

THE OUTCASTS™



Life as an Renegade Demigod in

EXALTED

ns'03

THE OUTCASTE™



Dragons Beyond the Empire

They are criminals, rebels, heroes, bumpkins and bastards, yet the Dynasty of the Scarlet Empire uses only a single word to describe those Terrestrial Exalted who live beyond the borders of the Realm: outcaste. But though they may not have graduated from one of the imperial secondary schools and may not possess a proper pedigree of parentage, they are Exalted nonetheless.

Eggs Gone From the Nest

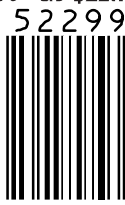
Exalted: The *Outcaste* details three major outcaste communities: the Forest Witches, the pirate band of Eos and Ossissa and the mighty Seventh Legion, the last First Age military formation remaining in Creation. Also included is a wealth of information on outcaste heroes born into the Threshold or to lower-class families in the Realm.



ISBN 1-58846-671-X WW8850 US \$22.99



9 781588 466716



www.white-wolf.com



BY R. SEAN BORGSTROM, ERIC BRENNAN,
GENEVIEVE COGMAN AND SCOTT TAYLOR



CREDITS

Authors: R. Sean Borgstrom, Eric Brennan, Genevieve Cogman, Scott Taylor
Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein•Hagen
Developer: Geoffrey C. Grabowski
Editor: John Chambers
Art Direction: Brian Glass
Artists: Ed Bourelle, Chynna Clugston-Major, Franchesco!, Andie Tong and UDON with Attila Adorjany, Omar Dogan, Eric Kim, Ryan Odagawa, Noi Sackda, Saka and Jim Zubkavich
Cover Art: Chris Stevens
Cover Design: Brian Glass
Layout and Typesetting: Brian Glass

SPECIAL THANKS

Barry “Shriekback” Andrews, for stopping by after the concert.

Jim “Spider-Man, Spider-Man, Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man” Zubkavich, for the long distance karaoke entertainment from Toronto.



1554 LITTON DR
 STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
 30083
 USA

© 2004 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, Mage the Ascension, World of Darkness, Aberrant and Exalted are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Hunter the Reckoning, Werewolf the Wild West, Mage

the Sorcerers Crusade, Wraith the Great War, Trinity, the Age of Sorrows, the Second Age of Man, Exalted the Dragon-Blooded, Exalted the Lunars, Exalted the Abyssals, Exalted the Sidereals, Exalted the Outcasts, Games of Divinity, Creatures of the Wyld, Exalted Storyteller's Companion, the Book of Three Circles, Scavenger Sons, Time of Tumult and Ruins of Rathess are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

For a free White Wolf catalog call 1-800-454-WOLF.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

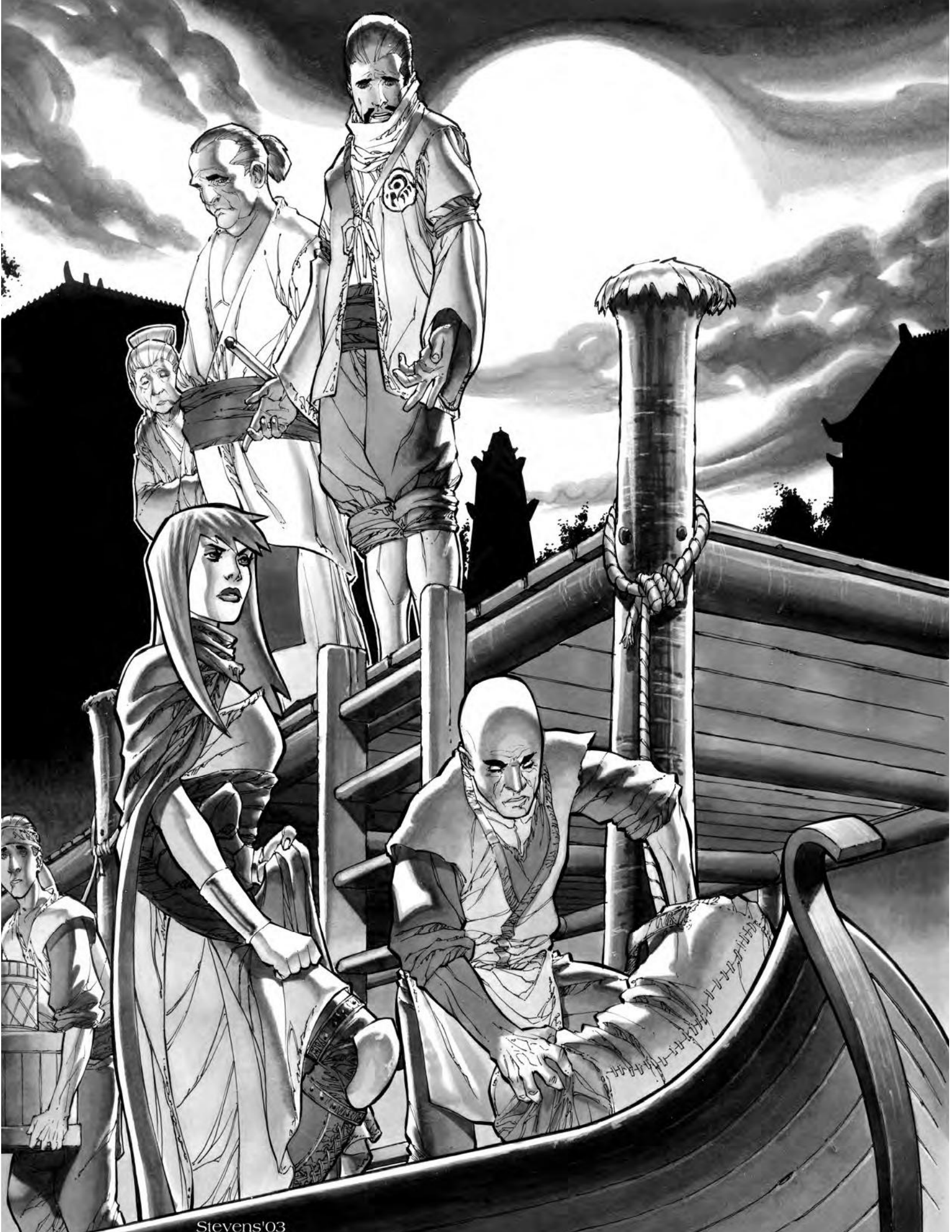
PRINTED IN CANADA

THE OUTCASTE™



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE: LOOKSHY AND THE SEVENTH LEGION	8
CHAPTER TWO: EOS AND OSSISSA	70
CHAPTER THREE: THE FOREST WITCHES	98
CHAPTER FOUR: LOST EGGS	134





INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Son for hire.
Sword for hire.
Suiou school.
Ittou Ougami.
—Kazuo Koike, *Lone Wolf and Cub*

If you asked an average lowborn inhabitant of the Blessed Isle how many Exalted there were, they would say that there were ten thousand, for that is what the Immaculate Texts name as the number of the Dragon-Blooded, and it is a population that the Dynasty has roughly maintained for many centuries, their numbers governed by the Empress' careful management of family stipends and the propensity of adult Dragon-Blooded to die through misadventure or in-

trigue. Certainly, the material published so far has dealt almost exclusively with those scions of privilege, the members of the Scarlet Dynasty.

But even excluding the miniscule number of Celestials, there are many thousands more Exalted in Creation than the Dragon-Blooded of the Dynasty. On the Blessed Isle itself, there are the "lost eggs," Terrestrial Exalted born to mortal families. In the heartland of the Realm, the blood of even



the commonest family is comparatively thick with the seed of the Dragons, and Exalted spring regularly from the population, children of countless forgotten or unrecorded liaisons. These Dragon-Blooded arise and are recruited by the agents of the Realm and made to serve it in the legions or the Immaculate Order.

Other Dragon-Blooded are born and raised entirely outside the Realm. Some of these Terrestrials are raised properly by Dragon-Blooded communities outside of the Dynasty and educated as potential Princes of the Earth. In the case of large communities such as Lookshy, this can provide an excellent education. However, in most cases, the Dragon-Blood is raised by a Threshold peasant and suddenly filled with power at or just before puberty. Such young Exalted are easy prey for the supernatural predators and politics of the Threshold, but those that survive their dangerous youth often become mercenary captains, merchant princes or petty kings.

Outcaste is about all of these Exalted, from the criminal to the merely disadvantaged, and it features a description of a number of outcaste groups and a general discussion of law and the treatment of non-Dynastic Exalts in the Realm. The Exalted groups featured range from sophisticated and organized (the massive military force of the Seventh Legion) to a handful of rebels and malcontents (Eos and Ossissa). Storytellers can include them in games as antagonists or as the context for player sworn brotherhoods.

OUTCASTES TODAY

Outcastes are critical to the future of Creation. The bastard children of the Dynasty are far more central to the unwinding story of the Age of Sorrows than their more civilized cousins would like to believe. Though they may be ignorant, lowborn, uncivilized or untutored in their powers, every outcaste is still a hero capable of the most heroic deeds. Weak though the outcaste without a panoply of artifacts may be among her supernatural peers, she is mighty in comparison to mortal men. While a daiklave and some training may not remedy the gap of culture between the two, they can make an outcaste the easy equal of a Dynastic scion. Each outcaste is, individually, an excellent servant for a god or Exalt seeking mighty minions. Every hero and divine army of the Age of Sorrows will travel with outcaste soldiers and emissaries. They may be recruited, beguiled or hired as mercenaries, but regardless, Dragon-Blooded independent of active ties to the Dynasty will be wooed and coveted by the generation of militant heroes soon to stride Creation.

WHERE ARE THE CADET BRANCHES?

Some readers are going to be looking for information on the cadet branches of the Dynasty that control the kingdoms on the northern shore of the Great Inland Sea. These individuals are not outcastes, but bumpkin nobility — though starved for proper culture, they are at least somewhat accepted by the Dynasts of the Realm. They will be detailed in a forthcoming supplement on the region.

For the Dragon-Blooded Host, the outcaste represent an untapped pool of manpower numbering in the thousands. If those who come to rule the Dynasty are wise, they will spread their arms to their brothers and sisters in the Threshold and offer the outcastes the legitimacy they crave in exchange for their military service. If there is a struggle for the throne, then those who are inferior in numbers or driven into the Threshold are sure to recruit heavily from among these exile heroes. If there is an imperial civil war of any length, those outcastes who ally themselves with the victors will ascend to influence and shape the government of the Realm-to-come. Those who choose incorrectly will surely be eliminated, as the victors destroy those enemies politically weak enough to be vulnerable. These victims are certain to include any mercenaries from outside the ranks of the Dynasty.

But the Dragon-Blooded are not alone in seeking the services of their exile cousins. Those things that make outcastes vulnerable to attack — their weakness, their poverty, their ignorance and their isolation — these things make the bumpkin Terrestrials vulnerable to recruitment as well. If the outcastes are weak compared to the Celestial Exalted and the more powerful gods and demons, this only means that outcastes in the Threshold are always open to offers of patronage and protection. Even the mighty Seventh Legion has treaties of alliance with the gods of Great Forks and the Emissary of the Council of Entities. Many lesser Dynasts are in a far weaker bargaining position than the last true legion of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate.

Some may believe in their causes, others may serve out of fear or greed for power and wealth, but all Dragon-Blooded separated from the Dynasty can expect that every Threshold faction, from the ancestor cult to the Cult of the Illuminated, will seek to sway the outcaste Terrestrials into their grasp. And sooner or later, one will succeed.

Some outcastes may maintain their independence for a time, and some few may even evade

entrapment in the finale of the Age of Heroes. For the average outcaste, the road to the world-wracking strife of the Age of Sorrows is as direct if not more so than that of some young Dynast just graduated from the House of Bells.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each chapter of **Exalted: The Outcaste** details a different fate for Terrestrial Exalted outside of the Realm. Each group varies wildly from the others — part of this book's purpose is to illustrate the possibilities available to Storytellers who set their games outside of the Realm. These are not the only outcaste groups in existence — Storytellers should feel free to add more.

Each chapter ends with a character creation summary for Outcastes of that group. Where appropriate, there is a character creation summary and supplementary information on any new or modified Traits, but this is only required in Chapter One: Lookshy and the Seventh Legion.

Introduction What you're reading right now. It tells you about the book's contents and suggests how you might want to approach the text.

Chapter One: Lookshy and the Seventh Legion details the largest Dragon-Blooded group outside of the Realm and the possessor of the most lavishly equipped military in the Second Age. Still able to

field formations of First Age war machines, the armies of Lookshy are a wonder of the fading Age.

Chapter Two: Eos and Ossissa describes the aforementioned pirates. Dwellers in the Wyld who prey upon the argosies of the Guild and take refuge among the Western isles of the impossible, these freebooters are slowly falling prey to their passions and becoming denizens of the Wyld themselves.

Chapter Three: The Forest Witches describes the strange and fragmentary magical haven that provides an eclectic band of Exalted brigands with a paradise both subtle and expensive. Vastly wealthy but also subject to the strange conditions of their powers, the Forest Witches are perhaps the most unusual of these outcaste groups and show well the sort of dangers and dark alliances that those Exalted isolated from the Realm can face.

Chapter Four: Lost Eggs details the fate of those outcastes who appear closest to the heart of the Realm — non-Dynastic Exalted born on the Blessed Isle. These Exalted have long been a quiet prop to the Dynasty and are given the choice of the “coin or the razor” — to serve the Dynasty as officers or monks. Together, these groups make up much of the Realm's professional officer corps and many of the monks of the Immaculate Order. This chapter also deals with the general fate of those Terrestrial Exalted who Exalt outside of the Blessed Isle but do not become part of an already-established outcaste group.





CHAPTER ONE

LOOKSHY AND

THE SEVENTH

LEGION



The city of Lookshy rose out of the ashes of Deheleshen, capital of the River Province of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate. Fragments of that city's grandeur still live in Lookshy's city center and the great Lookshy Manse. But the city has expanded far beyond its beginnings as a military encampment built around the ruins of a dead city, and today, it is one of the most important cities in the Scavenger Lands.

THE CITY OF LOOKSHY

The city of Lookshy occupies a promontory jutting into the mouth of the Yanaze, restricting unobstructed access to the River Province. The promontory was raised up from the surrounding countryside early in the First Age and is one of the most defensible pieces of real estate in Creation. Its perfect location and height, its deep wells, natural springs and other water sources and its extensive cavern system in dense granite are the results of far-reaching and powerful magics used by the original Solar Exalted who created Lookshy Manse.

The land approach to Lookshy is a trip through rolling hills and fields of wild grains bordered by forests. Several large towns nestle in these lands, but the first real sign of civilization is the great Lookshy Wall, stretching from one promontory edge to the other. The wall demarcates the border between the lands that Lookshy patrols and gathers duties from and the lands the Seventh Legion

calls its own. This curtain wall stands 30 feet tall and towers rise up every five miles along its path. Three heavily fortified gates pierce it; the blue-gray Sea Gate overlooks the fall into the ocean, the blue-green River Gate looks out over the Yanaze, and the forest green Center Gate, largest and most heavily traveled, sits midway between them. Previous attacks on the city have caused the defenders to reveal the existence of at least four sally gates, but their exact locations remain secret.

Behind the wall, the character of the land changes. Fields are managed and well irrigated, with carefully interspersed low walls to prevent accumulation of drifting snow in the winters — and to provide plenty of cover for archers in case of attack. Roads are wide, solidly constructed and frequently pass over small streams or riverlets with well built bridges — that can easily be dropped into the river to impede the progress of invaders. Small groupings of low stone buildings house tool sheds, field kitchens and dining halls or other facilities for workers — and provide rallying points for Lookshy's forces. Side lanes lead off regularly from the main road and frequently end in a guard post manned with Lookshy Home Guard regulars, troops who politely but firmly direct wanderers back to the main roads — further down those roads, out of casual sight, are the training areas of the Legion, where units practice combat maneuvers. Everything about the lands surrounding the city is developed with a careful eye toward how it can be



LEXICON

directorates: The seven directorates — Adjutant General, Operations, Intelligence, Stores, Security, Justice and Liaison — are responsible for overseeing the support operations of the Seventh Legion.

Gens: One of the Great Houses of Lookshy — well respected and great of power, even if overall less influential or central to Lookshy politics when compared to the imperial Great Houses' influence in the politics of the Realm.

Immaculate faith: The primary religion of the Seventh Legion, resulting out of a schism in the Immaculate Order after the formation of the Second Realm. Among other beliefs, the Immaculate faith of the Legion stresses personal responsibility, respecting the righteous orders of ones superiors — and correcting, or supplanting, those superiors if they are unrighteous.

metic: Nonnative resident of, or visitor to, Lookshy. Primarily a legal term, but metic sometimes carries a slight disparaging or exasperated undertone.

Order of Chaplains: Elite cadre of sorcerer-priests, called *sohei*, drawn from the ranks of the *Immaculate faith*.

rangers: Most well known of Lookshy's various commando units, the masked and hooded rangers are one of the premier special-operations units of the Second Age.

Seventh Legion: Last legion of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate. More formally known as the Seventh Legion (Reinforced) of the Dragon Shogunate at Lookshy.

sohei: A sorcerer-priest of Lookshy, responsible for policing interactions between the Celestial Bureaucracy and the citizens of Lookshy both at home and abroad. Trained in exorcism, the summoning and binding of spirits and demonology.

sorcerer-engineer: A senior sorcerer of Lookshy tasked with maintaining the most powerful First Age weapons and equipment and directing the enchantment of new artifacts.

strategos: Tactical and strategic advisor to a senior officer. The strategoi of the Operations Directorate are responsible for producing training programs, tactical and strategic analysis and risk assessment.

used in a state of war or siege — and how it might be used against the Legion if taken.

Eventually, a visitor comes within sight of the Upper City. The Upper City is divided by five great walls and a number of lesser walls that separate the city into districts of varying sizes. The great walls are numbered in order from the inside out. Defensive towers buttress each wall. There are 20 towers of battle, built immediately after the Contagion and well equipped with First Age weapons and defenses, and a larger number of lesser towers of more recent construction. Gatehouses are placed to allow passage between districts. Each gatehouse is wide enough for three warstriders to walk through abreast and are normally open except in times of crisis. On the western shoreline of the promontory, hundreds of feet below the Upper City, lies the Lower City of Lookshy, centered around the city's military and civilian docks and shipping facilities.

Visitors to Lookshy are welcome in the Fourth Ring and in the Lower City. Travel deeper into the city is allowed only with a pass, but these are easily acquired with a legitimate reason or a sponsor willing to vouch for the visitor. These small plaques of unbreakable First Age material are nearly impossible to forge (Wits + Larceny, Difficulty 3, and a character must have Occult 3 and Lore 2 to attempt the task). Not coincidentally, the "foreign quarter" (as it is

known by many visitors) is also the district most patrolled by the Security and Intelligence Directorates.

APPEARANCE

At first glance, Lookshy certainly doesn't give the appearance of an armed military camp — walls are brightly painted, the concrete paved roads are wide and tree-lined, and there seems as much space devoted to parks, gardens and fountains or ponds as there is buildings and fortifications. When one looks closer, however, it becomes obvious that as much care has gone into the planning and layout of Lookshy as any military campaign. Brightly painted walls make it difficult for dark-clad skulkers to hide against and show up any splatters of blood. The city's trees invariably bear fruit or nuts, and the various greenery provides emergency pasturage and additional space for growing foodstuffs during a siege. Every aspect of Lookshy's layout is designed to turn the city into a killing field for invaders, to make a would-be conqueror pay for every foot of ground captured. All of this is easy to forget, however, because Lookshy was also designed as a home, a refuge for the Legion where its soldiers can feel, if not altogether safe, at least more secure than in any other place in Creation.

DISTRICTS OF THE CITY

The city of Lookshy is divided into a multitude of districts. Each district has a purpose, but there is always overlap between districts, both for ease of access to vital services and redundancy — it is difficult to knock out any one industry or service with an attack on a given district.

THE FOURTH RING

The Fourth Ring, between the Fifth and Fourth Walls, is one of two areas in Lookshy where foreigners are truly commonplace — the other being the Lower City. Here are metic-run businesses and warehouses, temples and guild houses, teashops and apartments, as well as facilities where trade between Lookshy merchants and metics is conducted, and housing for dozens of independent mercenary companies who choose to winter in Lookshy instead of Nexus or compounds in the Hundred Kingdoms. Gate security between the Fourth Ring and the other city districts is nearly as tight as that on the main gates, and patrols of justicars or trusted mercenaries are common.

The Agricultural District: The largest district outside the Old City, the Agricultural District contains not only warehouses and granaries, but fields of vegetables and other necessities as well. Most produce grown here are vegetables, fruits and herbs (especially the all-important

hot peppers, grown in fields or greenhouses as needed). This district's output is not intended to provide for the entire city in times of siege, but rather, to supplement huge stockpiles of grains and other staples stored deep in caverns under the city.

The Trade District: The Trade District is centered on the main gate and is one of the city's largest districts. Most land-based trade is conducted here — nautical trade tends to be centered in the Lower City, for obvious reasons. The Trade District is home to a variety of businesses oriented toward meeting the needs of visitors to Lookshy — there are restaurants, teahouses, apartment buildings and homes for long-term residents, as well as meeting halls and offices for trade factors. The Guild maintains offices and a small trade hall here, and several non-Lookshy merchant houses also maintain permanent facilities in the trade district.

The District of Blades: Directly east of the Trade District are located many bladesmiths, weapon shops, armorers and other sellers of arms, as well as salons, training halls and garrisons for smaller, or less prestigious, mercenary companies. The shops of several equipment resellers are also located here, saving merchants and mercenaries the trouble of traveling further east to the District of Craftsmen or passing through the Fourth Wall into the Districts of Artisans or Engineers.





RUINS OF A FORGOTTEN AGE

More than any other inhabited city in the Threshold, Lookshy bears the mark of the First Age. Lookshy Manse and Deheleshen's remaining buildings form its center, great constructs of alabaster and gold that tower over the city. Many streets are lit at night with eternal glow spheres or sunstones, and artificial lighting is common in many households and barracks. Most buildings have running water and advanced sewage systems drain waste away from flush toilets. Windows are lined with sheet glass. The oldest buildings have no windows, but sections of wall can be turned transparent with the pass of a hand. Lift tubes transfer cargo and passengers between the Lower City and the Upper. Automaton and golems are common enough to not garner notice from natives, performing tasks too hazardous even for slaves. Sky chariots and other flying machines hover silently over the city, keeping watch for trouble.

Lookshy is a reflection of what the Shogunate once was — but it is greatly diminished. Many automaton have failed or are in poor repair, and the number of flying machines grows smaller each year, as they slowly succumb to age and fail. Though the central parts of the city and the towers of battle are wonders of First Age construction, more recent construction is cut stone and mortar. They are excellent buildings, of excellent manufacture, but mere pale shadows of what was once possible, when buildings were summoned whole up out of the earth or grown out of materials that no longer exist. Oil-burning lanterns and lamps increasingly replace artificial lighting, and a myriad of other conveniences are slowly failing as materials needed for their repair are siphoned off for military projects.

The Hexagon: The most respected and well-known mercenary companies aligned with Lookshy make their winter quarters here — three large units and a dozen smaller companies (see “Military Alliances,” below). The largest units have their own independent compounds and are responsible for manning the perimeter walls that overview the Hexagon — they also provide peacekeeping patrols for the Hexagon and the District of Blades, in cooperation with the Justice Directorate.

The District of Craftsmen: Most businesses and workshops here are centered around production of various non-weapon trade goods — leather workers and metalsmiths of all sorts, weavers and clothiers, carpenters and construction firms. There are also many homes and other businesses here as well — few workers want to spend much time traveling home after a hard day at work, and so, this district is more self-sufficient than many others.

THE THIRD RING

The Third Ring is mostly made up of businesses or crafts that have some need to interact on a frequent basis with outsiders but are not solely associated with foreign trade or business. Here, there are schools and salons, centers of industry and research and the shops of many fine craftsmen.

The Green Hunt: Originally part of the O-Daimyo's hunting preserve, and still named after it, this area is largely kept in its original wooded state. There are a handful of small houses that have been built here, a small number of temples and tombs tucked away in odd corners and a few monuments, but otherwise, the Green Hunt has been allowed to grow wild, within the confines of its walls.

The District of Schools: Many of Lookshy's finest salons, training halls and dojos make their home in this district, close to both the Trade District and the Green Hunt. The gates between this district and the Artisans District are often only cursorily manned, due to the amounts of traffic between them. Also located here are three hospitals staffed by citizens and helots trained in Great Forks and counted amongst the finest outside of Great Forks or the Imperial City.

The District of Artisans: The craftsmen and artisans who populate this district are some of the finest in their trade — although there are few weaponsmiths here, they are the best Lookshy has to offer. There are also glass blowers, woodworkers, makers of fine tools and fine instruments, stoneworkers, jewelers and builders of clockworks.

The District of Savants: Actually two districts, these adjoining spaces are home to much of Lookshy's heavy industry. The massive foundries, powered by Essence engines and bound fire elementals, located here produce raw metal ingots to be used in other districts, cast massive sheets of jade-alloyed steel to be used in the construction of warstriders and skyships and mill huge logs down into planks. Most work done here is large scale — there are few makers of jewelry in this noisiest of districts.

The Academy of Sorcery: The Academy of Sorcery is located near the District of Savants, despite the frequent need for silence and solitude, for two simple reasons — no other group was willing to relocate there during the most recent expansion, and no other organization in Lookshy is as likely to wreak as much havoc. It is thought better, therefore, to place the Academy near the savants, who have fire-fighting and disaster-recovery equipment handy at all times and whose buildings are sturdier and harder to damage than those in nearly any other district in the city.

THE SECOND RING

The Second Ring is a mixture of warehouses, residences and administration buildings. Many buildings here date to just after the wars against the Realm, are heavily fortified and have many useful enchantments and features built into them.

The Port District: Much of the Port District is taken up with homes and barracks for the Lookshy navy, the naval academy of Lookshy and the residences of Lookshy's more prominent merchant princes. Because of local geography, homes closest to the district's eastern wall are most highly prized — the land gently slopes upward to the east, and those homes closest to the wall have a stunning view of the Inland Sea.

The Deheleshen Lighthouse: The Lighthouse has existed for as long as any mortal can remember, a slim spire rising up from the western cliffs nearly 30 stories into the air, surmounted by a great Essence powered lantern that can be seen for dozens of leagues in every direction. The Deheleshen Lighthouse is one of the Inland Sea's primary navigational beacons and is also a level 5 Fire Manse, with the Jade of Puissant Seeing as its Hearthstone (see p. 50).

The Warehouse District: The Warehouse District is mostly concerned with storing goods intended for shipment — there are military warehouses here as well, but most equipment or goods intended for long-term storage are kept in underground bunkers, rather than surface warehouses. Major thoroughfares connect the Warehouse District with the Deheleshen Lighthouse and the main lift tubes to the Lower City and the Trade District.

The District of Barracks: Most soldiers stationed in Lookshy who do not have permission to live "off base," so to speak, live in barracks in this district. Parade grounds, drilling fields and the occasional block of shops and dining halls separate these uniform buildings, each holding a single talon.

The District of the Legion: Although much of the Seventh Legion's administrative and logistics structure is housed in Lookshy Manse or the Aviary, there is some overflow into this district, which acted as the business district of Lookshy several centuries ago. Many buildings here have been converted from other purposes to serve administrative needs, and in some cases, this conversion has been incomplete — some military offices occupy former apartments in the upper stories of shops, for example.

The District of Justice: Access to this district is limited — the single entry gate leads from the District of the Legion, and it is heavily manned at all times. This district is the headquarters of the Justice and Security Directorates, and the closest thing Lookshy has to a permanent prison, Nightwatch Citadel, is located here.

Residential Areas: Various residences occupy most of the Second Ring — the Gentes have sprawling compounds located here, as do the wealthiest merchant houses. One district is composed of various ambassadorial residences, carefully isolated — and watched. The southernmost districts are mostly smaller houses and apartment complexes, occupied by senior noncommissioned officers and junior officers, skilled tradesmen who don't wish to live close to their shops and a handful of others.

NIGHTWATCH CITADEL

Once the home and command center for the Daimyo of Intelligence Services for the River Province, Nightwatch is a level 3 Earth-aspected Manse, but it could be re-aspected to the sun with little effort. The squat domed citadel is a rare exception to Lookshy's other First Age buildings — it is jet and silver, a dark and somber place with a shadowy past. The Hearthstone of Nightwatch Citadel is a stone of judgment.

THE OLD CITY

The Fair Folk never reached the innermost sections of Deheleshen, despite breaching the inner walls. This left Lookshy Manse, the Aviary and many other buildings in what is now called the Old City undamaged — and these mansions and fortresses are now the heart of Lookshy. Few people actually live in the Old City — some of the General Staff and their assistants live here, as does the Shogunate Bureaucracy, but the total permanent population of this district is less than 5,000.

Instead, most buildings here are given over to the Operations Directorate, the General Staff, the Sky Guard and the Home Guard. The Black Legion stands watch over Lookshy Manse and access to the deep caverns that form Lookshy's main repositories of weapons, equipment and food in times of trouble.

Lookshy Manse: In the First Age, Lookshy Manse (and much of Deheleshen's construction) was considered daring and revolutionary, made up of smooth curves, spheres, domes and minarets instead of the squared-off look of Solar-dominated construction. The Manse is well-protected against attack and thoroughly capable of responding in kind — numerous Essence cannons (see p. 52) line its structure, firing from weapon loops hidden behind flourishes in the ornamentation, and other weapons are available as well. The Manse can raise powerful shields against attack — these should be treated as haze shields (see p. 58), but double the cost in Essence and the effects (at both levels). Lookshy Manse is one of only three ways of entering the caverns of Lookshy — there is also an entrance in the Aviary and one in the Port Citadel (see p. 14).

The Aviary: One of the largest intact First Age buildings in Creation, the Aviary towers above the city — only the Deheleshen Lighthouse is taller. The Aviary acts as both berthing space and construction framework for the massive skyships of Lookshy — the entire fleet can dock at once, if necessary, and even the largest of legendary skyships could make its home here. The Aviary is a level 5 Manse, Air-aspected, and its Hearthstone is the Gem of the Wind's Secrets (see p. 50).





THE LOWER CITY

Located on a great beach at the base of Lookshy promontory, the Lower City is protected from hurricane or tidal wave by the great Sea Wall, a vast featureless First Age wall that rises 50 feet out of the water even at the highest tide. Lookout towers along its length allow the harbormaster to observe any incoming vessel as it comes into view, and a tower of battle stands silent watch over the sea below.

The Lower City is bustling with activity at all hours — even when the harbor pilots cease operations at nightfall, there are always cargos to be unloaded, warehouses to be filled or emptied and shipments to be moved upcity to the Warehouse District 500 feet above. The military docks closest to the Sea Wall are busy even when the commercial docks close, refitting triremes and First Age warships under the light of huge sunstones. The Lower City is dedicated to commerce and trade: There are many short-term apartments and hostels but few homes. There are many teahouses and taverns, but few fine restaurants. There are many warehouses and brothels but few craftsmen, save those dedicated to the nautical trade.

There are several ways from the Lower City into the Upper. The main path for those seeking entrance to the Upper City is via the lift tubes located in the great stone galleries behind the Port Citadel, huge Essence-driven elevators that carry tons of cargo, dozens of passengers and other goods and equipment between the two cities. Many

of these tubes either function sporadically or not at all. What remains is sufficient to handle each day's cargo — but there is usually a wait unless one has priority or can convince the lift guards that one has a good reason to jump queue. Command rank is often, but not always, sufficient. Massive stairwells and ramps have also been cut into the promontory, and there are those who prefer to use them, despite the exertion involved, rather than the sometimes erratic, and occasionally dangerous, lift tubes. Lastly, one can scale the promontory cliff face. This is a Dexterity + Athletics task, difficulty 4, in good weather — the rock is sheer, and effort has been taken over the centuries to obliterate the most useful handholds and paths.

The Port Citadel: The Port Citadel sits with its back against the granite walls of the Lookshy Promontory. Nearly as massive as Lookshy Manse itself, the Port Citadel is the last line of defense between an ocean invasion and access to the Upper City — and its defenses reflect this vital role. Powerful weapons are mounted in its towers, and its walls are as unbreakable as any in Creation. The Port Citadel is a level 3 Water Manse, and its Hearthstone is a freedom stone.

THE CAVERNS OF LOOKSHY

The Lookshy Promontory is riddled with caves. Sunk deep into the granite bedrock, some of these caves descend far below sea level. Most are used for storage — massive reserves of grain, conventional weapons and other supplies have been stored in them over the centuries, in preparation

PRIORITY TRANSIT PASS

Even without human interference, the various parts of Lookshy can be difficult to navigate between — the city was built with defense in mind, not ease of movement. When guard posts, delays waiting for lift tubes and the other hassles of military life are taken into account, the trip from the Lower City to the Main Gate can be interminable for someone in a hurry.

A priority transit pass helps to negate some of the delay. Such a pass allows an officer or a courier to bypass all but the most cursory of identity checks, to step to the head of any queue or waiting list and to otherwise get around protocol and mandatory delays. Naturally, they are highly sought after. Just as naturally, they are hard to come by. An officer has to personally justify each transit pass he issues before the base liaison officer, and vouches for the identity and good conduct of each person issued a transit pass under his purview — with the accompanying responsibility for those bearers' misconduct.

Priority transit passes are similar to normal travel passes allowing entry into the main parts of Lookshy, but they are a brilliant red in color and even more difficult to forge (difficulty 5). A priority pass does not authorize an officer or civilian to travel anywhere she wouldn't normally be permitted, but it *will* get a guard commander's attention if presented — he probably won't allow the bearer into a restricted area, and certainly not unescorted, but he will at least listen to a reasonable request, because some officer has put his career on the line to secure a pass for the bearer.

OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

Lookshy is built to withstand a siege and urban warfare with First Age weapons. Buildings, particularly older ones, can be extremely tough to dent — let alone destroy — with anything less than an implosion bow, and the city's great walls were designed to withstand assault by warstriders, Thousand-Forged Dragons and skyships. Additionally, many buildings in the Old City are of imperishable First Age construction and nearly impervious to damage. To utterly destroy Lookshy Manse or the Aviary, for example, would require a First Age weapon of mass destruction or hundreds of attacks by lesser weapons.

Most First Age buildings have some kind of additional defenses and weapons. Usually, these are relatively minor — fire lances or light implosion bows — but powerful haze shields are mounted on all towers of battle, and each outer tower contains a tornado cannon in its arsenal, as well as numerous implosion bows, Essence cannons and other, more esoteric defenses and weapons, some now barely understood (if at all — more than one tower has a device marked "Use Only in Case of Real Emergency" with a brief explanation of its operation — and no mention of what it does).

TYPICAL DEFENSE RATINGS

Object	Soak (B/L)	Health Levels to Damage	Health Levels to Destroy	Notes
Lesser Wall*	30/30 (10)	60	100	None
Greater Wall*	50/50 (30)	80	160	None
Tower	40/30 (10)	60	120	None
Tower of Battle**	50/50 (30)	80	160	None
Normal Building	24/16	50	100	Depending on size of building
First Age Building	40/30 (20)	50-120	100-250	Depending on size of building**
Lookshy Manse**	60/60 (50)	250	450	None
Aviary**	50/40 (30)	100	150	None
Port Citadel**	60/60 (50)	100	200	None
Nightwatch Citadel**	40/20 (20)	150	250	None

Numbers in parentheses represent the minimum amount of damage that must be done in a single attack to damage the structure. Attacks doing less than this amount do no damage at all.

* This is to damage a section of wall large enough for a single character to squeeze through at a time.

** Cannot be damaged by non-magical attacks — requires First Age weapons, Charms or sorcery to affect. Immune to Rain of Doom and other similar effects that do not damage objects made of Essence or the Five Magical Materials.



for an eventual siege. Others have been prepared as emergency quarters and other facilities — even carefully vented workshops and forges. Caves have been extended out to the cliff face, where their commanding overlook of the bay affords the weapons placed there excellent coverage of incoming fleets. Many larger caverns have been turned into secret training facilities — some merely out of the public eye, where rangers can learn their craft in silence, while others are exacting replicas of some of the most famous buildings, Manses and chambers in Creation, painstakingly duplicated in every detail so that Lookshy operatives and rangers can prepare for possible missions against them. Deep cisterns and wells provide much of the drinking water for Lookshy. Finally, the vaunted arsenals of Lookshy are mostly below ground, with the most dangerous (or unfathomable) artifacts and weapons stored in deep, carefully warded and secured caverns far from the city — or any contact with the outside world.

THE POPULATION OF LOOKSHY

Lookshy's exact population is quite deliberately difficult to determine. Official census numbers suggest a permanent population of around 120,000 or so — only on closer examination does it become clear that this number does not include “personnel on detached service.” Those records are Secrets of the Shogunate and are not made public, as they include personnel on active duty (whether in the guards, the field forces, or the navy), the redoubts, military advisors, ambassadors and others. It also does not include slaves or persons serving periods of indentured servitude — or the various foreign legion units. When these various groups are taken into account, the population swells to closer to 300,000, though only a little over

200,000 of them are actual Lookshy citizens or helots, and the actual population of Lookshy itself, including metics, ranges from about 150,000 to a little over 200,000, depending on the time of year.

This population would be unable to support the massive military structure that Lookshy maintains were it not for the heritage of the First Age. The Legion makes significant use of artifacts, Charms and sorcery (both mortal and Terrestrial) in nearly every aspect of Lookshy's military and civilian sectors. In addition, the Seventh Legion inherited a powerful infrastructure and has built upon it. Bureaucracy Charms allow small groups of functionaries to do the work of entire bureaus. Artifacts and enchantments keep industry moving at a steady pace and enhance the productivity of fields and workers. Terrestrial spells summon up demons, elementals and spirits to help in manufacture, enchant golems to aid in tasks and enhance materials and finished goods, while mortal sorceries help smooth everything along in minor ways.

APPEARANCE AND CULTURE

Although the people of Lookshy are as disparate as any in the Scavenger Lands, their blood sees less intermingling with Fair Folk or spirit blood. Lookshy mortals tend to be tall, strong of build and generally handsome, as befits a culture that rewards physical fitness and martial prowess. As a rule, the people are fit, and while older Lookshy natives often carry some extra padding, they cannot be said to be fat, nor can their strength, the result of good diet and a daily regimen of exercise, be denied. Hair is usually cut short or worn in elaborate braids that can be quickly pinned up under a helmet — wearing one's hair down is a sign of trust and perceived security in Lookshy.

THE SHOGUNATE CALENDAR

Lookshy, like many parts of Creation where the Realm has little influence, uses the calendar of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate, rather than the Realm revised calendar. In the Shogunate calendar, major units of time are *epochs* and are divided into five *eras*, each 25 years in length. These are further divided into elementally associated *cycles*, each five years long. Cycle years are named after a creature associated with that element, in a sequence that ranges from risen to fallen. To be born in a rising year is a sign of great potential — likewise, those born in a fallen year are often seen as unlucky, or even cursed, though many inhabitants of Lookshy see this as a burden to be overcome, rather than a sentence to be endured.

Each epoch is numbered, and eras are named after metals — bronze, gold, copper, iron, and mercury — so the Realm Year 768 is the Year of the Mouse, Bronze Era of the 11th Epoch of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate. In casual conversation, this is simply called “the Year of the Mouse” for recent events or “the Year of the Bronze Mouse” for events that occurred in the not-to-distant past.

	Risen	Ascending	Primacy	Descending	Fallen
Air	Mospid	Hawk	Hybroc	Eagle	Raiton
Earth	Boar	Bull	Bear	Spider	Snake
Fire	Mouse	Dragon	Phoenix	Salamander	Basilisk
Water	Carp	Serpent	Dolphin	Siaka	Squid
Wood	Mantis	Cat	Wolf	Wolverine	Rat

Clothing tends toward the practical, and garments that are little more than duty uniforms in civilian colors and cut are surprisingly popular — a fact that's less surprising once one realizes that Lookshy duty and dress uniforms are designed for hard duty, while retaining surprising comfort. Dress wear is more elaborate — cheongsams, kimonos, flowing dresses and elaborate tunics and vests with skirts or pants predominate — but is still conceived with practicality in mind — outfits are designed to be moved and fought in, and boots, slippers or flats are universal footwear. Some Dragon-Blooded wear armor even to dress occasions, often special suits of half-armor that are decorative and colorful but still more protective than a cheongsam.

Music is a universal part of Lookshy culture and life, and the human voice is the one instrument a soldier always has with her. The Legion has always sung — cadences while marching, chanties to time jobs aboard ship, mnemonic chants to teach children history — or to remind soldiers the proper firing sequence for a tornado cannon. Despite the near-universal popularity of singing, this is not to say all Lookshy natives are accomplished performers — the most that can be said for many is that they are in rhythm, enthusiastic and *loud*. Still, enough natives have some real skill that the concept of a troubadour from Lookshy is far from an alien one to Scavenger Land natives — and rangers often use “wandering musician” as a successful cover for missions. Although instruments are limited by what can be carried in the field, some are prominent — horns, drums, whistles and pipes all see frequent use, and artifact instruments are popular. While some forms of traveling entertainment are less highly regarded, a skilled musician will never suffer from hunger or lack of coin in Lookshy, so long as she behaves herself — even their much-known thirst for new music is not normally enough for Legion regulars to break operational security.

Lookshy cuisine is fairly simple, though hotter than most Easterners would prefer. Hot peppers are fairly easily grown, and a bit of heat helps to disguise the fact that a soldier is eating something he'd really rather not. This necessity of the military kitchens led the culture to a preference for spicy cuisine. Lookshy cheerfully imports dishes and cooking styles from other cultures, and one can find nearly any type of cooking in Lookshy. How well a dish tastes to a member of its originating culture depends on how well the flavor survives the Lookshy tendency to throw a couple of Chiaroscuran chilies into almost anything. This is especially true for dishes already modified to account for some unavailable ingredient.

Though some old-fashioned Dragon-Blooded (particularly in Gens Maheka) hold to the idea that iconic artwork is a minor blasphemy against the Five Dragons, most Lookshy natives are defiantly iconic in their art, painting sprawling murals of military victories and pastoral landscapes and embroidering elaborate tapestries and rugs.



Lookshy



Most have little use for statuary or paintings — they are rarely portable, and many natives place great pride in their ability to have everything they truly value packed and ready to move in less than an hour. Murals are seen as a way of decorating walls, not as a specific form of art.

ECONOMY AND TRADE

Although traditionally a society deriving its wealth from mercenary service, Lookshy derives nearly as much income from commerce as it does from lending troops. The prevalence of sorcery (mortal and Terrestrial) and command of First Age magics gives the city-state a strong economic base and allows it to produce excellent quality weapons and equipment with a fraction of the manpower cities such as Nexus utilize. Lookshy merchants span most of the East and parts of the South and the North in their travels — they avoid the West only because of the hazards involved in such long journeys and prefer to trade through middlemen for most goods they require from those faraway islands.

Although it is commonly asserted that all Lookshy merchants are spies for the Intelligence Directorate, this is not, in fact, true. They are all requested to keep their eyes and ears open and to report anything they may see that is unusual or noteworthy back to their factors — who do make regular reports to the Intelligence Directorate. There are several merchant houses and companies that are fronts for the Intelligence Directorate, and so, no denials or assertions to the contrary are made. It's better to let the world believe all Lookshy merchants are spies and to treat them equally (and thus predictably), than to try and conceal which houses are or aren't working for the directorate.

Despite these suspicions, Lookshy merchants are welcome nearly everywhere they go. Their reputation for hard but scrupulously honest and fair dealings and for excellent quality merchandise that arrives on time barring the most unusual of circumstances more than makes up for what intelligence they may gather along the way. Lookshy merchants are occasionally hassled by pirates or bandits but rarely more than twice. Not only do they keep well-trained caravan guards, and well-armed ships (including a number of privately held First Age ships), Lookshy merchants are usually able to call upon whatever Lookshy forces are available locally to help them out. Successful pirates have learned that attacking Lookshy merchant ships can be very profitable — but that it is more likely to prove very fatal, either immediately or when the Lookshy navy catches them.

THE SALONS

Numerous private schools and tutors make their homes in Lookshy. While teachers of nearly any subject can be found in Lookshy, most are dedicated to the arts of war — weapon masters and salons can be found to teach nearly any martial art or weapons form known in Creation (and a few unknown in Creation, outside of Lookshy), if the price is right.

The elite salons are the most renowned of these schools. Salons are more than mere training camps for brawlers and archers — they are intended to take the most promising children of Lookshy and mold them into military leaders. They teach not only weapons and tactics, but diplomacy, history, and literature, mathematics and linguistics. Most children attending these academies are scions of the Gentes or the lesser houses, but each salon sponsors scholarships for helot children each year — these slots (normally 10 percent of the total student body) are paid for in part by the Adjutant General. Another 10 percent of the student population is set aside for metic children — normally the offspring of Marukani herdmasters, Great Forks merchants or other of Lookshy's allies, but daimyos and princesses from all over Creation send their children to be raised in Lookshy salons. These often spirited and headstrong students can be demanding of time and patience, but training them is highly profitable, both for the salons and for Lookshy, and some salons specialize in teaching the scions of metic royalty, developing a reputation for turning spoiled princes into worthy leaders.

Membership in a salon offers more than simply education — many are also social clubs, where graduates meet to reminisce, to discuss the day's events and to relax. There are (usually friendly) rivalries between various salons as to which affords the best preparation for a lifetime of service. Membership in a particular salon can be quite useful for a military career, and therefore, competition for entry into the most desirable salons can be fierce.

CITIZENSHIP

Inhabitants of Lookshy are broken down into five basic classes or groups, with a handful of subclasses. These classes are usually not discriminatory in nature — citizens and helots serve and fight together on military duty. It is not unheard-of for an experienced helot to be placed in command of inexperienced citizens — as in most things in Lookshy, merit and skill take precedence over family or station. All permanent inhabitants of Lookshy are required to serve a term of not less than five years in the military. Although basic living stipends and discretionary pay are not taxed, any moneys made on the side (from trade, services or whatever) are taxed at a flat rate above a basic income level set each year by the Liaison officer. The Legion reserves the right to appropriate goods and property from its citizens if necessary, but it requires that the Liaison or Stores Directorate make suitable compensation to those whose property is taken. Those who have fulfilled their service obligation are required to serve in the reserve, if sound of mind and body. This reserve status carries with it a requirement to attend daily calisthenics or weapon practice, and one weekend a month is spent in military drill — but these duties are flexible in schedule and seen as easily discharged — and even fun — by most inhabitants.

SUBJECT TO THE NEEDS

Freedoms and rights in Lookshy are extensive, but they are *never* absolute. In every contract or trade agreement, there is the final stipulation “subject to the needs of the Seventh Legion” — which basically means that if the General Staff decides it’s a bad idea, it doesn’t happen.

In normal day-to-day business, this stipulation means nothing — merchants can sell to whomever they please, and landlords can rent to whomever they like. Business with outsiders gets somewhat more interesting but not overly so. There is a Department of Trade, shared by the Stores and Intelligence Directorates, which oversees and approves trade agreements. However, outside of the sale of artifacts and weapons or equipment that have been declared Secrets of the Shogunate (such as the strongbow), sales to foreign groups not currently engaged in hostilities with Lookshy are normally rubber-stamped.

It does, however, mean the General Staff can always step in and deny a given sale of weapons, an employment contract or any other deal if it believes that action will “unduly impact the military readiness of the Legion, in whole or in part.” It also means that, if necessary, the Legion can force a helot to stay in a given position despite her desire to change jobs or require a citizen to make the choice between staying where he is or leaving Lookshy altogether — and potentially never returning. This power is rarely exercised, but it is nearly absolute — there is no room for appeal if the General Staff is unanimous in its decision.

Citizens make up the top of Lookshy’s social ladder, with the members of the Gentes occupying the top rung. Citizens are free — they can own property and run independent businesses, may speak at city councils run by the Base Liaison Office and, once they have discharged their military obligations, may even leave Lookshy if they choose. Citizens run businesses, manage the Legion’s industries and are often specialists and low-ranking officers in the Seventh Legion.

Helots are not free — but neither are they slaves. Helots may attend, but are not allowed to speak in, council — but they are allowed to join trade associations, which can elect representatives to the council to speak on their behalf. They may not own land, but they may own other property. While they can be assigned duties or tasks as needed, they may also request work transfers, which are normally approved if the helot has the necessary skills. Helots are paid, and their families receive the same basic

protections afforded citizens. Each year, a number of helots are granted their citizenship, either through years of devoted duty in Lookshy service or great bravery on the battlefield, as helots make up the majority of Lookshy’s enlisted ranks.

Metic is the term used in Lookshy to refer to nonnatives, particularly those who have taken up residence in Lookshy’s “foreign quarter.” Metics have only limited rights in Lookshy society. They are not allowed to own property (though they may rent), must hire advocates (who must announce clearly exactly whom they are representing) to speak for them in council and are subject to a variety of restrictions on where they may travel in the city, what weapons they may carry and other particulars. These restrictions are generally offset by Lookshy’s generosity toward strangers. While some are perhaps perfunctory in their dealings with foreigners, few residents fail to uphold their duties as an honorable host — especially toward one who takes his duties as guest seriously.

Indentured Servants are usually criminals or, uncommonly, the destitute. Although slavery is illegal, those with no money can choose to sign themselves into service to a citizen, in exchange for room, board, a discretionary stipend and the clearing of major debts. Such contracts are legally binding but can be entered only with the Adjutant General’s approval — and all such contracts are carefully scrutinized, and every possible option is explored before they are signed off on. No such contract may be signed for a period of more than five years, and there are distinct limits on how an indentured servant may be treated.

Slaves are uncommon in Lookshy — less than five percent of the population are legal slaves, and the number drops each year. It is illegal for Lookshy citizens or helots to own slaves — officially, all slaves are Legion property, though, in some cases, slaves purchased outside of Lookshy holdings can be “transferred” to the Legion, officially, while remaining in the owner’s actual possession. Most slaves are war captives who could not be repatriated for one reason or another after the end of hostilities — often, the slaves have no interest in being returned to their homes, expecting only swift torture and death from those now in power. Slaves are promised room and board, may own goods and can eventually expect manumission for their children, if not for themselves, but are heavily supervised, have no right to speak in council at all and, while protected against needless abuse, may be punished harshly for disobedience.

LIFE IN LOOKSHY

Once you strip away the corruption, the abject poverty, the pervasive crime and the even more pervasive stench found in most major cities, life in Lookshy is much like life in any other Second Age metropolis. A Lookshy citizen typically rises with first Bell (6 AM) each day. Depending on his schedule, he may attend morning calisthenics or go directly to bathe and break his fast. By 8 in the





morning, he is either in classes or has arrived at his workplace, whether he works in the foundries, the fields, the warehouses or the shops. Lunch hours are normally spread throughout the late morning and early midday, to prevent shutting down any vital industry and to relieve stress on the city's mess halls, teahouses and restaurants. For most, work is over by 6 in the evening (or 8 at the latest). After that, presuming he has dealt with his mandatory responsibilities to the reserve for the week, a citizen's time is his own. Many entertain friends at home, go out to dinner, engage in sports or take classes. The schedule for a helot is much the same, although his duties are assigned and are more likely to involve physical labor. While merit and skill are more highly regarded than class, the truth is that citizens often have more time and money to achieve the higher standards of learning necessary for less menial jobs — and those helots who have the drive to better their position are often granted citizenship.

LEISURE

Though time available is often scant, even in Lookshy, residents enjoy their free time. Literacy is nearly universal — though books and scrolls are expensive, reading is common. Especially in barracks, there is a common practice of each person reading a section of a book aloud each night. Games of strategy, often based around complex decks of cards are common — Gateway is somewhat popular, but board size and complexity makes it hard to carry into the field. One popular board game involves a simple board of squares, on which is placed white and black beads — beads placed on the intersections of lines work by one set of rules, while those placed in the squares themselves by another, and winning on one plane can mean losing on the other. Dancing and musical performances are common, and sports that require little in the way of specialized equipment or setup are favored. And, naturally, practice in martial arts and weapon skills are popular, ranging from simple sparring to complex games resembling tag — only with practice weapons.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Crime is fairly rare in Lookshy, and it mostly consists of scuffles between inebriated soldiers, petty theft and the occasional crime of passion. When larger crimes do occur, they often involve metics in some fashion — theft of state secrets or ancient relics, assassination or murder, crimes of rage. The Justice Directorate moves quickly to investigate any crimes that happen in Lookshy — or in any Seventh Legion encampment. Investigations are handled with a thoroughness and professionalism not seen in many nations, and justicars and judges are supposed to handle them without regard to political repercussions or bias. Punishment for minor infractions is normally handled through extra duties, through reduction in military allowances or

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

Most residents of Lookshy are, in the end, soldiers. The vast majority don't enjoy fighting or killing — but they understand why war is necessary and would look at someone who preached a philosophy of peace at any cost as if they had grown a third eyeball. A desire to avoid bloodshed when possible is understood and even commended — cowardice and an inability to do what must be done when it becomes unavoidable is seen as contemptible at best. Those incapable of serving in combat due to disability or temperament are assigned support missions in one or another directorate, usually only after serving at least a year in the field forces if possible, so they have some understanding of what combat is like. The Adjutant General is normally unwilling to place soldiers in positions they are clearly unsuited for, but the needs of the Legion outweigh those of any particular inhabitant, and more than one bookish sort has ended up carrying a spear — and a few have even found they were good with it.

Still, there are some few who grow dissatisfied with their lot. Most simply take the first opportunity to slip out of ranks and into the wilderness. Although desertion is a serious offense, the Legion normally makes little effort to pursue deserters during non-combat situations — it is felt to be better to let them return on their own (in which case little is officially said) or to let them go. Others occasionally try to do more, but soon find that while the Security Directorate will tolerate substantial quiet dissension and talk, they act quickly to suppress any attempts to turn talk of revolt into action — and they are very good indeed at infiltrating and shutting down groups inside of Lookshy.

pay and through reduction in rank. More serious crimes can result in short periods of imprisonment and/or canings.

Major crimes are punished through revocation of citizenship combined with periods of indentured servitude or through execution. There is no exile because the Seventh Legion refuses to unleash upon the River Province anyone it would not handle internally. Metics are typically fined for minor infractions; caned, heavily fined and then banished for major crimes; and executed for capital cases. Executions are normally conducted by beheading, which is seen as more merciful and painless than hanging or other methods. Officers, especially senior officers, are often given the opportunity to commit ritual suicide (under observation) and regain something of their honor — but this is determined on a case by case basis and is not always granted.

VICE AND VIRTUE IN LOOKSHY

Though the devout may see it differently, asceticism is no virtue to the average soldier. Lookshy regulars are highly disciplined, but most are as interested in a roll in the hay, a toss of the dice or a quick slug of “the good stuff” (whether that be beer, sake or marijuana) as any other soldier in Creation — the difference is that they are far less likely to let these desires rule them. Moderation is considered a virtue in Lookshy. The soldier who shows up for duty inebriated, who lets her night time dalliances sow dissension in the ranks, who traffics or partakes in harder drugs (especially heroin, opium or rock cocaine) or who lets her gambling (or other) habits endanger her savings, or the Legion, will face negative reinforcement. This might be in the form of a stern lecture, extra duties or, possibly, a court-martial or “barracks justice” if the problem gets too far out of hand.

Enforcing the line between the acceptable — if sometimes frowned upon — and the forbidden is the job of the Legion’s senior enlisted and junior officers. It is the job of the senior enlisted to act as world-wise mentors and advisors to new recruits and to steer them in the right direction. Junior officers must handle any disciplinary problems before they get out of hand and become the unit commander’s responsibility, as senior officers have far less discretion in what they

may or may not do in a given situation, once something actually comes to their attention.

The passions of the Dragon-Blooded are well known, and allowances are made for them and their sometimes erratic behavior under severe stress. Dragon-Blooded are expected to experiment and to discover the limits of their desires while young, and new members of the Legion are carefully watched and managed by their superiors to make sure their behavior does not cross over the line from experimentation into stupidity. Centak, a short hours journey by paddlewheel ferry across the Yanaze, is seen as a pressure valve, a place where the Dragon-Blooded can let off steam without endangering Lookshy — and steps are taken to make sure they do not. Those who succumb to one vice or another are, when discovered, unceremoniously courts-martialed and either harshly disciplined (if thought to be “redeemable”), drummed out of the service or executed, if their behavior has harmed the Legion, or handled with administrative discipline and drying out, if it hasn’t.

DISCIPLINE

Lookshy is one of the most disciplined cities in Creation. This is not the magically enforced discipline of Paragon or the desperate taciturn discipline of various barbarian cultures where the other option is a sudden and violent death. It is the quiet, steadfast discipline of a





populace that has been raised from birth to know what their responsibilities are, how they are expected to behave and the repercussions of failing to live up to those expectations. The system isn't perfect — there are always malingerers, those who will shirk duties if given the chance and people who are simply rotten or easily tempted — but they are the exception, not the rule.

In general, people do what they are told, show up on time, keep their promises and behave in an honorable fashion. The lazy might look for the easiest way to accomplish a task — but they won't abandon the job until they know it is done. This doesn't mean the citizenry are mindless automatons or dour-faced disciplinarians (though both can be found in Lookshy). In the Seventh Legion's ethos, honorable discipline carries with it the responsibility to question orders if one thinks they are unfair, unjust or illegal and to always think and offer up suggestions if appropriate.

This discipline extends to the battlefield. Lookshy soldiers retreat, but they do not rout, unless forced to magically — and they will regroup and press the attack

anew as soon as they are able. Desecration of enemy dead or temples, rapine and looting are all but unheard of where Lookshy soldiers are involved — not only are they courts-martial offenses, but officers tolerating that kind of action in non-Lookshy units they are commanding or fighting with can face disciplinary action as well. A senior enlisted might look the other way if a soldier collects a battlefield trophy or two, but wholesale looting is off-limits, and the abuse of prisoners or the local populace is never condoned — and harshly punished when discovered.

THE IMMACULATE FAITH OF LOOKSHY

Most Lookshy natives adhere, to a lesser or greater degree, to the Immaculate Philosophy — but the version they follow is significantly different than that promulgated by the Immaculate Order — and those differences date back to the earliest days of Lookshy. While early relations between the Scarlet Empress and Chumyo Nefvarin were surprisingly cordial — on the surface, at least — the first discourses between the Chaplain-General of the Seventh Legion, Laros Verak, and the Mouth of Peace could

THE GODS OF LOOKSHY

As one of the last bastions of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate, Lookshy is naturally of interest to the gods, both those who still follow the mandates of the Celestial Bureaucracy and those who have left its machinations. There are gods specifically interested in the Seventh Legion (see "Gods of the Legion," p. 36), but a number of gods are more interested in the city than the Legion. Primary among these is Tu Yu, the old god of Deheleshen (Essence 4). Formerly a sage tactician and battlewise advisor, he is fallen from his former glory — but while he may act the doddering fool at times, this still-proud city father still walks the streets of the inner city.

The spirit of Lookshy itself is Tien Yu (Essence 6) — who may be Tu Yu's daughter, mother, lover or sister, depending on which of them you ask and at what time. Tien Yu is a dutiful member of the Celestial Bureaucracy, naturally — and a tireless advocate and defender of her city in Yu-Shan. She rarely manifests — but when she does, she inevitably takes the form of a beautiful Lookshy officer in black jade and moonsilver dragon armor. Her skin is jet black, and her hair silver, leading some to believe Luna is her mother.

Neither Tien Yu nor Tu Yu are particularly active in mortal affairs, although neither has shied away from making their presence known when they felt the situation was dire, either. Both are active (in their own ways) in the Celestial Court, however, seeking to defend their city from outside interference.



generously be described as “exceedingly acrimonious.” There was probably no chance the two would have seen common ground.

The reality was the new Chaplain-General saw exactly what the Mouth of Peace was trying to create in this new Immaculate Order, wanted none of it and had no compunctions against telling her exactly so, and why, in blistering detail. A schism was inevitable and was conducted in a surprisingly quiet and harmonious fashion. Behind the scenes, long centuries passed before imperial monks were allowed into Lookshy at all, and even today, only the most erudite, calm and open-minded of monks are stationed in Lookshy — fanatics and fools are kept far away, lest they be tempted into doing something rash and getting themselves executed.

The modern Immaculate faith of Lookshy is a private thing. Chaplains of the faith are more than happy to explain how the religion works to anyone who asks, but they must be asked — a pillar of internal law is that the devout do not proselytize, that seekers must come to the road on their own or not at all. The faith stresses personal responsibility and duty. Among its other teachings, it stresses that while Exaltation can be a reward for excellence and perfection, it is not a sign of inherent worthiness or respect. An Exalt must be judged by his deeds, not the purity of the blood that runs in his veins or the enlightenment of his soul.

A fundamental concept in the Immaculate faith of Lookshy is that of the Righteous Warrior — the perfect soldier, who can win any battle but knows when not to fight, but to find another solution. The Righteous Warrior is the pinnacle followers of the Immaculate faith ascribe to — they know they will not reach it (even the Five Elemental Dragons were not Righteous Warriors), but they strive nonetheless, for excellence comes in the striving, and excellence is its own reward.

The Immaculate faith is built on five major pillars or precepts — behaviors or virtues that further the faithful along the path to righteousness. Bodies of ecumenical lore has evolved over exactly how each pillar should be represented and how each is tied to one or another Elemental Dragon, but the five pillars are generally held to be (in no particular order of importance) Honor, Loyalty, Prowess, Compassion and Resolve. In addition to these five virtues, there are perhaps a dozen lesser virtues that are considered nearly as important — Temperance, Conservation, Introspection, Valor and numerous others.

The Immaculate faith and the Immaculate Order share many features — many of the same texts (often with differing interpretations) are used, although documents written post-schism under the auspices of the Realm are given little heed. Both stress the proper role of spirits as part of the Celestial Bureaucracy, although Lookshy is often more pragmatic about the gods than the Immaculate

Order. The Seventh Legion interdicts the Realm’s Wyld Hunt in the Scavenger Lands, for security reasons — but this does not mean the Anathema are well-liked, or even tolerated, in Lookshy. The Legion dispatches units to destroy Anathema when it becomes aware of them but does not maintain any kind of proactive watch against them — their missions are reactive in nature. These operations are seen as eliminating dangerous threats to peace, rather than a holy quest, and there are openings through which a careful, honorable Solar could approach the Legion without drawing its wrath down on his head.

THE SHOGUNATE BUREAUCRACY

When Deheleshen was reclaimed, numbered amongst the survivors were numerous members of the bureaucratic engines that kept the Shogunate functioning, particularly members of the Tax and Revenue Directorates. The descendants of these bureaucrats and functionaries make up the last vestiges of the official Shogunate government, such as it is. Their role in Lookshy society is mostly ceremonial, but it is by no means unimportant — and there is real power hidden behind the ceremonies and rituals. As an example, the Director of Revenue Allocation must sign off on military budgets. Normally, this is a perfunctory action — but the Director *can* withhold his signature (and, on rare occasions, has done so), a sign of grave disapproval. These actions may be symbolic — it’s not like the Seventh Legion suddenly shuts down for lack of funding — but they carry meaning in the eyes of many in Lookshy, and few on the General Staff wish to incur the ire of the Shogunate Bureaucracy. On the other hand, the Bureaucracy understands that, without the continued tolerance of the General Staff, its members could find themselves having to actually work for a living, or worse, and so, the two organizations studiously attempt not to incur the other’s wrath.

THE DRAGON-BLOODED OF LOOKSHY

Lookshy is the largest enclave of Dragon-Blooded outside of the Realm — and the sheer numbers of Dragon-Blooded in Lookshy would surprise any savant with training in population studies that was able to gain access to Lookshy’s population records and military roles. In most of Creation, the ratio of Dragon-Blooded to mortals ranges from one Terrestrial for every 5,000 to 10,000 mortals.

In Lookshy, the numbers are closer to one in 100.

Much of this can be laid at immigration and aggressive recruitment of newly Exalted Terrestrials in the Scavenger Lands (and further abroad, when possible). However, it cannot be doubted that much of these numbers are based not on immigration, but on breeding. Where the Scarlet Empress has bred for powerful Terrestrial Exalted — and the more powerful, the better — Seventh Legion officers





have bred for numbers. A mate whose bloodline results in large numbers of weaker Dragon-Bloods is seen as more desirable (from a breeding point of view) than one whose children rarely Exalt but are incredibly powerful if they do.

FAMILIES OF THE SEVENTH LEGION

The Gentes of Lookshy are nowhere near as powerful as the Realm's Great Houses, but they are still an important part of life in Lookshy. Each Gens of Lookshy is built around major Terrestrial bloodlines, a powerful history of success on the battlefield and substantial reserves of wealth and First Age artifacts. While overt examples of influence peddling, nepotism or breaches of conduct over family are rare (especially after the period following the Gunzota Incident, fresh in many Dragon-Blooded's minds), it cannot be said that no Adjutant General has ever slipped a commander some extra resources because he would rather not see a favored cousin dead or made sure that a promising young Gens scion got the breaks needed to flourish. The result is a situation where Gentes' children have an advantage over others — but it is neither an omnipresent advantage, nor an insurmountable one.

Although politics can be spoken of in general terms by Gens, each member of a family has his own opinion on the future of Lookshy, and there can be found supporters of nearly any political camp in each house (with the possible exception of Gens Maheka, whose matriarch brooks little dissension). Alignment, therefore, refers to the average political beliefs of the majority of family members or of its leaders and scions, rather than a hard-and-fast line that each member hews to without exception.

GENS KARAL (FIRE)

Status: Major House

Political Leanings: Basically Mercenary, with Interventionist leanings.

Description: The Karal family traces its primary bloodline from the first Camp Liaison Officer, Karal Shan Zu. The Gens Karal has always been a military family in a society of military families — it has many shozei and kazei but few merchant princes or sorcerer-engineers. There are families that are larger or wealthier but none in Lookshy that are more respected. Gens Karal's fortunes are based on early successes, when bounties were paid for First Age weapons recovered and Realm ships captured — these bounties and salvage fees were invested wisely and, over the years, have blossomed until Karal is the third wealthiest Gens.

GENS TERESU (WATER)

Status: Major House

Political Leanings: Split between Isolationist and Mercenary.

Description: Perhaps unsurprisingly, Teresu family members have traditionally run Lookshy's small blue-water and larger brown-water navy — this state of affairs dates

clear back to the city's founding, when Admiral Teresu Mitaki was the only fleet admiral to sign on with Chumyo Nefvarin, bringing much of his small fleet, unbloodied and undamaged from its patrols in the frozen White Sea, with him. In the days since, the family has been centrally involved in the workings of Lookshy's merchant holdings and has turned modest beginnings into a minor but thriving sea trade that reaches as far as the Western islands.

GENS MAHEKA (EARTH)

Status: Major House

Political Leanings: Staunchly Mercenary.

Description: Gens Maheka was begun by a well-placed combat engineer in Realm Year 323. Its wealth is centered mostly around several powerful foundries and smaller weapons forges that have produced the finest weapons in Lookshy for over three centuries. Politically, if Gens Karal is deceptively political and deep for a Fire house, Gens Maheka is exactly what it appears to be — a solid core to the great families of Lookshy, a rock around which the politics of the General Staff swirls and eddies without ever truly touching it. House politics are rooted deep in the essence of the Legion's mandates and the Immaculate faith. Its members are the first to support the Shogunate Bureaucracy on those rare occasions it evinces an opinion and the last to support any measure that suggest the Legion is anything other than an arm of the Shogunate.

GENS AMILAR (AIR)

Status: Major House

Political Leanings: Moderately Interventionist, with increasing Purist leanings.

Description: Gens Amilar is a young house, barely four centuries old — the familial line is based upon the bloodline of Taimyo Vondy Beulen. The Amilar family made its initial fortune in much the same way that Gens Karal did — carefully invested bounties for First Age weapons and equipment recovered, although Gens Amilar concentrated more on manuscripts and documentation than on the devices themselves. Despite a generally scholarly bent, Amilar is not particularly known for the number of sorcerers it produces, being more famous for its artificers, mechanics and educators than for sorcery.

GENS YUSHOTO (WOOD)

Status: Major House

Political Leanings: Diverse, with no real emphasis.

Description: Gens Yushoto is built in large part around the bloodline of Yushoto Baraka, the Seventh Legion's chief sorcerer-engineer during the Contagion. While not himself a Wood Terrestrial, most of his children were, and their influence is still felt on the family to this day. The Yushoto fortune is not tied to any one industry or endeavor, rather being well spread out amongst all the possibilities the Lookshy economy has to offer.

THE MINOR HOUSES

In addition to the five major Gentes, there are over a dozen minor Gentes that, while not as influential or important as the five, are still of considerable import or recognition in Lookshy. A number are listed below, but Storytellers are encouraged to create their own minor (and major) Gentes as they need to — with a population of over a quarter-million, Lookshy has plenty of room for new Gentes.

Family	Element	Major Aspect	Political leanings	Leader
Nefvarin	Air	Military (Sky Guard)	Interventionist/Imperialist	Nefvarin Alixa
Kirigasa	Earth	Military (Infantry)	Interventionist	Kirigasa Kosu
Yan Tu	Fire	Military (Engineers)	Mercenary/Interventionist	Yan Tu Mara
Chan	Water	Merchant House	Isolationist (mildly)	Chan Bright Coin
Nerigus	Wood	Merchant House	Interventionist	Nerigus Shen
Toriki	Balanced	Military	Isolationist (extremely)	Toriki Laoshe
Bukane	Mortal	Military	Purist	Bukane Morning Lily
Mareseke	Mortal	Engineers	Isolationist (mildly)	Mareseke Golden Will
Mehela	Balanced	Merchant House	Mercenary (w/ mild Isolationist leanings)	Mehela Qiao Yin
Taroketu	Mortal	Merchant House	Mercenary/Interventionist	Taroketu Yushara
Tsung	Mortal	Researchers	No strong leanings	Tsung Tao Le

POLITICAL FACTIONS

In any organization with three or more members, there will be politics, and the Legion is no exception. There are never enough Dragon-Blooded, First Age tools or conventional resources for every unit or directorate to have everything they need, and political battles often erupt over resource allocation. These battles are often acrimonious in their execution, but they rarely lead to long-term disagreements — they are usually questions not of which is the right or the wrong answer, but which is the best answer.

