could see my parent's house in Grosgeret, but even then the distance and the mist made it appear to waver, and once I thought I saw only a valley of shattered rock and stone. Some people muttered that they saw shapes in the mountains, as if the peaks themselves were nodding like sluggish bats, partners in Szygany's blasphemy. The shadows of the rocks frightened us, and even more so the thousand-foot drop below. Yet we climbed still, knowing he could not escape us.

"But three hours later we were still climbing. Some of our torches had given out, and people had torn strips of their fabric free and balled it up to be burned. Where were we? people were asking. Why was the path straight when it was not supposed to be straight, crooked when it had been smooth and calm when we paid Szygany tribute months ago? Above us, the castle still stood, but it looked less like a castle than part of the mountain -- a spire of rock, grown from the cliff, with only one candle-lit window shining like grease in a stew.

"Hans fired his musket at the rock wall because of _something_ that he claimed thrust out of it. Jurgen started running down the trail and we heard him scream when he turned the corner. The rain was hail now, pelting us and striking bloody streaks in those who did not cling to the cliff for cover faster. The earth shook -- the mountains were leaning, nodding. I heard several men falling, and their screams carried endlessly as they fell. Our torches flickered and gave out.

"I clutched the musket tighter. Ignoring my men's screams, I looked toward the castle, the castle that had been here longer than the village, as old as the land. Its window was the only light now, but then it was darkened for a second. As the thunder flashed I saw the flock of black things that came towards us, faces terrible for their ruggedness as well as for their mandibles and fangs. I began to fire, putting those things into the oblivion which was preferable to what would happen to me."

In the Middle Ages European peasants feared mountains, thinking that their intimidating height was either a sign of or a challenge against God. The latter was right, and in Gaia the primal force of the blasted mountains originates. Named by scholars after a remote European country which vanished into Gaia in the 16th century, the Carpathians can still be reached in Switzerland, parts of South America, and Tibet. The gates to it are all very high up; mountain climbers sometimes disappear there, finding an even higher mountain rise up behind the record peak they scaled, and even planes sometimes cross over in the upper atmosphere.

The Carpathians are a giant mountain range, far above the treeline; nothing grows there but lichen on the rocks. As one climbs, the air becomes thinner and colder. The earth gives away leaving nothing to stand on but rock and stone, frequently slick with ice or slushy snow. Ropes, hooks, spikes and other mountaineering equipment are necessary to travel far. In some parts one must climb; in others, walk.

The mountains of Carpathia inspired Gustav Dore and Roerich. Concave slopes, like the top of the Matterhorn, are not infrequent. Some are mighty, snow-capped peaks, lost in fog or rising awe-inspiringly from the mist. They have a disturbing habit of growing higher as one attempts to climb them. Others lean perilously, with dark, steeple-like outlines looking like knives protruding from the earth. Some are hollow, and serve as the lair for nesting creatures or single, dark intelligences. Some mountains are said to be the heads of sleeping or dead giants, but others are rumored to be alive and only waiting for prey to walk over them. The clouds of steam which rise from geysers in the mountains may in fact be the breath of these buried things, rising from fleshy, organic tunnels underground. In other places, volcanoes erupt, and lava pours down the mountainsides turning the raw iron of the mountains white-hot.

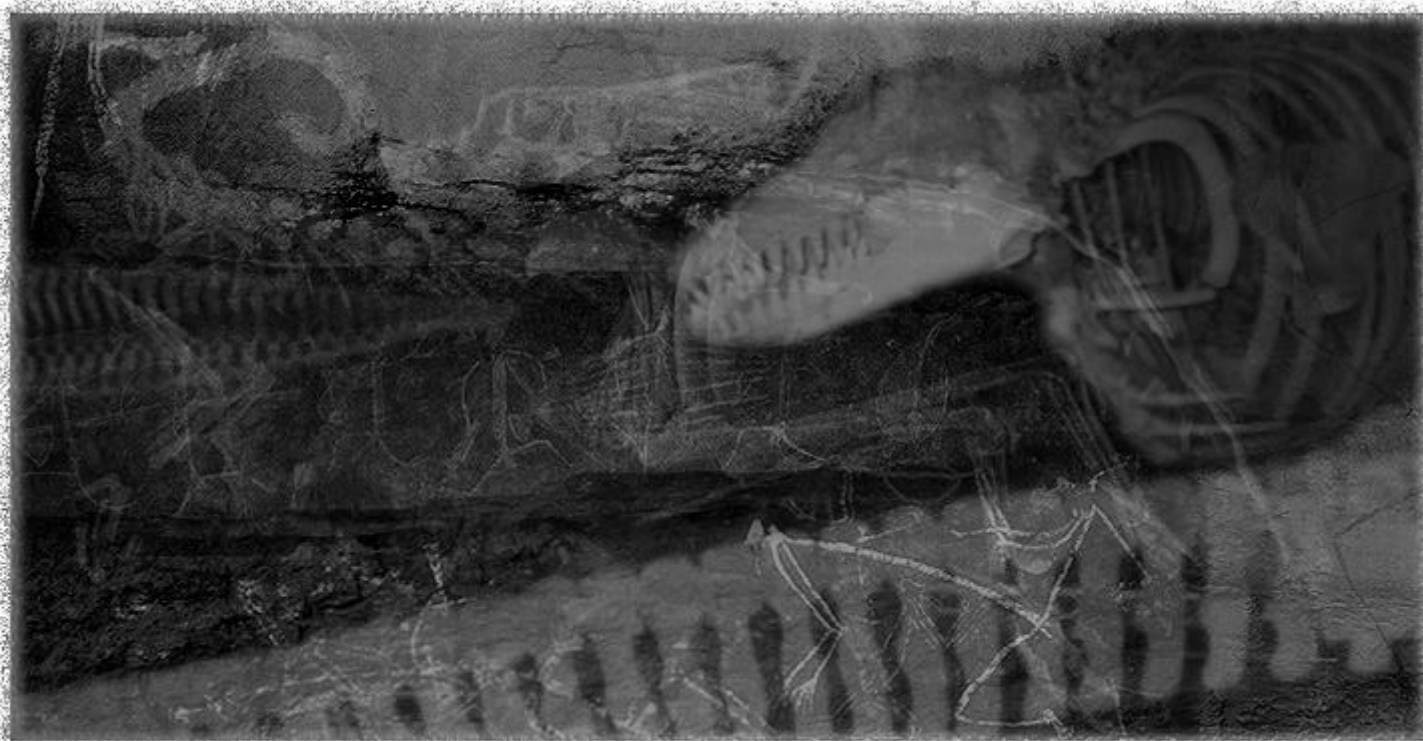
In the lower parts of the mountains live rock-climbing goats and vole-like mammals which leap from peak to peak. Further up on perilous crags are giant birds' nests of branches and twigs, where the originals of the roc and the Indian

thunderbird lair. Bat and bird are mixed in leather-winged, sharp-beaked beasts whose young cling to their stomachs and pick at prey grasped in their mothers' claws. Sharp-toothed creatures with long, goose-like necks and wide, flat feet slide on their feet like skis to surprise prey. White camouflaged things which are the origin of the yeti legend hunt furtively with six-fingered hands. Other, more grotesque crossbreeds of human and animal, blank-eyed men with pig-like tusks, spend their lives tearing boulders free from the mountainside and hurling them on travellers below. At the height of the storm, a pair of red eyes appears amid the falling snow and darkness and impels travellers to step forward into the fur-covered shape, similar to a giant manta ray, which lives by day in the caves in the mountains.

No one is ever safe from falling in the mountains, and humans with vertigo are at a terrible disadvantage. Humans' poor direction sense overcomes them, and unless they are stable and specially trained they may lose their sense of up and down, or the landscape may seem to sway. One always seems to be on the edge of a giant pit, or the side of a wall, with sharp peaks and jagged mountains terrifyingly far below. Some valleys are quiet and still to an unearthly degree, as any noise will cause echoes which lead to an avalanche of snow and ice, carrying mountaineers into the gorges below. The mountains appear to be eternal, but in actuality, most of them are constantly being reshaped as titanic earthquakes and tectonic plates push new summits of living rock into the atmosphere.

The weather in the mountains is the worst of any part of Gaia. Thunder and lightning constantly assault the highest peaks. Entire peaks are sometimes electrified; creatures with bat's wings and titan figures combining the features of humans and rams fly through the upper air, frenzied by the releases of energy. To stand on the top of one of Gaia's mountains is either to be transfigured or to be eradicated; some magicians have sought enlightenment this way. Storms cause a hail of rocks, pelleting and eroding the cliffs. The wind carries shrieking clouds of bird-clawed creatures and giant-throated, laughing beasts which fight one another and drag away bystanders as they fly by. In times past, the Lukundoo (witches) had their bacchanals here, and each year a few more would lose their reason and become Furies; now those once-human things glide in the awesome winds from mountain to mountain, shrieking.

To enter the mountains is to be tested; if one survives, one can expect to gain at least some power. Survivors -- humans hardened into ruthless machines by Gaia -- are often the result, but occasionally a chance bolt of lightning or a mind-



altering encounter with vertigo awakens unknown powers in a normal person. They may, however, be too haunted by their experience ever to feel right on flat ground, and problems with balance and coordination may last for years.

The Fossils

When earthquakes tear away portions of the mountainside, exposed in the rock beneath can be found fossils. Pressed between plates of shale and other rocks are the outlines of bones. The animals there are many; great-jawed dinosaurs, the fragile bones of birds, many-ribbed fish. Boneless things, like oversized microscopic life-forms, are also present in the dry stone as if they had been smashed there and left an indentation.

The difference between fossils as humans are conditioned to expect them, and fossils in Gaia, is that here they are the origins of life. If the fossils are watched for a few hours, the bones will begin to thicken and fill in, and meat and tendon will begin to spontaneously appear on the outside. Gradually the entire creature will appear, including a beating heart which is visible through the partial ribcage, and then the thing will pull itself free from the rock, fully alive. Visible behind the fossils are more beings, waiting to be born from the living rock. It may be dangerous to stay near here because of the many newborn animals, most of whom are hungry.

The Aeolian Harps

Up in the highest peaks, where the rock rises in formations resembling cartilage or a Gothic cathedral, are deep caves and rounded chambers from which rushes wind in almost orchestral sounds. The Harps are the Living Earth's vocal chords, and sometimes the voice of the earth itself speaks through here; human prophets climbing mountaintops have mistaken it for God. The voice is more a rumble than a voice, and the commands it gives are irrational at best or



sadistic at worst. At other times, beautiful music emits from the caves, or even sounds which the lost and desperate can mistake for the voices of those they love.

Around the harps cluster Aeolites (q.v.), inorganic-looking identical birds with gray gelatinous skin. The Aeolites parrot and mimic the notes of the Aeolian Harps, twisting them into increasingly disturbing variations. They feed on humans and other animals, whom they first deafen by emitting resounding, echoing bellows (which, in addition, sometimes cause earthquakes).

Curious chemical processes are at work in the Harps. The structure of some of the rocks resembles that of the lungs or the tonsils, in addition to the hollow stalactite-like structures which appear to be made more of horn or bone than rock. Sometimes saliva or spittle carries on the wind as well. Every few hours, the wind from the harps reverses, and people and things are sucked helplessly into the interior of the mountains.

The Caves

An opening in the side of the mountain promises momentary shelter from the storm. Within is a cold, damp cave which narrows at the far end, then widens again into a large chamber. The gray-green limestone walls are slick with water which trickles in from an unknown source, and stalactites and stalagmites show the age of the cavern. Further tunnels lead off in different directions; to foul dens covered with bat guano and full of sleeping, furry shapes; to warmer lairs lined with shed hair and the residue of meals; to vast dark galleries; and to forges far underground, where malformed, scab-covered beings instinctively work red-hot metal in pits of fire, and wear the metal pieces like hermit crabs.

In addition to bears, bats and blind cave salamanders, the caves which honeycomb some of the mountains contain larger, disturbing beings; hungry lurking presences which stay out of the light, cave crickets and glow-worms which like to worm under human skin, creatures like wet rags which come to life like lampreys. Two-headed, foot-long bugs crawl on the ceilings of caves waiting to drop. Flattened, ragged things who bite prey directly with the sharp points of their ribcages pad their way up from the dark. Albinism is the most common traits of all cave-dwellers.

In the real world, most caves are created by the extremely slow process of water carving channels in limestone and karst deposits. These caves are sometimes connected by underground waterways, which pose perils to any traveller. Other caves are created by processes such as lava flows. Such caves exist in Gaia, but so do stranger caves created by unknown forces. Deep down, the caves of Gaia connect to the Labyrinth.

Locations in Gaia: The Cold

"We descended carefully to the landing pad of the base below, cold flakes of ice spinning into our faces through the helicopter window. From the looks of things -- the snow on the radar dish, the open door, the broken wire of the animal pens -- the weather installation had been abandoned for some time. I jumped the last few feet to the concrete, zipping up the neck of my parka, still freezing under four layers of clothing.

"Any sign of where they went?" Bjornstern asked, after we'd landed and were searching the grounds. I shook my head. If they'd left the base in this condition -- ice, trash, machinery frozen up -- I realized grimly, they'd probably 'gone' farther than we could ever have followed. We should have sent a copter from Siberia sooner, after they failed to make the first of the daily reports. We'd thought it was weather, but it wasn't. I was still looking for the significance of the last of the transmissions we'd heard from them -- the mention of how they'd found some animal in the side of a glacier, frozen in the ice.

"Bjornstern went out to the generator while I searched the living quarters. I was disturbed to see that the rifles and flares were missing from the supply cabinet. Then I saw the trail of frozen blood that led to the back door. I drew my pistol and followed it out. It ended in something so liquefied it took me a second to recognize it as a corpse.

"My stomach swam. They'd used acid to do it, obviously, but where had they gotten it? And there were things wrong with the shape, extra fingers, something about the spreading flesh that didn't look simply melted and covered in ice. Then I heard Bjornstern scream. 'Jesus, no!' I ran back towards the entrance.