Questions about the Seventh Legion's future and its place in River Province politics, while rarely as outright nasty, have the potential to lead to serious long-term rifts in the fabric of the Legion. There are currently five major political factions or outlooks in the Lookshy political scene, although few would suggest they are organized or structured enough to be called parties or movements — they are, at best, collections of officers with similar views of how Lookshy should conduct its external affairs, and there is as much overlap and difference of opinion within their ranks as there is between each outlook.

Despite the animosity and outright hatred that can arise between members of various factions, little if any blood is spilt over these differences, especially between Dragon-Blooded. This is partly due to strictly enforced regulations against dueling and partly because every Terrestrial knows they are a not-quite irreplaceable resource. Lookshy officers may try to discredit, humiliate or maneuver their opponents into untenable positions, but political fights rarely escalate to the point where dishonor, violence or utter shame is involved. In the end, the Legion is more important than settling a personal grudge, and an officer

who is clearly losing will normally concede the point before being driven to take actions that would injure the Legion. Pulling scarce resources out of a losing battle is a principal the people of Lookshy understand well.

IMPERIALISTS

Imperialists believe that the Seventh Legion should take advantage of the Realm's political turmoil to sow further dissension and make alliances with the most worthy houses, leading eventually to a takeover by Seventh Legion forces. They have little real support, but in many cases, this is more a matter of practicality than fervent belief — if an Imperialist leader rose up with more to offer than vague allusions and semi-coherent ideas, they would likely get a closer hearing.

INTERVENTIONISTS

Interventionists believe Lookshy should take a more active role in Scavenger Lands politics, possibly including refounding the Shogunate. Interventionists are supported by certain elements of the Shogunate Bureaucracy and are generally thought of as being slightly radical but not overly so. After all, the Seventh Legion has a formal doctrine of intervening in affairs it believes will unduly affect the security of the River Province. It has never hidden the fact that its efforts in training various nations' militaries are as much an exercise in social engineering as they are about revenue gathering or defending the Province.

ISOLATIONISTS

Isolationists see the continued defense of anything other than Lookshy as a fruitless gesture toward a long-dead political entity and pointless ancestor worship of a





long-dead leader. At the faction's most extreme end, Isolationists would sever all noncommercial ties with the Scavenger Lands and shift from a wartime footing to a more commerce-based economy, but most favor a slower conversion away from a military society. Surprisingly, while there is support for the Isolationists amongst the various merchant Gentes, it is not as strong as one might think — merchant ties to the Intelligence Directorate provide ample opportunities to discover how dangerous an isolationist stance could be.

MERCENARIES

The Mercenaries are the most conservative — and, currently, the most powerful — political faction in the Seventh Legion. They believe the current state of affairs — relying on the might of the field forces, seeking out short-term contracts over eternal defense treaties and freely trading with anyone not currently engaged in hostilities with Lookshy or its field forces — to be a solid state of affairs. They seek the Shogunate's return but are willing to wait for a proper heir. Much of the military is at least vaguely Mercenary in outlook — they feel the continued well-being of the River Province relies on staying the course.

PURSUERS OF IMMACULATE PURITY (PURISTS)

This faction seeks to clean out what they see as the wickedness and depravity of the Scavenger Lands — the impropriety of peasants failing to properly respect their betters, the spirit-worship (especially of Great Forks), the utter den of iniquity that is Nexus. They wish to restore the Shogunate and to spread the faith of the Five Elemental Dragons to the Scavenger Lands — but are still generally opposed to the Realm itself. The Purists are a fairly minor (some would say “crackpot”) branch of political belief in Lookshy at present.

RATE OF POLITICAL CHANGE

There is a saying in Lookshy that shifts in policy move forward one funeral at a time. Social and political change can be glacially slow in Lookshy — there are still those who leave deformed children to die, even two centuries after the death of Strategos Batad Ferek. The long lives enjoyed by the Dragon-Blooded are partly to blame, but the fact is that most militaries are inherently conservative organizations, and Lookshy is no exception. If something works, armies are prone to keep doing it until it is clearly proven not to work anymore. Unfortunately, proof is often gathered only at the cost of terrible defeats in battle or embarrassing political disasters. While Lookshy military is more forward-looking and adaptable than most, it is still prone to moments of distressingly hidebound behavior. Despite this fact, once the need for change is made evident, by whatever method, Lookshy has proven itself quick to adapt and adopt when it absolutely must — albeit with much grumbling and general annoyance along the way.

CONTROLLED DEVOLUTION OF CAPABILITY

Much was lost in the Usurpation, but the Shogunate was still a magically advanced society. While it relied in part on near-imperishable relics and artifacts of the First Age, the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate was quite capable of building magical wonders — sky chariots and great skyships, warstriders and dragon armor, a wide variety of weapons and tools that let mortals rival even the Dragon-Blooded.

But those abilities relied on sophisticated factories and centers of industry, making up for a lack of advanced knowledge with raw effort. Building an aerial warship was a major undertaking even in the Shogunate — it was only the Shogunate's huge size that allowed such vessels to be commonplace. The fall of the Shogunate meant that many weapons and other devices became difficult, if not impossible, to repair, let alone build.

The Seventh Legion had substantial supplies of First Age and Shogunate resources — but those stockpiles would not last forever, and plans were made for their eventual depletion. With substantial modifications for changes in ability and situation, those plans are still in use in the modern era.

The basic idea is to anticipate shortages and deficits ahead of time and to account for how those deficits will impact operational doctrines and tactics before they become acute. Where possible, alternatives are developed (heliographs and packet riders, for example). When this isn't feasible, alternate strategies are researched and practiced before they become necessary — many Lookshy war games are predicated around developing different means of handling the loss of some critical technology or capability. At all times, the fundamental question is not “Will we lose this ability?” but “When we lose this ability, how will we adapt to that loss, and what impact will it have on our overall capability to successfully wage war?”

COMMUNICATIONS

Agile and rapid communication between elements of the Legion, merchants and operatives is vital to the continued well-being of Lookshy. Lookshy has cultivated a wide variety of different communications systems to facilitate the exchange of information and is constantly seeking new ways to link faraway units together. Some of these systems are magical in nature — artifacts designed to

enhance the use of various Linguistics and Lore Charms, for example, or sorceries that allow for conversations with faraway allies. Elementals, demons and minor spirits are also commonly used, although with somewhat more circumspection — elementals can be flighty, demons are untrustworthy, and spirits may have other allegiances.

Non-sensitive communications are normally sent by one of two methods — heliograph or the Legion Post. Lookshy's heliograph network is not as extensive as that of the Realm, but it's sufficient to allow for rapid communication between the redoubts and certain allies and clients. When combined with the sophisticated (and frequently changed) heliocodes used by the Seventh Legion, the heliograph system is secure enough for sensitive messages, when necessary. The Legion Post is used to link areas not directly connected by heliograph. The relay system used by the Post, with riders swapping horses at every station (ranging from 50 to 100 miles apart) and changing horses riders each day, allows messages and small packages to quickly cover ground between heliograph stations, but the Post is considered insecure even for coded messages — there is simply too much chance of a package getting lost in one fashion or another with the risks of ground travel.

REGIONAL DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS

Lookshy holds itself responsible for the defense and well-being of the River Province. This does not mean it

feels responsible for stopping every internal conflict in the province — there are simply too many governments, city-states and other political interests to even begin to maintain peace between them. Instead, the Legion concentrates on keeping conflicts from escalating beyond the point where they could destabilize the entire region and on protecting the Scavenger Lands from outside invasion.

These duties require funding. The Seventh Legion has experimented with several different methods of accumulating the wealth necessary to keep the field forces funded, most dealing with the collection of tithes and duties, as well as fees for services rendered. Many larger nations pay long-term retainers (normally based on the previous year's tax revenues) for services rendered — these help to cover the costs of naval operations and the upkeep of Lookshy and the redoubts. Other retainers are shorter-term and to set standards — fees paid to the Legion to prevent it from operating on a country's soil without the local government's permission or providing for guaranteed Legion assistance in case of invasion. These contracts are priced based on the conditions — an agreement requiring "Legion assistance" is much cheaper than one requiring "the First Field Force." These contracts are normally designed so the Legion can weasel out of them if it needs to. This has only rarely been done and only under great duress — the Seventh Legion has no interest in gaining a reputation for chiseling on contract disputes.





Short-term contracts make up the largest single part of Lookshy's mercenary revenues — these contracts can be automatically triggered by invocation of retainer clause or entered into independently. Many contracts are for single operation — drive off that behemoth, dissuade those barbarians from stealing our cattle, or convince our neighbor he would rather not invade our country. Others are for entire campaigns — drive out the invading forces, put down a hostile tribe, or deal with a Wyld infestation or Fair Folk invasion. Contract fees are based on threat, time frame, number of troops needed and desired resolution (“wiped out to a man, their cities razed so that no stone is left unturned” costs far more than “chase the bastards off our land, and convince them not to come back”).

Training missions are not hugely profitable, but have secondary dividends that make them worthwhile. Lookshy military advisors are hired by many nations to train local military forces, and general populations, in weapon handling, disaster recovery and other skills. In a few cases, they have been brought in to wholesale rebuild governments and militaries from the ground up. These missions give Seventh Legion officers a chance to interact closely with local armies — they not only learn how the locals operate (and, occasionally, pick up tricks to take back home), they are able to influence, through their training regimens, how those armies conduct operations. Officers know that the more training missions they conduct, the fewer enemy officers they have to hang for atrocities the next time they work in that area.

Military advisors are also hired on a semi-permanent basis by some countries — the Marukan Alliance and Great Forks make substantial use of advisors, and Sijan has a (typically rather bored) dragon-sized permanent contingent. Military advisors are hired for a variety of missions, usually involving political analysis, military intelligence gathering and analysis and minor training missions — while supposedly under orders to avoid direct confrontation with enemy forces, this does not mean they always succeed — or even try — to follow those orders.

The Legion Post is not a large revenue generator, but like training missions, it generates significant secondary effects — and in this case, is a mission that would need doing anyway. For a nominal fee, Legion Post riders carry private messages and small packages on their delivery runs, in addition to the official post.

POLITICS OF MERCENARIES

Lookshy has a potent political weapon at its disposal — refusal to provide troops to causes it does not support. And it is a weapon used to indirectly support — or oppose — political trends in the Scavenger Lands. While this is not an obvious Legion policy, a hundred excuses can be found not to provide troops.

Although Lookshy will consider nearly any mission, there are a number of reasons why it might refuse any particular contract. Primarily, any mission supporting an

invasion of the Scavenger Lands is rejected out of hand, and the General Staff will not normally accept missions that involve suppressing internal rebellions or uprisings. The General Staff also normally refuses jobs that face a substantial risk of trapping Legion forces in a rapidly destabilizing situation, those that are hopeless even by its definition of the term (no chumyo wants to simply throw troops away at a problem they cannot solve), or if it feels the Legion is being lied to or suffers a substantial risk of being cheated out of its fees in one fashion or another.

When a contract's terms simply cannot be made acceptable to the Legion and the contractor, the General Staff will usually try to find the contractor other alternatives, normally involving allied or friendly mercenary companies with lower overheads — while the Legion occasionally takes on “pro bono” missions, this is rare. If a contract appears to be dirty laundry, with misrepresented goals or a reliance on questionable tactics or actions, there are a number of indirect means of discouraging the contractor — inflated fees, strict interpretations of missions and subtle methods of dishonoring or embarrassing the client have all been used.

A prospective contract's political implications are normally not an issue — but the General Staff always considers the repercussions. Lookshy officially prefers not to get involved with strictly local politics, supporting whichever side is willing to sign a contract first — it is said that the Seventh Legion doesn't officially take sides, it merely takes contracts. Unofficially, the Legion clearly does take sides, at least on occasion — contract terms are adjusted, messages are delayed or lost, negotiators are “unavoidably delayed” while traveling to or from Lookshy. This kind of meddling in the negotiation process is not undertaken lightly, or often, but it does happen, and so far, the Legion has managed to avoid being caught. Lookshy strategoi are sometimes called in as neutral arbiters, and the redoubts are often used as secure negotiation sites — there are fees involved, of course, but these fees are normally far less than Lookshy would charge for its military services. Lookshy tends to avoid getting involved in local politics beyond arbitration and mercenary contracts so long as the problem remains local.

On rare occasions, Lookshy has intervened directly — sometimes with negotiators and peacekeeping forces, often with demonstrations of force and a strict admonition to knock it off delivered to both sides of a disagreement. In a handful of extreme situations, Lookshy has invaded and occupied nations, destroying the current political infrastructure and replacing it with one of the General Staff's own devising. While this has occasionally blown up in Lookshy's face, the overall results have been positive — Charms and sorcery can make a huge difference in weeding out corruption and setting up fundamentally honorable governments. The General Staff determines the circumstances for intervention on a case-by-case basis, but the

overarching guideline is that direct intervention is only pursued when outside forces are influencing the situation or when a developing crisis has the potential to destabilize a major region of the Scavenger Lands. Otherwise, serious compelling reasons are needed for the General Staff to even contemplate invading another member of the Confederation of Rivers — without getting paid, of course.

Additionally, if a situation develops beyond a strictly local conflict or threatens to involve governments outside of the province, Lookshy quickly steps in to contain or eliminate the problem and has interfered when it believed a war could compromise the province's defense. In general, however, Lookshy is content to make sure River Province governments are free to squabble as they desire.

NATURE OF RETAINERS

Though many in the Legion see long-term retainers paid by governments such as Sijan, the Marukan Alliance, etc. as just due for services rendered, there are those who argue that Lookshy is little more than a giant protection racket, holding the threat of its military power (either using it or refusing to use it, as the case may be) over the Scavenger Lands. These arguments are loudest in Nexus, of course, but more than a few nations in the Hundred Kingdoms (many of whom do not actually pay long-term retainers) loudly proclaim that Lookshy is nothing more than a band of militant thugs.

Despite these grumblings, Nexus pays its retainers on time and to the last chipped jade coin. While they may complain, the reality is that most in the Scavenger Lands want the Seventh Legion, and its troops, exactly where they are — and they certainly don't want the Legion to set its sights on the rest of the Scavenger Lands.

POLITICAL REALITIES

The guiding principal for the Seventh Legion on a geopolitical scale is "better the demon you know." Lookshy is loath to wipe out certain types of ills altogether not because it is incapable or because it wouldn't solve a problem, but because it would simply create other problems in other areas. Nations that sponsor brigands or pirates are rarely targeted — until they get too ambitious — because it is easier to control known problems than to ferret out where new ones are coming from. This philosophy permeates how the Legion deals with external pressures on Lookshy as well — when spies are found, they are as likely to be left in place, quietly surrounded by Intelligence agents, and fed misinformation as they are to be picked up and interrogated. Dealers in illicit drugs are allowed to remain in business, so long as they keep their trade quiet

and small-time, do little to encourage addicts or to increase their market and avoid any kind of violence.

This sort of careful approach to minor problems has its downsides — there have always been accusations of the Legion coddling brigands of various sorts, ignoring the threat of local empire-builders and failing to crack down on local drug trafficking, but these are reasonably ignored. More disturbingly, it can lead to a "boys will be boys" attitude regarding these kinds of problems, and the Seventh Legion's intelligence assets have, in the past, failed to recognize major problems in time to deal with them before they became major.

MILITARY ALLIANCES

Lookshy counts relatively few countries as permanent allies, let alone friends, and it prefers things this way. There are some exceptions, however. The Marukani are one such exception — Lookshy regulars often refer to the Marukani Cavalry as "horselords" in recognition of the long alliance between the inhabitants of the Marukani plains and the Seventh Legion, and while the two countries have had their differences — and even fought short, bitter wars — there has always been respect and admiration between the two countries.

The alliance between Great Forks and Lookshy is a curious one — Lookshy is staunch in its support of the Celestial Bureaucracy and those who seek to keep it functioning, which causes many spirits to give them wide berth. Nonetheless, the two countries have, largely at Great Forks insistence, remained allies for generations. Talespinner and Dreamweaver both insist that "the storydreams of Lookshy and Great Forks are inextricably intertwined," and while Dayshield is not as poetic, she notes that Lookshy's ideas of combat and warfare run largely in line with her own.

Metagalapa is a hidden ace card for Lookshy — most of Metagalapa's Dragon-Blooded trace their ancestry to officers of a Seventh Legion talon of scouts. Metagalapan hawkriders have been seen in Lookshy salons for two generations, and it is not uncommon for a scale of Lookshy scouts to spend time training with the hawkriders on their flying mountain, although the latter is far from common knowledge even in Lookshy.

The remote Haslanti League and Lookshy both desire closer relations — but they are doing a clever saber dance around the concept of an alliance, each trying to get as much out of the relationship as possible while giving up as little as possible. In each case, what the other side wants is a state secret — Lookshy desires access to air-boat designs and quantities of feathersteel, while the Haslanti want Shogunate Essence furnaces and propulsion systems. Meanwhile, as politicians and ambassadors dance, engineers and sorcerer-technicians from both nations have been quietly working on ways to integrate Haslanti hot-air technology with Shogunate propulsion and lift systems — and the





results may force the two nations into an alliance of convenience, if successful.

The Tri-Khan of the Delzahn horde is familiar firsthand with the skill of Lookshy mercenaries — and this has made him more, rather than less, fond of them. On the other hand, Lookshy strategoi admire the careful balancing game he has played between the Realm and the Guild, and while there are no formal alliances or even a permanent mission in Chiaroscuro, Lookshy “merchants” are welcome there, and high-ranking officers have been invited to sit at the Tri-Khan’s table — often across from imperial satraps and generals.

Several mercenary companies are more or less permanently aligned with Lookshy — although independent units, their goals and methods are similar to the Seventh Legion, and they have often formalized this tacit understanding. In exchange for mutual aid and information exchanges (and sometimes wintering space in Lookshy), these companies agree to place terms in their contracts requiring they not be committed to battles against Seventh Legion units. Units with these agreements are given preferential treatment by training halls and arms dealers and frequently have clients the Legion will not (or cannot) accept forwarded to them — with appropriate warnings when necessary.

SIDEREAL INTERFERENCE

The Sidereals have, for the most part, left Lookshy strictly alone, refusing to meddle in the affairs of a city that has so much attention focused on it. This is due partly to the simple difficulty of placing pronouncements on the city — not only does it have a larger concentration of higher-Essence beings than just about anywhere other than the Imperial City and perhaps Great Forks, but the city and its inhabitants are already under the umbrella of a pair of powerful sealed edicts sealed by the hand of the Maiden of Battles herself.

Also, Creation is big, and there is much work to be done. While Sidereals occasionally check in on Lookshy to see what is going on — and there are certainly many roles a Sidereal can take while staying in Lookshy — there are simply more problems and things to watch and take care of than there are Sidereals to watch them, and Lookshy seems to mostly take care of itself.

And, finally, there is always the question of discovery. Even the Sidereals are not certain what may reside in the city’s arsenals — though they have a better idea than even the master armorer does — and even the most skilled of the Maiden’s servants are not immune to a implosion bow’s bolts if they should hit.

NONHOSTILES

Sijan and Lookshy have a curious relationship indeed. While officially neutral, Sijan often sides with Lookshy in meetings of the Council of the Concordat, and Sijan has always paid the Seventh Legion a large permanent retainer and maintains several other long-term retainers. Lookshy, in exchange, arranges for Sijan to bury many of its dead — normally in local crypts, rather than in Sijan — and a contingent of the Morticians’ Order is a permanent presence in Trade District.

Relations between Nexus and Lookshy have been strained for centuries — Lookshy blames Nexus mercenaries for several spectacular disasters during the Fair Folk invasion, and the Council of Entities grows increasingly tired of paying large sums of money to Lookshy for no reason other than that the Emissary demands they do so. Meanwhile, the Guild does all it can to quietly encourage dissension between the two nations.

The Hundred Kingdoms shift and change so quickly that to assign them any particular outlook toward Lookshy would be impossible — and, in any case, their military and economic power is small enough that even if they all really hated Lookshy, there would be little they could do about it. Despite this, Seventh Legion units operate carefully in the Hundred Kingdoms — the region’s strife is legendary but not inherent, and a strong enough leader *could* weld the region into a powerful economic and military power, at least for a time.

Greyfalls is officially part of the Realm, but it is far enough away that its internal agendas and politics have always been somewhat out of step with the Realm — and Greyfalls’ position as regards the Seventh Legion has, recently at least, been one of guarded neutrality. Whatever is happening in Greyfalls, it does not appear to be a direct threat to the Legion or to the Scavenger Lands — yet — and the Legion is happy to leave Greyfalls alone, so long as this continues to be the case.

Gethamane and Whitewall are far enough away from Lookshy that the field forces are only infrequently seen there, but until recently, the two have had favorable relations with the Seventh Legion. The recent overtures between Haslanti and Lookshy — and Haslanti’s increasingly strident calls for conquest — have concerned both nations, and the possibility of Seventh Legion involvement concerns them even more, however, and recently, contracts for military advisors and other services have been canceled or put on hold.

ENEMIES

Lookshy considers its greatest opponent, at the present time, to be the Mask of Winters and not the Realm. The Mask of Winters has proven himself to be aggressive, competent and equipped with extremely powerful weapons — including Juggernaut, a construct or behemoth that

LOOKSHY AND THE GUILD

Relations between Lookshy and the Guild have always had a tense edge — Lookshy strategoi are quick to recognize Guild economic warfare for what it is, and the Guild has always been aware that its mercenaries and bodyguards, however good or numerous, are no match for Lookshy regulars or rangers. Furthermore, Lookshy's political makeup and widespread belief in the Immaculate faith renders the city much more difficult to influence subtly. Lookshy, meanwhile, is all too aware that, if the Guild ever decided to be unsubtle, it could wreak immense damage on the city's merchants and trade — and on the revenues necessary to run the Legion.

As a result, while neither group particularly cares for the other, for a variety of reasons, neither is willing to directly confront the other either. Recent developments, such as the posting of Gavin Bast to the Guild Directorate, have perhaps softened the latent hostility somewhat, but fundamentally, the Guild and Lookshy remain opposite sides of the same coin — Lookshy as the paragon of military might and the Guild as the principle trade power of the Second Age.

worries even the most confident strategoi. Lookshy devotes more resources each year toward building up for a confrontation with the Mask of Winters and desperately seeks weapons to use in that fight.

The Realm is considered by many in Lookshy to be something of a joke — although individual commanders may be worthy of respect, the Realm as a whole is seen as somewhat decadent and soft — large and dangerous in the way a wounded hippopotamus is dangerous but not fearsome as a tiger or a jaguar is. This opinion is considered dangerous and foolish by those who have actually had an opportunity to spend time with their cousins from the Blessed Isle, but it is widely enough held to be the conventional wisdom.

Relations with Linowan have always been strained at best and have erupted into open war on several occasions — the Linowan government is an imperial ally, and Linowan pirates and raiders attack Lookshy merchants with some regularity. Although one would expect this to endear Lookshy in Haltan eyes, they have their own reasons for disliking the Seventh Legion. Lookshy punitive raids into Haltan lands seeking after invading Fair Folk have occasionally failed to distinguish between Haltans and Fair Folk with sufficient clarity. Some Haltans say this oversight is deliberate, punishment for their treaties with the Fair Folk.

Lookshy makes no pacts with the Fair Folk, enters into no contracts with them and considers them hostile

under nearly all circumstances — most of the General Staff would rather enter into an agreement with the Anathema or the Deathlords than with the Fair Folk. This policy does not extend quite so far as to authorize immediate attacks on Fair Folk without provocation, especially in neutral or allied lands.

THE SEVENTH LEGION

In almost every respect that matters, the Seventh Legion is the populace of Lookshy — every citizen and helot serves a tour of duty upon reaching the age of majority, and on the completion of their active military service, they become part of the Legion Reserve until they are too infirm to continue military service.

SEVENTH LEGION RANK STRUCTURE

The Seventh Legion's rank structure has remained stable, hewing closely to the original Shogunate design. One change was made for the sake of continuity — an archaic rank, *taimyo*, meaning “force commander” or “force leader,” was resurrected for officers in charge of a field force. In practice, the term holds the same importance as general does, and *chumyo* is reserved for the officer currently in charge of the Legion as a whole.

Mortal officers rarely rise above the rank of *shozei*, and none have risen above *kazei*, but this is more due to their lifespan and lack of Charms than any inherent discrimination — *taimyos* are rarely younger than 130, and most are skilled sorcerers as well as masters of several Charm trees.

In addition to the ranks shown below, there are a variety of other specialized titles used in particular situations: *Sazei* is “vessel master” — a ship's captain, roughly equal to a *shozei* or *kazei*, while *haizei* is “skyship master” — the commander of an airship, equal in rank to a *shozei* or *taizei*. In all cases, the suffix *-myo* indicates a senior officer — an admiral or general; *-zei* indicates a junior officer — a field officer, leading troops in battle; and *-chei* indicates senior enlisted.

ORGANIZATION

Field forces are generally built along similar lines as Realm legions, as shown below, but they rarely show the homogeneity found in the legions — a field force will have several different kinds of troops in its structure, allowing it more flexibility in response than Realm legions have.

The Seventh Legion makes extensive use of planning and specialized equipment to reduce workload and carefully cross-trains field soldiers in support missions — most support troops are specialists or personnel associated with hauling supplies, etc. Arming the support units is generally considered a mark of desperation, but it is not normally a black mark on an officer's record.





RANK STRUCTURE

<u>English Equivalent</u>	<u>Seventh Legion</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Shogun	Shogun	Entire Shogunate
Daimyo	Daimyo	Administrative Province
General	Chumyo	Legion
Field Force General	Taimyo	Field Force
Colonel	Kazei	Dragon
Major	Shozei	Wing or Dragon
Captain	Taizei	Talon or Wing
Lieutenant	Chuzei	Scale or Talon
Subaltern	Choei	Training
Warrant Officer	Shonai	Technical Consultant
Over-sergeant	Sochei	Platoon Assistant
Sergeant	Gunchei	Fang (Senior Enlisted)
Specialist	Haichei	Technician/Specialist
Corporal	Gochei	Fang
Soldier	Nitei	Kill other guy for his country
Sorcerer-Engineer	Wai Tan-Junai	Create and maintain artifacts
Sorcerer-Technician	Shugan-Junai	Sorcery combat support and weapon and system enchantment, repair and maintenance

Rank titles in **bold** are officers. The ranks in *italics* are senior officers and normally Dragon-Blooded, although a handful of mortal kazei have served in the past.

THE GENERAL STAFF

The General Staff is the Seventh Legion's administrative and command group. The General Staff is actually composed of two groups — the General Staff, composed of six senior officers and the Chumyo of the Legion, and the Administrative Staff, which fluctuates

in size but averages 23. The chumyo is the leader of the General Staff, but he serves at its sufferance. A chumyo can be removed from his position if an undisputed majority of the General Staff agrees. While not a democracy in the formal sense of the word, the opinions of Staff members are given careful weight by a wise

Unit	Composition	Commander	Notes
Fang	five soldiers	gunchei or gochei	None.
Scale	five fangs (25 soldiers)	chuzei or sochei	Occasionally lead by a chozei — with a senior gunchei standing watch over the subaltern.
Talon	five scales (125 soldiers)	chuzei or taizei	Independent talons are usually reinforced with a scale of infantry or specialists and up to a scale of support personnel.
Wing	five talons (625 soldiers)	taizei or shozei	Normally reinforced with up to a talon's worth of specialist units and a support scale if operating independently.
Dragon	two wings (1,250 soldiers)	shozei or kazei	Reinforced with up to three talons worth of specialists or other units and a support talon.
Field force	five dragons (6,250 soldiers)	taimyo	Up to one dragon's worth of specialist and reinforcement units, mostly talon sized, and a support dragon (or less, though rarely less than two talons).

BONDS OF LOYALTY

Good officers can inspire fierce devotion, even fanatical loyalty, in their subordinates. A good officer not only rewards success — and brings it to the battlefield — she helps her soldiers develop their careers and skills. She recognizes the causes of morale and disciplinary problems and takes steps to prevent them. She fairly punishes transgressors and allows for second chances when feasible. Most importantly, she stands behind her soldiers, come hell or high water, if they are right. In return, her soldiers and officers trust her and will follow her orders, even if they seem insane.

Units under good commanders can accomplish impossible tasks, and officers in such units frequently develop strong ties of loyalty. This can cause problems — some officers want to remain with “their” commander long after they should have been promoted, while others refuse to perform for a new unit commander, seeing him as an usurper or an outsider. Finally, these kinds of bonds of loyalty can lead to reckless, or downright stupid, behavior in support of a beloved commander, and many senior officers are understandably cautious about the cults of personality that can arise around popular leaders. Despite these problems, the Adjutant General is normally loath to break up winning teams without good reason or as part of the natural flow of events, believing the benefits of such groups of officers outweigh the risks.

chumyo, even beyond any respect held for officers who average over a century of battlefield experience.

General Staff members generally also hold senior positions — commanders of the field forces, guard units and directorates are normally members, as is the base liaison officer. Although once there was a strict structure to both the General and Administrative Staff, those strictures have given way with passing centuries. The General Staff is less of a proper staff and more of a council of elders, advising the chumyo as much as they conduct day-to-day business.

THE DIRECTORATES

Seven directorates form the Seventh Legion’s support structure, making sure combat units are supplied with the tools they need to perform their job. Each directorate is lead by a taimyo, and they are the fundamental structure around which Lookshy life is

built. Although responsibilities frequently overlap, each directorate is responsible for a different support mission — the Adjutant General is responsible for personnel issues but takes into account the mandates and recommendations of the Security, Intelligence and Justice Directorates.

THE DIRECTORATE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

The Directorate of the Adjutant General is responsible for personnel and training issues in the Legion. From the day a child is born in Lookshy to the day an old retiree passes away, the life of a Lookshy native is structured and approved by the Adjutant General’s Directorate. The directorate makes sure children are schooled, administers aptitude tests to determine a youngster’s strengths and weaknesses and counsels them on how they might best use those strengths in service of their career and the Legion. The directorate assigns new soldiers to their first unit and manages their active-duty careers, moving soldiers and officers between assignments to maximize their potential and their utility to the Legion. When a soldier leaves active service, this directorate arranges interviews with employers for citizens, provides placement alternatives for helots and provides housing for those unwilling (or unable) to rent. And in old age, if there are no family members to provide for him, the Directorate, under the Legion’s auspices, takes the elderly soldier in, providing for his needs until he passes away, and then handles his funerary arrangements in accordance with the Legion’s traditions.

THE JUSTICE DIRECTORATE

The Justice Directorate enforces Legion and Shogunate laws and regulations in Lookshy and wherever else the Seventh Legion travels. The directorate justicars, in their white robes or armor, keep the peace in Lookshy, responding quickly to any disturbance. Although empowered to handle minor infractions on their own, major crimes are investigated by and their trials presided over by judges, officers assigned to the Justice Directorate because of their strong sense of balance and fair play and their encyclopedic knowledge of Legion statutes and tradition.

Although summary judgments handed down by the investigating justicar or judge are the norm, any soldier or officer can demand a proper trial before a tribunal of officers. In such cases, an advocate is appointed by the Justice Directorate to serve as a counsel and investigator for the defendant, should she so wish. Some choose to allow friends or superior officers to act as their counsel or investigators, or both, and this is normally allowed, so long as their requests don’t unduly degrade the readiness of the Legion. Once a decision has been handed down,





THE GUNZOTA INCIDENT

In RY 615, the General Staff and a number of senior commanders met at the Gunzota Redoubt — at the time, the redoubt closest to Greyfalls, located in the cleft between the Rock Rivers. One officer, the Adjutant General Teresu Hightower, was absent, held up by a malfunctioning sky chariot. On dawn of the third day of the week-long meeting, a First Age weapon stored in the redoubt's armory detonated, instantly transmuting every living thing in a two-mile radius into imperishable amethyst.

In the weeks that followed, the handful of remaining unit commanders, taimyo and directorate chiefs gathered to reconstruct what had happened — and to rebuild the General Staff. Adjutant General Teresu was elected chumyo, a post he held for 50 years until resigning. Hightower died two years later, commanding an expedition against the Fair Folk.

That's the publicly available story and one that Creation has taken at face value. The truth is somewhat more complex. For half a century prior to 615, the Legion had grown increasingly insular and political — cronyism and nepotism were rampant, ranks could be purchased, and while still publicly respected, numerous scandals involving the prominent Gentes were only

narrowly averted. Adjutant General Teresu lead a small coalition of officers who still believed in the old ideals of the Legion, who quietly arranged for troublemakers and corrupt officers — those they could reach — to be transferred to Gunzota Redoubt, which was remote enough to keep them safely out of the way but important enough not to seem a slight. After a decade — when the first transfers were due to expire — they put the operation's second phase into action, calling a General Staff meeting at the redoubt. When everyone — except most of the conspirators — was there, they detonated a First Age weapon, killing everyone, including those who set off the weapon, instantly.

Although Hightower's actions are not known, enough Dragon-Blooded alive at the time remember the days preceding the incident — though not fondly — and suspect that the “accidental” discharge was no accident. Whether they believe it to have been an accident or a deliberate attack, most are grateful it happened. Since the incident, the Legion has been able to severely curtail nepotism and corruption, at least at the higher ranks, and most feel Lookshy is far better off for it, despite the losses involved, both in men and material.



appeals are limited — a soldier can appeal on the basis of gross violations of procedure or on the basis of new evidence before sentence is carried out.

THE SECURITY DIRECTORATE

The Security Directorate is responsible for counterintelligence and military security in the Seventh Legion's holdings. While it works closely with the Justice and Intelligence Directorates, it is an independent arm of the Legion and fiercely defends its independence, pointing out that while its mission is similar to those of Justice and Intelligence, there are also significant differences. It is not always the case that a spy is what is needed to catch a spy, nor can investigations into security breaches be conducted in the same fashion as an ordinary criminal investigation.

THE STORES DIRECTORATE

The Stores Directorate is responsible for managing and disbursing the Legion's physical resources, from tent pegs and arrows to the most powerful First Age weapons of mass destruction. It is the largest single directorate, numbering hundreds of bursars, accountants, warehouse managers, supply sergeants and others in its ranks.

Two Stores Directorate groups are of concern to Dragon-Blooded — the sorcerer-engineers and the masters of the arsenal. The sorcerer-engineers are the primary producers of new artifacts in Lookshy and are all master craftsmen and smiths in addition to their skills in sorcery. The masters of the arsenal are in charge of the Legion's many artifacts — they repair artifacts broken beyond the skill of field sorcerer-technicians, train users in their correct operation and keep meticulous records of the Legion's assets and where they are currently assigned.

THE OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE

The Operations Directorate is responsible for the actual functioning of combat units — its members devise long-term strategies, formulate policy directives for the General Staff and facilitate dissemination of information between the directorates and the field forces. Most strategoi are part of Operations, and they are responsible (in part) for analyzing every battle fought, looking not only for what went right, but more importantly, what went wrong, how it could have cost the Legion and how to prevent it from happening again. The strategoi also plan elaborate war-game scenarios — some fought out on giant simulation tables, others in the field, often with the aid of troops from the Marukan Alliance or Great Forks acting as opposition forces.

INTERACTING WITH THE DIRECTORATES

Although the directorates can certainly be portrayed as an Orwellian monstrosity of surveillance and preplanned existence, with the directorates monitoring everything a Lookshy citizen does, that is not the intent. The directorates prefer (in the canon *Exalted* setting) to operate as subtly as possible and generally do take the rights and desires of Lookshy's natives seriously, interfering only when necessary.

This is partly out of a sense of duty to Legion soldiers and partly out of a sense of entitlement on the part of the citizens and helots, but the real reason is simple expediency. Using a light touch whenever possible is good for morale and helps to prevent serious dissension and rebellion. Soldiers who feel that they are being treated well, that they have choices in their career and that they are respected will fight nobly and, if necessary, die valiantly. Soldiers who are unhappy, treated poorly (or feel they are) and subject to poor leadership and overly harsh discipline have a distressing tendency to desert, revolt, kill their officers and otherwise misbehave. Such troops can be kept in line only through the use of heavy discipline (which further degrades morale) or the use of specialized, expensive-to-maintain Charms.

So, while the Legion bureaucracy isn't perfect — there are soldiers who fall through the cracks and others who resent their lot and the Legion — there is a general sense in Lookshy that the directorates genuinely care for the people they serve. People believe that when there is a problem, if a soldier cannot go to her superiors, she should get in touch with the appropriate directorate and it will attempt to sort things out and make things right.

THE LIAISON DIRECTORATE

The Liaison Directorate handles the civil affairs and administration of Legion holdings — this is primarily the city-state of Lookshy and the redoubts, but it also includes any temporary encampment. The liaison officers interact with local governments to secure provisions and to rent land for encampments, to arrange safe passage rights and to negotiate settlements in any disagreements between the Legion and locals.

THE INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE

Intelligence is concerned with gathering information about current hostilities, potential threats and the existence of new threats the Legion didn't





often works against it, for the Legion's restrained fighting brings less blood to her than she would like. Sunipa, Goddess of Soldiers (see sidebar), considers herself the Seventh Legion's patron, though few in Lookshy worship her, and she watches over the Legion, interceding on its behalf in the Celestial Bureaucracy when she feels it is necessary. Gods of innovation, sorcery, learning and commerce are often interested in Lookshy, for a variety of reasons.

While Vanileth seemingly has little interest in magical flight in the present day, his satrap Relza (see **Ruins of Rathess**, p. 69) still looks with favor upon the Sky Guard of Lookshy and has taken steps to protect it in the past. Curiously, the skies above Lookshy are often crowded with dematerialized birds of Vanileth, despite the small number Relza controls. Whether Vanileth himself keeps an eye on the city or some other of his satraps have taken to observing the city — and for what reason — remains unknown.

Most obviously, all of the war gods are interested in the happenings in Lookshy — though Siakal more

Description: Sunipa is related to Shield of a Different Day (see **Scavenger Sons**, p. 80), and they once fought side by side. Her hair is silver-gray, and her eyes jet. She carries a powerful fire lance, called Delicate Scarlet Blossom, and a sword whose blade is carved from a crystal of ice from the Far North that neither melts nor freezes. Her armor is forged of impossibly fine steel. She is patron to soldiers and officers and any who fight as part of a larger organization, instead of alone or in a small band. She rewards those who apply force with precision, using only as much as needs to be used to reach a goal and has no love for battle for its own sake, which sometimes sets her at odds with Ahlat and continuously with Siakal (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 21-23).

Sanctum: Sunipa lives in the Celestial City of Yu-Shan like the other war gods. Her mansion is a vast command-and-control complex, closely guarded and heavily fortified, from which she monitors the conflicts of the East. Her direct servants are an ever-dwindling legion of automaton warriors.

+2), Melee 5 (Spear +1, Sword +2) Occult 2 (War
Magics +2), Resistance 2, Stealth 4 (Ambush +2)

Charms: All listed Charms

Base Initiative: 17

Divine Daiklave (Neverfrost): Speed 22 Accuracy 20
Damage 15L Defense 20

Dodge Pool: 13 **Soak:** 28B/29L (Dragon armor, 20B/25L)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-
-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/
-2/-2/-4/-4/-4/-4/-4/-4/-4/-4/-Incap

Other Notes: Delicate Scarlet Blossom is self-powered and regenerates 4 motes of its 20 mote store each turn. Its attacks are equal in power to a warstrider fire lance (see p. 59), with triple normal range. Neverfrost ignores a target's first 10 points of lethal soak from any source. Sunipa's armor has the same abilities as a suit of dragon armor (see p. 54). She has been known to wear a warstrider (30B/30L soak, armed with two medium Essence cannons, otherwise identical to a royal warstrider) called Dreadful Necessity into battle. Her servants, the Sun Guards, are equal to Brass Legionnaires (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 103), and she is normally accompanied by a dozen of them.



The Maiden of Battles has little to say about the Seventh Legion, but her actions perhaps speak louder than words — there are at least two proclamations of destiny, sealed by her hand, that are still in action — one from early in the First Age and another, more recent petition put in place only eight centuries ago.

Although Lookshy's stance on the Celestial Bureaucracy does not make it a truly safe harbor for those who have abandoned their posts (since they face censure or even extradition to Yu Shan if the chaplains can get anyone there to listen), nonetheless small numbers of spirits have made their home in the city. Most notably, the Sun Lions, a mercenary company lead by a celestial lion, makes its winter home in Lookshy and maintains a small training and security garrison in the city year-round. Other spirits, mostly of a martial nature, have also made Lookshy their home, beyond those who would live in the city because it is their assigned post in the Celestial Bureaucracy.

THE LOOKSHY ACADEMY OF SORCERY

Lookshy makes more use of sorcery than most other organizations in Creation — a larger percentage of Abyssals and Sidereals are sorcerers, but Lookshy has more of them, rivaling the Realm (with more than three times Lookshy's Dragon-Blooded population) in terms of total numbers of sorcerers.

Lookshy's stores of magical knowledge are limited, but the Seventh Legion takes ruthless advantage of them. Nearly one in six Dragon-Blooded has some knowledge of sorcery, and sorcerer-technicians are integrated into the field forces at the wing level and even lower — most special-operations units have at least a single sorcerer, and large units have as many as a dozen, though this is rare.

Mortal sorcerers and wise men are also carefully integrated into most units — and are nearly as common. Most soldiers have a passing knowledge of minor charms that will keep a blade sharp or straighten an arrow's shaft, but each unit is assigned adepts who have studied further, learning wards against observation and spells that bring in the fog, cause clouds to dim the sun's fury or cleanse wounds. Larger units have access to masters of spells, who can summon up the rains, bind minor demons or curse enemy bowstrings.

The Legion looks on sorcery as a tool, rather than a quest into dark secrets. Sorcerers find themselves less isolated from Lookshy society than is common in the Realm. While they are certainly respected, it is the same sort of respect given to a weapon master, a warstrider-wearer or a strategos — the respect due the master of a trade, someone who has conquered a weapon in service of the Legion.

Some spells are kept from most sorcerer-technicians, in an attempt to reduce the isolation they bring upon themselves. Spells that deal with summoning, binding or dismissing demons or other spirits and similar



SPELLS AVAILABLE TO LOOKSHY SORCERERS

Lookshy's limited supply of grimoires means that its supply of spells, while large, is not limitless. Exalted sorcerers from Lookshy have access to the following spells — they may, at the Storyteller's discretion, have access to other spells as well, but they should have a reason why they haven't provided a copy of that spell for the main archives. Spells listed as "limited access" are not normally taught to sorcerer-technicians — they are reserved for the sorcerer-exorcists and select members of the Chaplainry.

From the Exalted main rulebook

Death of Obsidian Butterflies	Emerald Countermagic
Impenetrable Frost Barrier	Infallible Messenger
Invulnerable Skin of Bronze	Stormwind Rider

From The Book of Three Circles

Cirrus Skiff	Coin of Distant Vision
Commanding Presence of Fire	Commanding the Beasts
Dance of the Smoke Cobras	Disguise of the New Face
Dragon of Smoke/Serpent of Flame	Flight of the Brilliant Raptor
Flying Guillotine	Incantation of Effective Restoration
Magician's Pleasant Path	Mirror of Bending Light
Paralyzing Contradiction	Plague of Bronze Snakes

Purifying Flames

Shadow Summons
Spirit of Might
Spoke the Wooden Face
Stalwart Earth Guardian
Thunder Wolf's Howl

Unconquerable Self

The Violent Opening of Closed Portals
Water from Stone

From Caste Book: Twilight

Peacock Shadow Eyes

From Savage Seas

Calling the Wind's Kiss

Limited access spells

Calling the Stalwart Servitor (**The Book of Three Circles**)
Demon of the First Circle (**Exalted** main rulebook)
Lesser Golem (**The Book of Three Circles**)
Open the Spirit Door (**Games of Divinity/Exalted: The Sidereals**)
Summon Elemental (**Exalted** main rulebook)

Ritual of Elemental Empowerment

Song of the Waves
Spirit Sword
Sprouting Shackles of Doom
Sting of the Ice Hornet
Tongue of the Element Spirit

Unstoppable Fountain of the Depths

Virtuous Guardian of Flame

Written Upon the Water

Mast Shattering Spell

spells are the province of sorcerer-exorcists, an elite band of sorcerers closely aligned with the chaplains of the Immaculate faith. Sorcerer-exorcists and their mortal counterparts are often treated with some trepidation by the rest of the Legion, as much for their fanatical devotion to maintaining the Celestial Order as for the secrets they have learned.

The Academy of Lookshy is open to any Lookshy citizen who wishes to learn sorcery — there are classes in mortal sorcery and Terrestrial Circle principles. Only those who have mastered four Terrestrial Circle spells are granted the title sorcerer-technician, or shugan-junai — equivalent in rank to a taizei. The rank of sorcerer-engineer, or wai tan-junai, is not based on mastery of spells, but on an overall knowledge of First Age lore, spellcraft and mastery of craft — sorcerer-engineers must be smiths or artisans, as well as sorcerers.

LOOKSHY SPECIAL FORCES

Most nations deploy at least limited numbers of special forces units — these are highly trained elite forces (normally treated as superior opponents, as described above). Some will be heroic mortals, and special forces are often lead by champions of one sort or another — Dragon-Blooded, Wyld-tainted, God-Blooded, minor spirits or elementals. Most units of this type are scale sized, and few are larger than talon sized — a talon of gunzoshia is equal in fighting power to a dragon of normal infantry.

Ashigaru

Highly trained mortal soldiers armed with artifact weapons and armor intended for mortal use, normally deployed as heavy shock infantry, as fire support or as a heavy mobile reserve to shore up weakening lines. Ashigaru are extremely rare outside of Lookshy, which deploys one talon of ashigaru in each wing and additional scales that are assigned to units with large Dragon-Blooded contingents.

Equipment: Ashigaru battle armor; fire lance, shock pike or storm lance; slashing sword; possibly other artifacts (usually weapons).

Gunzoshia

Elite mortal soldiers that have been surgically implanted and ritually prepared to use the fabled gunzoshia armor, these soldiers are almost a match for Dragon-Blooded champions, but the cost they pay for this might is a dear one — there are no old gunzoshia. The Seventh Legion is nearly the only force in Creation to deploy any number of gunzoshia, attaching one talon to each dragon — smaller units sometimes act as support troops for warstriders and Dragon-Blooded champions.

Equipment: Gunzoshia combat armor; fire lance, shock pike or storm lance; great sword or great axe; occasionally a target shield; often other artifacts.

Rangers

Rangers are the premier special operations units of the Second Age, performing hazardous reconnaissance,

TROOP QUALITY

In most armies, unit quality is largely based on how much time the units actually spend in combat or preparing for combat. Reserve and levy units tend to be *weak opponents* type extras (see *Exalted*, p. 241), as are units that are largely for show — they may drill excellently, but they don't fight well. Seasoned forces that have seen some, or even extensive, battlefield experience are normally *competent opponents* type extras — they will react intelligently, fight bravely and die valiantly, but against Exalted opponents, they will die. Only the most experienced and competent units should be treated as *elite opponents* — these are physically and mentally superior troops training full time for war. *Superior opponents* are special troops, culled out of best units and given the best training and additional equipment. They should not be treated as extras, making them substantially tougher in combat. Units of superior opponents are frequently lead by heroic mortal, Terrestrial Exalted or God-Blooded commanders. There are handfuls of units composed entirely of heroic mortals, Exalted, God-Blooded and the like, but they are exceedingly rare.

Lookshy regulars are normally elite opponents, although some should be considered superior. In particular, ashigaru and gunzosha units are almost always superior. Natives of Lookshy are normally competent extras, but some will have maintained their fighting skills at the elite level, and there is always the chance of running into an ex-gunzosha just back from having his amulets removed.

Superior Opponents

Ninjas, rangers, battle-hardened Tiger Warriors

Base initiative 8, 8 dice in any relevant combat dice pools.

Valor 5, Willpower 7

Normal health levels — not treated as extras for purposes of taking damage

infiltration, sabotage and assassination missions. Lookshy rangers who must move openly travel in fang-sized units and are always masked to obscure their identity — often these masks are enchanted to further hide the rangers' presence. Lookshy rangers are normally heroic mortals or Dragon-Blooded, but there are also numbers of human appearing God-Blooded and Wyld-tainted amongst their ranks.

Equipment: Highly variable, based on mission. Often ashigaru or gunzosha equipment; infinite weapons are highly prized; bows are very common. Many rangers are Essence channelers and carry daiklaves or other artifact gear. Often mounted.

Artillery Engineers

Artillerists are responsible for artifact siege equipment — weapons such as implosion bows, siege-weapon equipped warstriders and defensive artifacts such as haze shields. Lookshy normally deploys one talon of artillerists per dragon, and



Ashigaru



Gunzosha



additional scales of artilleryists are assigned at the wing level.

Equipment: Typically as combat or siege engineers, with the addition of various artifacts.

Warstriders

Warstrider units are normally deployed against large-scale threats or as siege weapons, but they see plenty of field duty as well. Lookshy's deployment is two "fangs" (actually talon-sized in strength, but deploying five warstriders) per dragon. With close to 20 Dragon-Blooded, a fang of rangers and two scales of ashigaru or gunzosha, warstrider fangs are potent forces even without their giant war machines.

Equipment: Warstrider (usually common); otherwise variable — artifact weapons are common, but a warstrider's weapons and equipment are largely based on personal preference.

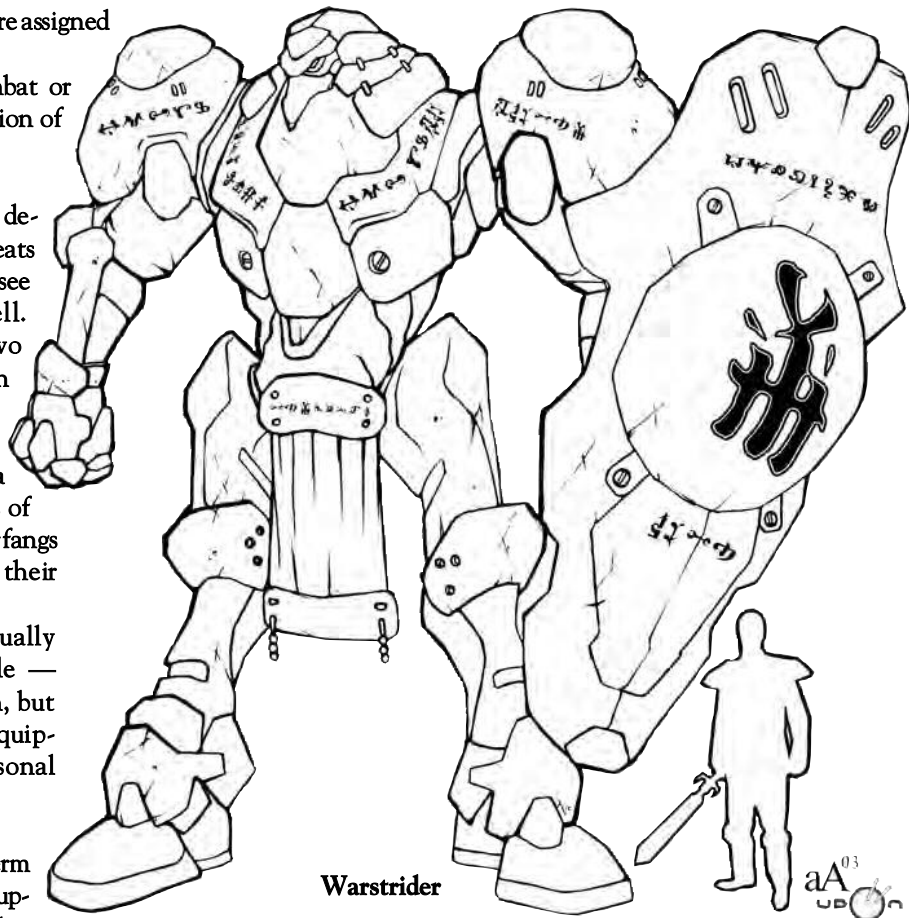
Dragon Warriors

"Dragon warriors" is a general term for a band of Dragon-Blooded supported by elite mortal forces. They are often held in reserve, but smart generals use them as high mobility shock forces. Lookshy dragon warrior units normally wear dragon armor and are similar in overall structure to warstrider fangs. Normal deployment is three dragon warrior "fangs" per dragon — this is sometimes flipped with the warstriders (two dragon warrior fangs, three warstrider fangs).

Equipment: Highly variable. Many units are equipped with dragon armor, but this is not universal, and personal weapons and equipment are largely based on preference.

UNITS OF THE SEVENTH LEGION

Officially, the Seventh Legion is titled "the Seventh Legion of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate (Reinforced)" and is a single legion. Unofficially, this is seen by many as a polite legal fiction, increasingly irrelevant in the modern day — even those who politically support the Shogunate's return believe the General Staff should simply acknowledge that the Seventh Legion long ago surpassed anything resembling a legion in organizational strength and should re-name it to accommodate deployed reality, rather than an ideal long ago passed into myth. As a result, many units are informally referred to as "legions" in casual speech or the vernacular.



Warstrider

THE FIRST FIELD FORCE

Description: Based around the Seventh Legion's reconnaissance and special operations units, the First has grown into a well-armed, well-supported field force. Combining high mobility with commanding striking power, the First is frequently deployed into the most dangerous environments.

Commanding officer: Taimyo Karal Linwei (General Staff)

Armor color: Red

Motto: First In!

General makeup: Skirmishers and reconnaissance units, with a solid core of heavy units. Reinforced with warstrider, combat engineer, dragon warrior and ranger units.

Overall quality: Superlative

THE SECOND FIELD FORCE

Description: The Second is a battlefield unit, reinforced with scouts and harassers. It is intended to engage Second Age forces in open combat and is usually reinforced with special operations units from the Home Guard.

Commanding officer: Taimyo Yushoto Marana

Armor color: Forest green

Motto: Ever Resolute!

General makeup: Heavy infantry with archers, reinforced with horse skirmishers.

Overall quality: Excellent

MOUNTS

Lookshy's long-standing alliance with the Marukan Alliance gives it access to the Marukani breeding stocks in ways few other nations have. The yearly retainers of the Marukan Alliance are only partly paid in silver — the rest is in fine horses, including breeding mares and stallions. Marukani horse breeders work closely with Lookshy sorcerers to improve the various breeds — in particular, they are currently working to improve the number of Marukani finest that are born and survive to adulthood.

Because of this, Lookshy cavalry and scouts are often mounted on Marukani steeds (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 88) although both battlers and Marukani finest are in low supply. Swifts and scouts are commonplace, however.

Dragon-Blooded of the Seventh Legion will typically *not* ride Marukani steeds — the Terrestrials simply kill mounts too quickly to waste fine horses on them. When possible, Dragon-Bloods ride automaton horses, God-Blooded mounts that can withstand their lethal animas or artifact mounts of various sorts.

THE THIRD FIELD FORCE

Description: The Third is reinforced and designed to engage in siege warfare and monster hunting—it has more heavy weapons than any other field force and has fought countless battles against Wyld creatures and behemoths.
Commanding officer: Taimyo Maheka Lespa (General Staff)

Armor color: Jade green

Motto: Death Before Dishonor

General makeup: Heavy infantry with archers, reinforced with warstriders and combat engineers.

Overall quality: Excellent

THE FOURTH FIELD FORCE

Description: The Fourth was originally organized in similar fashion to the Second, but over the last century, the Fourth has become a center for experimental units and limited deployment forces. As a result, the Fourth has a large number of small, semi-independent units that are parceled out on contracts that no other field force would want to touch. Although transfers out of the Fourth are not uncommon and attrition rates from casualties are higher than with the other field forces, the Fourth never wants for troops — more than one officer's career has been made in the Fourth, and the Fourth has a higher rate of granted citizenships for helot troops than any other unit in the Legion.

Commanding officer: Taimyo Teresu Zen Wu

Armor color: Silver

Motto: Always Forward

General makeup: Mixed.

Overall quality: Excellent

THE LOOKSHY HOME GUARD

Description: The Home Guard is the Seventh Legion's mobile reserve. Many special operations units and specialist forces temporarily attached to larger forces for particular missions are drawn from the Home Guard. The Home Guard has the largest supply of First Age weapons and equipment, although the First and the Manse Guard are close.

Commanding officer: Taimyo Maheka Varil

Armor color: Purple

Motto: Steadfast

General makeup: Heavy infantry and archers, with a heavy reinforcing of specialist units of all kinds.

Overall quality: Superlative

THE SEVENTH LEGION RESERVE

(THE GRAY LEGION)

Description: The Gray Legion has not been called up in full in over three centuries. Every native of Lookshy who has finished active duty is a reservist — all told, nearly six field forces worth of reservists, although actually calling up that many would be a serious strain on Lookshy's economy. Though organized into units, reservists are normally called up individually or in small groups and integrated into existing units. Reserve units are very light on Dragon-Blooded or First Age equipment.

Commanding officer: Taimyo Taroketu Stonefist

Armor color: Gray

Motto: None

General makeup: Mixed.

Overall quality: Good

SEVENTH LEGION NAVAL FORCES

Description: Although large on paper, the Lookshy Navy is no match for the Realm navy outside of its small purview — any of the Realm's massive fleets outnumbers Sirel's entire navy, and while Lookshy triremes are well-equipped and -manned, they are dreadfully outnumbered. For its primary missions — escorting Lookshy merchant ships and patrolling the Yanaze and the nearby Inland Sea, the Lookshy navy proves adequate.

Commanding officer: Admiral Sirel Sogrun

Armor color: Navy blue

Motto: None

General makeup: Naval marines and sailors.

Overall quality: Good

THE SEVENTH LEGION SKY GUARD

Description: The Sky Guard is the only functioning fleet of First Age airships remaining in Creation.





While recent losses have reduced their capability, they are still a fearsome asset for the Seventh Legion — but not in raw fighting power. Although no nation would want to see a *Skywolf*-class craft floating over its capital, the Seventh Legion prefers to use its skyships for transport and force deployment, rather than directly on the battlefield. Skyships are simply too expensive to repair or to replace to allow them to be lost in any but the most vital battles.

Sky Guard units are in constant demand, and as a result, they are frequently in need of maintenance and often in need of repair — there are simply too many missions and not enough air transports to provide for the need. The Stores Directorate works closely with Operations and Taimyo Nefvarin to keep the fleet as close to full readiness as possible, but especially after a major deployment, an unexpected call for air assets could leave Lookshy sorely lacking in resources.

Commanding officer: Taimyo Nefvarin Shou-Yu

Armor color: Sky blue

Motto: Lightning in the Night

General makeup: Air marines and sky sailors.

Overall quality: Excellent

THE LOOKSHY MANSE GUARD

Description: The Lookshy Manse Guard is the last line of defense for Lookshy. Although well-armed, the units assigned here are primarily mortal — deployment patterns have favored placing Dragon-Blooded in front-line combat units whenever possible, and as a result, only the barest minimum needed to operate Lookshy's various defensive systems are assigned to the Manse Guard. The Manse Guard has never been deployed in the field — indeed, "Calling out the Black" is synonymous in Lookshy slang for something that would never, could never, happen.

Commanding officer: Taimyo Bukane Winter Rose

Armor color: Black

Motto: Never Surrender!

General makeup: Bulwark infantry and archers, specialist units.

Overall quality: Elite

THE FOREIGN LEGIONS

Lookshy maintains a number of units on the outskirts of the Scavenger Lands — and in other parts of the East — that are not part of the Seventh Legion's official order of battle. Known in Lookshy as foreign legions, or sometimes janissary legions, these units are composed primarily of foreigners — former janissaries, ex-mercenaries, runaway slaves, criminals and bandits trying to escape prosecution or seeking redemption and a host of others. The only thing they all have in common is a desire to leave their former lives behind — soldiers of the janissary legions are shielded from their former existence, so long as they maintain discipline.

THE KARALA

The Karala are a tribe of semi-civilized herders who reside in the savannas outside of Larjyn. Their relationship with the Seventh Legion is predicated around a shared love for song, fiercely fought battles and a good dose of enlightened self-interest and is one of the stranger — and more powerful — alliances the Seventh Legion has forged over the centuries.

At the end of each winter, 700 Karala make their way from the Larjyn Legion outpost — the most remote of all permanent Legion fortifications — hundreds of miles to Lookshy or to a redoubt. There, they begin 10 years of service to the Legion, where they are taught the arts of war. When their service is over, most survivors return to their townships and take on the duties of adults — marrying, raising children and defending the herds from raiders. They bring with them fine weapons and their pay (which, over 10 years, is substantial). As a result, the Karala have grown from a minor tribe into one of the most important "barbarian" peoples in the plains around Larjyn. A handful each year choose to remain in service to the Legion — most become citizens five years after that, and Karalan blood is increasingly common in Lookshy.

The Karala are excellent scouts and skirmishers, and they can move over plains or other level ground nearly as fast as cavalry can. They are also all but incorruptible — Karala warriors are well aware of the good deal they have going and would never do anything to mess it up.

Recruits receive a year of intensive training designed not only to raise them to the Legion's exacting standards, but also to weed out any potential problems. After a year of instructors riding them day and night, the only people who graduate to Legion membership are those who *want* to be there.

Foreign legion units are normally neither as well-equipped nor as disciplined as their field force counterparts — this is especially true of artifact weapons, which are in precious short supply in the janissary forces. Most foreign legion units are dragon sized or smaller — this makes it easier for them to pose as independent mercenary units, and many spend much of their time doing just that. Other units are assigned to redoubts as garrison units, freeing up field force units for combat duty. Currently, no redoubt is manned completely by janissary units, although plans to open a remote redoubt outside of Larjyn, staffed entirely by Karala tribe members, have been on the drawing board for two decades.

REDOUBTS

Six redoubts have been built in various parts of the Scavenger Lands on lands permanently deeded or secured with centuries-long leases from the countries they are located in. Each is a combination of fortress, supply depot, command center and staging area for the Seventh Legion. They are safe locations to which Sky Guard units can deploy troops, facilities that field force units can retreat or evacuate wounded troops to and storage dumps for Legion equipment and supplies. Each is commanded by a taimyo, and operated semi-independently — while expected to obey the General Staff's directives, redoubt commanders are also expected to show initiative in using the forces under their command.

Four redoubts (and one inactive one) are listed here — the remaining two are reserved for Storytellers to invent as they need.

Marukan Redoubt

The oldest and largest redoubt, Marukan resides on the Grey River's banks, two weeks march from Varsi. The fortifications of Redoubt Marukan are very old, built around a level 5 Fire Manse and constructed with Shogunate-era techniques. With over 10,000 permanent residents, not counting locals, and two field forces worth of Legion troops, janissaries, allied mercenaries and Marukani cavalry stationed at the redoubt at any time, Marukan Redoubt is a sizable thorn in the side of

any attempt by the Mask of Winters to move on the Scavenger Lands.

Nasaru Redoubt

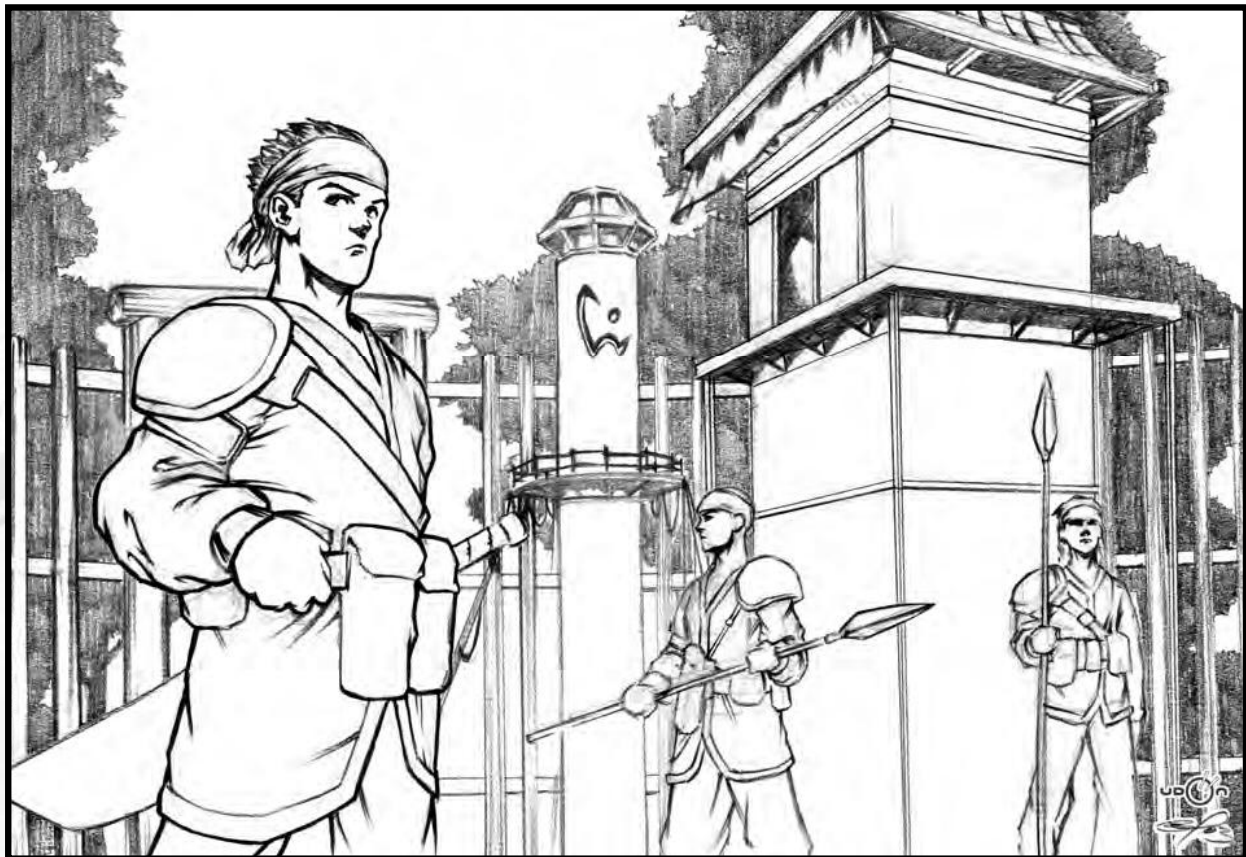
Located on the edge of the Hundred Kingdoms, Nasaru Redoubt is the newest and smallest redoubt, intended to replace Gunzota Redoubt. Nasaru is less than a century and a half old and sits three weeks journey from Greyfalls, six weeks from Metagalapa and two from the remains of Gunzota Redoubt. The redoubt commander normally has about three dragons of infantry available, most of it foreign legion, in addition to a fang of warstriders and assorted other small units.

Nechara Redoubt

The most remote redoubt, Nechara is a small outpost, important mainly for its proximity to many of the smaller Southeastern city-states. Assignment to Nechara is seen either as an opportunity or as a punishment, depending on the officer's demeanor — it is certainly true that it is not considered a plum posting by the Adjutant General, however. Nechara Redoubt normally posts one field force worth of troops, mostly Foreign Legion, and is less well equipped than most redoubts.

Marin Bay Redoubt

Marin Bay Redoubt is based out of an ancient harbor fortress (a level 4 Water Manse) and serves not only the Seventh Legion's field forces, but also the Lookshy navy. There are substantial dockyards and construction facilities





located here, and four slips capable of refitting First Age vessels are located inside the redoubt itself, out of public view. The great sea doors that protect access to those slips have been open, and the slips empty, for centuries, save on the infrequent basis that Lookshy needed to refit a ship here, instead of at Lookshy itself — but for the last five years, the slip doors have been closed and security tightened. Ground forces at the redoubt consist of several dragons of heavy infantry, but they are reinforced by the equivalent of 10 wings worth of marines.

Gunzota Redoubt

Sometimes known as the Lost Redoubt, Gunzota is a ghost fortress. The weapon used to change every living thing in it to imperishable amethyst still functions, leeching the Essence from the air and the ground and instantly converting everything that enters its area of effect into purple crystalline statues. These statues still wear their clothing or armor, as the enchantment specifically affects only living matter — a spirit or demon material enough to grab something is material enough for the enchantment to affect. Retrieval of equipment using automata has proven fruitless as well — the enchantment quickly drains their Essence, leaving them functional, but inoperative. A small unit of scouts and rangers quietly guards the location — would-be tomb robbers often find themselves thrown into the (clearly delineated) area of effect.

THE SECRET REDOUBTS

In addition to the six redoubts that are publicly known, there are four additional redoubts. Each is carefully located to minimize attention from neighbors, and unlike the main redoubts, each is small and well hidden. They are each manned by small, highly trained units, well equipped with defensive artifacts and centered around one primary purpose — to act as operation centers should Lookshy and one or more redoubts be compromised or destroyed. Their secondary purpose is to maintain watch over one of Lookshy's four Thousand-Forged Dragons (a fifth lies inoperative in Lookshy's arsenal, a victim of the Contagion war) — for this reason, none of these redoubts is associated with a Manse.

CHARMS OF THE SEVENTH LEGION

Military Dragon-Blooded make use of a variety of Charms not found in common use outside of the battlefield or small-unit combat. These Charms are often related to military preparedness, logistics or training in some fashion and are commonly seen both in the Seventh Legion and among Terrestrials serving in the Realm legions.

PERFORMANCE CHARMS

TIRELESS FOOTFALLS CADENCE

Cost: 2 motes per fang

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Memorable Performance Technique

The songs of the Dragon-Blooded can inspire even the most slovenly unit to incredible feats of endurance. As her unit sets out upon the road (the song must be started with the march), the Terrestrial raises her voice in song, singing tales of the unit's glory, the prodigious feats it has accomplished and the justified vengeance it is going to wreak upon the enemy when it arrives. As she sings, her soldiers find their loads lightened, their resolve stiffened and the journey less onerous.

So long as she continues singing, her unit gains a number of automatic successes equal to her Permanent Essence - 2 (minimum 1) on all fatigue checks, and its rate of travel is doubled. This feat can only be performed for infantry units, and a single Dragon-Blooded can only affect a number of fangs equal to her permanent Essence + 2, but the Charm is synergistic (see p. 45). Motes spent on this Charm are committed — a Dragon-Blood can keep the Charm working for a number of hours equal to her permanent Essence + Stamina.

FLAWLESS TRAINING EXECUTION

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower, plus 1 mote and 1 committed mote per fang trained

Duration: Two months

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm allows the Dragon-Blooded to execute a training plan developed by Charms higher in this tree. With the Charm in effect, the Exalt can flawlessly lead drills, impart knowledge and teach classes without error. A single Dragon-Blooded can train a number of fangs equal to his Permanent Essence, but this Charm is synergistic (see p. 45) — groups of Terrestrials working in concert can train large units of troops quickly. Each use of this Charm requires a training program or protocol developed with the Peerless Training Method Protocols or other Charms — a Dragon-Blooded can memorize a number of training programs at one time equal to his permanent Essence. While this Charm is in use, 1 mote of Essence per fang trained is committed to its continued operation — these motes are released when the program is complete.

SYNERGISTIC CHARMS

Some Dragon-Blooded Charms are *synergistic* — the more Terrestrial Exalted performing them in the same place at the same time, the more powerful the overall effect. These Charms are always simple, they can never be placed in Combos, and only Dragon-Blooded can work together in this fashion — an Eclipse or Moonshadow using them will not add to the effect, nor gain any additional benefit from its use.

Synergistic Charms are almost always of a support nature — there are Charms to grant skills to be used on the battlefield, Charms to help units quickly move to the battlefield and Charms to help units quickly set up the battlefield, but few of direct use during the actual fighting.

When a synergistic Charm is used, it adds dots equal to the number of extra Dragon-Blooded performing the Charm to each user's permanent Essence for purposes of determining the Charm's overall effect. Synergistic Charms are limited in their scope. The total number of Dragon-Blooded that can participate in a synergistic Charm at one time is equal to the permanent Essence + Performance (including appropriate specialties, such as "Leadership") of the highest-ranking Dragon-Blooded taking part in the Charm.

For Example: A unit of Seventh Legion infantry needs to get from Lookshy to Great Forks in a hurry, but no air transport is available. Twenty officers in the unit have learned the Tireless Footfalls Cadence. The commanding officer has Essence 5 and Performance 4 (Leadership +2), for a total of 11. Her second in command has Essence 4 and Performance 4. They split the unit into two groups — one leaving an hour ahead, under the command of the unit's second officer, and the other, larger unit remaining with the taimyo. When initiating the Charm, each officer in the second unit will gain 10 (the number of extra Terrestrials performing the Charm) dots of "phantom" permanent Essence. This means that the taimyo can aid 17 fangs (85 soldiers) on her own, and the other Terrestrials (average permanent Essence of 3) can aid an additional 150 fangs (750 soldiers), for a total of over 800 soldiers, more than a wing's worth.

PEERLESS TRAINING METHOD PROTOCOLS

Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One month per dot of permanent Essence, or until training program is used

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Flawless Training Execution

During the First Age, the Dragon-Blooded relied on the Celestial Exalted and their superior training methods to bring knowledge to the people and acted as facilitators, rather than designers, of training programs. When the Usurpation was being planned, the Terrestrial Exalted developed this family of Charms as a way to secretly train commandos and soldiers for their war, and the Dragon-Bloods have continued to refine the process ever since.

Like the Sense-Destroying Methods, this Charm is actually a family of Charms that work in an identical fashion — five examples of the Charms available are listed in the Protocols sidebar on this page, but others are known, and more can be developed as needed. Using one of these Charms, a skilled Dragon-Blood can develop a training program to improve those undergoing the program in specific areas — she can teach civilians how to be soldiers, teach disaster recovery techniques or impart the fundamentals of nearly any task.

To use these Charms, the Terrestrial develops a training program — this requires one week, minus one day for each dot of permanent Essence over 2 (so a Dragon-Blooded with Essence 4 can develop a training program in five days). At the end of this time, the Charm's user commits the plan to record on paper, and his player rolls the character's Intelligence + Performance, against a difficulty of 4. If the Charm is successful, the plan will raise one Ability listed to 3, two Abilities to 2 and the remaining Abilities to 1 each, add one dot to an Attribute listed and raise one of the Virtues listed by one. Extra successes can be used to buy specialties for the Abilities raised — each extra success equals one specialty. No more than two specialties can be gained in this fashion. A failed roll indicates a training plan that simply will not work — the time and Essence spent is lost. A botched roll indicates a training plan that is subtly flawed in some fashion — it cannot work, but this will not become evident until it is implemented in the field by being used by someone with the Flawless Training Execution Charm. This will typically be noticeable within the first week of training, but particularly bad botches may take weeks to become evident.

The Abilities gained by this Charm are not additive — if a character has more dots in that Ability than the training program would provide, she gains no benefit (though she may still gain any attached specialties, if she





has less than three). These Charms cannot raise Attributes above 3, Virtues above 2 or Willpower above 8 (these stats can be raised later through experience). A given character can only benefit from a single Charm in this tree once but can be the recipient of multiple *different* Charms (so a character could receive the Combat Drill Protocol and then the Officer Readiness Training Protocol). This Charm has no effect whatsoever on individuals with an Essence higher than 1.

Each training program is unique and can only be used once — if a developer wants to hand a training program to two subordinates, he must use this Charm twice and develop two different programs. A Dragon-Blooded can develop as many training programs as he likes, but each requires 2 committed motes of Essence to remain viable — these motes are returned when someone with the Flawless Training Execution Charm uses the training program.

TERRESTRIAL CIRCLE SORCERY

RAISING THE EARTH'S BONES

Cost: 25 motes

The Seventh Legion prefers not to fight from static positions when possible, but when necessary, it is perfectly capable of doing so, and this spell lets its soldiers quickly raise defenses when needed. The Exalt first marks out the rough outline of the area he wants to work with, using freshly cut sapling branches cut into marking poles. Once this outline is laid down, he must clear the area of any living creature larger than a rabbit and begin casting. If there is a creature larger than a rabbit in the area of effect, the spell fails.

As he casts the spell, the Exalt visualizes the defensive structures, which can include any kind of earthen ramparts, stone walls, small fortifications or other defenses. These protections must be completely contained within the area the sorcerer has marked out, which can be no larger than (Intelligence + Occult + the character's Craft (War) Ability, if any x 10) square yards in size. Stone buildings, fortifications or other defensive structures summoned in this fashion cannot exceed three stories in height and are of durable but not imperishable construction, equal to stone or brick.

MUNDANE EQUIPMENT

Lookshy makes use of a tremendous amount of specialized equipment to aid in its battlefield operations. This equipment ranges from exceptional examples of devices commonly available in Creation — lightweight tents and cooking gear, easy to wear frame packs and equipment harnesses and other common gear — to complex communication equipment. A few more noteworthy examples are listed below.

PROTOCOLS

These are the five most commonly taught Protocols, but they are not the only ones known — there are protocols to teach sailors, skyship crews and perhaps a dozen other specialized military (and some civilian) roles. Storytellers are free to make up their own protocols as they are needed, within the following guidelines: No more than five separate Abilities can be improved, and specialties can be added only to those Abilities. Similarly, no more than one Virtue and three Attributes can be improved. Willpower can always be improved, subject to the limits of the Charm.

Combat Drill Protocol

Abilities: Archery, Brawl, Craft (War), Dodge, Melee

Attributes: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Virtue: Valor (alternately, Conviction)

Officer Readiness Training Protocol

Abilities: Bureaucracy, Lore, Melee, Performance, Presence

Attributes: Dexterity, Charisma, Wits

Virtue: Valor (alternately, Conviction)

Faithful Bureaucrat Education Protocol

Abilities: Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny, Lore, Presence

Attributes: Manipulation, Perception, Intelligence

Virtue: Temperance (alternately Conviction)

Stealthy Agent Preparation Protocol

Abilities: Athletics, Larceny, Martial Arts, Stealth, Thrown

Attributes: Dexterity, Manipulation, Wits

Virtue: Conviction (alternately Valor)

Puissant Surgeon Education Protocol

Abilities: Investigation, Lore, Medicine, Occult, Presence

Attributes: Dexterity, Perception, Intelligence

Virtue: Compassion (alternately Conviction)

LOOKSHY STRONGBOW

The strongbow resembles a conventional compound bow but for an ingenious system of pulleys that amplify the strength of the wielder, allowing him to pull a stronger bow and hold the bow longer before release. Strongbows are unique to Lookshy service and are not sold to other nations — the handful that have been captured have only slowly been duplicated, as they require manufacturing techniques that have been lost to most of the Scavenger Lands.

Name	Accuracy	Max Strength	Damage	Rate	Range	Resources
Strongbow	+1	5+	+1L	3	275	•••• (if available commercially)

HELIOGRAPH

Heliographs are complex assemblages of reflectors, lenses and shutters designed to amplify the light of the sun or a fire (even a torch) and use it to transmit coded messages. Properly emplaced (the higher the better), heliographs can be seen for dozens, even hundreds, of miles, dependent on terrain, placement and conditions. Portable units are sometimes emplaced at semipermanent encampments, but most are mounted at Post way stations on tall towers, forming a communications network that stretches along the River Province's more populated and traveled districts. A portable heliograph is a heavy and fragile device, weighing 100 pounds and costing Resources ••••.

ARTIFACTS, HEARTHSTONES AND RULES

The Lookshy arsenals are filled with devices from the First Age, ranging from simple artifacts that enhance the workings of a single Charm or weapons with a single unique function to terrible devices that can destroy whole cities. Some of these weapons are singular artifacts, experimental or specialized weapons built for a particular purpose, then stored away in one of the great arsenals of the First Age and unearthed centuries later or built for a particular Exalt. Others were produced in number, intended as equipment for the mighty legions of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate.

RECHARGING ESSENCE STORES

Artifacts that can hold motes of Essence for later use are uncommon in most of Creation — the secrets to their manufacture are all but lost, and only the Sidereals, the sorcerer-engineers of Lookshy and a handful of others can still produce them — and only Lookshy in any numbers.

These Essence storage devices are inefficient and require maintenance and repair (this is normally beyond the scope of the game — few devices incorporating Essence reserves require the same kind of maintenance that a skyship requires, for example). Anyone who can channel Essence can recharge an Essence store — this requires handling the device for one minute and spending 2 motes of Essence for each mote restored (so restoring 20 motes to a device requires 20 minutes and the expenditure of 40 motes of Essence). This Essence can be drawn from any source, and devices can be partially recharged — the motes spent on recharging a device are *not* committed unless specified otherwise and will be regained at the normal rate.

Essence stored in a device can normally only be used to power that artifact — while records suggest there were

RITUAL OF ELEMENTAL EMPOWERMENT

The Ritual of Elemental Empowerment (see *The Book of Three Circles*, pp. 43 and 44) is invaluable to sorcerer-technicians and one of the most common spells in their repertoire. Its uses in creating equipment are nearly endless — Water-imbued weapons shift from javelin to lance in the blink of an eye, Earth-imbued spyglasses are unbreakable and already exceptional armor becomes even tougher, while Air-imbued equipment is lighter and easier to carry.

But the spell is more useful than just that. Pots imbued with Fire are self-heating — no need to gather firewood. Food containers imbued with Air stay chilled. Armor can be empowered to shift from a lightweight buff jacket to a reinforced breastplate in an instant. Tools shift from form to form — a small toolset becomes as useful as a massive workshop. Legion marching cloaks and storm jackets have removable liners — the garment itself is Air enchanted (to keep the wearer cool), and the liner Fire enchanted (to keep him warm). When on garrison duty, the Ritual of Elemental Empowerment is probably the most commonly cast of all spells.

Items imbued with some element are considered minor artifacts and typically cost Artifact •. These enchantments can be removed with countermagic — but sorcerers normally have better things to do with a counterspell than to attack personal equipment.

many different sorts of devices for storing Essence in the First Age, few have survived to the present day. Some of the few known examples are the iron horse (see *Caste Book: Eclipse*, p. 81) and the Crucible of Tarim (see *The Book of Three Circles*, pp. 24-25).

REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE

Although many artifacts such as daiklaves and other weapons were designed to be basically maintenance-free, others, especially those built during the Shogunate, required substantial upkeep — reagents and fuels that had to be reloaded, parts that needed to be replaced and enchantments that had to be strengthened or reapplied periodically or as use weakened them. These devices were often powerful but paid for that power in the time spent





to keep them functioning. The Shogunate could duplicate many First Age weapons in function — it could not generally duplicate their imperishable nature, however.

Equipment that requires substantial maintenance and repair has a Repair rating — this rating acts as a general guideline for how expensive and difficult the upkeep or reconstruction of such a device is, how much time must be invested in keeping the device working and how much replacement parts and materials costs. This is broken down into two basic tasks — maintaining the device to keep it working and repairing it when it inevitably breaks down.

Most devices that have a Repair rating were once made in the First Age, using techniques that obviated the need for this kind of continuous refurbishing — these are normally one Artifact rating higher in cost (so First Age suit of dragon armor would be Artifact 5). These techniques are all but lost in the Age of Sorrows — even First Age Sidereals or Lunars often do not remember the exact methods used or no longer have access to the materials and tools needed to make use of the secrets they retain.

MAINTENANCE

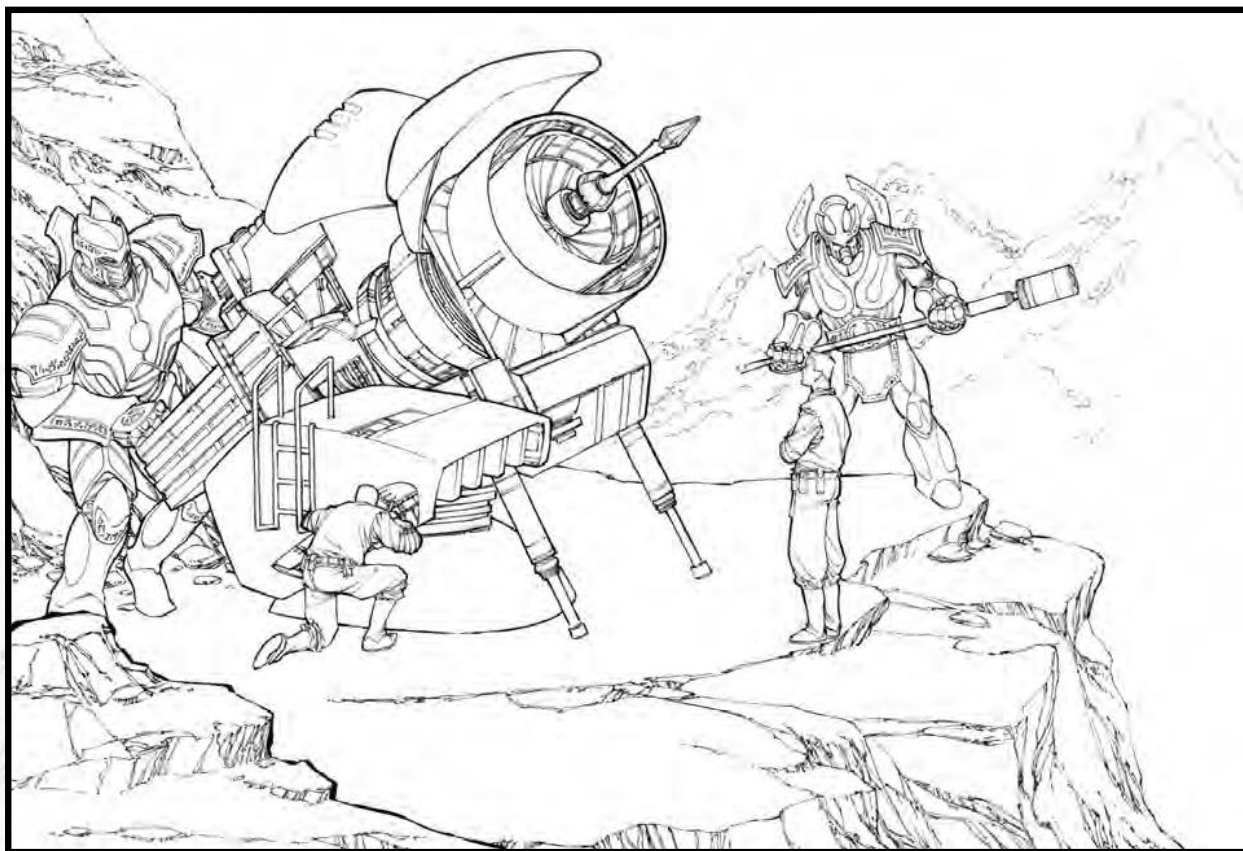
Maintenance is work needed to keep a device functioning and includes not just tightening belts and replacing Essence lenses and the like, but ritual tasks — sacrifices to appease the artifact's least god, reapplying or strengthening

enchancements and so on. Maintenance is assumed to be automatically successful — if the character has sufficient time, research and ability, she can keep the device working.

Artifacts normally need maintenance dependent on usage — a device that is not used may need some maintenance to bring it back to full working order but will not continue to decay. Heavy or combat use typically counts as double normal use — count each hour or fraction thereof as two hours when determining need for maintenance, unless otherwise noted in the artifact's description. There is usually a grace period between when this maintenance is needed and when performance is affected — if not mentioned, assume the device will lose 10 percent of its speed or maneuverability, 4B/2L damage or soak or one power for every 10 hours of maintenance the device is in arrears. These penalties persist until all of the maintenance required has been performed — in extreme cases, the device may actually be broken from the abuse and will permanently function at this level unless repaired.

REPAIRS

Broken devices can sometimes be repaired. This is dependent on many factors — very old, poorly treated weapons may be more difficult or even impossible to repair — in contrast, some First Age weapons may need only basic maintenance to bring them back to full functionality even after thousands of years of abuse. Repairs are normally a simple task, Intelligence + the appropriate Craft Ability —



Difficulty	Modifier
+1	Each dot under the minimum Ability requirements
+1	Substituting a close Ability (Craft: Metalworking for Craft: First Age Weapons to repair a warstrider)
+2	Rushing the job (cuts time in half)
+1 to +3	Inadequate tools
-1	Discussing repairs with the artifact's least god (takes one hour, successful prayer roll)
-1	Assistant
-2	Repair team (see below)
-1	Expert tools (additional +1 Resources cost)
-1	Extra time taken (doubles time)

usually Craft (First Age Weapons) — against the difficulty listed below. However, fixing very large or complex devices may be an extended task, with a total difficulty equal to the Repair ratings squared (so a Repair 5 device requires accumulating 25 successes on a difficulty 5 task to fully repair). Even these massive devices can usually be made to function a time or two with a simple success, however — the *Skywolf*'s sorcerer-engineer could keep her in the air for a short time with a difficulty 5 success, but long-term repairs would require an extended task. As with any extended task, each roll doubles the interval between rolls.

REPAIR TEAMS

Very large artifacts require more than a single sorcerer-engineer to repair them — there are simply too many things that need to be done simultaneously. Smaller devices can sometimes benefit from additional technicians as well, but for many projects, a single assistant is sufficient (or may even be too much help). Controlling a repair team requires a Charisma + Presence roll to keep the workers motivated and operating at peak efficiency — difficulty is equal to the size of the team divided by three. A repair team must have a number of technicians with Craft (First Age Weapons), Lore or Occult scores equal to that required of the sorcerer-engineer whose player is making the task roll - 2. The remaining members should have at least one Ability (Craft (F.A.W.), Lore or Occult) of at least 2. The total size of a repair team is typically equal to the Repair

rating x 3 for large artifacts (such as *Skywolf*) and x 2 for smaller artifacts.

TOOLS

Very few artifacts can be repaired with the contents of a carpenter's toolbox or a blacksmith's shop — they require a mixture of sophisticated tools, measuring devices and calibrated instruments and utensils. These toolkits are available at Resource costs of any level, but only suffice to service artifacts with a Resources rating one lower than their own (so a Resources 4 kit can service a chariot of the infinite heavens but not *Skywolf*).

These tool kits are often large — even the smallest barely fits in a carefully packed frame pack, and the largest fills a good-sized workshop. If multiple engineers are working on a large project, each requires his own set of tools — there is some overlap, however, so the total cost for additional sets is one lower.

HEARTHSTONES OF LOOKSHY

Lookshy has a number of unique Hearthstones associated with its Manses, creations of ancient power and far-reaching ability. These stones are essential parts of the Lookshy local defense grid, and the Manses they belong to are carefully managed and watched — only known and trusted officers of at least taizei rank are allowed to attune to them — and then, only when necessary.

Repair Rating	Examples	Lore	Occult	Craft	Resources	Time	Difficulty
•	Ashigaru Armor	3	3 (either)	—	••	one hour	2
••	Gunzoshu Armor, Light Implosion Bow	4	3	3	••	one hour	2
•••	Warstrider, Lightning Ballista	5	4	4	•••	one hour	3
••••	Chariot of the Infinite Heavens	6	5	5	•••	one day	4
•••••	<i>Skywolf</i>	7	6	6	••••	three days	5
••••••	Realm Defense Grid Installation	8	7	7	•••••	one week	6



JADE OF PUISSANT SEEING

Level 5 Fire

Trigger: Constant/Concentration

The Jade of Puissant Seeing is a translucent oval of shimmering red. If one stares deeply into it, one gets the impression the stone is in some way staring back.

The Hearthstone gives two benefits. The wielder of the stone can see expenditures of Essence, perceiving them as flickering firefly-like motes in his field of visions when desired. This effect has a maximum range of nearly 100 leagues — as far as the Deheleshen Lighthouse's light can be seen at night. Detecting important expenditures out of the background clutter can be difficult — the wearer's player must successfully roll the character's permanent Essence + Awareness, as a simple action (particularly large or blatant uses of Essence may require a reflexive check to observe). Detecting an incoming *Skywolf*-class craft running at top speed would be difficulty 1, while detecting a Night Caste using a damped Stealth Charm would be difficulty 5 + the Solar's permanent Essence. This effect cannot penetrate perfect Stealth effects. Working from the Deheleshen Lighthouse's summit is not required, but it does help — add two dice to the user's dice pool if he is standing in the tower's storm watch.

The second benefit is that, once the wearer has detected a target of interest, he can spend 3 motes to observe the site directly — this is a normal Perception + Awareness check to notice any given detail, at +2 difficulty. The observer can only see the location (he gains no clairaudience, etc.), and penalties or benefits for Charms, obscured vision, etc. are determined normally.

GEM OF THE WIND'S SECRETS

Level 5 Air

Trigger: Constant

The Gem of the Wind's Secrets is a perfect diamond the size of a man's fist. Unlike most Hearthstones, it is not intended to be worn constantly. Instead, it is permanently emplaced in a stand in the center of a great hemispherical chamber in the Aviary. When an attuned user touches the stone, it immediately casts forth an image of every thing that flies within 100 miles of the Aviary, identifying them by size, airspeed and direction. Each representation appears in a general relation to the Aviary ("located" where the Hearthstone is placed). The user can refine this to screen out unwanted detections — this is commonly done to filter out low-flying birds — and can magnify any particular contact to get a closer look for identification purposes. The latter allows a normal Perception + Awareness check, but the gem cannot bring the point of vision closer than 500 yards from a target, for unknown reasons, and normal penalties for range should be assessed. Even dematerialized spirits are shown by the gem — sorcery of

the Celestial Circle or Charms of at least Essence 4 are required to hide from its gaze.

WILLSTONE OF THE STRATEGOS

Level 4 Air

Trigger: Concentration

The Willstone of the Strategos is a spindle of fiery red spinel, with a center of solid blue amethyst. It is normally carried in the pommel socket of a daiklave. When used by a general coordinating a battle, the stone give her an uncanny insight into the way events will likely play out, selecting the most probable outcomes from among options and giving the general the ability to make sure her forces fight at their best. At the start of each turn, her player can roll the character's Wits + Lore (Tactics) as a simple action — every two successes scored adds 1 to her unit's initiative, and every four successes adds 1 to their Valor and all dice pools.

If their Valor is raised above 5, soldiers under the bearer's command become immune to fear and will not fail Valor checks of any kind until their Valor falls to 5 or lower. These benefits are dependent on the general being able to communicate with her troops and wear off at the rate of 1 initiative/Valor/die every other turn. So, for example, if her player rolled eight successes on the first turn of a battle, the initiative would have worn off eight turns later, and the Valor benefits after four turns. Rolls on successive turns do not stack, but can supplant earlier rolls at the wearer's option. Charms may not be used to improve the dice pool, but Virtues may be — Valor is always appropriate, and Conviction normally is.

ARTIFACTS

ASHIGARU BATTLE ARMOR (ARTIFACT ••)

Repair: 1

The elite ashigaru normally wear specialized armor whose design dates back to the First Age but can still be produced today. This lightweight armor, equal in protection to a reinforced breastplate, is enchanted to aid the wearer in various ways. The armor sharpens the wearer's senses, negating penalties for darkness less than "utter blackness" and adding two dice to all Awareness dice pools. Enchantments and filters protect the wearer against poison and disease, adding two dice to Resistance dice pools and completely shielding the wearer from breathed toxins for up to an hour. Finally, the armor can camouflage its wearer, blurring her presence and adding two dice to the wearer's Stealth dice pool when moving or three dice when stationary.

Mortals must spend one temporary Willpower to activate the armor — this Willpower is treated as committed and effectively lowers the character's maximum temporary Willpower. Additionally, wearers age one extra week for every season or part of a season the armor is used. Exalts must commit 4 motes to use this armor, but other-

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Minimums
Reaper Daiklave	+5	+3	+4L	+3	S••, D••

wise suffer no effect. Ashigaru armor is built using a mixture of Magical Materials and First Age alloys, and Exalted wearers gain no Magical Material bonuses. Ashigaru battle armor requires maintenance every 150 hours of operation. Every 10 hours of missed maintenance disables one power at random.

REAPER DAIKLAVE (ARTIFACT ••)

Where the reaver daiklave, with its great chopping blade, favors striking power, the reaper daiklave favors speed and defense. The reaper daiklave is a great slashing sword — a perfectly balanced, four-foot-long, four-inch-wide, inch-thick, gently curved razor, ground to a fine point. Favored by those Exalts who prefer finesse and speed over raw striking power, the reaper epitomizes the ideal that the warrior who hits first rarely has to worry about how hard his opponent is going to hit him. A reaper daiklave requires 5 motes to attune. Reaper daiklaves are popular amongst the Dragon-Blooded of Lookshy, who prefer the elegance and speed of the blade over the more common reaver or grand daiklaves.

SHOCK PIKE (ARTIFACT ••)

Shock pikes date from the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate and are still produced in limited numbers. Designed for mortal soldiers, they can smash enemy lines long before contact is made. A shock pike resembles a conventional, if somewhat short, spear. The staff is normally made of ebony or ironwood, and plackets of green jade, often in the shape of leaves, are inset into the staff at regular points

along its length. When used in combat, the spear's superlative balance and strength make it an excellent melee weapon, but its real purpose is as a ranged weapon.

At the cost of 2 motes of Essence, the shock pike can make an attack at range, exactly as if it had been used in close combat — this attack is normally a stab or a thrust, but it can be any attack that can be made with a spear (including stunts). This attack uses Melee + Dexterity, follows all the normal rules for melee attacks and is compatible with Melee Charms. The attack *can* be parried, but a parry attempt is at +2 difficulty because of the problems parrying an invisible attack.

Shock pikes store motes of Essence to power their use. A standard shock pike can hold 16 motes, although versions that hold 10 or 20 are known to exist, and a handful hold more than 20. Those holding more than 20 motes are Artifact •••, and none are known to hold more than 40 motes.

There exists a shock pike version intended for Exalts — this version doesn't store motes, but is a generally more powerful weapon, with a range of ([permanent Essence x 10] + 50) yards. The Exalted shock pike has a commitment cost of 5 motes.

WARSTRIDER IMPLOSION BOW (ARTIFACT ••)

Repair: 2

Warstrider implosion bows are lightweight, semi-portable versions of the light implosion bow mounted on First Age warships and skycraft. The warstrider implosion bow is built in two parts — a backpack-like device that holds

Melee Mode

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Minimums
Shock Pike	+2	+1	+5L	+1	S••, D••
Exalted Shock Pike	+3	+2	+7L	+1	S••, D••

Ranged Mode

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
Shock Pike	+2	+7L	2	50*
Exalted Shock Pike	+3	+9L	2	Special**

* The shock pike has no extended range.

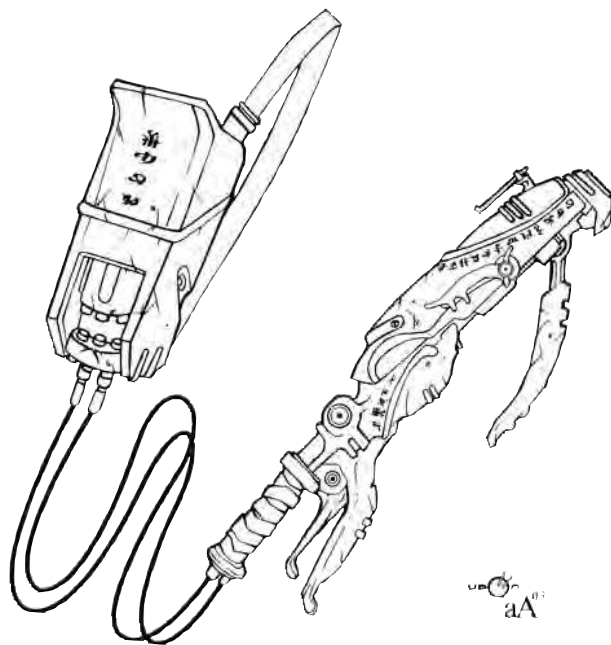
** The Exalted shock pike has a range equal to ([permanent Essence x 10] + 50) yards. It has no extended range.

WARSTRIDER IMPLOSION BOW

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Minimums
Half charge	+2	+7B/5L*	1	450**	Occult •••, Archery ••
Full charge	+2	15B/12L*	1/2	450**	Occult •••, Archery ••

* Does this damage to all targets in a 10-foot radius of the weapon impact.

** This is the maximum range — implosion bows do not have an extended range.



Essence accumulators, reagent canisters and other mechanisms, and the implosion bow itself. The bow is connected to the backpack by a pair of flexible emerald cables that are as strong as steel (and as difficult to sever). The warstrider implosion bow has the same statistics as a normal light implosion bow, but it fires less often at high charges.

ESSENCE CANNON (ARTIFACT •• TO •••••)

The design of the Essence cannon is very old, possibly the oldest ranged weapon not powered by human (or Exalted) muscle. Essence cannons are inefficient and clumsy in application — but they are also easily maintained, easy to build and capable of great power when built large enough. As more elegant or versatile weapons have succumbed to the passage of time or lack of maintenance, the Seventh Legion finds itself increasingly turning to Essence cannons.

Essence cannons are very simple in operation — an Exalt pumps in motes, and out comes a beam of raw, focused Essence. This blast is a concussive pulse that smashes anything it hits — damage is bashing, but the player of any target hit must make a Stamina + Athletics

roll against difficulty 3 to have his character remain standing. If directed against a nonliving target, the weapon inflicts half its damage as lethal damage.

The great advantage of Essence cannons is their rugged and simple nature — they require little maintenance beyond cleaning and, when broken, can be repaired even during battle — the only parts that can break are the Essence lenses, and these are easily replaced. For this reason, most of the non-powerbow artifact ranged weapons in use in the Realm today are Essence cannons of various types, mostly built by the Mountain Folk.

Small Essence Cannon: The small Essence cannon is a heavy brass and steel tube lined with Essence lenses, normally mounted on a wooden stock with crude sights. Fired over the shoulder, these weapons were sometimes used for riot control or for capturing wanted targets without permanently harming them. A handful of surviving First Age versions have an Essence reservoir built into them that stores 30 motes — these are Artifact ••• and have a commitment cost of 5.

Medium Essence Cannon: Medium Essence cannons are large enough to require a two-man team to fire — although some Exalts are strong enough to carry them into position, they are too long to fire effectively. If individuals try to fire the weapon, apply the same penalties as for using oversized weapons (see *The Book of Three Circles*, p. 125). Some warstriders carry one mounted on one shoulder or as a handheld weapon — if mounted, this weapon adds • to the warstrider's Artifact rating.

Large and Very Large Essence Cannons: Normally used only as fortification weapons, not even warstriders can use them effectively. The weapon's blast affects everyone within 10 feet of the impact point.

ELEMENTAL LENS (ARTIFACT •••)

Repair: 2

Elemental lenses were one of the more common weapons of the First Age, but few survive outside of Lookshy. A lens can take many shapes — some were made as part of a glove or gauntlet, with the lens mounted on the back of the hand, while others were built into talismans, weapons or suits of armor. An elemental lens built into an artifact adds • to the device's Artifact rating, if the Artifact's rating is less than ••• to start.

ESSENCE CANNON

Name	Acc.	Damage	Rate	Range	Motes	Commitment	Minimum Strength	Artifact
Small cannon	+1	15B	2	75	5	3	4	••
Medium cannon	+0	20B	1	125	8	5	8	•••
Large cannon	-2	30B	1	200	12	7	10	••••
V. Large cannon	-4	45B	1/2	300	15	10	14	•••••

ADDITIONAL CHARMS FOR LENSES

Additional Charms can be added to a specific elemental lens (or to lenses in general) at the Storyteller's discretion. Charms improved should be straightforward elemental manipulations — an Air Dragon cannot use a Lens to amplify Earth-aspected Charms. Charms with Essence or Ability requirements higher than 3 cannot be amplified by a lens (Dragon Vortex Attack is a specific exception).

The lens amplifies some aspect of the Charm's effect — it can increase damage, range or duration (or some combination of the three). Lenses cannot boost Charms that increase dice pools, Charms that allow extra actions or other effects that directly aid the user. The limit on motes spent through the lens is equal to the user's Stamina, or permanent Essence + Stamina at most.

Elemental lenses can improve up to three Charms, in addition to those listed above. Lenses cannot be refitted to improve Charms. A given lens' capabilities are not known until the wearer learns a Charm amplified by the lens.

Elemental lenses require 5 motes to attune — if added to another artifact with an attunement cost, it adds 2 motes to that cost. Two elemental lenses cannot be used to enhance the same Charm.

The elemental lens amplifies the effects of a Dragon-Blooded's elemental attacks as follows:

Elemental Bolt Attack — each mote invested in an attack does 4L damage.

Elemental Burst Technique — each mote invested does 3L damage or increases damage radius by one yard (so, permanent Essence + motes spent in yards). Total motes spent for damage or blast radius cannot exceed Stamina.

Dragon Vortex Attack — each mote spent above 10 either increases the radius of the effect by two feet or increases the damage suffered per turn by 1L. Maximum number of motes equals permanent Essence + Stamina.

FIRE LANCE (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Repair: 2

Fire lances were once common weapons, and a number of them have survived, mostly in the arsenals of Lookshy. Though called a lance, fire lances resemble a fairly conventional spear. Fire lances were commonly used by both mortals and Exalts and are believed to have been a further refinement of the flame spear (see **Caste Book: Dawn**, pp. 79-80). The fire lance holds 20 motes of Essence. When charged with 1 mote, the head of the fire lance becomes wreathed in colorless flames that explode over a target when next successfully used to attack in melee, inflicting terrible burns. If 2 motes are spent, the fire lance disgorges streamers of colorless fire at a target. Finally, if 5 motes are spent in a single attack, the weapon sprays streamers of its fire in an arc as the wielder fans it across his targets. This does less damage, but it greatly increases the chances of hitting and can be directed against up to three adjacent targets. Fire lances use Melee or Archery, as appropriate, and are compatible with Melee, but not Archery, Charms. An Exalt may attune to a fire lance and power it directly — this costs 4 motes for commitment, and motes to activate it are spent normally.

GUNZOSHA COMBAT ARMOR (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Repair: 2

Gunzosha armor was the pinnacle of artifacts designed for use by mortals in the First Age, intended to give elite units the ability to operate on the attack with Exalted and stand a chance of survival. This ability came at a great cost, however, and today, few are willing to undergo the risks to enjoy the benefits.

Gunzosha armor is equivalent in protection to a suit of articulated plate and provides a number of benefits. The armor conceals the wearer when desired (+4 dice to all Stealth dice pools), doubles the wearer's ground speed and protects him from diseases and poisons (+2 dice on all Resistance checks). Enchantments allow the wearer to recover quickly from minor injuries, regaining one bashing health level per turn. Further enchantments steady the user's hand in combat (+2 on all attacks and parries), and

Melee Mode

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Minimums
Fire Lance	+3	+1	+3L	+1	S●●, D●●
Charged	+3	+1	+6L	+1	S●●, D●●

Ranged Mode

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
Streamer	+2	+10L	2	150*
Fire Fan	+5	+7L	1**	100*

*The fire lance has no extended range. This is the maximum range of the effect.

** The fire fan can be used to attack up to three adjacent targets.



enhances his strength (+2 Strength for purposes of damage and lifting).

Before first donning this armor, the wearer must undergo a complex series of rituals over a period of a month, culminating in the implantation of amulets at major pulse points — at wrists, shoulders, hips and knees and at the back of the neck. This surgery requires a Dexterity + Medicine roll, difficulty 3 — in order to perform the surgery, the surgeon must have both Medicine and Occult at ••• or higher. Failure indicates an unsuccessful implantation, and the wearer must spend one month recovering for every success the surgeon fails to achieve. A botch doubles recovery time and destroys the amulets (Repair 4 to rebuild the amulets), and the implantee's player must make a Stamina + Resistance roll, with a difficulty equal to the number of 1s rolled on the botch +1, or the character dies.

The amulets help the user to control the armor and drain his Essence into it to power it. This has little immediate effect in game terms — but the wearer ages at twice the normal rate while the amulets are implanted. For this reason, the Seventh Legion requires that no gunzoshas serve for more than a decade. There is a permanent link between the wearer and his armor that can be traced if the two are separated.

Gunzoshas armor worn by an Exalt requires the commitment of 5 motes. Like ashigaru armor, gunzoshas combat armor is forged of several Magical Materials and can be used equally by all Exalts, but it provides no additional bonuses. Gunzoshas armor requires maintenance every 100 hours of operation. Every 20 hours of missed maintenance cuts the effects of one power in half.

INFINITE WEAPON (ARTIFACT •••)

Originally designed for those who wanted to travel light, rangers find them invaluable — a single infinite weapon replaces an arsenal, reducing the rangers' load and facilitating their ability to move unobserved.

In its normal state, the infinite weapon resembles a mace of some sort, with a perfectly spherical head of one of the Five Magical Metals, an arming strap made of woven steel as supple and soft as a silken cord and a counterbalance made of some precious stone (often a ruby). With the expenditure of 1 mote of Essence, however, the wielder can cause the weapon to shift to any of its other forms as

a simple action. (The weapon cannot be used in the turn that it is shifting shape.) Shifting back into its normal state is a reflexive action and takes no time.

An infinite weapon requires a commitment of 6 motes to function. Each has a portfolio of about 10 distinct weapons it can shift form into, in addition to the basic mace form. Infinite weapons do not come with a supply of ammunition — arrows must be supplied separately. Infinite weapons receive the following modifications to whatever weapon form they take, as well as the Magical Material bonus for their composition.

ARMORS OF THE IMMACULATE DRAGONS

(ARTIFACT: ••••)

Repair: 3

First Age armorers created many wondrous pieces of armor and protection for the Exalted. Although most suits of Celestial armor were completely unique creations, hand-crafted to exacting specifications and requirements, suits built for the Dragon-Blooded were normally more generic — while hand-forged, Terrestrial suits of armor were enchanted and designed with a common purpose and function in mind and are similar enough to be treated as a single type of artifact. These suits of armor were nearly the pinnacle of Dragon-Blooded armor, and few have survived to the present day, most in the hands of the Realm and Lookshy. The five elemental designs described below were the most common, but at least five additional designs were made for particular missions.

Each suit resembles a carefully forged and fitted suit of articulated plate armor, so cunningly built that no seam or gap in protection can be found, of plates of jade-alloyed metal. The helms of these suits of armor feature Essence-filtering lenses for the eyes and a face plate that filters the air — these helms are frequently carved with draconic designs and formats, but this is not universal.

Dragon armor not only protects its wearer, it provides him with mobility and a number of specialized abilities. When worn, the wearer gains the following benefits:

- The armor protects its wearer from poisons and diseases — add two dice to all Endurance and Resistance rolls to avoid infection or contact with any poison while worn.

Melee Weapon

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense
Infinite Weapon	+2	+1	+2L	+1

Ranged Weapon

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
Infinite Weapon	+2	-	-	+20*

* Extends the base range of the equivalent mortal weapon.

ESSENCE SIGHT

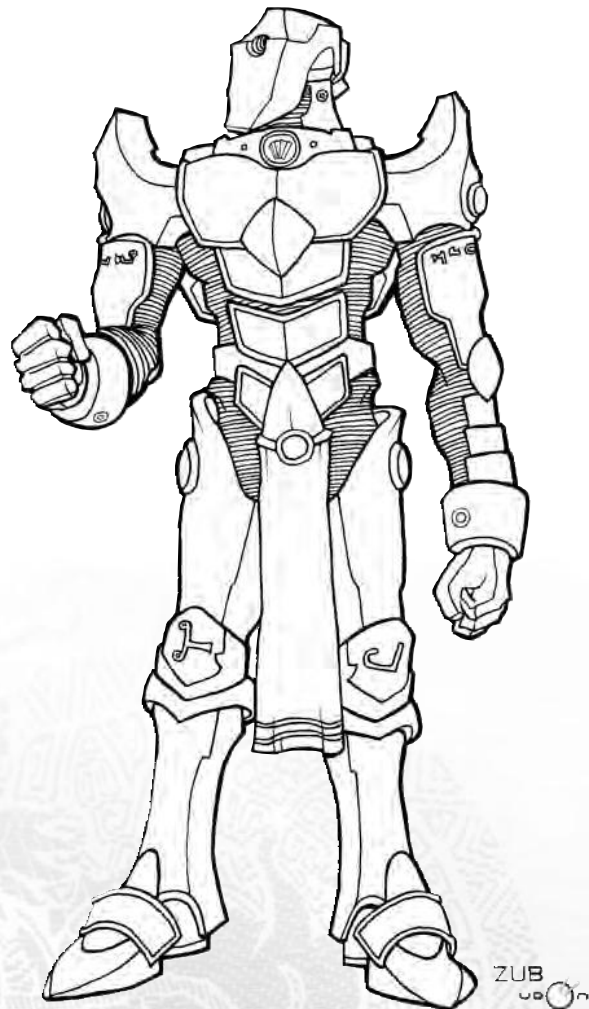
Essence sight uses special lenses and filters to see patterns and flows of Essence, rather than the light of a torch or the sun. This allows it to see through darkness, natural fog or smoke and driving snow or rain as if it was not there, and it allows the user to see through some forms of ground cover, such as underbrush. Essence sight cannot see through walls, heavy foliage or trees, but in all other cases, the user can ignore most visual penalties — only the heaviest of storms or fog summoned up by sorcery or Charm can obscure Essence sight.

- Dragon armor sharpens the wearer's senses when desired (+2 to all Awareness checks — 1 mote per minute), and grants them Essence sight (2 motes per minute of use).
- The armor augments the wearer's Strength. The exact amount changes depending on the suit, but applies only to tasks relating to brute strength — it specifically does *not* modify Strength for the purposes of Charms, but is compatible with abilities or Charms that enhance Strength.
- The armor can camouflage itself, making it harder to detect. Add +2 difficulty to all Awareness attempts to locate the wearer, so long as the observer is at least 10 feet away. (This costs 1 mote of Essence per scene). This ability specifically defends against Essence sight.
- The armor can also protect against detection by divination and astronomy — add +2 difficulty to all attempts to locate or determine the fate of the wearer, his armor and anything it is touching. This is proof against Sidereal astronomy and the foresight of the little gods. (This ability costs 5 motes and one Willpower per day).
- The armor doubles the user's ground speeds.
- Each suit is equipped with the equivalent of an elemental lens (see p. 52) — these are sometimes nonfunctional but are considered a priority repair, so they still operate in the majority of the remaining suits of armor.
- Each suit of dragon armor requires a commitment of 7 motes of Essence and a level 2 Hearthstone to power the armor's various enchantments. The armor has three Hearthstone sockets, and the wearer can select which one is rendered inactive by powering the armor as a dice action that requires no roll. Dragon armor must undergo maintenance

after every 50 hours of use. Every hour of combat (or fraction thereof) counts as two hours of use for maintenance purposes, as does every hour of flight or other special movement, if any. Additionally, every day spent using protections against divination requires an hour of additional maintenance. Every 10 hours it's in arrears causes the armor to lose one power at random, but the defenses against divination will always be the last ability lost.

THE MOST TERRIFYING ARMOR OF THE AIR DRAGON

Forged out of steel and stranger alloys and enameled with plaques of blue jade, the Most Terrifying Armor of the Air Dragon was intended for the hard-hitting blitzkrieg-style



LIGHTNING CORONA

	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Cost
Melee	+2	+1	+5L	+1	2 motes/turn
	Accuracy	Rate	Damage	Range	Cost
Ranged	+0	1	10L	200	3 motes



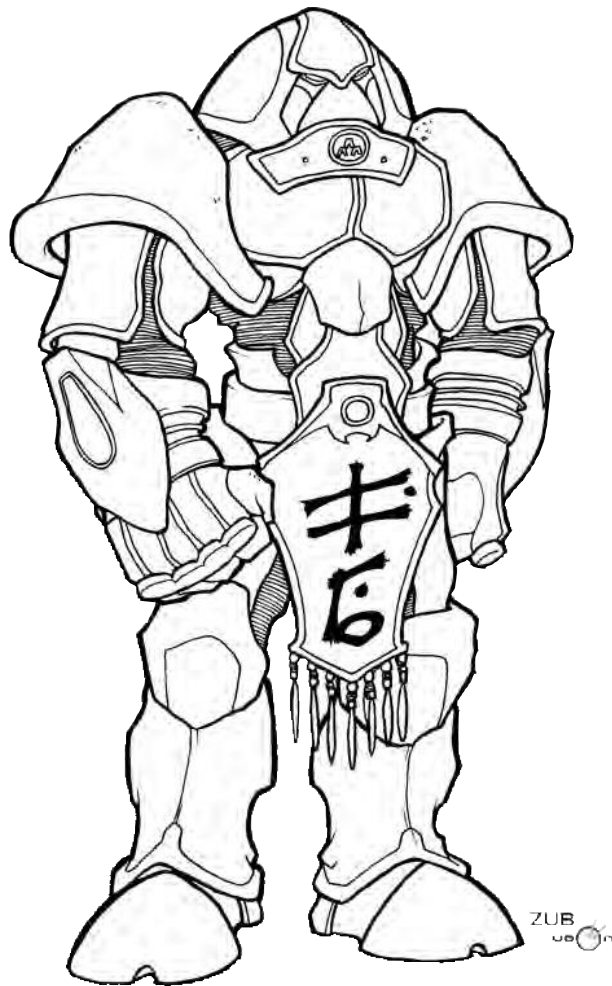
warfare favored in the First Age — it stresses mobility and fire power, sacrificing some protection and general utility to gain it. The armor has all of the abilities listed above and, additionally, can also focus Essence into the suit's gauntlets, causing them to crackle with electricity — this lightning can be directed against ranged targets, affecting all targets in a 10-foot area from the target point, or it can be used in melee (see the weapon statistics, below). This is a reflexive action — ranged attacks are made using Thrown, and close combat attacks are made with Brawl or Martial Arts, as appropriate. This ability is compatible with Charms that affect unarmed attacks.

The armor can fly at a speed of 45 yards per turn. This costs 3 motes to activate for a number of turns equal to the user's permanent Essence. This flight is accompanied by great swirling gusts of wind, and for an additional mote, these gusts can be harnessed as a defense, knocking arrows and other missile weapons out of the sky (+1 difficulty to all Thrown or Archery attacks on the user). For 5 motes per hour, the user can fly at up to 60 miles per hour for one hour, but maneuverability is limited — roll Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 2, for the Exalt to make any sudden change in course.

THE MOST RESOLUTE ARMOR OF THE EARTH DRAGON

Built as a combat engineering support suit, the armor's glistening white jade-alloy plates, rounded and powerful in structure, offer a striking contrast to the earth, wood and stone with which it works. The Most Resolute Armor of the Earth Dragon provides all of the benefits common to dragon armor and, for 2 motes, can find the weakness or flaw in any fortification or construction, allowing the next successful strike against that structure to inflict double damage after damage is rolled. Once a successful attack is made, this ability cannot be used for another five turns, while the wearer observes how the damage inflicted has affected the structure (this observation can be made while in combat).

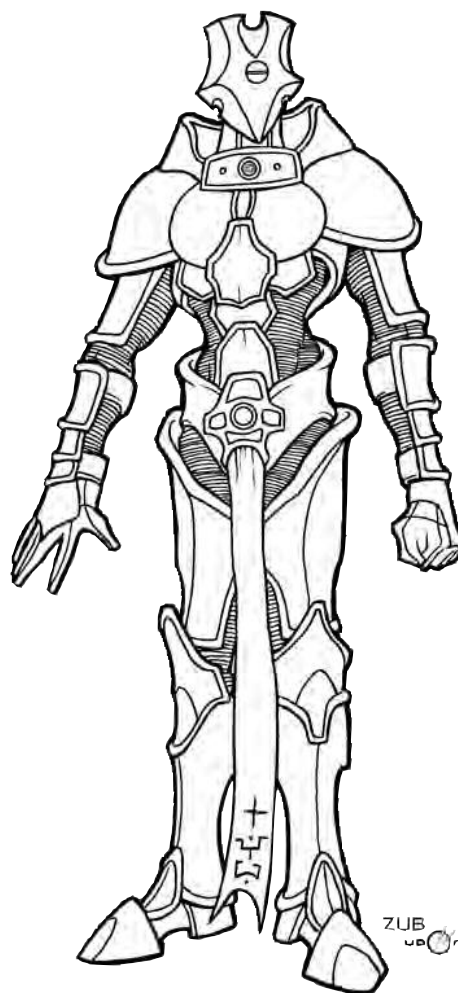
For 10 motes, the wearer can build battlefield fortifications and battlements out of stone and earth at a prodigious rate — stone reshapes itself, boulders obligingly roll into position, earth and soil roils to dig trenches and build whatever supports the engineer demands. This ability is relatively imprecise — the wearer can dig ditches or pits, can create low earthen or stone battlements, can even shape abatis or other obstacles from stone shards, but permanent fortifications are beyond her. This ability affects a maximum area equal to $(\text{the wearer's permanent Essence} + \text{Craft}) \times 3$ yards in diameter, and duration is dependent on the amount of work accomplished. A handful of pits and abatis to place archers behind might take only a few turns, while completely reshaping the area might take hours (and require more than one application of this power, at the Storyteller's discretion). The area being reshaped is extremely hazardous



while work is underway — anyone other than the suit's wearer may be rolled over, thrown by surging soil or otherwise manhandled. This is an environmental hazard, with a difficulty of 2 — success indicates the subject takes 4B damage (soaked normally), while failure results in 4L damage, and everyone in the area takes a two-die penalty on all actions while present.

THE MOST FEARSOME ARMOR OF THE FIRE DRAGON

Forged of copper alloyed with curious alchemical substances and red jade, the Most Fearsome Armor of the Fire Dragon was designed for fast-moving combat on the ground and was intended to allow the wearer to rapidly react to enemy advances or shifts in the battlefield. The armor has all of the abilities listed above and, additionally, can summon great fiery fighting claws into being around the user's fists — this action is a reflexive one. This ability costs 2 motes per turn, and the claws have the statistics listed below. These fire claws are solid enough to parry weapons (and can be parried). The fire claws may be used with the wielder's Melee or Martial Arts.



lookshy

For 3 motes, Fire Dragon armor can move with the speed of fire on the dry plains — quadruple the wearer's ground speed. This function lasts a number of turns equal to the wearer's permanent Essence.

For 5 motes, the wearer may take two extra actions for one turn, in addition to her normal action — only one of these extra actions may be an attack, and this ability is not compatible with any extra action Charms, sorcery or ability imparted by other artifacts or Hearthstones. The wearer may not split her dice pool when using this ability.

THE MOST BENEVOLENT ARMOR OF THE WATER DRAGON

Forged of glossy black plates of jade-alloyed steel, the Most Benevolent Armor of the Water Dragon was issued to Dragon-Blooded assigned to police the interactions between the mortal world and the spirit courts and to those operating with demon-hunting Celestial Exalted. The armor has all of the abilities listed above. Addition-

ally, expending 1 mote a turn allows the wearer to see and speak with dematerialized spirits or ghosts as if they were material. By spending 3 motes, the wearer can both see and affect dematerialized spirits as if they were material. This ability lasts a number of turns equal to the user's permanent Essence.

For 10 motes, the wearer can summon the Ghost Binding Wall, which permeates the area around the suit. This field hardens Creation — gateways cannot be opened between Creation and anywhere else (including other parts of Creation), and spirits are fixed in their current state, unable to materialize or dematerialize while within the boundaries of the Wall. This effect has a range of (permanent Essence x 5) yards and lasts half the user's permanent Essence in turns (round up).

The Ghost Binding Wall has no effect on beings with a permanent Essence higher than the user's, but each additional suit activating the Wall temporarily

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Cost
Fire Claws	+6	+2	+7L	+2	2 motes/turn

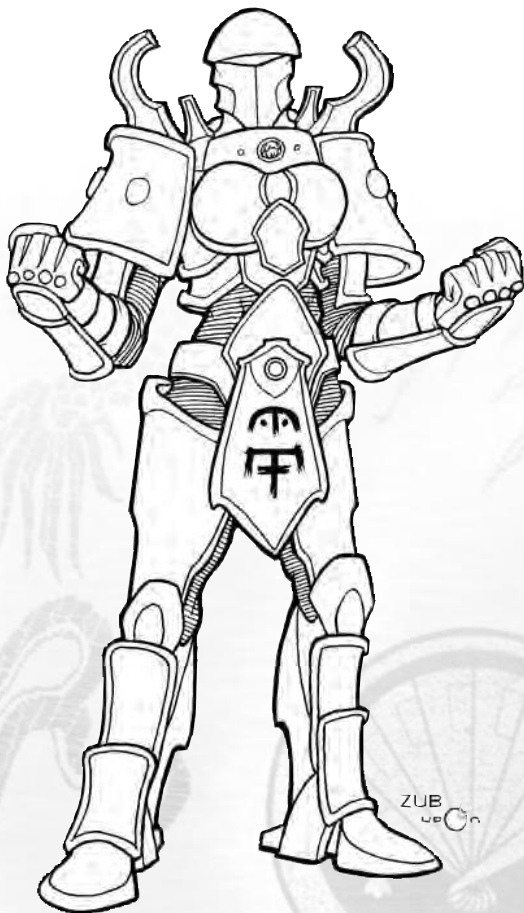


decreases the effective permanent Essence of all beings in the field by 1. If a being's permanent Essence drops below 0, he suffer a one-die penalty on all actions, and the cost of all Charms used rises by 1, for every point he falls below 0. Multiple suits acting in concert base range, duration, etc. on the highest permanent Essence of any of the users. This armor has no effect on mortals, even those with Essence higher than 1.

THE MOST PUISSANT ARMOR OF THE WOOD DRAGON

Inlaid with precious woods and formed of plates of green jade-alloyed steel, the Most Puissant Armor of the Wood Dragon was designed to confront Essence manipulating foes. Units equipped with this armor were among the most feared foes a rogue Exalt could face.

At a cost of 5 motes per turn, the wearer can dampen Essence in an area equal to (his permanent Essence x 5) yards in radius, making it harder to use Charms and sorcery. Each use of Essence — Charm, sorcery or activation of an ability or power — costs 1 extra mote for every 3 motes spent — so, a Charm that normally costs 6 motes would cost 8. This only affects expenditures of Peripheral Essence — Personal Essence is unaffected (if a pool is not specifically mentioned as Personal, assume it is Peripheral). This field specifically does *not* affect the armor's



wearer or users of other suits of dragon armor, which were designed to shield against this ability's effects. Multiple Wood Dragon suits can enhance this field, but the cost in motes increases by one for each additional suit in the area of effect — so, a fang of Terrestrials all using Wood Dragon armor would spend 9 motes each (base 5 motes, +4 for four additional suits) to raise the Essence damping field — but the field would encompass an area equal to the highest Permanent Essence in the group and would increase each use of Essence by 5 motes per 3 spent (8 mote cost for a 3 mote Charm, 16 for a 6 mote Charm, etc.). Calculate the additional cost of the Charm after the Charm's total cost has been determined, in the case of Charms with a variable cost, such as dice adders.

HAZE SHIELD (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Repair: 3

Control of the weather brought with it a host of new weapons and defenses in the First Age. The haze shield was one of the more common. Normally used to defend fortifications, haze shields were also occasionally used as defenses for battlefield units. When activated, a haze shield throws up a barrier that obscures vision as if one is looking into an unsettled pond. Those inside the shield seem to shift and flicker in place, making targeting through the shield difficult.

Activating the haze shield at its first setting requires a Hearthstone of Air or Fire of at least ●● in rating and the expenditure of 1 mote of Essence for every 50 yards of shield — protecting a front 300 yards long requires 6 motes. This defensive shield remains for one scene or until dropped by the controller. The shield can be brought into effect between 50 and 500 yards from the shield generator. While the shield is up, all attackers suffer a -2 success penalty on all ranged attacks against anyone or anything inside the perimeter of the shield. At this setting, the haze shield does not effect outgoing attacks — archers inside the haze shield can attack the enemy without penalty.

The second setting is much more difficult to maintain, costing 1 mote per 25 yards of shield perimeter and lasting a number of minutes equal to the operators permanent Essence + the Hearthstone rating of the stone used, but it provides much more protection. All incoming ranged attacks suffer a -4 success penalty on their actions. Unfortunately, the haze shield becomes much more distinct, and outgoing attacks are penalized by -2 successes as well.

Under no circumstances do haze shields stack with other haze shields or provide any protection against hand-to-hand attacks. Other defenses, including Charm effects and other shields (artifact or mundane) stack normally. Haze shields are common in the Lookshy arsenal — a large number were deployed around Deheleshen, and more have been produced. Each field force has several, and many Sky Guard vessels have been equipped with them.

Name	Soak (L/B)	Str	Mobility Penalty	Fatigue Value
Air Dragon Armor	15/13	+2	-0	1
Earth Dragon Armor	15/13	+4	-1	1
Fire Dragon Armor	14/14	+3	-0	1
Water Dragon Armor	15/13	+2	-1	1
Wood Dragon Armor	16/14	+1	-1	1

Haze shields must be maintained after every 20 hours of combat use. If a haze shield is not maintained, it will lose its effectiveness, decreasing the penalty on ranged attacks for every 10 hours the shield is in arrears.

MEDIUM IMPLOSION BOW (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Repair: 3

A more powerful version of the light implosion bow, only limited numbers survive even in Lookshy — one is mounted in each tower of battle, Lookshy Manse mounts half a dozen, and several skyships and naval vessels are equipped with them. The remaining handful have been mounted on heavy carriages for field use. Unlike light implosion bows, these weapons require a Hearthstone of at least level 2 to function — fortunately, they are no more difficult to repair or maintain. Medium implosion bows have a blast radius of 20 feet and have a longer range, but otherwise, they operate identically to light implosion bows, doing 15B/12L damage for 2 motes and 25B/20L damage for 5 motes. The medium implosion bow is fired using the Archery Ability but does not benefit from Archery Charms. The implosion bow is Repair 3 and suffers normal effects from a lack of maintenance or repair.

WARSTRIDER FIRE LANCE (ARTIFACT ●●●)

A warstrider-scaled version of the fire lance, intended to smash fortifications and troop units. This version carries only 10 motes of Essence. An expenditure of 2 motes is needed to charge the head for melee use, 4 motes to throw a streamer of colorless fire, and 10 motes to throw a fire fan (which affects an entire area, rather than individual targets). Fire lances use Melee or Archery, as appropriate, and are compatible with Melee, but not Archery, Charms. The warstrider fire lance requires 4 motes be committed to use.

WARSTRIDER SHOCK RAM (ARTIFACT: ●●●●)

The shock ram works in similar fashion to the shock pike (see above). It resembles a massive gauntlet of steel alloyed with green jade. To use it, the wielder simply pantomimes a punch at a distant target and spends 2 motes of Essence, releasing a powerful “phantom punch” or other attack at his target (the shock ram can be used to duplicate any one-handed unarmed attack the pilot could physically make). This ability uses Dexterity + Brawl or Martial Arts for the attack roll, is compatible with Martial Arts and/or Brawl Charms that affect unarmed attacks and follows all normal rules for warstriders and hand-to-hand combat, save one. Because of the nature of the attack, the warstrider does not suffer penalties for attacking smaller targets, so long as they are at least 10 yards away.

CRIMSON ARMOR OF THE UNSEEN ASSASSIN (ARTIFACT ●●●●)

Prized and rare armor used by the most dangerous rangers, these artifacts are part armor, part concealment, and exceedingly dangerous. Never common, they were made in some numbers, and both the Realm and Lookshy possess several working copies — Lookshy is known to have 10 functional suits and may have as many as a scale's worth. The Sidereals have retained the knowledge of how to produce new copies of this armor, and several members of the Gold Faction are known to use them.

The exact design varied, but all suits share a few common traits. All known suits are bright scarlet in color and obscure the wearer completely in armor and flowing robes — even at rest, it can be hard to make out the wearer's form distinctly. Most of the suit is formed of a flowing, tightly woven material similar in feel and quality to the finest silk. In most designs, the only visible armor are

MEDIUM IMPLOSION BOW

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Minimums
Half charge	+2	+15B/12L*	1	750**	Occult ●●●, Archery ●●
Full charge	+2	25B/20L*	1	750**	Occult ●●●, Archery ●●

* Does this damage to all targets in a 20-foot radius of the weapon impact.

** This is the maximum range — implosion bows do not have an extended range.



Melee Mode

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Minimums
Fire Lance	+0	+0	+7L	+1	S12
Charged	+0	+0	+14L	+1	S12

Ranged Mode

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
Streamer	+1	+18L	2	250*
Fire Fan	+3	+12L	1**	175*

* The fire lance has no extended range.

** The fire fan can be used to attack an area up to 20 feet in diameter — this attack cannot be parried, only dodged, save by perfect defenses. Roll to attack once, and compare the successes rolled against any applicable dodge attempts.

Melee Mode

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Minimums
Shock Ram	+1	+2	+9L	+1	Brawl •••

Ranged Mode

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
Shock Ram	+2	+11L	2	Special*

* Range is equal to ([permanent Essence x 10] + 100) yards. This is the maximum range — shock rams do not have an extended range.

Name	Soak (L/B)	Str	Mobility Penalty	Fatigue Value	Artifact
Crimson Armor of the Unseen Assassin	8/12	+2	-0	0	•••••



greaves and bracers that extend to protect the elbows and knees and, occasionally, shoulder guards — despite this, the protection afforded by this armor is nearly as good as that of reinforced plate.

The suit's true defenses in combat are not armor, but stealth and mobility. The armor doubles all movement rates and adds four dice to the wearer's Stealth dice pool. These dice apply to any and all means of detecting the wearer, by any sense natural or supernatural, and specifically bypass any Charm or ability that negates magical invisibility, unless the Charm's user has a permanent Essence 2 higher than that of the wearer. For 3 motes per scene, this is raised to +6 dice, rendering the wearer invisible to all but the most keen-eyed observers. The armor also adds 2 to the wearer's Awareness, negates penalties for darkness and, at the cost of 2 motes per minute of use, grants the user Essence sight.

For 5 motes, the wearer can blur his form in combat, becoming an indistinct red shadow that flows and strikes without warning. This effect lasts a number of turns equal to the user's permanent Essence and reduces all actions against the wearer by three successes — this includes attacks (ranged and melee) and parries but not dodges.

The most powerful defense afforded the wearer is both subtle and pervasive. So long as the armor is worn, the wearer is removed from destiny. This protection is identical to that enjoyed by demons, Deathlords and the

TOO DAMN ADVANCED

Lookshy is portrayed as significantly more advanced than the rest of Creation — it not only started out with more and better sorcery, artifacts and general knowledge of how things work, it has retained more than anyone else, except the Sidereals. Lookshy not only deploys more First Age weapons, it deploys *lots* more of them, in a more organized fashion and with greater results. Its artifact-armed elite mortals, air transport and Shogunate siege weapons, combined with Shogunate-era ideas about mobility tactics, special operations and sheer military professionalism, makes Lookshy a deadly opponent — or a great asset.

This can be pretty daunting, or simply not the tone a Storyteller wants. A Storyteller who wants an extremely mythic Exalted, more *Ulysses* and less *Escaflowne*, can delete the rangers, reduce or delete the shock pikes and ranged weapons and reduce or remove Lookshy's Sky Guard and Essence-powered siege weapons. This will have the effect of greatly reducing the Seventh Legion's operational range — even with the aid of Charms and sorcery, units will spend more time marching and less time garrisoning or fighting. Lookshy will become less of a global threat and more of a local power, holding dominance over the Scavenger Lands because it holds the mouth of the Yanaze. In this case, the Storyteller might want to increase the overall size of Lookshy. Otherwise, it will seem implausible that such a small nation was able to fend off the armed might of the Empress for so long.

By emphasizing or de-emphasizing different aspects of the Seventh Legion, a Storyteller can drastically alter its feel — getting rid of its siege weapons makes it more vulnerable to major threats such as behemoths and more powerful gods, while keeping siege weapons and removing various mortal artifacts makes it more dependent on its Dragon-Blooded and makes the field forces overall more fragile.

Flipping the coin, if a Storyteller wants to make Lookshy a serious threat to even the most powerful Solar Circle, she can go the opposite route — assume Lookshy retained more production capability. If Lookshy can pump out dragon armor and warstriders without real cost, if gunzoshu units are limited only by the number of soldiers willing to cut their lives in half to gain the ability to fight on a battlefield with the Exalted and if every infantryman is an ashigaru with a fire lance or shock pike riding in a chariot of the infinite heavens, then even experienced and tactically astute Circles are going to be wary of starting a major conflict in the Scavenger Lands. In this situation, Storytellers may wish to consider limiting the Seventh Legion's total size — if the Legion has only two field forces, it will be less likely to commit major units without a really good reason, or a certainty of victory, and each soldier lost is more of a blow.

Fair Folk — the wearer cannot be targeted by Sidereal astrology, his actions cannot be foreseen, nor may his location be determined in the stars. (In a game where Sidereal astrology is not used, this ability is lessened, and crimson armor is Artifact ••••). To the stars, the wearer simply does not exist, and his presence is not accounted for in any predictions.

Crimson armor requires 10 committed motes, and there are warnings against wearing it for too long at any one time, lest one's soul become permanently detached from destiny — and even from the cycle of reincarnation. While some dismiss these warnings as legend and myth, the Seventh Legion has strict orders against excessive use, and Sidereals are loath to wear crimson armor unless the occasion demands it.

SKYCRAFT

Lookshy deploys more flying craft than any other Second Age nation or organization and has more intact flying artifacts than any remaining cache or storehouse in Creation — it is possible that Vanileth has more (he certainly has larger) or that the remaining flying towers of Rathess might contain a larger fleet.

Because of the wide variety of designs used in First Age and the Shogunate, Lookshy's fleet is far from uniform. Even vehicles that are identical in game terms may show great differences in styling, original purpose or mission. Others' designs will be functionally similar but have minor differences — sky chariots originally intended for local traffic and nonmilitary duties often have fewer health levels (rarely less armor), while other variants might incorporate additional armor or built-in weapons. Minor variations of this type rarely impact a given vehicle's Artifact rating — it takes major changes to make a chariot of the infinite heavens worthy of Artifact •••••. A gunship with an extra 5L/10B armor, built in fire lances and a haze shield would qualify, for example.

GENERAL RULES FOR SKYCRAFT

All skycraft are governed by a common basic set of rules that cover their general behavior — they all have a flight speed, maneuverability, etc.

Speed: This is the craft's flight speed. **Multiply this rating by 20 miles per hour to get the craft's speed in ordinary flight and by 15 yards per turn to get the craft's speed in combat.** Travel at maximum speed is





often dangerous — Storytellers can require flight handling rolls with a difficulty equal to the Speed rating used, minus the craft's Maneuver rating, to prevent mishap when traveling at high speeds in dangerous terrain — such as combat.

Maneuver: How responsive the craft's controls are, and how easy it is to move around. Maneuver can be added to the controller's appropriate dice pool to avoid attacks, to bring a craft about on an attack run or to otherwise control the vehicle.

Endurance: Some craft can only operate for limited periods of time or have continuing costs to their operation. Others are only limited by the endurance of the pilot — in either case, any costs or limits on short-term operation are listed here.

Armor: Because of these crafts' First Age construction, attacks must do damage in excess of the listed armor to inflict any damage on most flying vessels — this is usually sufficient to ensure that mortal weapons such as arrows or spears are incapable of inflicting damage on flying vehicles.

Armament: If the craft has any built-in armament, it will be listed briefly here. Most smaller craft of the First Age lacked armament, but larger "skyships" were often armed with lightning ballistae, fire lances or other heavy weapons. In the Age of Sorrows, what few of these massive craft remain often retain some or all of their First Age weapons.

Health Levels: Artifact flying vehicles (or automata) are not treated as objects for purposes of taking damage — health levels must be rolled, and Charms or sorceries that do additional damage against objects are ineffective against them. Flying vehicles have four "wound states," as defined on the table on this page.