"He was running in a shuffling lope, his left arm bent, writhing with extreme pain. Saliva ran from his mouth, and behind him something was following. It looked like the body of a scorpion, covered in thick, plastic hair. Dog's paws grew from the ends of its legs. I saw eyes bulge, big as the eyes of a squid, before I raised the gun and blasted them away.

"I emptied the barrel into it. Bjornstern lurched into me as the thing's body twitched and bled. It stopped moving, but Bjornstern still jerked convulsively, leaning against me with his right arm. I saw that a trail of blood ran between him and the dying body of the monster. Then I saw it wasn't merely blood.

"Something like an intestine ran from the pulsing corpse to Bjornstern, merged with the flesh of Bjornstern's left arm. He clutched me tighter with his right hand, looked up at me, eyes dying away. 'You're too late, Nikolai,' he started saying. Then scorpion's legs exploded from his mouth and his head fell back like a mask as the thing inside his body went into mine."

Antarctica, Greenland, Siberia and the Canadian north are some of the least explored places left on Earth, and many gates still open there to the cold spaces of Gaia. Untouched by human incursion, and still deadly threatening, the Cold has only recently been forced back by the Greenhouse Effect. When a sudden chill grips travellers in the polar regions without any wind or apparent cause, they have crossed over the border into Gaia. Compasses will go wild at first, but soon will point perpetually towards 'North.'

Most of the Cold is a plain of ice covered with a layer of snow. In some cases there is liquid water underneath the ice; in other cases visitors may be on top of a glacier hundreds of feet thick. The snow lies in white rippling sheets, broken by huge slabs, running with icicles, which erupt from the ground. Occasionally the ice that is the foundation for the world shakes, and grinding sounds like squeezing cork and breaking metal linger for hours. Other areas are tundra, with frozen earth instead of ice, and brittle, yellow-brown weeds rising up between the snow. Here, the cold is dry as well, and even more hostile to life. And in some places the ice is broken into icebergs floating over a black, slushy sea.

The only variations in the flatness are the occasional glaciers -- pieces of ice the size of mountains, perpetually frozen solid. Glaciers are dangerous to climb upon because of the slipperiness of the ice and the possibility of breaking through it into a submerged water-hole or a tunnel, carved by streams running through the glacier. The interiors of glaciers are dangerous and awe-inspiring places, full of blue light and sharp ice formations and water colder than freezing. Impossibly long worm-entities coiled in gut-like loops drill tunnels through the interior glaciers, and families of headless apes with faces growing from their necks make their lairs on the outside. Trespassers are impaled from stalagmites dripping glittering necklaces of frozen blood. The greatest danger in the glaciers is a collapsing ceiling, or a sudden flood of water that carries both predator and prey into the frozen sea.

On the borders of the Cold are dark forests of pine and conifer, lifeless and frozen or almost petrified with ice. These areas usually connect the Cold to the Weir Wood.

Some recognizable life lives here; enormous, shaggy mammoths (within whose fur live cold-blooded parasites), giant horned elks, white-furred foxes, polar bears. Fenrir (werewolves), the spawn of the Russian Boyars' unnatural experiments, hunt the plain in great packs, their breath releasing freezing vapor which paralyses their prey. Clutches of white eggs resembling snowflakes glide on the wind, releasing small writhing entities with shrimplike tails. Penguins migrate across the ice, sometimes giving birth to giant, stillborn-looking carnivores with the necks of plesiosaurs. In beds of snow lurk wolverines whose hair ends in sharp barbs. Where the frozen ocean is visible, killer whales hunt, sometimes exploding from beneath the surface of thin ice to swallow prey. Albino manatees bellow from the frozen sea.

Deep in the Cold Barrens, black shapes are frozen in mammoth chunks of ice; monsters resembling grotesque composites of other creatures, frozen in states of hibernation. Some of them watch travellers with their yellow-tinted eyes. Breaking the ice releases an entity which is all the hungrier for its years of imprisonment. Other places are haunted by the Manitou, which Indian shamans know how to avoid, an invisible spirit with Commanding Voice which possesses humans and slowly twists them into horned, faceless hunters.

The temperature is almost always below the freezing point, sometimes much, much colder, but unpredictable elements still interfere. Sometimes a sudden heat wave causes the ice and snow to melt, turning the wastes into untreadable slush or, worse, melting the ice floes beneath travellers stranded above the dark sea. More often, winds and snowfall conspire to make travel close to impossible. The frequent snowstorms often block out the sun for days on end, creating a perpetual night.

Exposure to the Cold results in some of the most rapid alterations in all of Gaia. Cannibalism doomed the Donner Party when they became lost in Gaia, although some of the members were able to painstakingly hide their new hungers upon returning to society. Humans quickly gain fur, even a pelt, to protect themselves from the extreme temperatures; their teeth also become longer and stronger, like the Wendigo of legend. From frostbite humans lose their toes and then their feet themselves, the stiff cold flesh rotting into stumps or hoof-like shapes. Nearly lifeless with all their skin frozen away, the survivors may resemble zombies more than visitors to Gaia.

Snowblind

With the endless whiteness of the snow, and blizzards and clouds often adding up to 'whiteout' conditions, it is easy for travellers to go snowblind. Every day that the characters walk in the non-tundra parts of the Cold without dark glasses or some other form of protection, they should make PER rolls. A failure indicates that snowblindness begins to set in.

An afflicted character loses one point of visual PER every 1D4 hours. Their pupils shrink to dots and everything gradually becomes a white blur, until their PER drops to zero, at which point everything is white and even motion cannot be detected. First Aid, or covering the eyes with a wrapping or headband, prevents further PER damage. After PER reaches zero, the characters should make a CON roll every day until they receive medical attention; each failure means that 1/4 of the PER loss (round up) was permanent. Creatures of the Cold often possess echolocation, good hearing or smell, or other ways of locating blinded prey.

The Northern Lights

At night, the glow of the Aurora Borealis often shines over the Cold Barrens. These lights, which appear shortly after sunset, resemble giant purple and green curtains hanging over the horizon. In Gaia, the lights are brighter than over the Illusion, and can often be seen moving like liquids swirling together. They embody an evil spirit which feeds on sentient souls.

Anyone who sleeps -- or even falls unconscious -- and allows the glow of the Northern Lights to fall on their bare flesh, has nightmares. In these dreams, which segue into reality, they feel uncomfortably warm; they imagine themselves sweltering in the summer sun, thrust into an oven, burning in hot coals. Subsequent dreams reinforce the same imagery. They feel their skin crisping and blackening and their flesh melting off their bones. If they fail an EGO roll, they continue to feel too warm when they awake. Their bodies will begin showing symptoms of overheating; they will sweat and feel uncomfortable. If they fail a second EGO roll, they will be gripped by a desire to go 'north', to immerse themselves naked in the snow. They are still capable of rational behavior in other ways. An Art of Dreaming roll is required to identify the Northern Lights within the dreams, as a creeping, shapeless presence.

If a human succumbs to the Lights, they will continue to feel too hot, even as they lose skin and coordination to the freezing conditions. Each day they will also lose one EGO point. The Northern Lights will artificially preserve their life until they are a limbless trunk, at which point it will feed upon the dying release of energy. When they die the lights will swirl down from the Heavens and take the corpse's soul for its own purposes. The Northern Lights can be exorcised as a Creature of Death with EGO 20, but it can summon previously half-frozen prey to try to disrupt a ritual and kill the sorcerers. These are always large bears, walrus and other creatures; the Eskimo call their rotting bodies *_tupilak_*.

The Esquimaux

While wandering in the Cold, the characters stumble back through the Illusion. Not far from them stands an igloo made of blocks of ice. A faint line of smoke trickles from a hole in the roof. Maybe the characters can find shelter.

To enter, the characters must crawl through a narrow tunnel. The fire in the center of the room has mostly burned out, but enough light still flickers to illuminate a scene of carnage. On the seal and bear furs are splashed streams of not-quite-frozen blood. A few boots laced with walrus sinew lie in the corner still containing pieces of toes. At least one person has been killed here; human bones, not yet dry, litter the area around the fire, and hunks of meat and eyeballs lie in a copper cooking-kettle blackened with frequent use. The bones have been gnawed; a Forensics examiner or dentist recognizes the marks of human teeth. Everything must have happened only a few minutes ago; and the only thing missing from the igloo is any kind of weapon or knife...

Somewhere out on the ice is the cannibal. Perhaps he is waiting for the characters outside, or perhaps he returns while they are still searching. Possessed by the frozen spirits of Gaia and the Cold, dozens of people near the Poles become cannibals every year. Eskimo also have other interesting legends, which may or may not be true, such as the idea that the ghosts of dead babies, thrown out in the cold to die, may stalk the ice looking for meat or a womb to crawl back inside.

The Derelict

From the flat ice rises a ghostly blue-gray shape which, as the characters come closer, reveals itself to be a Russian ship. The Cyrillic lettering on the side has faded; icicles drip from the frozen chains and ropes hanging from the bow; and the snow which is piled on the deck and the skeletal radio tower indicates that the ship has been frozen in place for days or weeks. The ghost ship, a Russian icebreaker, may have been trapped in the ice mere days ago or may have been stuck there for years (the freezing temperatures of the Cold can preserve things which would normally disintegrate quickly when in Gaia).

Assuming that the ship is abandoned and none of the crew are still alive, the characters may search it for equipment or use it as a temporary shelter. The ship's log may reveal an interesting or disturbing story: perhaps telling of the ship's course into Gaia (and suggesting a way out?); perhaps giving important information about the crew or cargo; and perhaps telling in a pitch of rising fear how the crew vanished one by one, killed by an invisible presence, and now the captain is the last person alive, sitting in this room, writing in the log...

Locations in Gaia: The Perverted Earth

"We're glad to have you here, sir," the aide told Mitchum as they escorted him through the parking lot and into the foyer of Bernice Inc. A faint metal smell rose off the parked rows of Mercedes in the executive suite, but of course the stronger smell was the cows. He hadn't seen them yet, but he knew the stock pens were nearby. 'Bernice, as you know, is one of the world's biggest food providers. An alliance with your company would be most desirable. We're very glad your masters have sent you.'

"_Masters_?" thought Tom Mitchum as they entered the immaculate building, but he just nodded. 'Thank you.' If he was planning to make this deal, a little snobbery wasn't going to kill him. He'd only been a partner for just over a year, and some people persisted in treating him like a second class citizen. The aide was just especially obnoxious. It would be enough to give him a headache, if he hadn't had one already.

"By the time they were in the executive elevator, the headache medicine was already starting to take effect. It wasn't mere aspirin, and it certainly seemed to be working now. His doctor had warned him about nonprescription medicines -- 'They're constantly getting more potent. And we're running around with more chemicals in our body everyday...' But side effects weren't going to kill him.

"And you must be Mr. Mitchum!" a voice said and a hand shook his as he stepped out of the elevator. The smell of the stockyards rose up, and he had to conceal some nausea; the balcony overlooked the milking operation in the back of Bernice Inc. The man who'd shaken his hand could have been either forty or sixty, and gave an impression of great girth. On the balcony with him was another obvious executive, and two aides with a bottle of champagne. 'Glad you could make it. We've got lots to discuss. I hear your masters have good distribution in Southeast Asia...'

"He was about to say something, but something in the land below caught his eye. Cattle -- he knew them from pictures on the back of milk cartons, green grass, contented cows. But surely cattle couldn't have been meant to be like this. Thousands were packed below without room to move, staring up, not even in separate pens. Their skin and pieces of their faces were sunken, dangling off... there were gashes where it looked like they'd been chewing on one another. The smell rose up and he wanted to vomit. Black, white, and blood-red... puckered sockets where they'd obviously had eyes... pieces of them sliced off to accomodate others... and it went on for miles, as far as he could see...

"What's the matter, Mitchum?" he heard Mr. Bernice asking, his voice a sibilant growl. He turned and saw a white face atop a huge body in a business suit, a face that seemed to be made of sculpted lard. The pale eyes that swelled from the sockets seemed to be made of the same flesh, and in the mouth little teeth were working. A fat tongue squeezed down, past its chin. Behind it, the other men and the aides had also changed...

"Mitchum moaned and fell to the floor."

As Metropolis has gained a presence in the Illusion, Gaia has been the target of all-out war. The efforts of Malkuth to spread new technology, and the short-sightedness of humans and lictors alike, have caused terrible pollution. But rather than retreating, in many cases Gaia has endured; diseased and twisted, but still gruesomely alive. In these places, a new sort of nature prevails, on Metropolis' terms. Some say that Gaia is not actually injured; it is merely trying to adapt itself to an impossible situation.

Fields of candy wrappers, soft beer cans and plastic trash bags litter a landscape under a gray sky. The earth is a muddy black and smells like gasoline and rotten meat. Rusting metal tins lie about, and white, cottony fungus grows over some of the more biodegradable refuse. Sticky, sweet residue lies at the bottom of aluminum cans; spoiled milk sits in thick tubs. Everything seems to be a combination of a landfill, a garbage dump, and a swamp; the only life that is visible are crowds of flies, which settle around the nose, ears, and eyes of visitors. Uprturned earth is stacked around a huge pit with six inches of oil at the bottom; the remains of a gas station. Old sinks, radiators dripping freon, pieces of rusted metal, and other trash lie about, often impaling the earth as if pushed there with great force. The brand names are often still visible. The charcoal from huge fires, apparently burnt out, dirties everything. In some spots the fires still burn, and poisonous smoke climbs to the skies. The only remaining electricity seems to be used to power billboards which advertise cigarettes and hair sprays.