Repair: Most First Age flying vehicles require regular maintenance and re-enchantment to keep them airworthy. Damaged skycraft require a separate Wits + Lore (First Age Mechanisms) repair roll for each health level repaired, with a difficulty equal to the craft's Repair rating. Craft that are in arrears on their repairs normally lose one dot in Maneuver and Speed for each period of time they are short, and the controls become less responsive. As a result, the pilot suffers a -1 on the appropriate dice pools. This

penalty cannot be lifted until all the required maintenance has been performed.

Flying craft are normally controlled by Dexterity + Ride for small craft such as sky chariots or warbirds, or Wits + Sail for larger craft such as *Skywolf* or *Manta*, with the skycraft's Maneuver rating added to this dice pool. Rolls are not normally required for level flight — combat (especially at high speeds), rough weather and landings will require a roll, however. Difficulty ranges from 1 for a normal landing to half the craft's Speed for combat flying on up to 7+ for flying through the heart of a hurricane.

COMBAT WITH AERIAL TARGETS AND CRAFT

Fighting a flying opponent is perhaps one of the most dreaded battles of the Second Age, especially when that opponent is one of the fast-moving, hard to kill flying artifacts of the First Age, which can swoop and dive faster than any mospid or war eagle.

Melee attacks against flying vehicles are nearly impossible to perform — an opponent making a diving attack can be attacked on the initiative count he actually makes the attack in — fly-by attacks move too quickly, although extremely slow (speed 2 or less) vehicles can be attacked on the initiative count immediately before or after their attack.

Any ranged attacks made against a flying vehicle suffer -1 die for each dot of Speed over 4 used in a turn and an additional -1 die for every dot of Maneuver over 3.

CHARIOT OF THE INFINITE HEAVENS

(ARTIFACT ●●●●)

Although many in the armies of the First Age could fly, those not so gifted relied on a wide variety of flying craft to aid them. The chariot of the infinite heavens was one of the more common smaller craft used — in form, it resembled the wheeled chariots used by some barbarian forces, but it was sturdier, with four small feet or skids to hold it up when it landed. Perhaps 3,000 were built over the centuries of the First Age, in countless different designs, but only a fraction — no more than 200 — have survived to the present day. The majority of those that remain are in the hands of the Seventh Legion, which generally uses them for local patrols, rather than for offensive duties.

Wound State

Less than 1/2 health levels suffered
1/2 to 3/4 of health levels suffered

3/4 to one less than total health levels

0 health levels remain

Effects

Undamaged. Operates normally.

Speed and Maneuver drop by half. +1 difficulty on all control dice pools.

Speed drops to 1, Maneuver to 0. +3 on all control rolls. Roll control each turn to stay airborne.

Vehicle destroyed — crashes immediately, falls apart in midair or explodes violently, as appropriate.

AERIAL VEHICLES FROM OTHER SOURCEBOOKS

A number of flying artifacts and other devices have appeared in previous sourcebooks. Their stats using this system are given below, along with any exceptions that might need to be noted.

Name	Source	Spd.	Man.	End.	Armor	Armament	Hlth Lvl	Repair
The Chariot	CB: Dawn	2	4	Unltd*	Roll Valor**	None	3	

of Aerial Conquest

* Immune to damage less than 30L. Takes no damage from non-magical sources. Does not take damage as an object — damage dice must be rolled. Immune to sorceries such as Rain of Doom.

** Dawn anima magnifier, camouflage effect.

Wings of the Raptor	The Book of Three Circles	Spcl*	6	Unltd	None	None	None	None
---------------------	---------------------------	-------	---	-------	------	------	------	------

* Not properly a vehicle at all. Allows user to fly at five times their running pace.

Thousand-Forged Dragon	Creatures of the Wyld	2	-2	Ltd only by Essence	27L/39B*	Bite, claw, Conflagration of Doom	50	5
------------------------	-----------------------	---	----	---------------------	----------	-----------------------------------	----	---

An ungainly flier designed to destroy Manses.

* Ignores attacks doing 15L/15B or less.

Warbird	Ruins of Rathess	6	3	Rider's	10L/15B	Claw attack	10	3
---------	------------------	---	---	---------	---------	-------------	----	---

Each chariot can carry three, but requires only a single charioteer — anyone can fly the craft, provided the chariot's owner "turns over the reins" — this action is a reflexive one, as is regaining control. The other two passengers can take any normal action while the chariot is in flight — part of the chariot's enchantment is to ensure that passengers are always stable and steady, regardless of the movement of the chariot. Hitchhikers will quickly find the charioteer determines who is or isn't a passenger.

Each chariot requires a level 2 Hearthstone to power its flight and, additionally, must be fed 1 mote of Essence each scene — this is a security mechanism, to prevent mortal charioteers from fleeing with the chariot. Chariots of the infinite heavens require one hour of maintenance for every 20 hours of flight or for every 20 turns of combat use.

Speed: 4

Maneuver: 2

Endurance: Charioteer's endurance. 1 mote per scene.

Armor: 12L/18B

Armament: None normally.

Health Levels: 20

Repair: 4

Manta (ARTIFACT ●●●●●)

Although First Age units made relatively little use of mortal infantry (even equipped with gunzosha or other artifact weapons and armor), save in static, defensive positions, there was still a need for medium-sized transports to move troops and equipment around Creation.

Manta is one of a family of similar-sized and -purposed skyships in the Lookshy fleet. Carved from a diamond the size of a building and given the shape of a giant faceted crystal with small wings on either side, *Manta* is larger than many skyships in her general class, measuring over 60 feet from stem to stern and with a body nearly 12 feet wide. She is capable of carrying two warstriders as cargo or a talon of infantry for short distances (less than three days travel). Two doors on either side allow passengers to embark, and a large ramp can be dropped from the back of the craft to load cargo or troops. *Manta* requires a crew of five, including two Exalted, and is powered by placing two Hearthstones of Air (level 2 or higher) in sockets near the twin Essence furnaces that power the craft. As a security precaution, each of the Exalts must commit 3 motes of Essence for the skyship to fly.

Two fire lances are mounted on the sides of the craft, in mounts that allow them to fire in most directions. Firing slits can be opened on either side, allowing infantry or crew to fire out to port or to starboard, but this is the extent of *Manta's* offensive ability. *Manta* is a reliable craft, requiring maintenance every 100 hours of flight and suffering breakdowns only after becoming 30 hours of maintenance in arrears. Because of this, there are more craft like *Manta* still in existence than perhaps any other type of flying craft in Creation save the chariot of the infinite heavens. The majority of Lookshy and the Realm's air fleets are made up of these craft, and small numbers of



them can be found in the more civilized parts of Creation, mostly in the East and the South.

Speed: 5

Maneuver: 1

Endurance: Pilot's endurance.

Armor: 15L/20B

Armament: Two fire lances.

Health Levels: 40

Repair: 3

Skywolf (ARTIFACT: N/A)

Skywolf is one of a group of similar craft that form the backbone of the Lookshy Sky Guard. Although *Skywolf* is less than two centuries old, her sister ships were built during the Shogunate, based on plans for mid-range First Age skyremes. Nearly 300 feet long, *Skywolf* was designed to support ground operations and to carry troops and supplies to the battlefield. Only six of these great warships are known to have survived the Contagion (or to have been produced since), and all of them belong to Lookshy. Rumors persist of sky pirates armed with a *Skywolf*-class craft operating in the Western Ocean, and other, less credible tales wander the teahouses and caravansaries of Creation as well. It is believed that Vanileth has at least one flying craft similar to *Skywolf*, and legends persist that there were three similar ships docked in the aeries of Rathess when the Contagion struck.

In flight, *Skywolf* vaguely resembles a steel-and-jade alloy killer whale, but the resemblance is fleeting. A deckhouse rises from its mostly flat dorsal deck, equipped with numerous tiedowns for cargo or warstriders. The ventral hull is curved and comes to a point — skycraft usually land in large pools of water or calm inlets — and a thick ventral “fin” housing weapons and an observation deck hangs below it. To port and starboard are four armored housings carrying potent Essence turbines that power the massive vessel. When operational, these engines can temporarily drain an area of breathable Essence in mere days, and so, the ships are normally kept powered down when not being prepared for a mission or in the air. It takes a full day to bring the engines up to operational power. *Skywolf* and her sisters can float and can operate as ocean-going craft, after a fashion, although they are ungainly and slow in the water.

Unlike most of her sister ships, *Skywolf* retains her original armament. Combat between aerial warships was not unknown in the First Age, but it was uncommon enough that it was not a primary consideration — as a result, most of *Skywolf*'s weapons are designed to be able to engage ground targets. A forward weapon mount holds a pair of lightning ballistae (Hearthstone powered) facing forward, and the ventral fin mounts four medium implosion bows (see p. 59), one firing in each direction (port, starboard, fore and aft). Four light

implosion bows (two port and two starboard on mounts allowing one on each side to fire either forward or aft) and two forward-facing warstrider fire lances (see p. 59) are mounted on the top deck, allowing for fire against aerial targets (or while the craft is in the water). Additionally, firing ports located throughout the hull allow the ship's troops or Dragon-Blooded to use personal weapons against the enemy.

Skywolf requires a crew of 20, including five Dragon-Blooded, and normally carries two scales of ship's troops in addition to any embarked ground forces. The exact amount of passengers and cargo carried varies — *Skywolf* can carry a wing for short periods of time, but she normally carries three talons when traveling more than a week from Lookshy. Some of her sister ships, partially rebuilt for cargo capacity, can carry a wing comfortably for long periods of time and are the primary means of deploying large units to the redoubts from Lookshy.

Skywolf's operation is labor intensive, requiring one hour of maintenance for every three hours of flight or every five turns of combat. Fortunately, most of this work can be done while the craft is in flight, but for every 100 hours of in-flight maintenance, she requires a day of refitting in dry dock. In-flight maintenance is fairly simple (Repair 2). The Legion can build aerial warships resembling *Skywolf*, but they are massive undertakings even for Lookshy — nearly all other production of First Age or Shogunate-era weapons and armor ceased when *Skywolf* was built, and it is expected the impact on production would be worse today.

Speed: 7

Maneuver: -1

Endurance: Basically unlimited. Requires three level 3 Air, Fire or Solar Hearthstones to operate, in addition to Hearthstones for the various weapons (usually four to six level 2 Air or Fire stones, depending on exact armament). Requires 5 motes of Essence from three different Dragon-Blooded each day to continue operations.

Armor: 20L/30B

Armament: Two lightning ballistae, four medium implosion bows, two warstrider fire lances and five light implosion bows.

Health Levels: 80

Repair: 5

Notes: Only one of *Skywolf*'s sister ships retains most of her First Age armament, stripping out the ventral medium implosion bows and fire lances. The remainder have had most of their armament removed, replacing the lightning ballistae with medium implosion bows, the lower implosion bows with light implosion bows and removing the fire lances and one topside light implosion bow altogether. *Skywolf* is also the last ship in pristine condition — her sister ships are all damaged, though flightworthy.

WHAT ABOUT CRAFT (DRAGON ARMOR)?

The material that appears in **Aspect Book: Air** for Cathak Meladus was composed using an early version of this manuscript, and has Meladus using a skill called Craft (Dragon Armor) to maintain his armor. Craft (First Age Weapons) officially replaces Craft (Dragon Armor) in the text of that book, and the Air Dragon armor's description should be considered superceded by this one. Also, Craft (First Age Weapons) is now the Craft skill "officially" used to maintain First Age weapons. Storytellers running games with warstriders may wish to transition generic Craft skills for maintaining First Age gear over to Craft (First Age Weapons).

When doing this, it's important not to make the players' characters "dumber". Don't force an established character with Craft (Armoring) to suddenly stop working on the warstrider he's been maintaining for months, and don't make the player buy a brand new Ability from 0 to 3. One possibility is to give the character a Craft (First Age Weapon) skill equal to the Craft skill he's currently using as a free bonus, without worrying about if the character meets the requirements for the skill. Alternately, allow the character to keep repairing whatever equipment he's currently maintaining and only force his player to buy Craft (First Age Weapons) for when he starts maintaining new equipment types. It's easier to ignore these rules or make a special exception than to soothe a player who feels ripped off.

CHARACTER CREATION

The Dragon-Blooded of Lookshy generally follow the same character generation rules as other Dragon-Blooded, but there are some differences, and many of the expanded Backgrounds, equipment and Charms presented below can also be used in a Dragon-Blooded game centered in the Realm or among other outcastes.

MODIFIED AND EXPANDED ABILITIES

The Seventh Legion makes use of some specialized aspects of Abilities that are uncommon in the rest of Creation, as described below. Although they are more common in Lookshy, most can be found throughout Creation, except Lookshy Heliocode.

CRAFT (FIRST AGE WEAPONS)

The character has made an intense study into the creation, enchanting and maintenance of First Age and Shogunate-era weapons and combat systems. She can perform basic maintenance and repair on most systems

and, at higher levels, can design and build new copies of existing designs or even new weapons never before seen. Most sorcerer-technician characters will have at least moderate levels of this Ability, and all sorcerer-engineers are masters or near-masters of this arcane art. This specialized Ability is limited in that it cannot be any higher than a character's Lore or Occult Ability.

CRAFT (WAR)

A character who wants a solid grasp of how to conduct maneuver operations, how to deploy archers and pikes in proper formation and density for maximum effect or how to correctly use First Age weapons in a battle can use a specialty of Tactics to aid his endeavors. On a larger scale, the Strategy specialty allows a field commander to deploy units to reinforce their strengths while shoring up their weaknesses, to arrange for logistical support and sieges and to set up an effective staff.

LINGUISTICS (HELIOCODE)

Seventh Legion heliograph codes and ciphers are some of the most carefully kept secrets in Lookshy, and most officers know only the most basic code sequences, which are similar to those used in the Realm and elsewhere. The more carefully guarded sequences are changed frequently and are never communicated through a single method — rather, a combination of couriers, heliograph messages and transmittal by Wind-Carried Words Technique or other methods is used. Knowledge of the heliocodes allows a character to quickly transmit secure messages through Lookshy's heliograph system and to have them taken seriously.

MODIFIED BACKGROUNDS

The Dragon-Blooded of Lookshy follow the same rules for character generation as other Dragon-Blooded, but some of their Backgrounds have been modified to reflect the unique situation Lookshy is in, and several new ones have been added to their repertoire.

ARTIFACT

Most of the First Age weapons and equipment remaining in Lookshy belongs to the Legion as a whole, rather than to the soldiers or families of Lookshy. However, the Gentes retain enough that their Terrestrials are often well-equipped with First Age wonders, in addition to weapons drawn from the arsenals (see "Arsenal," below).

For more on artifacts, see Chapter Nine: Wonders and Equipment in **Exalted** and also **The Book of Three Circles**.

- X A single level 1 artifact of the Storyteller's choice.
- A pair of level 1 artifacts.
- Three dots of artifacts, divided any way (up to Artifact 2)





- Four dots of artifacts, divided any way (up to Artifact 3)
- Five dots of artifacts, divided any way (up to Artifact 4)
- Six dots of artifacts, divided any way (up to Artifact 5)

BREEDING

Lookshy breeding initiatives and incentives have been designed to reward numbers, rather than power. For the Legion's purposes, a dozen average Dragon-Blooded are more useful than four powerful Exalts. As a result, while Breeding is common in the Dragon-Blooded of Lookshy (the initial bloodlines were strong, and the Gentes have taken steps to maintain that strength), the highest levels of Breeding are much more uncommon. Levels 1 and 2 of this Background are priced normally, but each level beyond costs an additional Background or bonus point (on top of the extra cost to buy Backgrounds above 3). So, level 3 costs 4 points, level 4 costs 7, and level 5 costs 10 points.

COMMAND

This Background represents an officer's personal staff or command, rather than soldiers assigned to the officer by the Legion (which can be purchased using the Backing Background). Legion officers are discouraged from developing personal armies, but occasionally, circumstances result in an officer with an independent unit of troops and the General Staff in a position where it can't say anything about it. Officers are responsible for the men in their command, even if those soldiers are not Lookshy troops. This Background is purchased normally — keep in mind the different sizes of wings and dragons, however.

CONNECTIONS

This Background generally works identically to Connections as described in *Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded* (pp. 159-160). Storytellers may wish to allow characters to develop connections specific to the Legion — connections could be developed in the various field forces, the Intelligence Directorate, the Academy of Sorcery, etc. instead of the connections mentioned in the *Dragon-Blooded* book (pp. 162-163).

MANSE

Most manses in Legion territory are held by the Seventh Legion, rather than any household. Each Gens does maintain a handful of Manses, however, and Lookshy officers often purchase or build Manses in the Scavenger Lands. Lookshy characters purchase Manses using the same rules as Solars.

REPUTATION

An officer's reputation can make or break his career — few commanders want officers known for cowardice,

and few soldiers want to serve under an officer known for brutality or for wasting his troops. Conversely, an officer with a reputation for innovative tactics or for snatching impossible victories out of the jaws of inevitable defeat can count on support from his superiors and intense devotion from his underlings. Such reputations can carry wide and far, and the names of some Seventh Legion officers are spoken of reverently even in the halls of their enemies in the Realm.

NEW BACKGROUNDS

The following Backgrounds are most appropriate for Lookshy characters. Storytellers may wish to introduce them in other games where they are appropriate but are under no compulsion to allow characters to take them unless the game is about Lookshy Dragon-Blooded.

ARSENAL

Most of Lookshy's magical assets are stored away in deep vaults, managed by the master armorers of the Seventh Legion. This equipment is loaned out to Dragon-Blooded, to elite troop units and, rarely, to other agents of the Seventh Legion as needed or deemed wise. The equipment remains the property of the Seventh Legion, it must be turned in (in working order) when demanded, and in all other ways, it should be considered a temporary piece of lent gear, rather than an inherent part of the character's panoply (see "Artifact," above, for that).

Heroic mortal characters may purchase Arsenal (it is common with elite forces units, such as rangers), but the cost is doubled (so level 3 would cost 6 Background dots or 6 bonus points and level 5 would cost 6 Background or 8 bonus points).

Dots provided by Arsenal can also be used to purchase dots of Manse (including its Hearthstone) on a one for one basis — this represents the Legion temporarily turning over one of its Manses to you.

- X Apparently the master armorers don't trust your character very much. Why is that?
- Two level 1 artifacts
- Four dots of artifacts, divided up any way (up to artifact 2)
- Six dots of artifacts, divided up any way (up to artifact 3). At this level, your character may have been trusted with one of the Legion's legendary war engines, such as a warstrider.
- Eight dots of artifacts, divided up any way (up to artifact 4). At this level, your character has almost certainly been assigned some First Age weapon system, such as dragon armor or command over a major piece of field artillery.

- Ten dots of artifacts, divided up any way (up to artifact 5).

RETAINERS

Officers of the Seventh Legion are expected to maintain a proper staff of assistants and support personnel — even a taizei can be expected to have a steward, a cook and a pair of personal bodyguards unaffiliated with his command. He might also perhaps have a concubine or two, though some would see it as vaguely decadent. Retainers are generally quite loyal to their commanding officer, though that loyalty can be dependent on treatment. Well-treated, they will develop into fanatical servants — treated poorly, they may seek to gain vengeance, or they may simply sigh and accept their lot, depending on the personality of the characters.

- X None. Your character has no retainers, being either of low rank, unsavory reputation or stoic disposition.
- Two retainers, usually a steward and an aide-de-camp.
- Five retainers, normally including a cook and, possibly, a bodyguard.
- Seven retainers, likely incorporating a pair of bodyguards, a steward, a cook and a secretary.
- Nine retainers, or a lesser number of more skilled aides.
- Thirteen retainers, almost certainly incorporating armymen, bodyguards and concubines, the retinue of a taimyo or the spoiled child of a Gens.

SORCERY

This Background represents the advanced training of Lookshy sorcerers. These spells should all be selected from the list on page 38. This magical mastery represents the common training of the sorcerer-technicians, rather than their private studies and innovations (which must be purchased by exchanging Charms or with bonus points or experience).

- x Your character has never been tapped for sorcery training and has never studied sorcery privately.
- Your character has received basic instruction in arts of sorcery. Your character starts with the knowledge of one spell.
- Your character has a strong understanding of sorcery's core principles. Your character begins with two spells.
- Your character has received extensive training in the art of sorcery. Your character begins with three spells.
- Your character has an advanced understanding of the finer points of sorcery. Your character starts with four spells. Additionally, although your character cannot perform such spells, she has some knowledge of the fundamentals of the Celestial Circle of sorcery, enough to sometimes recognize Celestial spells when she sees them written down or performed.
- Your character's knowledge of Terrestrial sorcery is unmatched, and her furtive perusal of certain banned tomes has given her insights into the more powerful Circles. She begins with five spells.

SORCERERS OF THE HEPTAGRAM

At the Storyteller's discretion, graduates of the Heptagram should be allowed to purchase Sorcery as well, although they are unlikely to have the highest levels of it — level 4 costs 4 bonus points (instead of 2), and level 5 costs them 8 bonus points (instead of 4). If they possess this Background, Heptagram sorcerers are not limited in their selection of spells.



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose concept, aspect, Nature

Note the anima powers provided by the character's aspect.

• STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (7/6/4)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Note Aspect Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (3; may not be the same as Aspect Abilities).

Choose Abilities (35 — at least 13 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities; at least one must be in each Favored Ability; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points. Characters born in Lookshy must have a *minimum* of Performance •, Presence •, Ride •, Stealth •, Archery ••, Brawl or Martial Arts ••, Lore ••, Melee •• and Linguistics •••. Characters who were not raised in Lookshy receive only 25 points of Abilities. Of these 25, 10 must be spent on Aspect or Favored Abilities. Dynastic exiles or defectors use the rules in **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded**, but they must purchase Backgrounds as if they were from Lookshy.).

• STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

Choose Backgrounds (13 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points), Charms (6 taken from Dragon-Blooded Charms, at least 4 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities. Additionally, all Lookshy Dragon-Blooded have the Charms Wind-Carried Word Technique and Elemental Bolt Attack, at no cost. Lookshy Dragon-Blooded may not learn the Immaculate Martial Arts before play begins — if a player desires to have her character learn them, she should use the Dynastic rules in **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded** and then relocate the character to Lookshy), Virtues (5 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points).

• STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Record Essence (2), Willpower (add the total of two highest Virtues — may not start at higher than 8 unless at least two Virtues are 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool (Essence + Willpower, plus any gained from Breeding), Peripheral Essence pool [(Essence x 4) + Willpower + (the sum of the two highest Virtues), plus any gained from Breeding] and health levels (7, plus any gained from Charms).

• BONUS POINTS

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

ELEMENTAL ASPECTS

• Air:

Aspect Abilities: Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

Anima Powers: May triple leaping distances, and takes no damage from falls.



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

- **Earth:**
Aspect Abilities: Awareness, Craft, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.
Anima Powers: May soak lethal damage with her entire Stamina.
- **Fire:**
Aspect Abilities: Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.
Anima Powers: May burst into flame for a scene, doing lethal damage and becoming immune to fire damage.
- **Water:**
Aspect Abilities: Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.
Anima Powers: A Terrestrial Exalted aspected to Water can gain free movement in water. For the rest of the day, the Exalt can breathe underwater and operate as freely as if she was in air.
- **Wood:**
Aspect Abilities: Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.
Anima Powers: May add dice to Dodge or Athletics actions.
- **Backing** — Standing and rank in an organization of power and influence.
- **Breeding** — Your lineage, reflecting how strongly your blood resonates to your chosen element.
- **Command** — Authorization to lead soldiers.
- **Connections** — Information sources and friends in useful places who give you pull in the world around you.
- **Familiar** — An animal companion.
- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence that you have access to.
- **Mentor** — A patron and instructor.
- **Reputation** — How society views you and your actions.
- **Resources** — Material goods and money.
- **Retainers** — Mortals who serve you.
- **Sorcery** — Advanced knowledge of the Terrestrial Circle of magic.
- **Family** — *Notable family members. Optional, see page 279 of Chapter Seven: Storytelling in Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded.*

VIRTUES

- **Compassion** — Empathy and forgiveness.
- **Conviction** — Emotional endurance.
- **Temperance** — Self-control and clear-headedness.
- **Valor** — Courage and bravery.

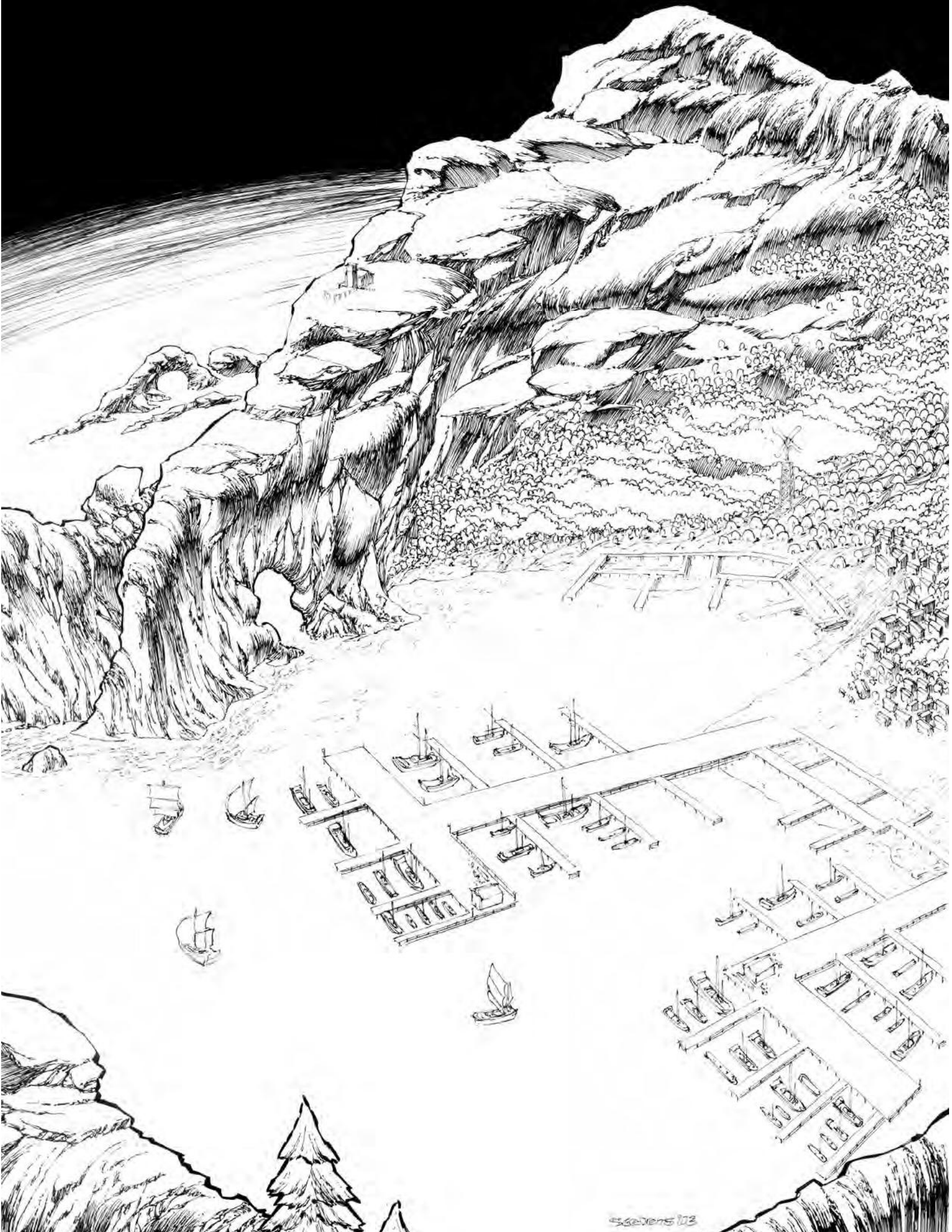
BACKGROUNDS

- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Arsenal** — Weapons or equipment issued from the Lookshy armories for your use.
- **Artifact** — Magical equipment, weapons or armor that belongs to you or your family (as opposed to being issued by the Legion).

BONUS POINTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Background	1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Virtue	3
Willpower	2
Essence	10
Charm	7 (5 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)





CHAPTER TWO

EOS AND OSSISSA



The Wyld holds all dreams. Indeed, the Wyld holds everything that can be conceived or imagined. It offers endless adventures, islands and seas with treasures that would stagger the prosaic merchants of the Guild, fortunes in jade and gold and silks and jewels. The Wyld provides new sunrises that will never pall, new frontiers to be explored, new diversions for mind and soul that will never grow old.

But the Wyld is addictive to the soul as well as to the body and mind. Yes, certainly, an Exalt can live out his dreams and be the heroic pirate of legend and sail beyond the sunset for discoveries that no other soul would have dreamed *could* be found — but what happens when he no longer wishes to return?

Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha, a dreamer from House Sesus and a peasant-born outcaste, harry the Guild across the Western Ocean, fleeing into the Wyld for shelter and for haven. With their fleet of followers, they sail through the courts of the Fair Folk, daring the soulless fae and even courting them as allies. They create or discover what their hearts most desire, deep in the Wyld, and they risk their souls in so doing, toying with the addiction that comes from being given what one most wishes for. At the moment, they are the heroes of their own story. But someday, the process may become more important than the ends, and the simple act of raiding or exploring be more necessary than the reason why they raid or explore. Someday,

they may never desire to leave the Wyld again — and if they do emerge, they will be changed, iconic figures who have lost their humanity.

But for the moment, they are the richest pirates in the West — individually richer than even the Grandfathers of the notorious Lintha Family, though they pick their targets more carefully. Or perhaps because of that; after all, who is there to rob on the high seas wealthier than the Guild itself? Some Dragon-Blooded flock to Ossissa and Eos, seeking leaders in their rebellion against the Realm. Other Terrestrial Exalted join them from private desires, wanting revenge or wealth or power or to seek their own dreams. Normal humans crew Ossissa and Eos' ships, mingled with a few specimens of the God-Blooded, the spirit-descended or stranger beings still.

Their activity has not gone unnoticed. Houses Peleps and V'neef have both attempted to dispose of the pirates but have not managed to do more yet than to slay a few nameless crewmen. The Lintha Family, which has its own reasons for anger besides the simple theft of possible targets, is hot on Eos and Ossissa's trail — and would be nipping at their heels if they didn't take to the Wyld so often. The Guild is furious and is trying to negotiate a sensible financial balance between stocking its ships with soldiers and sorcerers or losing those ships to the rapacious, vengeance-driven pirates.



Meanwhile, rumor is hot in every Western port, all the way to the Realm's own waterways, as to what Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha truly seek. Is it as simple as it seems, and do they merely desire to impoverish or break the Guild? Are the darker stories of their alliances with the Fair Folk true, and do they indeed hand their Guild captives over to have their dreams eaten? Is their island haven brimming with more jade than the Empress herself holds in the Imperial Treasury? Have they signed pacts with the Skullstone Archipelago or with some other Deathlord as yet unknown? Are they secretly working for the Empress and sheltering her while she prepares to return and cleanse the Realm with blood and fire? Do they control strange First Age weapons, discovered on the edge of Creation, which once served the Anathema? Nobody is certain, and what they don't know, they fear.

HISTORY

House Sesus has long been known for strong military, political and financial ties — and for a willingness to combine the three in order to wring the greatest possible profit out of a situation. Sesus troops help collect taxes in the Threshold, and Sesus merchants finance Cynis parties and Mnemon marriages, and Sesus politicians turn all of the above to the house's advantage. One major line of the house, the Magel family, is squarely in the Guild's pocket — or should that be the other way round? — and the house finances do very well by it.

There are those who speculate that the notorious pirate Sesus Ossissa, together with his cohort Eos Atitha, is merely a catspaw for House Sesus, harvesting from the Guild illegally just as the Magel family profits legally but formally disavowed by the house in order to avoid Guild reprisals. It's a good theory. There are some in the Guild who suspect it may be true and hope to find valid evidence for it some day.

House Sesus tolerates these whispers because the truth, should it get out, would be even more damaging to it.

When Sesus Chenow founded his own family line so that he could kill and pillage in the Threshold without hindrance from the rest of the house, he did so with the support of his sworn brotherhood. One member of this brotherhood was another Sesus, of the same age as Chenow but from the Denerid household — a sensualist named Ossissa, a pleasure-seeker and visionary, always in search of new experiences and strange horizons. When Ossissa was apparently lost to the Wyld, far out in the Threshold, Chenow regretted the loss of his cousin's interesting ideas for persuading satraps to part with their jade but, otherwise, had little reason to miss him.

Ossissa sailed into the Wyld for many days and nights, and his crew died one by one, until, at last, he stood alone on the planks of his ship. When the craft emerged into the open sea, far from where he had entered the Wyld, a

battered Guild ship, its decks flowing with blood, floated in front of Ossissa, and a crimson-haired woman, wounded so severely that she could scarcely hold herself upright, called on him to surrender.

Ossissa was amused. He boarded the Guild ship and took the badly wounded woman onto his own craft. As she healed, he learned that her name was Eos Atitha, and he listened to her story.

Eos Atitha grew up in the Wavecrest Archipelago, unaware of any Dragon-Blooded in her family line, on a small island that was one of dozens like it, with a port that hosted the occasional Guild trading craft. She learned to till the land and harvest crops, and while she knew of the Tya, she never seriously considered joining them.

Eos Atitha Exalted when barely in her teens, and her life changed. The elders of the village insisted that she seek guidance, and she took ship for a larger island. Three days out from land, spirits of the air screamed in her ears that her family was being kidnaped and her island ravaged. Eos Atitha persuaded the fishermen to turn their craft around and set winds in their sails that returned her to her island before dawn, running before the storm.

Guild ships had taken every living soul from the island, seeking to repopulate one of its slave plantations that had rebelled and that had been nearly depopulated in punishment. With the winds to help her, Eos followed the unsuspecting Guild fleet and brought down destruction upon it. The villagers rose up against their captors, and the Guild sailors and guards were fodder for the sharks.

But Eos now felt out of place among the villagers. No longer fit to farm and harvest and not wanting to become Tya, she was driven by outrage at what the Guild had dared to do to her family. Bidding her kin farewell, she set off with a few dazzled followers in one of the captured Guild ships, confident that her mastery of the winds and her newfound strength would enable her to take a proper revenge.

She barely survived her first fight, and her crew all perished. Had Sesus Ossissa not found her, she would have drifted into the Wyld and perished there.

Eos Atitha wanted revenge on the Guild. Sesus Ossissa had thought that he wanted nothing more than to explore the frontiers of dream and possibility, but the young peasant-born's lust for vengeance intrigued him. He could lose himself in her hatred and bitterness, it was so strong. It wasn't love on either side. It was a mutual obsession, with vengeance and with obsession itself.

Sesus Ossissa let the chains of loyalty to house and loyalty to Empress fall away with barely a thought, bewitched by these new horizons of outlawry, danger and visionary adventure. The taste of rebellion excited him in ways that he had never felt before, and with his lover's winds backing his ships, Ossissa raised his own flag and set out to bleed the Guild dry.

WYLD SEDUCTION

The Wyld may warp the body — and, indeed, that is what most fear from it, having seen the twisted monstrosities that emerge from it to assault Creation — but it also twists the soul. It isn't good for human beings, or even Exalts, to be able to sail into the mists and find their hearts' desires or to be able to lose themselves in opium-scented dreams of piracy and heroism and vengeance. They run the risk of not wanting to come back. And with the Wyld, you get what you want.

In purely mechanical terms, as described in **Exalted: The Lunars** (p. 205-207), the first time a character is exposed to the Wyld of a particular strength, her player must roll Willpower + Temperance against the addiction difficulty. Failure denotes mild addiction (-1 die to further exposure checks), while success gives a bonus of 1 die to all checks for avoiding addiction for a number of months equal to the character's Temperance. Eventually, the character's Willpower + Temperance dice pool is likely to run out, and she then becomes a hopeless addict to the sensations and dreams that the Wyld offers. That's the mechanical explanation.

What the pirates and their pursuers are risking isn't just the physical temptation of change or the mental temptation of pleasant sensations and delightful memories. It's a temptation that strikes to the soul. In the Wyld, you can be what you secretly dream of being. All you have to give up is your responsibility to the outside world, your objective perspective and your original self. "Be someone new," the Wyld says, "it's much more interesting." The pirates are slowly becoming noble heroes and explorers, rather than the more complex — and more real — people they once were. The people who would stop them become archetypal pursuers who will never quite manage to capture them. Everyone else in the world, from their perspective, becomes a supporting character in the epic.

Sesus Ossissa, the complex and lazy man who once served in the Thousand Scales, has become Sesus Ossissa, the obsessive explorer with room for nothing else in his mind except the deep Wyld. Eos Atitha, a woman who had a family, a home, personal ties and a real reason for hating the Guild, has become Eos Atitha, the driven, vengeful pirate, who dreams of smashing the entire Guild and lives for nothing less. This answering of one's deepest desires is the worst of temptations because it gives one what one truly wants.





Followers came quickly. Two powerful Dragon-Blooded master-captains, with knowledge of the Wyld, were the sort of leaders that rebels, pirates and adventurers dreamed of. A small fleet quickly formed, with Sesus Ossissa's own craft *Unveiling* as its flagship. And the Guild began to pay, in jade and silver and blood, for all the grievances that Eos held, with all the finesse that Sesus Ossissa could provide.

The Guild now wants the heads of Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha and all those who follow them. Naturally, House Sesus disclaimed Ossissa as soon as his identity became public knowledge. The other Great Houses publicly claim to believe this — and privately whisper that Sesus Ossissa is doubtless a deep-cover agent and funnels his takings back into the Sesus treasuries. Naturally, House Sesus wants its wayward offspring quietly disposed of and has sent a number of expert assassins to that end — all of whom have so far failed.

THE PIRATES! THE PIRATES!

Unlike the Lintha Family or certain solo operators, the pirates led by Ossissa and Eos are widely enough feared that nobody needs to ask *which* pirates their prey refers to after limping back to port with empty holds and blood-spattered decks. They are simply *the* pirates, and in only a dozen years, they've made themselves known and feared across the West. Of course, most of their attacks are on Guild ships — but the predominance of the Guild over trade in the region means that ultimately everyone is affected. If Eos and Ossissa liberate a ship's worth of slaves, then the Guild simply has to find more warm bodies to fill its current orders. If Eos and Ossissa disappear with jade and orichalcum from Guild coffers, then the Guild officials will make up the theft from the nearest expedient sources — prices will rise, tributes will increase, and it all gets passed on to the peasants.

The peasants and island-dwellers and fishermen aren't interested in complex economic reasoning or in the Guild's propaganda. The Guild are the bastards who have chosen to raise prices as a response to the raids, and the pirates, led by noble exiles fleeing from the injustice and tyranny of the Realm — insert some choice legend here — are the heroic bravos who occasionally share the wealth. Guild representatives attempt to explain from time to time (with touching sincerity and with some jade or wine to help the message go down easier) how it's all the pirates' fault, but it rarely seems to make a significant impression on the average island-dweller. The pirates are heroes out of song and story, sailing from the Far West in clouds of glory, their sails silhouetted against the sunset, freeing Guild slaves and occasionally distributing captured wealth. On the edge of the Wyld, with the Realm trembling on the edge of collapse and with the Fair Folk raiding and the marine

beastmen haunting the seas, people need comforting stories that they can believe in.

And the stories are, for the most part, true. The pirates really do target the Guild and really do release slaves — most of the time — and are generally in open rebellion against the Realm. Eos Atitha wants the Guild broken and utterly destroyed, but first she wants it to *hurt*, and she's aiming for its most vulnerable organ — its purse. Sesus Ossissa wants to dream and to explore his dreams and to satisfy the wildest fringes of his imagination — and, for the moment, to enjoy Eos' thirst for vengeance. Others beneath their flag want revenge or rebellion or the humiliation of their rivals or to explore new frontiers or safety from those who pursue them. To the common peasant, however, or the average dockworker or sailor across the West, they are *the* pirates: rebellious, valiant and very wealthy indeed.

IS IT TRUE LOVE?

Many people assume the obvious, on seeing Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha as joint commanders of the pirate fleet. Clearly they're in love, and that's why they've thrown away duty to Realm, family and Dragons. Some sigh for this romantic ideal, while others point it out as an example of emotions overmastering duty and use it as an parable illustrating the Way of the Sickly Whore. More cynical thinkers in the Realm are quite sure that one of them must be using the other and mutter darkly about deeply laid plots and spells of enslavement.

None of the above are true. Ossissa and Eos have shared a bed on several occasions, but their relationship is one of convenience, friendship and shared obsession, rather than anything romantic. Both tend to find their partners elsewhere — Ossissa courts noblemen or ladies of the Fair Folk, while Eos has a fondness for innocent island girls or Tya. What they both take care to avoid is sharing a bed with any of their four captains, as such a situation is likely to provoke favoritism or accusations of favoritism.

COMMAND AND OBEDIENCE

Just as a ship cannot have two captains when in action, a fleet cannot have two leaders while in battle. If all six ships are engaged in an action against the Guild, then Sesus Ossissa is acknowledged overall commander and directs the other ships. If retreat is necessary, then he is the one who signals the need for flight. The other

captains, including Eos, obey his instructions but are at liberty to assist each other where appropriate.

If Ossissa's ship is not on the mission or if Ossissa is incapacitated in action, then command falls to Eos Atitha. While she has less experience in naval combat than Ossissa, she is a fast study and is adept at noting the weaknesses of Guild craft. What Eos lacks, however, and what may prove a significant danger to her, is experience in combat with other Dragon-Blooded of equal strength. She's never had the training that the House of Bells offers. She was not taught to command humans or other Exalts, and all she knows about strategy and tactics comes from common sense, natural gifts and the teaching of Sesus Ossissa. While she could take advice from Peleps Cardero or Medros Slitneck, it would be inappropriate — and awkward — to do so in the midst of combat. If some of their pursuers have realized this potential hole in the pirates' defenses, they have yet to take advantage of it.

If a single ship is on a mission, then either it's Ossissa's ship — possibly with Eos accompanying him on it — on a quick raid, or it's one of the other ships scouting. The Guild has already tried innocent-looking merchant ships whose holds are stuffed with soldiers and with a sorcerer behind every bulkhead. Ossissa knows better than to let his pirates attack single ships, however tempting they may look, unless he is absolutely certain that they are proper targets. Whenever the other four captains are operating solo, they have standard orders to refrain from approaching other ships or from tying up in any port unless they are *absolutely* certain that the area is safe. Heroic piracy is what they do, but common sense keeps the pirates alive and operating.

Technically speaking, the four captains exercise authority in order of seniority. That is, Peleps Cardero has the most authority, then Green Poison, then Medros Slitneck, then Gemella Windrose. In practice, Cardero and Medros have roughly equal authority in a combat situation, as both of them are experts at commanding ships in battle. Green Poison gives way to their expertise, for the moment, though if her hatred and anger continue to grow, this may lead to an awkward confrontation. Gemella Windrose is the undisputed expert on sorcery — and the undisputed (even by her) bottom of the command tree under any other circumstances.

Any new Dragon-Blooded joining the group would probably be assigned as a junior officer to one of the current ships — most likely Ossissa's own or perhaps Eos' — until the leaders were certain of her loyalty and prowess. After a few months, assuming that she could handle crew and sail, she might be given her own ship to captain. A Dragon-Blooded (or several of them) joining the pirates with her own ship would neither be turned away nor have her ship taken from her, but she would not be fully trusted for a while. Eos and Ossissa are unlikely to promote newcomers above their own trusted captains, either, barring truly

exceptional circumstances. Should this happen, Peleps Cardero in particular is likely to hold a grudge. Medros Slitneck is prepared to have Dragon-Blooded promoted over him, so long as he keeps command of his own ship and still has a voice in matters.

A truly enterprising Dragon-Blooded (or group of Dragon-Blooded) who felt the need to operate independently and outside of Ossissa's authority might be shown certain hideouts in the Wyld and left to work as an independent ally. The oceans are wide, after all, and there's no shortage of Guild ships to raid. Of course, the Guild is more alert these days, and such new pirates would have more difficulty staging raids or escaping afterward. They would be operating without the knowledge that Eos and Ossissa have of the region and without their numerous allies, but if the Exalts insist on operating solo, it's their life — and, possibly, their funeral.

For a crew member to actively disobey one of the captains is a whipping offence at best. There have been several cases of attempted treachery, mutiny or selling out to the Guild. Ossissa quite understands the temptations of wealth and power and will even occasionally attempt to salvage a traitor of exceptional skills or abilities. While such traitors will have to prove themselves by truly heroic means, it is possible to earn the pirate's forgiveness — eventually. Ossissa might also use Guild spies to leak false information to the Guild or to bait Guild ships into a trap. Eos views betrayals more personally. While her hatred of the Guild is far hotter than Ossissa's, she lacks his skill at intriguing or his cold-blooded attitude toward spies and is more likely to throw any discovered spies directly to the sharks or to hand them over to the Fair Folk as slaves.

NOTABLE ASSOCIATES

Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha, feared as they may be, cannot operate a pirate fleet alone. Though some of the stories about them in the Threshold describe them as single-handedly steering a mighty caravel and defeating Guild crews through their own martial prowess, this is an exaggeration. Loyal crews are necessary to help subdue Guild enforcers, to dispose of guards, to handle ships and treasure and to share the joys of exploration and bloody revenge.

Naturally, Ossissa and Eos are always glad to recruit Dragon-Blooded to their cause — in fact, three of their captains are Dragon-Blooded. One is an outlaw on the run, one is a pragmatist with a private mission, and one is a sorcerer who dreams of finding Charms and spells that will allow her to permanently command the Wyld. The fourth captain is a human, a veteran from the Lintha Family seeking refuge with one of the few groups that might be able to protect him from the Family's vengeance, but has skills that few can match. There are a couple of other Dragon-Blooded in the group, both newcomers, and both serving aboard Ossissa's ship.





FAITH AND REBELLION

The Immaculate Order teaches obedience to the social structure of the Realm, respect for the Dragon-Blooded, honor to the Empress and that all things have their proper place. Outright rebellion against the Realm, preying on Guild shipping and assaults on the navy — regardless of whether or not the navy gets in the way — are improper actions from both the secular and the religious points of view. So, how can a Terrestrial Exalted pirate reconcile his current course of action with his faith, assuming that he has any?

Some outcastes have it easy. They were raised outside the Realm, offspring of parents who'd forgotten the touch of Exalted blood in their family tree or of mothers who didn't realize that their casual liaisons had been with the Dragon-Blooded. As such, these Exalts have grown up in places where the Immaculate Order was one of several competing religions rather than the sole source of religious dogma. Their current actions don't necessarily outrage their beliefs. They may even reconcile a partial understanding of Immaculate dogmas with a belief that they're only striking at the corrupt parts of the Realm and, thus, supporting true Exalted justice. Eos Atitha herself matured on a small island hundreds of leagues from the nearest Immaculate outpost and knows little more of the immaculate faith than she does of the Realm itself. If she bothered to consider it, she would hope that the Dragons themselves approved of the justice and vengeance that she brings to the Guild.

Some Dynasts will attempt to cast aside their Immaculate beliefs, together with their loyalty to the Realm. It's not always that easy. They may convince themselves that they've discarded their religious convictions, as Sesus Ossissa himself has, but such Exalts still often find themselves abiding by their childhood strictures. They don't use iconic decorations, they fly undecorated or abstract flags, and they still walk among lesser mortals in the unshakeable belief that they, as Dragon-Blooded, are divinely appointed to rule them.

Other Dynasts may honestly lose their faith and be able to say that the Immaculate Order and its stories of the Five Elemental Dragons mean as little to them as the dust beneath their feet.

Peleps Cardero, disowned by his house and sadly resigned to it, is the recognized third-in-command of the fleet after Ossissa and Eos. When the Scarlet Empress gave control of the merchant navy to House V'neef, it caused

House Peleps (the previous commanders) significant financial problems. Peleps Cardero had previously been heavily involved in the merchant navy, specializing in security and in protecting the ships from pirates. He realized that House V'neef would dispose of him as quickly as possible and that his own house had no use for his particular talents. Clear-sightedly, he chose a path that would allow him to cause trouble for V'neef, through raids on Guild shipping. He hopes that some day in the future, Peleps will establish itself as the imperial line or as an ally of the Great House that has and will once again have control of the merchant navy. On that day, Cardero intends to return to his house under a new name and to marry his childhood sweetheart, Peleps Mairill, an accomplished sorceress.

Peleps Cardero is a skilled strategist but an even more skilled merchant and clerk. He passed through the Spiral Academy in his youth, and he knows how to juggle finances, men, supplies and taxes. Ossissa relies heavily on Cardero's help in judging when to hit the Guild for maximum effect and where to dispose of the profits afterward. This has done much to add to the group's reputation as "the richest pirates in the Threshold." Cardero is a tall man, 35 years old, with pale hair and eyes as green as the deepest ocean, and his fingers are as often ink-stained as salt-stained. He can defend himself as well as any other Dragon-Blooded, but he prefers a cautious attack to a reckless one. Cardero maintains an occasional correspondence with Mairill, but under conditions of extreme secrecy, through spirits of air that she summons. Nobody else is aware of this yet, but Ossissa and Eos would frown on such a potential breach of security, and House Peleps would seize the opportunity to lure the notorious pirates into a trap. His ship is the *Shark*.

Green Poison is an Iselsi, from the outcaste branch of the house, and is extremely bitter about it. Notable for her habit of wearing green leather, her green-dyed hair, her twin green-jade swords and her fondness for disemboweling captains who make any attempts at resistance, she is the youngest Dragon-Blooded among the captains, being barely 25. She dreams of overthrowing the entire Realm, of casting down the other Great Houses, of making the monks of the Immaculate Order labor in slave gangs for the rest of their natural lives and of other such pleasant visions. Since she is aware that this is nearly impossible, she's decided to settle for crippling the Guild, as this will inconvenience all the Great Houses. In a few decades, she may grow bored with this and try something else. The Iselsi (the Savenis bloodline in particular) have not tried to use her — yet — but are keeping her under distant observation, as a possible hole card for emergencies.

Green Poison knew from her childhood that her House had been systematically dismantled at the Empress' wish, and that she wouldn't even be claimed publicly as an

Iselsi, in order to give her more latitude to maneuver and rise. Acknowledged as a courtesan-born Dragon-Blooded sired by an Peleps nobleman (dead and unable to contradict the slur), she trailed along on the outskirts of society, able to watch her peers but never given any work of importance or invited to the best parties. She broke out with a vengeance, dyed her hair green and ran off to join Sesus Ossissa. An Aspect of Water, she has largely untrained potential as a sorcerer but is truly skilled with her swords. Ossissa and Eos trust Green Poison but keep a careful eye on her, as she is brash and arrogant and may well lead her ship into an ambush one of these days. Peleps Cardero feels that there is something strange about her claims of ancestry but has not made any serious attempt to investigate. Her ship is the *Dismay*.

Medros Slitneck was named for the gills that line his neck, but there are those who say that his habit of slitting the throats of enemy sailors before throwing their bodies overboard may have had something to do with it. He is a renegade from the dread Lintha Family and had a bad enough reputation while serving as a ship's captain under the Family to terrify half the Coral Archipelago. He had no doubts about his choices in life or about his loyalty to the Family, until one day when he was watching a cargo of

slaves being brought in on a Guild ship. Among that cargo was the younger brother whom Medros had left at home 25 years ago, now comatose and half-dead from head wounds.

Something snapped in Medros that day. With his customary efficiency, he secured his brother and fled the Lintha, terrifying his crew into obedience. He sought shelter with someone powerful enough to protect him from the Lintha Family. Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha, newly making a name for themselves and with a haven hidden deep in the Wyld, were the obvious choice. He swore his loyalty to them by blood and name and sword and keeps that oath still.

Medros Slitneck is a short man, barely 5'5", with green-tinged long black hair tied back in a ponytail, gills set in his neck, an uncompromising face and a vicious temper. His saber is a First Age weapon, and it glows red in battle as he sheds blood with it. While he has no Charms or spells, Medros is an accomplished sailor and a genius at the steering wheel. His crew fear him — with good reason — but follow him for profit and luxury. His brother sleeps at the Obsidian Hands, still in a coma from those injuries years ago, and Eos (who sympathizes, to a degree) has promised to watch for some way of healing his wounds. The Lintha Family want Medros alive — and intend for him to stay alive for a very considerable length of time, as an example of what happens to traitors.





His ship is the *Murderer's Wind*, and it is noticeably older and more battered than the others in the fleet — though no less efficient.

Gemella Windrose is the daughter of Elucina Silvereye, an outcaste who served with distinction as a magistrate till her death in the line of duty. This death involved a number of daggers in the back received, courtesy of a faction from the Ministry of the Honorable and Humble Caretakers of the Common Folk, during a complicated tax fraud case that Elucina was investigating. However, by then, Gemella was already in boarding school and comfortably ensconced in the Realm's educational system. She Exalted successfully and passed through the Heptagram with high marks, a scholastic rather than a social success. Shortly after graduation, she headed off to the Threshold and vanished from the social map. She reappeared in the company of Ossissa and Eos, as their newest captain, devoted to expanding the boundaries of reality and exploring the Wyld.

Gemella is a dreamer pure and simple, a fantasist who wants to build strange new realms out of the Wyld and to sail into the sunset and return with a hold full of pearls and flowers. She came to Sesus Ossissa because she'd heard that he'd explored further into the Wyld than any other Dragon-Blooded, loyal or traitorous, and that he intended to go further still. Ossissa feels almost paternal toward the girl and has ensured that her ship is crewed by some of his most loyal and able followers. Gemella is an expert sorceress but a poor sailor and relies on her first mate (Lynden Jadenose, an old hand) for most of the prosaic duties of captaining a ship. She is a slender woman, gaunt with self-imposed austerities and a mere 30 years old, and she wears her dark hair cut short. While she is perfectly competent with her Charms, she's Earth-aspected, so she seldom feels entirely comfortable in the middle of the ocean. Her ship is the *Declaration*.

Other known followers of Ossissa and Eos include:

Ethe Lathin, a Tya who joined in the hope of finding her lover, another Tya lost to the Wyld years ago, and who regularly proposes a raid on the Lintha Family's sargasso.

Edge of Coral, a man whose mother was a coral-spirit and whose nails and teeth are red coral, who searches for a way to make his spirit-kin accept him.

Doraste Eel-biter, who drank the blood of one of the great eels that swarm in the Far West and who now has white scales and hair and eyes red as blood and swims faster than any human.

Incan Star-Eye, who always goes wrapped in gray robes and has yet to reveal evidence of either gender but can call and dispel mists by singing.

IN THE OBSIDIAN HANDS

The fleet's secret haven is deep in the Wyld, found long ago by Sesus Ossissa when he only had a single ship under his command. The actual port is an extinct volcano,

long since flooded by water, whose obsidian cliffs rear skyward like a pair of cupped hands, giving the place its name. At the far end of the water-filled crater, a stretch of beach leads up to an expanse of fertile land, where trees bear both fruit and flower throughout the year, crowned by Ossissa's gold and ivory pagoda. His followers have their own dwellings further down — tents of ice-white silk embroidered with silver thread or houses of ebony or towers of marble. Even the lowliest crewman sleeps between silk sheets and is attended by beautiful faerie courtesans or doe-eyed boys with sculpted muscles.

This is a haven of pure desire, where every wish is answered. Meals are brought by birds every morning or prepared by the smiling servants and include fresh bread, fresh meat, unearthly sweetmeats and wines that might have been pressed before ever the Scarlet Empress took the throne. The men and women of the fleet lounge among the trees or swim in the clear waters below or practice with their weapons on the sandy beach or sport with their paramours. Each time Ossissa or Eos leads an attack on the Guild, there are always a few who are unwilling to leave this earthly paradise. Some of these lotus-eaters become guards of the Obsidian Hands, watching for any attackers who might somehow find their way to the haven. Others — in an act of strange mercy from Ossissa — are returned to mortal lands, where they live in longing for the distant shores of the Wyld, to report on Guild activities to Ossissa and Eos, solaced with dream-crafted treasures that their old shipmates bring them.

The way to the Obsidian Hands requires passage through certain points of the Wyld. It cannot be reached without passing these waypoints, short of using the most powerful spells or the Charms of the ancient Anathema. The Celestial Circle spell *Summon Spirit Boat* (see *Savage Seas*, pp.117-118) could take a sorcerer to the first waypoint on the route but would require the token for that checkpoint to go further. Sesus Ossissa is a dreamer and a visionary and a Wyld-shaper, but he is not stupid. While it is possible that a ship lost in the Wyld might come upon the Obsidian Hands purely by accident, it is extremely unlikely. Such fortunate sailors — for anyone surviving a voyage through the Wyld purely by chance is *ridiculously* fortunate — find themselves at the entrance to the Obsidian Hands harbor, where the cliffs part to allow entrance to the central crater, being hailed by the guards watching from above.

(The Obsidian Hands are in the Deep Wyld, in a pocket of stability with a single path leading to it. Passing each waypoint requires at least five successes on a Perception + Sail roll with a difficulty of 7, in addition to fulfilling the condition at that place.)

There are three waypoints to pass and three tokens to give. First, the ship must pass through a sea of endless long waves that stretch from horizon to horizon. If, and only if,

the steersman of the ship drinks a mouthful of the seawater, bitter and salty as it is, will the waves part to reveal a hidden ravine that leads to the next point on the journey.

As the ship sails through the ravine, countless ruby-feathered gulls flutter above, calling to each other in a way familiar to any sailor. The ravine is wide enough to hold three caravels sailing abreast, but it apparently continues on forever, never actually coming to an end. At any time, a captain may turn his ship back and try to leave the ravine. He will find himself at the entrance again within a hand's turn of minutes and may return through the endless sea of waves to the Wyld and, from there, to normal seas. But should he wish to continue further, someone on board the ship must hold three ruby feathers from one of the gulls. These can be feathers that were collected earlier or ones picked up from the sea where they may have fallen or feathers taken from a gull that has been coaxed down to the deck of the ship with food. In fact, Sesus Ossissa's ships have been through here often enough that the gulls will frequently fly down to passing ships and perch on the rigging out of habitual curiosity.

Once someone on board the ship possesses three feathers — detached from a single gull — then the ravine will come to an end, and the ship will sail out into a fog-covered sea. Upon looking down, it becomes clear that the ship is no longer sailing in the waters, but is navigating through the sky, borne through clouds and mist by the prevailing winds. High above, the Five Maidens are all visible in the sky. The steersman must set his course toward the Maiden of Journeys and hold the tiller steady. Failure in this will result in the ship wandering through the cloud-ridden sky for hours, until it comes upon some other outpost deep here in the changing seas or some hidden court of the fae or until it emerges upon a fog-shrouded sea, far from where it entered the Wyld.

However, if the course is true and the steersman does not waver, then within three hours, the ship will emerge from the mists to a bright sunlit sea, and see the Obsidian Hands reaching up toward the sky in a great dark sweep of stone, with Sesus Ossissa's pagoda shining at the peak.

Naturally, Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha only share the secret of passage with trusted followers. While it is possible for any intelligent person on board to get some idea of how to traverse the waypoints, purely through observation, new recruits and rescued captives are kept belowdecks for the first few trips to the Obsidian Hands. Eos herself likes to cloak the whole voyage in mystery, calling to the winds around her and raising her anima banner, while Sesus Ossissa takes care to pass through other strange parts of the Wyld and to add extraneous rituals in order to confuse the issue. At the moment, only their four captains know the full route for certain. Perhaps a dozen of the regular crews — all old, trusted hands — are reasonably sure of the steps that are required and could pilot a ship through if necessary.



Obsidian



Some of the pirates have brought their human par-
amours to their haven and keep them there in the lap of
luxury, lavishing jewels and silver upon them. These
pampered lovers are certainly happy, but they dwell in a
lotus-eating paradise, where everything is provided and
nothing need be sought. They dwell there like flowers
caught in amber, not needing to go on the missions and
raids in which their pirate lovers risk their lives. Many of
them drift into placid dreams and idle indulgences, rousing
themselves only when their lovers return to garland them
with flowers and receive their embraces. The nearby Fair
Folk have no interest in kidnaping them or luring them
away, as such folk are already lost in their own dreams.

SUPPORT NETWORK

The pirates have their haven and their captains and
their ships, and they form an excellent and highly lethal
strike force. However, they cannot exist in a vacuum.
Their interest in bankrupting and breaking the Guild
keeps them tied to the human population of the Western
Ocean and keeps them involved with ordinary fishermen,
sailors, farmers, slaves and soldiers. This is ultimately a
fortunate thing. Were the pirates to keep to their explora-
tions of the Wyld and their association with the fae, they
would soon lose track of what humanity and human
interactions mean. For the moment, Eos' obsession and
the desires of others among the pirates keep them safe from
the deepest temptations of the Wyld.

For the moment.

TRACKING THE MERCHANDISE

Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha may be daring pirate
adventurers, sailing into the Wyld and into the distant
courts of faerie, but this provides little practical intelli-
gence on when the Guild fleets sail and what routes they
intend to take and how well guarded they will be. The
Guild has the jade to afford sorcerers who can conceal its
plans with spells of confusion and hide its passage with
clouds and to bribe or compel the little gods and the spirits
of air and sea to keep silence.

However, what Eos and Ossissa have are loyal follow-
ers who are prepared to report to them on when ships sail,
on where they intend to go and on who crews them. Some
of these folk are pirates who were invalidated off their ships
due to injuries that could not be healed. Others are
members of the crew who could no longer endure the
nearness of the Wyld or who found addiction too much to
bear and had to retreat to more civilized human lands
before they succumbed to the endless temptations of
dreams. A few are only working as spies for a little while,
scouting for new crew members — or even new outcasts
— and serving as go-betweens and agents. Soon enough,
they will return to their beloved ships and to the sea-paths
of the uttermost West.

Withered Hanzi dwells in an elegant, well-moneyed
town in the Coral Archipelago but is a social recluse,
preferring to spend his time in his high house on the cliffs
to the north. The sea-mists wash over those cliffs in the
evenings, making navigation hazardous, and rise to wrap
the house in their shrouds. Local children tell each other
that he summons demons and converses with the ghosts of
the dead and that black galleys from the Skullstone Archi-
pelago visit him at the dark of the moon and bring him
trapped spirits to sing to him at night. Their parents view
him as an eccentric, but as a rich eccentric — and the rich
are forgiven many things. He comes down every day to the
port, to do his own shopping, as he insists on fresh fish for
every meal.

Hanzi was forced to leave the *Unveiling's* crew after he
was struck with venom from a sea serpent that warped his
body till he seemed 80 years old. Ossissa supplied him with
enough jade to buy a house and to maintain him in moder-
ately extravagant style. Hanzi listens to gossip and observes
ship movements during his daily shopping expeditions, and
he passes the information on when his old shipmates visit
him at the dark of the moon. He also has a spirit of the air
trapped inside a sapphire cage, which he can release if he
needs to send a truly urgent message to the pirates.

Hanzi is currently watching for new potential outcaste
recruits and would enjoy the chance to tweak the Realm's
nose by hiding any fugitives. He is not actually ill, but
physically, is as weak and frail as an 80-year-old man and
suffers from chronic arthritis.

The spirit of the air was bound by Gemella Windrose.
If the cage's door is opened, then the spirit is released, but
it must perform a task for whoever opened the door. If the
cage is shattered, then the spirit is free and owes obedience
to no one.

Kieran Red Whiskers is a large deckhand in a major
port somewhere between the Lintha Family's sargasso and
the Skullstone Archipelago. Always friendly and with a
merry quip for one and all, he cheerfully accepts heavy
work for low wages — in order, he explains, to keep his
poor little sister fed and clothed — and always has a few
spare coppers for the children who flock to the wharfs to
watch the cargo being unloaded. Nobody notices the
bloodthirsty gleam in his beady eyes as he smiles and bows
happily to the Guild captains and sailors.

Kieran is not a sane man, though he gives a good
impression of it to the casual onlooker. Ossissa was only
too glad to post him well away from the other pirates, so
that, when the inevitable breakdown occurs, the other
pirates won't be caught in it. Every night, Kieran goes
home to his lover, a Fair Folk enchantress who hides her
exotic features behind layers of veils and whom the neigh-
bors believe to be Kieran's poor frail sister. Every night, she
builds a seagull from blood and feathers and sends it to Eos
with the latest reports. And every night, she kisses Kieran



to sleep and drinks from his dreams. Some nights, the two of them wander the streets of the port together and find a Guild sailor, and Kieran breaks the man's bones while the faerie drinks his blood and paints the walls with it.

Massatha is one of the Tya, and she owns her own ship, which she sails on short trading voyages between the outskirts of the Skullstone Archipelago and the edges of the Coral Archipelago. She specializes in small luxury goods such as spices, pearls and silks, and she pays the Guild a heavy fee by way of insurance against "accidental pirate attacks." Most of her crew is Tya as well, but none of them are aware of her links to Sesus Ossissa and Eos Atitha. In fact, many of them would be furious to hear of it, and she might well be deposed as captain — not to mention thrown overboard for the sharks.

Massatha's grudge against the Guild is deep and permanent. She resents having to pay the equivalent of heavy taxes to them, resents having to take their wishes into account and resents most of all that she, a single trader, will never be able to hurt them. Given all of this resentment, she is more than happy to pass information on to pirates who can and will make the Guild suffer. Her news is passed in coded messages inside her trade goods, folded inside spice-barrels and painted on the inner linings of bales of silk, and while her messages are slow to reach the pirates, they are full and detailed. Also, three times now, she has observed a potential recruit who was working on

her ship and then anonymously passed that person information about how to contact Eos and Ossissa. Massatha is a middle-aged woman, weathered by a life at sea, with a tongue that can blister paint at 40 paces.

Of course, there are other silent agents who watch the seas and report to the pirates on Guild movements. Annisterre, a young man with many years to go till he attains the dignity and rank of death, takes substantial quantities of jade to watch certain comings and goings through the Skullstone Archipelago. Mefer, an itinerant Immaculate monk with abolitionist leanings, occasionally passes on information about Guild slave convoys in return for proper donations to local temples. Firebird Ikkalia, an arrogant female pit fighter who is a frequent visitor to the Lintha Family's domains, has a good eye for troop movements and trades it for exotic new weapons. Jadis Ice-Eye is an elderly charm-maker and potion-brewer who uses the rare drugs that Ossissa provides to create some of her more exotic potions and, in return, gives him information on the sorcerers and Exalts who pass through her part of the Coral Archipelago.

CHESTS OF JADE AND GOLD

The pirates must also be careful about what cargo they take as loot and where they dispose of it. If they return after a raid with holds full of black lotus, indigo, peppers, Conqueror root, merhorse skins, flamewood planks, auk

For the



down and cane spirits, they can't necessarily sell it at the first port they come to. This holds particularly if the Guild knows what's been stolen and is likely to express its grievance on anybody who ends up buying it or to try to trace the pirates through it.

Of course, this leads to the black market and to smugglers and to discreet vendors in back alleys and to little shops with strange proprietors who can find anything a buyer wants — at a price — or who can arrange to sell it to someone who'll buy it. For every law-abiding society in the West, from the Coral Archipelago to the Skullstone Archipelago — and even among the Lintha Family, which has its own rules — there are buyers and sellers willing to flout established law and agreed custom in order to make a profit.

A certain amount of effort is necessary to get the goods to the sellers. This may require stealing a cargo ship, disguising it, packaging the small but valuable items at the bottom of barrels of beer or bales of cotton and sailing into port under the Guild's noses in order to hand over the spoils and collect the price. Equally, it might involve rowing into small inlets in the dead of night in small, silent boats and handing over chests filled with jade and spices and fae goods, which are received by masked smugglers whose kinfolk keep watch for lawmen or Guild interlopers. Or perhaps it will require a rendezvous deep in the heart of the ocean, in a position specified only by stars and tides, for a private exchange between two or more ships. Such a mid-ocean rendezvous would be made with one eye on the horizon for a Guild fleet informed of their plans or for some deep sea behemoth lurking for prey.

Some items come from the Wyld itself and, as such, are perishable. Ossissa sells the occasional such item (roses made of rain, cats of smoke, opal-eyed birds trapped in golden cages) to wealthy individuals who have the facilities to keep them solid and real. Gemella Windrose has the Charms to keep such things solid and permanent, but Ossissa doesn't want her spending too much time on a trivial pursuit. However, there are people who will pay a fortune for trinkets that only the Wyld can provide — or who will give the equivalent value in information, treachery or assistance — which makes the deal worthwhile.

Candelati of the Second Winding is an elderly woman whose eyes are far too young for her face. She operates in the Lintha Family's stronghold and is tolerated by them because they prefer to have an identified free agent whom they can control and feed false information to, rather than a hidden potential enemy. She has a disturbing giggle and dresses in scanty silks that do not suit her age or demeanor, and she will offer her clients anything they want — for a reasonable price.

Candelati was sold to the Fair Folk as a slave at an early age and grew old working in their palaces, scrubbing their perfect floors and manicuring their perfect nails.

However, she interfered — by pure chance — in an assassination plot, accidentally saving the life of a high lord and was sensible enough to accept his thanks gracefully. He gifted her with 100 more years of life, her own group of minions and an introduction to one of the Lintha Family. Candelati left the Fair Folk island as fast as she politely could, but maintains business connections with them and sells Fair Folk goods — or anything else interesting — at a reasonable price. She is obsessed with her nails, having them manicured twice daily by eunuch slaves and wearing elegant jade nail guards.

Sweet Decay is an elegantly coiffured young man who haunts the edges of the Skullstone Archipelago and affects the dress and manners of a deathknight. While not of such rank himself, he dreams of elevation to the higher aristocracy and hopes to buy his way in through jade and favors. The true deathknights and powers of the land despise and discount him, considering him no more than an imitative groveller in their wake. He simultaneously resents their opinion of him and uses it as protective coloration.

Even in the Skullstone Archipelago, there is a market in luxuries for the living, and not everyone wants to die — or perhaps they'd rather hasten someone else's death. Sweet Decay can provide silks, drugs and rare luxuries from across the West and even sometimes from further afield — furs from the distant North or peppers and spices from the Far South. He mingles smoothly flattering words with cold disdainful mannerisms, leaving his buyers often uncertain as to whether he's going to supply their needs or strangle them on the spot. A number of orphaned children serve him as a spy network, hoping for a better future.

Madam Doubleknock runs one of the most famous pawnshops in Azure, the capital of the Coral Archipelago. She courts the poorer clientele, and sailors can pawn anything from their latest coral trinket to their second-hand trousers in her shops. Repeat business from the cheap end of the market keeps her in business, and the rumors of private dealings with everyone from the Guild to the Lintha Family are totally accurate. She manages to conceal her dealings with Ossissa and Eos due to all the other merchandise that moves through her warehouses and shops and camouflages their spoils with pawned goods and black-market items.

As far as Madam Doubleknock is concerned, she's in it for the money. She keeps all her clients strictly separate, she doesn't sell information (though she does sell goods), she doesn't run assassins, and she carefully avoids the sort of activity that might leave her in the prisons awaiting the next sacrifice to the volcanoes. To her, Eos and Ossissa are just another set of sellers (and occasional buyers). She's prepared to pass on a message if anyone wants to set up a meeting, but she will charge for the service. The Guild are aware that she serves as a channel for the pirates' stolen goods and is putting together a scheme to lure at least one

of Ossissa's ships — and captains — into its hands. Dominic Malfortayn (see p. 88) already has such a plan, but needs a few innocent outcasts to serve as bait.

SIGNING ARTICLES

A lot of people would like to join up with the pirates. Some want to serve them faithfully, while others want to betray them. Some want to explore the deep Wyld, some want to get rich, some want to hurt the Guild, and others nurture plans to take over the fleet and be acknowledged as the rulers of the Western Ocean. As with any elite organization, it's not as easy to join up as it looks.

MAKING CONTACT

Aspiring pirates have to find some way to make contact with Ossissa and Eos. Randomly sailing into the Deep Wyld is far more likely to result in a painful death or a permanent Wyld-change rather than an actual encounter with the pirate fleet, much less its secret haven. Of course, chance *can* take a hand, the workings of fate are inscrutable, and the Maidens and the Dragons shape destiny to their ends. It is possible that the battered raft that is all that remains of a character's noble ship will be noticed by the *Unveiling* in passing and that the character will be taken aboard and given a chance to prove himself.

Death-defying characters who wish to dare the far reaches of the Wyld should lay in provisions for a long

voyage, fortify themselves with any Charms they have that provide resistance to the Wyld's effects, gird on their weapons and set sail for the uttermost West. If the pilot's player can obtain 30 or more successes on an extended roll of Perception + Sail, then the character may indeed manage to pilot the ship to Ossissa's fabled haven, though this will take at least three days in the Middlemarches of the Wyld per roll. For every success above the 30 required, the number of days is reduced by one. The player of a Lunar, should his character be seeking Ossissa's haven, may attempt to roll Perception + Survival at a difficulty of 7, using his character's innate familiarity with the Wyld and its ways to track the pirates more easily, but it will take him the same length of time to travel to the Obsidian Hands.

Smart Exalts — of whatever variety — have various ways to try to find the pirates. Sorcerers may summon the spirits of air and earth and water — or even demons — and bid them to trace the pirates to their haven. Also, if a sorcerer knows that the pirates are currently in a particular area after a notorious raid or battle, she might command her spirit allies to search that tract of sea for their ships and to return with word of their location. Certain Charms of investigation and detection, such as the Evidence-Discerning Method or the Unknown Wisdom Epiphany, might also allow Exalts to examine a particular location where the pirates have been staying and to note clues that will give some idea of where they might lair or where they intend to go next.





Those Exalts who have a particular affinity for diplomacy or crime — or a knack for conversation and bribery — will doubtless realize that the pirates must have contacts among the population of the Western archipelagos. Such contacts are a logical way of sending a message to the pirates, and setting up a first meeting. A bit of spying, a few bribes and a certain amount of observation can allow characters to identify merchants or others who might be in touch with the pirates. Of course, the Guild is currently trying to trace Eos and Ossissa's agents too, so Exalts must be careful not to leave an obvious trail to their door. Particularly naïve Exalts might not realize that the Guild is using them as catspaws. This offers the possibility of a tragic outcome, if they expose the hapless agents or even lead the Guild all the way to the pirates' haven. Possibly Ossissa might intervene in time to help them escape and offer them a place with the pirates, as their intentions were worthy, even if their naïveté is troubling.

Particularly devious Exalts might even decide to use the Guild's information and resources. Burglary, blackmail and straight out bullying are all potential ways to persuade Guild representatives to pass on any knowledge they may have about where to find Eos and Ossissa or any suspicions about their haven. Exalts with strong family connections to the Guild may have an advantage here. Of course, a Great House with strong Guild connections won't want its members playing pirate and emptying its coffers — so such Exalts had better have a good excuse or be ready to break all ties and desert their house. The sheer amount of physical force that Exalts can apply to breakable things (buildings, expensive ornaments, human bodies) can usually convince even the most obdurate to talk.

If all the above fail, a long-term strategy of tracing the movements of the pirates, plotting out where their raids take place and trying to intercept them at likely points — or near likely targets — might yield results. This is a plan for scholars or strategists and would require a significant investment in time and research. It's also something that the Guild is likely to try at some point, which could result in awkward meetings between Guild ships and pirate-seeking Exalts. Once might be coincidence, twice might be happenstance, but three times?

JOINING UP

The pirates are suspicious, cynical raiders, and those of them who come from the Houses of the Realm are heir to centuries of bluff, double-bluff and betrayal. On the other hand, the crewmen who've spent the last few years running from the Guild also have a good, practical grounding in ambushes, plots and spies. The Guild has tried numerous attempts at infiltration, to the point that enthusiastic-looking would-be recruits are now automatically distrusted rather than trusted.

The most useful testimonial that characters can have to their credit is the approval of one of Ossissa's trusted

contacts. Ossissa and Eos are willing to trust the contacts whom they've put in place and will give at least some credence to their opinion of potential recruits — particularly if a contact then expedited a meeting. Arriving with the Guild in hot pursuit gives the fugitive some moral credibility but not absolute certainty. Such things could be set up and have been before. If Ossissa and Eos know that the characters are looking for them, they'll certainly check up on any publicly available knowledge about them, and the two pirates' black-market links might even give them access to a few disreputable secrets as well.

The two most useful emotional keys for characters to appeal to are Eos' hatred of the Guild and Ossissa's urge to explore new horizons. Having a reliable reputation for either pursuit is one good way to get a hearing with the captains and a sympathetic reception. A personal appeal to one of the *other* captains can have interesting results, as all four of them would be glad to have Exalted allies, and this might cause them to possibly be less thorough than Eos or Ossissa in their checks.

It might seem that the most *practical* way for characters to show their trustworthiness to a jade-hungry group of bloodthirsty pirates is through large physical tokens. Such tokens could include a useful First Age relic, perhaps, or a just-captured Guild ship or two. Other possibilities are a hold full of jade, a few notorious Guild officers in chains, maps to unexplored parts of the Wyld or similar items. Characters who go by the Guild's version of events or who assume that Ossissa and Eos are leading a group on the order of the Lintha Family may assume this, and they wouldn't be entirely wrong. These tokens will work as beginning offerings, but the character will then need a convincing reason for seeking alliance with Eos and Ossissa to back it up. Anyone trying to buy her way in without a good explanation for where she got the money or why she wants to join the pirates will be suspected to be a Guild plant or a fool — or both.

Appropriate skills will help to tip the balance. Being able to sail, steer or crew a ship is a point in any character's favor. Knowing how to use a weapon or spells or Charms is expected of any competent Exalt. Being able to captain a ship under battle conditions, however, will get Ossissa's full attention — he's had problems with Gemella Windrose's lack of technical competence, however good a sorceress she is. Social skills or training in theft and assassination will mark a character as a possible agent to go spying on land missions or to infiltrate a Guild ship before an attack. (It will, however, also mark him as a possible danger to the crew — what better cover for a Guild agent?) Truly unusual skills — such as an affinity with water spirits, the ability to assume animal shapes or strange powers of divination — will earn Ossissa's interest. However, such characters will need an excellent explanation as to why they want to join this group in particular, rather than being paid vast sums of jade by an appreciative Guild or Realm.

Ultimately, however, deeds are more convincing than words. New recruits will be separated and placed on different ships, and they will be expected to show their worth in battle, in seamanship or in simple survival. They will not be taken to the Obsidian Hands unless and until Ossissa and Eos are sure that they are trustworthy, but left on nearby islets or in small ports or villages. Alternatively, they may be sent to spy on the Guild or to discover the route and sailing times of a particular argosy, while the main part of the pirates' fleet recuperates at the Obsidian Hands. Spies may see this as the ideal time to report back to their masters in the Guild and seek further instructions. Loyal allies of the pirates will, accurately, see this as a chance to prove their loyalty in the absence of direct supervision.

It's hard to say exactly what will definitely prove a character's intentions and loyalties to Eos and Ossissa. The usual test of faith is to kill for the pirates, taking down one of their enemies in open battle or in a stealthy raid. Once a character has done this, he is said to have "made his bones" and is an accepted member of the crew. At this point, the character is required to swear on his blood, his bones and his seed that he will never betray the pirates or work against them in any way. Further, the character swears that, if he betrays this oath, may the blood be drawn from his veins, the bones torn from his body, and the seed rot within him. Ossissa is currently looking for a magical way to enforce this oath. While he can (and has) dealt with traitors in a purely physical way, sorcerous or First Age methods of automatically punishing treachery would be useful.



ANATHEMA AMONG THE PIRATES

So, do Solars or Lunars have a chance of acceptance in the group? While the pirates have, for the most part, forsworn the Realm together with the Guild, it's harder for them to free themselves from the prejudices of childhood and from the beliefs that the Immaculates taught them. Anathema are bad — this goes without saying. Even if the Anathema in question has fought beside them, and was a trusted friend, it'll be hard for the pirates to accept her once the sun-mark has blazed upon her brow and she has shown the power of her Charms. Reactions would range from the determinedly tolerant to the automatically revolted.

There is also the fact that Ossissa remembers the tales of First Age power and has no wish to see *his* pirates taken over and his leadership usurped. Having an immensely charismatic and powerful Solar arrive in the group would probably result in an eventual challenge for leadership. He is aware that the Anathema have been returning and has considered possible options — after all, he doesn't want to anger a powerful Solar who might hinder him. Ossissa might tolerate a very weak Solar or Lunar as a junior captain in the group, but he would want a more powerful one to be regarded as an ally rather than an actual member of the pirates. Of course, Ossissa has never yet met a Solar and has little understanding of the loyalty that used to bind Dragon-Blooded to Solar as follower to leader.

If a Solar or Lunar truly wishes to join the pirates as a regular pirate, rather than simply as a distant ally, then she will have to prove herself from the ground up and win the respect of the crew as well as the regard of the captains. Gemella Windrose has acceptance from the crews because she brings skills and sorcery that have been vitally useful in the past. Exalts who want to overcome prejudice can do so by sharing the menial tasks, working and fighting side by side with the ordinary sailors and proving that, despite their Exaltation, they are, at heart, normal men and women who share the pirates' twin aims of revenge and exploration. Such Exalts might become regular captains, on the rank below Eos and Ossissa, trusted members of the pirates whose opinions are sought and whose abilities are welcomed.

It's even possible that an immensely charismatic Solar or Lunar might simply waltz in, dazzle the pirates, claim adherence to their causes, subdue Eos and Ossissa in a fair fight and take command. Given Exalted charisma, this tack could even work. However, if the new leaders don't stay with the original causes, crew members will slowly begin to desert. Also, most of the treaties with the local Fair Folk were negotiated by Ossissa and Eos. Fae, being fae, will be delighted to take the opportunity to renege on treaties that are "no longer valid."

Newly arriving Solars or Lunars who don't even try to hide their nature or soften its impact will suffer penalties of two to four dice on all rolls involving Charisma or Manipulation. Those who clearly embrace the pirates' cause or who work to play down their reputation as Anathema will have penalties of one die to two dice on Charisma and Manipulation rolls. A Solar who is championing the cause of the Guild's destruction or the exploration of the Deep Wyld and who has saved the lives of numerous crew members will have no penalties at all and may even have Eos and Ossissa's respect. Use of Charms such as Mastery of Small Manners, Knowing the Soul's Price and Understanding the Court will also help an Exalt to grasp the social situation among the pirates and allow a Solar to fit in smoothly.



It may seem strange that the pirates place so much faith in an oath, when they know so much of treachery. But this, too, is a peril brought on them by the Wyld in which they live and the archetypal roles that they uphold. They have become the heroes of their personal story, and occasionally... a hero is betrayed. But that, too, is part of the story.

THE DISTANT COURTS

In the Wyld, bordering the fringes of civilization, are the Distant Courts where the fae dwell in glamour and beauty. Their islands of coral and ivory and jade are curtailed by the living water, and their food is so sweet that a single taste would ruin a mortal man's appetite for any earthly nourishment. Birds with the voices of humans — torn from the throats of child captives — sing at dawn and at dusk, and leopards with hides of glowing pearl lie down next to the ladies of the Courts and serve their whims.

These are the lands where Sesus Ossissa casts anchor, when he travels through the far oceans of the Wyld. Sometimes, the waters of the sea become as dark as wine or blood beneath the keel of his ship and leave the wood stained crimson. Sometimes, the oceans become fresh and sweet, like pure light, and lilies float in them under the unceasing sun. Sometimes, his fleet leaves the waters and takes to the clouds, sails still spread to catch the wind. Here, it travels the reaches of the sky, and strange peacock-feathered birds perch on the sails and rigging to watch the ship's passage.

This is the Wyld, the place where imagination can create reality and where glamour and nature merge to form impossibility. Flowers bloom here that melt into drops of water at a touch from human hands. The wine that the faerie courts drink comes from grapes that never see the sun, which grow beneath the waves and are harvested by dwarfish divers who may never taste them. Sharks here spread great feathered wings and fly above the surface of the sea, scenting blood on the wind.

The Wyld is addictive. Sesus Ossissa knows this. Every time he brings new followers here, he watches the sudden shock and glory in their eyes and sees them struggle against the temptation of their wildest desires. Some cannot bring themselves to leave and spend their lives in revelry among the glamour-clad fae until their souls are drained away. Others, those who have their own motivations of revenge or exploration or the like, manage to control their dreams and stay in command of themselves. In time, such sailors may become his captains and lead voyages of their own into these realms. They may forge new paths into the mist and fog to find islands where men with ebony skin and pale hair mould silver and platinum between their bare hands. They may discover amber-draped jungles where bees thrice the size of a human fist gather nectar from seven poisons and five flowers to create a honey that can restore sight to the blind or voice to the dumb.

Three particular Fair Folk domains lie near to the Obsidian Hands. Of them, one has a strong alliance with Eos and Ossissa, one has a well-defined, yet fragile treaty, and the third is an enemy who would be glad to betray the pirates' location to the Guild.

THE ISLANDS OF DESIRE UNKNOWN

These islands lie near the Obsidian Hands, and sometimes, at dawn, the pirates in the haven can hear distant flutes and harps playing through the mists that shroud that quarter of the ocean. Ossissa has forbidden any boats to visit these islands except with his direct permission. Two sailors disobeyed his orders once and have not been seen since.

The Queen of the Islands once styled herself Empress, in imitation of the Scarlet Empress, but grew bored with that after a mere century and now names herself the Ruby Queen. She lounges on couches of carved jet, clad only in her long red hair, attended by servants with dappled skin and ivory eyes. While she is not averse to amusing herself with mortal pets, hunting for humans displeases her aesthetic notions of elegant languor, and she prefers to have them brought to her. Eos has taken pleasure in giving her a number of Guild captains as slaves, and they wander the shores of the islands, dead-eyed and empty-souled.

In time of need, the leopards that prowl the island can cast themselves into the seas and take on the form of sharp-toothed dolphins, then crawl aboard an enemy's ship in the form of leopards again and slay or seduce all aboard. Twice now, Sesus Ossissa has gone hunting with such minions, and both times, he has returned victorious, with treasures and slaves as a gift for the Queen of the Islands.

The Queen is a comparatively minor power among the fae, but having her as an ally guards this flank of the Obsidian Hands. She doesn't particularly care whether she receives slaves and gifts from Ossissa and Eos or from the Guild, as long as she is shown sufficient respect and is kept amused by the proceedings. She has pacted to keep faith and truce with Ossissa and Eos until one of them betrays the other or till they attack her or till the day the whole Realm acknowledges the Scarlet Empress as sole ruler. For Ossissa to sleep with her would break the pact, and she constantly makes languid attempts to seduce him — though is not so far offended by his refusals.

THE FORTRESS OF THE PEARL

Four brother-kings live here in proud dominion, each commanding a host of water spirits. The Northern King has rulership over the area to the north of the Fortress, the Southern King to the south, and the Eastern and Western Kings in their respective directions. This includes all formal pacts, wars, peace and matrimonial alliances. Since the Fortress is not constant in its direction from the Obsidian Hands, Ossissa and Eos have had to negotiate separate treaties with each of the kings.



The Northern King commands the Hounds that Run Before the Rain and goes out hunting every dawn with a coral bow and barbed arrows, his Hounds running across the surface of the waves and snatching stray birds from the air. He is the oldest of the brothers and views Ossissa and Eos as a temporary phenomenon, but suffers their presence for three new songs every year at Calibration that he has never heard before. The Southern King owns three birds crafted from ivory that fly over land and sea to observe his enemies and then return to report all that they have seen. He is the second oldest brother and sends his birds to spy for Ossissa and Eos in return for scandalous stories about the Great Dragon-Blooded Houses of the Realm.

The Western King is the third oldest brother and rules his quarter with cold-blooded rigor, seeing spies under every wave and behind every reef. Eos negotiated a careful treaty of neutrality with him, as all that he wanted was to be left strictly alone to the society of his brothers and minions. The Eastern King is fond of new wives and drains the souls of the old ones or pins them like butterflies in his private chambers or encases them in crystal and hangs them on the walls of his great hall. However, he is also a master of dreams and glammers and has been willing in the past to lay such glammers on the pirates' ships, in return for human garments of wool and cotton in which to clothe his latest paramours. The Eastern King wouldn't mind having a Dragon-Blooded spouse, but Ossissa doesn't want to sacrifice any of his followers.

THE SERPENTINE DUCHY

The Scaled Duke, ruler of this court, is of the opinion that there is nothing that cannot be improved by the addition of poisonous serpents, crocodiles and iguanas. He wreathes the fae women of his court with coral snakes and vipers and binds black and green mambas around their waists, so that, by embracing them, one risks an agonizing death by poison. Coral reefs



surround his island in a maze of razor edges, and his palace is grown from living coral and surrounded by a moat of hissing snakes. Many of his court have slit eyes and forked tongues, though, as they are Fair Folk, this merely adds to their allure. If visitors manage to reach the island, then the Scaled Duke will allow them to enter the main hall, but he will not declare himself immediately or sit on his throne, preferring to watch the newcomers from among the crowd. A wise observer can identify him by his sapphire eyes, his blue tongue and the fact that his shadow ends in a serpent's tail.

The Scaled Duke isn't interested in any sort of alliance with Ossissa and Eos, whom he views as interlopers. He would be delighted to sell their location to the Guild, if only he could bear to tolerate the society of such dull, unattractive humans. Aesthetics are his primary concern, and if visitors offend him by their ugliness or discourtesy, then he will have them thrown into a pit of serpents or driven into the Wyld in the hopes that their appearance will change for the better. Some of his servants — a young female, Lady Sythruul, in particular — hope to win his favor by negotiating a treaty with the Guild to betray the pirates' haven. They will perform the negotiations, so that the Scaled Duke need not expose himself to the unaesthetic humans and then present him with the rewards — slaves, wealth, service, whatever the Guild may be willing to give. (And if the Guild is truly generous, well, perhaps it is time for the island to have a new ruler?)

ENEMIES

Ossissa and Eos must contend against the forces of Realm and Guild and Lintha Family and Coral Archipelago in their quest to despoil the Guild and explore the Wyld. However, there are certain notable figures who have sworn a particular vengeance to their activities or who devote all their time and energies to hunting them down. Such people are often looking for independent agents to help them pursue the pirates or to infiltrate them or to trap them. Some of these enemies are patient and skillful enough to let Dragon-Blooded who owe them a debt of some sort join the pirates in perfect innocence and then to extract that debt in service — and in betrayal.

Haletha is an elderly Immaculate whose skin is marked by age and by the weathering of the sea but whose eyes are as dark and hard as iron and whose posture is still that of a Wood-aspected Exalt who has mastered every art of her chosen Dragon. She is never seen without her bow, and there are stories of how she transfixed ghosts and Fair Folk with her arrows, pinning them to the prow of the ship that she sailed in and sending the ghosts to the mercy of the Dragons and the Fair Folk to the depths of the Demon Realm. It is generally known that she hunts Ossissa and Eos and their followers, but few know precisely why.

Personally speaking, Haletha has absolutely no interest in the Guild's welfare, though she acknowledges that it provides a useful service to the Realm. What she struggles

against is the taint of the Wyld. She sees it afflicting Dragon-Blooded who might otherwise have provided useful service to the Realm and who could have lived in honest veneration of the Five Dragons, and she bitterly regrets the waste. She can see the Wyld advancing around the edges of the Realm, bleeding into reality and ruining the world where it enters, with the Fair Folk following closely behind.

Sesus Ossissa is, to her, not merely a traitor to the Realm, but a betrayer of all Creation, and he must be stopped. Eos Atitha is a fool, a young, reckless fool, but could be taught better, given time and effort. (In fact, Haletha feels a certain sympathy for the isolated outcaste Eos, who never had any chance to learn proper behavior. Should Haletha ever have the opportunity to capture Eos, she has a nice isolated Immaculate monastery far in the North that owes her several favors, which would be glad to take a wayward Dragon-Blooded under supervision for a proper education in manners and morality.)

Haletha has been given particular dispensation to do whatever is necessary to stop the pirates and can call upon further Immaculate assistance, or temple funds, where necessary. However, she is balked by the fact that the pirates move freely through the Wyld, making it very difficult to predict where and how they will strike. She has taken to acting as an unpaid guard on Guild convoys that may be attacked, hoping to catch the pirates by surprise. Her brisk demeanor and firm manner make sensible people keep their distance or listen when she speaks to them.

Haletha's greatest fear — something she will not acknowledge, even to herself — is the possibility that she herself may become tainted by the Wyld and succumb to the longing for dreams-come-true that drives so many of the pirates. She does not realize that she has already fallen to her own dream of being the constant heroic pursuer, the bringer of righteousness, the enforcer of proper behavior. The longer she continues to pursue them, the less likely she is ever to catch the pirates.

Dominie Malfortayn of the Guild has a much more practical attitude. He wants the pirates dead, he wants their treasure chests in his coffers, he wants their heads on pikes above his gate, and he wants their Fair Folk allies buying his slaves. His over-educated youth shows through when he devises epithets to give full vent to his opinions on the subject. While not of an Exalted Great House, he attended one of the lesser boarding schools on the Blessed Isle in hopes of a post in the Thousand Scales. Having failed the examinations dismally, and being disowned by his family in consequence, he took to service with the Guild and rose from the lowest ranks to high position, due to his efficiency, his practicality and his extreme caution when dealing with the Fair Folk. Dominie has taken care to avoid the temptations that have doomed so many other Guild agents who went out to sell slaves to the Fair Folk and ended up in chains themselves, enslaved by foolish contracts and careless oaths.

Dominie isn't the only Guild agent to have suffered from the pirates' attacks, but he is the most ambitious. He can see that promotion in the Guild's ranks will come to anyone who can stop the pirates—and, equally, that, while he suffers their depredations, he's unlikely to get any further promotion. The solution is plain.

He's hired assassins to kill Ossissa and Eos and had the assassins' heads sent back to him in a box. He's set up carefully faked convoys that were actually full of Guild mercenaries in order to trap the pirates, but so far, the pirates have not been fooled. He's attempted to insinuate his own spies into their crews, and the spies have vanished to the Dragons alone know what fate. (They've either been entranced by Ossissa's dreams become reality or handed over to the Fair Folk as slaves.) He's tried to investigate the past history of Eos and Ossissa and their captains, in an attempt to use it against them, and bitterly regretted that the Guild attacked Eos' island rather than some *other* island. He has grovellingly requested the help of Exalted warriors or sorcerers from those Great Houses that owe the Guild favors. (Some such warriors and sorcerers are currently on Guild ships, hoping for a pirate attack so that they can show their mettle.) He's even attempted to get help from the Lintha Family and was delighted to find that it had its own grudge against the pirates, in the person of Medros Slitneck—but, so far, it hasn't been successful either.

Dominie is a tall, pale-haired man with dark green eyes and a mouth like a bloody slit. Any employees who betray him or fail to give their utmost can look forward to a new career as a slave in chains. His reputation is formidable, but by now, it's known that he's plotting against Ossissa and Eos, causing sensible freelance assassins to be very careful about accepting contracts from him. Dominie's caution extends to his bed. He keeps a private harem and doesn't seek company outside it. The great pains he has taken to remain untainted by the Wyld have not gone unnoticed. Sooner or later, somebody will challenge him on the point and demand to know why his ships haven't hunted Eos and Ossissa past known boundaries and into the frontiers of dream. It's only a matter of time, and time is running out as his superiors grow more impatient.

THE PIRATE LEADERS

Eos and Ossissa epitomize the two urges that drive the pirates: revenge on the Guild and exploration of the Wyld. For the moment, mutual affection, enlightened self-interest and fascination with each other's enthusiasms bind them together. In a few decades' time, as Eos becomes more proficient as a commander and a privateer and as Ossissa finds his addiction to the Wyld growing stronger and stronger, this partnership may finally break. It will probably do so on good terms and without active hostility, but it may end with Ossissa traveling into the depths of the Wyld, not to be seen again for many years—



WYLD



or, possibly, to return strangely changed — and with Eos taking full command of the pirate fleet.

SESUS OSSISSA, PIRATE LEADER

Description: Ossissa was a good Sesus child. He never caused his elders the least bit of worry. His enthusiasm for exploring the boundaries of sensation, of ability and of nature were quite in keeping for a child of the house. He joined the Thousand Scales and acquired a reputation as a timeserver — but one who could get into the best parties. When Sesus Chenow led his sworn brotherhood out into the further satrapies to claim obedience and jade for the Realm, Ossissa followed obediently but was tempted by an entirely different prospect. To him, the Wyld was the ultimate frontier to be tested, a new experience to which nothing else could compare. He broke from the others of the brotherhood, forgetting his oaths with barely a qualm, and joyfully sailed into the Deep Wyld.

That was 10 years ago. Since then, Ossissa's obsession with new frontiers and new discovery has deepened, but his fascination with Eos' enthusiasm keeps him tethered to reality and real people. His constant exposure to the Wyld has, to some degree, eroded his sense of self, and as he becomes more the perfect pirate leader and explorer, so, in turn, he becomes less the Sesus Ossissa whom his old friends would have recognized. Mere physical gratification no longer suffices. Nothing quite compares to the moments when he sails into the Wyld and discovers something totally new, something that nobody but he himself has ever seen before. His eyes scan the horizon, and his thoughts are always on the future and on new lands further on. Some of the more romantic among his crew find this attractive. Others occasionally wonder whether he'd be prepared to sacrifice them for some ultimate discovery — and fear that he would.

Ossissa is a tall man, with oak-brown eyes, graying dark hair and hands callused from long hours of labor. He still carries himself with the elegance characteristic of House Sesus and remembers the proper etiquette that he was taught as a child. The crew of his ship are all most properly mannered and treat new arrivals or guests with a surprising degree of courtesy. This isn't just affectation. Ossissa handles most treaty-making with the fae, and he likes to be sure that his crew isn't binding itself into accidental debts or giving insult that he will be called on to repay. Ossissa is an intelligent planner, with drive and enthusiasm that were never fully tapped while in the Thousand Scales or with his sworn brotherhood, and has learned the tactics of sailing — and piracy — very swiftly and very thoroughly.

Ossissa wants to increase the size of his fleet, the better to explore the Deep Wyld and will treat potential Dragon-Blooded recruits well, stressing the high adventure, the exotic Wyld and the great rewards. He dislikes waste and uses his men to best effect in battle against the Guild. However, this is matched by his obsession with the Deep Wyld, where he would gladly sacrifice crew and ship alike to



penetrate where no man has traveled before. He is still generally faithful to the Dragons and the Immaculate beliefs, even if he never bothers to attend a temple or actually respect their social teachings. His ship, the *Unveiling*, has silksteel sails and flies a plain copper-colored cloth pennant, unless it is actually traveling under false colors. His favorite weapon is a jade powerbow, but he also carries paired jade wavecleaver daiklaves. He owns a cord of winds (see *Savage Seas*, p. 125) but will only use it in an emergency.

Aspect: Wood

Nature: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 3

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Old Realm, Seatongue) 2, Lore 2 (Fair Folk +1, Wyld +2), Medicine 2, Melee 4 (Swords +2), Performance 2, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Ride 1, Sail 5, Socialize 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Connections (Pirates) 4, Henchmen 2, Resources 4, Retainers 5

Charms: Aura of Invulnerability, Benevolent Master's Blessing, Blazing Courageous Swordsmen Inspiration, Enemy-Fouling Method, False Color Flying Demonstration, Fine Passage Negotiating Style, Harvest of the Hunter, Hurricane-Predicting Glance, Loquacious Courtier Technique, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Phantom Fire-Warrior Horde, Pirate-Masquerading Method, Pleasant Convocation of the Like-Minded, Spring Follows Winter, Storm-Outrunning Technique, Sturdy Bulkhead Concentration, Swallows Defend the Nest, Terrible Glow of

Nautical Valor, Threshold Warding Stance, Warlord's Convocation, Wind-Summoning Whistle

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 2B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 4B Defense 5

Paired Jade Wavecleaver Daiklaves (Mercy and Compassion): Speed 13 Accuracy 12 Damage 7L Defense 9

Jade Short Powerbow (Finality): Speed 7 Accuracy 10 Damage 8L* (Rate 3, Range 300)

*Ossissa usually uses frog-crotch arrows, which double the target's lethal soak from armor.

Dodge Pool: 7 **Soak:** 1L/3B

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 6

Personal Essence: 14 **Peripheral Essence:** 38 (24)

Committed Essence: 14

Other Notes: None

EOS ATITHA, PIRATE LEADER

Description: However far she may travel and how-ever powerful she may become, Eos Atitha will always, at root, be the young girl who came home to find her family gone and her home empty and laid waste. She will never forget that moment of shocking loss and uncertainty, as her entire world came apart in a single breath. She will never forget that the Guild took everything away from her and that it was sheer luck and desperation that allowed her to take it back. Her hatred for the Guild is too personal to be a holy vendetta or an idealistic cause. She wants it *dead*, and she wants it *dead now*.

To Eos, the fleet and the captains are her new family, and Sesus Ossissa is as much supportive elder brother and guiding father as he is her occasional lover. While she fights much more bitterly than Ossissa does and would take more extreme risks in a battle than he does, she's also far more protective of her men. It's a personal injury to her when one of her crew is killed, and the sailors sense this.

Equally, she has absolutely no empathy with the Guild or with anyone who is prepared to work for it and leaves such matters as spies, contacts and bribery to Ossissa, who is willing to approach them in a properly detached spirit. As far as she's concerned, Guild captains are most appropriately dealt with in the heat of battle. If they survive that, then they can be given to the fae as slaves, dropped overboard to satisfy the sharks or otherwise disposed of. Nobody has yet managed to convince her that this simplicity of outlook may be a danger, and Ossissa has barely even tried. He enjoys her tangible thirst for vengeance and her obsession with destroying the Guild.

Eos is a tall woman, with vivid brown eyes and golden skin, and she wears her dark crimson hair pulled back in a tight braid. Her minimal black leather and steel outfit makes her easily distinguishable among her crew, and Guild sailors have been known to dive into the ocean on seeing her coming,



rather than wait to face her in battle. She has a pronounced Coral Archipelago accent and is heretical in her beliefs, having no true faith in the Dragons or in the Immaculate teachings. Her ship (the *Revenge*) flies a blue pennant with three white gulls on it, and she wields a wavecleaver daiklave (see *Savage Seas*, p. 126) in battle. She owns a pair of wave-stepping boots (see p. 92) and wears them frequently.

Aspect: Air

Nature: Rebel

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 3

Abilities: Archery 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Craft (Carving) 1, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Medicine 3, Melee 4 (Daiklave +1), Occult 2, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Sail 4, Socialize 1, Stealth 2, Survival 4, Thrown 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Connections (Pirates) 2, Henchmen 1, Resources 4, Retainers 4

Charms: Dragon-Graced Weapon, Fine Passage Negotiating Style, Harmonious Wind-Luring Song, Hurricane-Predicting Glance, Infection-Banishing Prana, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Pleasant Convocation of the Like-Minded, Spirit-Detecting Mirror Technique, Storm-Outrunning Technique, Sturdy Bulkhead Concentration, Wind-Summoning Whistle

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5

Jade Wavecleaver Daiklave (Mulberry): Speed 14 Accuracy 11 Damage 8L Defense 10

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 1L/3B

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 12 **Peripheral Essence:** 33 (28)

Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: None

EOS
ATITHA



NEW ITEMS

FRESHWATER PEARLS (ARTIFACT •)

These pearls are the size of a child's fist, nacreous white as the first star on a winter's evening. If a pearl is placed in a barrel (or lesser quantity) of seawater or fouled water, it will instantly render the water as clear and fresh as that of a mountain spring. If thrown into a larger quantity of water, then it has no effect. Legends of certain Solar Exalted attempting to purify an inland sea in order to give the local inhabitants water have resulted in several diving expeditions to hunt for such pearls — and even a few successes. A Pearl works up to five times a day. If placed in a barrel of wine or other alcohol, then the pearl turns the liquid to ordinary healthy grape juice or whatever the appropriate source liquid might be. A pearl has no effect on actual poison, unfortunately.

COMPASS OF IMMANENT STRIFE (ARTIFACT ••)

This compass is forged of orichalcum and starmetal, and once installed in a ship's helm, infallibly points toward the largest current battle within 50 miles. Should there not be any ongoing battles within that distance, then the starmetal needle hangs loosely in the compass, swaying idly with the waves. The size of a battle is gauged by the power of the participants and then by their number. A fight between a handful of Solars and Abyssals will trump a sea battle involving a dozen ships, though the needle will show notable hesitation in making up its mind. Should the steersman sail toward the battle, following the compass' direction, then he will benefit from a favoring wind until he reaches the battle, giving the ship an extra dot of speed.

WAVE-STEPPING BOOTS (ARTIFACT ••)

Footwear of this sort has been seen in various different forms — elegant sandals, silk slippers, polished half-boots, thigh-high leather with high heels — but always sizes itself to fit its latest wearer perfectly. While wearing them, the Exalt may walk upon seawater as though it was solid ground. This protection extends to the whole of his body. He literally cannot sink into the water or be pulled into it, though he can certainly fire missiles into the water or plunge a daiklave into it. Wave-stepping boots can occasionally be dangerous. Since the Exalt's body will not sink into water, falling from a height onto the surface of the ocean risks damage as though the Exalt had fallen onto solid earth from a similar height. The Lintha have a somewhat similar, non-magical item (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 55).

THE HELM OF HEART'S DESIRE

(ARTIFACT •••••)

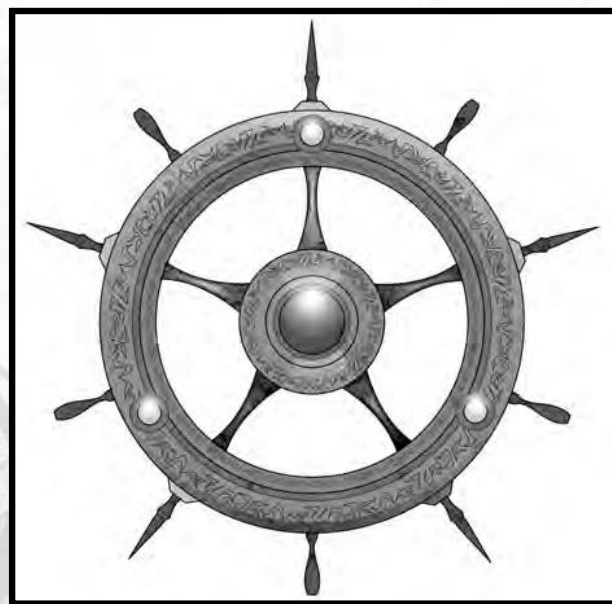
Where can a ship go? Anywhere the helmsman can steer it. With this precious First Age artifact, a captain can steer his ship to any known harborage — or, better

still, to the land of his dreams. The edge of Creation holds all possibilities, including dreams of the past and hopes for the future. Does the steersman seek a land where the friends of his youth still live in harmony and where the cliffs of his childhood rise to welcome him as he emerges from the Wyld mists to see a familiar shore? It can be found. Would he rather find a land that fits his future dreams, where lions will follow him obediently and birds of paradise will nest in his eaves and where he can live in never-ending contests of arms or constantly test himself by hunting antelopes or rarer prey?

The Helm of Heart's Desire, as it is referred to in certain First Age scrolls, answers the spoken and unspoken desires of a steersman's heart. It can guide a sailor to his deepest fantasy or lead him to the nightmare that he has never dared examine.

The Helm is constructed of all five types of jade, with the wheel itself being orichalcum and the three compasses set beside the wheel made of moonsilver. Of the three compasses, it is said that the first points toward the Elemental Pole of Earth at the heart of the Realm, that the second points toward the helmsman's desire and that the third points to his worst nightmare. To use it properly, the owner must have the Helm set properly into his ship and must attune the Helm to himself by committing 10 motes of temporary Essence to it. If he does not attune the Helm or if someone other than the attuned steersman lays a hand on the Helm, then the wheel will remain fixed and unmoving, and the ship itself will shudder and tear itself in two and sink, should it be out of sight of land.

Once attuned, the Helm may be used as a normal helm with no restrictions or cost. To use it to seek out a desired image requires 5 motes of temporary Essence a day to operate. If the helmsman concentrates on what he desires to find, be it an island suited to his whims or a sea battle in progress or even a place where he will find a clue leading to



the man who slew his brother, then the Wyld will open before him, and he will sail those waters for a dozen hours before reemerging into more normal seas. The accuracy of his navigation depends on a roll of Perception + Sail against a difficulty of 6. Five successes will take him to precisely the place or event that he wishes to find, three successes will put him within a mile of such a place, a single success will leave him within 10 miles of the location, and a failure leaves the ship on the open sea, within a mile of where it entered the Wyld. The precision of the helmsman's imagination also affects his steering. The roll is made without penalty for a carefully thought out dream island, at a penalty of two dice for some vaguely desired event such as a sea battle and at a penalty of four dice for something as unformed as "the man who slew my brother" or "the seas above Leviathan's dwelling." A botch means that the ship has come upon the helmsman's worst nightmare, such as an island where his family is being slaughtered by deathknights or an area of absolute darkness where slimy things crawl from the sea onto the ship and drag down all those they find or worse.

The Helm cannot magically transport the ship to a real location that has been deliberately focused upon. Such places must be reached under normal sail or with the aid of Charms or spells. The Helm deals with desires and fantasies, not real things.

NEW SAIL CHARMS

These are all Terrestrial rather than Solar Charms. Of course, an Eclipse Caste could learn them just as she could any other Charms.

WIND-SUMMONING WHISTLE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Storm-Outrunning Technique

By pursing her lips and whistling as she invokes this Charm, an Exalt can call the winds into the sails of her ship and escape from a dangerous situation—or hurl herself into battle. The wider the sails and the mightier the ship, the more winds are called, as the spirits of the air hasten to obey the Exalt, until the ship is moving at full speed in the desired direction. The winds are intensely localized and will affect other ships within a couple hundred meters of the Exalt's ship. However, they cannot be commanded to alter their direction once summoned. The ship may run before the wind or tack into it, but it cannot turn back on itself. The winds will cause the ship to move at its full rate of speed, depending on the type of ship, and will last for up to a scene.

TERRIBLE GLOW OF NAUTICAL VALOR

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Fine Passage Negotiating Style

When this Charm is activated, all those who see the ship on which the Exalt stands perceive it as an awesome naval battleship, haloed with strange lights and manned by deadly warriors—even if it's a rickety old piece of wood held together by worn-out nails and crewed by the sweepings of the local port. While common sense cuts in a moment later and the ship is clearly visible as what it actually is, the players of all those who were looking at the ship when the Charm took effect must succeed in a reflexive Willpower roll for the characters to attack it. This Charm is normally used in order to gain the advantage of surprise. A wise captain can have half the enemy crew slaughtered before it manages to pull itself together and fight back.

PLEASANT CONVOCAION OF THE LIKE-MINDED

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Fine Passage Negotiating Style

By spending 5 motes of Essence and invoking this Charm, an Exalt can whisper his name into the waves around his vessel, and it will be carried to all sea spirits, pelagials or other sentient inhabitants of the ocean within five miles of his ship. All those who have no particular and personal reason to hate that Exalt will be instinctively reminded of the power and authority of the Exalted and will travel to the vessel to pay their respects and to find out why the Exalt has declared his presence. Particularly powerful creatures or minor gods may send a representative rather than attend themselves. This Charm can be used while at port, but fewer creatures of the sea are likely to answer the summons. Any beings who will arrive do so within half an hour at the most. Their behavior and the length of time they remain depends upon the attitude or requests of the Exalt.

ENEMY-FOULING METHOD

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Pleasant Convocation of the Like-Minded

By invoking this Charm, the Exalt summons a great swarm of lampreys and similar clinging creatures, which adhere to the hull of the target ship, slowing it and possibly even causing it to founder if the weather conditions are





exceptionally bad. The target ship, which must be within a mile of the Exalt, has its speed reduced by 10 percent for every mote of the Exalt's permanent Essence and will remain at this reduced speed until its hull is cleaned or for a week, whichever is sooner. This may require a formal dry-docking, if the crew has no facilities to do so at sea. This Charm fails to work on any ships whose hulls are crafted from the Five Magical Materials or other imperishable First Age materials, though the Essence is still lost, as such ships are of too noble a substance to be so fouled.

FALSE COLOR FLYING DEMONSTRATION

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Pirate-Masquerading Method

This Charm invokes the powers of the Exalted to disguise the ship, clothing it in the appearance of an ally — or even an enemy. When a ship with this Exalt on board flies the colors of a particular person or group and comes into contact with other ships, the Exalt's ship temporarily appears to be the ship of the captain who flies those colors or a typical ship of that group. This is a visual illusion and even goes so far as to alter the perceived lines of the ship if necessary, so that a warship may appear to be a slaver's dhow or even a common fishing vessel. The Charm fails

the moment that any outsider sets foot on the ship or if any damage (such as that of a flaming arrow or a barrel of pitch) is done to it. It has no mechanical effects in terms of sailing speed, defense or anything else.

NEW SPELLS

The following spells are all Terrestrial Circle and are not taught as widely in the Heptagram as other, more generally useful spells. Not every Exalt sorcerer is going to want to serve the Realm at sea, let alone ever go to sea. However, like many other little-known spells there, they are safely recorded and can be discovered through careful research. Sorcerers of House V'neef who are assigned to missions with the merchant navy will negotiate to learn these spells and other ones related to sea travel, in order to protect their investment in the fleet. However, the house's relatively short affiliation with the merchant navy means that they have few such Exalts. Sorcerers of House Peleps are *expected* to know such spells, as their function is to be useful. They may not be truly accepted into the family, but they are expected to do their utmost to protect the family interests, and that means being expert in sea-related sorcery.

CALLING THE GULLS WITH BEAKS OF STEEL

Cost: 25 motes

With this spell, a sorcerer can summon a horde of sorcerous birds driven by an unquenchable hunger. These birds look like mortal gulls, save for their steel beaks and



claws, their glowing topaz eyes and their twice-normal size. They descend on their target, and devour all the non-living organic material that they can find. They will eat a man's clothes from his body while leaving the flesh beneath untouched and peck the silk ribbons out of a woman's hair. More to the point, they will happily chew up the wood and rope and sails of a ship that is their target.

This spell endures for as many turns as the casting sorcerer has points of permanent Essence, during which time the gulls attack the hull of the target ship. The flock's gnawing and clawing reduces the ship's hull soaks (both bashing and lethal) by a cumulative point per turn, until either the flock is driven away or the spell ends. The damage to the hull remains until it is mended. Thus, 1 point on the first turn, 2 points on the second turn and so on.

The birds can be attacked comparatively easily, as they make no attempt to defend themselves from the humans or to attack in return, only going so far as to dodge if attacks are being rained on them. The flock remains bunched together. It has, as a whole, health levels, Dexterity and Dodge equal to those of the sorcerer who summoned it, a bashing soak equal to that sorcerer's Perception and a lethal soak equal to the sorcerer's Intelligence, and it dodges reflexively with its full dodge pool if attacked. The birds draw their strength from their summoner's spirit, and a weak sorcerer produces a poor flock of gulls. They may be made to attack any boat within their summoner's field of vision.

INVOCATION OF THE LIVING SHIP

Cost: 20 motes

When using this spell, the Exalt calls to the figurehead of the ship on which he stands with such command and authority that the ship's very spirit wakes and takes control of the vessel through the figurehead. The ship will obey the Exalt's verbal commands for the duration of the scene, to the best of its ability — it can't suddenly accomplish the impossible, leap into the sky or turn into orichalcum. However, the sails and ropes can set and tack of their own accord, and the wheel and rudder can both manage themselves as the Exalt commands. Oars are unaffected by this sorcery. If the Exalt moves more than 100 yards from the ship, then it will attempt to follow him, whatever orders he may have given, and will pursue him to the limits of its ability until the spell lapses. This spell won't function on a ship that doesn't have a figurehead. It endures until the next dawn or dusk, whichever comes first, at which point, the figurehead closes its eyes, and the ship becomes normal once again. There have been recorded cases where sustained use of this spell caused the ship's spirit to awaken permanently.

KEEL CLEAVES THE CLOUDS

Cost: 25 motes

This spell permits a ship to literally sail upon the clouds, ascending from the ocean below to the mists above. It is Terrestrial Circle, but not in general use, as the Dragon-Blooded tend to prefer more efficient ways to move fleets rather than single ships. The spell requires that, at some point, the mists or clouds touch the sea itself. The caster of the spell must be present on the ship while casting it, though she need not be the steersman or captain. After the words have been recited and the gestures made, the ship will move up through the mists, as though rising from wave to wave, until it reaches the heights of the sky and sails atop the clouds there, as though they were merely the foam of heavenly waves.

The ship can be steered as it would normally, even to the extent of tacking against the wind, but is as vulnerable to a lack of wind as it would be on the seas below. The spell endures for 12 hours. At the end of this time, it may be recast. If it is not renewed, then the ship descends gently to the ocean below, landing upon the waves as softly as a feather. The ship is not protected in any way from dragons or from other spirits or gods of the high air. If it is traveling above islands or bodies of earth at the point that the spell runs out, the ship will land softly but may be stranded miles from water.

LIGHTNING WHIP SMITES THE WATERS

Cost: 15 motes

Upon incanting this rediscovered First Age spell, a long whip of braided copper wire with a dark oak handle appears in the caster's hand. It will continue to exist until used or until the next dawn. In either case, the whip dissolves into nothingness, leaving a thin pile of copper powder behind. To use it, the caster cracks the whip in the direction of the target, which must be within half a mile or less. The sorcerer's player makes a Perception + Thrown roll to determine the accuracy of the blow, against a difficulty of 3. The whip transforms into a bolt of lightning, which skips across the surface of the water until it strikes the target. Human-size targets may attempt to dodge as they would a normal missile, but ships have more difficulty. The whip can be parried. If the target fails to dodge, then it is struck by the lightning.

The bolt of lightning does 5L structural damage per success scored by the caster to any ship that it strikes and three health levels of aggravated damage (burns and shock) to any living beings within five yards of the point of impact. This spell, unfortunately, only works on a body of open water. If a caster attempts to use it while on land, the lightning grounds itself while leaping toward the target and is lost.



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

Exalts joining the pirates will be of two sorts: Dynasts or outcaste from birth. Dynastic Exalts will want to consider *why* they have left behind Realm, Great House and loyalty while defining their character. If they have suffered through the hothouse of Realm education, they have also lived through years of indoctrination as to their duty and proper behavior. Why have they chosen to betray the Realm?

Exalts who were born outcaste will also need a good reason for exploring piracy and abandoning civilization, though they will be less trammelled by upbringing and loyalty. While a player may not wish to trace his character's family line back to one of the Great Houses, it will probably be of considerable assistance to his Storyteller if he suggests possible areas where Exalted blood entered the family tree. Of course, if he wishes to render the character a foundling with no known heritage, that too may please the Storyteller.

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose concept, aspect, Nature.

If the character originally comes from one of the Great Houses of the Realm, choose her house as well. Consider why she has left that house and if she remains loyal to it or if all links to the character's past have been broken. Perhaps the Great House is now a particular target for revenge?

Note the anima powers provided by the character's aspect.

• STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (7/6/4)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Note Aspect Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (3; may not be the same as Aspect Abilities). While it is not obligatory to have

Sail as a Favored Ability, given that the characters are seafaring pirates, it can be useful.

Choose Abilities (35 — at least 13 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities; at least one must be in each Favored Ability; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points. Dynastic characters must have a *minimum* of Archery •, Brawl or Martial Arts •, Melee •, Performance •, Presence •, Ride •, Lore •• and Socialize ••. Characters who are not raised as part of the Dynasty receive only 25 points of Abilities. Of these 25, 10 must be spent on Aspect or Favored Abilities.).

All pirate characters must have *at least* Sail •, whether Dynast or born outcaste.

• STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

Choose Backgrounds (12 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points), Charms (7 taken from Dragon-Blooded Charms OR 5 taken from Immaculate Order Charms — at least 4 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities if the character is not learning Immaculate martial arts. If the character is an Immaculate martial artist, all the Charms must be part of the same elemental tree.), Virtues (5 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points).

MONKS AND PIRATES

There are several possible reasons as to why an Immaculate — or an ex-Immaculate or a partly trained ex-Immaculate — might have joined the pirates. These could range from having run away from the Immaculate Order and rebelled against the Realm to being an Immaculate somehow bound by an oath that constrains him to aid the pirates against the Guild to being a deep-cover Immaculate agent trying to hide his true abilities. In any case, the player should consider how to reconcile an Immaculate background with his character's current employment.

• STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Record Essence (2), Willpower (add the total of two highest Virtues — may not start at higher than 8 unless at least two Virtues are 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool (Essence + Willpower, plus any gained from Breeding), Peripheral Essence pool [(Essence x 4) + Willpower + (the sum of your two highest Virtues), plus any gained from Breeding] and health levels (7, plus any gained from Charms).

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

• BONUS POINTS

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

ELEMENTAL ASPECTS

• Air:

Aspect Abilities: Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

Anima Powers: May triple her leaping distance, and takes no damage from falls.

• Earth:

Aspect Abilities: Awareness, Craft, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.

Anima Powers: May soak lethal damage with her entire Stamina.

• Fire:

Aspect Abilities: Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.

Anima Powers: May burst into flame for a scene, doing lethal damage and becoming immune to fire damage.

• Water:

Aspect Abilities: Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.

Anima Powers: A Terrestrial Exalted aspected to Water can gain free movement in water. For the rest of the day, she can breathe underwater and operate as freely as if she was in air.

• Wood:

Aspect Abilities: Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.

Anima Powers: May add dice to Dodge or Athletics actions.

VIRTUES

- **Compassion** — Empathy and forgiveness.
- **Conviction** — Emotional endurance.
- **Temperance** — Self-control and clear-headedness.
- **Valor** — Courage and bravery.

BACKGROUNDS

- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Artifact** — Weapons and tools crafted from the Five Magical Materials, including wonders of the First Age.

- **Backing** — Standing and rank in an organization of power and influence.
- **Breeding** — Your lineage, reflecting how strongly your blood resonates to your chosen element.
- **Command** — You have pirate minions.
- **Connections** — Information sources and friends in useful places that give you pull in the world around you.
- **Familiar** — An animal companion.
- **Henchmen** — Agents who do your bidding.
- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence that you have access to.
- **Mentor** — A patron and instructor.
- **Reputation** — How society views you and your actions.
- **Resources** — Material goods and money.
- **Retainers** — Mortals who serve you.
- **Family** — *Notable family members. Optional, see page 279 of Chapter Seven: Storytelling in Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded. Players of Dynast characters should consider which members of their Great House they are still in contact with and why such people are still ready to assist them. This is unlikely to be a useful Background for adventures in the Deep Wyld. It may, however, be of help to characters busy spying on the Guild or intriguing in major Western cities.*

BONUS POINTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Background	1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Virtue	3
Willpower	2
Essence	10
Charm	7 (5 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Immaculate Charm	10 (7 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)





CHAPTER THREE

THE FOREST WITCHES



Woods exist at the edge of Linowan lands where neither the Linowan nor the Haltans go. The woods' trees — twisted, tall and deeply green — are of a kind unnamed in savants' lore. It touches both deciduous and coniferous forest at its border, but does not partake of their character. The weather changes subtly as it crosses the woods' edge, as does the color of the earth.

Once, something lived in this woods. Because it lived, no one else came there. Even today, the people of the East are reluctant to enter it. They do not remember why.

It lived in the days before the First Age dawned. Whatever it may have been, even the gods have forgotten it now.

Even the stars and the Sidereal prophets are blind to what scraps of it remain.

THE LEGACY

In the bright days at the beginning of the world, when all seemed well with Creation, the brash lovers Kehiro and Cassandra agreed that they would part ways before age and sorrow found them. "It is best," each told the other, "for I will wither and I will fade, and lines of suffering shall etch themselves upon my brow, and my heart may even grow untrue — but you shall remember a love forever young, forever joyous and forever pure."

The next night, in the fashion of those who makes such declarations, Kehiro went into the cold and terrible woods

where the Forest Witches now dwell. At its heart, he found a pool of liquid, viscous, dark and clear, with white pebbles visible far below. Clinging to the knowledge that their decision had been best for Cassandra, but in agony at his loss, he cast himself into the pool to drown.

Cassandra was a more sensible creature, resistant to grand gestures. The seasons changed three times, and she grew intimately acquainted with her sorrow before she in her turn went into the woods and found the pool and walked into its depths.

THE GARDEN

Pherenike, called the Harp of Morning, served the Unconquered Sun as an Eclipse Caste Solar. Her aide Oreithyia walked carelessly in Pherenike's garden while her mistress was away. When she realized the damage she had done to its impeccable arrangement, she fled into the woods.

Had Pherenike's mood been pleasant, Oreithyia would have faced a reprimand for her act and punishment for her flight. Instead, when Pherenike caught her wayward servant, there was blood in her eyes. "I do not believe that you have mastered the fine principles of gardening," she said, and demonstrated, arranging Oreithyia's flesh in an aesthetically pleasing fashion across an acre of forest.

The bones she placed to evoke the peculiar yellow-white of certain trees' bark. The meat she hung in tattered strands to mimic and enhance the dried dead texture of the



creeper vines. The leaves she stained with blood adopted a curious diffusive pattern, black on black. Only after setting Oreithya's eyes amidst the flowers and her skull amidst the stones did she let her servant die.

This garden was known, in the coming days, as Pherenike's masterwork. It held out against the rot for nearly seven years, and several painters and poets captured the image in their respective forms.

THE SHAPE

The Lady Domnica went into the woods one night and slept. In her dreams, she saw a shape made of mists and memories. She thrashed in her sleep, beset by a sense of completion and a sense of fear, and impaled her hand upon a thorn. When she woke, she saw no blood. In the hole the thorn had made, clean through her palm, she could see only a faint and shimmering gray.

All through the day, Domnica drew and revised a complex pattern. She turned to her manservant and said, "Before I wake, etch this into my skin with the point of your knife." Then, she went into the woods and slept. In her dreams, she saw a shape made of mists and memories. When she began to thrash, her servant pinned her down, and with the tip of his knife, he sliced into her skin. Yet, when she woke, she saw no blood. In the tracks his blade had cut, clean down to the bone, she could see only a faint and shimmering gray.

The morning came, and the day peaked, and the night fell, and Domnica turned to her servant again. "Before I wake, cut out the bones from beneath my skin." Then, she went into the woods and slept. In her dreams, she saw a shape made of mists and memories. When she woke, she saw no blood and no servant, yet her limbs were curiously light.

Thus, it went, though now she forsook other creatures' aid. During each day, she formed her plan. Over each night, it was carried out. One morning, nothing woke save a faint and shimmering gray.

THE OUTCASTES

Sixty years into the reign of the Scarlet Empress, a princess of the Fair Folk came to the Blessed Isle to break the Realm. She found an ambitious and competent Exalt and showed him a vision of himself perfected. For this reason, Cevis Ghandarva declared himself the Immaculate Dragon Mela born once again into the world. To his followers, he promised final enlightenment, a power beyond that of the Dragon-Blooded. A handful of young Exalts found him convincing, while others found him seductive. His home became a temple and a seraglio.

His actions displeased the hands behind the Realm. The first small steps taken against him failed. A handful of infiltrators, touched by an unexpected glamour, became his lovers. A small military force proved entirely unable to find his house. Subtler action, however, proved successful. Quiet whispers prompted heretic preachers to acknowl-

edge him. They named him Mela come again, invested in flesh as her own Antithesis: the Petitioner of Clouds Accordant to the Call of Battle incarnate as the Sickly Whore. They waited for him to gather his peers and bring the end of the world. As they did so, Ghandarva's appeal with the Dragon-Blooded waned. When he found himself the butt of others' jokes at such few occasions that still welcomed him, Ghandarva left the Isle in fury.

Sixteen Exalts traveled with him, setting up camp in an untraveled woods. They would later call themselves the heirs to the Realm and the heralds of a new Creation. Their victims and their enemies would call them the Forest Witches.

PEACE OF SONG FORGOTTEN

The first lieutenant of Cevis Ghandarva was a shaven monk named Peace of Song Forgotten, who practiced the Water Dragon Style and trafficked with demons. Studying in the woods to perfect himself, he came upon a clear, dark pond. Calling to its spirit, he said, "Come forth and test yourself against me, for I have need of an opponent worthy of my Form."

The waters roiled and disgorged a creature that, at first, he thought a dragon, dark and bilious; and then, a centipede-spirit, segmented and hundred-limbed; and then, a vapor that might fill the entire clearing in which he stood. In its darkness, it surrounded him, and dreams fell upon him. He shook them from his mind and said, "You shall do."

Thrice he tested himself against the spirit of the pond. On the first pass, the monk found himself thrown into the forest floor at such speed as to bury him several yards beneath the turf, but he struggled to his feet and bowed to his foe. On the second pass, as the head of the creature swept toward him, he seized it about the neck and began to choke the life from it. Then, another head, screaming and wailing, struck him from the side, and for a long moment, he was senseless. On the third pass, he applied the true way of water. His was the deepness of the farthest sea, so that the force of the creature might pour itself into him forever and be gone. The creature poured into his heart and his lungs and his flesh, and as the pond and the sea, they each sought to drown the other. Then, without transition, the monk found himself seated on a hill near a great walled city. Five hundred feet below him spread a sea greater than the West. A young man, brooding in countenance, sat beside him. A young woman walked beside the shore.

"Have I lost, then, and fallen into fever dreams?" he asked.

"This is not your dream," said Kehiro, "but mine. In the past few moments, my mind has wandered strangely. I am, no doubt, drowning."

The monk considered this. "It seems unlikely," he said, "for, as you can see, I am a Prince of the Earth, and you are not, and my dreams must take priority."

"Ah," sighed Kehiro. "Perhaps this is so. Then I must wonder why you should dream such a tragic figure as

myself? For you do not look a callous man, and my life is certainly the architecture of the cruel.”

Looking upon Kehiro's features, Peace of Song Forgotten instantly understood the events to which he alluded. Having done so, he frowned. “You are dead,” he said, “and ought not linger here.”

“Ah, is this so?” said Kehiro. “That would explain it. Yet... I have nowhere to go.”

Rising, the monk said, “See you the woman below? I would assume her name Cassandra, and this a place where you may have eternity.”

Kehiro looked down. “It is so,” he said. “And strange, for it seems I have been here for some time and never once looked upon her or heard the song she is even now singing to the wind.”

“Life is often perplexing,” said the monk, as he attached metal claws to his fingers and raked them through Kehiro's heart. As he walked down the hill toward Cassandra, he added, “Still, I expect to find better uses for this place than to preserve two mortals' endless dream.”

Cassandra's voice went silent. In a distant clearing, a thing like a dragon — but more like a centipede or a fog — choked and gagged and coughed free a monk. It slinked back into its pool.

To Cevis Ghandarva, the monk said, “I have found a thing of use to us.”

“And what is that?” said Ghandarva.

“None of us need ever die.”

The Witches forever honor the discovery of Peace of Song Forgotten: a pool deep within their woods with a strange and singular property. It can hold within its waters the minds of those who give themselves to it. For nearly five centuries, the greatest Forest Witches traveled to the pool when their life came near its end and fed it their power and their selves. It held them safe, in a world of its own making.

This custom was later to have its consequences.

VALENTIN AND OREITHYIA

The second lieutenant of Cevis Ghandarva was a white-haired catamite named Bidalaksa Valentin, whose mind the Fair Folk had chilled and whose body they had perfected, both for Ghandarva's sake. When he found Ghandarva's attentions distracting, Valentin would walk into the woods, and even his lord could not hold him back. On a rock, he sat and combed out his hair. The strands that fell from his brush gleamed silver even in the absence of the sun. He would, from time to time, return to where he had combed out his hair before, and each time, the fallen strands were gone. This he attributed to the wind or, perhaps, to Ghandarva's lust.

One morning as he attended to this task, he looked up and saw a face of bone: the skull of Oreithyia, regarding him with what seemed to be eerie attention. Paying it no mind, he resumed his grooming. When he finished, he



Forest Witches



returned to the outcastes' camp. The next morning, however, he returned. Again, the strands of his fallen hair were gone. Again, the face regarded him. The vines that hung about the clearing seemed to him to have a certain resemblance to flesh. He still felt no concern and only the mildest of curiosity, and when he had completed his task, he returned to the outcastes' camp.

Thus, it went, and thus, it continued, until when he sat on his rock, the air was thick with the carrion scent of Oreithyia, and the skull's gaze bright with her carrion interest. Finally, Valentin sighed. "Do not trouble me so," he said. With a horrid skittering and the sound of washing blood, Oreithyia's presence left that place.

Six days passed of quiet, and then, three days of wind, and he bent down to pluck a flower for his brow. There, amidst the rustling of petals and stems, he caught sight of a gleaming eye. "Do not trouble me so," he said again, this time chiding. He walked away, and the flowers fell silent, save for a slow dripping as if from the rain.

Six days passed of quiet, and three of wind. Then, as he sat upon his rock, the exits from that place grew thick with vines, or ropes of meat, and others reached down for him from the sky. "Do not trouble me so," he said, and the vines froze, quivering, in their place, but the presence that waited around him did not leave.

Valentin set down his brush. "I will say to you what I said to Cevis Ghandarva, almost three years past."

The clearing was silent.

"I will never love you," said Valentin, "for I do not understand what love means. If you wish to serve me and give me the things I desire, I am willing to tolerate your presence."

The eye sockets of the skull narrowed. There may have been a threat in them, but Valentin met their empty gaze evenly. His eyes shone like mirrors, and in those mirrors, the forest saw everything that made it weak. Such was the gift given to Valentin in payment for what the Fair Folk had done. The vines withdrew into the trees with the hissing of a hundred ropes, and Oreithyia was gone.

Valentin returned to the camp. Over the night, a great house grew around his tent, shaped still living from the forests' wood and sod. In the morning, the breezes that blew through the camp were gentle and warm, and the grass around it soft. For all Valentin's life, Oreithyia tended to him and to the outcastes, and if Valentin sometimes sensed eyes upon him as he dressed or woke with strands of green still clinging to his skin, he made no objection save a small, thin frown.

ANJA'S SACRIFICE

Among those who had followed Ghandarva to the forest was an Exalt named Kumari Samathi Anja, who used the name Anja in casual correspondence. She suffered numerous deformities in both flesh and sanity, and her parents had nearly slain her at birth. She had found

only a marginal welcome upon the Isle, but Cevis Ghandarva had broader tastes.

After departing the Isle, Anja developed a habit of traveling deep into the woods. There, she would whittle at her flesh with a small bone knife and meditate upon the virtues of nonexistence.

Despite her melancholia and her many personal flaws, Anja remained an Exalt. She feared neither spirit nor beast. Thus, when a voice questioned her one day, asking, "What carve you there?" she felt little concern but only cast her gaze around her for its source.

"What carve you there?" it repeated, and this time, she knew its origin: a soft gray mist that blanketed the forest floor.

"Nothing of any consequence," she replied.

"Perhaps," suggested the mist, "you seek to carve yourself into a better form. We begin as nothing save an unformed infant mind. It is by shaping ourselves that we become people and by just such efforts that we transcend that state."

"That is as it may be," said Samathi Anja.

"What carve you there?" repeated the mist. "For I would know what it is that you seek to become."

Anja carefully set down her knife and stared down at the mist. "You are unusually talkative for vapor," she said, "and also an annoyance. I wish not to better myself, but to cease, until not even the memory of me remains."

No sooner had she said these words than the mist was gone. Thoughtfully, Anja returned to the outcastes' camp.

Six times she went out again into the woods, and these trips were uneventful. The seventh, however, conjoined two circumstances that proved unfortunate for her. Firstly, Ghandarva had grown curious as to her activities. Thus, when she went out to practice her nihilistic meditations that day, he followed. Secondly, as she carved, the mist returned.

"It seems to me," the mist said, "that you cannot truly wish nonexistence, or as a woman of your character, you would plunge that knife into your heart."

Anja reflected upon this. "Perhaps this is true," she agreed. "But my intentions are my own."

"Please," it said, the wind carrying its words to Ghandarva. "Tell me of your thoughts. It can do no harm."

"I grant this," Anja said and hesitated. "So I will put it in this fashion. As I loathe myself, I gain pleasure from carving at myself and making elaborate plans for my own extinction. To actually die would deprive me of this pleasure and all others. As I am a sybarite, I am unwilling to take this step."

"Ah," said the mist sadly.

"Ah?"

"Well," said the mist, "had you wished to remake yourself, as I hoped, than I would have presented you an offer. I could have given you gifts beyond your imagining, for nothing save your acceptance of my aid."

"It is well known," Anja said dryly, "that one can trust such offers entirely, when made by nameless mists in the center of an ancient woods. I weep that this priceless opportunity has come to naught." Then, she stood and walked away, not seeing Ghandarva as she passed.

Three days passed, and three nights. Anja came to consciousness with a searing headache, hands and feet bound behind her, deep within the woods. A mist slithered around her, and a small bone knife sat in her hand. She struggled into a kneeling position, knife sawing at her bonds, and said, "This does not bode well."

"A man named Ghandarva has presented me with an opinion," said the mist, "that your desire is, in truth, nothing more or less than to become a negative image of yourself. That you sculpt yourself to cut away your Essence until only its inverse remains. This accords with various evidences, including your own description."

"I do not wish to have this conversation," said Anja. The ropes binding her hands snapped.

"I have been without form for a very long time," said the mist. "And if I am to have form, I must have a soul, and that soul must be a thing of its own shaping."

"I do not wish to have this conversation," said Anja again. The ropes binding her feet snapped, and she pulled herself upright.

"Naturally," it said, "you must consent. However, is that consent not implicit in your pattern of activities?"

Anja looked around. In all directions, there was mist.

"I will not submit to this," she said.

A shape formed from the mist, and in its features, she saw herself. "It is already transpiring," said its voice. "It need only complete."

Those who might think her next action foolish must remember that Anja was not entirely well. She could see on her image a massive bloody welt along the left side of her head and understood from it more of how she had come into the woods. Thus, she was dazed, insane and dizzy from betrayal. When she lunged forward and drove her knife into the image's heart, these things drove her decisions—not reason.

Still, those who would consider her the victim in this affair should remember that Samathi Anja herself cut her true Essence away, and with the knife she had for years applied to that use. In this fashion, she became the first of the Forest Witches to remake themselves as numina of the mist.

When she next entered the Dragon-Blooded camp, Samathi Anja gave this message. "Let those who wish themselves remade come to me. For such sacrifice of self as it may require, they shall transcend."

THE FOREST WITCHES

As the seasons turned, the outcastes in the forest developed a habit of visiting the pool and speaking to the dead Exalts' minds suspended there. They would walk into its spirit and find in that spirit another world—a small paradise the dead had constructed for themselves. At

times, one would say, "I am disinclined to return to the world where I live, for this is a better place."

Always, the dead would reply: "Ah! If only it could be so! But the spirit of this place has limited power. It surely cannot hold us all."

One day, Amoril Rurik said, "Already it holds more power than any simple pool ought. Surely, we can expand its reach?"

And Evelina, who was dead and for that reason possessed of certain oracular insights, answered, "Then, find things of jade and orichalcum, too—and moonsilver and starmetal, if you can—and cast them into the depths of the pool. Find you Hearthstones. Find you artifacts. Even bring the hearts of Exalts whose lives you do not value. For there is a thing within these waters that may feed on such power and grow."

"What manner of thing?" asked Rurik, who was not so foolish as some. Still, when Evelina looked at him in silence with eyes white as bone, he looked away and thought to himself that it could not matter all that greatly, so long as the pool behaved itself and served the Dragon-Blooded well.

Thus, the Dragon-Blooded of the forest began to hunt through the communities around them, looking for things with which to feed the pool. With each thing of power they cast into its waters, the little paradise inside grew larger and more real. It captured the senses of those who came there to an ever-greater degree, and certain of Ghandarva's folk began to live as often in that world as in Creation. They named it the Sea of Mind, or, sometimes, the Forest Sea.