In other places, huge leaky drums are half-stacked, half-buried, inscribed with warnings and the names of chemicals; terrible pollutants and toxic waste, sometimes radioactive, soak into the soil. Half-open vaults contain the waste from nuclear power plants, glowing ingots which shine a light out the door. Tangled networks of pipes, covered in greasy dirt, vent poisons into the ground. Sometimes the vapors are deadly, and the green pools must be carefully avoided. Half-melted corpses, their skin dissolved in the acid, float to the top of the pools. Acid rain falls, corroding everything. Storm drains sit choked with old paint, fuel oil, detergent and bleach, and an oily film covers the surface of mercury-filled rivers. Everything stains human flesh; it is nearly impossible to wash off. The corpses of animals extinct, or nearly so, in the Illusion are impaled to metal sheets with huge harpoons and knives; elephants with their tusks gorily removed, tigers soaked with blood from bullet wounds, monkeys with the tops of their skulls removed so their brains can be eaten by businessmen. Others lie flattened in the middle of roads reeking of freshly laid asphalt. A great slaughter appears to just have ended.

The life that exists here is chaotic, as mad as the land. Most of the creatures here are transients, originating in another plane. Humans often wander through the perverted earth, unable to perceive what lies behind the Illusion as they throw away another half-eaten hamburger. Lictors sometimes come here to see what they have created, but usually send their servants, the yellow, callous, frog-faced serviliants (q.v. LEGIONS OF DARKNESS). War goes on between small groups of environmental activists and large, heavily-armed lictors' mercenaries fighting over limited natural resources. In places, genetides and serviliants simply plunge knives into the ground again and again, or dig holes in the earth so as to fill them with gasoline. Grossly sexual oil wells assault the soil. Machines with multiple rows of axes hack down trees and trespassers alike. Things with smokestacks rising from their shoulders leave a trail of blood and mucus as they try to peel their tire rubber skin off their face. Then the Living Earth itself rises up and pulls the combatants in.



The normal animals that live here are broken, beaten things, frequently mutants -- two-headed infants, nine-legged cows, and worse.

Some lictors feel that the Perverted Earth has gotten out of control, as the ground itself now starts to produce its own toxins and poisons -- which rise up as if from springs -- and it expands towards parts of the Illusion which the lictors want to preserve. Gaia seems to be almost masochistic. But some evidence exists that it is not, in fact, pleased with the changes. At times, seemingly out of revenge, everything in an otherwise normal landscape -- the plants, the trees, the grass and earth -- will suddenly converge upon and eat a human being, melting and ripping them to shreds.

The Perverted Earth is closer than most humans realize. Humans who enter it, or live in its vicinity, first lose their memory and develop traits of wastefulness and compulsive consumption; their appetites increase while their discrimination vanishes, until they will eat unpleasant and repulsive things. They develop acne, bleeding sores, and other skin disorders (such as a doughy texture). In some cases they gain a white, powdered appearance as if makeup had sunk into their skin. They start to exhale cigarette smoke, their extremities become stained with nicotine, and finally the proportions of their limbs and head swell and shrink grotesquely until they resemble congenital freaks. In this degraded form they at last de-evolve into protoplasm.

The Human Touch

An area of crumbling, wet earth, it is sometimes found when the Illusion breaks near cosmetics factories, gyms or hair salons; places of human vanity. Any piece of flesh, hair, nail or bone of human origin which is buried in the ground here will become a living, self-perpetuating, unintelligent thing.

Nails, growing like translucent yellow-gray reeds, and hair, looking like the scalps of buried humans, grow copiously, but it is only the beginning. Bits of mucus or earwax turn into oily, puddle-like molds. Teeth reproduce into a hard white carpet of molars and incisors, slightly damp. Underneath the ground can be felt buried shapes as if the visitor were walking on a thin layer of dirt over corpses. If flesh, even as much as some blood and skin from a wound, falls here it will take root. Fingers rise from the ground, moving faintly with reflex activity. Piles of ears grow together like clusters of cabbage. Noses and protruding throats can be heard breathing. Intestines coil along the ground. Only in the worst places are whole bodies buried -- sprouting new torsos and limbs like buds on rotting potatoes.

If a body is uprooted, the part below ground will be found to have turned into a pinkish web-like mass of tendrils. Animals sometimes forage here for food.

The Hydra

The landscape takes on a soft, almost organic look, like foam rubber. Sometimes it seems to shed layers of itself, which dry, harden and break away. It can be seen rising and falling, like yeast or a breathing torso. These areas -- which often lie uncomfortably close to the Illusion -- are usually strictly surrounded by wooden slat fences, yellow-and-black signs warning trespassers to keep away, and barbed wire. Rumors are spread that they are toxic waste dumps, or nuclear test sites, or anything other than what they actually are. If a person or animal walks over the soil, the Living Earth will give way, partially trapping them. It will then take various forms -- leech-like maws full of teeth, the heads of its past victims, sucking lips -- and painfully devour them.

Small, short-lived patches of the Hydra are also known to appear when humans bury corpses in remote places -- the mafia has lost several members this way.

Slash & Burn

From miles away the fires can be seen. Great plumes of black smoke rise from the distance, carrying with them hot embers and bits of burnt wood. The heat intensifies, and the increasing concentration of smoke sets travellers to

coughing, costing 30 points of Endurance per hour of exposure (if they collapse or attempt to sleep in this area, most visitors will die). Because of the smoke, it always seems to be night.

In their greed lictors and humans have created this growing part of the Perverted Earth, which covers much of South America and Canada. 24 hours a day, rumbling metal machines and gas-mask-wearing things in stained, rubberized suits shoot hoses of napalm over trees, turning them instantly into torches from which burning branches drop, frequently crushing the other workers. Chains are flung around the trees and bulldozers pull them down. The earth is covered with charcoal and ash. Harrows and slave-labor humans wielding axes and saws cut down other trees by hand, and stack the lumber in rows ten stories tall, which are often consumed by the raging fires. The bark is cut away by plane saws and wood chippers and spit over the landscape. For miles nothing is left but blackened stumps surrounded by stacks of wood, around which lies a pall of smoke and still-flaming pools of gasoline.

Anyone attempting to stop the important work will be attacked by robots, starving human workers, and madmen with flamethrowers.

The Cattle Fields

Dry, yellow stubble and dusty earth are the only landscape. Gradually a terrible smell, a hundred times worse than the Chicago stockyards, comes into being. The dirt becomes covered with manure, over which buzz swarms of flies, and a stinking mixture of fertilizer and blood. An occasional barbed-wire or slat fence lies half crushed in the mire.

For thousands of miles lives nothing but uncountable cows, where they are kept here to feed humans within the Illusion. Most of them resemble normal cattle, but sickly and grossly overweight, barely able to stand on their hooves for the rolls of fat. Others are missing facial features or limbs altogether, and simply sit as quivering blobs covered with a thin layer of white hair. They feed on regurgitated dirt; their eyes are vacant and glazed. Conditions are so cramped that lesions form where two cows rub against one another. Milk and pus swirl together in the mud. Infections and skin cancer have formed on many cows, tearing the skin like a rupturing balloon. Some appear to already have been partially cooked, trailing off into piles of hamburger or sausage. Many have chewed off their own lips, exposing their teeth and gums.

Lictors and serviliants tend the fields, which border on much of the American Midwest, and drive away with great tanker trucks of meat. It is said that at one point the fields border on Inferno, where humans are kept in conditions identical to those of the cows.

The Wasteland

The earth is blackened and covered with fallen ash; it is cold, and the sky is dark red, smothered in clouds. The ruins of buildings -- smashed brick, melted glass -- rise from the ground, in addition to large areas of blackened trees, each fallen in the same direction. In some places the buildings are anachronistically primitive -- tribal huts or feudal European cottages. Everything seems to have been exposed to great heat and knocked over as if by an enormous force. Going closer to populated areas, one finds black outlines of human beings -- their shadows -- seared into stone walls. Beneath the rubble are human and animal corpses turned to ash which crumbles at a touch; they are frozen in positions of surprise, mothers clutching children, spears fused to an incinerated hand. The only things that live are maggots, cockroaches and Nachtkäfer (q.v.).

The Wasteland is strongly linked to the End Dimensions, a realm of Time & Space where every end-of-the-world scenario, from overpopulation to pollution to Ragnarok, exists. Lictors conducted tests in this part of Gaia, on native and tribal populations, to determine the effectiveness of nuclear weapons. In the 1950s and 1960s gates opened to it with alarming frequency, but army lictors and others who know of it (such as the Guardians of the Earth) are relieved to find that it is less prevalent lately. A U.S. army base at Goose Lake in Utah conceals a permanent gateway. The

Wasteland is close to Metropolis.

Needless to say, the Wasteland is suffused with high levels of radiation. After an hour or more in the Wasteland, one begins to feel sick and queasy, and loses some hair. Soon vomiting of blood and other symptoms set in and there is no turning back. The GM is encouraged to look up the realistic symptoms of this deadly condition.



Locations in Gaia: The Ancient Sea

"A week out from Svitsbergen the sextant began to fail. Although the moon and stars were still there, the navigator swore that the positions had changed, and though it was easy to mistrust him our compasses were also pinning strangely. Experiment showed that they pointed only towards the iron of the ship. The crew continued reeling in catches of fish, but the liquor supply ran low, morale was bad, and our mealtimes were silent and grudging. On the tenth day out Olson screamed about something they'd found in the nets, and it was true that the fish were also changing, growing bigger, grosser, more like jellyfish. I made up Latin names for them to calm the crew, but Brenner was educated and saw through me. Olson began to eat separate from us.

"It was on the first day of the second week (or was it? The fog was so thick) that we lost Olson. Someone had heard a splash, and in his cabin his clothes were coated with water, but also something like translucent mud, a thick mucus as salty as the sea. Amundssen opened the gun locker and armed me and the other officers. Something had chewed through the net and we could only catch fish with the poles, but the things we caught did not make us want to go on eating. Then a slimy rot began crawling up the walls. Barnacles grew on the inside of the ship, the smell of rotting fish covered everything. The crew became threatening and I could see them changing like Olson. I hid myself in the cabin; I couldn't bear it. Some time later I heard Amundssen pounding on the door, yelling at me, and then, maybe days later, gunshots. It's okay though. I locked myself in with some fish, including heads and guts, which I eat raw. When that fails, I will take a knife to the web between my fingers. From the porthole, you can see the water. It's rising higher every day."

The Ancient Sea is a powerful and frightening place. Some commentators refer to it as distinct from Gaia. As many gates open to it today as ever, though smaller ones are bypassed by large modern passenger ships and freighters; the Carribean Sea, the South Pacific and the area between Iceland and Greeland are the most unstable regions. The Marie Celeste floated through here, losing all her crew to the Sea, and then floated back through to the Illusion. Travellers stare at its waves and know instinctively that the Sea is the Meaning, the primal source of life. Red skies at dawn, the sight of a landmass on the horizon which then vanishes, a sudden total calm of the sea; all these are ways in which sailors know the passage to Gaia has been made.

The Ancient Sea looks much like any other ocean, but more tempestuous and unpredictable. Sometimes strange colors appear in the water, or beds of floating plants and unusual-looking seaweed choke the sea. Occasionally the water surface itself seems to thicken, become syrupy, and clots of bubbling foam, smelling of salt, converge upon sailing ships. More typical are strange smells; the wind over the Ancient Sea carries the smell of rotting fish, of fermentation, of indescribable scents that leave entire crews vomiting. Mostly, the Ancient Sea is a greenish-black expanse of turbulent water, resisting the efforts of sailboats and battleships alike, and constantly in the throes of storms.

The pounding, plummeting water and weather blur the distinction between sea and sky. Tsunamis sweep across the horizon, crushing ships in their wake. Thunder and lightning flash from the clouds, sometimes striking and electrifying portions of the ocean which phosphoresce and burn off into mist. Rain plummets down from the clouds, sometimes carrying with it small fish and frogs or clusters of jelly-like eggs. Periodically the water itself gains life like the Living Earth, and sucks ships and swimmers down. Since the moon itself sometimes seems to change shape or even merge with the blurry clouds, tides make no sense and seem to come in and go out based largely on observers' fear of the water.

In the Ancient Sea new life sometimes generates spontaneously out of the murk of the water. Corpses lowered into its briny deeps are said to have returned to life (though being eaten by fish is more likely). Green-scaled mermaids with transparent skin through which their internal organs can be seen swim here. The model of the medusa lives here, an octopus-headed blimp which propels itself over the ocean surface like a water-treading insect. Tusked dolphins and baleen-toothed birds leap through the waves. Thousands of types of fish live here, constantly breeding and growing. Many of them, like the Tiburon-sharks and the sea serpents, are simply mouthfuls of knife-shaped teeth, or stealthy

and terrifying versions of the prehistoric ocean's inhabitants. Blood in the water attracts lampreys and schools of predators, and eyeless great white sharks the size of battleships swim up from the deep. Strange creatures with webbed feet hypnotize humans with the glare of a single great eye. Horse-headed and hammer-headed fish fight in deathly struggles. The smooth backs of submerged monsters are mistaken for islands. White whales, their skin rough as lumps of oyster, drift through the ocean on unknown missions. A carnivorous creature has a lure growing from its jaw which roughly resembles a drowning human, and which can emit moans of pain. Oversized plankton swim in schools. Deeper underwater, the pitch-black water is heavy with nutrient fluid, and bubbles rise up from places unknown; the ocean is bottomless. Some say it connects to the Abyss. Glowing, almost embryonic fish dwell there, side by side with gigantic squids and kraken. Humans swimming in the water cannot expect to last long before their limbs are eaten, one by one, or they are pulled down. Tentacles, teeth, fins and feelers adorn the grotesque but superbly functional bodies of the spawn of the Ancient Sea.

The Ancient Sea is not the Primal Sea, that birthplace of the human body which resides in Metropolis. Sometimes dimensional gates lead to it in a roundabout way, through the Polluted Sea, a noxious-smelling ocean covered with black oil, the corpses of dead seabirds, and plastic six-pack holders. In the Polluted Sea, giant schools of dead fish and whale carcasses are constantly rising to the surface, eventually leading to the Primal Sea's stew of boiling meat.