THE RAGE OF OREITHYIA

Amoril Rurik was one of those who found himself frequenting the pool. In the world it formed, he had all qualities of valor and strength. He grew accustomed to this condition and came to perceive himself in a state of perfection. When he walked in Creation, he had an arrogant stride. Many problems that had troubled him before, he now solved trivially. He had found an inner power and confidence that made it so. Those problems that still bested him, he named irrelevant. No such troubles would follow him into the Sea of Mind! One day, he clashed with Bidalaksa Valentin and looked into his mirrored eyes and saw nothing there that could make him weak. With the long curved blades he favored, he killed Ghandarva's lover and stalked away. Valentin's blood soaked into the grass.

That night, the forest went mad.

There was nowhere in the woods that Ghandarva's outcastes could sleep, for when they slept, the trees and beasts came for them in insane hunger. There was no shelter they could build that did not collapse, no food that did not turn to dust in their hands, no water that did not turn to mud. The paths that led out of their home curved back on themselves, and everywhere, they heard the screaming of dead Oreithyia on the wind.





They could quite easily have died, for it is unquestionable to those who know the Forest Witches that the thing that wears Oreithya's visage has a power that no ghost or forest spirit ought. Ghandarva himself was almost slain when it came to him as the great stooped tree named the Walker's Foot — but he saved them all with the words, "Valentin was given me, and I shall give you others."

Oreithya took Ghandarva's tongue and one eye but nothing more. By this measure, she and he sealed the bargain between them. With force or with honeyed words, the Witches bring the beautiful to their woods and release them in its depths. Their victims' lives are luxurious in every respect, and when they encounter the Witches, the Witches do them homage. In time, however, Oreithya comes to regret that they are not her Valentin and tears them limb from limb. The Witches must then placate her with another gift.

For this price, Oreithya performs again the function that she did when Valentin lived. There are few places more palatial than the homes of the Forest Witches, all of living wood. Those who have come to attack the outcasts find the forest itself set against them.

THINGS THAT LIVE WITHIN THE WOODS

Ghandarva's band understood that the fundamental economies of their position had changed. The lifestyle of each member depended upon the total wealth of the community, rather than the manner of its division. So long as the forest remained pacified and the pool well fed, they had an overabundance of material resources and pleasures.

The Forest Witches opened their ranks to outcasts from every stratum of society. A certain egalitarianism came to their culture, with no one member exceeding any other, so long as all could provide sufficient assistance on the Witches' raids.

The night each new member arrived, Samathi Anja came to him in his tent and told him her story — as she still does today. Over the centuries, three others accepted her offer, remaking themselves as numina of the mist: Iurka, the Autumnal Torrent; Menderes, the Face Behind the Sky; and Seven-Face Rësja.

These creatures do not often communicate with the Exalted community that gave them birth. The Forest Witches sometimes see or hear them moving in the distance. Sometimes, they deign to assist the Exalts on a raid. The Witches know certain sorceries for calling to them. Otherwise, their presence is rarely felt.

THE MANDALA GUARD

The woods of the Forest Witches contains five Demesnes, all of them low level. These places — three aspected to Wood, one to Water and one to Solar magic — are not compatible with the entities of the forest. Oreithya and the numina of the mist cannot enter them. The Sea of Mind cannot reach into them. Samathi Anja describes them as "open wounds in the forest".

Regardless, the Witches considered these Demesnes important resources. Many wished to claim them, but no Dragon-Blooded dared openly proclaim himself more worthy to do so than his peers, as the notion conflicted with their society's sensibilities. Instead, small Exalt factions took to "tending" each of the Demesnes, ensuring that all went well within their borders. This included "overseeing" their use, a process that occasionally bred ill will. As the Witches constructed Manses on these sites, disputes arose over who could claim the Hearthstones. In RY 144, in a brief internal conflict that wounded six Witches and slew 20 mortals, one faction destroyed an established Manse.

Tensions rose slowly over the next 68 years, until it seemed likely that violence would erupt again. Amoril Rurik regained favor within the Witches by forcing through a compromise: the creation of the Mandala Guard, responsible for tending all of the forest's Demesnes, apportioning out the Hearthstones and ensuring their availability to all.

THE REALM'S HEIRS

Ghandarva's skin grew cold, and his hair turned gray. The Witches expected him to die and move peacefully into the Sea of Mind. Ghandarva chose otherwise.

From the mist, he claimed the payment it had promised him for Samathi Anja's soul. Donning a cloak carved from its substance, he circumvented the normal mechanisms for birth and death, transferring his mind and the spark of his life into an embryo in the womb of Ledaal's daughter. Reborn as Ledaal Demyen and drawing on powers and an understanding of the world entirely unexpected in a child, he attempted to steal most of the house's fortune. "Demyen" and Ledaal's Sidereal advisors badly underestimated one another. He failed to bankrupt the house but still returned to the Witches a wealthy and hale youth.

Ghandarva asserted his identity and attempted to resume command of the Forest Witches. After watching his 14-year-old body best seven able warriors, the Witches conceded his claim.

Cevis Ghandarva remained bitter at the circumstances of his departure from the Realm. Growing up as Demyen had only added to the score. Neither his teachers nor his parents had accepted his own sense of adulthood and excellence. Armed with a vigor lost to him since Valentin's death, Ghandarva laid forth two proposals, known later as the Blood Sutra and the Spear Sutra.

The Blood Sutra presents a philosophy of aspiration. Those who aspire such, he argued, have earned the right to build an empire that will succeed the Realm — perhaps, even, through direct combat against it. In the Spear Sutra, he explains how the Forest Witches can build that empire.

Ghandarva remained charismatic, and many of the Forest Witches came to accept his theories.



Forest Witches

THE BLOOD SUTRA

The Ultimate Exaltation is the perfection of the self. The Immaculate Dragon Mela found this perfection. All living beings quest for it.

Those of the Realm seek this Exaltation at the hands of their teachers and their masters. In so doing, they doom themselves, making themselves over into generations of mock of the mistakes of their ancestors. They have calcified. They have lost their way. They have lost their mandate.

The Unmanly Babblers asks: "What does the world expect of me?" In his eyes, his Essence flows inward from the world.

He Who Illuminates Both Worlds With Majesty and Power asks: "What is there in me to become?" He knows that Essence flows outward from the self.

When the Realm falls, you will know its heirs by this sign: They willingly sacrifice what they are to become something greater.

Choose this sacrifice. Become one of the heirs of the Realm.

THE SPEAR SUTRA

One does not claim a place by conquest. This gives one only rule in name, and rule in name is not true rule. Those who rule in name suffer a plague of courtiers, bureaucrats and manipulators that rend their power apart.

To claim a place, we need only this: It must lack the fortitude to oppose us.

Those who control that place must recognize our power or our worth. They must fear us or belong to us. Those who would stand against us must lose their hold on power. Then, we may rule without name, and our will hold sway.

Those both able and willing to stand against us oppose this rightful destiny and must be purged.

They are the Anathema of our Age.



THE COMPANY OF THRONES

The first of Ghandarva's tools in implementing the Spear Sutra was to appoint 25 Exalts as the Company of Thrones. Each took on the burden of a new life. They were born again to highly ranked members of Linowan, Haltan or Hundred Kingdoms society. Methodically, they gathered information and influence.

Upon Exaltation, seven of them struck blatantly, killing the Witches' most effective enemies and sending caravans of ungarded wealth past the Witches' woods. In three cases, they left no one in their immediate region who could practically oppose the Witches' will.

The remaining 18 kept their new lives, although most found excuses to spend most of their time away from "home" and live among the Forest Witches once again. They used the Witches' wealth to build upon their power, buying the hearts of the elite. The greater authorities in their communities, if they seemed intent on holding on to power, strength and independence — these became their antagonists. Whether beneficent or selfish, such figures seemed evil to those who accepted Ghandarva's philosophy.

THE HERALDS

Two hundred years ago, the Sea of Mind declared itself complete. It opened the gates of paradise to those who wished to enter. "In life and in death," declared dead Vitali Proseria, "you may join us. We only ask that you divert some portion of your attention, now and again, to the flow of power on which this Sea depends."

One by one, the Witches who had experienced the Sea came to the banks of the pool and gave their minds to it. When they rose again and walked away, the taste on their lips was still paradise, as was the scent of the world and the touch of air and clothing upon their skin. Though they walked in Creation, still they saw the Sea of Mind, and they understood perfection.

THE COMPANY OF MESSENGERS

In the Blessing of Awakening, Proseria declared the Sea open to all — not simply to the Forest Witches. Any Dragon-Blooded who wishes can come to the Sea and claim paradise, eternal, both in this life and after. Even mortals may know this, to some extent. If granted access to the Sea in their life or upon their death, they may live there in an Exalt's retinue, though they exist only in those moments that an Exalt actively remembers them.

Naturally, Proseria could not offer this as a gift. The Sea would run short of the Essence it needs to maintain its power. It would collapse. The dead preserved therein would vanish.

All among the living who wish to dwell within the Sea must, therefore, feed it wealth on a regular basis. In the modern day, where the Sea holds too many dead for its native spirit to sustain, they must support the dead as well.

THE BLESSING OF AWAKENING

You who know not every taste of pleasure,
You who know not satiety;
You who know the grief of glories lost;
You who dwell in cold gray sorrow,
Fallen on you like the mist;
You who are small, and weak, and cannot make
yourself the greater:
I hold out my hand.

May all the world know what has happened here.
May all the world come to taste its fruits.

May the shadows lift from the hearts of the world,
Even as the beasts of the field,
Their slumber disturbed,
Shake themselves; and from that sleep know
waking.

I have opened the door.
Come and taste of perfection.

Finally, many among the living and the dead wish to make the Sea self-sustaining. Given a sufficient store of Essence, they hope to catalyze it into producing its own. Building this supply requires additional wealth. The Forest Witches have a purely pragmatic reason for carrying Proseria's offer to others. The more Witches there are, the easier it becomes to divide up the Sea's overhead.

Further, the taste of paradise is intoxicating. Compassionate Dragon-Blooded may reject the Sea — but if they find it appealing, they have every reason to share it with the world. To hold others back from perfection is cruel. Further, it is contrary to the essential tenets of the Immaculate philosophy, which influences even those who have cast it off.

Thus, many of the Witches became proselytes. The elders of the dead selected those of greatest devotion to the cause and named them the Company of Messengers. They usually hold to Ghandarva's belief that the Witches represent the heirs to the Realm — have they not found in the Sea the path to greatness? However, finding new warriors and preachers to spread the word of the Sea occupies more of their attention than Ghandarva's dreams of empire.

THE TABLE OF FIENDS

A few of the outcasts declared the Messengers loathsome, stating an unwillingness to share the Sea with those who do not merit it — who come to the Forest Witches drawn not by destiny, but by the story of paradise. They named themselves the Table of the Resplendent. The other Witches quickly rechristened them the Table of Fiends.

Before setting themselves against the cause of the elders of the Sea, the Fiends spoke at length to the dead. As a result, when the dead replied to their declaration, they did not do so with a severance of their connection to the Sea and a request for their execution. Instead, to limit the effects of any hostilities, it assessed the Tax of Fading Embers: A Witch who killed another Witch would pay the tithes of both. Having done so, it declared the matter closed — the Fiends could make trouble as they liked.

THE TABLE'S DECLARATION

The world does not hunger for excellence.

Those who have come here have searched in honesty for perfection. We have hunted down pleasure and earned our elevation to greatness. These things we claimed because of who we are.

Hold forth this gift to all, and you destroy its meaning. Those unwilling to hunt still eat the butcher's leavings. Those unable to appreciate perfection will still glut themselves on it, growing fat on our paradise, learning nothing, contributing nothing save empty jade.

With our lives, we shall stand between them and our sacred realm.

THE EMBASSY OF THE DRAGON

Eutychia, Demon of the Third Circle, is also named the Bull Slain on Stagnation's Altar. Eighty years ago, by means unknown, Eutychia arrived in the hilltop city in the Sea of Mind. She named herself the emissary of the Ebon Dragon. In a 20-hour conference with the elders of the dead, she established the Black Scale Embassy on the Street of Strangers and bought it a seat upon that council. She then departed, leaving the token of her authority in the hands of the Second Circle Demons that visit and depart the Embassy with an unsettling ease. (It is the assumption and the hope of the Witches that they cannot venture directly from there into Creation.)

Eutychia's staff focuses most of its attention on the Company of Messengers. The Embassy contends that the Yozis have not yet established their place in the Sea, for good or for ill. At some point, if the Messengers' efforts succeed, the Sea of Mind must gain some fraction of the reality and interest value of Creation, and the Yozis will act. Strong and amiable relationships between the Yozis and the agents of the Sea can only make this easier on all involved.

Even put in these terms — undoubtedly both deceptive and artificially pleasant — the Embassy's suggestion unnerves most of the Messenger's Exalts. At the same time, some argue, access to demonic lore, deals with Yozi cults and the potential of Infernal Exaltation can only strengthen the Messengers and make their work easier.

TIMELINE

Time	Event
Before the First Age	Something lives in the woods.
During the First Age	Kehiro and Cassandra commit suicide. Pherenike creates her masterwork. Domnica becomes the mist.
Realm Year	Event
68	Cevis Ghandarva and his followers leave the Isle. Peace of Song Forgotten discovers the pool.
71	Oreithyia falls in love with Valentin.
72	Ghandarva betrays Samathi Anja in exchange for Domnica's mantle.
137	Ghandarva's followers become bandits, at the request of Evelina the dead. Their ranks open to outsiders.
144	Manse destroyed in internal conflict.
145	Valentin killed. Ghandarva bargains with Oreithyia.
212	The Mandala Guard established.
286	Ghandarva reborn as Ledaal Demyen.
301	Ghandarva returns to the Forest Witches with the Spear and Blood Sutras. The Company of Thrones formed.
563	Ghandarva reborn as the God-Blooded son of Great Forks' Spinner of Glorious Tales.
564	Proseria delivers the Blessing of Awakening. The Company of Messengers formed. The Table of Fiends formed. The Tax of Fading Embers levied.
585	Ghandarva returns, somewhat nonplused.
688	The Black Scale Embassy established.
768	The present day.



THE THINGS OF THE FOREST

Long before the First Age, something lived in the forest. Its exact nature no longer matters, for it has forgotten that nature and, in so doing, lost it. All that remains is a memory that it existed and a hunger for that existence. Naturally, it must exist again in a form worthy of its grandeur. Yet, it has no sources of inspiration more useful than the minds of mortals, spirits and Exalts. Coaxing anything resembling its proper glory from them is a difficult and frustrating task. Still, it perseveres.

The thing in the forest is very old, and it has forgotten how to fail. If people are its only tools, it shall make them better. If it cannot remember what “better” means, perhaps its tools can define it for themselves. As they better themselves, that definition can only improve.

THE FOREST WALKER

Savants among the Forest Witches have determined Oreithyia’s name and history. Moreover, they know that she cannot be the creature that moves in the forest and answers to her name, using eyes that seem like Oreithyia’s eyes, flesh that seems like her flesh and bones that much resemble her bones. Valentin’s peculiar lover exceeds the dead in scope. She is a living garden. Pherenike’s art captured Oreithyia’s every virtue and failing, the torment of her death and the natural beauty and vital force of the forest around her.

The thing in the forest felt the power of that art and remembered it, though millennia passed, but it could not understand it until it saw the world mirrored in Valentin’s eyes. When it understood, it gave Pherenike’s garden power. This is the forest walker that names itself Oreithyia and rules the plants and beasts and air and water of the woods.

The woods twist themselves into the shapes that Oreithyia desires. From the land, she brings forth temples, houses, fortresses and bathhouses. The ropes of her muscle carry cooked and seasoned food to the Forest Witches. A polite request to the trees can make pure water fountain forth from the ground. It generally takes no more than three years for a newly arrived Witch to accustom himself to the fact that the raw flesh of a millennia-dead Dragon-Blooded cooked his dinner and that a mind of unknown origin planned the layout of his home.

For practical purposes, the woods are now the body of Oreithyia. She shapes the land, the water and the vegetation as she wills, just as a human adjusts her posture. If someone tries to stop part of her from moving (preventing a door from closing, for example), Oreithyia has Strength 6, Dexterity 6 and no appropriate Abilities. When constructing meaningful structures, such as fortress walls, she builds at a rate of one health level per hour. For example, a wooden statue would take 16 hours to achieve its full solidity, and a wooden wall would take 12. She can

undertake a large but finite number of these projects at once. When she wishes, every animal native to the woods obeys her as an extension of herself. She has an endless number of ropy tentacle-vines, many of which she uses to busy herself about various crafts. To better please Valentin, Oreithyia mastered cooking, tailoring and weaponcrafting.

Oreithyia’s presence has kept the Forest Witches well equipped, well fed and well housed at a minimum cost. This has a profound impact on their society, giving them a surety in the satisfaction of their basic needs that even the most spoiled scions of the Dynasty lack. The Forest Witches do not farm. They do not craft. From Ghandarva’s perspective, Oreithyia frees them to pursue personal excellence. From the perspective of the dead, she frees the Witches to pursue the wealth of others. The mortals in service to the Witches simply rejoice in the knowledge that they may live in comfort until they die at their masters’ behest. The spirits and elementals of the forest very carefully offer no opinion. Those that complain of Oreithyia’s presence, at best, lose their tongues.

MANSES OF THE FOREST

Oreithyia’s presence does not reach into the five Demesnes of the woods. The Demesnes disordered the Essence that animates her. When built, the Manses provided a conflicting and unpleasant order. Accordingly, the Manses stand in sharp contrast to the prevailing architectural themes and overall upkeep of the woods. Insects sometimes bite those who visit these places. One may trip on an unexpected root.

The Mandala Guard attempts half-heartedly to rectify this situation. It embarrasses the Guards when the grounds are noticeably ragged compared to the forest around. Neither does the notion of themselves as gardeners and groundskeepers please their pride. Thus, the degree of effort put into the Manses’ upkeep depends on the Mandala Guard’s mood. Each Manse serves as the primary personal residence for one or two Guards.

THE SHAPE OF THE MIST

In the First Age, Domnica sacrificed all that she was to become the potential for something else. Since the coming of the Forest Witches, that potential has begun to bear fruit.

The mist — which remains, in some sense, Domnica — has multiple aspects. Each of them is an Exalt that has, in one fashion or another, chosen to forsake the nature of her birth. In so doing, each became instead one of Domnica’s aspects, a numen of the mist. Two of these Exalts later met unfortunate ends. In both cases, the mist offered sufficient inducements to a new Dragon-Blooded, who stepped forward to assume the aspect left behind. In this fashion, the mist’s many faces are immortal.

BECOMING A NUMEN

Any Forest Witch — and most Dragon-Blooded visitors to the woods — can give herself to the mist and form a new aspect of its nature. The mist will ask her how she wishes to change herself. Her answer forms the template for her apotheosis. The mist requires an indication of consent and does not normally accept mortals or Celestial Exalts. If a Celestial Exalt went willingly through the process, her Exaltation shard would consider her dead and flee to Yu-Shan for reassignment. Dragon-Blooded enter into a symbiotic relationship with the mist. They retain their abilities and even their flesh while acquiring certain characteristics of a spirit.

Like the Sea of Mind, the mist cannot expand itself without a sacrifice of power. If the character wishes to avoid a long post-transition convalescence — potentially lasting more than a century — she must make this sacrifice beforehand. Examples of appropriate sacrifices include: enough unworked orichalcum, moonsilver, starmetal or soulsteel to build a statue of the character; a level 3 jade artifact; three level 3 or level 4 jade artifacts; the still-beating heart of a Celestial Exalt; or a level 4 or level 5 Hearthstone. In the last case, loss of control over the Manse will dramatically weaken the character and may endanger the fledgling creature's life. This sacrifice is not required if the character steps into the role of a slain numen — however, in doing so, the character changes into *that* entity, rather than refining herself in whatever fashion she might desire.

The effects on the character are as follows.

She learns the Dematerialize Charm. This costs half of her motes of Essence to use. If killed without the assistance of a spirit-destroying Charm, she reforms in one lunar month in the heart of the woods. She can hear prayers made to her, if they're accompanied by a successful prayer roll (see **Exalted**, pp. 335-336), and determine their source. If she wishes, she may grant the petitioner her blessing, with effects as described below.



Exalted



If the character does not have the Cult Background, she gains one dot in it. Certain Witches and many of their mortal servants revere the aspects of the mist.

For magical purposes, she has no element. She loses her anima abilities. She cannot manifest her anima. She has no favored Charms and pays a surcharge on all Charms as having a different element than her aspect. This process does not sever her connection with her element, and she retains the physical markings and Caste/Aspect Abilities. However, her connection with it is greatly reduced.

The character changes shape. Numina are prone to peculiar shapes with many limbs and odd animalistic features. Byspending a mote of Essence, the character may alter her shape freely among shapes suitable to her apotheosis. The character's odd deformities use the same rules as Wyld pox, afflictions and blights (see *Exalted*, pp. 280-281). The character gains up to one blight (normally Multiple Limbs), one affliction and three poxes. If the character gained a blight, an affliction or both, she loses one dot of Temperance. Blights do not inflict Derangements, although the character may very well go insane as part of her redefinition. The character can shift into shapes without certain of these features if appropriate. This costs her their benefits.

Connivance of Wood and Bone, a spell detailed below, allows Forest Witches to emulate certain aspects of the mist's numina. The Storyteller works with the player to define the spell's effect on those who summon the character's nature. This includes several benefits and a limitation. The character herself always receives these benefits and always suffers this limitation. She may have additional inescapable limitations as a consequence of her new definition.

The Storyteller works with the player to define one numen effect for each point of Essence the character possesses. These should have efficacy similar to that of a Fair Folk power or a Terrestrial or Celestial Circle spell. The player chooses a Virtue. Spending one point of that Virtue activates an effect. Powerful effects, comparable to Celestial Circle sorcery, require two points instead.

The Exalt is generally surprised by many of the details of the transformation. Given a suitable understanding with the player as to what abilities and limitations she finds enjoyable in play, the Storyteller may wish to conceal certain details of the transformation from the player until they become relevant.

THE MIST AND THE WITCHES

In the absence of an overriding reason to follow the Immaculate faith, most of the Forest Witches elect for pragmatism. Their spiritual nature matters little to them. Their afterlife is prearranged. Gods exist to be bullied, when feasible, or placated, when useful. In this respect, they classify the numina of the mist as gods. Bullying them is often feasible. All save Samathi Anja have immersed themselves in the Sea of Mind, and the Dragon-Blooded who rule that paradise can cast them out. Placating the

numina is also useful: Prayers offered to them offer minor but tangible rewards.

The mythology of the Witches has associated a number of phenomena with each of the numina. When a numen grants her blessing to a relevant activity, it weights the evolution of events. At any one point during that activity, the blessed character can reroll one roll and take the better of the two results.

These creatures are particularly impressive to the mortal followers of the Witches. A single sighting in the woods, in the distance, can yield weeks of gossip. A small cult has developed that offers them active worship. The Witches tolerate this practice on the off chance they will desire the transformation themselves someday.

THE SEA OF MIND

The Sea of Mind contains nearly 100 living Exalts. High on a hill there stands the city of the blessed, Atsiluth Eternal. Those who have died after full and proper service to the Forest Witches live there, forever, in a paradise of their own creation. Beneath the hill, there is the sea, and in that sea, a shining reflection of the world the Primordials made.

ICHOR, SEEN FROM THE SEA

Descending Water
Its heart melts rime from my sword
A sheen of triumph
Splashes on my arms and face
Drips and feeds Ascending Earth.

ATTUNING TO THE SEA

To bind herself to the Sea, an Exalt need simply bathe in the forest pool. When she ducks her head under the surface and rinses out her eyes, her world fills with light. When she lifts her head again, she is at the shore of the Sea, and where the pool lay, a hill now rises, and atop it lies the glorious Atsiluth Eternal. She remains attuned to the Sea until and unless the council of the city banishes her.

Creation, as seen through the Sea, is both starker and more beautiful. No petty unpleasantness exists. Given no reason to notice it, an attuned Exalt's eyes would skim past a fox's corpse crawling with larvae, seeing nothing but the beauty of the day. If she had such a reason, then the fox would have its own kind of striking beauty—the kind that could spur an artist to remark upon it in spontaneous and multilayered verse. The Forest Witch never feels overheated, regardless of circumstance — she experiences dangerous heat as a sense of the Fire Dragon's touch. Colors are more vivid. Swamps drag less at her heels. Her every word takes on an extra grace. Such characters continue to act and live in Creation, but see and feel a vastly improved reflection.

Living in a world stripped of its grime, most Forest Witches develop a ruthlessness unusual even for the Dragon-Blooded. Every horror is either eminently just, inherently beautiful or screened carefully into nonexistence. They focus on the things they consider important with an uncanny ease. They develop their passions, for passion gives the Sea a larger palette of glories with which to work. The symphony of small alterations to the world around them helps the Forest Witches to shape themselves toward their personal ideal.

In some cases, the subtle misperceptions created by the Sea could endanger an Exalt. In these cases, the attunement to the Sea subtly steers the character's actions. Where she experiences herself doing one thing, she in fact does another. Thus, if an Exalt wishes to weave a garland of nettles, reacting to their intense floral beauty and her apparent immunity to their sting, she may, in truth, weave a garland of grass. The Sea is not intelligent in its approach to these matters. Rather, like a talisman that improves eloquence, it directs the force embodied in the Exalt's own nature toward its assigned goal. That goal, for the Sea, is to maintain a vague correspondence between the world its attuned Exalts see and the world they should see.

Attunement to the Sea also allows a character to visit Atsiluth Eternal, the first and final city at the forest's heart. This city does not exist in Creation. It is nothing more than a desire of the Forest Witches, given form and structure by the pool. When a Forest Witch attuned to the Sea dies, he may take up residence there. Residents of Atsiluth Eternal can venture out into the reflected world, and the Sea attempts to maintain the shared delusion in an appropriate fashion. However, the dead accept that nothing they do in the reflected Creation can have direct effects upon the real one. This often costs them their interest in the world outside Atsiluth.

THE FOUR PERFECTIONS

Few of the Exalts who shaped the Sea wished to drastically alter their personalities. Thus, the Sea does not erase the weaknesses and failings of its inhabitants. Nor does the Sea entirely obscure the limitations and incapacities of its residents. In the presence of 100 Exalts, conflicts of interest would certainly arise. A clash of omnipotent entities would be hazardous to the consistency of the dream. At the same time, however, the Sea allows its residents to reach far beyond the limits of the possible when it matters most to them. Mechanically, this takes place when a character spends a temporary point of one of his Virtues. From the perspective of those who live in the Sea, a single point allows acts of nearly unlimited glory. Some examples follow.

Spending Compassion allows a character to accomplish almost any task on behalf of the sick, the innocent, the needy or the oppressed. He can plow 100 square miles of fields in an hour or hold back a Third Circle Demon

THE DOCTRINE OF PARADISE

These are the words of Vitali Proseria, elder of the first and last of cities at the Forest's heart.

It is the wish of all women and all men that they should know a faultless world. The burden of granting this desire has fallen upon our shoulders. We accept.

It is known that no person is herself faultless. In perfection lies destruction. That is the way of the numina, but it is not our way. The hosts of the fallible that teem in our world shall retain their folly.

It is the assertion of our council that in all women and all men one may nevertheless find the four pure impulses: to strive, to feel, to endure and to demand. These ring forth in clarity through the muddled voices of the heart.

Let one man strive against another and strike him low. This is the excellence named "the Carrion Perfection," which is born within the kill. There is suffering, but still, he strove.

Let one man weep for another, and his soul break for the pain. This is the glory named "the Gangrenous Perfection," which is born within a wound. There is suffering, but still, he wept.

Let one woman suffer another's insult to her name. This is the virtue named "the Boneyard Perfection," which is as still as the grave. She yields her anger to her intent.

Let one woman raise a bloody blade and lead her kind against her kin. This is the fulfillment named "the Feast of Flies Perfection," found on the battlefields both subtle and overt. Though corpses may fall to earth like a gentle rain, still, there is glory.

What woman or what man could deny these things a place in paradise?

Therefore, it is our will that, in the Forest Sea, these voices shall never fall short of their realization. Flail with your petty gifts if you must, and know some small frustration, but know also that, when your heart speaks, you shall exceed all limits known.

With that glory, you shall forge a world to your own devising. For, if you have not the strength of those four voices in your heart, then your perfect world is the world that others make.

This is the will of the elders of the first and last of cities at the Forest's heart.

from a child sacrificed thereto. His touch is medicine to the sick and peace to the tormented. It can cleanse the Great Contagion or a river clogged with blood. The character can perform similarly great acts when defending or seeking love or justice. When he looks upon a desired love, he takes on a beauty irresistible.





Spending Conviction allows a character to walk unscathed through fire and water or all the hordes of Malfestas. He may go for 40 days without food or drink or weather torture without qualm. One blow of his hand shatters the greatest of walls, if there is need. If a village shelters his enemy, a whisper to the wind can dissolve it into dust. In sum, spending Conviction can negate even the harshest circumstances or facilitate even the harshest measures.

Spending Temperance allows a character to operate with a clear and cool mind no matter what powers or circumstances attempt to sway him. For a scene, the character suffers no dice pool penalties from wounds, drugs or distractions. He can laugh in the face of the greatest tempters in the world. Mental effects have no leverage upon him. With a touch and a word, he can restore rationality to the mad or the drunk. Illusions and appearances have no power to sway him. The true nature of all things becomes apparent.

Spending Valor allows a character to accomplish almost any imaginable martial feat or feat of strength. Slaughtering a mortal army is as easy as commandeering one. In addition, he may buy combat Charms for one experience point each, on the condition that they function only in the dreamworld of the Sea of Mind and only in scenes where he spends a point of Valor.

When spending a Virtue point to directly oppose another Exalt, the character cannot achieve an automatic victory. Instead, he adds his Virtue rating as automatic successes to appropriate dice pools for the duration of the scene.

IN THE REAL WORLD

For all its potency, the Sea of Mind cannot cause these effects to take place in the real world. To their foes, the Forest Witches are deadly antagonists, but no more so than any other Dragon-Blooded. If a Forest Witch spends Conviction to shatter a wall she could not otherwise overcome, Creation's version of the wall remains intact.

So long as a Witch remains in the Sea of Mind, the actual course of events has no bearing on her life. Some lose track of the true Creation's existence entirely. Those who have emerged briefly — cast out for some sin but permitted reentrance — indicate that the world does tend to remain roughly the same. Subtly steering the actions of the Exalts under its influence, and sometimes inventing entirely fictitious streams of events, the Sea acts to correct the worst deviations between the world it shows and the world that is.

Despite the best efforts of the Sea, however, the two worlds diverge. Due to slight differences in perceived positioning, a war band can return home falsely thinking that one of its members survived — or falsely thinking that a member died. A Witch may lose a hand without noticing it, wielding a sword she incorrectly imagines to be a daiklave. On one occasion, a Forest Witch was cast from the Sea only to discover that she was never actually born.

Her mother had died in labor, deprived of her father's Compassionate touch. After one full year of exile, the Sea permitted her return, whereupon she went mad. Occasionally, those who temporarily leave the Sea have the sad duty of reporting to a friend that she died long ago in a battle that she thought she'd won. Naturally, one must die in the context of paradise to move on to the city on the hill.

The Storyteller can run this in one of several ways. If all of the players' characters attune to the Sea, then the divergence between reality and the Sea makes no difference. The occasional separation from the Sea is nothing more than a shocking venture into a twisted and imperfect echo of the world the other characters know. Otherwise, the characters that fall into the minority are functionally insane, with an incorrectly perfect or imperfect view of the world.

In a game set in the Sea, non-attuned characters can also spend Virtue points for grand successes. This helps the Sea explain their real-world equality in competence. The Storyteller can extend this privilege to Storyteller characters on a case-by-case basis.

EXILE

The Sea of Mind demands a yearly tithe from the Forest Witches. Ultimately, those who cannot pay forfeit their divine abode and must return to the dim Creation of their birth. They are not alone in this: The dead wield the power of exile as their only weapon against the will of the living, and those who displease them must face a short or long span of days outside the dream.

Technically, the yearly levy is fixed and equal among all. In practice, the dead make an effort to monitor the overall contribution of each living Witch. Those who find themselves falling behind attract the attention of Atsiluth Eternal, whether early in the year or late. Those with strong social connections among the dead or who give the impression of future reliability may survive for as much as seven years without a full payment.

As a rule, it requires a severe crime to merit temporary exile. The living can police themselves on lesser matters. Crimes considered severe include treason in various forms, manifest lack of worth and taboo violations such as betraying a comrade in the heat of battle, kinslaying or the desecration of gravesites. The sentence ranges from a lunar month outside the aegis of the Sea to permanent exile, with seven years the stiffest temporary sentence offered.

CULTURE

The Forest Witches unite around a common goal: maintaining the lifestyle that they are accustomed to. In banditry, pillage and defense of the forest, they find their core camaraderie. The band plans its major actions openly and pleasantly, with any interested parties participating. At any given time, three or four thefts or military actions are in planning or execution.

Outside of that loose affiliation, the desires and interests of the Witches diverge and even conflict. This bothers few. The Witches have an individualistic philosophy. They are content to act in small polarized groups so long as the overall community's needs are served. On a large raid, the Fiends are the Messengers' peers and shield-brothers. Such actions manifest the destiny that all share. In lesser matters, they stand as rivals in deadly earnest — though, aware of their flexible circumstances and the Tax of Fading Embers, few indulge in true enmity. The culture of the Witches includes a very strong appreciation for the respected or beloved foe.

Most of the Forest Witches' decisions come either from the communal action of the living or the decree of the dead. Technically, the council of the dead limits its actions to those directly concerning the Sea unless asked to attend to some other business. However, its political leverage in controlling the Sea tends to exceed the living community's leverage in controlling the offerings. The living cannot afford to have the flow of tithes stop any more than can the dead.

THE LIVING

Two major factions dominate the living Forest Witches, with about a quarter of the membership permanently dedicated to each and the others vacillating between them. First, Cevis Ghandarva retains his life and authority. He intends to make his society a weapon against the Realm that humiliated him. Like some Lunar preacher, he speaks of the corruption of the Blessed Isle and the wealth that one could take by conquering it. Such is his personal strength and historical position that few directly argue with him.

Ghandarva planned to implement his plans slowly, building a rival empire over the millennia potentially available to him. Now that the Empress has vanished, he finds himself in an awkward position. If the Realm collapses before he can strike, his revenge becomes more difficult. Further, decisively defeating the Realm would do more to establish the legitimacy of his ambitions than picking up the pieces after potential centuries of darkness. If he acts now, however, he has an entirely inadequate force. Ghandarva's usurpation attempt would not decisively defeat the Realm so much as create a new in-joke for historians.

The other faction clings tightly to the wishes of the dead. Where Ghandarva wishes to expand the Witches' influence, they wish to increase the Witches' numbers, bringing new members into the group to help feed the Sea of Mind. They consider dominating the world an ultimately pointless endeavor — once the Sea is self-sustaining, what use have the Forest Witches for Creation?

GHANDARVA'S SECT

Those who follow Ghandarva live by the Spear Sutra. Their quest to establish the dominance of the Forest Witches involves intensely personal conflicts. They consider the communities that resist the Witches battlefields rather than

THE RESOURCES OF THE LIVING

The Forest Witches number 87 Dragon-Blooded in all. This includes 12 members of the Company of Thrones, 22 who call themselves Messengers, 4 Fiends and the 9 Mandala Guards.

Drawn by promises of paradise — both the simple comfort of Oreithyia's woods and possible future service to their employers in Atsiluth Eternal — roughly 5,900 mortals serve the Witches. Of these, more than half are combat-trained. The efforts of the forest walker allow several thousand mortals to support a standing army twice their numbers.

On a per capita basis, the Witches have an access to artifacts that rivals that of the Great Houses. The continual accumulation of wonders is a necessary part of their existence. Those they find most useful, they keep. Those they find simply interesting, they may also keep, saving a little wealth in case they should later need a bribe or face a dry raiding season. However, they have only two sources for tailor-made artifacts — a small number of Witch sorcerers who craft minor wonders and the demons of the Black Scale Embassy.

As a group, the Witches securely control only five Hearthstones. Those who wish to claim a Manse and a Hearthstone for themselves must claim and defend a Manse outside the Witches' domain.

In terms of mundane goods, the Witches' material wealth is essentially unlimited. Oreithyia produces raw material, undemanding craftwork, clothing and weapons essentially as fast as the Witches can arrange to export them. Many of the Messengers ruthlessly exploit this advantage when working in nearby communities, although, as a matter of pragmatism, both Ghandarva's faction and the Messengers are wary of making their unlimited fortune obvious. In practice, this means that a Witch adds •• to her Resources rating while in the good graces of the community, to a maximum of •••••.

enemy camps. In those battlefields, they strive against those who marshal that resistance. Even the most powerful are simply playing pieces to them, if they lack the motivation to oppose Cevis Ghandarva's plans. What matters is breaking the monsters' hold on the world, and a monster is anyone who stands opposed to the Witches' destiny.

Those who follow the Spear Sutra spend a great deal of time working not against the armies of their foes, but against the viziers. The Forest Witches trade machination for machination against those who pull the strings, in the hopes that, in the end, the Witches will own the city, village, town or region in question. Success means that





they may claim both a tangible and a moral reward: wealth, from those who can no longer oppose them, and further proof that Ghandarva's prophecy of empire holds weight.

Like most of the Forest Witches, Ghandarva's sect is blind and indifferent to whatever harm it does. Its members live in the idealized Sea of Mind, and where they have done their work, they see glory spreading across the world. This makes it easy for them to genuinely believe their opponents evil — and a romanticized, storybook evil, at that.

THE COMPANY OF THRONES

The allure of the Sea has taken a significant bite out of the Thrones. Every time a Witch uses Ghandarva's cloak to create a new life, she spends anywhere from nine years to several decades without access to paradise. Renewed youth has its allure, but old age more readily transitions into endless pseudo-life in Atsiluth Eternal.

Nevertheless, a number of Witches still pursue the methodology of the Thrones. Either their loyalty to Ghandarva's cause or the inherent interest value of a custom-made new life gives them sufficient reason to dirty themselves in the true Creation. Several others claim temporary membership. They perform tasks on behalf of the company in exchange for a life that interests them. Fifteen Witches have used the cloak for this last purpose, returning as children of the Fair Folk, buck-ogres and even gods. One Witch, attempting to circumvent a bargain with the Black Scale Embassy, attempted birth as a child of the demoness Alveua. Auguries suggest she still lives, but she has not yet returned.

The traditional dress of the Thrones is crimson and black. Their traditional weapons are the hammer, the khatar and paired hook swords.

When making a character from the Company of Thrones, give primary consideration to his most recent life. This has the largest influence on his mindset in the modern day and indicates a great deal about his interests in the life before. He can have almost any parentage, with the attendant affects upon his appearance and social connections. While the Exaltation restores him to a Dragon-Blooded in mortal flesh, he still spent years growing up in the family of his new birth, and he still looks as he did before. Thus, a Throne of Haltan birth may have an emotional attachment — positive or negative, reciprocated or otherwise — to his Haltan family. He certainly has the physical characteristics of the type. A Throne born as a Fair Folk noble retains his dream-forged appearance and knowledge of their society, although he is no longer welcome among them.

THE MANDALA GUARD

The Mandala Guard's number is set at nine: two for each cardinal direction and one for the earth. Its original mandate was to protect the forest's Manses. The Guards have slowly expanded that mandate in order to justify their

personal use of the Manses' Hearthstones and to earn various concessions from the dead of Atsiluth Eternal. Now, the Mandala Guard's primary responsibility is to protect the woods as a whole from the attention of outsiders. Many also study sorcery and lend its advantages to the outcastes they protect.

The costume of the Mandala Guard has grown elaborate over the years. Guards wear chain shirts of interwoven black jade, gold and silver links and a cloak marked upon its back with the mandala that symbolizes their order. It is considered either forbidden, scandalous or unusual — depending on the onlooker's sensibilities — for a Mandala Guard to show his face to others. Most wear masks, hoods or veils.

The armor of the Mandala Guard gives 5L/3B soak without fatigue or mobility penalties. It is available without cost to characters belonging to the Guard. Members of the Mandala Guard with their own Hearthstone should take the Manse Background equal to the Hearthstone's level. They may need to lend it to others when strategically necessary. Guards who know Terrestrial Circle Sorcery may practice it in the Manses' dedicated ritual spaces. However, they must also devote some portion of their time to using their abilities on the Witches' behalf. Examples include the conjuration of demon servitors to accomplish certain tasks and the enchantment of minor artifacts.

THE TABLE OF FIENDS

The Fiends' Table has never had a large membership. For most purposes, one can consider it a heretic branch of Ghandarva's sect, for its methods are ultimately the same. In adherence to the Spear Sutra, the Fiends work to break the hold of the Messengers on the hearts of others — to weaken them and their message so that the Fiends' influence overpowers it. They spread fear of the Witches and doubts as to the glory of Atsiluth Eternal.

The traditional dress of the Fiends is white and gold. Their traditional weapons are the great sword, the tiger claws and the seven-section staff.

Membership in the Fiends is unsafe for ordinary Witches, due to the conflicts it produces with their peers. Most who join the Table of Fiends are both talented and extremely experienced, and they generally join only after heavy recruiting by and blandishments from existing members. The exclusivity this produces makes such blandishments easier — a request from the Fiends to join them appeals to any Witch's pride, no matter how thoroughly she objects to the Table's principles.

CHILDREN OF THE WOODS

Children are a lot of work, and the Forest Witches see little reason to divert energy to that work's details. They wish to pass their values on and have impressive children to take pride in. The rest, they leave to Oreithyia.

For this reason, when a Forest Witch is due to give birth, she typically goes into the woods and sprawls upon



Forest Witches

the dirt. The Sea blurs her mind as Oreithyia's vines reach for her. Then she wakes and rises and returns to her home, the child delivered and gone.

As for the child, drawn away into the woods by gristly vines, Oreithyia raises him. He suckles on Oreithyia's milk, bled like sap from knots in the trees. He plays with the creatures of the forest, which Oreithyia rules: the bears, the burrow loks, the giant wolf spiders and the strix. He is brought in stealth near the homes of the Dragon-Blooded and their servants, to hear their voices and learn to speak. He takes a name for himself, following the custom that the forest walker favors: a concept the child finds meaningful, phrased in the simple language of youth — such as Rain Bringing Gloom, Almost Morning, or Dew-Covered Web. He may or may not adopt a traditional Dynastic name later.

As the child grows, he learns, on pain of various forms of unpleasantness, self-discipline, written language and the arts. Food comes less readily into his hands, and he must learn to hunt and kill: skills later of use when he raids for his kind. If he is a beauty, then Oreithyia may at any time decide to first spoil him and then kill him — his parents may or may not ever remember that the child existed. Otherwise, on his 10th birthday, the child is starved for two days in a cage of wood and then presented to his parents, who explain to him his legacy as a Prince of the Earth, admonish him to virtue and obedience and send him back into the woods. Should he later Exalt, he will

have more opportunities to bask in their company. Otherwise, it depends upon their disposition.

Having observed the child's growth and considered the implications of his Exaltation or lack thereof, Oreithyia updates her plans for the community's development. Various mating combinations suggest themselves, and she selects several that seem apt. Over the course of that child's life, the forest walker will occasionally usher appropriate mates to his home, whereupon both may earn a small share of community credit through sex and a larger share by formalizing a relationship.

Children raised in this fashion have a minimum of Athletics •, Awareness •, Brawl •, Stealth •, Endurance ••, Occult •• and Survival ••.

GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY

The Forest Witches consider their lives blessed by fortune, wisdom, and worth. Those who do not join them must, therefore, lack one of these. The Fiends assume that those who do not find the Witches on their own are unworthy or unwise. Ghandarva's sect considers them unwise or unfortunate. In both cases, however, the factions believe that an inherent superiority descends from their circumstances, even in comparison to other Dragon-Blooded. Destiny has cast its light upon those who have found the forest. They have risen half a rung above the Dynasts in the Perfected Hierarchy. Regardless of the



direction in which their personal quest for perfection takes them, those in that light are equals. Those beyond that light's borders labor outside the ranks of the blessed. In one sense, to Ghandarva's faction, expanding that light is the duty of all. Until that happens, however, those who wait in the shadows are made trivial by their doing so.

THE YEARLY TITHE

Paying the yearly tithe requires Resources •••••. This represents about 30 or 40 Resources ••• and •••• transactions per annum, each sufficient to purchase a minor artifact or equivalent source of Essence. Witches in the good graces of the community add •• to their effective Resources, as usual. Normally, characters with insufficient wealth compensate through banditry and other contributions to the Forest Witches' efforts.

THE DEAD

The dead of Atsiluth Eternal spend a good portion of their time simply enjoying their state. All of them have received a rare and precious gift: the chance to look at death as a sumptuous retirement. In Atsiluth, they may have such pleasures as they like, and they cannot cease — if “slain,” the dead of the Sea must simply wait until the will of the elders' council recreates them.

The dead of Atsiluth have an existence whose nature is unclear. Not even the dead themselves know whether they retain anything in the nature of a soul. Even their possession of independent personal viewpoints is in some dispute. They are dreams shared by the Sea and those attuned to it, and they may be nothing more.

Regardless of the nature of their existence, the dead prefer to maintain it. Thus, their first goal is to ensure that the flow of tithes continue. This requires maintaining their power over the living, predicated on a combination of respect and the power to exile others from the Sea. Their second goal is to build a sufficient excess of power as to establish the Sea as a permanent structure — what they consider a rival to Creation, although, in their doubts, they compare it instead to a work of fiction or glamour.

PROSERIA'S SECT

The prophetess Vitali Proseria leads the dead of the city, having seized leadership from Evelina soon after she died. Proseria sets forth the principles under which they exist.

Her first principle: The councils of the dead are not for the living, and the deliberations of the dead not for the living to hear. The living may present their case at the elders' council and hear a few words in answer and leave — but the true business of the city is not for them to know. She does not wish the living to interfere in her affairs or to

THE RESOURCES OF THE DEAD

A council of 25 leads the dead of Atsiluth: 24 elders of the dead and a single representative of the Ebon Dragon. Over 200 additional Exalts dwell there eternally. The number of their mortal servants is somewhat smaller, at any given time, but countless thousands exist in potential when a resident or a visitor chances to remember them.

The dead command little in the way of material wealth. Most of their possessions pass to their heirs or into the pool upon their deaths. On rare occasions, they may choose to retain titular authority over some artifact or other. Some maintain a residence in the forest as well as the city. Even so, a typical resident of Atsiluth limits herself to possessions kept within the city itself. Atsiluth is paradise, after all, and a dream. Artifacts and wealth not intended to leave it are as plentiful as dust.

The dead have a large and continuous need for magical wealth. One best impresses Atsiluth Eternal by offering it impressive treasures. Those who do so can expect to increase their Connections (Atsiluth Eternal). Characters who repeatedly fail to do so find their standing declining.

speculate on the nature of the dead's existence or to lose the slight awe in which they hold their dead elders.

Her second: The dead shall not strive against one another in Atsiluth Eternal. If they must do so, they may travel into the reflected Creation and strive against one another there. Atsiluth is a place of peace, and she does not wish it disturbed. In this matter, her will does not entirely hold. Petty intrigues have, on occasion, led to thefts or “assassinations.”

Her third: The dead shall use discretion when acting outside of the forest. Whenever Atsiluth's dead affect the world in the reflected Creation, they force a divergence between what actually happens and what the Witches perceive. This only makes more work for the pool, which drains its power. When the dead travel with other Witches, she prefers that they act as advisors and observers, participating only when they must.

Her fourth and final principle: The Messengers must be supported, for when their work is complete, the city's dead may again walk the world. Not all of the dead truly care — but some, in the quiet places of their heart, prefer that Atsiluth Eternal and not Cevis Ghandarva conquer the existence they know. If the dead still shape the Sea when it becomes a permanent fixture, then it may have this power. Within the reflected Creation, regardless of

Creation's true fate, Atsiluth Eternal could form the heart of a new Realm.

With the Storyteller's permission, players may play dead characters. Backgrounds such as Artifact and Manse are acceptable, but the artifacts and Hearthstones work only in the city. Characters should take such Backgrounds if the wonder in question has a meaningful nonphysical effect, such as divination or social prowess. In Atsiluth Eternal, physical wonders such as daiklaves, servile automata and wings are available for the asking. Dead characters receive an extra three dots of Stealth when traveling in the mortal world.

THE COMPANY OF MESSENGERS

Many among the living find themselves swayed by Proseria's message more than Ghandarva's. They wish power not for themselves, but for the first and final city. They wish to drown the world in the Sea of Mind.

Despite the subtle differences in their ultimate goals, the lives of the Messengers much resemble those of Ghandarva's soldiers. They spend their days in a personal struggle to spread the light of the city's glory and influence to faraway places. Most of the world remains unaware of the blessing offered to it. The Messengers pit their wills, their voices and their minds against those who would keep the world in that shadow. As noted before, those attuned to the Sea have a tendency to see the world in black and white. Most Messengers consider their cause inherently pure. Those opposed to it are simply evil, corrupters rivaling the Deceivers of the Anathema in their malice.

The traditional dress of the Messengers is crimson and white, and their traditional weapons the spear, the cestus and the wind-fire wheels. Characters belonging to the Company of Messengers should have at least one dot of Connections (Atsiluth Eternal).

GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of the dead is unavoidably shaped by their awareness of their circumstances. Though in the full flush of youth and capable of every manner of vigorous activity, they know quite well that their time is past. They have moved on. They can no longer accomplish the goals of life. They have infinite leisure in which to accomplish the goals remaining to them in death. Further, they experience the world in a fashion even more stylized than that of the living Witches, for the dead lack any connection to Creation. They may spend three days in debate upon a subject or in enjoyable conversation and have no more content to the experience than that — at such and such time, they spent those days in debate, and the Sea found no reason to live through the petty details. Only in those matters the dead find most important do they shake off their reverie and live moment-to-moment. For the most part, what they consider important is finishing off those matters they started in life — studies, romances, introspec-

THE FIRST AND FINAL CITY

It is unclear whether one can feasibly map Atsiluth Eternal. Some allege that the first and final city at the forest's heart is infinite in its scope. Others suggest that its streets move about when the residents find it convenient. Navigating from one place to another is nevertheless easy, as is intercepting others en route — Atsiluth is, after all, a dream.

Certain places in Atsiluth stand out as particularly easy to find, perhaps because the Sea has established them firmly. These include the District of Fallen Petals, the Street of Strangers, the Gallery of Ancient Dust, the Street of Soup Vendors and the Walk of Unforgotten Words. Most meetings between the living and the dead take place in one of these sites or in the labyrinthine Department of Administrative Management of Excellence, where Proseria keeps her office and the elders' council meets.

tion, intrigues and even wars — so that they may feel a sense of completion and drift off into timeless happiness. A few would be horrified by that final ending. Inevitably, these find that the affairs of their life are unending — that they may always and forever learn more, deepen their love, improve themselves, gain more power or sharpen their military competence.

Many of the dead have no real interest in the mechanics of advancing Atsiluth Eternal's agenda. The dream that sustains the city does not mind. They have a contentless experience of spending time supporting Proseria's actions and need do nothing more.

NUMINA OF THE MIST

A significant number of Dragon-Blooded find the opportunity the mist represents fascinating. Domnica's legacy offers them the chance to perfect themselves in a single effortless, beautiful step. The Forest Witches believe in the notion of perfection as something to be found within, rather than something adhering to a fixed standard. It does not deter them that the mist offers only their own personal perfection and not an idealized ascension. Therefore, certain Witches worship the mist. They feel awe in its existence, and they lend their voices to the numina's cult.

They do not, typically, join the mist as one of its aspects. They grasp as few others do how wondrous it would be to become fully what they desire from themselves. Because of that perception, it terrifies them. It represents an end to their struggles, when they have lived their lives struggling — a sacrifice of the process of life to achieve its completion. It is a sudden beginning that carries with it an equally sudden ending. And, not least in their minds, those who have made the sacrifice do not





seem entirely happy with it. To properly take advantage of the mist's offer, one must properly understand what one ought to become — something few of the Witches do.

Instead, they worship the mist. They plan for the day when they will accept its offer. They wait for the courage and the certainty that will allow them to take that step.

THE RESOURCES OF THE CULT

Roughly eight Dragon-Blooded participate in the Cult of the Mist, along with about 1,000 mortals. Accordingly, each numen has either Cult • or Cult •• as a Background. One dot allows a numen to regain a point of temporary Willpower at either sunrise or sunset. Two dots allows her to regain a point of temporary Willpower every morning or evening and 2 motes of Essence per hour. Her Cult Background would also translate as her effective Resources rating in Yu-Shan, if circumstances permitted her travel there.

To the Dragon-Blooded who participate in the cult, there is no real benefit. At best, they receive slightly more favor from the numina than others, should they encounter them.

THE CULT OF THE MIST

Most members of the Cult of the Mist take one of its aspects as their personal patron. They associate themselves with its symbolism and offer it regular prayers. Most importantly, they study this aspect, trying to understand the full intention behind the original sacrifice of self, the ways in which it succeeded and the ways in which it went wrong. In this fashion, they hope to understand how to do it better themselves someday.

The traditional color of the Cult of the Mist is silver. Its members favor the weapons most appropriate to the aspect they follow.

Characters who belong to this cult typically have some level of the Command Background. The mortals of the cult are inevitably greatly impressed with the Dragon-Blooded who emulate their deities and follow them willingly into battle.

GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY

The numina do not openly share their goals or purpose. As far as most of the Witches can tell, they have little purpose other than to exist. The mist itself, however, has a definite and concrete goal. The Forest Witches have heard it weeping to itself, in the distance, because it remains incomplete—seventy-and-seven Dragon-Blooded it needs for that completeness. For this reason, Samathi Anja works directly to recruit for the mist. The others' actions, if relevant at all, are subtler.

POLITICS

For the Forest Witches, the political situation has reached a delicate stage. For centuries, their banditry has been a thorn in the side of the nations around them. Their political maneuvers have seemed merely an outgrowth of the quest for wealth. The Sea of Mind and the forest walker have seemed like legends. Now, the accumulated weight of all the Witches' actions is beginning to register on the eminences of the region. The Near East grows ever weaker, and that weakness spreads like a blight from the Witches' woods.

The Hundred Kingdoms to the south represent the primary source of the Witches' income and the Messengers' principal target. It is Ghandarva's intention to pull the teeth from every Kingdom there before he tips his hand as their would-be ruler. It is the Messengers' intention to spread the fire of their message to every Dragon-Blooded who finds his way into the region. In both cases, the effort is surprisingly strenuous: The politics of the Hundred Kingdoms shift so rapidly that the Witches' successes dissolve nearly as fast as they achieve them.

Greyfalls and Mount Metagalapa are also common victims of the Witches' raids. The small and militant Realm presence in Greyfalls provides the Witches with an interesting test for their skills and a renewable source of jade. Conversely, since the Realm does not send its best to Greyfalls, the Witches rarely lose lives on such raids. Such lives as they lose, Greyfalls itself replaces, as the Exalts sent there desert and join the Witches on a semiregular basis. Raiding the floating Mount Metagalapa is never anything but a way for the Witches to challenge themselves. The logistical difficulties involved make it difficult to profit.

The Witches have amiable relations with Lookshy. The Seventh Legion has considered and rejected the offer of the Sea. To the Dragon-Blooded of Lookshy, it seems little more than a drugdream, and missionaries have drawn only one convert from them since the Company of Messengers formed. The woods itself they consider a large potential danger, but if that danger suddenly manifests, the Witches seem admirably located to handle the immediate problem and bear the brunt of the long-term casualties. Since it has no real desire to eliminate the Witches and take on that responsibility itself and since the Witches have no real desire to assault Lookshy, the Witches and the Legion use one another as sources of breeding stock.

The Haltan Republic is a key target for the Company of Thrones. Many of its most important families have birthed a Forest Witch at one time or another, and a number of its merchants are unknowingly dependent upon the Witches for their livelihood. When raiding in the Republic, the Witches coat the soles of their shoes with an Air-attuned wax that holds them a fraction of an inch above the ground. This frustrates the Fair Folk who dwell below the Haltan trees, for they can claim only those who walk upon the earth.

The Linowan pose an interesting problem for the Witches. Their lands are near the center of Ghandarva's planned empire, but the Linowan are too disorganized for him to conquer them easily using his preferred methodology. The evangelists of the Witches, therefore, have taken up the difficult task of trying to civilize the Linowan.

Great Forks lies furthest to the south of the Witches' interests. Ghandarva and Proseria alike believe that Great Forks represents a significant medium-term threat to those interests, as its recreational drugs compete directly against the promise of paradise. Proseria wishes the city destroyed. She fears its spirits, whose understanding of the process of dreams might allow them to undermine the Sea's existence. Ghandarva, conversely, has developed qualms about acting against Great Forks. His most recent childhood as the son of Talespinner — one of those guardian spirits — produced a deeper personal bond than he expected.

BANDITRY

Ultimately, playing through a series of raids on nearby communities and passing caravans is boring. Accordingly, the Storyteller should handle the Forest Witches' propensities in one of four ways. First, she can gloss over the banditry entirely. Second, she can run an occasional raid between stories of more import. Third, she can rely on the players to engage in a proactive search for wealth — which can involve enough of a personal touch in information gathering, manipulation and planning to make it interesting. Finally, she can play out raids that, in some fashion, interact with a more important ongoing story — allowing the characters to take an important prisoner, revealing plans that the characters become involved with and so forth.

AVAILABLE CONNECTIONS

BACKGROUNDS

- **Atsiluth Eternal:** Influence with the dead allows a character insight into the motivations and true nature of the dead, a chance to track and influence the operations of the Company of Messengers and the ability to encourage or discourage the elders' council when it considers exiling someone from the Sea.

- **The Black Scale Embassy:** Characters with connections to the fell creatures serving the Black Scale Embassy can make favorable bargains for occult secrets, inquire after the actions and defenses of sorcerers prone to demon summoning or make a pact with the representatives of the Ebon Dragon that facilitates the safe conjuration of demons. Certain bargains require a visit to Malfeas, either in actuality or in the dream that the Sea of Mind creates.



Forest Witches



- **The Forest Witches:** Influence within the living Forest Witches allows a character to sway the overall politics of the band, to inspire or direct raids, to engineer an invitation to join the Mandala Guard or the Table of Fiends, to commission minor artifacts and to obtain preferential access to the resources of the group.

- **Great Forks:** Connections in Great Forks allow a character easy access to unusual drugs and poisons, competent doctors, the ability to guide the Witches' economic efforts against the city and the chance to meet with any number of spirits and decadent revelers. At higher levels, the character can influence the drug trade throughout the Near East and encourage or discourage the worship of spirits that attract her notice.

- **The Guild:** Connections with the Guild function as described on page 162 of *Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded*.

- **The Haltan Republic:** Characters with Haltan connections can coordinate with the Haltans on efforts against the Linowan, study at the Haltan libraries, dabble in trade with the Far East and obtain highly trained animals. At higher levels, the character can focus the efforts of a large, educated and able country toward her aims.

- **The Hundred Kingdoms:** The Hundred Kingdoms are politically fractured, and meaningful influence is difficult to obtain. Characters who possess it can investigate affairs and prominent individuals within the Scavenger Lands' breadbasket, obtain the support of petty kings and potentates, manipulate the Hundred Kingdoms' economy, establish themselves temporarily as a kingdom's champion, engineer shortages and glut markets and stir up or suppress military trouble. To someone who can manipulate the Hundred Kingdoms' patchwork political structure from the outside, almost anything is possible.

- **The Linowan:** Characters with connections among the Linowan can feed false information to the Realm, encourage or discourage Linowan raids and monitor those visiting Linowan territory. At higher levels, the character can participate meaningfully in the Witches' effort to unify the Linowan.

- **The Realm:** Connections in the Realm gives a character input into the Realm's activities in the Near East. The character can influence the Realm's ongoing campaign to reclaim the region, encourage or discourage its activities in the Eastern Threshold, receive the respect of Dynasty representatives and turn the Realm's attention toward or away from potential threats to its power. This Background includes connections with the Realm's outpost in Greyfalls.

- **Others:** Characters can take any of the Connections Backgrounds described on pages 162-163 of *Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded*. Most of these relate to the internal politics of the Realm and, thus, have little relevance to the Forest Witches' lives. Characters can also have Connections with important locations in the East outside of the immediate interests of the Forest Witches, such as Lookshy, Sijan or Nexus.

STORYTELLING IN PARADISE

The Forest Witches believe that they have their situation well in hand. Despite the dangerous powers that touch their lives, everything in the forest ultimately derives its character from their choices. The numina, though seen as pathetic by some Witches and regarded with awe by others, express nothing more or less than a certain peculiar potential inherent in those Exalts who took their forms. The forest walker Oreithya serves them; while modern Witches must work to pacify her, she remains a slave to dead Valentin. Naturally, the paradise of the Forest Sea comes entirely from their own concepts of what such a thing must be.

Their acceptance of the world as presented to them, where all of this flows from their own desires, boils down to a state of innocence. They cannot turn away from the gods they have created, as they see those gods only as reflections of themselves.

Eventually, of course, doubt always seeds itself. Regardless of the truth of their underlying beliefs — which are, of course, both right and wrong, and in proportions difficult to measure — some portion of the Forest Witches will reject this idea, see themselves as the shaped rather than the shapers and seek to tear the paradise of others down.

A typical Forest Witches game begins and possibly ends before that stage. Paradise has not yet fallen. For this reason, the Witches live in a world where the progression of destiny seems inevitable. They do not question that they will spread their truths throughout the world. They do not question that they will perfect themselves. Their key questions are: "What shall we make of the world?" and "What does self-perfection mean?"

A Forest Witches game, therefore, focuses on the creation of a new world and the recreation of the self. In the first case, key challenges include deciding the best shape for the world, shoving aside those who favor different shapes and dealing with the logistics of the effort. In the second, the core challenges are internal: The character must contend with the price of being what she seeks to become.

The Virtues' effects exist to encourage the Witches in their fundamental certainty of success and, also, to isolate their most important choices. Each spent Virtue point expresses something significant about the character's concept of that Virtue and her effort to impose her viewpoint on the world. From a practical perspective, the Virtue effects also allow the characters and many antagonists to go a little further over the top with their abilities when it really counts without trivializing combat or dragging the characters out of the overall Dragon-Blooded milieu.

The paradise of the Witches is grittier than most, and the characters can misstep horribly on occasion. Events may proceed with a terrible grandeur instead of a beautiful one. The potential for such mistakes is inevitable in a story of creation and beginnings. The Storyteller should ensure

sufficient success to satisfy the player group, which may range from “none” to “near-total,” but should not otherwise feel concerned.

Monitoring the development of the Witches’ proposed empire and the Forest Sea can inspire the Storyteller with stories fitting with the Witches’ theme. The Storyteller should also make the personal development of the characters important, primarily through the reactions of other Witches and the dead.

PEOPLE AND THINGS OF POWER

Although the true powers of the forest embody themselves as the forest walker, the mist and the Sea of Mind, lesser magic also has its place in the Witches’ lives. This section discusses a few of the entities, artifacts, Charms and spells that characters in a Forest Witches game may encounter.

ARTIFACTS

The Witches, naturally, have access to artifacts stolen from everywhere in the region. In addition, they can usually obtain artifacts crafted over the centuries in the woods itself.

SIX-AND-FINGER STAFF (ARTIFACT •)

The final link in this seven-section staff is the skeletal remains of one of Valentin’s fingers, its bones locked together by knuckles forged from blue jade. After Rurik killed Valentin, the Forest Witches forced him to craft eight of these staves, suffering a beating from each.

The power in these staves does not improve their combat effectiveness (although they are invariably exceptional weapons with a bonus to their speed, accuracy and damage). However, Presence rolls that would affect a character who has a six-and-finger staff in hand, including those for Charms such as Unbearable Taunt Technique, subtract two dice from their pools.

Once during the existence of a given six-and-finger staff, a victim struck by it will fall hopelessly in love. The wielder cannot control when this happens but is instantly aware of it when it does. This last virtue of the staves derives not from Rurik’s desires, but from the Essence of dead Valentin’s bones.

VEIL OF THE ANOINTED (ARTIFACT ••)

When pressed against someone’s face, these thin, nearly transparent veils cling of their own volition. This does not interfere with breath or with sight, but others can no longer see the wearer’s eyes — instead of eyes, orbs of brilliant light now seem set in that person’s skull. A character who holds a veil for a day and commits 1 mote to it can remove it from others at will. He need only gesture, and it will fly to his hand, folding itself neatly on the way. Others must succeed at a Willpower roll or spend a

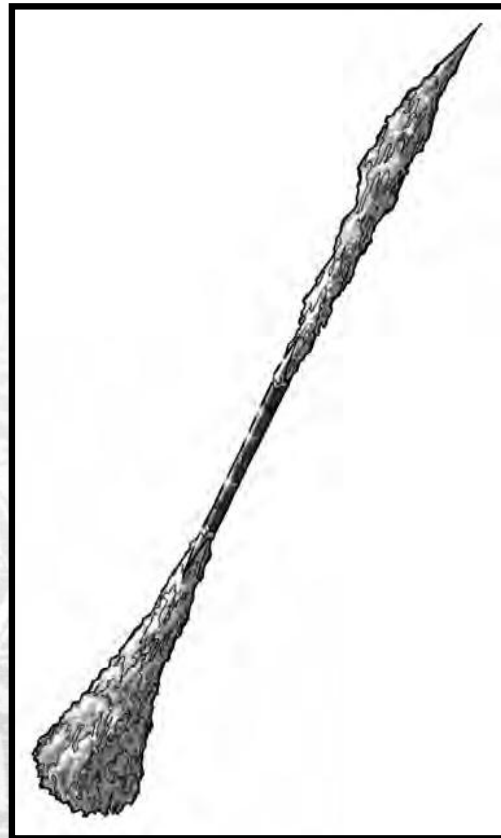
temporary Willpower point in order to remove the veil from another’s face or from their own.

Anyone wearing a veil of the anointed perceives the perfected vision of Creation found in the Sea of Mind rather than its true form. However, this experience has limited duration. The veils permit any given person at most 28 visits to the Sea of Mind in his lifetime, each lasting up to a day and a night. After that, he may never visit the Sea by this means again.

Creating one of these veils requires that a mortal willingly give the crafter both of her eyes. The artificer then uses a loom of white jade to weave them together with water from the forest pool, the womb of an old man, the teeth of a mayfly and the spittle of a toad born in the sky. Arranging for these ingredients to exist requires some effort, but the remainder of the work is essentially mundane, and the Forest Witches produce a modest number of these artifacts for sale (or, more properly, as advertising) in regions not yet reasonable targets for banditry.

PERFECTED FLAME (ARTIFACT •••)

Each of these torches begins as the horn of a Fair Folk cataphract’s fell unicorn mount. Cold jade, made liquid through sorcery, drips onto its surface over the course of a year, slowly suffusing the spire with its Essence. Each morning and each night, the crafter tells stories to the horn, and this is the first and last time each story is ever told. The horn is then plunged into a vat full of the ashes





of a burned-out star, still white with a heat that can turn steel instantly to mist. If it survives, it is a perfected flame.

Only those with the Glowing Coal Radiance Charm can attune a perfected flame to their anima. This requires a 5 mote commitment. A perfected flame functions as a jade dire lance. In addition, if the character reverses the weapon and spends 5 motes of Essence, the thicker end ignites in a brilliant radiance that lasts the remainder of the scene. The character thereafter benefits from Glowing Coal Radiance. Further, for each point of temporary Willpower she spends, she can either extend this Charm's protection to one ally or add 1 to the difficulty of an opponent's reflexive Willpower tests against the Charm. For example, protecting two allies and adding 2 to the difficulty of such tests would cost a total of four points of temporary Willpower. These benefits remain in force for the entire scene. Blind opponents and opponents who close their eyes ignore the abilities of the perfected flame, but suffer the normal penalty of two fewer successes on all attack rolls.

Most of these weapons are held by the Company of Messengers.

WALKING STONE (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Over the centuries, the Witches have constructed a small handful of walking stones — artifacts that allow the dead true interaction with the living world. Put in the Hearthstone setting for a suit of artifact armor, these fist-sized drops of water from the forest pool allow a dead character to move the limbs and gloves of the armor as if she was physically inside.

The Witches call suits of armor so equipped "Radiant Dragon Armor." When a dead character wears such armor, she can act in the reflected Creation without incurring the disapproval of Atsiluth Eternal's elders. This is a recommended option for players with dead characters.

On two occasions, the Forest Witches were fortunate enough to seize a common warstrider. The dead of the city refused to accept these artifacts as sacrifices, and instead, have set walking stones in each of them. One of these suits normally stands guard at the major road into the woods, red jade daiklave in hand.

DOMNICA'S MANTLE (ARTIFACT ●●●●●)

This mantle, made of a fine gray mist, allows the wearer to utter a word so potent as to both end and begin his life. As the mantle draws upon his Essence, his body turns to dust. The mantle holds the spark of his life, and unless the mantle is destroyed, the wearer is reborn within two years. He may name the mother he prefers, who must have Essence 8 or less; he may name the circumstances and location of the birth; and he chooses which of these criteria takes precedence, in the event that the intervention of greater forces prevents the satisfaction of both desires. He can even tailor his physical appearance in his new life.

Over his new life's early childhood, he slowly remembers his previous existence. If he was a Dragon-Blood or a Celestial who retained the grace of his patron, he Exalts at puberty. If he chose a non-mortal mother, the Exaltation burns away his substance and recreates him as a mortal before it takes effect. Any supernatural abilities deriving from his new life's heritage disappear, while his old Traits return. However, he may rearrange dots among his Strength, Dexterity, Stamina and Appearance and can also replace previously purchased Charms with Charms that simulate natural abilities of his new Form (such as Ox-Body Technique, Strength of Stone Technique, Impervious Skin of Stone Meditation and Mountain Toppling Method).

Normally, the chosen mother gives birth in the normal fashion. In the event that the Exalt chooses a barren mother, a male, a Fair Folk lady or some other creature that does not normally suffer pregnancy, the mantle must distort circumstances. For example, someone "born" to the Fair Folk may simply appear among them as the "child" of the mother chosen, with puberty defined entirely in reference to some opportunity to prove himself adult.