Boats travelling on the Ancient Sea quickly become infested with barnacles and plants; the paint peels, the iron rusts, and the ship becomes a rotten hulk before finally sinking. In some cases, however, the ship may become bio-organic instead, its engine and motor turning into intestines and skin. Humans generally alter in one of two ways. Some



become fish-like, amphibian things, growing fins and scales and gradually losing their noses, body hair and the ability to blink. Others melt into the brine of the sea itself, their skin becoming gelatinous and then fluid until they become jellyfish. (90% of the human body is water, after all...) They float forever in the froth of the Living Sea, or until Gaia releases them and begins the evolutionary cycle anew.

The Fogbound Coast

Occasionally the Sea borders on other parts of Gaia, forming an area of ragged coast. Fog always blankets these fjords and beaches, making it extremely difficult to approach by ship without crashing on the rocks. Giant sand fleas, red-eyed seagulls and crabs whose mouthparts resemble plane saws wait to eat the survivors from just such shipwrecks. In tidal pools mobile anemones wait for the tide to rise to allow them to swim towards stranded prey.

Along the gray coast rise steep cliffs of sand and clay, vanishing into mist and the sound of the eternal waves. Out on the ocean, the bellowing of mating ichthyosaurs sounds like foghorns. Travellers have made it to shore only to never find a scaleable cliff leading up from the coast. For hours one can walk passing only mounds of rotting weed and the beached, putrefied corpses of creatures of the deep. Sometimes fossils (q.v.) are found in the rocks. Quicksand patches are common along the beach and suck in unwary wanderers. There are also many islands in the Ancient Sea, all of them individual. They rise from and sink into the depths. These are up to the GM to flesh out.

The Sentient Reef

If the characters are in a ship, the pilot must make a Seamanship or Pilot Boat roll with Average effect or the ship runs aground with a grating noise. Looking outside, the characters see the waters receding, revealing a great reef of porous coral of all kinds; orange sponges, spiky white masses, and mushroom-like pillars. The mass is the size of a submerged city, with arches and spiny blobs protruding from the water. It is hard and sharp, and difficult to walk on without cutting oneself. Trapped among the coral, petrified and covered with the coral ooze, are the remains of sunken ships and the mostly-dissolved skeletons of different creatures. The coral stretches underwater indefinitely, and the shapes become more gruesome as it goes down.

Repairs will probably have to be made on the characters' ship, at the least, for them to escape the reef. However, these must be done quickly as already the coral is hardening around their ship, anchoring it to the reef. The coral is a vast neural net, its sentience a part of Gaia, which absorbs ships and creatures (though it is not fast enough to absorb living things unless they stay in one place for several days). The reef sometimes changes its shape, forming composites of different ships and disappearing or growing overnight. Moray eels and shale-skinned goosefish live symbiotically with the mass.

The Sargasso Sea

The sea goes utterly calm and stagnant beneath a layer of fog. The ocean surface is gradually covered with seaweed: filmy, hairlike strands; green and black morasses of plantlife; fleshy bubbles and pods. Ships which stumble into these parts are gradually stuck in the sea.

The weed looks thick enough to walk upon, but it actually is not, and the thickness also hinders swimming. Great crabs and many-tentacled octopi live in the sea, as well as walking leeches which weigh little enough to stand on the weed, and look similar to Oberons (q.v. the METROPOLIS SOURCEBOOK). However, the greatest threat is the weed itself.

Humans who immerse themselves in the seaweed -- by entering the water -- are gripped by a cool, pleasant sensation, and failing an EGO throw (which becomes 1 point harder for each minute they are underwater) do not want to leave. They will at first make excuses and act rational, but gradually will forcibly resist any attempts to make them leave, and will try to convince others to get in the water. Over a period of 24 hours their flesh and internal organs are dissolved by

the weed, and their submerged portions become only a skeleton covered with thick veins. At this point, or soon after, they will start to immerse their heads as well.

Howling for any uninfected humans to join them, the fleshless things will board ships after throwing handfuls of weed onto the decks; they are incapacitated with pain and function at +15 to all rolls when not in contact with seaweed. They retain all their normal statistics; treat them like zombies, save that their limbs will cease functioning if severed or blown away from the main body.

The Shipwreck

This is an outlined event which could be role-played to bring the characters into Gaia. The wreck sequence (a storm works just as well) assumes a large boat; if the characters are in a small, private vessel, they will effectively be under lifeboat conditions anyway, without a wreck being required. While en route to another destination, a sudden stilling of the ocean surface is remarked on by the captain and crew. If above deck, the characters may see the sea go completely flat. Characters with Sixth Sense have a twinge of fear.

Suddenly, the entire ship lifts several feet, then splashes down onto the suddenly again-active sea. Characters who make a PER roll distinctly hear a roar in addition to the sound of water and rending metal. Down below, the hull has been breached and water is quickly filling the bulkheads of the ship. Characters who go below to look immediately after the crash may notice, with a PER roll, giant pieces of inhuman flesh caught on the twisted spars of the hull. However, by this time water is probably rising fast in the lower levels, including the cargo hull, the engine room and (in large liners) the economy-class quarters.

The characters must get aboard a lifeboat or raft, which may or may not be difficult depending on the ship. Make the scene tense; the characters have only minutes to escape the ship. What will they bring along? If there is insufficient room (bring Bad Luck into play here), will they squeeze in, fight for the seat, or put on a life jacket and try to swim? If the ship is sizeable, and anyone is swimming nearby when it sinks, they are pulled under and must make a Swim roll with Good effect to avoid being sucked underwater along with the craft. Failure to immediately move a lifeboat away from the craft may also carry some risk of being pulled under. After about a minute ripped-up segments of the hull float to the surface if the boat was made of wood or another light material.

The characters are now stranded in cramped conditions. Radios bring nothing but static. Food in the lifeboat's emergency pack consists only of dry biscuits and insufficient water. Even if the boat crashed in a storm, the ocean should now be calm, the skies completely cloudless. Soon the characters will start to feel the effects of lack of food and water as shown in the KULT rulebook. The different lifeboats may drift apart if the characters are unable or unwilling to row them.

After a few hours (sooner if anyone died in the wreck) several sharks start to appear, fins above the water. First small sharks appear, then sharks whose fins are two feet or more above the surface. Anyone who makes a Natural Science or similar roll notices disturbing abnormalities in the sharks. A chance motion sets up a brief chain-reaction of wobbling in the lifeboats. The sharks start to tear into any floating dead, and clouds of blood fill the water. They begin fighting in a splashing mass, and at this point the characters see the double vertical row of teeth inside the mouth of one of the larger sharks. Anyone who falls in the water at this point is, of course, in extreme danger. A liferaft may be punctured if violence takes place, or develop a slow leak. If a boat flips over, people may climb onto the bottom of the boat, but only half the boat's normal capacity can stand on the upturned boat without it sinking completely. A knife and flare pistol are probably available in the lifeboat to fight the sharks, or the characters can use pieces of metal debris, if it comes to that.

Eventually this torture ends, although some sharks may follow the boats hoping for more. Then, large birds fly by high above. The characters may think they are near land. However, soon the birds -- strange crosses between gulls and pelicans with sharp webbed claws -- start to descend upon the survivors, pecking at them, tearing away strips of meat. They can be fought (or, if there are not many people in the lifeboat, the characters can crawl under the tarpaulin), but the characters will have an easier time of it with long-distance weapons, as the birds stay out of hand-to-hand range and only close in to attack. The Keeper may want to dash the characters' hopes about land being near by having some of the birds dive under the water. Tailor the number of birds to the number of characters and whether combat is intended to be a viable solution to the problem.

Of course, what would a shipwreck be without cannibalism? The sharks' meat can be eaten, but the birds are so stringy and salty that a CON roll must be made to digest them. If the characters are on the sea for weeks or more, and are not alone, a suitable Keeper-controlled character may suggest cannibalism even if they do not, inspired by the urges of Gaia (by this point, the characters are probably already losing skills and memory, and their clothing has begun to rot away). Cannibalism requires a Terror Throw, modified by the circumstances (whoever has to kill, cut and prepare the meat may suffer a +10 Terror Throw, or more if they knew the victim well), and may trigger physical changes in those already of extremely low (-50 or lower) Mental Balance. Of course, if only one person eats, only they will regain CON, while the other survivors, weakened, may not be able to resist when they next hunger...

After a certain period of anguish, the party may either return to the Illusion or land in other parts of Gaia, or the Keeper can devise some puzzle to allow them to escape.

The Maelstrom

A perpetual storm moves across the Ancient Sea, and scared fishermen in the Sea of Galilee when the Illusion was only freshly made. The great storm of the Sea consists of hurricane winds, driving rain, and a whirlpool so giant it goes down out of sight, appearing endless. Anyone caught in the maelstrom who does not make proper provisions (such as lashing themselves to an object which will float against the current) is lost forever. Leviathan, the largest and oldest living creature in all of Gaia, lives at the heart of the Maelstrom, churning all the waves of the Ancient Sea. It is said that when the Apocalypse comes, Leviathan will steer the Maelstrom into the Primal Sea, and empty it with his thrashings, devouring the embryonic souls and causing there to be no more difference between life and death.

Alternate Gaia Decay Table

- 1-10: Item decomposes normally but quickly, as in LEGIONS OF DARKNESS.
- 11-14: Item decomposes in a dramatic way which would not normally be possible (such as melting or suddenly disintegrating at a crucial moment).
- 15-17: Item regains life if composed of dead organic matter. For instance, a wooden box may start to grow branches, or a leather belt may begin to sweat and emit a strong cow-like smell.
- 18: Item becomes a symbiotic life form. A piece of clothing may become a snail-like viscous skin which feeds off the person's body heat but provides protection in return. The new form is not harmful to the user, though it may be disgusting.
- 19: Item becomes a parasitic life form, feeding off its user. A helmet may become a spider-like, blood-sucking shape. The new form is harmful.
- 20: For some reason, the item does not decompose faster than normal.

~ Non-Player Characters ~

Although Gaia as a whole resists power structures, it is nevertheless home to many powerful and unique creatures which could be called Gods: Leviathan, Thuwathu (aka Minyindagarr), Helen Vaughan (q.v.), Baba Yaga, Yggdrasil, Fenris, The Wild Hunt, The Hungry Moon, The Northern Lights, The Ferryman of the Dark River, Pazuzu, certain presences in the Carpathians... the list goes on. Shiva Nataraja dances through Gaia as he does through the rest of the universe; each living creature sees him as one of their own species. Malkuth used to have Incarnates in Gaia, but they were mostly abandoned in order to concentrate on her other plans. Some of the Living Gods from Metropolis moved here after the Fall. In addition, witches, intelligent beings of slightly less than godlike power, and some human (or humanoid) tribal societies dwell within Gaia or near its borders. Only a small number of the many groups and entities which deal with Gaia are listed here.

Adam Welsh

A lictor who once served Chokmah, Adam Welsh has never abandoned his past master's cause. In a past identity Welsh was ecologist John Muir and tried to equate religion with nature, believing that humans could be steered away from Metropolis and made to accept Gaia (as seen through the Illusion) as a sign of holiness. The Muir plan succeeded in part, and Welsh has held his current name and visage since 1961. According to falsified records, he was born in 1934 in Sausalito, California.

Welsh is a tall, strong man who appears to be in his early 40s, with a Hemingway- or Connery-esque beard and mustache. He dresses in loose-fitting shirts, shorts and other intentionally informal clothes. Unlike most lictors, he makes little effort to disguise his great physical potency. He is the funder of the Natural Law Party, a political organization dedicated to the idea that certain rights, conditions and political affiliations are natural and healthy, with a strong spiritual undertone. The movement has supporters among the Green Party, health faddists in several states, and many liberal Christians. Welsh's definitions of Natural Law generally exclude any enemies of the organization or of the Archons, and are vague enough that all members see in them what they want to see.

The movement is not quite a "cult," although hundreds of party volunteers look up to Welsh fanatically. He chooses nonviolent methods and has discredited his opposition using Passion Magic and performed selective assassination using creatures summoned from the Ancient Sea. Welsh lives in Bolinas, California, a misty ex-hippie town along the coast.

PERSONALITY: Welsh has a genuinely pitying, condescending attitude towards humans. He makes a friendly, down-to-earth impression, and has a sense of humor. When the Illusion is broken, he becomes more authoritarian and the random, bestial elements in his behavior become shockingly noticeable. (Even lictors are effected by Gaia, although the process is much slower than it is with humans.)

GAMEMASTERING HINTS: Take deep breaths and make strong gestures. Smile, act reasonable, and listen to others, but the players may become gradually aware you don't necessarily care what they say; you're tolerant because they're insignificant.

AGL 35
STR 45
CON 45
COM 16 (4)
EGO 31
CHA 22
PER 26

EDU 30

Terror Throw Modification: +5

Height: 260 cm

Weight: 475 kg

Senses: Acute, especially its sense of smell. Sees infrared and ultraviolet light.

Communication: Speech and telepathy

Movement: 17 m/combat round

Actions: 5

Initiative Bonus: +23

Damage Bonus: +9

Damage Capacity: 9 scratches=1 lw, 8 light wounds=1 sw, 6 serious wounds=1 fw. Takes 2 fatal wounds before dying.