CHARACTERS

In the essentially egalitarian society of the Witches, no potential opponent is beneath her peers' notice. Characters may find themselves in conflict with Cevis Ghandarva, Vitali Proseria or even the monsters of the mist. Note, however, that Storytellers intending regular one-on-one conflicts with these ancient and experienced Dragon-Blooded may wish to hand out additional experience at the start of the game.

CEVIS GHANDARVA

Description: In his most recent existence, Ghandarva chose rebirth as a tall and sharp-featured God-Blooded, his white hair shimmering like the halo of his divine parent, Spinner of Glorious Tales. It is no coincidence that his new body perfectly fits a suit of superheavy jade plate the Witches captured several decades before. Ghandarva projects a strong, dynamic and ruthless presence.

Spinner of Glorious Tales, perplexed from the beginning at the whirlwind infatuation with a mortal boy that led him to adopt female form and conceive Ghandarva, long ago determined that a deeper story lay behind his child. He suspects strongly that he is somehow being used. Ghandarva knows it. Nevertheless, surprising both of them, a strong familial bond formed during Ghandarva's latest childhood. This complicates Ghandarva's plans and frustrates Talespinner's reflexive desire to crush someone who manipulated him so. Talespinner suspects his ally Dreamweaver of meddling. It told him once that he would benefit from family, and he does not consider Dreamweaver too moral or too weak to arrange a story of love, betrayal and redemption for his benefit.



Ghandarva's memories of his first life's humiliation are fading, but he still believes strongly in his quest to replace the Realm. His feelings toward the Ledaal family, in particular, remain bitter. He has deep concerns about the influence of Vitali Proseria but, even as she does, hesitates to provoke an open conflict between the living and the dead. His closest ties among the Witches are to the long-term members of the Company of Thrones.

Aspect: Air

Nature: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 1, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Endurance 3, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Forest-tongue, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 4, Lore 2 (Spirits +1), Martial Arts 5 (Against Exalts +2), Medicine 1, Melee 2, Occult 3, Performance 3, Presence 4, Resistance 1, Ride 1, Socialize 2, Stealth 3, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Artifact 8, Backing 5, Breeding 2, Command 5, Connections (Atsiluth Eternal) 2, Connections (The Forest Witches) 5, Connections (Great Forks) 4, Manse 4, Resources 5, Reputation 3

Charms: Blazing Courageous Swordsmen Inspiration, Elemental Concentration Trance, Five-Dragon Blocking Technique, Five-Dragon Claw, Five-Dragon Fist, Five-Dragon-Force Blow, Five-Dragon Form, Five-Dragon Fortitude, Five-Dragon Invulnerability, Five-Dragon Wrath, Glowing Coal Radiance, Loquacious Courtier Technique, Phantom Fire-Warrior Horde, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Voices on the Wind, Wind-Carried Words Technique

Spells: Connivance of Wood and Bone, Emerald Countermagic, Stormwind Rider, Wood Dragon's Claw

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 6B Defense 8

Five-Dragon-Force Blow: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 8B Defense 9

Five-Dragon Force-Blow with Wood Dragon's Claw: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 12L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 6/4 **Soak:** 17L/20B (Jade superheavy plate, 15L/15B, -2 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 13 **Peripheral Essence:** 35 (25)

Committed Essence: 10

Other Notes: Ghandarva wears a dragon tear tiara set with a Stone of Healing claimed from a small and insecurely held Manse near the Witches' lands. Austere blue-jade armor protects him in battle. He is the technical owner of Domnica's Mantle and several veils of the anointed. Ghandarva has a Combo including Five-Dragon Force Blow, Five-Dragon Claw and Five-Dragon Wrath. He names this the Talon of Mela. When he invokes it, a gale pours past him, tearing away his face and exposed flesh to reveal scaled skin and a dragon head formed of Essence. The dragon shape revealed charges his foe, battering her like a furious wind. Then, it fades, and Ghandarva's body returns to normal.

VITALI PROSERIA

Description: For over three centuries, Vitali Proseria has ruled the dead of the city. Long before she died, she laid the seeds for her coup. Her purpose, which she pursues ruthlessly, is to establish the Sea of Mind as a self-sustaining reality that retains the rules it follows now. The dream of Atsiluth Eternal currently allows the dead to shape paradise and gives the elders' council rule over the dead. If this is still true when the Sea becomes self-sustaining,





Proseria expects to rule both Atsiluth Eternal and a perfect Creation forever.

Proseria's enemies are many. The people of Creation are not overeager to surrender all their magical wealth to the forest pool. Ghandarva, who understands Proseria's motivations, expects to rule the new empire himself. Although she cooperates with the Black Scale Embassy in some matters, Vitali Proseria understands that the Ebon Dragon's plans for Atsiluth Eternal can mean nothing good.

The Spear Sutra, it seems to her, has some validity. To handle those who stand in her way, she must simply give them reason to do otherwise.

Aspect: Earth

Nature: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 2

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 5 (Smashfist +1), Bureaucracy 5 (Cowing Bureaucrats +1), Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Investigation 4, Larceny 2, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Forest-tongue, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 3 (Atsiluth Eternal +1), Melee 2, Occult 3, Performance 4 (Oratory +2), Presence 4 (Coalition Leadership +2), Resistance 2, Ride 2, Socialize 4 (Political Manipulation +2), Stealth 2, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 5, Breeding 4, Connections (Atsiluth Eternal) 5, Connections (The Black Scale Embassy) 2, Connections (The Forest Witches) 3, Henchmen 2

Charms: Atsiluth's Bounty, Benevolent Master's Blessing, Blade-Deflecting Palm, Drowning Embrace, Falsehood Unearthing Attitude, Observer Awareness Method, Ox-Body Technique, Pounding Surf Style, Riptide Method, Scent-of-Crime Method, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Thoughtful Gift Technique, Thrashing Carp Serenade, Vision Outside Time

Spells: Connivance of Wood and Bone, Death of Obsidian Butterflies, Demon of the First Circle, Impenetrable Frost Barrier, Infallible Messenger, Sworn Brothers' Oath

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 2B Defense 7

Paired Jade Smashfists (Surgeon and End to Mourning): Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 5L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 5/3 **Soak:** 13L/18B (Jade articulated plate with walking stone, 12L/14B, -2 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 17 **Peripheral Essence:** 38 (27)

Committed Essence: 11

Other Notes: Proseria acts in the world through a suit of Radiant Dragon Armor (articulated plate). She wields

paired blue jade smashfists, Surgeon and End to Mourning. When striking with Surgeon, she ignores half the lethal soak of her target's armor. When striking with End to Mourning, she inflicts euphoria on any target she damages. For the next five turns, the target's player must succeed at a reflexive Temperance check made after initiative for the target to take any non-reflexive actions that turn.

NUMINA

The pantheon of the mist, as worshiped by the mortal servants of the Witches, stands at four members. Iurka, the Autumnal Torrent, embodies dance, battle, destiny and the stars. Menderes, the Face Behind the Sky, governs night, the social graces, failure and prophetic vision. Samathi Anja, the Shadow of the Knife, masters all remnant things. Finally, Seven-Face Rèsja rules change, weather, hounds, fire and new endeavors.

Each numen offers certain benefits and limitations to sorcerers who conjure his aspect using Connivance of Wood and Bone (see p. 128). Numina continuously possess their own benefits and limitations unless stated otherwise.

IURKA, THE AUTUMNAL TORRENT

Description: She carved away her stillness to make the toad idol Setsi-Lum that hangs around her ankle. For this reason, Iurka may never rest. To think of motion is to move, and she pours through the world like water driven by a storm. She carved away her uncertainty to make the spider bangle Menine-Li that hangs around her wrist. For this reason, Iurka makes no choices: She knows but cannot speak the long path of her destiny from now until her death. She has seven arms, eighteen legs and three faces, yet, as she has carved away her ugliness, she is beautiful. So much of herself has she carved away that she sheds at every moment a trail of sparkling blood, each drop colored red, orange, yellow or gold. When seen in the distance, she seems a great long streamer-tailed kite or perhaps a glittering dragon. Up close, with the blood splashing against one's eyes, the sight becomes somewhat more macabre.

Iurka argues that stillness only leads to suffering, as one's enemies find one. Choice leads only to pain, as one's enemies punish one. Failure leads only to pain, as one cannot help but suffer for one's own inadequacies. Her own existence is proof that one may escape this state: for nothing hurts Iurka that she does not already suffer.

Former Aspect: Fire

Nature: Martyr

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 5, Temperance 1, Valor 5

Abilities: Athletics 5 (Tricky Maneuvers +2), Awareness 1, Dodge 5, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm);



High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 1, Martial Arts 4 (Hook Swords +2), Occult 3, Performance 4, Resistance 2, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Cult 1

Charms: Bellows-Pumping Stride, Dematerialize, Effortlessly Rising Flame, Falling Star Maneuver, Fiery Prowess, Flickering Candle Meditation, Incense Smoke Ladder, Ox-Body Technique, Safety Among Enemies, Smoke Obscuring Effect, Unbreathing Earth Meditation, Uneating Earth Meditation, Unfeeling Earth Meditation, Unsleeping Earth Meditation

Numen Effects:

Carve Away: For one point of Conviction, Iurka can carve away a weakness from anything she touches. This does not affect Traits, but it can remove addictions, personality flaws, disease, weak links, blotches, wrinkles, cracks, barrenness, curses, holes in strategic defenses and so forth.

Dragon Kite: For one point of Conviction, Iurka can whisk someone away, taking his hand and dragging him up to five dizzying miles in the blink of an eye. She can only take someone to a place that her victim could safely travel to through normal means.

Shape in the Distance: For one point of Conviction, Iurka can stay entirely out of the story for a scene, regardless of how vigorously others pursue her.

Cost To Dematerialize: 22

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Exceptional Hook Swords: Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 7L Defense 14

Dodge Pool: 10/9 **Soak:** 10L/15B (Blood, jade reinforced buff jacket and spider bangle, -1 mobility penalty, +1 difficulty to attack)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 12 **Peripheral Essence:** 31

Committed Essence: 0

Other Notes: The warm blood that coats Iurka acts as the Fur/Feathers/Leaves pox, giving her an extra point of soak and an extra die on Survival rolls. She has the Multiple Limbs blight, reducing the penalties for multiple actions by one.

If Iurka wills it, the toad idol Setsi-Lum asserts its stillness and cannot be moved by any power short of Solar Circle Sorcery. In this state, it can suspend an arbitrary weight or hold a door against the strongest Exalt's charge. The spider bangle Menine-Li confuses attackers, raising the difficulty of attacking Iurka by 1.

MENDERES, THE FACE BEHIND THE SKY

Description: Menderes is a dream, and in that dream, he watches from far away. Now and again, those who know the Witches find themselves aware of his study. As their eyes look upon his form or his eyes fall upon them, they see a vision of the numen standing outside the observable world, before a crystal globe. In that globe, they see themselves: petty figures in a bounded existence. When his hand caresses the top of the globe, the sky shudders at



fox



his touch. When his hand lifts it from the pedestal, the earth and air reek with the sense of confinement.

On occasion, Menderes' gaze falls lightly, and those who find themselves thinking of him feel nothing more ominous than the sense of his presence. Sometimes, if such is his will, those he looks upon have more distorted fantasies and, in flashes of unwilling daydream, find themselves slain or tortured by him. The stress of his study builds, and weak minds have cracked under it. Stronger souls have struck at him, sometimes even successfully, and dreamt they felt their blade reach beyond the sky.

Menderes has the head of a cockatiel and seven serpent tails. His skin is red with heat, and his eyes lost in shadow. Each of his three hands has an extra finger. He radiates an unpleasant spiritual aura that yields a pervasive but low-grade sense of stress and fear.

Former Aspect: Water

Nature: Survivor

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 2

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Larceny 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Forest-tongue, High Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 3, Martial Arts 2, Melee 2 (Grimcleaver +3), Occult 3, Performance 2, Presence 2, Ride 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Breeding 2, Cult 1

Charms: Dematerialize, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Ears of the Snowy Owl, Feeling-the-Air Technique, Hearing & Touch-Riding Technique, Hopping Firecracker Evasion, Observer Awareness Method, Precision Observation Technique, Spring Follows Winter, Threshold Warding Stance, Trackless Walk Style, Window-in-the-Door Technique

Numen Effects:

Stressful Presence: Menderes' presence is oppressive. Spending one point of Temperance increases this effect. For a scene, everyone able to see him loses one success from all rolls.

Nightmare: For one point of Temperance, Menderes can cast someone into a nightmarish vision. Roll one die for each point of temporary Willpower the victim possesses. Set her temporary Willpower to the number of successes rolled. The victim cannot spend Willpower to gain an automatic success on this roll.

Silence the World: For one point of Temperance, Menderes can cast a veil of distance, obfuscation and silence over the world. For a mile around, for everyone except Menderes, the difficulty of Awareness rolls rises by two. Noticing things that normally require no roll — for example, that a comrade is speaking or that one is about to walk into a tree — requires two successes on a Perception + Awareness roll. This effect lasts for one scene.

Cost To Dematerialize: 21

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Jade Grimcleaver (Biting Wit): Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 10L Defense 8

Jade Short Powerbow (Piercing Gaze): Accuracy 7 Damage 5L Rate 3 Range 300

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 8L/8B (Jade-Alloy Breastplate)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/

Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 13 **Peripheral Essence:** 29 (20)

Committed Essence: 9

Other Notes: Menderes' inhuman head gives him two extra dice to Awareness rolls. He has the Tail affliction, giving him two extra dice to Athletics-related endeavors, and the blight Multiple Limbs, which reduces the penalty for multiple actions by one. He wears a red jade ring that heats his flesh; anyone who touches him and whose player fails a Stamina + Resistance roll suffers one level of lethal damage.

SAMATHI ANJA, THE SHADOW OF THE KNIFE

Description: The Forest Witches leave their corpses in the woods for Samathi Anja. They give her the bones of their meals. She is the guardian in the forest of remnant things: of refuse and lingering love, vomit and abandoned plans, discarded slaves and memories of childhood. She is all these things and takes all their forms. When one encounters that within the forest that should exist only as a memory, it is Anja.

Samathi Anja sometimes wears the form of a skinless eyeless cat, of a woman cut in half down the center or of a great seething pile of cast-off snake skins. When she comes to the camp as a representative of the mist, however, she looks as she did in life, save more tired, more sad and with dead black eyes. It is Ghandarva's contention that this is natural, and when she cut away every element of her nature, she found herself still remaining — for who but Anja could do the cutting? Nevertheless, he does not meet the creature's gaze.

Former Aspect: Air

Nature: Martyr

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 1, Valor 3

Abilities: Archery 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Forest-tongue, Guild Cant, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 5 (Subtleties of Connotation +3), Lore 3 (Mysteries of the Forest +1), Martial Arts 2, Melee 2 (Knives +2), Performance 1, Presence 3, Ride 1, Socialize 2, Stealth 3, Thrown 5 (Knives +3)

Backgrounds: Breeding 1, Connections (The Forest Witches) 2, Cult 2



Charms: Dematerialize, Elemental Concentration Trance, Feeling-the-Air Technique, Language-Learning Ritual, Loyal Weapon, Poisoned Tongue Technique, Seeking Throw Technique, Soundless Action Prana, Thousand Tongues Meditation, Vengeful Gust Counterattack, Voice of Mastery, Voices on the Wind, Whirlwind Shield Form, Wind-Carried Words Technique, Wind Armor Technique, With One Mind

Numen Effects:

Rot: For one point of Conviction, Samathi Anja can infuse her knives with the Essence of decay. This lasts for one scene, during which flesh struck by the knives begins to rot. This increases the weapons' damage by 5L. Those damaged by one of her knife attacks suffer a cumulative penalty of 1 to all rolls. This is a simple action.

Summon Trash: For one point of Conviction, Samathi Anja can summon the remains of anything ever lost within the forest. If she conjures refuse, she can summon it in an arbitrary quantity and place it where she wishes (save inside someone else's body). If she conjures a dead person, she may either awaken a zombie or duplicate the person as he was in life. In the latter case, the duplicate lasts for one minute before fading into memory, and she does not control its actions. If she calls forth forgotten knowledge or skill, she possesses it until the scene ends. Activating this power is treated as a dice action but requires no roll.

Shame: For two points of Conviction, Samathi Anja can show someone everything in their spirit better abandoned.

Regardless of their other actions, the two engage in an opposed reflexive Willpower + Essence test until one accumulates three more successes than the other. If Anja wins, she breaks the will of her victim, who collapses in shame. Like someone on mete leaf, the victim follows directions without interest or reflection until something triggers him to notice his environment. (This is at the Storyteller's option, normally occurring when the character's Virtues or sense of self-preservation drive him to do so.) This is a simple action.

Mist: For one point of Conviction, Samathi Anja can call forth the mist or any of its other numina. This is a reflexive action.

Cost To Dematerialize: 22

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Exceptional Knife: Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 4L Defense 7

Thrown Exceptional Knife: Accuracy 14 Damage 5L (Rate 3, Range 15)

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 9L/9B (Armored hide, chain shirt, 7L/5B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 12

Peripheral Essence: 33

Committed Essence: 0

Other Notes: Samathi Anja is no longer truly alive. Her entire body is essentially armor guarding the two things that remain important — the heart cavity and her overall physical integrity. This gives her the effects of the Armored Hide blight (4L/4B soak and an extra four dice to survival rolls). In many shapes, she also has the Huge affliction, gaining two dots each of Strength and Stamina and an additional -0 and -1 health level.

SEVEN-FACE RÈSJA

Description: Those who go into the woods may meet a creature compelling in its persuasion, perfect in beauty and seductive beyond measure. They make bargains with it, sometimes wise and sometimes strange, or they ask to dream of it, and this, it grants, or they take it to bed. The bargains are left unfulfilled. The dreams are full of confusion and change. The creature they sleep with becomes a horror beneath them. Wise heads nod and say, "Ah, that was Rèsja." For, having longed for change, Rèsja could not decide what to become. Now, it is beyond Rèsja to stay one thing long enough for a promise or a memory or love. It does not hold back. Rèsja wears each new face with whole devotion. But even when its nature pleases Rèsja, the mist calls it back, to cut away its shape again.

There is no consistency to Rèsja's appearance save its perfection. Rèsja is one of the great living artists of the self, although, at times, it recreates itself in a horrific or peculiar form. Even in these cases, every detail lends itself to the desired effect. Rèsja is often followed, at a discreet distance,





by a swarm of insects. Some of these Rèsja has made intelligent to serve it. Others are mortals who bargained away their humanity to spend their lives near it. Every few years, Rèsja eats them all and must rebuild the swarm again.

Former Aspect: Water

Nature: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 1, Temperance 2, Valor 3

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (Sculpture) 3, Craft (Self) 5, Dodge 4, Endurance 1, Larceny 2, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; High Realm) 1, Lore 2, Martial Arts 5 (Unworthy Opponents +2), Melee 2, Occult 2, Performance 4, Presence 2, Resistance 1, Sail 2, Socialize 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Breeding 2, Cult 1

Charms: Crashing Wave Style, Dematerialize, Drowning-in-Blood Technique, Flow Reversal Strike, Flowing Water Defense, Rippling Water Strike, Shrugging Water Dragon Escape, Spirit Sight, Theft-of-Essence Method, Water Dragon Form

Numen Effects:

Swift Change: Spending a point of Compassion, Rèsja can recover from up to one blight, two afflictions or four pox, while simultaneously acquiring a similar number.

Tame: For one point of Compassion, Rèsja can tame any living creature. Intelligent creatures can recognize the sudden affection and devotion as irrational and need not

obey her. However, when dealing with someone she has tamed, Rèsja can make any social roll twice and take the better of the two results. Further, that person must spend a point of Willpower each turn to attack her in any fashion. **Shared Transformation:** For one point of Compassion, Rèsja can sculpt any willing person's shape, remaking her as an animal, a human or some combination thereof. Countermagic of any circle breaks this effect, but subjects who spend a long time in animal form may need time to fully recover their humanity.

Cost To Dematerialize: 20

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 2B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 8 Damage 4B Defense 8

Dragon's Claws: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 4L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 7L/9B (Black-jade-and-moonsilver-thread dress)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 12

Peripheral Essence: 28

Committed Essence: 0

Other Notes: Rèsja has various pox, afflictions and blights depending on its mood. It often wears a magnificent dress of First Age design, with black jade and moonsilver rendered down into fine threads that trace patterns through the white cloth. Originally crafted for a Lunar Exalt, the dress adjusts its shape to match Rèsja's. Although the dress always fits well, it does not always remain perfectly appropriate.

CONNIVANCE OF WOOD AND BONE

Cost: 15 motes

This spell calls up one of the aspects of the forest mist, binding it to the sorcerer and vice versa. A roiling cloud of vapor rises around the character. Tiny flecks of the character's Essence flake off, opening channels by which the power of the mist can reach the character's heart. Make a Willpower + Essence roll for the character. Each success represents one day that the character falls under a numen's influence, gaining certain abilities and suffering certain restrictions. The character chooses the numen in question when casting the spell. On a botch, the character is drawn to the forest to join the community of Witches there. For those already belonging to the Witches, botching has no additional effect. The sorcerer cannot voluntarily terminate this effect. Ending it prematurely requires Emerald Countermagic. This is a form of self-transformation and cannot affect Lunar Exalted.

Iurka: A sorcerer who summons Iurka's aspect receives one automatic success whenever using a stunt based on dexterity, foresight or beauty. This is in addition to the normal bonus dice. The Autumnal Torrent also offers a lesson, so that others may understand the virtues of Iurka's escape from stillness and uncertainty. Players of those struck

by the sorcerer's open palm must succeed at a reflexive Valor roll, or their characters find themselves, for an eternal moment, in a still and quiet place full of darkness. There, they wait, full of the knowledge of their own flaws, for a shape unspecified to come and mete out justice. This vision costs the victim one point of temporary Willpower.

Those who summon *Lurka* must make her sacrifice: They can neither rest nor sleep while under her influence. Without rest, they cannot recover Essence naturally. Instead, they regain 1 mote for each hour spent in vigorous physical activity. In addition, they bleed in a quiet trickle from two locations of their choice, and this bleeding will not stop. This effect causes one level of unsoakable bashing damage that cannot be healed until the effects of the spell end.

Menderes: A sorcerer who conjures the aspect of Menderes onto himself fades from view. His player can roll twice for any Stealth action the character takes and use the better of the two results. Moreover, those who do see the sorcerer see him as a daydream or a figment of their imagination. Even total certainty that he is actually there does not affect this perception. This subtracts two dice from all dice pools to attack him. Conversely, if his player makes a successful Perception + Awareness roll, the sorcerer can witness the daydreams of others and optionally interact with them.

Menderes does not speak, and a sorcerer under Menderes' aspect has difficulty communicating. Regardless of the means he uses to get a message across, he can convey only

simple emotional concepts — things such as “vague unhappiness” or “snide laughter.” An Intelligence + Awareness roll against difficulty 3 can garner a little more of the sense of his communication. The sorcerer can share more general two- or three-word ideas with those whose players make the roll, such as “ambush ahead” or “oh, you idiot!”

Samathi Anja: A sorcerer who summons Samathi Anja's aspect receives one automatic success on Lore and Occult rolls. She can travel unerringly to lost things, unless concealed by a power greater than Terrestrial Circle Sorcery. If she attempts to locate an item thus concealed, she instead finds her way to the god Madame Marthesine of the Lost, with whom she may discuss the matter further.

In addition, the sorceress can store any number of her possessions Elsewhere, retrieving one with a simple action. When the spell ends or suffers the touch of counter magic, any possessions still in Elsewhere are destroyed (if possible) or lost. If she finds anything willingly discarded, it belongs to her by occult law. This has no direct effects, but may interact with the laws of the Fair Folk and the actions of certain Charms.

A sorcerer under the influence of this aspect casts off her nature. She may not regain Willpower, even after this spell ends, until she works a significant treachery against herself or her goals.

Rèsja: A sorceress who conjures the aspect of Rèsja cannot fail to please. No power short of Celestial Circle Sorcery can force her to look graceless or inept. She receives





one automatic success on all rolls based on Appearance or dealing with etiquette. This rises to three automatic successes for non-magical rolls. She may lay a magical binding on any bargains or agreements she makes. If the other party breaks the agreement, he suffers three great strokes of ill fortune. The sorceress, like Rèsja itself, is under no obligation to keep the bargain. When it is sealed, her nature changes, and it no longer applies. (This may or may not function against unrelated powers that enforce bargains.)

Each time a sorceress invokes Rèsja's aspect, she must sacrifice some facet of herself to it and claim another in its place. Appropriate possibilities include minor aspects of appearance; phobias, phobias and other personality traits; tastes in clothing; style of speech; or her approach to society, combat or life. This does not normally include changes in Traits, although Rèsja's aspect can justify spending experience on them.

INVESTIGATION CHARMS

ATSILOTH'S BOUNTY

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Investigation: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

Those who live in Atsiluth Eternal dwell in luxury such as even the Forest Witches cannot imagine. With a moment's study of the Essence flows around her, a character can bring forth unbounded wealth. Invoking this Charm within Atsiluth Eternal, a character can conjure any mundane object or structure, as well as any artifact or Manse up to level 5. However, the artifacts and Hearthstones this Charm creates only affect the "material" reality of Atsiluth Eternal. They can improve the user's perceptions but cannot otherwise divine information or directly affect the minds of others. They cannot act at range without some physical effect that conveys their power to the target. Outside of Atsiluth Eternal, they do not function at all. The Sea of Mind chooses where the summoned thing appears — the character cannot summon a Manse into the air above an enemy, although she can expect a summoned weapon to appear in her hand.

VISION OUTSIDE TIME

Cost: 2 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Investigation: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Atsiluth's Bounty, Falsehood Unearthing Attitude

The Exalt sprinkles a few drops of blood upon the dust of Atsiluth Eternal and calls forth her vision soul: an image of herself drawn from a dream of future days. Such images are

vicious, twisted and perverted liars, desiring primarily to torment those who call them forth with false hopes and false despairs. A wise Witch can, nevertheless, finagle hints from them about the future, the present and the past. The player makes a Manipulation + Investigation roll. If the Storyteller wishes to play out the conversation, then each success represents an opportunity to force out such a truth. The Exalt can spend one of these successes at any time to determine the vision soul's motivation behind a given statement — for example, to tease the Exalt with obfuscation, to encourage unwarranted despair or to save face after being tricked into making some admission. Otherwise, the difficulty of the roll is 3, and success tells the character one thing she should watch for, one thing she should fear and one thing she should desire.

CHARACTER CREATION

This section provides the rules needed to create Forest Witch characters. The process of creating a Witch much resembles the process of making a Dynast from the Blessed Isle of the waning Realm, but it differs in a few key respects. The following material details these differences, customizing character design to the children of the woods.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

As usual, the most important step in character creation is defining the character you wish to play. You need a character concept that you will find enjoyable, that fits well into the Storyteller's game and that meshes reasonably well with the concepts of the other players. Decide what brought your character to the Forest Witches and how your character reacts to the ideals of its various factions. The Witches focus strongly on the goal of perfecting themselves, but this means something different to each of them. Your character's approach to this goal shapes her allegiance and how the other Witches regard her.

Depending on the game, the Storyteller may or may not want dead characters or numina of the mist — check before making such a character. In either case, have a solid reason for the character to interact regularly with the other characters and the world.

ORIGINS

Most Forest Witches are outcastes who drift by various routes from the Realm into the Witches' woods. The remainder are born in the Near East, roughly half of them descending from the Witches themselves.

STEP TWO: CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

As with all characters, Forest Witches begin with each Attribute at one dot. As heirs to the glory of the Realm and the heralds of a new Creation, their potential exceeds that of ordinary mortals. However, only those who drive them-

selves past the limits of that potential will equal the unnaturally privileged children of the Unconquered Sun.

A Forest Witch has seven (7) dots to divide among her primary Attributes, six (6) dots to divide among her secondary Attributes and four (4) dots to divide among her tertiary Attributes. Attribute values range between one and five dots.

STEP THREE: CHOOSING ABILITIES

Abilities begin with a rating of zero and are divided according to which element each skill is attuned to.

- **Air Abilities** arise from one's Temperance, the understated effort that brings a flawless victory. They are Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

- **Earth Abilities** draw on one's Compassion, the empathy for the world that makes one immortal. They are Awareness, Craft, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.

- **Fire Abilities** arise from one's Valor, the passion that conquers all obstacles. They are Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.

- **Water Abilities** draw on all the Virtues and none, for Aspects of Water are fluid in spirit. Their Abilities are Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.

- **Wood Abilities** derive from one's Conviction, the mastery of self that enables the mastery of others' flesh and soul. They are Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.

Every Forest Witch has a natural affinity with her element's Abilities. In addition, she selects three (3) Abilities to be her *Favored Abilities*. These Abilities are also natural for her, but this affinity stems from who she is, not what. She cannot choose an Aspect Ability as a Favored Ability.

Outcastes who join the Forest Witches as adults have Abilities appropriate to their origins. Ex-Dynasts have 35 points of Abilities, 13 of which they must spend on their Aspect and Favored Abilities. Most other outcastes, including those raised by Oreithyia, have 25 points of Abilities, 10 of which they must spend on their Aspect and Favored Abilities. Abilities have a maximum of three dots at this stage, but bonus points and experience can raise them to four or five. If raised by the forest walker, characters must have a minimum of Athletics •, Awareness •, Brawl •, Stealth •, Endurance ••, Occult •• and Survival ••.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Players have 12 dots to spend on Backgrounds. They use the Dragon-Blooded versions of all Backgrounds, except for the Manse Background.

Instead of measuring attunement to the Realm's Manses, the Manse Background measures attunement to the Manses of the woods. Subtract three dots from the Manse Background when determining the Hearthstones the character has access to. Characters with Hearthstones are either Mandala Guard or Witches who have conquered a Manse outside the Witches' territory.

The Virtues are of particular import to the Forest Witches, as these passions and desires drive them to the four perfections. Characters raised by Oreithyia, in particular, reflect this peculiar emphasis of their culture. In addition to a starting rate of one dot in each Virtue, your character has six additional dots to divide among the four Virtues — Compassion, Conviction, Temperance and Valor. You cannot raise Virtues above 3 without the use of bonus points.

Note the character's highest Virtue. This Virtue is affected by the Great Curse, as detailed on page 150 of **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded**.

- **Traditional Dragon-Blooded:** Select seven Charms from among the list of Dragon-Blooded Charms, as detailed in Chapter Five of **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded**. At least four of your character's Charms must be selected from her Aspect or Favored Abilities.

- **Former Immaculate Monks:** Characters who belonged to the Immaculate monks or who attended the Cloister of Wisdom before turning their back on the Realm and joining the Forest Witches instead select five Charms from the Immaculate martial-arts styles, as detailed in Chapter Six of **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded**.

- **The Dead:** As above.

- **Numina:** As above, but replace one Charm with Dematerialize. The character must take either Cult • or Cult •• as a Background. In addition, your character receives the benefits described on page 118. This may cost your character a point of Temperance. Traditional Dragon-Blooded must still pick four of their Charms from Aspect or Favored Abilities.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Calculate a Forest Witch's starting Willpower by adding together her two highest Virtues. She begins with an Essence of 2. Each of these Traits can be increased using bonus points.

Calculate a Witch's Personal Essence pool by adding together her Essence and Willpower ratings (Essence + Willpower), plus any additional points granted by the Breeding Background. (See **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded**, p. 158.)

Calculate a Witch's Peripheral Essence pool by multiplying her Essence Trait by four and then adding the sum of her Willpower and her two highest Virtues ([Essence x 4] + Willpower + [the sum of her two highest Virtues]), plus any additional points granted by the Breeding Background.

Forest Witches have the normal mortal seven health levels — a -0 health level, two -1 health levels, two -2 health levels, a -4 health level and an Incapacitated health level — plus any additional health levels gained from the Ox-Body Technique.

Dragon-Blooded characters have 15 bonus points that may be spent at any time during character creation. See the chart on page 133 for the bonus point cost of raising each Trait.



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose concept, aspect, Nature and heritage.
Note the anima powers provided by the character's aspect.

• STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (7/6/4)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Note Aspect Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (3; may not be the same as Aspect Abilities).

Choose Abilities (35 — at least 13 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities; at least one must be in each Favored Ability; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points. Characters raised by the Dynasty must have a minimum of Archery •, Brawl or Martial Arts •, Melee •, Performance •, Presence •, Ride •, Lore •• and Socialize ••. Characters raised elsewhere receive only 25 points of Abilities. Of these 25, 10 must be spent on Aspect or Favored Abilities. If raised by Oreithyia, they must have a minimum of Athletics •, Awareness •, Brawl •, Stealth •, Endurance ••, Occult •• and Survival ••.)

• STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

Choose Backgrounds (12 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points; numina must have Cult • or Cult ••), Charms (7 taken from Dragon-Blooded Charms OR 5 taken from Immaculate Order Charms — at least 4 must be from Aspect

or Favored Abilities if the character is not learning Immaculate martial arts. If the character is an Immaculate martial artist, all the Charms must be part of the same elemental tree. Numina replace one Charm with Dematerialize.), Virtues (6 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points).

If playing a numen, work with the Storyteller to choose effects (one per point of Essence), deformities (up to one blight, one affliction and three pox) and the effects of summoning the character's aspect with Convivance of Wood and Bone. Reduce Temperance by one dot if the character has a blight or affliction.

• STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Record Essence (2), Willpower (add the total of two highest Virtues — may not start at higher than 8 unless at least two Virtues are 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool (Essence + Willpower, plus any gained from Breeding), Peripheral Essence pool ([Essence x 4] + Willpower + [the sum of your two highest Virtues], plus any gained from Breeding) and health levels (7, plus any gained from Charms).

• BONUS POINTS

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

ELEMENTAL ASPECTS

• Air:

Aspect Abilities: Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

Anima Powers: May triple his leaping distance, and takes no damage from falls.

• Earth:

Aspect Abilities: Awareness, Craft, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.

Anima Powers: May soak lethal damage with her entire Stamina.

• Fire:

Aspect Abilities: Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.

Anima Powers: May burst into flame for a scene, doing lethal damage and becoming immune to fire damage.



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

- **Water:**

Aspect Abilities: Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.

Anima Powers: A Terrestrial Exalt aspected to Water can gain free movement in water. For the rest of the day, she can breathe underwater and operate as freely as if she was in air.

- **Wood:**

Aspect Abilities: Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.

Anima Powers: May add dice to Dodge or Athletics actions.

- **Mist:**

Aspect Abilities: None.

Aspect Powers: One numen effect per point of Essence.

VIRTUES

- **Compassion** — Empathy and forgiveness.
- **Conviction** — Emotional endurance.
- **Temperance** — Self-control and clear-headedness.
- **Valor** — Courage and bravery.

BACKGROUNDS

- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Artifact** — Weapons and tools crafted from the Five Magical Materials, including wonders of the First Age.
- **Backing** — Standing and rank in an organization of power and influence.
- **Breeding** — Your lineage, reflecting how strongly your blood resonates to your chosen element.
- **Command** — Authorization to lead the Forest Witches' soldiers.

- **Connections** — Information sources and friends in useful places that give you pull in the world around you.

- **Cult** — Worshipers whose devotions give you strength. See page 118, page 127 of *Games of Divinity* or page 98 of *Exalted: The Lunars*.

- **Familiar** — An animal companion.

- **Henchmen** — Agents who do your bidding.

- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence that you have access to.

- **Mentor** — A patron and instructor.

- **Reputation** — How society views you and your actions.

- **Resources** — Material goods and money.

- **Retainers** — Mortals who serve you.

- **Family** — *Notable family members. Optional, see page 279 of Chapter Seven: Storytelling in Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded.*

BONUS POINTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Background	1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Virtue	3 (2 if raised by Oreithyia)
Willpower	2
Essence	10 (8 if raised by Oreithyia)
Charm	7 (5 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Immaculate Charm	10 (7 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)





CHAPTER FOUR LOST EGGS



Once the seed of the Dragon-Blooded has mingled in a bloodline, there is a chance, no matter how minute, that, at some point in the future, a descendent will bear the touch of the Five Elemental Dragons, be it in the next generation or after a score of them have passed. Thus, the hereditary nature of the Terrestrial Exaltation is such that any indiscretion or chance sexual encounter could lead to Dragon-Blooded offspring. That fact, combined with the breadth of the Old Realm and the Shogunate that came after it, means that nearly every piece of land in Creation has known the tread of Dragon-Blooded footsteps and that outcaste Exaltations occur in areas that have not seen a Terrestrial Exalt in centuries. Savants of the Realm have averred that, if all of Creation were to be accounted for, these Dragon-Blooded outcastes would number in the thousands at any one time.

A HISTORY OF OUTCASTES

The word “outcaste” itself had little meaning until after several centuries of the Scarlet Empress’ rule. Before that, the idea of dividing the Dragon-Blooded into separate groups based on who resided in the Realm and who lived outside it would have been an alien one — the Shogunate had spanned across the whole of Creation, and the Dragon-Blooded Host was dispersed very widely after the strife of the Contagion. There were times, especially until the first centennial of the Empress’ reign, that there

were as many Terrestrial Exalted outside of the Realm as there were inside it.

Every Dynast knows that the strength of the Dragon-Blooded Host lies in its numbers, and this was never truer than in the tumultuous days following the Contagion and the rise to power of the Scarlet Empress. Every Terrestrial Exalt who could be enticed into following the Empress’ banner added to the nascent Realm’s strength, while every Dragon-Blood who remained on his own detracted from it. As such, the formative years of the Realm were shaped by the Empress’ attempts to make life on the Blessed Isle more attractive than life in the chaotic Threshold states, which had been devastated after years of warfare against an inhuman foe. Anyone bearing the mark of Terrestrial Exaltation was given the same blandishments to join the newly formed Realm, whether they were some bastard three generations removed from a chance sexual counter or an officer of the Shogunate exhausted after decades of conflict.

The Realm thus went about absorbing most of the Terrestrial Exalted who lived in the distant corners of what had been the Shogunate, until such time as the Empress was eventually satisfied that those who were going to move to the Blessed Isle had done so. In the Empress’ estimation, those Terrestrial Exalted that remained in the Threshold were, at best, irresolute and content with their minor holdings on the edge of the Inland Sea. At worst, they were



potential threats to her power, as the Seventh Legion had proven itself to be in RY 89, at the Battle of Melevhil.

By the second centennial of the Empress' reign — a full Dragon-Blooded generation — the power of the Realm was well established, and the social structure of the Dynasty had been put into place to such an extent that the legacy of the Great Contagion seemed distant. The idea that some Dragon-Blooded existed "outside" of the Realm had become generally accepted, and the term outcaste came into everyday use to describe those who were unaware of — or, worse yet, eschewed — the Scarlet Empire. The Empress first used the term "lost eggs" in RY 212, during a speech to the Deliberative concerning the Delzahn horde's assumption of control over Chiaroscuro and the Tri-Khan's submission to the Realm. Her speech, delivered by proxy, discussed the new direction that statecraft with the Threshold states lining the Inland Sea would take. The Empress declared that she deemed that every outcaste was a "lost egg." The lucky ones fell "into the nest" by being chosen by destiny to be born on the Blessed Isle. All other outcastes had fallen "out of the nest" by being cast adrift in the Threshold. The Empress' desire, stated succinctly within the oration, was that all outcastes be integrated into the Realm and worked into the fabric of the Perfected Hierarchy.

THOSE WHO FALL INTO THE NEST

According to the divisions set down in the Empress' speech, outcastes could be divided into two groups — those born within the Realm, who were subject to the bureaucratic methods set down by the Empress for dealing with them, and those born outside of the Blessed Isle, who were left to decide their own fate among the cruel wilds of the Threshold. Among the outcastes born within the Realm, two other divisions soon appeared, separating those who were born to the upper-class patrician families from those who were born to the lower classes — the merchants, the peasants, the slaves and the disenfranchised.

Within the Realm, the moment of an outcaste's Exaltation is transcendent not just physically and spiritually, but socially. The outcaste had been a mere mortal child, and yet, she now finds herself physically, mentally and socially superior to her family and friends. As is to be expected from such a sudden transformation, many of these newly fledged Dragon-Blooded are not ready to take their places as Princes of the Earth. They will only be capable of handling the responsibilities and mastering the etiquette required of a member of the Dragon-Blooded Host after years of intense training and devoted study. The Realm has thus developed a number of different means to prepare an outcaste for a productive life as an Exalt of the Blessed Isle, the details of which vary based on what class the outcaste was born into. Those born into the patricians

social and economic class are not at an unforgivable deficit in regards to normal Dynasts, and so, they are dealt with by the same machinery that handles the Exalted children of Great Houses — the secondary school system. Lower-class outcastes, however, are years behind their patrician fellows and, therefore, must follow a different path to equip themselves with the tools necessary to become fully capable members of Dragon-Blooded society.

LOST EGGS AMONG THE PATRICIAN CLASS

Those who Exalt among the patrician class are in the best position to reach a lofty rank later in life, while, at the same time, they possess no real control over what happens to them just after they take the Second Breath. They are exempt from those laws that dictate the fates of lower-class outcastes, as their patrician family's social status, wealth and connections are presumably sufficient to shepherd the outcaste through his secondary school years by guaranteeing one of two fates for him — adoption or fosterage.

EXALTATION

Patrician Exalts are fortunate in that their Exaltations typically occur while they are at one of the primary schools and that these schools are well-prepared to deal with those who experience the Second Breath. As usual with Dynastic Exaltations, the faculty moves the young outcaste to the quarters set aside for the Terrestrial Exalted. What is unusual is that, unlike Dynastic Dragon-Blooded, these patrician outcastes find themselves to be the victims of prejudice and scorn from their fellow Exalts. While the newly Exalted students' futures are brighter than they could have ever possibly been as one of the unExalted, many outcastes fail to appreciate that fact as they suffer the jeers and barbs of their fellow Dragon-Blooded.

Worse yet is the fact that these lost eggs are an offense to the sensibilities of those scions of the Great Houses who have not yet Exalted. These young nobles' own insecurities about their futures are heightened by the fact that a member of a "lesser" class has been blessed by the Five Elemental Dragons. At a confusing time in these young Dynasts' lives, when their whole future is dependent on Exaltation, the presence of a patrician touched by such power is a slap in the face. The outcaste who Exalts in a primary school is a walking, breathing, social anomaly, neither Dynast nor mortal, and heightened tensions result. It is rare that such tensions ever erupt into violence — the outcaste youth is, after all, superior in every way to a mortal child — but in the already competitive world of the Dragon-Blooded educational system, the outcaste is subject to more pressure from his peers in an already confusing time.

The jeers suffered by the young outcaste are made still more troubling because of the uncertain future that comes with being a newly Exalted member of the patrician class.

Even as he struggles through lessons in the use of his power and the teachings that assure him of his place at the top of the Perfected Hierarchy, the young Exalt knows that his parents are attempting to find another family to adopt him permanently or, at the very least, to raise him for the next decade. Sometimes, the young patrician is mature enough to understand that such maneuvers are merely part of the great game of politics played at all times in the Imperial City and that his adoption or fosterage will result in increased wealth for his family and a better future for himself. In fact, some outcastes are acutely aware of the perks that come with membership in one of the Great Houses compared to their own (relatively) humble place in the social strata and look forward to their adoption.

More often than not, however, the outcaste only knows that his once comfortable and secure life has experienced a sea change. Everything he had once taken for granted — his future, his place in society and his very family — has been transformed by his Exaltation. The young outcaste's family is expected to hand its child over to a Great House for education and adult employment — after which, the outcaste becomes a full-fledged member of the house, taking the Dynastic founder's name as any other member of the line would. As painful as the loss of a child might be for the patrician family — especially one so favored by the Five Elemental Dragons — it has a valuable commodity on its hands. This means that outcastes among the patricians tend to be the subject of much horse-trading, as the family attempts to use the young Exalt to better the household's collective fortunes. The outcaste becomes, in effect, a means to an end as the patrician family sees how great an accommodation it can get from a Great House. An Exalt of a patrician family finds himself put in the position of human currency that can be loaned out or bartered away at his parents' whim.

NEGOTIATING FOR A FUTURE

Most families of the patrician class have contacts among one or more Great Houses, and they begin the

BOARDING SCHOOL DRAMAS

Using the boarding school as a setting for a campaign set around young Dragon-Blooded, as suggested in *Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded* (pp. 286-288), can be made more interesting by the introduction of a Exalt of patrician birth. Will the patrician outcaste allow himself to be pushed around by those Dynasts present? Will he fight back, accept his lot or attempt to manipulate his enemies? Is he a toady or a hero in his own right? The crucible that will forge the patrician outcaste's character is the school he has been sent to, either during his initial Exaltation or after his adoption or fosterage.



NOI SACKDA



process of adoption by approaching a single house and inquiring about interest in an outcaste child. Typically, the Great House is indeed interested — such adoptions not only result in a new Dragon-Blood being added to the line's strength, but also go a great way toward cementing a relationship between the two families. On those rare occasions when the sole Great House with a preexisting relationship to a patrician family is not interested in adopting, the family must scramble to find another Dynastic house interested in raising the child. In these cases, the adoption process takes on a hint of desperation, and the patrician side's position is at a disadvantage during negotiations. This is a rarity, though, since the best patrician families have ties to multiple Dynastic lines, and if one house isn't interested, another will be — only the most poor or down-at-the-heels patricians worry about having to approach strangers regarding an adoption.

After the initial approach, the Great House and the patrician family each agree to be represented at the bargaining table by leading members of their own families. While the nomination of representatives would be the subject of much lengthy back-and-forth discussion if it were to occur at any other time, with an outcaste child, time is of the essence. Every week wasted dithering over who sits across the table from whom is a week that the

outcaste loses from her patronage, falling that much further behind normal Dynasts.

Once the families agree upon who will handle negotiations for each side, the two representatives sit down and begin discussion. Depending on the parties involved, the stakes can vary wildly, although there are always several components discussed during an adoption: social, political and economic. In addition, the actual terms of the outcaste's upbringing are discussed and set down in detail, so the patricians know just what they can expect awaits the child they are giving up.

Social components to the negotiations include those informal ties that will be established between the patrician family and the Great House. These ties can be as simple and informal as invitations to parties held by the Great House or as complex and permanent as arranged marriages between the two groups. If the Great House looks upon the patrician house as marriage material, the negotiators will decide which scions of the families will be most advantageously wed together. If the patrician clan has economic or bureaucratic assets that the Great House desires, the Dynasts may marry favored, unExalted children off to the brightest lights of the patrician household. If the patrician family has little going for it in any sphere, the Great House may refuse to cement the adoption with a marriage at all or marry off those family members who would, under any other circumstances,

ISELSI ADOPTIONS

House Iselsi is the Great House that is, at the same time, the most in need of adoptees and the least likely to get them. In the past, the House was able to surreptitiously gain control of lost eggs that fell into the nest by either co-opting them from the Immaculate Order (with the tacit permission of the Mouth of Peace) or by occasionally arranging a favor through the All-Seeing Eye or the Immaculate Order for a patrician whose child had Exalted. Although the Iselsi were unable to wield open power in those organizations in order to broker favors for adoption purposes, they subtly manipulated them as often as they could without drawing the Empress' ire.

More often than not, the Iselsi had nothing to offer a patrician family in exchange for its young offspring, and so, they were effectively out of the running. Only the poorest of patricians would arrange to have a child raised by the hidden and much-maligned Iselsi. Those few other outcastes who fell into the Iselsi's hands were ones who had been declared wards of the state because they Exalted after being orphaned. The Realm's bureaucratic machinery occasionally wielded the rarely used right to remove a child from his parents' care if they were unable to raise the Dragon-Blood properly. Occasionally, the Iselsi would get ahold of these children whose parents were from extremely impoverished minor lines and incapable of raising their child in a manner that behooved members of the Dragon-Blooded Host. Only a handful of children ever fell into that category in any decade, though.

In the Realm's current disarray, the checks the Empress put in place to keep the Iselsi from exploiting their power are no longer functioning as well as they should. The Iselsi have been able to wield their influence within the All-Seeing Eye and the Immaculate Order more frequently, although no less subtly, and, so, have been able to offer certain incentives to interested patrician houses. These incentives have ranged from intelligence that enables a patrician's business to prosper to persecution of the family's enemies through the front of either the Eye or the Immaculates. In the current political climate, a patrician family that offers up an Exalted son or daughter for the Iselsi can be assured that the power the house can bring to bear in the Immaculate Order and in the All-Seeing Eye will be exerted for the family's own prosperity.

Certain Sidereals observing the current crisis have helped the Iselsi to wield their power more liberally in order to allow the house to gain access to outcastes. Even the Iselsi do not dare guess what the Sidereal motivation for doing this might be.

HOW MUCH IS AN OUTCASTE WORTH?

Based on the discussion of economic concessions to a patrician family in exchange for the right to adopt its outcaste child, the question may legitimately be raised as to how much an outcaste is actually *worth* paying for. The answer is that, as far as the Great Houses are concerned, the value of a Dragon-Blood is immeasurable. An outcaste of high birth, schooled at a good primary school and properly trained at the best secondary schools, can shoulder the same burden as any other member of the house, be it in the form of military service, administrative tasks, political action or anything else the house needs. Not only that, but barring extreme bad luck or death on the battlefield, the Dragon-

Blooded outcaste's expected length of service to the house can be measured in centuries. Thus, a Great House typically has no problem paying a substantial fee every year for the right to add the outcaste to its ranks.

An outcaste from a fine patrician family may merit a payment worth Resources •••• each year for 20 years, paid to the outcaste's birth parents in jade scrip or silver. An outcaste born to a down-at-the-heels patrician family, in desperate need of the income, may merit Resources payments valued at ••• or whatever the Great House can get away with — it is a buyer's market when the stink of disgrace hangs about your family, after all.

be impossible to find a spouse for — essentially, disposing of the house's refuse as a way to appease the patricians.

Political components in any adoption negotiation revolve around any political alliances that may occur on the floor of the Greater or Lesser Chambers of the Deliberative. Indeed, due to the fact that the seats of the Lesser Chamber are filled by those decided upon by the Greater Chamber, some Great Houses can guarantee a particularly promising patrician family a chance at a seat on the floor of the Lesser Chamber. In addition, the Great House may be able to push through tax exemptions, new terms for leased lands or other policies in the Deliberative on behalf of the patrician household. It is very rare, though, for a Great House to go to great political lengths for any but the best patrician households.

Finally, economic aspects of the negotiations consist of bribes and trade benefits. Some Great Houses will desire that their relationship with the patrician family be as short-lived as possible, especially if the family is particularly needy or deemed to be useless in the long-term. Perhaps the patricians' star is fading or there is more than a hint of scandal in their past — whatever the actual substance of the matter, the Great House may actually negotiate flat payments of jade or silver in exchange for the right to adopt the outcaste youth, in lieu of any economic or social benefits. Such payments tend to be spanned across the lifespan of the outcaste's parents, and the Great House may negotiate to pay the sum each year or every decade. The outcaste, once brought into the Great House, does not shoulder these payments — the house assumes that she will be worth the amount in question and pays the money gladly.

Other economic benefits that are often negotiated include trade alliances and the like. A patrician clan with interests in shipping would naturally approach House Peleps or V'neef to adopt its child if it had a contact with the house. Those with Threshold concerns might approach the Cathak or, up until a few years ago, the Tepet. House Ragara has

more than its share of potential outcaste adoptees to choose from because of its extensive banking interests. Since the Empress' disappearance and the recent vicissitudes of the financial market, the number has only increased. The only Great House that spurns the adoption of patrician class Exalts is House Mnemon, whose founder has dictated that such adoption sullies the bloodline overly much.

Patrician families can bring a lot to the table as well, especially if they are one of the powerful bureaucratic families that control large portions of the Thousand Scales. Great Houses and minor lines alike fall over one another to compete for the chance to adopt or foster an outcaste from one of those bureaucratic lines, although such competition has a habit of getting out of hand. The chance of conflict is exponentially more likely if the bureaucratic family wields power in one of the more important parts of the Thousand Scales. The rivalry gets fierce when it comes to fostering a scion of one of the families that run the Treasury, for instance, or the Honorable and Humble Caretakers of the Common Folk. One series of negotiations for the adoption of an outcaste daughter of a minister in the Home Office erupted into a conflict between House Tepet and House Cynis and resulted in minor brawls in the streets of the Imperial City in RY 739, until magistrates stepped in and arrested the house negotiators involved, threatening them with imperial sanction. While such open conflict is an infrequent occurrence, more subtle maneuvering is all too common — after all, a lasting alliance with an important patrician family is worth the outcaste adoptee's weight in jade. In many cases, the outcaste becomes a secondary issue relative to the real matter of an alliance between the bureaucrats and the Great House.

The situation gets more complex if the patrician family has a history of outcaste children, making it more likely that the Great House will try to integrate the two bloodlines on a more permanent basis. Several noted patrician families within





the walls of the Imperial City are kept in kind of a permanent concubinage to a Great House because of the frequency with which they bear Exalted offspring. Such a protected state is both a blessing and a curse because, while the patricians in question certainly prosper from the agreement, they are also targets of other Great Houses, either for potential breeding or for reprisal if a conflict between Dynastic groups breaks out. For many of patrician families, this is the end goal of arranged adoptions and fostering — they finally lift themselves out of the relative mire of their social class and see themselves near the real seats of power alongside the Dynasts. While their status as concubines within the house is certainly weak at first, they are now nearly a part of the Dynasty, with all of the attendant financial and social perks that come along with association to a major bloodline. With continued intermarriage and the birth of many Dragon-Blooded scions, they will eventually be elevated to true membership in the Great House. They will finally have become part of the true elite of the Blessed Isle.

ADOPTION

The key question any negotiation between a patrician family and a Great House must settle on is whether or not the Dynast will be adopted or fostered. The vast majority of patrician outcastes are adopted into the Great Houses, rather than subject to fosterage. The nature of adoption means that the house's line is strengthened with outside blood and gains centuries of service from a new Dragon-Blood in exchange for granting benefits to a patrician family in the short-term. Given the life spans of the Dragon-Blooded, 20 years of dealing with a group of patricians is a small price to pay for an addition to the family whose service will last more than a century.

Regardless of the nature of the contract, the Greater House of the Deliberative or the Scarlet Empress must certify the adoption. In the past, the Scarlet Empress certified an adoption herself, usually as a favor or a symbol of her largesse. The Regent has shown himself unwilling to get involved in such matters, preferring to spend his time meditating on the Immaculate Texts and, thus, leaving the matter of adoptions to the Deliberative. If the house attempting the adoption in question is currently at loggerheads with another house, political maneuvering must take place, this time on the floor of the Deliberative. Because of this, in the past year, two adoptions took nearly six months apiece to certify as the Great Houses struggled for an advantage over one another. Those two adoptions were exceptions to the normal rule of swift certification, but the chances of an adoption becoming mired on the floor of the Deliberative grows greater with each passing day.

THE LIFE OF AN ADOPTEE

Once adopted by a Great House or a minor line, a young Exalt can be assured that no one will openly refer to

THE FUTURE PROCESS

As the conflict for the Scarlet Throne heats up, adoptions will take more and more time as houses attempt to keep one another from adding new Dragon-Blooded to their ranks. As that happens, the entire system of adoption will break down — the outcastes will be denied the advantages that the Great Houses can give them, such as access to secondary schools, and trapped in a bureaucratic limbo. As these occurrences become more frequent, it will be a sure sign to the houses that the smooth functioning of the government is breaking down.

her as an outcaste any more. Certainly, the stigma will follow her throughout her life, with whispered allusions to patrician birth and subtle snubs in the halls of power, but it is easier to live with such troubles once a Dragon-Blood has found herself within the lap of luxury.

A Dynast of outcaste origins may never be treated as well as a member of the house who was born of the family, but she will still be better off than anyone else in the Realm. That is because, from the moment of adoption onward, the adoptee is a member of the house and subject to all of the benefits that come with it. Her name is changed in a ceremony overseen by an Immaculate priest and house elders, and she is expected to cut off all but the most necessary ties with her birth family until at least a decade after graduation from secondary school. The cost of secondary school — indeed, the whole of the young Exalt's education — is absorbed by the house that adopts her, and any expenses that the patrician family accrued over the years are paid for by the Great House.

As with other Dragon-Blooded, the house expects the newcomer to either go on sabbatical after secondary school or leap right into business or politics. Most of these young Dynasts leap right into adult affairs, though — they are aware of their somewhat precarious position within the family and hope to gain the eye of some mentor within the house as quickly as possible by distinguishing themselves in one endeavor or another.

For the most part, these Dragon-Blooded of patrician stock become the workhorses of the Great House as they enter adulthood. Aware of the amount of scrutiny they are under and cognizant of what life outside of the house is like, they tend to work harder in the interests of the house than those children who carry the family's blood within their veins. Gaining the house's favor does not just keep the Dragon-Blood from being sacrificed in political maneuvers — it helps in later efforts to arrange a marriage with a good part of the family line and to guarantee a decent stipend and status in the family. Thus, most Dynasts of patrician birth work incredibly hard to overcome the stigma of their bad breeding so that they can be guaranteed a better seat at the family table.

PATRICIANS AND THE IMMACULATE ORDER

Occasionally, a patrician family is of such devout faith that, rather than scheming to get the best deal for itself out of its outcaste child, it offers the Dragon-Blood to the Immaculate Order. Given the social, political and economic incentives for arranging an adoption with a Great House, such an act surely signifies a family of such faith and devotion as to place them above reproach.

While giving up an outcaste to the Immaculate Order does not bear obvious dividends, patricians who do so can expect the backing of the Immaculate Order in disputes in which the family might otherwise be powerless. This does not mean that the family may wield the Order as a blunt weapon — but if a case comes up where the family is clearly being taken

advantage of or pushed into an early demise, the local abbot is far more likely to take a personal interest in the situation. The family is of great faith, after all, and it has shown itself to be in complete harmony with the Perfected Hierarchy.

In the Immaculate Order, what class a Dragon-Blood was born into ceases to matter the moment she dedicates herself to walking the coils. An outcaste from a patrician family handed over to the Immaculate Order by her parents can expect the same treatment as any other outcaste who is sent to the Order — training at the Cloister of Wisdom, then a test at the Palace Sublime by the Paragon of Sextes Jylis, who will decide the fate of the outcaste.



FOSTERING

Fostering takes place only in unusual circumstances, and it is usually reserved for the children of those patricians who wield the greatest power in the Thousand Scales. These spiders squatting in the webs of the bureaucracy see no reason to give up a Dragon-Blooded child for short-term gain, especially when the Dragon-Blood in question can serve the family's interest and long-term goals long beyond the lifespan of any mere mortal. Rather than damn its offspring to life as just one more Dragon-Blooded

among the whole Host, it guarantees him a life as a prince among powerful mortals.

In the case of fostering, the patrician family involved seeks out a line of Dynasts, just as in an adoption. However, in this circumstance, the tables are turned — or at least the playing field is leveled — due to the patrician family's power, and the patricians make an offer to the Great House. The same careful negotiation process between the patricians and the Great House then occurs, over the same economic, political and social components, with the caveat that the Dragon-Blood of patrician birth is expected





to eventually return to his family after a decade or more of service to the Great House. In exchange for a long-term business alliance or favored status in dealings within the patricians' particular area of business or bureaucratic expertise, the Dynasts agree to sponsor the Dragon-Blooded patrician to a good secondary school — typically the House of Bells or the Spiral Academy. Then, the Great House acts as “godparents” in the patrician Dragon-Blood's early career, typically within the legions or the Thousand Scales. With the aid of both his powerful patrician clan and the Great House, the Dragon-Blooded will now find doors open to him that might have otherwise been closed due to his social standing as a patrician. Ideally, the Dragon-Blood will then mastermind the rise of the family's fortunes over several mortal lifetimes, overseeing plans and investments that may take decades to come to fruition.

Some ancient, wealthy and politically powerful patrician families have enough foresight and ambition that they attempt to build their own minor line. These patricians bring in outcastes from the Threshold, especially the Northern Dragon-Blooded nobility, to marry their outcaste children. Their hope is that, eventually, Dragon-Blooded children will become so common within the family that a Great House or a Dynastic minor line will make an offer to intermarry the two lines together. While it is rare that any patrician family's fortunes stay steady over a long enough period of time that this dream can become a reality, it happens often enough that the greatest of patricians pursue it as an end.

The practice of fostering has fallen on hard times in the past five years. The gutting of the Thousand Scales by the Great Houses has left very few patrician bureaucrats in the position where they can dictate terms to Dynasts, and their numbers were precious few to begin with. As such, adoption is the most common method of arranging for the fate of patrician lost eggs, and fostering a nearly singular occurrence under the Regency.

LOST EGGS AMONG THE DROSS

In RY 216, shortly after her speech decreeing that all lost eggs be integrated into the Perfected Hierarchy and trained to be worthy members of the Dragon-Blooded Host, the Scarlet Empress created a new administrative position within the Thousand Scales. Called the Humble and Munificent Master of Orphans, this individual was to control a bureau known as the Splendid and Just Arbiters of Purpose. She further explicated that the Master of Orphans would henceforth gather up all outcaste Exaltations that occurred on the Blessed Isle and that these individuals would be declared wards of the Realm until they were able to enter Dragon-Blooded society. As wards, they would be educated in preparation for their roles as members of the Dragon-Blooded Host. Special exemptions would be made for those of the patrician class who Exalted, but only if a Great House would agree to adopt or foster the child and raise it as a Dynast — if an adoption could be

arranged, such children would fall outside of the purview of the Master of Orphans.

The Arbiters of Purpose were to hold newly Exalted Dragon-Blooded of low-birth for a short time, helping them master the rudiments of their power and remedying basic educational deficits, if necessary. These outcastes were to be prepared for the day when they decided their own fate, since according to the “tradition” that the Master of Orphans and Empress agreed upon, each one of the outcastes would choose to either “take the coin or take the razor.” The fate that awaited those who took the stylized jade coin from the Arbiters was a life in the legions, after grueling training at a fortress called Pasiap's Stair. The choice of the jade razor denotes allowing oneself to be tonsured, leading to

BEFORE THE ARBITERS

Previous to the RY 216 creation of the Arbiters and the revisions of the adoption laws into their present form, the Empress and the Realm relied on the old Shogunate practice of ritual adoption into a family by the household head to deal with outcastes. While this practice had sufficed for the first two centuries of the Scarlet Realm's existence, by the second centennial of the Empress' reign, she began to limit the Great Houses' ability to continually expand their numbers through the adoption of outcastes from the lower social classes. The revised adoption laws therefore limited the new blood brought into the Great Houses to outcastes of the patrician class and guaranteed that the wealth of the houses would not be continuously drained by stipends set aside for new adoptees. Her changes were, in effect, the first revisions of the adoption laws that had seen use through both the Old Realm and the Shogunate.

By shutting off the means of adopting lower-class outcastes to the Great Houses, more Dragon-Blooded were funneled into the legions and the Immaculate Order. These two organizations were effectively meritocracies that allowed the best soldiers and priests to rise to the top in the service of the Empress herself, rather than the houses. In doing so, the Empress also created an effective check to the ambition of the Great Houses, in the form of a segment of the military officer-caste beholden only to her own largesse. It came as no surprise to anyone watching the ebb and flow of power on the Blessed Isle that with the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress, one of the Great Houses' first acts was to disband the imperial legions and then funnel outcaste officers to house legions, where they could be commanded by Dynasts whose loyalties were to their own blood, rather than the Realm as a whole.

the Cloister of Wisdom and training as a member of the Order of Immaculate Dragons.

It was the plan of the Empress and the Master of Orphans that the taint of outcaste Exaltation would be washed away by passage through Pasiap's Stair or the Cloister of Wisdom. The Dragon-Blood in question would assume his rightful place as a Prince of the Earth or a follower of an Immaculate Dragon. The rigorous discipline and indoctrination at both institutions meant that whatever base origins the Dragon-Blooded had sprung from were now irrelevant. All ties to a childhood of ignorance and subservience were forcibly cut, and what was left behind in their place were the skills needed for someone to live successfully in the strictly regimented society of the Scarlet Empire. The result would be a Terrestrial Exalt fit for life as a member of the Dragon-Blooded Host.

After a century of service, an officer in the legions who graduated from Pasiap's Stair might retire and settle upon a large farm, with plenty of land and slaves to help with the labor — in fact, for many of the officer corps, marriage into a good patrician or down-at-the-heels Dynastic line would be possible. An Immaculate priest could one day hope to achieve nothing short of absolute mastery over a powerful martial art and perhaps receive an abbot's chair in a temple. Thus, the legions and the Immaculate Order both served as outlets for outcaste ambition and as meritocracies where those with potential would not go to waste despite the problem of their birth among the lower classes. The key to getting these outcastes into the priesthood and the legions were the Arbiters of Purpose.

THE ARBITERS

The Splendid and Just Arbiters of Purpose are a part of the Thousand Scales and answer to the Master of Orphans, who, in turn, reports to the Empress — or, more recently, the Regent. Invariably, the Master of Orphans is a Dragon-Blood, usually a retired officer of high rank noted for distinguished service within the legions and, inevitably, of outcaste Exaltation himself. The Master's office is not just intended to oversee the disposition of lower-class Dragon-Blooded, but to serve as a symbol of how high an outcaste may rise in the Realm. The Arbiters' duties involve tracking down and seeing to the futures of those outcastes throughout the Realm who Exalt amongst the lower classes, as well as the recruitment and military training that goes on at Pasiap's Stair.

Outcastes of the lower classes fall into the Arbiters' hands shortly after Exaltation. Whether they Exalt in a small farming village or a large city, the local governor alerts the prefect, who sends word to the Arbiters through the imperial heliographs or via sorcery. The Exaltation of an outcaste is important enough information that the Realm's heliograph system or sorcery are considered valid methods with which to transmit the news. Within a week, Arbiters arrive from their headquarters in Juche to take custody of the outcaste and make her a ward of the state, as well as attempt to undo any damage she might have done

THE HUMBLE AND MUNIFICENT MASTER OF ORPHANS

The current Master of Orphans is Agama Orir, born to a peasant family nearly a century and a half ago in Arjuf. Like his predecessor before him, he was an outcaste who took the coin and studied at the Stair and, as such, is familiar with all of the various subtle heresies and traditions there. He keeps a small Manse located at the base of Gray Mask Mountain, on which the Stair is situated, and occasionally teaches classes on elite military units of the Threshold.

Orir has two children from a mortal wife, but his true love is Tepet Kyvul, an officer he served under in three campaigns. Due to his relationship with Kyvul, he is distressed by the Tepet's recent misfortunes and has gone out of his way to guarantee that certain promising students are gently persuaded to join the Tepet's house military. His informal ties with the Tepet have been noted by the other Great Houses, who have begun to work on ways to force Orir out of his position and put a more impartial agent in his place — or to dismantle the office of Master of Orphans altogether.

during the first confused days of her Dragon-Blooded existence. If the outcaste has fled her home for whatever reason, the Arbiters track her throughout the countryside. Each team of Arbiters has at least one Dragon-Blood among them, in case the outcaste is unable to control her powers or reacts angrily to pursuit — the mere presence of a member of the Dragon-Blooded Host is normally enough to cow slaves or those of the peasantry, since they've been conditioned to react subserviently to a Prince of the Earth.

The presence of the Arbiters serve two purposes: In the first place, it allows the Realm to gather up these lost eggs and bring them to a central point — the Arbiter's headquarters in Juche, known as the Obsidian Mirror. The Arbiters then make sure that the outcastes are funneled into either the legions or the Immaculate Order. The second, subtler use is to cement within the minds of the citizenry that the Realm is capable of containing these young Dragon-Blooded and making them a stable part of society.

THE OBSIDIAN MIRROR

While the Arbiters have a bureaucratic office in the Imperial City, their real work happens at the massive compound known as the Obsidian Mirror, and the Master of Orphans splits his time between the two locations. At the Obsidian Mirror, the Arbiters train young outcastes in the use of their powers and teach them basic reading skills, if necessary. Previous ideas of caste and social standing are carved away at the Obsidian Mirror — the





son of a wealthy merchant from the Imperial City is forced to tolerate the daughter of a disenfranchised thief seated next to him. Whatever they were before, they are both now Dragon-Blooded.

The most important reason for the schooling at the Obsidian Mirror is to prepare the outcaste for the moment when she makes the decision to pursue a life in the legions or in the Order of Immaculate Dragons. Any time not spent training in the basic use of Essence or math and reading is spent in discussion with the outcaste's Arbiter mentor concerning what path she is most interested in pursuing. The decision, at heart, comes down to this — does the outcaste possess the faith and the drive to pursue a path of power and contemplation among the Immaculates, or is she more suited to a life as a warrior, steeped in combat for the glory of the Realm?

The Arbiters keep the outcastes at the Obsidian Mirror and train them until the following year's celebration of Empire Day, marking the coronation of the bureau's patroness, the Scarlet Empress. On that day, a massive banquet is held in true Dynastic fashion, called the Feast of the Elect. Massive platters of steaming meat and huge tureens of rich soup are placed before the young Dragon-Blooded, and an army of chefs prepare side dishes and desserts the likes of which are rarely seen outside of the fetes of the Great Houses. Musicians play tunes from all over Creation, storytellers intone the legends of the Realm, and dancers caper and sway across the floor and even onto tables. For children usually no older than 12, most of whom have grown up in relative poverty, the Feast of the Elect is nothing less than the greatest moment of their lives, a time when they first feel the true privilege that awaits those who have been blessed by the Five Elemental Dragons.

After the celebratory feast, each outcaste at the Obsidian Mirror is brought before the Master of Orphans. The Master is always seated on a magnificent golden chair, surrounded by five candles representing each of the Immaculate Dragons. In front of him are two stands, each of which bear a silver platter. On the left platter is a jade razor, filigreed with bronze and platinum, representing the razor used to tonsure an Immaculate when she becomes a postulant. On the right platter rests a jade-enameled coin bearing the Empress' profile on the obverse with a strix upon the reverse — the former represents she to whom the outcaste's loyalty will be devoted, while the latter symbolizes the end awaiting all who take the coin.