Endurance: 255

Natural Armor: 2 points blubber

Powers: Commanding Voice, Telepathy, Telekinesis 100 kg, 10 m/second, Invulnerable to fire

Skills: Natural Science 50, Theology 50, Rhetoric 50, Survival 50, Hypnosis 30, Meditation 30, Net of contacts: politicians 30, Information Retrieval 30, Occultism 30, Man of the World 50, Etiquette 30, Diplomacy 50, Unarmed Combat 30, Swim 20, Rifle/Crossbow 30, Area knowledge: California 30, Seach 30, Seamanship 20, Track 30, Trap/Bait Animals 30, Climb 30

Attack modes: Bite 20 (scr 1-6, lw 7-13, sw 14-24, fw 25+), 2 claws 25 (scr 1-7, lw 8-14, sw 15-28, fw 29+), Unarmed Combat 30

Magic: Lore of Passion 50, All spells 30

Home: Bolinas, California



Guardians of the Earth

An America-based group, the Guardians of the Earth consists of survivalists, ecologists, and members of the military whose goal is to convert more of the Earth into Gaia. They think civilization is a sham, an unnatural construct, and believe that when people are forced to live in Gaia they will live in harmony and contentment. Few of them are violently insane; still fewer realize that Gaia is not so altruistic. Their increasing isolationism has attracted some suspicion, but they still have many contacts among the U.S. Army and the scientific community, thanks to their prominent members, numbering among them Generals and Nobel Prize Winners.

The group consists of several hundred core members, surrounded by tens of thousand volunteers and part-time workers who think they're only another environmental group. They are predominantly male, and their beliefs sometimes include sexist thoughts on the roles of the genders, though this is not the core of their teachings. A few intelligent creatures from Gaia work with them, disguised as humans. The group began in the 1950s and 1960s when the government set up several army bases near gates to Gaia, to monitor and try to understand them. Their data (although biased by their beliefs), held in military bases in the American Southwest, is the most comprehensive study of Gaia in the 20th century. They are more fully described in LEGIONS OF DARKNESS.

Karman Shaugnessi

Shaugnessi was born in 1958 in Novosibirsk in the former Soviet Union. A proud young Communist, he went with his friends on wolf-hunting expeditions out on the tundra. One day a pack of Wolven mauled most of his comrades and the shock sent Shaugnessi into Gaia. When he escaped he had lost many of his memories, but with great willpower he painfully regained them. A relative with local industry connections spared him the insane asylum and Shaugnessi repaid him by joining his factory staff. He became an administrator, but never forgot his terrifying experience.

When Shaugnessi gained Enhanced Awareness after a chemical poisoning incident, he studied the occult and made assumptions about what he had seen. He decided that serviliants, lictors and the like were things that came from the Cold Barrens and which were trying to infiltrate society. He developed a personal religion and theory about the universe, which though false was all-inclusive. Only by eliminating Gaia could the Things which live in lonely spaces be vanquished.

Becoming a prominent industrialist, Shaugnessi has worked to cut down forests and spread houses throughout the former Soviet Union. Capitalism has made his work much easier. From within his black factories in the Ukraine, Shaugnessi oversees what he views as the obvious extension of the pioneer spirit, the total taming of the planet. Several lictors and razides are aware of his plans but encourage him or allow him to go on for various reasons.

PERSONALITY: Shaugnessi has a seeming open-mindedness and earnestness which wins people to his side. In reality, every new piece of information he processes only makes his conspiracy theories more elaborate. A sufferer from early stages of black lung disease, he cannot acknowledge the pollution and poisons of the work he oversees.

GAMEMASTERING HINTS: Be businesslike and deep-voiced, but periodically let a moment of insecurity make you seem more human and vulnerable (you still remember your early traumas). Be shrill, threaten violence when your assumptions are seriously challenged.

AGL 13

STR 13

CON 8

COM 14

EGO 17

CHA 17

PER 11

EDU 18

Height: 185 cm

Weight: 85 kg

Movement: 6 m/combat round

Actions: 2

Initiative Bonus: +1

Damage Bonus: +2

Damage Capacity: 3 scratches=1 lw, 3 light wounds=1 sw, 2 serious wounds=death

Endurance: 70

Mental Balance: -20

Dark Secrets: Supernatural Experience, Guilty of Crime

Advantages: Influential Friends, Enhanced Awareness

Disadvantages: Fanaticism, Nightmares, Manic-Depressive, Greedy

Skills: Information Retrieval 17, Russian 17, French 17, English 12, Net of contacts: Russian mafia 17, Net of contacts: industrialists 17, Accounting 17, Diplomacy 17, Etiquette 17, Handgun 11, Drive Vehicle 11

Attack modes: according to weapon

Home: Moscow



The Natural Fulfillment Society

Natural Fulfillment is a British group which started in the 1970s as a service for jaded yuppies who wanted to experience the hippie commune life. The society would take groups of people out into the wilderness, force them to forage (aided by food brought back from the base camp if things went bad) for a time, and teach them about nature. Many honeymoons were made on Fulfillment tours. Peter Hamilton, a voyeur and then only a guide for the business, noticed that couples seemed more sexually stimulated when camping in certain parts of the country next to old standing stones. He gradually became addicted to the stimulation and at one point finally murdered a woman on the tour who threatened to have him arrested for rape. When investigating his case, his employers noticed the effects of the stones. They gradually became addicts themselves and re-organized the Society in the late '70s as an overtly sexual group which made enormous amounts of money from mostly rich clients. Crackdowns in the Margaret Thatcher era forced them to go partly underground.

Clients of the Society encounter a very smooth, professional organization run out of the second floor of a good apartment building in London. Videotapes and literature describe the Society in health-oriented, *‘The Unbearable Lightness of Being’* terms, always following the latest trends and jargon. Once clients are on tours, however, any doubts they have about their slightly bestial guides are erased when they arrive in the deep wilderness, entering parts of Gaia where their inhibitions and willpower are broken and they participate in orgies and bestiality with the other society members. Afterwards, Passion Magic causes any dissatisfied or horrified members to forget their experiences, or failing that creates parallel neuroses so that the insanity cannot be traced to the Society.

The corporate board of the Society, and many of its repeat clients, have lost memory and reasoning skills to Gaia, which they try to cover up with drugs and therapy. Peter Hamilton, still a guide, is the most degenerated, with a very low Mental Balance, barely present social skills, and several subsidiary limbs growing in his crotch and waist region. He is physically incapable of eating anything but raw meat. Some members have tried to sue the Society after having deformed births from their sexual encounters in Gaia, and the Society has used blackmail and intimidation to keep them quiet. Several thousand people, many influential, are on the Society mailing list.

The Ainu

The Ainu, a Japanese group of mountain-dwelling nature worshippers, have dwindled in recent centuries but still exist. Since the 19th century they have been assimilated into society, but now practice their religion as a sect instead of a people -- with several magician-lectors among them providing the upper ranks. 300 of them live in Hokkaido, and 100 in the southern, more populated island of Japan.

The Ainu philosophy considers humans and animals to be part of the same spirit of life; humans do not have any innate importance. Therefore, Ainu magicians have developed spells (in the Lore of Death) which allow humans to be consistently resurrected into the bodies of animals. From this experience, they believe, people will learn humility and respect for Nature. They also try to preserve the sacredness of entrances to Gaia throughout Japan. The Ainu are mostly an altruistic group, although they use magic against their opponents.

Helen Vaughan

"Here too was all the work by which man had been made, repeated before my eyes. I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. The principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed."

-- Arthur Machen, THE GREAT GOD PAN

The entity called Helen Vaughan was released into the world in 1902, when an Edwardian scientist broke the Illusion

in a part of the Weir Wood and unwittingly allowed a mute servant girl to be trapped there for hours. She was impregnated by a horrible creature which left her catatonic, and died giving birth to a precocious, normal-looking girl who seemed mute for years, so spoke so little. Passed back and forth between upper-class orphanages and foster homes, Vaughan grew into a beautiful woman, three of whose husbands committed suicide or went mad on their wedding nights. When in 1940 her apparent age of 21 was attracting attention, and several prominent parapsychologists were found bloodily murdered after breaking into her widow's apartment, she vanished and has only periodically been seen in public since, spreading horror and depravity and keeping pace with the times.

Vaughan is one of several beings who could be considered an Incarnate of Gaia, a human-appearing creature who roams Europe and America, spreading tragedy by corrupting people and convincing them of the worthlessness of their intelligence, their morals, and their civilized beliefs. Physically, she is a very attractive, yet strangely repulsive woman of 19 to 21, with dark hair, olive skin, and an indistinct Caucasian racial appearance. When she wants to, she can have a very charming and expressive personality, but frequently she is quiet and dismissive. Seen through the Illusion, she looks no different, but her shadow has the shape of a giant horned beast. Humans with a negative Mental Balance in

her vicinity act as if their Mental Balance was 25 points lower.

Vaughan has access to many sources of money, and generally wears good clothes of whatever era or country she is in. She particularly likes dark dresses. She rarely has need for other equipment and never uses conventional weapons. She has several passports and the savoir faire to get more, and travels under various aliases all with the initials "H. V.". Vaughan is more powerful than a lictor, and they allow her to roam as she chooses.

If attacked, Vaughan usually flees if she does not expect to be able to kill all her attackers. In battle, however, and in sex she can change into a loathsome true form; a constantly changing mass of black jelly, altering into freakish bat-like and goat-like forms and masses of pseudopods. She can change her age and sex at will (as a man she may still be recognizable to those who know her), and when inhuman can double or halve her mass and size. She disdains physical violence, preferring to tempt others into committing suicide or despicable acts. Sometimes she will teasingly reveal her origins or her seemingly endless store of knowledge to try to cause such acts in others.



(Helen Vaughan is taken from the story THE GREAT GOD PAN by Arthur Machen.)

PERSONALITY: Helen Vaughan's thoughts are unknowable; in a great way, she/it shares the consciousness of Gaia, which sometimes distracts her or makes her act irrationally. She feels a warm, exultant superiority over human beings and lictors alike. She views death, like sex, as a transformation; both are welcome, even inevitable. Her intellectual side enjoys playing with words and subtle distinctions.

GAMEMASTERING HINTS: Look coldly at the players, do not move your face much. Occasionally break out in a wide-eyed smile and talk pleasantly but quickly in a quiet, nonaggressive voice.

AGL 42

STR 39

CON 50

COM 30 (1)

EGO 40

CHA 20

PER 25

EDU 22

Terror Throw Modification: +10 when transformed

Height: 160 cm (variable)

Weight: 55 kg

Communication: Speaks all human languages.

Senses: Acute. Sees auras and Mental Balance.

Movement: 20 m/combat round

Actions: 6

Initiative Bonus: +30

Damage Bonus: +10

Damage Capacity: 11 scratches=1 lw, 10 light wounds=1 sw, 8 serious wounds=1 fw. Dies after 3 fatal wounds.

Endurance: 280

Natural armor: none

Skills: Seduction 30, Savoir Faire 30, Etiquette 20, Man of the World 30, Survival 40, Gambling 20, Dancing 30, Riding 30, Acting 30, Hide 30, Occultism 30, Parapsychology 30, Style 30

Powers: Enhanced Senses, Infrared Vision, Hunting Vision, Regeneration, Infinite Endurance, Resistant to Poison, Shapechange

Weaknesses: Vulnerable to Radioactivity

Attack modes: Claws 20 (scr 1-8, lw 9-14, sw 14-19, fw 20+), Tentacle 20 (scr 1-7, lw 8-13, sw 14-18, fw 19+), Hooves 30 (scr. 1-9, lw. 10-14, sw. 15-22, fw. 23+), when transformed

Magic: Masters the Lore of Passions as an Awakened human; no need for rituals or Endurance loss.

Home: Europe

~ Inhabitants of Gaia ~

There is a literally infinite variety of monsters in Gaia, and the following list describes only a few. The GM is encouraged to make up their own beings, using the brief notes provided in the place descriptions if they like. Some of these creatures are expansions of those notes; others are new.

Inhabitants of Gaia: Plants

- * Gaian Man-Traps
- * Mycelites
- * Cnidarian Plants
- * Verrucktpflanze
- * Hounds of the Hedges

Gaian Man-Traps

This is a catch-all category for the many variations of this species which inhabit the Jungle. Man-traps are giant plants, rising out of a hillock of their own roots to a height of several feet. The top half of the plant is a profusion of green leaves and vines (which sometimes pulse with a bloodlike substance), and pitcher-plant-like blooms that are curved into shapes like flutes or mouths. 2D3 long tentacles grow from the middle of the plant, resembling six-inch-thick blackberry vines covered with thorns. Most species have no face or head per se, though the center of the plant rises into a noticeable lump. The brain-center of the plant is at least a foot below the skin, down among the roots.

The plants can move slowly along its roots. The blooms can emit music and mimic the sounds of animals to attract prey. With experience, they can even imitate mechanical sounds (such as gunfire) and human shouts and sobs. Meanwhile, the tentacles -- which have a range equal to half the plant's STR in meters -- slowly close in, often creeping underground or from behind, using their extreme length to their advantage. (Roll the Man-Trap's Sneak skill against the prey's PER.) The tentacles then strike, either grappling the victims or slashing them with thorns. When a victim is caught, the plant can bring another tentacle to bear, grinding them like a vise. The resultant damage releases showers of blood, which are rapidly absorbed.

Individual tentacles are disabled by a Fatal Wound, which does not count against the plant's central body. They have 5 points of armor and can Dodge with a skill of 20 when not grappling prey.

After the blood is drained, the corpse is used as bait for predators. The Man-Trap can also dig one of its tentacles into the spinal column of prey and speak with their voice. They range from clever to extremely intelligent and malicious, and some of them even form elaborate plans to break into the Illusion to feed.

Some subspecies of this plant have one or more large mouths similar to the Venus Flytrap which can bite prey and make simple conversation. In these cases, the brain of the plant is still in the roots, and is not harmed by the loss of its mouthpiece.

AGL 3D10+10 (26)

STR 4D10 (22)

CON 4D10+30 (52)

EGO 1D3x1D10 (5-16)

PER 1D10 (5)

Terror Throw Modification: --

Width: 300 cm

Weight: 200 kg

Senses: Excellent smell and hearing, infrared vision. No normal vision. Feels vibrations through earth (such as footsteps) in a EGOx10 meter radius.

Movement: 2 m/round (4 m/round through mud)

Actions: 4

Initiative Bonus: +14

Damage Bonus: +6

Damage Capacity: 11 scratches=1 lw, 10 light wounds=1 sw, 8 serious wounds=dead.

Endurance: 340

Natural Armor: 5 points of tough skin

Skills: Sneak 25, Mimic Sounds 16, Dodge (tentacles only) 20

Attack Modes: 2d3 tentacles 17 (scr 1-6, lw 7-12, sw 13-17, fw 18+). Tentacles can either cause grappling or wound damage. Maw 12 (scr 1-4, lw 5-10, sw 11-15, fw 16+)

Magic: Mantraps with an EGO of 20 or higher sometimes know elementary Passion Magic at a score equal to their EGO. They can crosspollinate with plants within the Illusion, effectively forming an 'Incarnate' which can take many forms.

Home: The Jungle

Number Encountered: 1

Mycelites

The Mycelites are some of the only creatures from Gaia to successfully incur into Metropolis. They are a white fungus which grows in dumpling- or bole-like clusters, composed of a spongy material which tears easily but releases millions of spores. If eaten it is nourishing and has a sweet, bread-like taste.

The touch of Mycelites is contagious. Anyone who eats the Mycelites is infected from within; the infection is first visible in the tongue and throat, by which time the damage is already irreparable. At this point, the victim begins to cough up balls of fungus, Mycelite boles, which adhere to any available surface. Their own limbs become fungus, and they may be possessed by an urge to eat portions of their own transformed body. These victims are a gruesome sight, ranging from people covered in white fuzz to shapeless gray masses which do not appear to have human form. Finally the victim simply collapses into rot.

The presence of Mycelites has a positive effect on the growth of fungus in the Illusion, which triples in growth and adaptability in a 100' radius.

(Mycelites are taken from a short story by William Hope Hodgson.)

STR: 1

AGL: 1

CON 3D10+10 (26)

EGO 1

PER 1D5 (3)

Terror Throw Modification: -5

Height: varies

Weight: varies

Senses: Detects Body Heat and Organic Matter.

Movement: 1 m/round

Actions: 1

Initiative Bonus: none

Damage Bonus: none

Damage Capacity: 6 scratches=1 lw, 5 light wounds=1 sw, 4 serious wounds=1 fw

Endurance: unlimited

Natural Armor: Invulnerable to normal weapons (can be killed by fire, acid, cold, electricity, etc.)

Attack Modes: Touch 5 (scr. 1-13, lw 14-24, sw 25-30, fw 31+). The touch does minimal damage, but if it penetrates armor, the bodypart which is hit must roll for infection by Mycelite spores.

Mycelite Spores

The spores' potency (amount of CON loss) is 1d10 normally, but 3d10 if ingested instead of merely touched. After infection of the entire body is complete, the victim will remain alive for 2d10 days, albeit covered in fungus. Being completely covered with fungus requires a Terror Throw at +10 effect. Having an arm or leg be completely infected requires a Terror Throw at +5 effect. Arm or leg infection can be treated by professional medical help or acids/poisons (which may also harm the victim); full-body infection is fatal. It is impossible to treat mouth/tongue infection once it is visible.

CON Loss: 1d10 (CON=0, infection of the entire body within 1d10 days; CON=1/3, infection of the effected bodypart (or mouth/tongue) within 1d10 days; if allowed to continue, infection of the entire body within an additional 1d10 days; CON=1/2, itching and infection of the effected bodypart within 1d10 days; CON=2/3, no effect.)

Home: Metropolis, the Subterranean Wood, Islands in Gaia

Number Encountered: 5d10 (27)

Cnidarian Plants

Cnidarian Plants grow in those parts of Gaia bordering Sumatra and Polynesia. They are large pitcher-plants, composed of green vines and tendrils supporting a heavy grayish or yellowish pitcher as big as 2 1/2 feet long. Unlike most pitcher plants, however, no flies or bugs can be seen swarming around their cup. Instead, their cup serves a defensive function.

The Cnidarian Plant can sense when prey approaches. The pitcher swivels in the direction of prey and fires a jet of acid up to 5 meters away. They often target the head (-6 to hit). The steaming, hissing greenish-yellow stream is comparable in power and velocity to a firehose of hydrochloric acid. It takes the Cnidarian Plant 5 rounds or less to recharge between shots (trauma speeds up the process; for every light or serious wound it takes in the course of the 5-round period, subtract 1 round from the waiting time for that period). The plant is stationary and has no other defenses, but its skin is extremely tough.

The Plants supplement their photosynthesis by absorbing the acid-eaten bodies of passers-by (through their roots). The acid smells so putrid that other creatures will not touch the corpses.

AGL: 2d10 (11)

STR: 2d10 (11)

CON: 3d10 (16)

EGO: 1

PER: 3d10 (16)

Terror Throw Modification: -5

Initiative Bonus: none

Movement: none

Endurance: unlimited

Attack Mode: Acid Stream 20 (scr. 1-4, lw. 5-7, sw. 8-13, fw. 14+) (Only usable once per 5 rounds or less (see above)).

Natural Armor: 10 pts. Immune to acid.

Damage Capacity: 5 scratches=1 lw, 4 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=1 fw

Senses: Radar. Excellent hearing. Feels vibrations through the soil at a 10 meter radius.

Home: The Jungle.

Number Encountered: 1d10 (5).

Hound of the Hedges

These strange beings, like the Barometh or vegetable lamb, represent a balance of the plant and animal kingdoms. They resemble large canines -- beagles or corgis -- formed out of grass, clover, and other common plants, intertwined in a way that resembles organs, muscles, and hair. Aphids and other small, harmless bugs live symbiotically with the hounds. Their saliva is chlorophyll, and their sweat is dew.

The Hounds are rare, nonaggressive creatures who live by photosynthesis alone. They are friendly to humans, although they resist being captured or trained, and can bite or scratch if necessary. They cannot be killed by normal weapons; arms, legs and head will continue living if severed, and will eventually join together or regenerate into a new animal.

Home: The Elysian Fields

Number Encountered: 1

Verrucktpflanze

The Verrucktpflanze are the origins of the legends of fairy fruit. A green, grapevine-like, stationary plant, it grows copious berries which resemble round, blue-purple strawberries. The berries are edible and delicious, but powerfully addictive. After they have been eaten, the victim must make an EGO roll against the plant's EGO of 3d10 or they will be haunted by the taste of the fruit and vow to taste the Verrucktpflanze again. If they are unable to do so, they will grow disgusted by the taste of all other food and drink; to them, everything will taste like the berries, and the taste will grow increasingly rotten. Eventually the victim refuses all nourishment and will starve to death. They can be cured by being given the merest taste of the Verrucktpflanze, which will allow them another EGO roll against 3d10 to avoid falling into the same cycle of addiction.

When consumed in combination with other substances, the Verrucktpflanze has powerful magical effects and can improve the casting of Dream and Delirium rituals. The Sidhe, and certain species of goblin-like beings native to Gaia, are immune to its negative effects and often tempt humans with it. The plants themselves have a dim, creeping intelligence and may have more control over the minds of their victims than simple addiction.

EGO (POT): 3d10

Home: The Jungle, The Elysian Fields, The Weir Wood

(The Verrucktpflanze were originally used in the rules I wrote up for the Lore of Delirium. The statistics printed here are a little different and don't necessarily supersede the older ones.)

Inhabitants of Gaia: Animals & Monsters

- * Harrows
- * Aeolites
- * Parazoocytes
- * Hidebehinds
- * Colacathant
- * Nonochtos

Harrows

On the borders of Gaia and Metropolis these predatory machines can be found. Harrows are created by lictors from blueprints found in the Machine City, to keep the wild growth of Gaia under control. Razides also use them as footsoldiers. In the Illusion they look like bulldozers or forklifts. Beyond the Illusion they look like metal things resembling a cross between bulldozers and humans on all fours, with an organic throat and mouth inside which can be seen "teeth" composed of bloodstained chainsaws.

Harrows eat anything alive, including trees, and excrete small items of consumer culture: chocolates, keychains, suntan lotion, anything useless and inexpensive. The waste products are later collected by serviliants or humans with mental constrictions and sold. Permanent groups of Harrows patrol the Amazon basin, India and parts of the American Midwest.

AGL 2D10 (11)

STR 4D10+10 (32)

CON 3D10+10 (26)

EGO 1D3 (2)

PER 1D10 (5)

Terror Throw Modification: +5

Length: 210 cm

Weight: 100 kg

Senses: Poor. Infrared vision, detects sudden movement.

Movement: 5 m/combat round

Actions: 2

Initiative Bonus: none

Damage Bonus: +5

Damage Capacity: 6 scratches=1 lw, 5 light wounds=1 sw, 4 serious wounds=1 fw

Endurance: infinite

Natural Armor: 6 points of tough metal and muscle

Attack Modes: Chainsaws 10 (scr 1-5, lw 6-9, sw 10-14, fw 15+)

Home: Metropolis, the Perverted Earth

Number Encountered: 2d10 (11)

Aeolites

The Aeolites resemble parrot-like 2' tall birds carved out of transparent soap; their skin is grey and gelatinous, with few internal organs. Although birds, they have teeth inside their beaks. They live in hordes near the Aeolian Harps, where they squat like gargoyles or the babies in drawings by H.R. Giger. Aeolites repeat the strange, guttural noises emitted by the Harps, and add their own embellishments and screeches, making the music all the more disturbing. For every 30 minutes of exposure to Aeolite-song, humans with a Mental Balance of less than 100 lose one point of MB, until down to -50.

When five or more Aeolites are present for each human, they will begin to bawl. The bawling and bellowing sounds, produced in unison, are deafening; it is also a hideous noise that requires a Terror Throw from listeners, even in reproduction (i.e., on tape, etc.) Every round that the Aeolites bawl, humans within 100 feet must make a CON roll or lost one point of PER. The CON roll is at +1 penalty for every five Aeolites over the initial five (note that Aeolites brood in the hundreds in parts of the Carpathian mountains). After PER reaches zero, the human is deafened. Every round following, they must make a CON roll or one point of the PER loss is permanent. (Outside of the range of the Aeolites, temporary PER loss returns to normal in 1d20 hours.) When brought to permanent zero PER, the victims' ears look crushed and flattened, almost liquefied. Aeolites also dive-bomb and bite prey. They eat flesh, especially ear tissue, but some say they truly live off their victims' screams.

Aeolites are difficult to kill. Any portion of an Aeolite remains alive and moving, and will eventually regenerate, as long as there is more than 30 decibels of noise in the vicinity, although dismembered Aeolites can no longer make noise.

AGL 3D10 (16)

STR 1D5 (3)

CON 2D10 (11)

EGO 1D3 (2)

PER 2D10+10 (21)

Terror Throw Modification: -10

Height: 55 cm

Weight: 15 kg

Senses: Good, especially their hearing. Echolocation.

Movement: 8 m/combat round (flying)

Actions: 3

Initiative Bonus: +4

Damage Bonus: none

Damage Capacity: 4 scratches=1 lw, 3 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=1 fw. Aeolites cannot die permanently unless it is quiet; dismembered Aeolites reform in 2d10 rounds.

Endurance: 85

Natural Armor: none

Attack Modes: Bite 10 (scr 1-8, lw 9-16, sw 17-26, fw 27+), Bellowing (special; victim must make CON rolls or loses one PER each round).

Home: The Carpathians

Number Encountered: 3d10 (16) and up

Parazoocytes

These odious creatures live in dank, wet parts of Gaia. They resemble giant (horse-sized) gray-green slugs with a yellow shell made out of ribcage-like bone and tendon. Their heads consist of only a single eyestalk, several feet long, with a small lump beneath it.

Parazoocytes are deceptively slow-looking. When attacked, they turn their cyclopean eye to face the predator, and emit a stream of poison out of a gland in their eyestalk. The curare-like poison causes localized paralysis in the area which is struck (a fatal hit to the head or chest results in inability to breathe, and quick death). The lump beneath their eye opens into a triangular mouth, with which they attack and do biting damage. Their eyestalk can be struck (treat as a hit to the head; a serious wound severs it) but will grow back within an hour.

AGL 2D10+10 (21)

STR 5D10+10 (37)

CON 2D10+10 (21)

EGO 1

PER 3D10 (16)

Terror Throw Modification: -10

Length: 240 cm

Weight: 140 kg

Senses: Poor

Movement: 4 m/round (moves slower than it reacts)

Actions: 4

Initiative Bonus: +9

Damage Bonus: +7

Damage Capacity: 6 scratches=1 lw, 5 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=1 fw

Endurance: 190

Natural Armor: 4 points of hide

Attack Modes: Spray Fluid 16 (poison damage, see below), Bite 10 (scr 1-9, lw 10-17, sw 18-27, fw 28+)

PARALYZING FLUID CON Loss: 3D10 (CON=0, localized paralysis for several hours; CON=1/3, localized paralysis for 1 hour, CON=1/2 localized paralysis for 1d10 rounds, CON=2/3 cramps, stiffness.)

Home: Underground, the Subterranean Wood, the Fogbound Coast

Number Encountered: 1d5 (3)

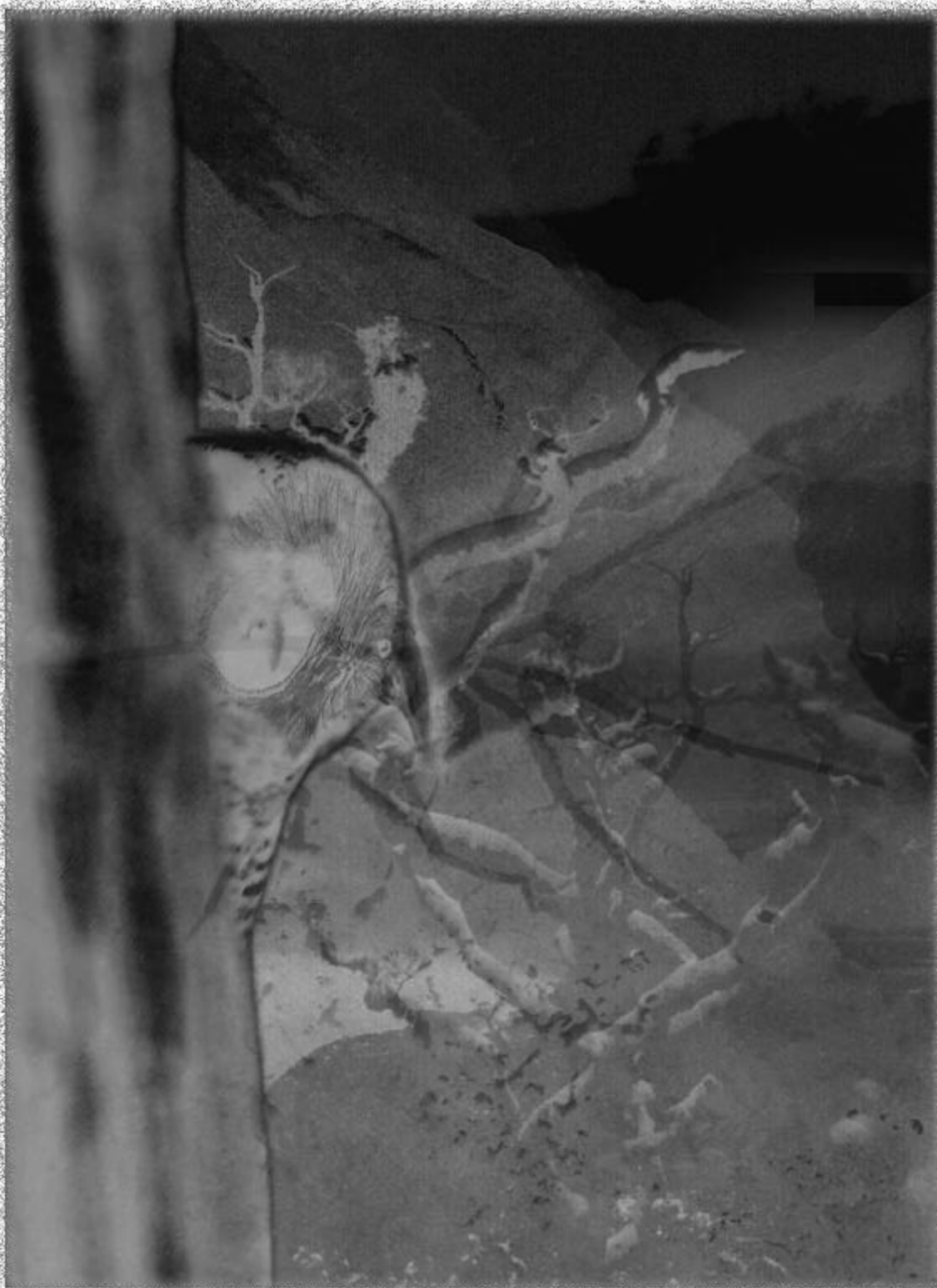


Hidebehinds

The Hidebehind is a folk tale in the Ozarks. It dwells in forests, where it hides behind trees, following its prey for days. Under no circumstances does the Hidebehind attack prematurely. In fact, it wants its victims to know they are being stalked.

The Hidebehind is a telepathic thing which becomes increasingly powerful, uglier and taller as its prey become more scared. When it first encounters a victim (Terror Throw at -5 if seen), it is in its basic shape: a pale, hunched thing, 150 cm tall, with an owl-like, staring face, and claws. As time passes and its prey becomes more frightened, it becomes larger and more powerful. When it requires a straight Terror Throw to see, it has elongated to 180 cm tall, its hands and claws become more splayed and rounded, and its face becomes uglier and flatter. When it requires a +5 Terror Throw to see, it is 210 cm tall, its face is unspeakably hideous, its legs are stalks, and its bones and tendons are now visible under a thin layer of dead white skin. It can grow as unpleasant as the GM wants it to be.

In game terms, each time the Hidebehind's prey fails a Terror Throw due to the creature, it metamorphoses over a period of hours into a stronger creature, gaining 5 points in AGL, STR



and CON to a maximum of three growth stages. Its Terror Throw modifier also changes, going from -5 to +5 (the Terror Throw has only two growth stages). After it eats its prey, or if it loses its prey for a period of more than a week, it reverts to its original state.

Nominally a mammal, the Hidebehind buries its broods of 4-6 young underground, where they lie in pits waiting for passerby.

(Hidebehinds are taken from a story by Manly Wade Wellman.)

AGL 2D10 to 2D10+15 (11 to 26)

STR 2D10 to 2D10+15 (11 to 26)

CON 3D10 to 3D10+15 (16 to 31)

EGO 1D10 (6)

PER 1D10+10 (15)

Terror Throw Modification: -5 to +5 (see above)

Height: varies (150-225 cm)

Weight: 65 kg

Senses: Acute. Hunting vision. Telepathy which lets it know where its victim is.

Movement: 11 m/round

Actions: 4

Initiative Bonus: varies

Damage Bonus: varies

Damage Capacity: 5 scratches=1 lw, 4 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=death

Endurance: 110

Natural Armor: None

Skills: Sneak 30, Hide 30, Ambush 30, Track 20

Attack Modes: 2 Claws (scr 1-7, lw 8-14, sw 15-19, fw 20+)

Home: The Weir Wood, The Carpathians

Number Encountered: 1

Colacathant

These 12' long predators look most like a cross between large, prehistoric crocodiles and a Dimetrodon. Their blue or green skin varies in roughness, from an almost impenetrable armor on their backs to a scaly but weaker skin over their bellies. Their fist-sized eyes are sunken beneath bony ridges, but can extend out, giving them a bug-eyed appearance. Two large fins protrude from their backs. By flapping these, they can leap for great distances.

AGL 1D10+10 (15)

STR 8D10+30 (74)

CON 6D10+20 (53)

EGO 1

PER 2D10 (11)

Terror Throw Modification: --

Length: 400 cm

Weight: 220 kg

Senses: No color vision; good hearing and smell

Movement: 7 m/round; 14 m/round (swimming); leap up to 20 m once per five rounds

Actions: 2

Initiative Bonus: +3

Damage Bonus: +10

Damage Capacity: 12 scratches=1 lw, 11 light wounds=1 sw, 9 serious wounds=1 fw. Dies after 2 fatal wounds.

Endurance: 195

Natural Armor: 7 points of flak-jacket scales on their back; none on underside

Attack Modes: Wing-Beat 20 (all creatures within a 10-meter radius must make STR rolls with normal or better effect or be knocked down), Bite 19 (scr 1-4, lw 5-8, sw 9-14, fw 15+)

Home: The Jungle, Pangaea, The Dark River

Number Encountered: 1d3 (2)

Nonochtos

Grayish-pink, four-legged lizards the size of small ponies, the Nonochtos are essentially unintelligent animals. They eat insects, and only attack larger creatures in self-defense, using their sharp teeth. They are sought by humans for their 'milk' -- a white substance which drips from an udder on the underside of the Nonochtos' body.

Nonochtos' milk has several effects. It improves the effects of Schizophrenia or Enhanced Awareness, making the drinker more likely to see through the Illusion. It causes feelings of manic euphoria which develop over time into Megalomania (-10). And lastly, it is extremely addictive, causing the victim to require more and more 'milk'. As the addict becomes more insane, they soon desire no other food or drink, and if their Mental Balance is low enough to cause physical changes, they eventually wither into a small homunculus which becomes attached to the Nonochtos and finally is absorbed into its udder.

Home: The Jungle, Delirium

(The Nonochtos were originally used in the rules I wrote up for the Lore of Delirium. The description printed here is a little different and doesn't necessarily supersede the earlier ones.)

Inhabitants of Gaia: Humanoids

- * Hesperides
- * Sidhe
- * Hafgygr
- * Ghouls
- * Fenrir

Hesperides

Nude, human-sized creatures, they resemble a human whose upper body and shoulders turn into the swollen head of a tapir or hedgehog. Their bodies are dirty and hairy, and the upper regions are covered with sharp quills and needle-like protrusions. The two-foot-long hedgehog-head has a narrow, ugly mouth, and the eyes are empty sockets, which dribble pus; its skin has an unhealthy appearance.

Hesperides used to be our groundskeepers and companions in the Garden of Eden, but in our absence they have become diseased and warped. When they see humans they become obedient, in their way, but their recreations of the hunts and feasts that were held in Gaia are now frightening to us, and in any case the magic can hardly be performed by the now rotting Hesperides. Their frustration drives them to terrible acts of cruelty against the other beings of Gaia.

AGL 3D10 (16)

STR 4D10 (22)

CON 3D10+5 (21)

EGO 3D10 (16)

PER 2D10 (11)

Terror Throw Modification: --

Height: 200 cm

Weight: 75 kg

Communication: Sign language. Speaks to and understands all animals. Understands all human languages.

Senses: Infrared vision only; no standard vision. Other senses average.

Movement: 8 m/round

Actions: 3

Initiative Bonus: +4

Damage Bonus: +4

Damage Capacity: 6 scratches=1 lw, 5 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=dead.

Endurance: 135

Natural Armor: 2 points of spiny hide.

Powers: Infrared Vision, Resistant to Poison

Skills: Fertility Rites 11, Spear 20, Bow 20, Throwing Weapon 20, Track 20

Attack Modes: 2 Claws 16 (scr 1-10, lw 11-16, sw 17-22, fw 23+), Bite 10 (scr 1-8, lw 9-14, sw 15-18, fw 19+), or by weapon

Magic: 1 out of 5 Hesperides know the Lore of Passion and several spells (including ritual spells not listed in the rulebook) equal to their EGO. Hesperides must make a CON roll with Effect equal to the level of the spell for the spells to work; otherwise their bodily corruption causes the spell to succeed only partly in some way determined by the GM.

Home: The Elysian Fields, The Weir Wood

Number Encountered: 1d5 (3)

Sidhe

Less than six inches tall, they resemble fairies; unnaturally slender, female-appearing (though commonly hermaphroditic) humans. Delicate fly wings, blue-black and glistening, grow out of their shoulders and the underside of their arms. They are neither plant nor animal and live partially on photosynthesis. Their skin is a green or brown tinge, and their hair resembles plant matter or grass. They are often beautiful by human standards, with slightly Oriental features and large eyes.

Like flies, the Sidhe eat by vomiting upon material, which then melts enough for them to consume it. They breed in stagnant water; their young are larvae covered with bristly appendages, unrecognizable as the same species as the adults. Alluring glows, like will-o-the-wisps, hover over these pools.



The Sidhe are creatures of dreams and passion, who have no allegiance to us. They carry out rituals and romances under the bark of trees and in remote locations lit by the light of putrefying bodies. The Sidhe like to collect human blood and breath for unknowable purposes, and will trade with a traveller or trick them utterly and fatally.

AGL 4D10 (22)

STR 1D3 (2)

CON 2D10+10 (21)

EGO 3D10+10 (26)

PER 4D10 (22)

Terror Throw Modification: -5

Height: 10 cm

Weight: 2 kg

Senses: Acute. Sees in infrared and ultraviolet. Sees auras. Limited ability to see through solid objects.

Movement: 11 m/round

Actions: 4

Initiative Bonus: +10

Damage Bonus: +1

Damage Capacity: 6 scratches=1 lw, 5 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=1 fw

Endurance: 155

Natural Armor: none

Powers: Telekinesis, Eternal Youth

Weaknesses: Sensitive to iron, Sensitive to electricity

Skills: Rhetoric 16, Occultism 16, Erotica 16, Sneak 20, Hide 25, Natural Science 20, Drugs and Poisons 20, Dodge 25

Attack Modes: Blowgun 16 (scr 1-14, lw 15-25, sw 26-34, fw 35+). Blown darts are usually poisoned with any of a variety of substances.

Magic: All Sidhe have a score of their EGO in either the Lore of Dreams, the Lore of Passion, or both.

Home: The Weir Wood

Number Encountered: 1d10+10 (15)

Hafgygr

The origin of the Grendel legend, Hafgygr are apelike things eight feet tall which live in swamps, rivers and fens. Their bodies covered with hair, either white or black, usually slick with water and knotted with briars and thistles. Their deformed, Neanderthalish faces lack a nose, and they have a great maw with sharp teeth, the size of a goosefish's jaws. Their eyes glow redly in the dark. They can hold their breath for several minutes, although they cannot breathe water. The underparts of their body are usually covered with leeches.

Like Jenny Greenteeth and other water monsters, Hayfygr are attracted to gaps in the Illusion by movement or noise above water, where they then surface to attack prey. They eat meat and sometimes use primitive weapons such as wooden clubs wielded in their enormously powerful arms. The females are more aggressive and intelligent than the males.

AGL 3D10 (16)

STR 4D10+20 (42)

CON 4D10+10 (32)

EGO 1D5 (3)

PER 2D10 (11)

Terror Throw Modification: --

Height: 300 cm

Weight: 110 kg

Senses: No smell; good eyesight, particularly under water and through darkness.

Movement: 8 m/round; 12 m/round swimming

Actions: 3

Initiative Bonus: +4

Damage Bonus: +8

Damage Capacity: 7 scratches=1 lw, 6 light wounds=1 sw, 5 serious wounds=dead.

Endurance: 240

Natural Armor: none

Skills: Swim 20

Attack Modes: 2 Hands 16 (scr 1-9, lw 10-15, sw 16-24, fw 25+), Bite 16 (scr 1-7, lw 8-12, sw 13-18, fw 19+)

Home: The Weir Wood, The Dark River

Number Encountered: 1

Ghouls (described in the text)

Ghouls have lived among humans in Egypt and the Middle East since the dawn of Time. Corpse-eating scavengers, they are nonetheless highly intelligent and attracted to the trappings of human society. They do not often fight openly, but prefer to waylay lone travellers, or to break into freshly dug graves. They live on the borders of Gaia, the Labyrinth, and the Illusion, finding their way through a network of catacombs and rituals similar to those used by the insane.

Their faces vary greatly. Some resemble jackals or bats; others resemble dried-up human corpses. Some of them have a huge hump of fatty flesh and blood, like an enormous scar, where their nose and forehead would be. (Like a camel's, the hump provides nourishment.) Their pupilless eyes can see in complete darkness, and their tiny nostrils have excellent smell. Their skin is leathery and resistant to sand, with great burrowing claws on their hands and feet. Their lipless mouths expose their teeth and their long, flickering tongues.

Ghouls are crafty, treacherous, and irreverent, and sometimes can be dealt with through bribery or diplomacy. They can use tools and learn human languages. They usually wear white wrappings or bandages to protect themselves from the heat of the desert; with human clothes, some of them can pass for human at a distance. In the past they posed as beggars and outcasts; nowadays many of them take a more violent approach bearing submachine guns and automatic weapons stolen from military forces in the Middle East.

Home: Metropolis, The Labyrinth, The Empty Quarter

(The ghouls described here are mostly inspired by H.P. Lovecraft, but research into the traditional ghoul of the Middle East should provide a regional focus and a distinction.)



Fenrir (described in the text)

These savage quasi-human beasts are the primary origin of the werewolf myth. They are the outcome of inbreeding and cruelty, coupled with an obscure form of pre-Christian shamanism, which was passed on among Russian nobles throughout the Middle Ages. The Lictors decided to eliminate the Fenrir problem in the late 19th century, and they have not been seen within the Illusion since the Russian Revolution.

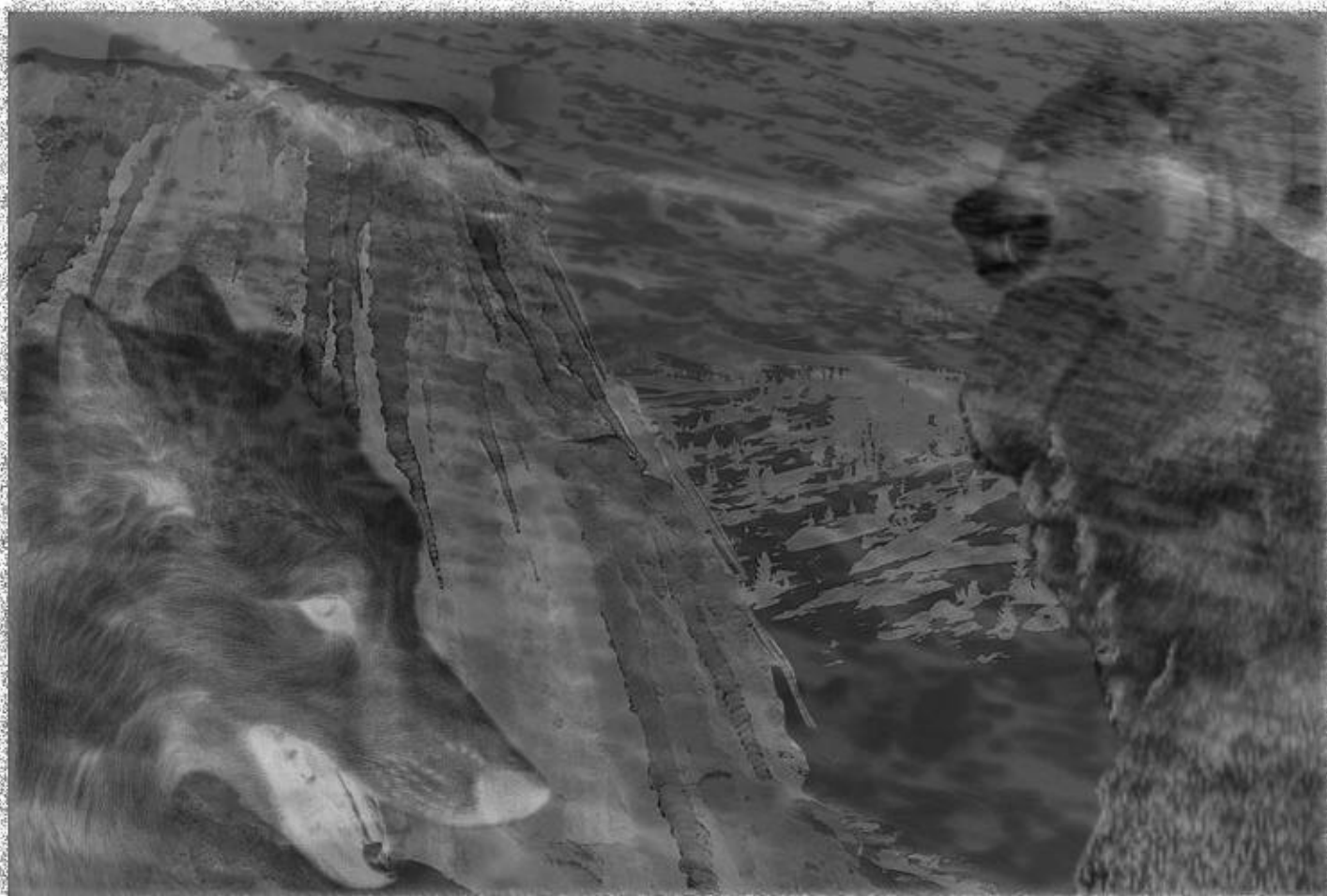
Fenrir appear as giant furry humanoids with the heads and claws of wolves. Their hair is white or gray to blend in with their arctic environment. Some have distinct beards or moustaches. Their eyes are solid black. They run in hunting packs across the ice, some on two legs, some on four. Each pack is ruled by the oldest, strongest member. The soles of their feet are broad, like snowshoes, and spiked to cause more damage in combat and ensure safe footing on the ice.

They can sometimes speak a few words of human languages, albeit in a horrifying, baying voice. As they grow older, their fur becomes thicker, and their muscles and skeleton become less like a human's and more like an enormous wolf's. They sometimes mate with humans to keep their breeding stock fresh. After generations of degeneracy, their only goals are to breed, survive and kill, although they also take pleasure in torture. Sometimes one of their kind demonstrates atavistic qualities of higher-level intelligence. It is said that the hearts of the oldest Fenrir are frozen in their chests, making them unkillable except by fire.

Fenrir can emit clouds of frost from their mouth and nostrils to incapacitate prey. The range is only four feet, approximately, but in close combat the intense cold (humid, and below -150 degrees Fahrenheit), coupled with the innate toxins of the Fenrir's saliva, can blind, shock and even flash-freeze parts of their prey. Needless to say, the Fenrir are immune to cold.

HOME: The Cold

(Note that this follows the rules for the 1st edition, where "Wolven" are distinctly not werewolves, unlike the 2nd edition Player's Handbook where they are.)



Inhabitants of Gaia: Humans

While in Gaia, humans die from violent shock, and gain or lose Mental Balance, just as they do elsewhere. They do not often die of old age, however, as they are more likely to de-evolve into another form over the course of years, unless they are already very old when they enter Gaia, or if they have some magic which spares them from Gaia's effects. Once a human begins the cycle of de-evolving into mindless protoplasm and back again (each cycle of which takes several decades), they can theoretically live forever unless they are killed by another creature -- although in Gaia this is almost assured. Once they are killed, their soul will re-enter the cycle of Heaven, Hell or rebirth as if they had died within the Illusion.

Normally it is impossible to retain one's memories and consciousness while undergoing the evolutionary cycle, but the Ainu and certain other tribal magicians know methods which sometimes work.

- * Survivors
- * Children of Gaia
- * Lukundoo

Survivors

It takes a strong person to survive in the endless wilderness, and madness can provide strength. Humans of Mental Balance below 75, but not quite Furies, often take a new form which allows them to compete with the other animals, on the terms of survival of the fittest.

Survivors maintain something of the original determination and memories which allowed them to live, but their bodies are altered. Their skin becomes hard, armored or leathery like a rhinoceros'. Their facial features become coarser and blunter, often resembling a shark or a bug, and their teeth become a rasp-like or saw-like contraption to enable them to feed more effectively. Their muscle structure becomes wildly exaggerated. They move quickly, but stiffly and mechanically, and in the end may gain metal and cybernetic parts as well; as their gear from the Illusion fails, they grow extra bodyparts to replace it (i.e., a hand becoming a survival knife). Survivors are paranoid and ruthless. When they escape from Gaia, or find what they are searching for, their lives usually end bloodily shortly afterward as realization of their physical alterations catches up to them.

AGL 2D10+10 (21)

STR 4D10 (22)

CON 2D10+20 (31)

COM 1D5 (3)

EGO 2D10 (11)

CHA 1D5 (3)

PER 2D10+5 (16)

EDU 1D3 (2)

Terror Throw Modification: --

Height: 200 cm

Weight: 80 kg

Communication: One language at skill score equal to their EGO.

Senses: As human. Improved smell.

Movement: 10 m/round

Actions: 4

Initiative Bonus: +9

Damage Bonus: +5

Damage Capacity: 7 scratches=1 lw, 6 light wounds=1 sw, 4 serious wounds=1 fw

Endurance: 155

Natural Armor: 1d10 (5) points of hardened skin

Mental Balance: -50-(9d10) (-95)

Advantages: Endure Hunger/Thirst, Endure Pain

Disadvantages: Rationalist, Touchy, Mental Constrictions (physical changes), Depression, Forgotten, Death Wish, Animal Enmity, Rage

Powers: Protective Skin, Natural Weapons, Regeneration, (some) Hunting Vision, Fast Reactions, Enhanced Senses

Weaknesses: Hunting Instinct, Cannibalism, Inhuman Appearance

Skills: Track 16, Sneak 16, Survival 20, Unarmed Combat 20 (or Martial Arts)

Attack Modes: Unarmed Combat 20, Fangs 15 (scr 1-6, lw 7-12, sw 13-17, fw 18+)

Children of Gaia

Nothing is wasted in Gaia. Reproductive fluid that falls on fertile ground -- or is absorbed by the living earth in the course of eating a being -- can germinate, forming the Children of Gaia.

The Children of Gaia are composed of clay, sod and dirt, itself alive in a meatlike fashion. 1-5 are born from a given batch, all of which share group Telepathy. On the outside they look like normal, if somewhat filthy, humans, identical to the person who sired them (though they may be of a different sex, or a younger age). Their hair is not composed of individual strands, rather of a solid mass of fleshlike substance. If killed they collapse into dirt and mud. They have no souls.

The Children of Gaia understand Gaia in a way humans cannot. Most are merely clever animals, though some of them develop split personalities instead, still believing themselves human. The normal ones encourage humans to de-evolve and degrade inside Gaia; they take a childlike, polymorphously perverse pleasure in tormenting their parents. They have a short lifespan (1d3 weeks) after which they become a heap of compost-like, cannibalistic soil; further crossbreeds from the same stock may create even more human-like Children, and the Children are not unwilling to try.

AGL 3D10 (16)

STR 3D10 (16)

CON 2D10+10 (21)

COM as parent

EGO 1D10 (5)

CHA 1D10 (5)

PER 2D10 (11)

EDU 0

Terror Throw Modification: n/a

Height: varies

Weight: varies

Senses: As human. Understands physical disorders and conditions on a cellular level. Knows when the Living Earth will move or attack.

Movement: 8 m/round

Actions: 3

Initiative Bonus: +4

Damage Bonus: +3

Damage Capacity: 6 scratches=1 lw, 5 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=1 fw

Endurance: 155

Natural Armor: none

Weaknesses: Controlled by external force (Gaia)

Attack Modes: Unarmed Combat 16
 Home: Gaia
 Number Encountered: 1d10 (5)

Lukundoo

Among the tribal peoples of the world, a cult of magicians exists that dares to understand Gaia. It's not a true organization as much as a phenomenon which has developed simultaneously in many places, particularly in South and Central America and Australia.

Lukundoo can sometimes be distinguished from other shamans by the fact that their fetishes and animal totems, although nominally corpses and furs, sometimes exhibit signs of life. They study the primal essence of Gaia, and seek to give their bodies and souls up to it, usually with passion magic and by mortification of the flesh -- becoming "a voice crying out in the wilderness." In modern days a global network of Lukundoo, forgotten by the lictors, plots to save the world from the encroaching domination of Metropolis, but they are going mad almost faster than the world's ecology is being destroyed. They are individually powerful, able to summon or breed deadly creatures and inflict diseases and curses.

Higher-mental-balance Lukundoo are muscular and calm, with an instinctual understanding of things. Lower-mental-balance Lukundoo gain the features of animals, such as muzzles, enlarged canines, extreme hair growth, and extra nipples. The snarling remains of Lukundoo shamans are often mistaken for werewolves, stalking in daytime in the fragments of their former robes. Many are cannibalistic predators. Most of them have brought things back from Gaia and their personal possessions include shrunken heads which refuse to stop mouthing for food, teeth of enormous animals, and flapping headbands made from the dried wings of birds.

AGL 1D10+11 (16)

STR 1D10+10 (15)

CON 1D10+10 (15)

COM 1D10 (5)

EGO 4D10 (22)

CHA 2D10 (11)

PER 3D10 (16)

EDU 1D5 (3)

Terror Throw Modification: n/a

Height: 190 cm

Weight: 70 kg

Senses: As human.

Movement: 7 m/round

Actions: 3

Initiative Bonus: +4

Damage Bonus: +3

Damage Capacity: 4 scratches=1 lw, 3 light wounds=1 sw, 3 serious wounds=dead

Endurance: 105

Mental Balance: -40-(4D10) (-62)

Advantages: Animal Friendship, Magical Intuition, (some) Endure Hunger/Thirst, Resist Heat/Cold, Resistance to Illness

Disadvantages: Wanted (by lictors), Persecuted, Fanaticism, Ecomaniac, (some) Unwilling Medium, Bad Reputation, Schizophrenia, Hygiene Disorders, Paranoia

Powers: (some) Enhanced Senses, Increased Ability (STR or CON)



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