Each outcaste at the Obsidian Mirror is brought before the Master of Orphans alone and asked to choose between the tonsure and the coin. If the young Dragon-Blood takes the razor, then she will be told to pack what few possessions she has and will leave for the Cloister of Wisdom the next day to pursue a life as an Immaculate priest. If she chooses the jade-enameled coin, she signals her commitment to a military life and will be sent to Pasiap's Stair.

THE COIN

Those who take the coin are gathered up by the Arbiters and transported to Pasiap's Stair, the fortress-academy where they will be educated in the ways of warfare. The outcastes make the long trip to the fortress via carts and stay at the various roadside rest stops and teahouses along the way. An easy sense of camaraderie springs up, setting into place the first pieces of the foundation that life at the Stair will build upon. After weeks of travel, the carts carrying the outcastes finally arrive at the base of a massive mountain, and the outcastes catch their first glimpse of the Stair.

PASIAP'S STAIR

Pasiap's Stair is located in a range of mountains halfway between Portee and Noble. Atop a rough, wilderness covered peak called Gray Mask Mountain squats a massive stone encampment and a small, incredibly well-defended fortress-Manse. The sides of the mountain are steep and treacherous, and the only way to get to the outpost at the top is via a single, winding staircase, covered in stone carvings and ancient First Age script. According to legend, Pasiap, He Who Illuminates Both Worlds with Majesty and Power, is responsible for the construction of the staircase and the fortress-Manse. These tales state that Pasiap used mighty sorceries and Essence-fueled Charms to scour away the mountain's peak, and then built the Manse and staircase in preparation for the day when the Realm itself would come under attack.

The stronghold and outbuildings of the Stair are made of solid, moss-covered granite. There are mazes of warehouses and vaults within the mountain, used to store foodstuffs and equipment, and a well-equipped armory exists inside one of the largest caverns. The Stair can handle a population of up to 1,000 people at any one time. Despite that, there are rarely more than 300 individuals present at any moment — typically, the population of the Stair includes somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 students, two dozen instructors and 125 mortal support staff performing the menial tasks that any such large facility needs completed. The storerooms beneath the Stair can provide food and water enough to outlast a siege of up to a year in duration (or more, if Pasiap's Stair has only its current number of residents.) It is kept provisioned year round — the Stair is a part of the Realm's network of defensive fortifications in addition to being a military academy for outcastes. In the case of an invasion, the Stair would be used as a secondary command center to coordinate defense of the southern coast of the Blessed Isle between Noble and Arjuf.

At the base of Gray Mask Mountain is a small village called On-Sha, whose residents are mostly menial laborers used to transport supplies or litters up the staircase. The nearest city is 20 miles away, but farming hamlets utilizing the nearby mountain terraces as cropland are ubiquitous, and the hamlets are all under the control of retired military officers who graduated from the Stair and chose to retire in the area. No buildings except for the Stair exist on Gray Mask Mountain or

the mountains directly touching it, except for a few primitive wooden huts used as hunting lodges or shelters by the instructors at the Stair. The Empress guaranteed that the lands leased near the academy would only go to officers of outcaste birth, thus effectively making that area a sealed military territory for use by the Stair. During field exercises, retired Dragon-Blooded in the region take great pleasure in helping the instructors of the Stair, playing out the roles of recalcitrant farmers or guerillas. If an outcaste attempts to escape the Stair, the retirees also guarantee that there is no safe haven for many miles around the fortress.

LIFE AT THE STAIR

From the moment an outcaste arrives at the Stair, he is driven through a painful regimen of exercise and humiliation for 10 years. The goals of the instructors are simple — destroy the young man that existed before, and rebuild him as a soldier fit to serve the Realm.

The instructors at the Stair are admirably suited to this task — all of them are Dragon-Blooded retirees from the legions, and all of them graduated from the Stair themselves more than a century ago. Service at Pasiap's Stair is considered a proper way for those who have retired or who are on extended sabbatical to earn a stipend from the Realm. Officially, all instructors are paid from a fund established by the Splendid and Just Arbiters of Purpose. Their quarters on the Stair are spartan, but they're comfortable enough after a mortal lifetime spent as a legionnaire. There are also a few farms in the nearby hills that elderly instructors are permitted to move into during their final years, with the permission of the Master of Orphans.

When students arrive at Pasiap's Stair, the instructors take them well into hand. Each student is given a copy of *The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier*, a suit of heavy armor, a spear and a short sword. The equipment is to be maintained in top condition, and checks are common —



THE SECRETS OF PASIAP'S STAIR

Few of the Dragon-Blooded students present at any time are aware of the true nature of Pasiap's Stair. Most of them believe that it has always been a fortress used in the defense of the Blessed Isle, and a few of the more devout Dragon-Blooded at the Stair truly believe that Pasiap himself crafted it for some hidden purpose.

The Master of Orphans and the instructors at the Stair know the truth. The massive vaults within Gray Mask Mountain were built during the First Age, and the fortress-Manse atop the peak is of exquisite construction, a strongpoint rarely seen even among the wonders created centuries before the Usurpation. The instructors also understand the Stair's original purpose. It was once an ancient watchtower, one in a chain of watchtowers designed to use ancient sorcery to coordinate responses to an invasion of the Blessed Isle during the days of the Old Realm. When the Usurpation came and the Dragon-Blooded and their Sidereal allies rose up against the Solar Exalted, one young Solar politician escaped from the bloody feast and fled to the mountains, eventually finding respite in the vaulted caverns beneath the ancient communications center.

The Dragon-Blooded tracked her to the fortress, and for many months, a running battle occurred beneath the communications center, as the Solar maiden fenced with teams of Dragon-Blooded tunnel-fighters. In the deepest bowels of the earth, a handful of specially blessed Sidereals and Dragon-Blooded finally cornered the Solar and slew her, burying her where she died.

If one follows the tangle of tunnels and storerooms far enough underneath the mountain — well below the base of it — they will come to a ritually sealed and warded area, crowded with dusty and faded warnings in the language of the Old Realm. A massive tomb has been built there, covered in prayers begging the gods to let the spirit of the Solar sleep soundly and overlaid with expensive and lavish grave goods, including the ancient Solar's weapons and armor. A hundred of the greatest soldiers the Dragon-Blooded could find were sacrificed and their hungry ghosts bound to the tunnels just outside the tomb, to guarantee that no intruder would stir the slumbering ghost of the Solar warrior. Traps surround the tunnels as well, utilizing ambient Essence to power ancient weaponry.

As of yet, none of the students have ever made it so far beneath the mountain as to find the tomb and live to tell the tale. Most simply become lost in the maze of ancient and forgotten storerooms and starve to death, while the hungry ghosts and ancient traps dispatch those who are cunning or lost enough to find the burial chamber. However, there is always a possibility that a cadre of students will be lucky — or, more properly, unlucky — enough to find their way to the tomb of the dead Anathema.

If one of the newly reborn Solar Exalted ever braved the borders of the Blessed Isle to raid the tomb after finding mention of it in some ancient source, they would face massive resistance. The Anathema would not only have to deal with the traps and ghosts set around the grave, but also almost 200 Dragon-Blooded, heavily armed and well trained, in a region almost exclusively used by the military and retired military officers.



failure to maintain one's equipment means punishment for the entire fang. Depending on the number of students arriving, each year's class is separated into fangs of five, and if need be, those fangs are placed into scales of 25. There have rarely been enough students in single year to make more than one scale, but it has been known to occur perhaps once every century. Each fang is named after its instructor during the first year, and each member of the unit is told clearly that transgressions by one member will mean punishment for all.

For first-year students, life falls into orderly, ritualized torture. Each first-year finds himself stripped of his family name as a manner of removing ties to his old life. The instructors make it clear that whoever the student was before his arrival at the Stair means nothing. Nicknames are common and often humiliating. However, by the end of the first year, students tend to wear them with pride. A nickname in later life identifies one as a graduate of the Stair, and only other graduates of the Stair are allowed to use a graduate's nickname without permission — outsiders using a Stair nickname can find themselves on the receiving end of a duel.

Each day begins with a run in full kit, regardless of the weather. Runs begin around the perimeter of the plateau, and as the months pass, these turn into jogs up the massive staircase that winds along the mountain. If a student collapses, it is up to his fangmates to carry him and lose no time — leaving a man behind is as unacceptable as tardiness. Breakfast follows, and then, several hours of study. The education provided to these outcasts before their Exalta-

tions was spotty at best and will not suffice for those who must become officers in the legions. As a result, students are taught military tactics, reading, math, imperial and legion history, and the Immaculate Philosophy. After lunch, they study etiquette and then move to one of the Stair's many training fields for sparring and weapons training. First-year students learn the basic use of Charms and how to stand their ground in the face of strange opponents and Essence-fueled Charms and spells. It is typical for fang of first years to be forced to crawl through offal and viscera while their instructors fire blasts of elemental flame above them, and injuries occur frequently in such training maneuvers. Instructors often order strange Threshold creatures brought to the Stair in cages and pit them against the students, with surgeons standing by for the inevitable casualties.

The instructors at the Stair are trained to push each young student to the brink, to break down his attachments to his old life, his old self-concept and his own assessment of his capabilities. The students are stripped bare of their upbringings as peasants, slaves and the disenfranchised, in the hopes that what is left will be a core of solid jade. In addition, each student is indoctrinated into an intense loyalty to the Empress and to the Realm itself, which is held in higher esteem than ties to any house or political entity. It is this loyalty to the Empress and the Realm that provides the backbone and structure over which all of the other lessons of Pasiap's Stair are laid. For the students of Pasiap's Stair, the legions are their father, and the Empress is their mother.



Instructors choose one student to be fang leader each year, and it is up to this student to administer whatever discipline the instructors see fit. From the second year to the tenth, the fang bears the name of the fang leader, rather than the fang's instructor — every first-year fang has its own retired officer to teach it, but in later years, one or two instructors may oversee all of the fangs for that year.

If a student transgresses against an instructor's authority, the fang leader doles out the lashes. If a student fails to grasp the lessons in *The Thousand Correct Actions*, the fang leader is required to stay up late and study with her. Each year, the instructor selects a new fang leader. This guarantees that particularly ruthless or sadistic fang leaders check their own darker impulses with the sure knowledge that comeuppance awaits them when it's someone else's turn to command the unit.

The bond between students in a year's class is strong. They share the same barracks, although males and females are separated by gender. It is common for the bonds of friendship shared between members of a fang to blossom into a full sworn brotherhood if the cadre of students stays together into their later careers in the legion. It is customary that each fang leader to find an upper-classman to serve as an advisor, and it is through this route that the legends and esprit de corps of the Stair are passed on from year to year. It is also the way that the various small heresies that pop up from time to time get passed to the next year's class.

Similar mentoring also occurs if a student shows an aptitude for sorcery — he is paired with an upper-classman, and the two study together after hours with a skilled instructor. Instructors in sorcery are the one exception to the rule that teachers at the school are drawn from retired graduates of the Stair. Sorcery tutors are either “loaned” to the Stair from the Heptagram or are capable war-sorcerers on sabbatical from a legion.

By the second year, students are used to the abuse, and so, each year, it lessens in intensity. Marches and mock battles still occur daily, but advanced classes become available — classes on engineering and siegecraft, command and advanced tactics. Students are allowed a furlough each month to the nearby city, although they are expected to comport themselves as members of the Dragon-Blooded Host. The instructors pay well for information on fangs that run rampant over the town, and punishments are harsh.

Second-year students are to be well versed in both Five-Dragon Style martial arts and the use of their Charms. Once a month, students take marches up Gray Mask Mountain without the use of the staircase, although most of them would call these “climbs.” Second-years and other upperclassmen are also expected to hunt local game in order to provide fresh meat for the Stair's larders and are free one day each week to study privately, although many take the opportunity to explore around the Stair, wandering along the mountainside or exploring the warehouses and vaults within the mountain itself.

The third and later years follow the same structure — constant study, never-ending drilling and mock combat,

broken up by the occasional furlough. By the 10th year of their studies, the students would be considered the cream of Creation's elite troops even without the blessings their Exaltation brings, and before the disappearance of the Empress, foreign troops of favored governments were allowed to observe the fangs of the Stair in action during the mock battles preceding the Feast of Spears.

THE FEAST OF SPEARS

The climax of each school year is the Feast of Spears, which follows a massive mock battle involving every Dragon-Blood at the school, which is coordinated by the instructors. These “graduation exercises” are structured so that, during the battle, each class takes a place in the hierarchy commensurate with their experience. Tenth-years take the place of generals and strategists, with first-years leading fangs made up of imported slaves and foot-troops on loan from a legion stationed on the Blessed Isle.

The themes of these battles vary from massed troop combat to siege warfare in which the fate of the Stair itself is at stake. Rarely are the sides evenly matched — promising students are often put in charge of forces that are numerically inferior in order to test their mettle. The retired officers in the area often allow the school to use their farms or volunteer to help play the part of foreign generals or adjutants. While the students take these battles very seriously indeed, there are few casualties, except among the slaves. The battles waged before the Feast of Spears are as grand as those fought at the House of Bells. The instructors at the Stair privately argue that theirs are more impressive, simply because the glorious Exalted warriors fighting on the field were mere peasants or worse a scant few years earlier.

The climax of the week is the Feast of Spears itself, marking the release of the 10th-year students from the Stair. A great revel is held in one of the ballrooms of the Manse, and all students are invited. Instructors frequently bestow small gifts to favored students, and the graduates take the opportunity to try to arrange placement in one legion or another by pressing an instructor for a letter of formal introduction or for a name to look up in the Imperial City. For the first time, students are permitted to address instructors by their first names. The students are no longer outcasts. They are now Dragon-Blooded soldiers, ready for a life in the legions, their old names forgotten.

The next day, the graduates muster out to travel to the Imperial City. They are expected to arrive in time for the Celebration of Twelve Voices, a minor festival at which time they will be addressed by the Scarlet Empress and sponsored into a legion — a fulfillment of the promise made with their selection of the coin 10 years earlier. With the disappearance of the Empress, the Regent is supposed to handle the sponsorship, but recent events have made that problematic at best — the Arbiters now handle the arrangements for a graduate's future from their Imperial City offices. They place the graduates where the Great Houses want them and guarantee that a student earmarked for a specific legion or duty gets it.





WALKING OFF OF THE MOUNTAIN

There are those who do not live long enough to graduate from Pasiap's Stair. A small number of students, usually one from each of the 10 classes, die each year in hunting accidents, training mishaps, accidents or by being beaten to death by their classmates or instructors. Occasionally, one of them wanders off within the bowels of the mountain during his free time and never returns. In the case of deaths through brutality, most commonly, a slacker in a fang is brutalized by his fellows after one too many punishments are meted out to the entire group and dies from the beating. Most fang leaders know enough to dispose of the body by throwing it off the plateau, claiming that the student died while "sleepwalking." It is from this practice that the term "walking off of the mountain" has come to signify death, accidental or otherwise. Roughly a dozen outcastes walk off of the mountain each year.

Another reason why some students do not graduate is that they simply cannot make the grade. Some students, through some fluke of birth, are just stupid and incapable of learning the necessary lessons or of keeping up with the other troops. Punishment is worthless to "these types" because they simply cannot keep up no matter how hard they try. Others find that they do not desire a place in the legions and become dead weight for their fangmates. In either case, the choice of the coin is a permanent one, and a student is expected to find some way to keep up or to find some method of inspiring himself to perform well. If he cannot, the instructors themselves arrive in the barracks one night, after lights-out but in full view of the other students, and walk the troublemaker off the mountain. Life at the Stairs is anything but forgiving.

LIFE AFTER THE STAIR

A graduate of the Stair can expect to enter a legion with the rank of scalelord, although, if a legion is short on Dragon-Blooded and the graduate bears high marks from an influential instructor, he may be allowed to begin his service with the rank of talonlord. As members of the legions, lost eggs are in a position to take a wife, to attend parties in major cities, to gather contacts among Dynasts who are officers in the same legion and to make a name for themselves and rise through the ranks. The Scarlet Empress viewed the legions as a meritocracy, and she frequently promoted those of lower-class birth to high rank. There has always been a conflict between Dynastic and outcaste officers and an intense — but usually non-violent — rivalry between graduates of the House of Bells and those who studied at Pasiap's Stair. Those who attended the House of Bells receive a better education, certainly, but those from the Stair are united in the belief that they have survived a crucible that has forged them into men.

THE CURRENT TROUBLES

With the disappearance of the Empress, all of the legions were disbanded or placed under the Great Houses'

control. Until the Thousand Scales and the Dynastic houses maneuvered the legions into their current predicament, the military forces of the Realm had been apolitical insofar as they answered only to their executive officer, the Scarlet Empress. Loyalty to the Empress and to the Realm itself was held in higher esteem than ties to any house or political entity, and that loyalty united Dynast and non-Dynastic officer alike. Officers could be assured that they would keep their jobs for decades — until the sundering of the legions, when there were suddenly purges and those deemed disloyal were mustered out or assassinated.

Graduates of Pasiap's Stair, who swore upon a coin with the image of the Empress on it, are in a awkward position. In the first place, they are aware that the focus of their loyalty for the past 500 years is missing. They see the fate that awaits those officers of lower-class birth who

WORST-CASE SCENARIO

It is possible, given the current political climate and the dissatisfaction with the current regime, that upper-level, non-Dynast career officers may choose to follow Tepet Ejara into a coup or to begin one on their own. It was fear of that very scenario that drove the Great Houses and the Thousand Scales to castrate the legions in the first place — and they have pushed some officers closer to that end by doing so. In fact, something similar has already happened on a small scale, with several legions disappearing into the Threshold on private military expeditions (or worse) to avoid being disbanded.

If a coup occurs, graduates of the Stair will be in a tough predicament. The officers leading such a coup will probably not be Dynasts, but officers unattached to a Great House, just like themselves. Many of them will have passed through the Stair and know of the young officers through gossip, and many will be able to justify such a coup as an act of loyalty to the Empress or the Realm. However, young officers of low birth will be in a position to further their own political ambitions if they help to suppress the coup, perhaps even arranging their own rise through the ranks by helping to cull the disloyal elements. The main obstacle to any such rebellion on the part of the Dragon-Bloods of lower-class birth will be that they lack leadership — none of them are currently in a position to ignite such a revolution, and even if one was, the Dynasts would never follow someone whose origins are outcaste.

All that is certain is that, if a coup occurs, the graduates of Pasiap's Stair have a chance to reshape the future of the Realm, if they don't damn themselves to more centuries propping up the Scarlet Throne and whoever was powerful enough to seize it.

don't swear loyalty to a Great House, and they wonder what their new leaders will command of them.

THE RAZOR

The monks at the Cloister of Wisdom are of the mind that, compared to the students at Pasiap's Stair, those who choose the tonsure have a far greater challenge ahead of them. The instructors at the Stair merely seek to build a soldier, while those at the Cloister of Wisdom attempt to create a spiritually elevated being capable of wielding powerful, Essence-fueled martial arts. In addition to educating their charges and preparing them for a life in the Immaculate Order, the monks at the Cloister of Wisdom hope to guide their charges to enlightenment — a difficult task indeed.

THE CLOISTER OF WISDOM

When the young outcastes arrive at the Cloister of Wisdom from the Obsidian Mirror, their heads are shaved, and they take the gray robes of the postulant to wear. From the first, a postulant is paired with a mentor who serves as both confidante and sensei. The mentor is responsible for the young Exalt's education on spiritual matters. If the training at the Obsidian Mirror was insufficient, more practical issues are addressed as well. Then, as at the Stair, the postulant is stripped of her birth name. Days spent training and studying are grueling, but failure is not an option — punishment is just as brutal at the Cloister of Wisdom as it is at the Stair.

Two aspects to this initial training are central to the Immaculate Philosophy and the postulant's future. The first is contemplation. Postulants of outcaste birth are expected to master the art of quiet meditation, pushing the memories of their early childhood behind them by dwelling on the perfection of the Immaculate Dragons and the divine Essence of the Realm. This Essence reveals itself in many ways, be it in the flights of birds, the harmonious placement of natural geographical features or the movements of the Dragon-Blooded body as it channels its own Essence flows. The latter form of contemplative exercise means that martial-arts and weapons training thus become a form of meditation for the young postulant — the outcaste is expected to recognize in her own smooth motions and swift, powerful blows a microcosm of the Essence flows of the Blessed Isle and the whole of Creation.

The second aspect of the training is the assumption of knowledge. To the Immaculate priest, the fundamental tools for discovering knowledge in the greater world all lie within the lessons of the Immaculate Texts — the texts provide the basic logic for deciphering the world around the Immaculate. Daily study of the Texts occurs under the guidance of the Dragon-Blooded mentor, and the postulant is questioned to see if she can grasp the multiple levels on which the Immaculate Dragons make their knowledge known. Particularly astute students may grasp as many as three levels of meaning within each chapter or verse, although prodigies have been known to





point out five or more. Sometimes, a Dragon-Blood's Charms open up awareness of the different layers of meaning within the Texts, and the Bronze Faction frequently makes note of students who master this technique. These youths are quietly guided into studying augury, since the secret elders of the Immaculate Order consider the expansion of one's perceptions of the world the first step on the path to real power and wisdom. Many younger Sidereals assume that the deeper layers of meaning within the Immaculate Texts may have been put there as a form of long-term recruitment program for gifted seers and augurs among the followers of the Immaculate Order.

The goal of this training is to prepare the young Terrestrial for a meeting with the Paragon of Sextes Jylis. It is the Paragon who decides if the young outcaste is material suitable to be shaped by the Immaculate Order, based upon her own enlightened opinion and the advice of the mentor that worked with the postulant. In addition, the postulant is subject to a battery of tests measuring physical fitness, mental acuity and moral fiber. She is questioned on the Immaculate Texts and the Gentle Rule of Daana'd as to their meaning, as well as quizzed about her own perception of the world, her opinions on her past and her ability to withdraw into a contemplative state. If accepted, the young monk, now an acolyte, embarks upon a journey through the First Coil, usually under the same mentor. All outcastes are trained exclusively at the Cloister of Wisdom under the tutelage of other Dragon-Blooded.

By the time the Immaculate reaches the Second Coil, she is ready to leave the bosom of the Order and her mentor's oversight and pursue some other career within the priesthood, just as any other monk. Those outcastes who find themselves walking the Second Coil end up wherever the Order believes they will do the most good, be it in bureaucratic positions, in the role of itinerants or as members of the Wyld Hunt.

LEAVING THE ORDER

Once a postulant enters the gates of the Palace Sublime, there is no way to leave. During the probationary period before the postulant meets the Paragon of Sextes Jylis, the mentor is empowered to take the life of his charge if he sees the task of training her as hopeless or if he deems the student unable to rid herself of ties to her old life. This is an extreme act, rarely undertaken, and in most cases, the mentor would prefer to spare the postulant's life. However, it is a hard world, and the Immaculate Texts are clear — a Dragon-Blood who cannot or will not live up to her responsibilities and duties is little better than an Anathema and must be dealt with severely.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The troubles of outcastes sent to the Immaculate Order are not as severe as those facing graduates of Pasiap's Stair. The most drastic change that the Empress' disappearance has brought about is that Immaculates who stumble across outcastes in their itinerant travels or

SUBTLE COMPREHENSION TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 3

Minimum Lore: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Language-Learning Ritual, Elemental Concentration Trance

This Charm allows the Dragon-Blood to parse the hidden layers of metaphor and symbolism after reading a text. Under normal circumstances, where the layers are apparent to those of a creative enough mind with sufficient study, the deeper meanings stand revealed instantly. The Dragon-Blood using this Charm is automatically aware of what each symbol or metaphor represents according to the author's intent and subconscious meanderings, even if the relevance or obviousness of such a symbol would not be apparent to someone living in the present day, as is often the case when reading ancient texts.

However, if the writer tried to bury the symbols purposely, either through a conscious effort at ciphering them (requiring an Intelligence + Lore roll) or with a Charm, then the Dragon-Blood's player must make an opposed roll against the successes from the Charm or on the Intelligence + Lore roll. The Dragon-Blood using this Charm in such an attempt gains a number of automatic successes equal to his Essence. This Charm does not aid in breaking ciphers or codes, only in delving into the hidden meanings within a text, be that text an ancient poem or the results of an augury.

near their urban temples tend to quietly take possession of the young Dragon-Blooded themselves. No one tells these postulants about Pasiap's Stair, nor informs them that they might have a choice in their own destiny. They are sent directly to the Cloister of Wisdom for their education after preliminary training by whoever discovers them. The Paragon of Sextes Jylis justifies this privately by assuring her superiors that, with the compromise of the Thousand Scales, there will be no protest from the weakened Arbiters.

THE FOREIGN BORN

Finally, some foreign-born outcastes make it into the care of the Realm at an early age. A concentrated effort is made to draw these foreign outcastes into the bosom of the Realm, and the Immaculate Order, which has spread throughout so much of the Threshold, is the perfect vehicle for it. In areas where the Immaculate Philosophy holds sway, the outcaste can be assured of sanctuary during the first confusing days after her Exaltation. If a

Dragon-Blooded monk is present, he will attempt to aid the young Terrestrial in grasping the basics of harnessing her own Essence into the use of Charms and will offer to educate the youth if that is her desire.

Such help comes with a price, however, for there will be pressure to join the local Immaculate temple or, better still, to travel to the Realm for further training and service to the Scarlet Empire. Those foreign-born outcastes who do join the Immaculate Order go through the same training at the Cloister of Wisdom as other outcastes and are granted citizenship — in addition to its other benefits — as a reward for making the Second Coil. If the path of an outcaste born on the Blessed Isle is difficult at the Cloister, it is even more difficult for a foreigner, who may not possess even the basic education a peasant of the Realm would receive at the local temple. Certainly, she will likely suffer from a language deficit during her first few months.

The foreign-born can also be brought into the Realm's grasp if there is a military presence from the Blessed Isle stationed nearby. If one of the Realm's legions is posted in the vicinity when an outcaste Exalts, the Dragon-Blooded officers may hear of the new Terrestrial's appearance and seek her out. For those who show interest in a life in the legions, they typically offer her a position within the hierarchy as a scout or a place working with native troops in exchange for the legion's training and arming the outcaste. If, after a few years, the Terrestrial has taken to military life, she may be offered a position within the legion itself. This is the only way that a foreign-born Exalt can join the Realm's militaries — the Scarlet Empress was reticent to allow a large number of Threshold outcastes into the legions for fear that her rule would appear to be propped up by foreign-born mercenaries.

THOSE WHO FALL OUT OF THE NEST

There are as many outcastes in the Threshold as there are outcastes inside the Realm, numbering a few thousand at any one time. These lost eggs are destined for something far different from their brethren inside the Realm. They lack the advantages that make life in the Realm so pleasant for the Dragon-Blooded, such as a social system designed to place them at the top of a religious and social pyramid, access to extensive collections of jade artifacts and easy wealth through family allowances.

But outcastes in the Threshold have something the lost eggs of the Realm lack — freedom. An outcaste born outside of the Blessed Isle may never see as much wealth as a single jade shekel, but she will be the master of her own destiny. Her fortune is hers to seek out or squander, without the intervention of the Great Houses or the Order of the Immaculate Dragons. Because of this, some Dragon-Blooded outcastes amount to nothing, living their lives as mere mercenaries, palace guards or humble savants. Others, however, are blessed by the Five Maidens and become princes, warrior-elite, adventurers — legends.

EXALTATION IN THE THRESHOLD

Magnificent futures await outcastes, but only if they survive their Exaltation and the perils of the Threshold. Those who take the Second Breath in areas where the Immaculate Faith is strong can count on a few years of relative safety, for the Dragon-Blooded are still held in high esteem in those regions. Social and spiritual prohibitions in those nations are likely to protect an outcaste as he fumbles through the first painful months or years after his Exaltation. In fact, there are some areas that practice unorthodox versions of the Immaculate faith — Chiaroscuro and the lands of the Delzahn, for instance — in which outcaste Dragon-Blooded are held in higher regard spiritually than the Dynasts of the Realm. To the barbarians of the desert, outcastes are a kind of Noble Savage, exemplifying the wild purity of the elemental nature of the Terrestrial Exaltation, as opposed to the decadent nobles of the Blessed Isle who have smothered themselves in the trappings of civilization.

More importantly, the chance of a newly Exalted outcaste finding a mentor is far higher in areas where the Immaculate Order is strongly represented because those are the places where older, more experienced Dragon-Blooded outcastes find it easier to thrive. Finding a mentor is the easiest way of navigating the hazards of a new Exaltation, for the mentor can educate the new outcaste on the fundamentals of Charm use, warn him of common pitfalls and guide him through an adolescence that just got far more complicated. Some mentors are selfish, hoping to cultivate in a young outcaste a loyal henchman for schemes of power and dreams of glory, but many are altruistically motivated — some Dragon-Bloods remember their first, difficult years and hope to spare others the trauma of a life alone.

Finally, given the number of outcastes that wander the edges of the Wyld and the cities of the Threshold, it is inevitable that some of them band together in groups that expand past the basic mentor-outcaste relationship. These groups are just as likely to be informal alliances of convenience that join together one day and end a month or a year later as they are to be mercenary companies, cults and sorcerous orders. Some of these groups seek out the newly Exalted Dragon-Blooded, while others bide in the shadows, waiting for the most powerful and cunning outcastes to find them.

DANGERS IN THE THRESHOLD

All Dragon-Blooded taking the Second Breath away from the safety of the Realm face similar challenges. In the first place, their youth at the moment of Exaltation means that their maturity and training are minimal — many outcastes find themselves manipulated by or pressed into the service of local officials or petty warlords, who find the thought of pliable Dragon-Blooded attractive. Up until five years ago, the Realm's legions, the Wyld Hunt and the Immaculate Order made it a point to use such governors and generals as very public examples so as to protect the idea of the inviolable status of Dragon-Blooded. But as the Realm turned inward





with the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress, these demonstrations have become fewer and far between. Now, petty tyrants and local governors alike are on the lookout for outcastes who Exalt in their territory, in the hopes that they can use the Terrestrials as tools for their own ambition.

Finally, there is the matter of old grudges against the Terrestrial Exalted. The Realm has enemies who have waited ages to gain revenge on the Dragon-Blooded, and they slaughter outcastes indiscriminately for slights committed centuries ago. The further an outcaste gets from the Great Inland Sea, the more likely he is to run into beings of power who nurse a hatred for the Dragon-Blooded. At the edges of the Threshold, Fair Folk, barbarians and the Lunar Exalted all hunt any who bear the touch of the Five Elemental Dragons. Worse still, the Dragon-Blooded are alone among the Exalted in that they visibly demonstrate the touch of their elemental nature even without the expenditure of Essence, making them easier targets.

OUTCASTE OCCUPATIONS

Outcastes in the Threshold tend to seek greatness or perish trying — the nature of the Exalted is excellence, no matter how base their origins. An outcaste can pick up a soldier's spear or a scholar's brush and expect to outperform every mortal he meets with little trouble. The only common thread between outcastes who pursue such disparate careers is that, despite their best efforts, their lives are never boring. Even if they desire only quiet, their long lives mean that, at some point, the petty ambitions of others will drag these outcastes into a revolution, an uprising, a war. With the Time of Tumult arriving, even the humblest outcastes are certain to find themselves pulled into some escapade or another as the world descends into chaos following the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress and the return of the Solar Exalted.

With their Charms, outcastes make formidable warriors, and a single Dragon-Blooded leading a unit can transform it from a forlorn hope into a band of soldiers capable of breaking a line. The nature of Dragon-Blooded Charms means that they may aid their fellows in the heat of battle. Around a Terrestrial Exalted leader, a dozen well-trained men can fight as well as 100 mortal troops. A force of outcastes working together as a unit can break fortifications or repel forces far greater in size. Because of this, the most obvious work a young outcaste can seek out is as a mercenary or soldier. Those who survive the years of soldiering are redoubtable warriors. Several kingdoms have come under the control of outcaste generals and their mercenary armies when they found themselves ready to retire after years of mercenary work in the hinterlands and decided some kingdom would be better served by their rule, rather than their employer's.

The fact is, whatever the skill an outcaste sets out to master, no matter how mundane, he may become so skilled at it that he is sought out by the Guild and other customers. A trainer who can break even the most exotic steed for a customer is always in high demand, while a craftsman that can make swords of exquisite beauty and unparalleled

deadliness will never want for work. An outcaste performer, by dint of his superior physical attributes, skill with an instrument and Charms can hold a crowd within the palm of his hand and sway the hearts of commoner and noble alike. A Dragon-Blood can expect to earn Resources ••• with little trouble, and those who work directly for the Guild or allow a Guild merchant-prince to represent them can easily earn Resources ••••.

Finally, the outcaste Exalted can make their fortunes with sorcery. The weakest of Terrestrial spells outshines the most potent mortal magic, and kings and merchant-princes alike will pay good silver and jade for countermagic, timely battlefield spell casting and anagathics. An outcaste sorcerer can summon demon foot soldiers, command the elements and wipe out a scale of troops, if the need beckons, which is why an outcaste with a command of the Terrestrial Circle is capable of drawing a heavy price from those who demand his services. Sorcerers are the rarest of the lost eggs, and the pursuit of such knowledge will take the outcaste to any place where there is a hint of arcane knowledge. Without the training that the Heptagram offers, an outcaste will find himself performing potentially deadly missions for spirits in exchange for a copy of a spell, robbing the dusty tombs of long-forgotten scholars and Anathema and traipsing across Creation in search of lore, from the City of the Mad one decade to the ruins of Bagrash Köl's flying fortress the next.

OUTCASTES THROUGHOUT CREATION

The experiences of many outcastes differ depending on where they take their Second Breath. An outcaste in the Scavenger Lands faces different challenges and opportunities than one born in the North or the West. To understand the outcaste, one must understand where he comes from and where he finds himself — has he taught himself lessons learned from the mean streets of Nexus, did he have a mentor, or was he brought into an organization made up of outcastes?

THE NORTH

The frigid wastes of the North are rife with danger and chances for advancement for an enterprising outcaste. Those Terrestrial Exalted who ally themselves with one of the Northern Dragon-Blooded colonies or some other power are granted safe haven and access to weapons and wealth. Those who wander the storm-wracked lands alone face death and worse, unless they are very hardy and brave.

Those who take the Second Breath in the North live or die based on where and when they are Exalted. Among the tribes of icewalkers, an outcaste is permitted to live within the tribe only if the Animal Master that watches over the band of nomads allows it — if the Animal Master forbids it, the outcaste must flee or face what had been her family and friends in mortal combat. Those tribes that follow the Bull of the North allow an outcaste to live amongst them only if she was born to an icewalker tribe — those who belong to the villages that dot the snowy landscape are slain when first

encountered by the Bull's people. As such, when a village discovers that one among their number has taken the Second Breath, they exile her rather than risk the wrath of the Bull or one of the nomadic bands that follow him.

Toward the Inland Sea, outcastes fare better by far, and the Northern colonies are always looking for outcastes suitable for breeding purposes or who can fill posts in the government. Outcastes are required to follow the Immaculate faith to gain any such post and to toe the political line of the colony in question, but few find that to be any trouble once they taste the relative luxury that Dragon-Blooded experience within those Terrestrial-controlled lands. If an outcaste from an icewalker tribe or one of the primitive villages strewn across the interior shows up in the territory of a colony, she is offered opportunities for study and martial training. A Dragon-Blooded child from the Far North may lack the basic knowledge Northern colonies need, but she can usually be taught, and she makes up for it in the potential she offers with her might and power.

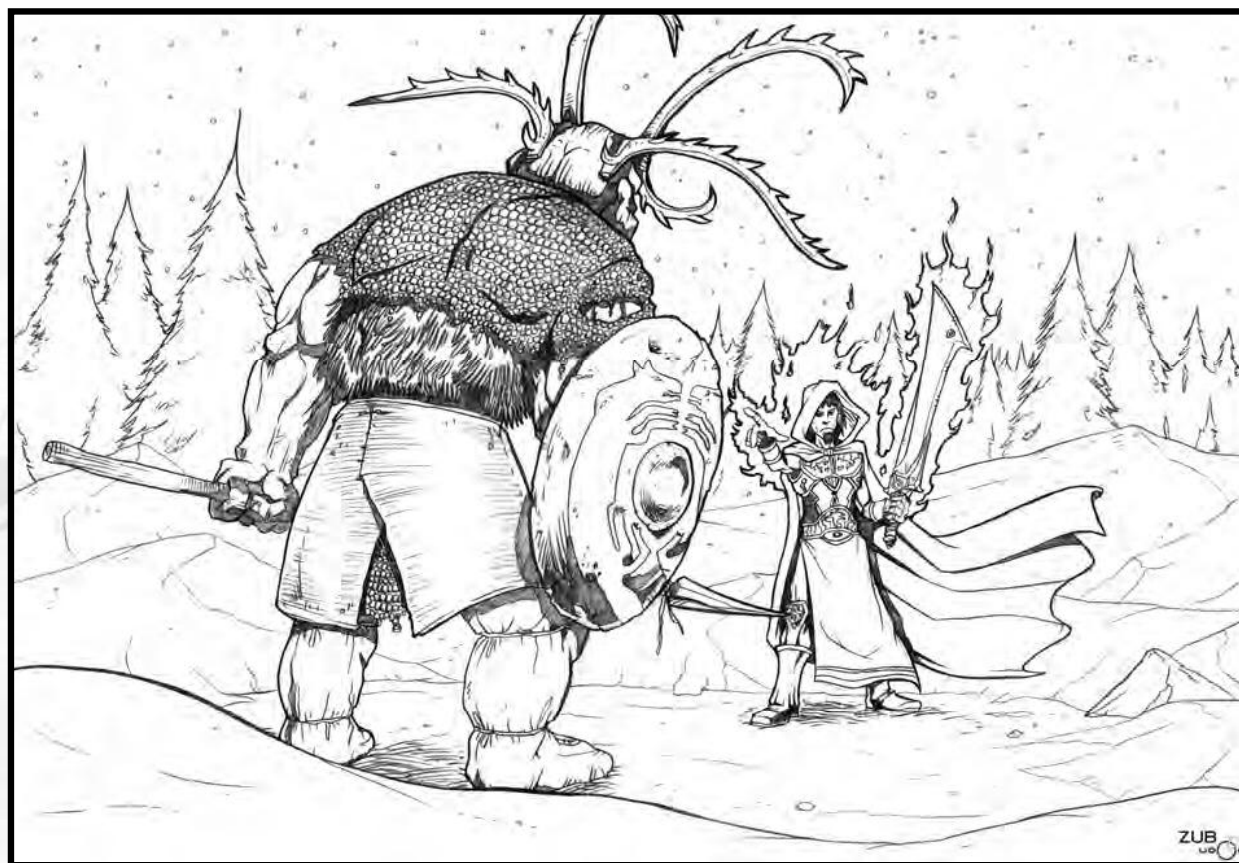
Other areas vary in their treatment of the outcastes. Whitewall is always willing to accept an outcaste among the city's guardians, and the Syndics make sure those Exalted have access to sorcery and artifacts, if they need them, for the duration of their stay in Whitewall. The library of the Syndics is extensive, and those rare few who have seen it claim that it dates back to the First Age and the height of the Solar-controlled Realm.

The Haslanti are eager for outcaste craftsmen to work on air boats and outcaste mercenaries to aid in the Haslanti's

dreams of expansion, although they have little to offer other than feathersteel weaponry and copious amounts of silver. The finds from their excavations in the North make it into the hands of only the most trusted Terrestrial Exalted, consisting mainly of those who have sworn to bind their fate to that of the League. Still, the Haslanti know full well that the best air-boat captains come from the ranks of the Exalted and, occasionally, a Dragon-Blood is given command of such a vessel after earning the Haslanti's trust.

Only in Gethamane are the outcastes unwanted, for while all outcastes are permitted to visit, none are encouraged to stay for longer than a month, by command of the priests who oversee the temples in the city. Something in the vaults beneath Gethamane does not like the Dragon-Blooded. Few outcaste treasure hunters who enter the underways return, and those who do are rarely in the same condition coming out as when they went in. While a Dragon-Blooded might attempt to stay in the city without wandering into the vast tunnel network, those who have attempted it complain of strange nightmares and a growing sense of unease that increases nightly — the same dark dreams that many mortals who stay in the temples complain of. At the very least, those who stay in the mountain city longer than a month make sure to make frequent trips outside of the mountain in order to shake the mounting claustrophobia and nervousness that grows to afflict them.

Many villages have given an outcaste mercenary their last dinars in exchange for protection from those icewalker tribes and Wyld cults that wander the North. It pays for





these outcaste warriors to be well versed in the ways of the various barbarians, so that the outcaste can mediate a settlement between the predatory barbarians and the isolated settlements that the Dragon-Blooded have been hired to protect. If the two parties cannot arrange such a treaty, outcastes have found that attacking the herds is far easier than attacking the icewalkers and results in the icewalkers being driven off just as combat would.

THE MARMOREANS

Among the outcastes of the North are found the Marmoreans, a sisterhood of pale, outcaste cannibal-scholars who wander the windy snowpack, memorizing the songlines of the barbarian tribes even as they attempt to gain knowledge of lost First Age lore. They serve Eshemati, the Hundred-Eyed Shouter of Blasphemies, a demon whose chosen sphere of influence is knowledge and who was freed centuries ago from Malfeas by Bagrash Köl. The Marmoreans operate out of a dozen cave-fortresses within the North, served by deaf worshippers forbidden by Eshemati from hearing even a single secret. The Marmoreans know forbidden rites, gleaned from the twisted religion of the Dragon Kings, that allow them to ritually devour the brain of a victim and gain his knowledge, which they then bring back to the buried temples of Eshemati. In their religion, every secret is Eshemati's, stolen from her during the years before man's creation and sullied by the whispering of human tongues.

The Marmoreans are fierce, uncompromising foes armed with weapons of bone and jade, but they have been known to trade information with other Exalted — but only if the other party has a secret that no Marmorean has heard.

THE WEST

In the West, there is no organized outcaste presence as there is in the North — no colonies of Dragon-Blooded where a newly Exalted outcaste can find respite. This is not to say that there are no opportunities for an outcaste in the West — quite the contrary, since almost all of the islands and nations of the West welcome outcastes with open arms.

The Coral Archipelago offers any outcaste warriors who join them a chance at making a fortune, although the limits that keep foreigners from attaining high rank in Coral's navy ensure that all but native-born outcastes attempt instead to gain letters of marque from the Sea Lord. The peaceful Wavecrest Archipelago is also receptive to outcastes, but more for the added safety that Terrestrial Charms ensure for ships with a Dragon-Blooded on them. More than one ship has returned to Wavecrest after close encounters with massed pirates or enemy vessels without having had to fight at all — such is the power of an outcaste who focuses his talents into sailing.

The Lintha Family seeks to add Dragon-Blooded bloodlines to its own, but only under its own terms. Those Terrestrial Exalted who join will be expected to offer a child for gelding and possible torment. Terrestrials whose stature competes with the Family's or who seem to threaten the Family will have no chance of actually joining, al-

though alliances are always possible. Characters who were not castrated would have to have bloodlines worth the dilution of the Familial blood.

It is not just the governments of men who welcome outcastes into their midst, however. Fakharu, Censor of the West, makes use of Dragon-Blooded as errand boys and representatives in the mortal world, and as such, his enemies, including several Storm Mothers, attempt to make use of them as well. Fakharu finds outcastes to be the perfect agents — they're far more powerful than mortals, and the accident of their Exaltations tends to create independent and resourceful individuals who lack the greater impulses that drive the Celestial Exalted. Work for such luminaries as Fakharu and his adversaries brings with it the opportunity for jade goods and blessings from the gods, and so, many consider the potential gains worth the attendant risk.

While outcastes may be honored guests of many of the human and spirit worlds, little love is lost between the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water and the outcastes of the region. The Bodhisattva allows the Dragon-Blooded to enter the Skullstone Archipelago, but they are clearly not welcome. None may pass the Bone Gate to enter the city of Onyx, and the freebooters in the service of the Bodhisattva are crueler to the outcastes they take prisoner than even the Lintha Family. A captured outcaste is allowed to die only after ritual torture, a fate mandated by the Bodhisattva and carried out gladly by his mercenary crews. He also forbids his freebooters from taking outcastes as crew, and Dragon-Blooded in the region have met their ends at the spearpoint of a dozen zombie warriors often enough that they tend to either skirt areas controlled by the Bodhisattva or attack his reavers on sight.

FREEBOOTERS

Outcastes who wish to work toward their own ends frequently take up one of two occupations in the West — pirate or shaman. The West teems with Dragon-Blooded buccaneers, some of them traveling in sworn brotherhoods. The Rising Scarlet Wind Brotherhood, for instance, is a quartet of outcastes commanding three fast ships, and their leader was once a high-ranking naval officer for the Realm. They are a companionable bunch, less bloodthirsty and far more efficient than the average pirates that ply the West are. They kill only when necessary and squander enough jade and silver in the various ports they keep to that, when they land their vessels, they are well favored by town notaries and local prostitutes alike. The Lintha have taken a strong dislike to the quartet, but the four outcastes have managed to hold their own in the few battles they have had with the Family.

Standing in strong counterpoint to the Rising Scarlet Wind Brotherhood is Demon Captain Kasua, whose bloodthirsty methods and demonic crew have led rise to a dozen differing myths concerning her origins. Some say she is the offspring of a shipwrecked Dynast father who was unlucky enough to wash up on the shore of one of the more isolated and cannibal-wracked islands. Others argue that she is a

rebel Tya who fled the restrictive atmosphere of Coral. Whatever the truth, she is a sorcerer of formidable ability, and her crew is made up of demons of the First Circle and their awful hybrid offspring. These latter crew are the product of the rapes she allows to take place when her demonic crew takes a prize, and she purportedly raises them on an isolated island. Kasua is a dark beauty whose visage could bring a man to his knees, if not for the teeth she has filed into ugly points. She wields a daiklave of black jade and wears leather armor crafted from the cured skins of those she has defeated in personal combat, which, through artifice, she has turned into a powerful artifact that protects her from anything but the most specially crafted of weapons. She is famous for having no love for the governments of the West, sacrificing captured crews to Siakal, the Western god of battle, slaughter and sharks. She is rumored to be looking for other outcastes to join her sinister cause and has made it known in the ports she lands in that she will teach sorcery to any Dragon-Blooded who will fight under her flag.

For those who resist the call of life as a freebooter, the West is in great need of shamans, Dragon-Blooded whose powers allow them to deal with spirits. The Wyld is an ever-present threat in the lonely West, and the smaller islands fight daily to resist its pull. Many outcastes arrange for gods to use their Charms to protect the more secluded tribes — and guarantee the survival of the tribe's lands by making sure that chiminage and other rites are followed properly.

THE EMISSARIES OF PERFECT WATER

The Emissaries of Perfect Water are a loose band of nearly 40 individuals who are bound by social ties and common goals. The ties that bind the Emissaries are those that come from being responsible for the plight of an island or tribe in the West — these warriors and leaders cemented an alliance a century ago, hoping that they could accomplish together that which they, individually, could not. Nearly a dozen of the Emissaries are outcastes, while the rest are God-Blooded and mortal sorcerers.

The Emissaries' goals are simple — to protect the island-nations of the West from the Wyld and its agents, to defend the status quo of tribal culture from unnecessary contamination by the Realm or the Guild and to propitiate the gods and puissant beings of the West in order to guarantee the safety of the Emissaries' island homes. In order to perform these sacred tasks, the Emissaries protect one another's interests, go to battle as a unit and form a petitioning block in the courts of the various Storm Mothers and sea gods. Many of the Emissaries travel the Western Ocean in specially crafted longboats and coracles, artifact ships capable of traveling at enormous speeds through dangerous storms and treacherous seas. The rewards for being an Emissary of Perfect Water are meager — the knowledge that one has protected the West for another season, the thanks of a tribe or two on an island, the monetary and magical rewards presented by chiefs and shamans.

Despite their numbers, there are too few Emissaries patrolling too large a space, and so, they have watched the

Wyld grow stronger over the last decade and lost a number of important islands to Fair Folk incursions or aggressive raiders. The Emissaries are desperate for new members to join their number and have begun scouring the West for likely candidates. Yet, they can find few who would be willing to hazard the worst of the Wyld zones in exchange for the meager thanks of the tiny islands who depend on them. The Emissaries have recently called for a council to meet at the spirit court of Fakharu, Censor of the Western Oceans, in order to discuss the growing threat of the Wyld. Even before the council has taken place, however, the Emissaries have received word of a gathering of Lunar Exalted hosted by the mighty Leviathan — and suspect that the worst is yet to come.

THE SOUTH

Outcastes in the South are fortunate in that, in many cities, the Immaculate faith holds sway on some level — even among the Delzahn nomads, the Dragon-Blooded are accorded respect. As such, Terrestrials who Exalt in the region tend to be able to find a way to survive, and even thrive, with little trouble. While the tribes and cities of the South do not kowtow to the Dragon-Blooded as do the peasants of the Realm, the South is the safest place in the Threshold for an outcaste to Exalt.

In Chiaroscuro, outcastes can find work as superior craftsmen, bodyguards, mercenaries or anything else that suits their fancy, and treasure hunters and ghost-killers are well paid and much respected occupations for Dragon-Blooded in the city. The Delzahn hold outcastes in high esteem, and the Tri-Khan surrounds himself with those noted for their skill in armed combat — or any other talent that he finds personally useful. Given the open and accepting nature of the Delzahn royalty, liaisons between high-ranking nobles and their outcaste companions are common, though outcaste offspring are still not frequent occurrences.

To the ruling houses in Gem, outcastes are a necessary, if odious, price of doing business, and so, they do not embrace them quite as easily as do the people of Chiaroscuro. Outcaste Dragon-Blooded are tolerated because the skulduggery that surrounds the politics of the city requires a constant flow of assassins capable of dealing with magical wards, and hence, sorcerers capable of creating them. Only Dragon-Blooded readily fit the bill, and they cost a reasonable amount of coin, for even the least powerful Terrestrial magic cast by an outcaste sorcerer can overwhelm wards crafted from mortal sorcery. Occasionally, an outcaste craftsman of extraordinary ability is summoned to work on the city's namesake jewels, and when raids become common on the caravans, outcaste mercenaries can charge a high price for their services. The city also relies on outcaste forces to support its military.

Another reason why the Dragon-Blooded are tolerated in Gem is that there is a large market for the dreams of the Princes of the Earth, and outcastes have made a





fortune selling their fantasies to the opal-merchants of Gem. For a hefty price, anyone can taste the power and passion of the Five Elemental Dragons within the dreams of an outcaste Dragon-Blood, although such a practice is heavily proscribed by the Immaculate faith. Proscription does not stop the heavy traffic in such gems, as the patricians of the Blessed Isle form an avid market for them.

Within the Varang City-States, outcastes challenge the notion that each person's future is writ large in the stars. Many outcastes born within the cities aver that their futures change at the moment of Exaltation, while the astrologer-priests disagree, labeling such ideas as heretical. This issue has caused a minor rift between the Varang orthodoxy and those who hew to the Immaculate faith in the city-states, for the Immaculates in the area maintain that Exaltation frees a person from his previous mortal destiny and allows him to rewrite his fate. The Immaculate stance has not changed the way the Varang deal with outcastes, however, for no matter where an outcaste's true ability lies, he is kept locked into the same caste and rank that he had before his Exaltation. This has lead many who Exalt among the city-states' lower classes to flee the region to find their fortunes in Chiaroscuro, Gem or even the Realm. A few of the outcastes that do find work in the city show the potential, and the birth-forecast, to become craftsmen, working upon the intricate and beautiful clock-works and orreries that the Varang are famous for.

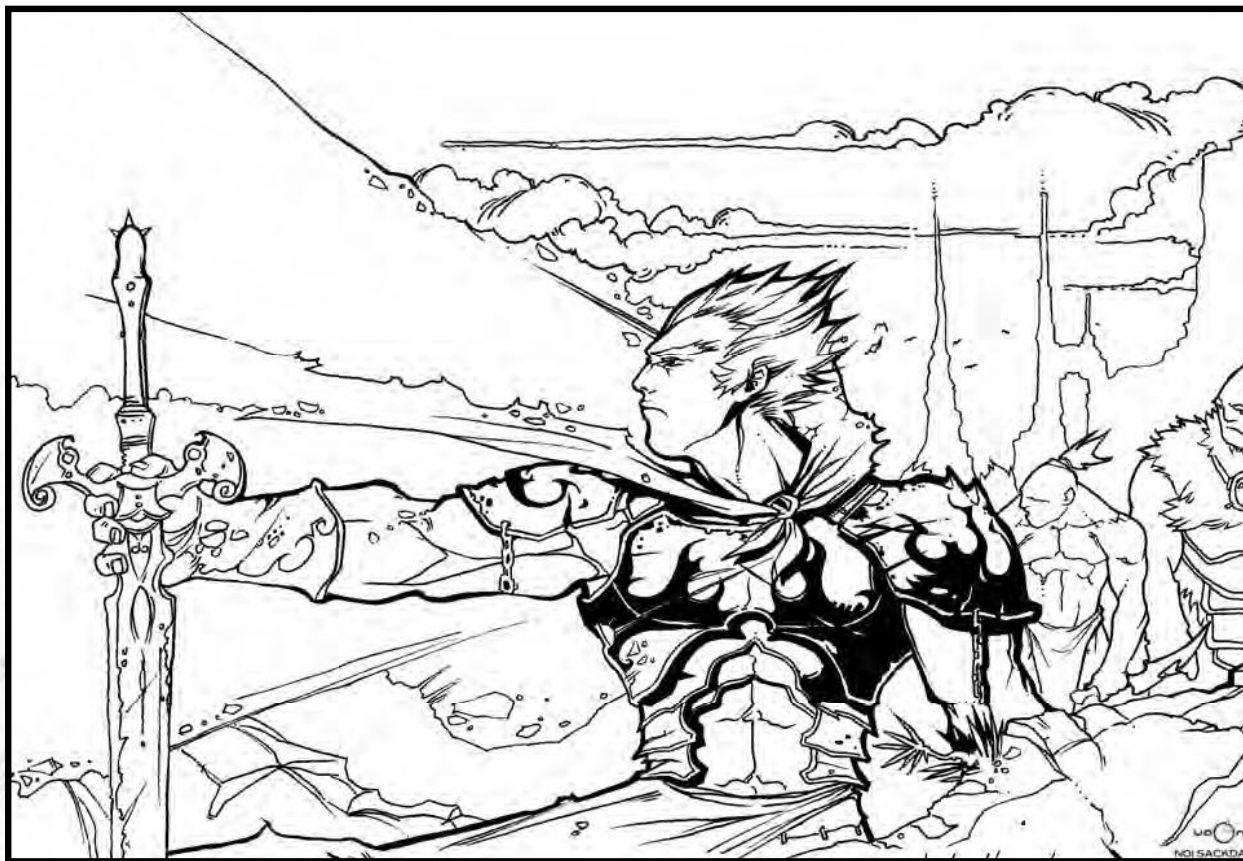
The Perfect of Paragon has no problem with outcastes seeking residence in the city, which boasts of a Dragon-

Blooded population of almost 100, all of whom have taken vows to serve only Paragon itself. All of these outcastes have undergone the ritual of subservience to the Perfect. As with the Solar Exaltation, those Dragon-Blooded outcastes who Exalt within the city find themselves freed from their oath to the Perfect, but surprisingly few of them choose to leave the rigid confines of the city. The main reason for this reticence is that, once Exalted, the outcastes of the city find themselves promoted to high rank and granted both status and wealth.

The majority of outcastes in the South stick to time-honored occupations such as sorcerer, savant and warrior. That doesn't mean there is little to do, however — the Guild relies extensively on mercenaries to protect gemstone and firedust caravans moving through the Southlands, and an outcaste can always find work among them. Finally, prospectors who bring back baskets of firedust or handfuls of yasal crystals can earn a king's ransom, so outcastes who know the desert and who can wield a sword typically try their hand at mineral harvesting if they have no other reliable work.

THE LEGION OF SALOY HIN

There are unsubstantiated rumors that one of the legions that disappeared when the Great Houses attempted to consolidate their control over the military has taken to military adventurism in the South, amassing a supply of firedust while searching for lost Manses in the region. The general of the legion, Saloy Hin, a graduate of the Stair and



an Aspect of Fire, is eager to gather more Exalted under his banner and has made it known that any outcaste is welcome to fight beside him. He and his legion were legends in the Realm for their daring tactics and rigid discipline, and when he left the Blessed Isle, his men took an armory's worth of weaponry with them. They have jade daiklaves and powerbows to spare if an outcaste will take an oath to support Saloy's efforts to build a power base in the region. He has sent out sorcerers under his command to scour the area for Anathema tombs, Manses and places of power, hoping to find some edge for when he finally makes his move and conquers parts of the South as a stepping stone toward bringing the Realm itself under his bootheel. Under his banner, he has gathered outcasts from the various Wyld barbarian tribes and sold firedust to the Varang City-States through middlemen in order to buy out the contracts of mercenary bands for use as foot soldiers.

Whether Saloy Hin is a madman or not remains to be seen. He keeps to himself in an abandoned and isolated fortress-Manse that he and his men have discovered, which they have named the Steel Tower. He has made overtures to other Dynastic exiles, including Tepet Ajava, and his closest associates say that he is interested in forming something he calls a "Second Alliance of Tigers," channeling the ritual power of that name to overcome a Realm without the Scarlet Empress. He is obsessed with the future and pays heavily for Varang sages to bring him astrological forecasts. Those who know him feel that, if his plans come close to fruition and he does create an alliance with other outcaste legions, he could spell the salvation — or the doom — of the Realm itself.

THE EAST

From the massive, silent rainforests of the Northeast to the oppressively humid jungles of the southlands, a Dragon-Blood in the East will face a variety of unique and challenging environments that offer equal chances at wealth and danger.

In the Northeast, the seemingly endless war of the Linowan against their Haltan adversaries is always in need of new Terrestrial troops, for both sides appreciate soldiers who are just as effective fighting on their own as they are in a war party. This is all the more true after the great battles recently fought between the Realm and the Bull of the North in the region. Savants skilled in the etiquette of the spirit courts are needed just as much as mercenaries, for outcaste sorcerers the nations hire are relied upon to perform the duties of emissaries to the courts of Caltia and Jorst when the need arises.

The Mask of Winters' takeover of the Eastern city of Thorns has also provided work for itinerant outcastes — those Dragon-Blooded who lived in the city and know it well are often hired to wander back in to locate and placate the ghosts of those massacred in the Deathlord's conquest of the metropolis or to gather intelligence from those august shades. Other outcastes hire themselves out to the Mask of Winters or his lieutenants, spreading throughout the East as spies, assassins and agents provocateurs, never piecing to-

gether the ancient ghost's hopelessly labyrinthine plans. Even such skilled and cunning Exalted pawns are frequently sacrificed in one move or another of political chess.

In the Southeastern jungles, an outcaste can make a fortune risking his skin by bargaining with the diminutive and cannibalistic chaun for poisons and rare healing drugs or by collecting the pelts of rare animals such as tree-singers and claw striders. Those same scouts, familiar with the jungles, sometimes hire themselves out to the Realm's garrison at Jades as trackers or mercenary troops (see *Ruins of Rathess*, pp. 21-22).

Others sometimes make it further into the jungle and declare themselves kings, dictating the law to a tribe of worshipful barbarians, if that is their wont. Some outcastes have lived and bred among the deep-forest people for so long that there are tiny pockets of a few primitive, inbred Dragon-Blooded ruling over vast swathes of forest territory. These savage Terrestrials remain unchallenged until a god or Lunar Anathema becomes so disturbed by their predations that they slaughter the whole tribe in one riot of bloodshed, leaving nothing behind. Such a deed is never an easy task, though, even for gods and Lunars, given how much power even these inbred atavisms can bring to bear when they have been touched by the Five Elemental Dragons.

THE GRASS-SPIDERS

Hidden on the outskirts of the River Province is a small Manse from which the Grass-Spiders ply their bloody trade. They are assassins, well versed in a strange form of martial arts based on their namesakes, which was taught to them by spirit guides who reside within the deep forest. The clan works extensively within the Scavenger Lands and across the East and makes a healthy income from assassinations made to look like accidents and murders meant to send a message. They are also poisoners, skilled in the use of toxins both subtle and obvious, which they gather from the tribes who reside within the deep forest such as the chaun. They also sometimes purchase venoms from the Sijanese, who have strange contacts within the Underworld. The latter poisons, made from strange pastes and efflorescents smuggled in from the lands of the dead, are necrotic agents that rot away limbs and devour the very souls of their victims.

The Grass-Spiders answer to the Three Elite Fiends, mysterious elders who dictate the assassins' diet and training regimen, hand down martial-arts techniques and pass judgments on those who fail a mission or spurn the laws of the community. It is the Three Elite Fiends whom outsiders contact in order to arrange an assassination or to buy the services of the clan, and no two patrons agree as to what, exactly, the Three Elite Fiends are. Some say they are spirits crowned in white fire, while others proclaim that they are demons bound to the Manse or ancient ghosts. Even the Grass-Spiders do not wholly understand the nature of the Fiends, though many of them believe that their masters are merely the eldest outcastes of the clan, bloody-handed assassins with a flair for disguise and the dramatic arts.





The clan has tried to expand its numbers by kidnapping and indoctrinating outcastes who Exalt within the deep forest. The Grass-Spiders number less than two dozen individuals of varying ages, many of them brought into the “clan” shortly after Exaltation as little more than children. An outcaste brave enough to seek them out stands an equal chance of being initiated into their clan or being disposed of, depending on her approach and the whims of the Three Elite Fiends. Surprisingly enough, the Grass-Spiders are an affable bunch, justifying their acts as an occupation no different than that practiced by any of the other denizens of the River Province and pursuing their livelihood like any another trade. They see themselves as artists, exploring the limits of their chosen profession and perfecting their martial arts skills and bodies just as an Immaculate priest would, all the while taking pride in a job well done when a murder is particularly well executed.

THE RIVER PROVINCE

Outcastes in the Scavenger Lands exist in a world that has grown accustomed to contact with gods, the Seventh Legion and the Celestial Exalted — so it is in this region that outcastes have the most opportunity to focus on profit rather than finding themselves swept up into political concerns. The other side to this coin, however, is that beings who possess more power than outcastes feel comfortable working openly in the province — so Dragon-Blooded must tread carefully and be extraordinarily cunning if they hope to survive in a region where gods and Solar Exalted openly walk alongside mortals.

In the Scavenger Lands, outcastes can find plenty of opportunities to make a name — and a fortune — for themselves by allying with the scavenger lords and looting the tombs of the Anathema. The Terrestrials’ broad skills and Charms make them ideal candidates to raid the resting places of the ancient and unholy dead, and many outcastes manage to find plenty of wealth before they step past the wrong trap or face off against a foe too powerful for their Charms. The problem is greed — too many of the outcastes who take up scavenging simply do not know when to stop and, so, meet ugly ends. Those few who manage to pick the right time to quit the business end up settling down with enough jade and artifacts to last a lifetime.

The cities of the River Province nearly always have work for itinerant outcastes, no matter their talent. Performers can find work in Great Forks, where the three gods who run the city have been known to reward outcaste performers greatly — rumors persist, however, that those who displease the trio disappear, reappearing later as ensorcelled thralls. Nexus, the filthy gem of the Scavenger Lands, is constantly looking for new outcastes for work as Exalted concubines, mercenaries, gladiators or sorcerers, for in Nexus, it doesn’t matter what class a man or woman was born into. All that matters is that the Five Elemental Dragons have blessed them and that they’ll work for honest (or dishonest) coin.

Dragon-Blooded craftsman, especially those who can work with grave goods made of jade and stone, can always find employment in Sijan, although such jobs tend to be minor affairs unless the outcaste is willing to join the Morticians’ Order. Occasionally, outcaste mercenaries are paid heavy sums by bereaved relatives to travel into the Underworld of Sijan and bring some important message to a dead loved one, if he can be found — these messengers sometimes come back with ancient grave goods as gifts, but more often, they don’t come back at all. Only the brave or foolish take the long walk from the shadowland of the Black Chase into the Underworld just so that some potentate or merchant prince can consult with a long-deceased ancestor rumored to possess great wisdom.

MERCENARY-CHAMPIONS OF THE HUNDRED KINGDOMS

One of the most lucrative careers an outcaste can aspire to is that of mercenary-champion for one of the Hundred Kingdoms. Since the kingdoms rarely indulge in open, total warfare, disputes are settled via champions, through single combat — and outcaste duelists are a common sight. It is an honest living, with successful champions earning enormous sums and receiving access to one or two First Age weapons for the duration of their employment.

For most people in the Scavenger Lands, a duel between two champions is the only safe way to witness the true might of the Exalted. The ritual combat of the mercenary-champions is a sight indeed — the champions’ brilliant pennants of dyed wolf-spider silk flap in the wind, while the gorgeously attired Dragon-Blooded flare their animas and clash in Essence-fueled powered armor crafted from jade and encrusted with glittering diamonds, huge pearls and adamant emblems. Peals of thunder roll across the verdant fields as weapons capable of unleashing bolts of lightning and daggers shaped from black jade and obsidian whirl in a complex dance, while each kingdom’s singers intone the virtues of the fighters. Both sides host great feasts and perform copious sacrifices before the combat, and the winning side always holds a similar feast afterward.

There is an informal etiquette among the outcaste duelists. Even though many of them have developed intense rivalries over the years, the death of a champion in combat is a rare event, as the kingdoms involved prefer to ransom off the loser of the ritual combat, which, of course, makes the role of mercenary-champion even more attractive to outcastes. A Dragon-Blood can live her life as the champion of a kingdom while kept in the richest digs, with little chance of being killed in battle (barring some unfortunate accident.) Those Dragon-Blooded outcastes who choose not to live their lives as mercenary-champions leave the occupation skilled in warfare and single combat, ready for a career as a gladiator or a soldier anywhere in Creation and with a reputation that precedes them throughout the Scavenger Lands.

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose concept, aspect and Nature.

Note the anima powers provided by the character's aspect.

• STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (7/6/4)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES FOR

REALM OUTCASTES

Note Aspect Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (3; may not be the same as Aspect Abilities).

Choose Abilities (outcastes of lower-class birth receive 25 Ability points — at least 13 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities; at least one must be in each Favored Ability; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points. Graduates of Pasiap's Stair or the Cloister of Wisdom must have a *minimum* of Archery •, Brawl or Martial Arts •, Lore •, Melee •, Performance or Presence •, Ride • and Socialize •. Patrician-born outcastes receive 30 Ability points and must have a *minimum* of Archery •, Brawl or Martial Arts •, Melee •, Performance •, Presence •, Ride •, Lore •• and Socialize ••.

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES FOR

THRESHOLD OUTCASTES

Note Aspect Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (3; may not be the same as Aspect Abilities).

Choose Abilities (25 — of these 25, 10 must be spent on Aspect or Favored Abilities.).

• STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

Choose Backgrounds (7 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points), Charms (7 taken from Dragon-Blooded Charms OR 5 taken from Immaculate Order Charms — at least 4 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities if the character is not learning Immaculate martial arts. If the character is an Immaculate martial artist, all the Charms must be part of the same elemental tree.), Virtues (5 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points).

• STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Record Essence (2), Willpower (add the total of two highest Virtues — may not start at higher than 8 unless at least two Virtues are 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool (Essence + Willpower, plus any gained from Breeding), Peripheral Essence pool ([Essence x 4] + Willpower + [the sum of your two highest Virtues], plus any gained from Breeding) and health levels (7, plus any gained from Charms).

• BONUS POINTS

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

ELEMENTAL ASPECTS

• Air:

Aspect Abilities: Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

Anima Powers: May triple his leaping distance, and takes no damage from falls.

• Earth:

Aspect Abilities: Awareness, Craft, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.

Anima Powers: May soak lethal damage with her entire Stamina.

• Fire:

Aspect Abilities: Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.

Anima Powers: May burst into flame for a scene, doing lethal damage and becoming immune to fire damage.

• Water:

Aspect Abilities: Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

Anima Powers: A Terrestrial Exalted aspected to Water can gain free movement in water. For the rest of the day, she can breathe underwater and operate as freely as if she was in air.

- **Wood:**

Aspect Abilities: Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.

Anima Powers: May add dice to Dodge or Athletics actions.

VIRTUES

- **Compassion** — Empathy and forgiveness.
- **Conviction** — Emotional endurance.
- **Temperance** — Self-control and clear-headedness.
- **Valor** — Courage and bravery.

BACKGROUNDS FOR REALM OUTCASTES

- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Artifact** — Weapons and tools crafted from the Five Magical Materials, including wonders of the First Age.
- **Backing** — Standing and rank in an organization of power and influence.
- **Breeding** — Your lineage, reflecting how strongly your blood resonates to your chosen element. *Outcastes may not have this Background higher than 3, and must pay twice as much for every dot they possess in this Background.*
- **Command** — Authorization to lead soldiers.
- **Connections** — Information sources and friends in useful places that give you pull in the world around you.
- **Familiar** — An animal companion.
- **Henchmen** — Agents who do your bidding.
- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence that you have access to.
- **Mentor** — A patron and instructor.
- **Reputation** — How society views you and your actions.
- **Resources** — Material goods and money.
- **Retainers** — Mortals who serve you.

BACKGROUNDS FOR THRESHOLD OUTCASTES

Outcastes from the Threshold use the Backgrounds found in the **Exalted** core rules (pp. 141-146).

- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Artifact** — Weapons and tools crafted from the Five Magical Materials, including wonders of the First Age.
- **Backing** — Standing and rank in an organization of power and influence.
- **Contacts** — Information sources and friends in useful places.
- **Familiar** — An animal companion.
- **Followers** — Mortals who look to you for leadership.
- **Influence** — Your pull in the world around you.
- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence that you have access to.
- **Mentor** — A patron and instructor.
- **Resources** — Material goods and money.

BONUS POINTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Background	2 (3 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Virtue	3
Willpower	2
Essence	10
Charm	7 (5 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)
Immaculate Charm	10 (7 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability)