

KITHBOOK: REDCAPS

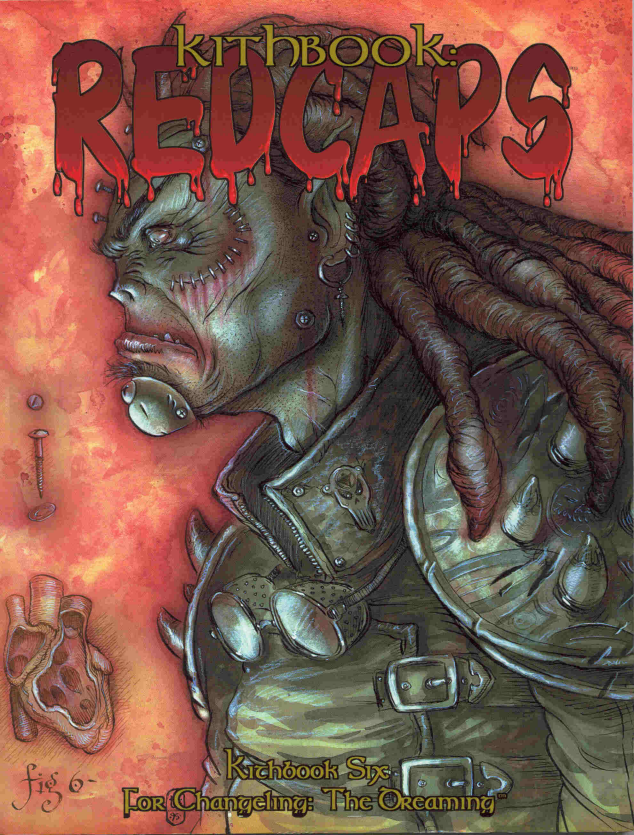


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Kithbook Six
For Changeling: The Dreaming

kithbook: REDCAPS™



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A MEMORY OF TEETH

BEING A TALE OF HOW THE REDCAPS GOT THEIR BITE... IN A WAY

"What can you remember?" asked the old man of the boy.

He was ancient, the old man was, with arms like oak driftwood that had been too long at sea. He had a beard, ragged and white, that spilled down from his long chin like a waterfall, and he had strong hands that looked like they could wring tears from a stone. His mouth was wide and his smile was cold, and he wore a battered hat the color of rust on his head. He sat on a boulder in one of the wild places of the world, looking out over a valley carpeted in trees wearing red and orange leaves, and his gaze passed over the boy like the brush of a forgetful ghost.

The boy sat at the base of the boulder and looked up at the old man. He was small and wiry, and had the same cruel features that the old man on the stone did. He, too, had strong arms and strong hands, but his cap was bright and new.

"I remember my birthday," the boy said, "When the other childlings came to play with me, and the duke cut my cake with his sword, and let me have the first piece. There were musicians there, and dancers. I remember that, and I remember they gave me

a songbird as a gift. They asked me what I had done with it later, and I told them that I had set it free. They believed me."

The old man nodded, once. "That's good, that's a fine start. But that's what you remember, Alaric. You-as-you-are-now. What do you remember?"

The boy Alaric looked thoughtful for a moment. "I remember when I was small," he said, and shifted where he sat. "I was always hungry. Never cold, but always hungry. I learned not to cry, though. It never helped to cry. Instead, I learned to wait."

The old man flicked a piece of moss from the stone, the only sign of his impatience. "Impressive," he said, "but not what I am asking. Go past who you are, Alaric. Think about what you are. Think about where you came from, why you are what you are now. Where did those teeth come from, Alaric? Who gave them to you?" And with that, the old man smiled a crooked smile that showed a palisade of crooked fangs.

"I remember..." the boy said uncertainly, and stopped.

"Yes?" the old man breathed, barely audible. "Tell me, boy, tell me what you know deep in your bones."

"I remember the dark," Alaric said. "I remember the dark and the cold of the tower, and looking out of the one window. There was a ladder made of rope, but it had rotted away and I couldn't leave. So I had to call them up." Alaric's breathing was shallow, and the voice he spoke in had a rasp to it like a battered hack-saw, drawn across stone. His eyes were open, but they didn't see the old man. "They'd find a way. They'd always find a way."

"And then what?"

"And then... I don't remember."

The old man shook his head. "You don't want to remember, that's what it is, boy. Deep down you know, though. Deep down you know. So go back again," he said. "Further."

The boy's breathing was labored now, an old man's wheeze. His eyes had gone pure black, without pupil or iris. "I remember



the old times. We were in the rivers, then, and we'd reach up to grab the children by their ankles.

Their mothers had told them not to play near the waters, that the rivers were hungry, but they didn't listen. We'd reach up from the weeds and clutch at them, and if we were lucky we'd snatch them away like they'd never been there. Some of them screamed, but not for long." He paused for a moment, and looked almost thoughtful. "You can't scream for long, down in the weeds."

"Further," the old man breathed. "You're almost there, boy. What does it feel like where you are now? When you are now?"

Alaric whimpered. "It's dark..." "It's supposed to be dark, boy! It was all

dark then, except right up close to the fires. Everything else was shadows under the eaves, and we were there, weren't we? Weren't we?"

"Yes." The boy's voice is quiet, almost inaudible.

"What was that?"

"Yes, oh yes, I see now."

"Good." The old man leaned in close. "What do you see?"

"I see the firelight, and men sitting around it. Their backs are to the fire, and they watch the shadows because they know we are there. They know that if they go into the shadows, the claws will tear and the jaws will catch and they'll vanish. They know there's something waiting for them in the forest, something that will swallow them and hunger for more. They know that the forest and the darkness can devour



everything they are, everything they can be, and they are afraid. That's why they stay close to the fire. They know that this place is older than they are, old and terrible. They know they're not welcome in this world, and that it will swallow them up as if they never had been. The wild places want them. We want them."

The old man nodded slowly, daring only to breathe the word "further." If the boy heard him, he gave no sign, but he clutched his arms to his sides and shivered.

"It's cold," he said. "We're cold. We are the cold. Snow is everywhere. Snow and ice. There is an old man, telling stories. He looks like you do, grandfather. He has your eyes. The others sit around and listen. I can't see myself here. I can't see any of us, but I know we are here. They know I am here, too."

"The old man who looks like you is looking at me. He is telling them about the wind. The wind has teeth, he says. It will devour them, so they must seek shelter. They must keep moving toward the sun, or the wind will chew the

flesh from their bones. He is looking at me, grandfather. He knows we are here. The others are looking too, now, but they do not see me. They believe, though. They believe. Every word he says makes us stronger, and they believe."

With a cry, the boy pitched forward. The old man made no move to break his fall, but merely sat, and watched, motionless. At some indeterminate point in time, a squirrel chose to investigate the motionless tableau a little too closely. At first it would barely venture onto the rock before darting back, but as the long minutes past it lost its fear of the two unmoving figures in front of it. With a jaunty strut, the squirrel stepped out onto the boulder, and surveyed the scene.

The old man reached out, fast as a striking snake, and caught it. The squirrel chittered in fear for a moment as he regarded it, then without a word he tore off its head with his teeth. Blood spurted onto his fingers, the stone and the still-

unmoving Alaric, but only for an instant. Without hesitation, the old man opened his mouth impossibly wide and swallowed the rest of the squirrel, whole, then almost daintily licked his fingers clean.

At his feet, the boy stirred. "About time, boy," the old man said. "When I did that, it took me half as long to get my sense back. You're keeping us here," and he gestured out over the valley, vaguely, "with the sun going down. We don't want to be caught out here after dark, do we?"

Alaric sat up and grinned that same impossible grin his grandfather

wore. "We've been out in this dark for ten thousand years, grandpa. What's one more night?"

Off in the distance, something moved under the trees. There was a flash of color, dim in the twilight. It could have been a deer, could have been a bird, could have been a backpacker trying to make a few more miles before sundown.

Alaric didn't care. Neither did his grandfather. Together, they loped off in the appropriate direction, swiftly. After all, they were still hungry.





CHAPTER ONE: A TALE AS OLD AS THE WIND

A hungry people listens not to reason, nor cares for justice, nor is bent by any prayers.

— Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae*

Welcome to the last history class you're ever gonna want to sit down for. The good news is that there's no final, no pop quizzes and no curve. The bad news is that you sure as hell aren't gonna like what you're gonna hear over the next few hours.

You know what? Tough crap. In case you hadn't noticed, you're talking to me. You're not talking to some more-ethereal-than-thou bard type with a gold-plated harp and a tin ear who's gonna spin you six hours of bullshit tales of noble glory, and you're not talking to some twitchy-nosed rat-faced pooka who's got diarrhea of the brain by way of his voicebox. You're talking to me, because I feel like talking to you instead of ripping your ears off. That means that when I talk, you listen, when I ask you a question, you make your answer as short as possible, and when you ask me a question you make sure you're ready for the answer.

And if you decided that what you're hearing is too much for your tender little ears and try to leave, well, I ain't gonna be held responsible for the consequences. You're getting a rare opportunity here to see something about the kith besides our dental work, so you'd best take some kind of advantage of it. If you decide that this privilege ain't to your liking, I'm liable to get highly offended. You don't want to see me offended, honest. It would be bad, and you don't look like you're cut out to handle my level of badness.

As for the other lads and lassies around here, don't worry about them. You're safe as long as I give the high sign. They won't lay a finger on you — or take one off — unless I give the word. And as long as you make like you're a good little guest, I won't give the word.

I take it we have an understanding? Good. That's always nice to hear. You have no idea what a pain in the ass you'd be to get out of the carpet.

IN THE BEGINNING

The first question is, of course, where did we come from. You don't even have to ask it. It's the first one everyone asks. It's also the first answer they hate, and it tends to set the tone for the rest of the discussion. If you screw the pooch here, you're screwed all night. Remember that.

Now I want you to think for a minute. Think about where we all came from, the dim and distant past. What do you think it was like back then? Was it some sort of wonderland where people cavorted around the woods without being afraid that sixteen types of wild critters were going to drag them off for snacks? In some people's minds, sure. Other folks are gonna think of the primeval forest, where the sun's afraid to peek through the branches to see the rotting corpses on the woodland floor, and nasty slimy things move from shadow to shadow just 'cause they can. Which of these pasts is true? Well, they both are, or they both might as well be, because there's enough of a belief that they are true. You get the same for all sorts of situations, and all of those pasts are very real to the right people.

But that's not our history, no. Hey, if it works for other folks, great. More power to 'em, that's what I say. But it's not where we come from, and it's not something we can understand.

Now take a wild guess at the sort of past we look back to. It's a wild one. It's an angry one. It's one that most folks don't like to think about because it's not noble or illuminating or any of that crap.

Instead, it's just cold.

You ever been up in the mountains? Ever seen chunks of landscape that look like they were just carved out with a putty knife? Ever seen boulders big as houses half a mile away from any sort of rock face that could have made 'em? It took power to do that, cold power. We're talking rivers of ice and a world that's so cold that the oceans curled up and hid themselves.

That's the world that made us. We come from the wind that swept down over the ice. You ever think about how that wind felt to the poor bastards living in those days? It was the real enemy, always tearing at them, looking for exposed skin to bite. It never rested and it never slept and it never, ever went away. It must have seemed alive to them, some sort of hungry animal with invisible teeth and claws that was always looking to snap them up. Of course, the fact that if they wandered too far out into the wind there were always bears or big cats or whatever else to chew them up for real couldn't have hurt the myth. And so they got to thinking about the wind and the cold, but there was one problem: They couldn't put a face on it. You can point to a cave bear or a sabertooth whatisis or a wolf and say, "There's the enemy. There's the monster." You can't do that with the wind. It comes from anywhere, vanishes in a heartbeat and leaves

ACROSS THE MAP

Something else to bear in mind is this: It's not like that wind was a neighborhood kind of thing. Winter was everywhere — north, south, east, west, it didn't matter. That meant that the wind went everywhere, too, and where there was wind, you'd find us.

Big deal, you say. Dreaming's everywhere, right? Weather shouldn't matter too much in terms of what sort of critter goes where.

If you believe that, you're more of a moron than you look, and you look pretty damned dumb to me already.

Look, it's this simple: Where the dreams went, we went. The dreams went everywhere, therefore the things that became us went everywhere. Other sorts of dreams and fears didn't get that sort of play, and that's why they've got a more limited range than we do. But because of the way the dice rolled back then, we — or things like us — are universal.

That ought to scare you. If it doesn't, you're clearly not thinking about the situation hard enough.

no tracks. It's invisible and it's silent and it's impossible to watch for. All you can do is build walls where you can to try to keep it out, and pray it's not feeling vicious.

Is it any wonder they put a face on that sort of thing? It helped them fight it. It helped their little shamans make charms against it and say things in the dark that made their little holes at least feel a little warmer. It gave them something to watch for and to stand guard against, gave them a feeling of power in the face of the enemy.

That's where we came from. Oh, the faces we had then were very different. We were all white and gray, colored like the things they thought made the wind. We were either tiny and vicious, or huge, roaring beasts that would crush entire tribes at a single blow. But we were hungry then, just as we're hungry now. That much hasn't changed.

WINTER

Now waitaminute, you're saying, what the hell does this have to do with anything? We're Kithain, after all — where does the archaeology lesson fit into all the stories we've all been taught about where our kind came from, and where it's going. There's this whole marvelous batch of stories about the first Winter and the second Winter that's coming, and so on and so forth, and where we fit into all of that.

Well, don't think too hard about it. You'll strain something you don't use too often but might need some day. Yeah, we believe in Winter. We know Winter. Winter is our mother. It gave birth to us, and it made us who we are. Oh yes, we know Winter. It's where we came from, and it's where the lot of us are going back to. Sooner or later, all the rigmarole and circumstance is gonna fade away, and we'll be back to the very beginning — back to those basic notions that we all came from at the start.

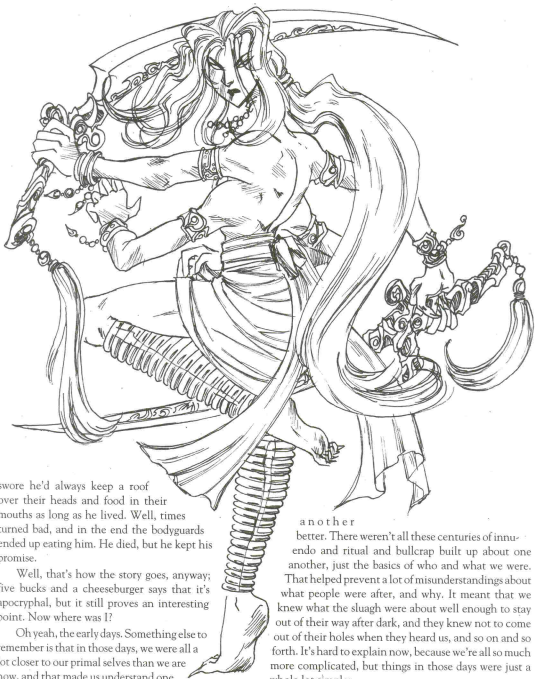
So yes, we know the stories and myths. Hell, we know them better than you do because we know the truth behind them. That means we believe them, too — and we're looking forward to watching them become literal truth again. What goes around, comes around, and we figure it's just about due.

THE EARLY NIGHTS

Anyway, as I said earlier, we didn't look much like our current selves in those days. Things like what we are now weren't needed then. The world wasn't ready for us yet. But the things that would become us were out in the world, and they were moving. They went north to follow the ice as it retreated. They went south with the stories of the ancient winters as they spread. In short, they went everywhere they could, and their surroundings changed them. Most of them stayed like us, or along our basic lines. You know what I mean here — short, big mouths, sharp teeth, wiry bodies — the basic predatory package. There wasn't too much about us that was distinctive, though, unless you count the appetite and the lack of airs and graces.

This was also around the time when we first started running into members of other kiths. I'm not ashamed to say that there used to be a lot more than there are now, and that we're part of the reason that the numbers are down. The world was a bit more savage in those days than it is now, and a lot of times there wasn't much time between "How-de-do" and a fight to the death. The other kiths were mostly little, local things who didn't want interlopers stealing their turf, and they'd fight hard to keep strangers out. Sad to say, fighting hard ain't the same thing as fighting well, and just because you pick a fight doesn't mean you can win it.

Other kiths knew not to tangle with us, at least not on that level. Still, that's not to say relations were all that friendly. They just knew better than to wade into a scrap automatically or without thinking. And, that's not to say it was all skittles and beer. We didn't make any attempts to pretty ourselves up for anyone else, and the others didn't pretend they liked us no matter what our eating habits were. What you had was a healthy respect for each other's capabilities, and in some cases a détente. Everyone was still feeling their way through the world in those days, and trying to dope out how they related to one another. Is it any wonder that there were some pretty weird combinations tried? There's a legend about one troll chieftain who had a band of redcap bodyguards. He



swore he'd always keep a roof over their heads and food in their mouths as long as he lived. Well, times turned bad, and in the end the bodyguards ended up eating him. He died, but he kept his promise.

Well, that's how the story goes, anyway; five bucks and a cheeseburger says that it's apocryphal, but it still proves an interesting point. Now where was I?

Oh yeah, the early days. Something else to remember is that in those days, we were all a lot closer to our primal selves than we are now, and that made us understand one

another better. There weren't all these centuries of innuendo and ritual and bullcrap built up about one another, just the basics of who and what we were. That helped prevent a lot of misunderstandings about what people were after, and why. It meant that we knew what the sluagh were about well enough to stay out of their way after dark, and they knew not to come out of their holes when they heard us, and so on and so forth. It's hard to explain now, because we're all so much more complicated, but things in those days were just a whole lot simpler.

Pity it all had to go to hell, don't you think? And it's all the fault of the damned sidhe.

THE END OF THE PARTY

Something else to bear in mind is that as bloody as things were back then, there was a sort of unspoken understanding among the survivors. We were all on the same level, such as it was. What inter-kith organization there was, the trolls ran because A) they were big and B) no one else really wanted to do it, anyway. That meant that for all intents and purposes, the trolls were in charge, but they weren't in charge of a whole lot, and they knew better than to press their luck.

Everything changed when the sidhe showed up, however. They had definite ideas about social structure and society and order, and they set about putting those ideas in place — with themselves at the top of the heap, of course — as soon as they poked their snooty snouts out from under the hill. (Cripes, how stuck-up can you be when you live under a mound of *dirt*? I think we're talking about compensation issues here, boys and girls.)

Now some of us didn't like that, and some of us just didn't care. The key thing is, though, that we didn't have a better alternative, so even when we fought against what the sidhe were doing, we didn't have anything better than what they were proposing. We just liked the status quo, while they had an idea they were trying to ram down our throats.

Let me clue you in here — people who are fighting for something will, assuming everything else is even, beat people who are fighting against something. You've got a cause, you've got something to believe in, well then, you've got something that will put you over the top. The lads and lassies that dug in against the sidhe didn't know what they wanted; they just knew they didn't want what the sidhe were offering. That wasn't enough. Then, when you throw in the fact that a great many fae just didn't give two shakes of a rat's ass over who was in charge, and it's easy to see why the sidhe won.

Once they won, they immediately started chopping up the landscape into this Duchy and that Barony and all suchlike crap, and making sure that all the power was in their hands. I'll give 'em credit — they were organized and they had a plan, and they knew how to put that plan into operation. It worked beautifully for them, too. Then they started putting pressure on everyone else to believe their nobility bullshit, to think that theirs were "more noble souls" or some similar hooey. Sooner or later, there were enough gullible idiots who bought into it to cement the sidhe's spot, squatting on top of the food chain. That's where they stayed for a very long time.

Fortunately, a very long time ain't forever.

RED CAPS AND PEEL TOWERS

Right about this time, give or take a few centuries, is when we finally settled in as what — in addition to who — we were. Yeah, I know some tight-buttocked history geek is going to read whatever you write down and start bitching about how this is all out of sequence and the peel towers didn't show up until eleven-umpty-three or whatever, but frankly, I don't give a crap what they think. They just know facts. I know the stories. Who are you going to believe?

Right. Glad we got that settled. Now, once upon a time there were these people called the Picts. You can go to any occult bookstore today and find dozens of books on these people and their magical, mystical ways, which is a real hoot because no one really knows jack about them. They're long gone, baby, and all that's left is enough for people to wonder about.

One of the few things that is known about the Picts is that they built these things called "peel towers." Peel towers were watchtowers or defensive emplacements or some such that were built without doors. Instead, they had one window, way the hell up near the top, and a ladder inside that was let down so friendlies could gain access but unfriendlies couldn't. It was a neat idea, but

the stupid things were painfully easy to reduce by siege — it's not like they were easy to re-supply, so all you had to do was sit six guys at the base of the tower and starve the poor bastards inside out.

That's neither here nor there, though. You see, the Picts were funny about their architectural standards. They used exacting measurements, quality materials — and a dead guy underneath each tower. I'm not quite sure what the thought process was, but it was something to the effect of the blood from the sacrifice strengthening the tower. Or maybe it wasn't. Don't ask me, I wasn't there.

Still, as a result, those peel towers got a bad reputation among the locals, especially since they were all abandoned once they were taken in battle. I mean, who wants to bother manning an indefensible fort? So they became lonely, haunted places, and bad stories grew up around them. The bad stories, not to mention the free real estate, attracted bad things. And before too long, those crumbling towers became home to a whole lot of nasty creatures who liked eating whatever came by, including travelers who didn't look too closely before camping for the night in the ruins of the old peel tower.

Locals had no idea what was there, but they tied together the notion of the bodies in the cellar with the reports of the few survivors and came up with us. We're talking about redcaps — the classic model.

THE RED CAP

Right around this time is when we started dyeing our caps red, too. Truth be told, it was a sort of merit badge. Having a red cap — one dyed the right way, of course — let everyone else know you'd made it. It said "I'm big enough to handle myself and anyone who comes my way." Most of all, it told everyone outside the kith that you were big enough and had enough not to screw with. After that, it just got to be ritual. You re-dyed your cap when you could to let other redcaps know you still had your hand in. A fresh red cap, all bright and new, let you strut your stuff a bit. It gave you bragging rights, and others would clear space to let you tell your little gourmet tale.

The most interesting thing about the whole procedure, and the one thing that no one ever comments on, is the fact that the caps came out red. Dried blood is brown. It's crusty and it's sticky and it generally makes a really lousy dye for most fabrics. But our caps came out just the right shade of red to let everyone who was looking at us know exactly what they were looking at, and how those caps got their color. Isn't it nice when things work out just how you need them to?

THE SHATTERING

If you run down the three big events of Kithain history, you're gonna get the following:

- 1-The sidhe taking over.
- 2-The sidhe coming back.
- 3-The sidhe running like scared little girls when the Shattering hit.

How they get ranked depends on whom you ask. A lot of Kithain don't even remember the sidhe taking over. They've been brainwashed by too many songs and too many centuries, and they've bought the party line that the sidhe have always been here with their pretty little butts on pretty little thrones. However, if you ask 'em about the sidhe lighting out of here like rats with their tails on fire, well, hell, everyone remembers that. Where you get arguments is on what it all meant.

WARNING SIGNS

I suppose you won't believe me for a second if I tell you that we saw it all coming. Hell, we even tried to tell people what was on the way, because we knew the whole thing was going to be a royal pain in the ass, but no one listened.

But we could see it coming. The pretty boys were putting on too many airs with their "faery rades" and stealing children and otherwise setting up what was a pretty adversarial relationship with the mundane world. They're the ones who set it up, making sure all the dung-on-the-boots mortals knew that there was something strange and wonderful out there under the hill, something that they shouldn't come near. That's what did it.

You don't believe me? For fuck's sake, *think* for a minute. Stop buying into all of the "the sidhe are true and beautiful, and always right" crap you've been sucking down like mother's milk all these years. The sidhe can do bad things, OK? Deal with it. I know it rocks your pointy little worldview something fierce, but you're going to have to get over that if you ever want to amount to crap in this life. If you keep on thinking that the sidhe can do no wrong, sooner or later it's going to get your throat cut. The only question will be who's holding the knife. Will it be someone the sidhe screwed, or a sidhe whom you let get too close because, shucky darn, he'd never do you no wrong?

Face it, the sidhe are responsible for some of the biggest cock-ups, if not the absolute biggest ones, we've ever seen. They're just really, really good at ducking the blame and making the shitstorm seem inevitable.

And how do they do it? By making you buy into what they're selling. By portraying themselves as noble and righteous, and convincing twits like you to go march off under their banner. By coming up with pretty titles like "Seneschal" and such to give to you, so you don't notice you're being kept away from the real power. By means of a million things like that. It's a snow job. It's bullshit — but you bought it, and all of your fuzzy little friends bought it, too.

What does that mean? It means that a sidhe could be standing there with a big honkin' butcher knife dripping with blood and his left foot on a corpse's neck, and you'd think he didn't do it because, hey, the sidhe don't do that sort of thing. Or maybe you'd think that if a sidhe decided to put a knife in that guy's liver, there had to have been a good reason — and any reason the sidhe gives sounds like a good one to you.

That's how they've been getting away with it for so long. They're pretty, and they use archaic language, and they have lots and lots of people like you just waiting to give them the benefit of the doubt because they are who they are. That's how they've literally been getting away with murder for all these years, because we're trained to think they're not capable of stupid shit like the rest of us.

Guess what, boyo? They are. They always have been. And when they screwed up the first time, they nearly murdered all of us.

So let's get back to that. Let's talk about how they screwed the pooch. Basically, they got greedy. They're the ones who insisted on separating the worlds, of keeping distance between them and us. It wasn't good enough for the sidhe for us to mingle with the mortals the way we always had. No, we had to have our places and they had to have theirs, and never the twain shall meet. In the end, the dividing line the sidhe set up to make sure no one messed with their little fiefdoms got harder and faster than anyone could have imagined.

The sidhe wanted their turf separated from everyone else's? Well, they got their wish, and the rest of us ended up screwed.

IT HAPPENS

Everyone knows that when the Shattering started to go down, the sidhe high-tailed it for Arcadia before the gates slammed shut, and left the rest of us here to rot. Devil take the hindmost, right? And it didn't matter who was hindmost as long as it was someone else. Like the story goes, if you and a friend run into a bear, you don't have to be able to outrun the bear. You just have to be able to outrun your friend.

FLAVORS OF BUTCHERY

You may be thinkin' that it's hypocritical for us to hate the sidhe for what they did when we are what we are. Go put a sock in it. Yeah, we rack up a body count, just like the sidhe bastards did. The difference is that we do it personally. If a redcap jacknecks you, it's because that redcap wanted you in particular dead. It's all about the relationship you and he have, if you know what I mean. We don't write off kicking the world in the throat as an unfortunate side effect, and we don't duck the blame for every body that lands at our doorstep.

That's the big difference. Think about it.

You know what happened next. The gates slammed shut. No one was getting in to give the place the Banality cooties, and the bigwigs back home made sure no one was getting out. That meant that the lot of us was stuck getting the Shattering right in the teeth, without any help from anyone.

And you know what? We survived. We figured out how to protect ourselves, and how to prosper. We did that, not the sidhe. We did it without their help, not that we would have needed it anyway.

We never forgot, though. We never forgot that the sidhe had caused all that. We never forgot that they left us here to die, either. You hold on to a memory like that, you know. You hold onto it for a good long time.

THE AFTERMATH

So, the Shattering hits. What was it like? The best way I have to put it is that it was like pressure, unbelievable pressure that wouldn't stop until you were a greasy smear. Does that make any sense?

OK, let's try it another way. You ever play "Kill the man with the ball" when you were a kid? The idea is to throw around a football, and everyone piles on the poor bastard who has it until he coughs it up. Then the guy who gets the ball turns into the rabbit, and the whole thing starts again.

Now, if you're smart, you run with the ball until there's someone right behind you who's gonna take you out at the knees. Then, you turn around, throw the ball in his lap, and start the dogpile. It works like a charm if you're timing's down. They never see it coming, and they catch the damn thing by reflex, plus there's always a herd of guys right behind 'em ready to pile on.

Sad to say, though, sometimes that doesn't work. You get hauled down before you can hand the rock off, and then everyone and his brother starts piling on. You get trapped at the bottom of this pile of bodies that gets deeper and deeper, and presses down on you harder and harder. You know that any minute now you're gonna start hearing things inside you snap, and even if you could breathe to scream it wouldn't do you any good, because the pile's too deep and they'll never get off you in time. So the weight keeps coming down, and your only thought you've got is that you're gonna protect that ball that's stuffed into your gut because it bought you all this pain and you've damn well earned the right to keep the thing.

Most of the time, your buddies let you up before they do permanent damage. Sometimes, they don't. And once in a very long time, you manage to weasel out the side of the pile, but not often enough that I'd bet on it happening twice.

That's what we did, though. We snuck out the side and got out from under the pile. Did it just in time, too—snapping ribs make a sound like nothing else, and we were hearing it a lot, if you know what I mean.

By "we," I don't mean just us redcaps. We were all under the same little tent with the rain coming down—us and trolls and sluagh and things there ain't names for anymore. We were all getting out together, or none of us were getting out at all.

Don't ask me exactly what happened, though. It's not like there was a grand pow-wow of all of us elfy types putting our heads together as to the best way to cover our asses. It's not like we could have done anything like that, anyway, with the weight of the world coming down on our heads. It was just instinct, pure and simple. We all looked at one another and just somehow knew where we had to go, and what we had to do to get there. There ain't no rhyme or reason. It was just the whole lot of us, sprinting like hell for a place we'd be safe.

A QUESTION OF MOTIVES

I know, I can hear you saying "Hey, isn't that what you were waiting for? The whole shebang going up?" Well, yeah and no—you're misunderstanding us here. We want Winter back. We don't want a goddamned cold snap that will ruin the pretty flowers then leave everything else normal. All things will come in their own time, naturally.

Well, either that or we just didn't want the sidhe getting credit for accidentally doing our job for us.

Not everyone made it. It happens. Enough of us did, though, and when the dust cleared, we looked around and realized that the sidhe were gone. Some of the other kiths started whining and wailing about how all was now lost, with truth and beauty gone from the world. Blah blah blah, you know the drill. We told 'em to put a sock in it.

We were on our own again, and we liked that just fine.

THE LONG YEARS IN BETWEEN

The dust took a long time to settle. When you turn the world on its ass, that tends to happen. It was years before anyone was interested in poking his head up and seeing what was left. Everyone was too tired, too hurt and too scared. Plus, there was still the pressure we'd tried to run away from out there, and no one wanted to feel that weight for too long for any reason.

Eventually, though, folks got used to the situation. They realized that things had settled in as they were for a nice long stay, so we might as well get used to them. Slowly, messengers started getting sent back and forth between the new freeholds. Contacts were re-established. Search parties went out looking for survivors and to get the lay of the land. Looking back on it, it's kind of funny that the places the sidhe had walled off were now the places that most of us could hide. Then again, if they hadn't started cutting those places out of the natural order of things, we never would have needed to hide in the first place.



THE FIRST YEARS

Everyone was equal parts scared and angry in those days. Most of the kiths were upset that their sidhe mummies and daddies had left them on their own, and they had no idea what to do. They had no idea what had hit them, what was coming next or if they were going to wake up tomorrow at all, and that had them running in circles and chasing their little pooka tails. It was a real productive time, let me tell you. Most of the survivors ended up with one of two reactions. They either became best buds with everyone else out there because they were all survivors, or they decided to tell everyone else to piss off and make it every elf for himself.

Needless to say, we went for the latter. While everyone else was huddling together around the fires and singing the period equivalent of "Kumbayah," we were mad. We knew what had happened, more or less, and we were pissed off about it. Mostly, we were pissed at the sidhe, for leaving us with their crap to clean up, but they weren't around for us to demonstrate our displeasure, if you get my meaning. The other idiots, however, were. Besides, in their own stupid way, they'd helped it happen, and we weren't shy about telling them how they'd screwed up.

This made us a lot of friends, let me tell you, not that we wanted to be friends with those jokers anyway—not in those days, at least.

As a result, a lot of us struck out on our own. Much of the early exploration of the post-Shattering map was actually done by redcaps who'd had enough of their little refugee communities, but needless to say, communication as to what they'd found wasn't exactly perfect. Most of the time, the messages ran something like this: "All clear on the other side of the big mountain at the south end of the valley. I'm claiming it for myself. Don't come visit or I'll kill you."

Hell, we weren't even talking to one another back then. You have to understand, there was a lot of paranoia going around. When your entire world gets turned on its ass, you tend to get suspicious. If you can't trust the way the world works anymore, you sure as hell can't trust any people. It's not a friendly attitude, sure, but it's a safe one. So most of the redcaps out there went solitary. Meetings were infrequent, very formal and very cagey.

To make matters worse, the landscape was a mess. There were *things* out there in those days, chimera that were just as screwed up as we were. Mortals got clocked by the Shattering, too, even though most of them didn't know it, and there were a lot of nightmares taking shape in the dark corners of the world. Those things were loose, and they were both hungry and hurting. It was a bad combo.

What that meant was that the landscape of the Dreaming was a dangerous place to be for a lone Kithain of any sort, even one of us. Drop your guard for a second and you were toast, plain and simple. However, since no one wanted anyone else around, there wasn't anyone you could trust to watch your back. Either way, you were screwed.

The way we ended up dealing was, in the end, what cemented our rep with the rest of the kiths. We went monster hunting.

It was an easy call, really. We could either A) sit on our butts and wait for something nasty to come along or B) go out and be the nasty thing ourselves, and let the monsters learn to be afraid of us. Well, gee, that's a no-brainer. So we went out and started hunting beasties, and we made sure that when we made the kill we let everyone else know how we did it.

Eventually, when we'd gotten good at it, we started hiring out to other Kithain who were too scared to hunt the things down themselves. Every scared little boggan who hid inside his house when the bad things went stomping by would pay through the nose to have a redcap come in and take care of the problem.

This sort of thing snowballed, as such things tend to do. Eventually we started getting called in on contracts that were just too big to handle. You know, dragons, tarraques, things like that—no way any one redcap can take one of those babies down without help, even on his best day.

Now, we ain't stupid. We may look dumb, we may sound dumb, but we ain't dumb. There ain't now nor has there ever been a redcap who'd go and get his head bitten off for the sake of proving a point. (Well, OK, maybe there *have* been a few, but it's not the sort of trait that gets

passed down, if you know what I mean.) The first time a redcap got hired to take out a critter and found himself staring down the snout of a dragon, he didn't stick around to argue the point. He said to himself, "Gonna need a bigger gun," or something like that, and went off to get help.

Anyway, once redcaps started banding together, they stuck with it. It worked, after all, and it was nice to get some sort of sense of community back. The other kiths had a head start on us in that department. They'd been huddling together for warmth while we'd been spitting into the wind, and it showed. We were behind, and it was time we started to catch up. After all, if this was a brave new world without the sidhe, we needed to have a say in where it was going.

Those monster-hunting teams, by the way, are what eventually turned into gangs and bands. Everything has to come from somewhere, after all. Even us.

SLOUCHING TOWARD SOCIETY

The gangs got stronger as the years went by, and we settled into a place in Kithain society that was, if not respectable, then at least recognized. All in all, the Interregnum wasn't a bad time, above and beyond the obvious problems with it. After all, we'd gone back to the way things were once upon a time, and decisions got made based on strength and merit. There wasn't any feudal order handing down the impossible and the ridiculous, all of which had to be done by breakfast. Instead, something workable popped up. Sure, it wasn't the same from freehold to freehold, but it worked pretty well nonetheless.

We stayed on the outside, of course. The others liked us even less than usual without the imaginary protection of the sidhe, so we generally didn't play pattycake with the others too often. On the other hand, you had a sort of respect and détente. If some commoner headman came out to treat with a boss and his lieutenants, you could be damn sure that he was headman because he'd earned it.

And so it went for a good long time, until the factories started going up and we decided that we, collectively, were in love.

TROUBLE DOWN AT THE OLD MILL: US

Whoever thought of the Industrial Revolution deserves a medal. It was the greatest thing that happened to us since sliced bread, bearing in mind of course that we generally go for the whole loaf at one pop.

I know, you don't get it. The Industrial Revolution was a dank, dark time when the whole agrarian lifestyle got it right in the neck, and when the dreams of all the world's children got crushed between factory gears. Play me another song, Sam, I've heard that one a few times.

That whole mindset is another helping of the crap that the sidhe served up. There's only one way to dream, according to them, and it's their way. You can't possibly find Glamour or anything else worthwhile in anything but rustic, rural splendor, at least not if you believe them and their pet Yeats.

Well, guess what? That ain't the way it works. The Industrial Revolution had its dreams — hungry ones. It was all about ripping things out of the land and using them, feeding the factories day and night. It was about finding what you needed under the ground and tearing it out, and it was about the hunger that the machines had for more raw materials.

Think we couldn't get a buzz from dreams like that? It was perfect. We went down into the mill towns and the mining towns in droves. We became pit bosses and factory foremen, teamsters and so on. What better job could there have been for us than to be there, first-hand, to feed the beast? Who knew better than we did how the factories must feel?

On the docks and in the pits, we were happy. On the factory floor, we were ecstatic. This was what we'd been waiting for since those cold winds had gone home, all those winters ago.

In the middle of the soot and the smoke, we found our perfect time. Oh, we knew it couldn't last — it was bound to devour even itself, sooner or later. But in the meantime, it was everything we could have wished for.

GONE WEST

Not everyone stuck around to watch the smoke cover the sky. People like to move, as long as they think they've got someplace better to move to, and in this case that meant heading to the New World. Once they got over there, it was more of the same, of course — a factory is a factory no matter where it is, and the same goes for a sweatshop. Still, the masses were hungering for something more, and so we went along with them.

The New World had its own unique circumstances. First of all, you had the whole melting pot effect, which meant that no one was quite sure where he stood on the streets of New York. Folks quickly formed ethnic neighborhoods, and with those neighborhoods came gangs and territorial scraps. It was interesting, to say the least.

For another thing, the joint was already occupied by the Nunnehi, though by the time a lot of our kind started coming over, the Nunnehi had mostly been pushed back from any place we were likely to see. Still, they were out there, and they weren't happy with us. It made sense to stay within the cities for safety's sake. Foreigners weren't too welcome most places, regardless of what face they were wearing.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Some folks look at the two big wars of the 20th Century and think it's exactly what we wanted. I say that they're wrong. The slaughters made as much sense to us as the millions of buffalo that were left to rot after being machine gunned from railroad cars. There has to be a point to the exercise for it to work for us,



FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Legend has it that the first redcap who actually invited someone else to go hunting with him was named Aelfric, and he lived in what they used to call East Anglia. Supposedly he got hired by a bunch of commoners living in a handful of hole-in-the-wall villages to take care of a "wurrum" (that's "big, mean lizard" to you and me) that was big enough to wrap itself entirely around a hill seven times. That's one big lizard if you ask me, and the urgency of the whole thing makes more sense if you consider that the hill in question probably was the old sidhe fort.

So Aelfric went to town with his trusty sword, thinking that the locals were being their usual scared chickenshit selves, and that he'd have to deal with something maybe as big as a horse. Redcap monster hunters didn't have a lot of respect for their clients in those days. Still don't, come to think of it.

Instead, he came snout to snout with something that was, well, big enough to wrap itself around a hill seven times.

Aelfric nearly got his ass chomped off as he hightailed it out of there. It was a near thing, and he went back to his camp to A) plan and B) wait for his butt to heal enough for him to sit down again. He came up with some real doozy plans — spiked pits for one, and hiding in trees to jump down on the thing as it went past. You know, he tried the whole nine yards, and he really put his noggin to work on this one. But nothing worked. The critter was too big for the pits. It smelled him in the trees and chased him away again. All in all, the whole thing was pretty embarrassing, and the commoners were starting to make noises about getting their money back (especially considering what it was costing to keep Aelfric in provisions).

Aelfric was, as previously noted, no dummy. He couldn't handle this one by himself, and he knew that if he screwed this one up, his career as a monster hunter was over. Who wants to hire a monster-killer that can't kill a monster? So he sent messages to two other badass redcap critter killers whom he knew by reputation, and offered them a share of the payoff in exchange for their help. This wasn't an easy thing for him to do, mind you, and it surprised the hell out of the other two when they got the message. At first, they laughed it off, but then they thought about it. They knew what a hardass Aelfric was, and they knew that if he was asking for help, he was serious. Plus, they'd each come off fights that were too close for comfort recently, and were just a wee bit worried about running into something a bit tougher next time out.

Besides, three hunters working together could do less work individually, and charge higher fees together. It was perfect.

So the other two went down to East Anglia, or wherever the hell it was, and joined up with Aelfric. Then they sat down for three days and three nights and planned how they were going to get this thing. They talked about what Aelfric had tried that hadn't worked, and what the other two had done in similar circumstances. They drew up plans, tore them apart, and drew up more.

And in the end, they just went out and beat the holy hell out of the thing. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

After that, there was no stopping Aelfric and his two buddies (named Theodric and Offa, which if you ask me is no sort of name to give a monster hunter). They went up and down the countryside kicking the snout out of everything they saw until they'd cleared the whole countryside of monsters. Then,

not a mechanical waste of life. We deal in murder and hunger, not genocide. If you can't tell the difference, then screw you.

You want to talk more about that stuff, go find someone else. It sickens me, and that's saying something.

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?

In 1969, mortals went to the moon and the sidhe came back. I coulda done without the former if it meant that we didn't have to deal with the latter. Why? Because someone up there put some WD-40 on the gates of Arcadia and out came the sidhe, la-de-da, like they'd never been gone. They showed up and decided that they were in charge all over again, and wasn't it quaint how those little commoners kept things going while they waited!

Surprise, surprise, some of us didn't want to bow and scrape again, just 'cause the sidhe thought it was their right and due. This shocked the poor precious darlings to no end, and they responded the only way they could — assassination and terror. You think we would have come up with something like the Night of Iron Knives? It's a coward's ploy.

So off we went to war, and you know what? We were winning until Ardry came along. Don't listen to any of that bullcrap about how the 4th Troll Commons were on the run, or anything like that. Maybe the trolls were losing the standup fights, but anyone who goes toe to toe with the enemy in a fight like that is an idiot.

We're not idiots. Oh, the sidhe hated us because we didn't fight fair (meaning, we didn't fight by *their* idea of how you're supposed to wage war, so they kept on losing). But who cares! More of them were going down than us, and that's what war's all about.

History's written by the winners and the survivors, kid. The survivors are generally more accurate.

ARDRY

Unfortunately, all the fun had to end sometime. Along came Ardry, and that was that, at least as far as the killing was concerned. Mind you, the kid had presence,



and he played straight. That's why we were willing to listen.

I'll even give him points for trying to hold to his word. I'm sure that was a pain in the ass, what with all the antique nobles breathing down his neck to start waving Caliburn around. Still, the kid tried, which is worth some respect, at least. Pity he didn't succeed that often.

And then, of course, he went bye-bye, and everything went to hell. It seems he was keeping the sidhe in check just as much as he was keeping us from their throats, because the second he slipped out of view, the old bullshit started up again. The good news is that without a High King in place, the sidhe are spending as much time trying to climb over each others' corpses as they are trying to beat the commoners back in line.

Well guess what, kids? We ain't gonna take it any more. We gave it one (that would be 1) shot, and it didn't work. We told Ardry we'd be good, and they sandbagged him for talking to us — at least, that's my guess. So from here on in, it gets ugly. The Accordance War was just the warm-up. Get ready for the main event.

REDCAP FAVORED PROFESSIONS THROUGH THE AGES:

- Tax collector
- Brigand captain
- Food taster
- Shift foreman
- Mine pit boss
- Teamster
- Barge captain
- Strikebreaker
- Machine gunner
- Bagman
- Warehouse foreman





CHAPTER TWO: THE WRETCHED AND HUNGRY: REDCAP SOCIETY

I suspect that hunger was my mother.
Plautus, *Stichus*

Now that the history is out of the way, we can get to the fun stuff, like “What do all those jolly fellows in their bright red hats do during their hours of leisure?” Trust me, bunky, you’re going to want to start with smaller questions before we get to that one. Still, that’s where this discussion is ultimately headed, isn’t it? What do we do, how do we do it, and why do we do it — those are the big questions. The answers, though, are a little more complicated than you’d think.

You need to learn is what a redcap really is, and what we’re all about. That’s gonna take some doing, because you’ve probably already got an idea, and it’s probably all wrong. The first thing we’ve got to do is empty your head of all the crap you’ve already heard that’s flat-out wrong. And yeah, there’s a lot of that out there. Have no fear, though. You’re going to get it straight, if you think you can handle it. Ready for the next part of your ride? Good.

Oh, and keep your hands and feet inside the cart at all times. Otherwise, something’s gonna eat ‘em.

WHAT YOU KNOW

As I said, we have to start with the bullshit. What I’m gonna do now is list off a bunch of things that people say about redcaps and we’ll see if they match what you think you know about us. Right. Redcaps:

- Eat everything in sight
- Can be wacky funsters who’ll munch on any thing for a laugh
- Are all evil monsters
- Hate everyone else
- Are born spitting tacks and eating 2x4s for breakfast
- Dye our caps red in the blood of things we kill

Absolutely none of these are strictly true in all cases, though the last one comes close. It’s the only one that makes sense, anyway.

Now, let's look at the rest of this steaming pile o' dung. How could anyone in their right mind believe all that — especially all together? It doesn't make any goddamned sense. Then again, since when did Kithain make sense? None of it — the whole setup — makes any sense. Maybe that's why they're all so willing to believe whatever comes down the pike, especially if it comes from Duke Fancypants or Baron Stickupbutt. It saves people the trouble of thinking.

It also saves them the trouble of why exactly there needs to be a Duke Whiny in the first place, but that's another matter entirely.

What I'm getting at here, though, is that there's a whole lot of crud out there about what me and mine are "really" like, and it's all hokey to a greater or lesser extent. It's the hokey everyone knows, though, and it's the hokey that everyone uses day to day. So that means that us redcaps get a raw deal, not because of anything we've done, but because of what people think we've done.

Mind you, this ain't a plea to help the poor, misunderstood redcaps. We're right bastards in our own way. I just want to be sure that I get hated for the right reasons.

It's the little things that matter, doncha think?

WHAT'S A REDCAP MOMMY?

That's the first thing we have to establish: What is a redcap? The quick and easy answer is that a redcap is a Kithain who belongs to a particular kith that's all about eating.

Great. Wonderful. Really goddamned informative. If that's all you've got, you don't know jack about us.

Because you want to know what a member of a kith is, you've gotta think long and hard about what that kith really means. You gotta think why there are redcaps out there, and not bluecaps or greencaps or whatever.

In a sense, this is a bigger question about all of us. Where do we come from, why are we here, all that sort of thing. Yeah, this is the sort of existential crap that keeps us going between meals, but some of us do think about

this. We don't get to share our thoughts with the other kiths too much because, let's face it, the sidhe aren't going to let us into the drawing room to chat about philosophy, but that doesn't mean we ain't thinking.

Something you need to get straight before you go any further is this: We don't hold illusions about ourselves. We are what we are. We know where we came from. We don't make up bullshit stories to make ourselves feel better about our place in the universe, and we don't try to blow blue smoke up anyone else's ass. Recognize that and you'll do fine. It's the first rule of dealing with our kind, anyway.

THE DRIVING HUNGER

What we're really about is hunger. We exist to devour anything we can get our mitts on, and we don't care too much if it's still moving when we take that first chomp. The big question, of course, is why.

The big answer, and it probably ain't the one you're expecting, is "Because that's what we are." We're hunger



personified. That's what it boils down to. Primarily, it's "eat, drink and fart loudly" kinds of hunger, but we're tied in with more abstract stuff as well, hungers that don't just come from the gut.

You can figure out what that one means, if you've got the stones.

BULLYING

Why do we push people around? Because we can. What other reason is there? We're a primal drive, kid. We move in straight lines and we don't like anything standing in our way. If you're in our way, we're gonna try to push you out. If you push back, we'll respect you — and then try to flatten you anyway.



Do we have respect for authority? Sure we do — if it's earned. It just takes a hell of a lot of work to earn it, as far as we're concerned. Don't try to bluff it, either. Sooner or later, we'll sniff a fraud. When that happens, you're gonna wish you'd never been born.

Beat us fair and square, you're OK. But if you bullshit us and then come clean, don't expect us to nod and smile. It ain't gonna happen.

THE BAD ATTITUDE

Sure, we've got a bad attitude. Why not? Everyone hates us, we're no fun at parties and most of what we like to do sends the rest of you running for the hills. Do you think we're gonna try to play nicey-nice after all that? Hell, half the time you lot don't even give us a chance to cause a ruckus. We just ain't allowed in polite society no more; you don't want our kind around.

So if you don't want us around, why the hell should we even consider behaving? Life's too short to suck up.

Besides, two thirds of what most Kithain call a bad attitude is honesty. If you don't play with the flowery words and phrases, you're being a big meany, and they just can't handle that. You know what? Sucks to be them. It's not like we're gonna stop calling things as we see them just because it hurts some dumb bunny's feelings.

THE DAMN HATS

Do we all wear the red cap? No. It's not like they're nailed to our heads or anything. We like to wear them, though. Seeing the cap is like hearing a rattlesnake shake his butt. It means there's something dangerous right in front of you, and you've walked into its territory.

As I said, not every redcap wears a red cap. But you can be damned sure that somewhere, every redcap has one. It might be a baseball cap. It might be something homemade. That doesn't matter. It's there, waiting for the right occasion.

After all, even we dress formal sometimes.

THE SEELIE SIDE

Someone told me there's an ugly rumor going around that there are no Seelie redcaps anymore. Supposedly, all the Unseelie ones got together and jackknicked the lot, solving that whole problem forever.

That's the problem with rumors. They're generally dumber than a bag of hammers. If you think about them for thirty seconds, you realize what a crock of hooley they are. First of all, how the hell could we kill every single Seelie redcap? What, did we send out an engraved invitation to a pizza party so we could get them all in one place at one time? Don't be stupid. The logistics alone make the whole thing impossible.

Then you have to think about the whole Seelie/Unseelie thing. It's not a hard and fast line, remember? We change, or at least we can. Even if we killed off all the Seelies on Thursday, by Friday odds are there'd be a few new ones who'd just hopped over that spiritual fence.

In the end, though, that means that there are Seelie redcaps. They're not common, and most of them have been drifting back to the Unseelie side of late. They're tired of being treated poorly, angry about the political situation and generally horked off at life, which is why they're coming home. That might be where the rumor started — it's hard to find a genuine Seelie redcap these days. They're still out there, though.

TYPES

Seelie redcaps tend to fall into two categories: jokes and badasses. The jokes are the ones you think of immediately. They're the fat, jolly types — bakers and food tasters and so on, and they'll eat anything if it gets a laugh. They're very careful not to offend anyone, and they work hard to make sure everyone likes them. That means they'll eat anything on a dare, a bet or even a cue. It gets them attention. A lot of childlings go this route, at least for a while. It gets them friends.

Joke redcaps all have one thing in common: They go out of their way to seem harmless. That's what they're really all about, pretending to be something they're not. Needless to say, we don't have a lot of respect for that type.

Badasses, on the other hand, know exactly what they're about. You find them as knights, as designated monster-slayers, court champions, ducal bodyguards — stuff that requires a real hard edge. They're all about discipline. They like taking their primal urges and beating the crap out of them, just because they can. Then they turn around and take it all out on acceptable targets.

Seelie badasses we can have some respect for. They may be working for the wrong people, but they don't take any guff. They'll still shoot from the hip and march to their own drummers, even if they do it within bounds that most of us consider kinda pointless. But they fight hard, and they know their business.

They just don't necessarily take care of the same business we do.

OUR EATING DISORDER

What do redcaps do, you ask. Well, duh. We eat. We eat a lot. We eat everything we can get our hands on, and a few things we catch in nets and snares as well. We'll eat stuff that's alive, stuff that used to be alive, stuff that never was alive and stuff that might conceivably be alive in the dim and distant future, but you don't feel like hanging around to check the results.

Now, that's not to say that we just eat everything in front of us. We're redcaps, not vacuum cleaners. You can't just set us to "suck a lot" and hope we'll clear up everything directly in our path. I mean, come on. How stupid do we look? Yes, we eat. Yes, we're always hungry — not, "Gee, I could go for a Chipwich right now, but it might spoil my dinner," hungry, but rather, "I haven't eaten in three days and I'd cut my own leg off and fry it up if I didn't know I'd be just as hungry in an hour," sort of thing. It's nothing we like and nothing we can control. It's just who and what we are, and it's always with us. We're always empty, always needing something to fill us up. Stuffing something down the old gullet dulls that

pain, at least for a little while. It's going to come back, the same way the sun's always going to come up in the morning, but in the meantime you can get a little peace and think straight for a bit.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU

The next big question is, "What do redcaps eat?" The short answer is "everything." However, that's the sort of reply that results in more nosy questions being asked, so I'm going to save you the trouble and explain a bit more.

If you want to be technical, we're omnivores. We eat animal matter, vegetable matter, mineral matter and now that I think about it, gray matter, too. We're not picky, though generally when we talk about feeding someone a shit sandwich, we're being metaphorical. All things considered, we'd rather eat something that tastes good, but in a pinch damn near anything will do. You know that story about the bunch of kids whose plane crashed and who ended up eating each other? If it had been us, there wouldn't have been a plane left, either.

CANNIBALISM FOR FUN AND PROFIT

The one question that everyone is curious about but is too chicken to ask is this: Do we eat people? (More accurately, they want to know if we eat other Kithain — screw the mundanes, even the elfiest of the lot are more worried about their own skins.)

The answer is pretty simple. Think about it. Think about the legends, and the stories, and how we got our name. Think about your worst nightmares, and the answer you really, honestly, devoutly hope isn't true.

That's always the right answer in the end, isn't it? The one you don't want to hear?

Let's move on.

EATING PEOPLE: THE RULES

Yes, redcaps really do eat people. They don't do it often or indiscriminately, but they do it. Storytellers should be prepared for over-enthusiastic devotees of "long pig" in their game, just in case.

THE VICTIM

Redcaps have big mouths, but they're not *that* big. (Well, not usually, at least) It's extremely difficult for a redcap to swallow anything larger than, say, a raccoon at one gulp. There are exceptions, of course, but then again, there are always exceptions.

SWALLOWED ALIVE

Getting swallowed alive by a redcap is a special case, and it comes with a special price. A Kithain who is devoured thus is hurled violently out into the mundane world (don't ask about the physics; it'll just make your head hurt) and is unable to resume fae mien for a year and a day. However, it's nigh impossible for a Kithain to be swallowed at a single gulp (though childlings are more prone to it than others). Doing so requires three successes on a Dexterity + Brawl roll (difficulty 9 for wilders and grumps, difficulty 8 if the target is a childling) on the part of the redcap, and the intent to devour stated before the attack. If the attack succeeds, the target is swallowed at a gulp — though suitable bits can dangle at Storyteller discretion — and has precisely one turn to find a way out of the redcap's gullet. (Cutting one's way out with a knife is the best bet, but other ideas of sufficient cleverness — ranging from causing the redcap to sneeze violently to a slough diving out the other end — should be encouraged by the Storyteller.) If not, he dies, and finds himself back in mortal mien without any idea what's happened to him or why.

Kithain killed in this fashion suffer all of the usual penalties of chimerical death, plus the delay in resuming fae mien noted above. Redcaps who deal with enemies in this way don't receive any immediate benefit, but often get the approbation of their peers.

SWALLOWED DEAD

This is the more usual fate for a redcap snack, and it's all about disposing of the bodies. Either the redcap can choose to bite in battle and, if he kills his opponent, tear off a nice chunk (on a successful Strength roll, difficulty 9) or just go to work on the cadaver, which tends to demoralize opponents to no end.

It takes a redcap three turns to devour a full-sized corpse completely, though complications like armor can extend the time. In that time the corpse is pretty thoroughly masticated and dismembered — redcaps have eating habits that are strikingly similar to those of sharks. A Kithain killed in this manner finds himself in the mundane world in mortal mien, with no memory of anything that happened and unable to resume his fae mien for a month. It is said that there are certain charms and cantrips that can speed the process along, but their knowledge is kept hidden. Otherwise, the victim endures all of the usual indignity of chimerical death.

THE ENCHANTED

Sad to say, a mortal who is devoured by a redcap — regardless of status when the redcap starts in — ends up dead. For this reason, most redcaps are a lot more careful about eating normal humans than they are about chowing down on Kithain. They can afford to make a mistake with their own kind, more or less. With a human, one screw-up means it's all over.

ACCOUNTREMENTS

Anything on a redcap's victim is swallowed with the meal. Unless it is in some sense magical, it is destroyed almost instantly. For each treasure devoured, the Storyteller should roll the Redcap's Stamina (difficulty 6). A success indicates that the treasure survives, and will somehow be there, intact, if the redcap is ever killed and cut open.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A redcap who chooses to dine upon mortals or other Kithain is not going to be the most popular fellow — if he's caught. That's why redcaps with that sort of taste try to keep it low-key. They don't advertise. Anyone who is too clearly into that kind of cuisine, if found out, is in a great deal of trouble. Once word gets out that a particular redcap has gone cannibal, the local court will almost always set a very high price on his head. Eshu will carry word of the sentence far and wide, meaning that there will be no safe haven for the cannibal to run to. All things being equal, sooner or later he'll be hunted down and, if he's lucky, killed. If he's not lucky, the punishments start at flaying and escalate rapidly from there.

In other words, it's not a good idea to get caught, or even suspected.

On the other hand, redcaps seem to know when one of their own has crossed the line. Even a Seelie redcap thinks twice about ratting on one of his own kind, though. The bonds of kith are strong.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

As noted previously, we can eat just about anything. That's not an empty boast. If it fits in our gullets, we'll take a bite. We can chomp through just about anything, so odds are if we can wrap our jaws around it, it's got "lunch" written all over it.

Are there things we won't eat? Sure. If it's got spikes on it, well, who wants to puncture their palate? Not I, pal. I'll go for something softer, like a sheep. Fire? Who wants to eat fire? No, that will put a kibosh on one of us right quick. Treasures tend to be hard to chew and harder to digest, and most of them are too damn long and pointy to eat anyway. And so it goes. Sure, we can eat anything. In a pinch or a dull moment, we *will* eat anything. But that doesn't mean we *have* to eat anything.

DINING HABITS

I know this revelation is going to shock the hell out of you, but redcaps are messy eaters. Yeah, I know — you're stunned. Well, pick your jaw off the ground, Gertrude, and get over it. When we eat, we like to eat. We really get into it. I'm talking bits flying everywhere and sauce on your fingers, if you know what I mean.

Our style of eating has its benefits. For one thing, it freaks out everyone else. No one, but no one likes to watch redcaps eat. It's disgusting. It's revolting. It's icky. You get the idea. No one wants to stick around when we're digging in, and that suits us just fine. Anything that makes the little sidhe tummies twist into knots works just fine for me. Wanna hear a secret? Nine times out of ten, if a sidhe is watching redcap mess, we go out of our way to put on a show. The phrase "Want some more toes?" never fails to do the trick. The sidhe know you don't mean it... but they can't help wondering, and it turns their pretty pale faces green.

POISON

It is actually possible to poison a redcap. It takes work, and it takes a lot of effort, but it is possible.

What is *impossible* is using anything found in nature to do the deed. Redcaps can swallow anything this side of nuclear waste (which really has no place in the Dreaming, to be honest) and be fine, with only a toxic belch as evidence of the arsenic milkshake.

On the other hand, there are certain chimerical poisons that can easily do a redcap in — if he's not watching for them. Sluagh in particular are good at brewing up this sort of concoction, and the most accomplished alchemists have whole ranges of brews that can do anything from making a redcap woozy to knocking him stone dead in seconds. That doesn't mean, however, that such brews are accessible — or cheap.

Note that this limitation applies only to ingested poisons. Any other sort does its dirty work in the usual fashion.

Every so often someone from outside the family gets an invite to sit down and eat with the lads. This is a pretty rare occasion. We don't invite just anyone — it has to be someone we think can take it. Now if he can, if he can make it through one meal in all our bone-chucking, fat-gnawing, gristle-tearing glory, then he's accepted. He might as well be one of us. Then again, that might not be something to brag about in certain circles.

Like the song goes, if you're a buddy of the redcaps, you're a buddy of the redcaps for life. What does that get you? More than you might think. First and foremost, anyone who's known to hang out with redcaps automatically gets the words "Serious badass" painted on his forehead. There are worse things in this life than having a rep as a butt kicker who hangs out with other butt kickers.

Second of all, it means that you can call on one of us for help. Now that's not a marker you should call in too often, but by the same token if you earn that kind of trust, odds are you're tough enough on your own not to need the favor. I know what you're thinking here — why the hell would redcaps help anyone out? We take care of our own. It's as simple as that. If we take you in and you ask for help, we'll be there. We'll give you crap afterwards for needing help, but we'll be there.

Bear in mind before you decide that we're a bunch of flower-arranging sentimentalists, that you don't get invited to dinner with a bunch of redcaps by being good at poetry. You get that invite by wreaking some pretty high-profile carnage, one way or another, and walking out the other side with a smile on your face. We don't call you over unless we're pretty sure you're our type of people already.

You want to know what happens to the guys who get invited to dinner but don't make it past the salad course? I've got one word for you.

Dessert.

(Actually, we just beat the living hell out of them and turn them loose. It's not like they're ever going to come back, and the benefit of having others see some bruiser beaten up like a nerd in the schoolyard is incalculable.)

Not everyone who gets invited to dinner comes, and we can respect that. We can even respect the guys who say "no." On the other hand, if it comes to a fight, we gun for those guys first, because we know just how tough they are.

THE MERRY BAND OF DESPERADOES

Redcaps prefer (and let me know if this surprises you) the company of other redcaps. This is the case for many reasons. For one, it means that you don't have to worry about offending anyone with your table manners, or accidentally eating their pet pixie chimera, or any crap like that. For another, it means that you're with people who understand. They've got the hunger, too. They know what you're feeling, and they've done everything you've done because of it.

It's nice to come home, you know?

ORGANIZATION (IF YOU WANT TO CALL IT THAT)

Your average band of redcaps is about as organized as your basic riot, but with fewer pitchforks and torches. (Don't need 'em, after all.) The basic structure is pretty simple — one redcap's in charge, and everyone else listens. If the group is big enough, there are some lieutenants who give orders for the boss and take no crap from anyone else. Orders come from the top, get passed down through the lieutenants, and that's how it goes. Anyone who gets uppity gets kicked into place real fast and real hard, and he'd better thank the boss for the privilege.

If someone gets out of line and doesn't get hammered back in line, it means that the boss is in trouble. If he doesn't keep discipline, then he ain't gonna be the boss for too much longer. Turnover at the top can be fast and fierce, or it can be nonexistent — a good boss can keep a gang running smoothly for years, if not longer.

THE BOSS

The boss' job is to keep the band running well, make sure everyone's happy and getting their fair share, and basically keep things from going to hell in a handbasket more than once a week. He divides the booty fairly, makes sure there's food on the table and divvies up the chores. His word is law, for as long as he can enforce it.

The boss is also the one who makes up the battle plan if it comes time for a scrap, and gives the word to charge or retreat. Anyone who gives the boss lip on the battlefield is asking for it. It's punishable by being kicked out of the band at best, death at worst. That might seem a bit harsh, but there's no place for debate when the blades are swinging. Obedience has got to be absolute, or everything's going to collapse. Even we know that.

A boss becomes a boss by general acclamation of the band at large. Usually, the acclaim comes after the new boss has beaten the crap out of the old boss, but not in all cases. Sometimes the old guy just steps down because he's tired of the hassle. Sometimes the previous boss moves on, or gets taken out. There are all sorts of reasons. But in the end, the new boss has to be in there by unanimous consent. How he gets the consent is up to him, but that's the rules.

SHE-BOSS

Are there female bosses? Absolutely. It's toughness that counts, not plumbing. Besides, lady redcaps fight dirty.

A boss who falls down on the job ain't a boss for long. If he doesn't hand out loot fairly and he's caught at it, he's gone. (Definitions of "fair" vary, of course.) If he's demonstrated he can't lead well in a scrap, he's gone. If he can't keep food on the table, he's gone. And so it goes.

There's a million ways to fall, but still, everyone wants to be the boss. So it goes, so it goes.

LIEUTENANTS

The boss appoints his own lieutenants. Usually they're his best buddies, the ones he can count on to watch his back and not try to put a shiv into it. A lieutenant speaks with the boss' voice when the boss ain't around. When the boss is, the lieutenant hops every time the boss says "frog." Lieutenants report directly to the boss, and are responsible for keeping him apprised of morale, the presence of troublemakers and pretty much anything else they feel the boss should know about. In return, they get a share and a half of anything that comes down the pike, and the right to order people around when the boss is indisposed.

There are never more than two lieutenants per band. If a band gets large enough to need three, a bunch of the lads just generally split off and form their own band, usually with one of the lieutenants as boss. These bands set up shop as far as they can from the gang they've just left, to avoid competition, and they tend to make one hell of a mess on their way out of town. Redcap "migrations" are legendary. Luckily for the rest of the kiths, they don't happen too often.

A lieutenant can be stripped of his post for insubordination, for failing to keep the boss properly apprised or any other damn thing the boss feels like. The boss gets his job by acclaim, but lieutenants are appointed. The band's got no say in who the lieutenants are — it's all the boss' call. He makes 'em, and he can break 'em just as easily. Some bosses even rotate their lieutenants to keep the lads fresh. I guess it works for them, but I never much saw the sense in it. Show me a band full of redcaps who think they've got stripes, and I'll show you a unit that's gonna trip over its own feet the first time someone tries to give an order.

THE LADS

Most of a band of redcaps is made out of just ordinary fellows; well, ordinary redcaps. They've got two jobs: Do whatever the boss tells them, and don't do anything stupid while they're waiting for orders. Otherwise, they're pretty much on their own, at least within the confines of the band. Most of the time they spend together is sparing, scrapping, scrounging or eating. It's pretty rough and tumble, but the lads generally seem to like it. If they've got a good boss, they've got all the toys they want, plenty to eat and a place to kick off their shoes.

Everyone within a band is equal and has equal voice (with the obvious exceptions). It's rowdy, but it works pretty well. If there's a dispute between two of the lads, the boss tells them how to settle it, and they do. Usually it's bare knuckles, but sometimes bosses get creative.

A redcap who doesn't like the way his band is going can walk out the door at any time. He doesn't have good chances of being asked back in, but there's nothing keeping anyone from going whenever he wants. Why the hell would you want a surly redcap around, anyway? Letting him walk is the best thing you can do.

Contrariwise to that, a redcap who wants to join an existing band has to run through whatever tests the lads devise for him. (The boss is the one who decides if he gets the chance at all, and the lieutenants make sure that everything's on the up-and-up.) That can range from having to beat up everyone in the band, one by one, to an eating contest to bringing back the head of whatever sort of chimerical critter is making a pest of itself that day. Keeping the boss out of it is a smart move. The way the lads define the tests is a pretty good indicator of whether they want the new blood on board or not, anyway.

THE RULES

Bands operate on a bunch of simple rules. Anyone can leave but it's hard to join. The boss' word is law. Everyone else, lieutenants excused, is equal. Shirk in a fight and you're in for a world of hurt. Stand by your brothers in the band and they'll stand by you. Everyone does equal work, and everyone gets an equal share (again, lieutenants and the boss excluded).

That's pretty much it. Do your share and you get your share. If there's ever an issue that the boss can't solve by decree, it goes to popular vote. If it's still an issue after that, the band's doomed, anyway.

SOMETHING TO STRIVE FOR

Once upon a time, if you believe some of the more long-winded troll bastards out there, Thor went out for a jaunt in his chariot. He brought along Loki, for no reason anyone's ever been able to explain to me, and he picked up a kid along the way to serve as a manservant. (It had to do with goats. Don't ask.)

As part of this pleasure cruise Thor stopped in with some giants, who challenged him to a series of contests. One of the challenges was an eating contest between Loki, who was known to stuff his gut on Odin's tab, and a servant in the giant household named Logi. When the contest started, Loki ate all the food in front of him. Logi did, too, plus he ate the bones, the plates and the table the food had been sitting on.

It turned out, of course, that the whole thing was one of those deeply metaphorical tricks that you only see played in myths. Thor's wrestling match was rigged — he was fighting old age. The belt he had to lift was actually the world serpent. You'd think he'd recognize the damned thing, but no one ever accused Thor of being too bright. And Loki's playmate, Logi, was fire. No wonder it devoured everything.

Even if you don't buy the story, or don't like it, you've got to admire Logi's style.

THE HIDEAWAY

Most redcap bands don't spend all their time together. It's not like the local countryside could support their appetites if they did. They tend to gather when they can, but to go their separate ways a lot in the interim. Most bands have a place — be it a freehold or a hutch in the center of the city — they can call their own, and where they meet, regular as they can. Often the place has one lad there at all times, just to keep it safe, and a few traps and unpleasant surprises for unwelcome visitors. It's hard to mistake a redcap band's hideaway for anything else, truth be told. If nothing else, the bones tend to give it away.

THE COOK

On rare occasions, a band has a redcap who's the designated cook. His job is to put the food on the table and make sure it tastes good. In the kitchen, the cook outranks even the boss; otherwise, he's just one of the lads. Still, no redcap in his right mind makes an enemy of the cook, or else he's getting something nasty on his plate at the next mess call.

Redcaps fight to get into bands with good cooks, as if that's any surprise, and pissing off the cook has been grounds for more than one boss' removal.

What you'll find at a redcap hideout is pretty predictable: any loot the band's gathered, weapons, food, trinkets, trophies of battle and whatever else has caught their eye. You'd be amazed at how many pool tables wind up in those places. There's also usually a larder, stocked with whatever the band's managed to lay in recently. Details are usually pretty sketchy on what's in there, not that anyone actually cares.

HOW REDCAPS FIGHT

Hokeydoko, here's something you've got to understand now: We fight to win. We don't fight for pretty medals or titles or lilting songs sung about our bravery by waif-thin elfin chickadees that disappear when they turn sideways. We don't fight to be noble or memorable or any of that crap. We fight to win. And if we can't win, we fight so that the other guy's gonna be hurt so badly after messing with us that he'll be in no shape to do it twice. He may win, but he's not gonna be marching down Main Street for the victory parade.

Part of it's just common sense, after all. If you get a rep for fighting until the bitter end, it scares the other guy a little bit. It lets him know that no matter what, he's gonna take losses. That means that he's gonna be a little hesitant when he wades in, and every little hesitation is an opening. And in this biz, an opening is as good as a knife in the gut.

Hell, the whole thing even saves us some fights on occasion. If a guy knows that it's gonna cost him more than he wants to take us down, he just might back off.

The other reason we fight that way, though, is a deeper one. You can yammer about tactics and strategy and morale until your tongue's hanging out, but the basic truth is that we like to break stuff. It's what we're here for, after all — to tear it all down. All of it. Every freehold wall that we tear down is one less obstacle for the Winter wind. Every broken body at our feet is one less arm to bar the door. You get the idea. It ain't pretty, but it's who we are. It's in our bones.

That doesn't mean we can't fight to defend something. After all, only an idiot lives in a world of absolutes. The greatest heroes had their little antisocial habits, after all. No one's all one thing or another. But even if we're fighting to keep something standing for a change, you can bet we're gonna take a pound of flesh out of the enemy, right where it hurts. Everything's got its time, after all. It's just that your time's gonna come sooner rather than later if you mess with a bunch of redcaps.

NO PRISONERS

Something else to bear in mind is that we don't take prisoners, at least not on most occasions. Mind you, it can be a good idea to take the odd Duchess off to your camp for nefarious purposes. Hell, you don't even have to do anything, as the whole pointy-ear crowd is going to assume the worst of you anyway, and will do anything to get her back. Have yourself a few conspicuous ladyfinger sammiches and the process gets even faster. It's amazing how they'll cut a deal to get one of their own back, especially someone that's pretty much useless. The useful ones, of course, we kill. No sense letting the enemy get them back, regardless of how many toys they'll give us. But if some pencil-neck negotiator thinks he's hot stuff because he gave us something we wanted for someone we'd as soon kill as look at, well, hey, give me ten of those and a side of fries.

The flip side of the whole thing is that since we show no mercy, we don't expect any. We fight to the last. As long as a redcap can twitch, he's dangerous. The rest of the lot have learned that by now. They know better than to even try to take prisoners. We don't break under torture. We don't talk. Hell, any redcap worth the salt you'd season him with will bite out his own tongue and swallow it before he blabs. Then he'll smile at you and spit blood in your eye.

Besides, we don't make trades. We don't swap. You manage to pull Angus out of the scrum and march him off to Wythywynde Woode (or wherever the hell the sidhe go) and offer to give him back to us in exchange for, say, a retreat, we'll laugh and cut your courier into filets. It doesn't matter who's caught — if one of us was dumb enough to get captured, he deserves what he gets. We'll just take the price of his hide out of someone the next time blades are drawn.

Mind you, there's one time we will trade for someone. That's when the idiot on the other side of the fence demands a sworn oath that we'll go away and play somewhere else if we get our buddy back. Any oath can be broken. Any. You just have to be ready to pay the price

— and we always are. But another body in the trenches is worth a lot.

TACTICS

If you ask, say, your average troll, a redcap fights in pretty much the same way that a chainsaw does. You know, just rev it up and wave it around, and sooner or later big pieces of whatever it hits will get turned into little ones.

Now, that's ain't necessarily a bad way to fight. It's unpredictable, which is good, and it scares the crap out of anyone who goes into a brawl looking for a nice, mannered fencing match.

On the other hand, fighting out of control like that will get you killed, sooner or later. That's just the way it works. You may be hell on wheels, but sooner or later, if you just run around breaking stuff, you'll run into someone smarter than you who's going to understand what archers or ambushes are for. That's when you get turned into a redcap-shaped pincushion, and it's all over but the shouting.

That's why we don't all fight like that. We're smarter than that, and honestly, most of us would like to stick around a while. If that doesn't scare you, well, it should.

GOING SOLO

A redcap off on his own has to fight smart. Most of the map is hostile territory to a lone redcap, after all. So a redcap who's out to dye his cap properly needs to be smart. If he's not, he's a head on a pike outside some baronet's court.

With that being the case, the lone redcap's not going to stand on a bridge and announce that none are gonna pass. That's a great way to get turned into the crap in between the treads on some butch troll's boot. If he's smart, he'll do one of two things:

A) He'll pick himself a good ambush spot, wait there and then pick off the occasional traveler. This works in the city as well as the country, you know. It's just a different sort of mindset to play with.

A REDCAP STORY

One day a troop of sidhe was moving through a pass in some hills when up ahead, an advance scout spotted a redcap. He was standing on the hillside wearing nothing but a kilt and a ragged shirt, and he had a pike in his hand.

"Hey! You!" the recap shouted. "Sissy-boys! I'll bet you my cap and my eyeteeth that I can whip any one of you!" And then, if the sidhe hadn't gotten the message, the redcap turned around and flipped up his kilt.

The sidhe second-in-command was all for filling the redcap's backside full of arrows, but the duke who was leading the troop decided against it. "A fair challenge has been offered," he said, "so we shall meet it fairly. Pick one who'll deal with this disrespectful redcap."

And so the second-in-command selected one of the soldiers, a swordsman of great skill and poor temper, and sent him off to kill the redcap. The redcap saw the sidhe coming and, without a word, ran over the crest of the hill. Enraged, the sidhe followed. A second after he'd vanished from sight, there was a great clamor of battle, and then silence. A minute after that, the sidhe soldier's head came rolling down the hill. It stopped at the second-in-command's feet with a thump, and without a word, he picked it up. The expression on it was one of great surprise, and the left ear had been gnawed on.

At just that moment, the redcap re-emerged over the top of the hill. "That was no challenge!" he shouted. "Send up your two best men and let's see if they can take me!" So straight away two soldiers charged up the hill, and straight away the redcap vanished over the crest. Again there was the great hullabaloo of battle, and then a pair of heads came rolling down the slope.

Again, the redcap came out. He dusted his hands, belched mightily, and laughed. "If that's the best you can do," he said, "then I should be fighting with one hand tied behind my back!" And then, very deliberately, he lifted his kilt and made water in the direction of the sidhe.

That, needless to say, enraged the second-in-command, and he charged up the hill with a dozen troopers. The redcap laughed, an ugly sound, and once again scampered up over the crest of the hill. The sidhe followed and the sounds of battle echoed from hillside to hillside. But soon, all too soon, it faded to silence, and with a *thump* *thump* *thump* the heads came rolling down the hillside.

Slowly, arrogantly, the redcap came out again. He said nothing this time, but he didn't need to. The sidhe commander was overcome with rage and ordered all of his men to slay the impertinent commoner. As one, they advanced up the hill. The redcap retreated, and the sidhe followed.

At the foot of the hill, the sidhe commander waited impatiently. He heard screaming, shouting and the clang of metal on metal. Then, suddenly, he heard running footsteps. He looked up and there, at the crest of the hill, stood his scout.

"Your Grace! Your Grace!" the sidhe shouted. "It's a trap! There are **two** of them!"

Now, what lesson does this story teach us? Let me correct myself: What lesson besides "Two redcaps can whip a hell of a lot of sidhe without half trying?"

If your answer is "Sidhe are suckers," you're half right. Sidhe are suckers, and you can use that against them. Use a little strategy. They won't expect it from you, and it works.

If you're going to play ambush, you need a good spot for it. You don't want to be too close to the local court when you do this, or you get a half-dozen knights breathing down your jock strap. You don't want to be way the hell and gone away from where everyone is, or you won't get diddly to jump.

The real trick, of course, is making sure that no one spots you. You let groups go by if you're smart, and just jump the stragglers and the solos. That way, when you get bored with the lifestyle, you can stroll into court and converse, with no one the wiser.

B) The other option is to find yourself a clutch of others to go wandering with. In a setup like that, you can't lose. Sooner or later, a band like that always stumbles into something that needs killing. The question is, how long can you stomach being part of a merry band of roving adventurers without going after the folks you're traveling with instead.

SCHRECK

One of our biggest weapons is terror, and we use it whenever we can. In so many words, all the rest of the kiths are afraid of us. They may hate us, they may feel sorry for our "sad and lonely ways" — whatever. It doesn't matter. Deep down, they're all terrified. Every sidhe knight's balls crawl up his spine at the thought of facing us in a fight because he's already thinking about what we're going to do to him if he loses.

So if we can stoke that little fire of fear by doing something gross or barbaric before the fight, we will. If it scares the punters across the line into fighting worse — and most of the time it does — then we're that much closer to winning. That means we'll toss severed heads across the line, eat still-pumping hearts, things like that. Usually it has the desired effect. Fancy that.

ALL TOGETHER

When redcaps work in packs, it's a whole other kettle of fish. Mind you, a kettle of fish won't last too long with a pack of redcaps around, but you get the idea. A regular redcap band with blood in its eye is a thing to behold.

The boss gives the orders, of course. A big advantage that we have going into a lot of fights is that the other side expects us just to charge in and get slaughtered. They also can't resist the opportunity to pick one of us off. That means that the old "run a lone decoy out and have them follow him back into the teeth of the ambush" shtick works like a charm every time. The idiots on the other side are in such a rush to nail a single redcap that they'll charge on without taking half a second to think "Gee, could this be a trap?" Nope, they just put the blinders on and make like a bull in a field full of ketchup. We pick off more idiot sidhe that way than you'd believe, and the beauty of it is that it's not like there are survivors to warn the next batch of morons about the technique.

Whatever. It works for us, and we love them for it. Makes our lives easier, doncha know?

Redcaps are also good at ambushes, as if you couldn't guess. We're experts at picking good spots to jump travelers, using cover and cutting off escape routes. It comes with the territory, really. We don't sneak around like the sluagh do, but we know the value of cover. If nothing else, it lets dinner get closer.

That's something else to bear in mind, by the way — we can be very patient when we need to be, and very still. One of the things we school the kids in is pretending to be a statue — holding still long enough to convince the birds and the squirrels and whatever else to come play on you. It's a great way to get a snack. Advanced classes involve lying on your back with your mouth open, and actually waiting for lunch to hop inside.

You think that's no big deal? Then think about this: Imagine a bunch of redcaps hiding in brush or gully or whatever, holding that still and waiting for you and your buddies to stroll along. You're not going to see them. You're not going to hear them. They're not going to move and give themselves away.

Betcha look twice the next time you go walking, pally.

WAR

The worst case scenario — for everyone else, at least — is when a bunch of redcaps bands get together and get into gear. One of the bosses gets elected warchief by the other bosses, and they act as his lieutenants from then on out.

What happens after that is pretty impressive, and pretty damned scary. For all the noise we make, we can be pretty damned efficient in a fight, especially on the offensive. Usually a warband will just take off and head for some objective, clobbering everything along the way.

If the other side is lucky, once the objective is reached the warband tends to dissolve. The various bands go their different ways, the bosses pick up the reins again and everyone promises to get together next year and swap lies about what they did on the campaign. That's the fast version.

That ain't what we got now, though. There are warbands out there that are permanent, or as near to permanent as you'd want them. They're dug in, and they've got boggan engineers making fortifications for 'em. Other bands and warbands are out there, making raids and roving around like they own the countryside. Come to think of it, maybe they do.

In any case, those warbands are the hard core of what's going on now. They're not going to go away and they're not going to fall apart under their own weight. They've set out to do something, and they're going to do it.

I almost feel sorry for the poor sons of bitches that are going to have to fight them.

REDCAPS AT PLAY

What a lot of folks don't get is that we occasionally do things besides eat. We're a right fun-loving bunch when we put our minds to it. Mind you, that might not be by anyone else's definition of fun, but that's their problem. We're having a good time.

DRINKING

Redcaps drink. This is a fact of life. We can swallow pretty much anything, so a belt from a bottle doesn't hit us at all unless we want it to. That means that if you see a band of redcaps spending quality time, odds are you're going to see a pile of bottles near them that's tall enough to have ski trails on it. What makes it even better is that we can drink anything, so we'll suck down the stuff that the high-and-mighties consider swill. They hate watching us enjoy that stuff; it's another sign of our inferior breeding, or some such.

Redcaps do get drunk, by the way. We have to want to get drunk, but we can. Yes, lads who can't hold their liquor hear it from their peers, assuming they wake up anywhere near where they started — tossing a drunkard into a barrel and seeing how far downstream he'll go before waking up is a favorite sport.

So is punching a hole in the bottom of the barrel.

SINGING

There's only one thing more horrific than the notion of a band of redcaps bombed off their skulls. That's a band of redcaps bombed off their skulls and trying to sing. Yes, we do try to sing when we're plastered, or when we're marching or whenever, really. Just bear in mind that the sorts of songs we're gonna be singing won't necessarily be ones you want to hear — especially if you've been drinking yourself.

We like to dance, too. Betcha can't even picture that.

SPORTS

When you get right down to it, sports are war. They're about beating the other guy, usually by taking his territory and ramming something — a ball, a puck, whatever — right down his throat. That's something we can relate to. The more violent the sport is, the better we like it. Shinty's a favorite. The more of us we can get into a game of that, the better. A head makes a great ball, but if we can't get one on short notice, anything will do.

What that means is that if you see a whole scrum's worth of redcaps going at each other, you're not watching a scrap — at least, not one for anything more than bragging rights. Still, it's best to get far away, fast, when the action starts. Those games don't have out of bounds markers, and they don't stop for bystanders.

HUNTING

No one, but no one should be surprised that we like this. They just might be surprised at how we do it. Yeah, sometimes we go chasing through the woods, grabbing as much as we can. It works for sharks, right — why shouldn't it work for us?

Other times, though, we've got different approaches. Sometimes we'll stalk one thing for hours, just cause we can. Maybe we'll go for a sprint; see who tires first, the prey or us. Sometimes we hunt in packs, whooping and hollering just 'cause we can.

That's what scares people the most, and with good reason, I say. Imagine a whole band chasing one target, howling to wake the dead and never letting the poor son of a bitch rest for a second. Those can go on for miles, and they can go on for hours. The trick is to let the prey think he just might be able to get away, without ever letting him think he's lost you. It's a fine balance to maintain, but it's doable — with practice.



STUDYING

Believe it or not, we do teach the childlings. Life as a redcap's tough, so why not give them every edge? Any redcap kid out there is liable to get taken under the wing of some grump, like it or not, and taught the basics of fighting, survival and dealing with the rest of the critters. If we don't, it's a disaster waiting to happen. A kid who doesn't study is a kid who's exactly what everyone else thinks a redcap is, and he ain't gonna last too long. We ain't so common that we can afford to throw childlings away.



So we teach. We teach 'em about hunting, and about fighting. We teach 'em where they came from, and where they're likely to go. Most of all, we teach 'em how to be redcaps, not junior-grade sidhe wannabes. It works out just fine, from where I'm sitting, though the sidhe tend not to like it much. It horns in on their territory for teaching the kiddies proper care and grooming.

After all, we have to take care of our own. No one else will.

WHY THE KIDS GO UNSEELIE

You want to know what it's like? I'll tell you what it's like. Take yourself back a few years, to when you were fresh-faced and pink-checked and everyone thought you were cute as the dickens, even if you really were a rotten little monster. You remember those days? I'll bet you remember some of them — endless hours of running around with the other childlings, playing games and hunting chimera and generally having a blast.

They were great days, weren't they? Everyone was friends with everyone else, and no one cared what kith anyone was 'cause it was all one big adventure. Kids versus grownups, those were the sides, and all the little brats stuck together because, well, they were all little brats. Remember those days? You do?

Well, then, you're so full of horseshit I wouldn't eat you for fear of getting a bad taste in my mouth. There were no good old days, boyo. It's all a lie your memory paints so you don't remember what an atrocious little bastard you were. Oh sure, it may have started out innocent. After all, when you're brand spanking new to the Glamour, everyone's different and wonderful. You might have treated everyone the same, at least for a while. You might have hung out with a pooka or a slaugh or maybe even someone like me, at first, because as different as we were from one another, we were all in the same boat. We were all baby changelings, and as weird as we were to one another, we were weirder to everyone else, so we played together. We didn't have a lot of other options, I think.

But that didn't last too long, did it? It's like anything else. Someone has to come along and ruin a perfectly good thing. All the good little sidhe got taken up to court and told whom they could and couldn't associate with. Oh, I'm sure it was never too blatant — those pointy-eared snakes would put a knife between your ribs haft-first so you didn't notice the blood — but the whispers would be there all the same. "Are you sure you want to invite him to your knighting? I'm sure he's perfectly well behaved if he's a friend of yours, but the other nobles might not understand." Heard that one, have you? Well, how about this one? "I'm certain he's Seelie now, but you know how his kind is..." And then you'd get the meaningful silence, and the meaningful look, and before long the lesson sank in: You're not supposed to be playing with the funny little boys in the red hats.

All the jokes that were so funny before, like getting your redcap buddy to eat a Big Wheel or chow down a whole pizza at one gulp, they weren't funny any more. They were scary. You could see other things going into that maw, couldn't you? You could imagine how it could all go wrong. Because the older changelings, the ones with the very best of intentions, had let you know that it just wasn't done, that it just wasn't right. It was all for your own protection, though, so that made it all right.

It wasn't just the damn sidhe, either. The big bruiser trolls would tell their kiddykins not to associate with that sort of ruffian because they didn't fight fair and weren't honorable. The eshu heard all the stories — they always do — and started looking over their shoulder. And so it went, all because the kid might go bad sooner or later.

I can hear what you're saying to yourself. You're saying, "You know, that does make a certain amount of sense." You're thinking that, well, a lot of redcaps can get pretty dangerous, and it's best that the kids know the risk, and anyway, you certainly weren't like that. And I say piss on you and yours, because this isn't about you.

You know who it's about? It's about the kid, the stupid little redcap childling who looks around one day and sees that his friends ain't gonna play with him no more. It's the kid who sees his buddies look at him like he's some kind of monster, the kids who gets left out of everything all of a sudden and he has no goddamned idea why. It's not like anyone bothered to tell him, after all. It's not like anyone bothered to explain. None of those sidhe bastards are going to sully themselves telling a little kid that he's just not the right kind to hang out with their precious heirs. Hell, they don't even give him a comforting lie, like Redcap Mumps or some crap like that. They just take his friends away, inch by inch, and they let him stew in his own juices.

Now think about that childling for a second. He can't play with his friends any more. He doesn't have any friends any more, really; the wilders and grumps have scared them off. He's all of six years old and he's alone. He's not stupid, though. He pokes around, asks some questions, and sooner or later he'll find an ex-friend who still likes him enough to turn him on to the truth. "You're gonna be a monster," the other kid says. "I'm not supposed to play with you any more."

Now how do you think a redcap kid is gonna take that? He's not gonna take it well at all, if you ask me. He'll think about it, and at first he'll deny it. After all, he's been a good friend. He's worked his skinny little ass off making sure he didn't eat anything important, being a good friend, doing the stuff his buddies thought was funny, and still they're turning their backs on him because *he might be dangerous some day*.

This kid's a redcap, but he's not dumb. He knows that he's being screwed. He dwells on that for a bit, and he dwells on it some more, and eventually he comes to one inescapable conclusion:

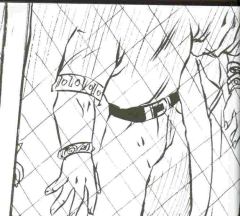
If they're gonna treat me like that, I might as well act like that.

You're not listening to me any more. I can tell. You've got that, "Well, that's stupid," bullshit look on your face. You're thinking you would have been plucky and soldiered on, and made everyone realize what a nice guy you really were.

Again, I tell you that you're full of shit. Try being the freak to the freaks some day, pal. You'll learn it changes you real fast. I learned that the hard way.

It's a damn shame you can't too — but that doesn't mean I can't teach a thing or two to your kids.

And yeah, I know where you live. Sweet dreams, asshole, that is, if you can sleep at all.



CHAPTER THREE: SHUT YOUR BIG MOUTH

Hunger maketh hard bones soft.
— Hill, *Commonplace Book*

WHY WE DON'T LIKE YOU

As long as I'm cleaning up your misconceptions here, I might as well take a whack at another one. There's this long-held belief that despite our differences or histories or goals or whatever, all of us kiths really get along well when the chips are down because, gawrsh, that's the changeling way. When the pinch comes, it'll be us shoulder to shoulder with the sidhe and the sluagh and everyone else because, hey, that's just the way it is.

It's a pretty little picture, isn't it? There's just one problem with it: It's a load of crap. If you believe that, you're dumber than you look, and you look plenty dumb

to me. When push comes to shove, we're all shoving each other to avoid getting pushed out the back of the sled and fed to the wolves. And I hate to burst your shiny happy bubble, but the sidhe and the pooka and everyone else will be shoving right along with us. That's the way it really works, kiddo. We've got a bad rep among the other kiths because we shove harder and because we don't just stand there and let them shove us. The sidhe love you if you stand there and let them walk all over you. We don't do that. You can figure out what comes next.

But in any case, that's beside the point. Lemme give you a rundown of who all our little elfy cousins really are — not the Yeats-flavored crap they tell you about themselves.

Yeah, I've read Yeats. You sound surprised. What, just because I'm a redcap means that I'm a goddamned illiterate? I'm hungry, bunkie. I'm not stupid. Remember that and you might last a while longer.

BOGGANS

These guys are just plain sad. At what point did an obsessive need for tidiness become one of the great archetypal drives? I don't get it. I don't see where these guys came from, where they're going or what the hell they're doing in the meantime.



I guess the big problem with the boggans is that they're so damn drab. I mean, household spirits. Great, perfect, whatever — fix my shoes and I'll give you a cheeseburger. That's not legend, that's a barter economy. Whoop-de-do.

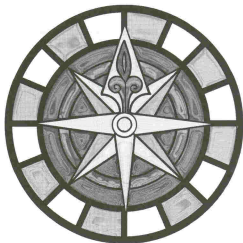
There's only one thing to admire about these guys, and that's their stones. I mean, you tell a boggan to do something and he's gonna do it if it knocks him, his buddies and his extended family stone dead. They're stubborn as all hell, and that means that if you line 'em up and put swords in their hands, they get ugly. Tell them to march, and they get dangerous, 'cause they just keep on coming regardless.

Other than that, though, there's just not much to them. There's not much to say because there's not much to talk about. Maybe next incarnation, fellas. 'Til then, hang in there and see if you can get me something in a black loafer.

ESHU

There's something weird about the eshu. Ask any other Kithain about the eshu, and you'll get "Oh yeah, I got a lotta respect for those guys, wish I could go with 'em, too bad they're not around here much."

Does that strike anyone else as funny? It's like they're all afraid to say anything bad about the eshu, but they sure as hell don't want them moving into the neighborhood. I dunno. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm reading too much into it. Maybe not. Doesn't really matter in the grand scheme of things, though.



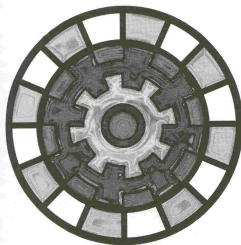
The deal with the eshu, at least from our perspective, is pretty simple. They've got big mouths, though not the same way we do. That can be a good thing, or that can be a bad thing. When you want your rep as a badass to get far and wide, you tell an eshu. Makes sense, right? I mean, these guys are gonna hit a dozen courts in two weeks. You can't buy that sort of exposure.

On the other hand, there are times when we don't want word of what we're doing to get out. In that case, it makes sense to make sure no one's carrying that word. Lucky for us, eshu like to travel light, fast, and most importantly, alone.

One lone eshu versus a pack of redcaps with an agenda. Who do you think wins that one?

NOCKERS

Nockers like building things. We like tearing things down. That's as basic as it gets. It doesn't matter that the crap they like building is left-handed can openers, three-eyed cucumber peelers and steam-powered nail clippers — it's the principle of the thing. Whatever they make, we want to knock down. It's like sticking your chin out and daring us to take a swing. It's just gonna happen, and don't you dare bitch about it when it does. You asked for it, after all.

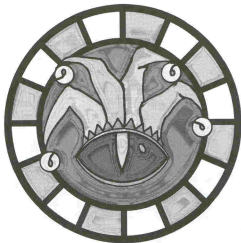


The good news is that everything that a nocker makes has some problem with it. There's always a screw-up somewhere, and that means there's an easy place to start taking it apart. It's just a matter of finding it.

Besides, when it comes right down to it, we're simple creatures. We like basic stuff — straight razors, sausage grinders, things like that. Complicated things make us nervous. We don't like 'em much. And from there, it's not much of a jump to not liking the people who make 'em.

POOKA

If you say "tastes like chicken," I swear I'm gonna haul off and clock you one. I don't know what pooka tastes like, I don't wanna know what pooka tastes like and frankly I don't give a rat's hairy ass what pooka tastes like. Can we move on? Thank you.



Now that I come to think of it, though, that's what makes pooka such a pain in the ass. They're all about sidetracks and one-offs and getting distracted by that sparkly thing in the dirt. You can't get a handle on them. One minute they're showing teeth and willing to fight to the death over something, the next they're playing some goddamned annoying word game that's just a cover for the fact that they stole your lunch. There's no rhyme or reason to it, and it means that trying to deal with them in any kind of situation that isn't hunter-prey is annoying as all get-out.

Can you deal with a pooka? Sure, you can deal with a pooka. If you can dope out what they want and give it to them, they'll jump through flaming hoops for you. Even better, they're all so desperate to make an impression that they'll talk to you even if you ate their four best friends. Just give them the sad eyes and make noises about how you reformed, and they'll crawl right into your lap.

Dumb bunnies. Heh.

SATYRS

So this satyr walks into a bar where a redcap is sitting and orders a drink. While he's doing so, he knocks over the redcap's beer. The redcap looks at him and says "Hey! You knocked over my beer!" The satyr says, "Yeah?" The redcap says "So you're gonna buy me another one, right?" The satyr says, "The hell I am." The redcap, being a reasonable guy, says "I didn't hear that. You are gonna buy me another beer, right?" The satyr looks at him and says, with a suitable obscene gesture, "Eat me."

So he did.



That joke always cracks me up. I've got no idea why. You get the gist of it, though, right? Satyrs are way too impressed with themselves. They're all convinced that they're badasses and they've got to show it. Most of 'em

aren't exactly original about it, either. I mean, OK, how original do you expect a bunch of guys with hairy legs and foot-long packages to be about their conversational openers, but still, it's a tired act.

Deep down, the satyrs aren't that far from us. They're appetite, too, just a different sort. They've gotten away from their roots, though. It's all got to be frolicking and cavorting and "tee-hee, oh, you've got me in a compromising position." Screw that. What ever happened to the way it used to be? I'm talking about gut-twisting, knee-buckling need, the sort that gets your thighs sweaty and your shorts soggy. I'm talking about needing to screw someone so bad that the watermelon with a hole in it over there is looking good to you, that you'll die or kill to get what you want. That's what these guys used to be about, back in the day.

They're not about it so much any more. Now you can just brush them off, more or less. It's kind of pathetic. Ah well, sucks to be them.

SIDHE

Okay, here we go. Are you sitting down for this one? It's gonna take a while. After all, it's not going to be easy summing up what bastards the sidhe are in just a few sentences.



Well, lemme try: The sidhe are a bunch of bastards, and each and every one gets a stick inserted someplace delicate right after Chrysalis just to make sure they maintain the proper snot-nosed attitude.

Hey, that wasn't so hard after all. I could let it go there, you know, but it's just too damn much fun to trash those guys. Before you think I'm just waving my dick in the air, though, lemme straighten you out on a few things.

First of all, no one elected the sidhe kings. They just came along outta nowhere and decided that they were in charge because, well, that's what they're made of. Let's face it, as kiths go they're young. Night fears and hunger and loyalty — those are old ideas. They've been around forever. That's why we've been around forever. So have the sluagh and the trolls, if you think about it. But nobility and all that crap? It's new. It's got no history to it. But that didn't stop the sidhe from riding in like the goddamned Queen of May and just taking over when they showed up.

Now, on a certain level I can respect that. New kid on the block makes good, all that crap — it's the feel-good story of the year. But what puts my nuts in a vise, and I think I speak for every other redcap with more brain cells than teeth, is that as soon as the sidhe got on top, they pretended that they'd always been there. They've got no class, no style and no sense of history. They just crapped all over everything that came before because, hey, if it didn't have sidhe in it, it couldn't have been any good. That sticks in my craw. That sticks in the craw of every soul that's got the sense to think about it. And that's just the start of the list of things we owe them payback for.

You want ancient history? They sold the lot of us out during the Shattering. Sure, the sidhe could go running back to Arcadia, but were the gates open for anyone else? Hell, no. They don't want our kind up there, do they? So we got to take it in the teeth while they went back to their castles and fairy forts. You think they thought about the poor bastards they left behind during all those centuries? Don't be a Pollyanna.

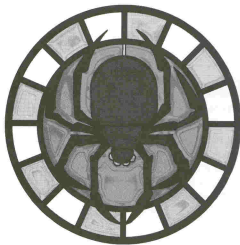
That's not good enough for you? Then let's talk modern history. It's 1969 and they come back, and they do the same goddamned thing to us all over again! Did they even notice that we were doing just fine without them? Hell, no — it all needed a sidhe's cold-fingered touch. After all, the commoners couldn't be trusted to do dick, right? That's a perfect excuse for their sort of war.

You know what I think? It's a self-image problem. All of the point-eared SOB's are terrified, deep down inside, that we don't really need them any more. They'd piss their tights if they thought that we'd get along just fine without them. So that's what drives them. They're trying to convince us that we need them any way they can, and if we can't be convinced, well, we gotta die. In their flinty little heart of hearts, that's what they're thinking.

And if that ain't a good enough reason to hate the lot of them, I don't know what is.

SLUAGH

By all rights, we and the sluagh should be on the same side. I mean, look at the basics: We got a bad rep, they've got a bad rep. We've got all sorts of antisocial habits, they've got all sorts of antisocial habits. We eat weird crap, they eat weird crap. We like good music, they... okay, it only goes so far.



Still, though, you'd think we'd have a lot to talk about with these guys. It's kinda sad that's not the case. Sluagh seem intent on working from the inside, you know? Every duke's gotta have one around to show how open minded he is, and to yank as much info as he can out of the little worm. What the sluagh gets out of this is the fun of forcing some high and mighty to rely on him. You know, making the sidhe get the knees of their tights dirty by getting down and begging for the straight poop.

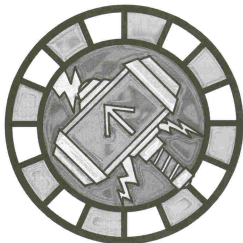
The problem with that approach is basic, though. The damn sidhe always get back up, change their tights and start acting like assholes all over again. Nothing changes, except the sluagh goes back to his sewer or cave or whatever and puts another chalk mark on the wall. I figure they all get together and cackle over who's got the most each month, and then realize they can't stand each other long enough to do anything else.

Then again, that's all right because we can't stand them too long, either. You always get the impression that a sluagh's looking at a spot about half an inch behind your eyes when she's talking to you, and it's one of the few things that'll give a redcap the willies. They never seem to do more than stare, but you know, sometimes that's enough.

In the end, it's all pointless. They don't like us, for whatever reason. I've never bothered asking why. We don't like them, because they're ineffective little worms who are too damn creepy for anyone's good. It'd be a beautiful thing if we ever found a way to work together to shove a tin can up the big bosses' asses, but it just ain't gonna happen any time soon.

TROLLS

Trolls are tough. (Yeah, yeah, get the joke out of your system, lemme know when you're done with the bullcrap about the l'orange sauce and the scallions and we can move on. Too goddamned predictable, that's what you are, and it's gonna get you in trouble real soon now.) They know how to fight, and they know how to fight well. That's what they're there for, after all. They're supposed to know how to fight. No one ever dreamed up a troll-like critter that was good at macramé. The big blue morons are just supposed to stand there in a byrnie or a kilt or whatever local ethnic outfit seems appropriate and beat the crap out of things honestly.



Now, that's all well and good, but it explains pretty handily why they don't like us. Trolls like things to be done properly. They're kinda anal-retentive, in a jarheaded sort of way. You're not supposed to fight unless you're fighting the right way, with all the forms filled out and all the procedures followed and all the ritualized insulting of everyone else's mother before you actually start swinging.

Well, piss on that. You get in a fight, you're in it to win, not to limp home and thump your chest about how well you did, all things considered. We fight to win. They fight to score brownie points on the invisible troll-o-meter, which I presume comes with merit badges. We see something that pisses us off, we deal with it. They see something that pisses them off, they make a big deal of being stoic about it and letting everyone else know exactly how long-suffering they are. Well, gee, guys, that's just great. We'll give you a medal for putting up with more crap than anyone else, but in the meantime, we've got stuff to do.

So go on, stand there. Do what you gotta do, in your own time and your own way. And when it's all over, we'll let you know exactly how we kicked your teeth in.

NUNNEHI

There are about four thousand types of Nunnehi out there, near as I can tell. You've got everything from giants made out of rock to, well, things I can't even put a name on. They're everywhere and they can do stuff that we just don't have a handle on.

So you know what? Most redcaps avoid 'em. If you can't deal with it, don't. It's a nice, simple rule of thumb, and it works great. We don't bother them, they don't bother us and everyone's happy.

DENIZENS

We keep hearing a lot about the Dark-kin, but they've been damn slow to show their faces around us. I've only met or heard of a few and of those I was only interested in two. The ones called keremet are driven by hunger, so I hear. I'd like to meet one and see who chows down on whom. From what I hear they have no emotions, so how anyone knows *what* they feel is beyond me, but what the hell? They wanna eat at my trough they better be planning to come armed. The other type, naraka, I take a little more seriously. I've seen one in action and I gotta tell ya, popping out extra arms and doing the whirlwind killing thing is pretty impressive. Not that we couldn't take 'em if we had to. Still, we might want to look into the naraka and see if we can't find some new chums who share our goals. I don't see anybody askin' them to the Grand Duke's party either.

OTHER CRITTERS

Much as we'd like it to be that way, Kithain ain't the only fish in the big, dark sea. The world's a nasty place, full of nasty people and nasty things, and we've just got to be nastier than everyone else in it if we wanna survive.

We do have one advantage on the rest of the freakin' zoo, though. We know they're out there. They don't know boo about us. It kinda tilts the odds in our favor.

VAMPIRES

You know, a friend of mine who's a real hard case made a very interesting discovery about vampires. He said (and mind you, this is just what he said — I don't know if this is true or not) that you can tie one down, chop a bit off for a snack and, as long as you keep feeding it, it grows back! Mind you, he also said that it tasted like crap, and something's gotta be pretty damn foul for a redcap to think it's skunky.

On a more serious note, there are some redcaps out there who say that vampires are just redcaps gone way, way out of whack, and that sooner or later they're gonna come back to their roots. I don't know about that, but I do know that they've got something in common with us. It's less than you'd think, though, and they're way too wrapped up in their own little world. If they notice you at all, they're gonna think of you as something to use. So don't let 'em notice you unless it's on your terms, and remember that you know a little bit about how they think. That's useful.

WEREWOLVES

Well, let's see. They're big, they've got big teeth, they like wrecking stuff and they don't ask questions before they tear into stuff. Works for me.

MAGES

As long as there have been people, there have been people who poked their noses into places they had no business going. That hasn't changed one bit. There are still nosy bastards out there trying to figure out what's really going on, and they're still convinced they're smarter and better than everyone else. Funny, though, they don't think they're so smart or so good when you're about to put the bite on them. Get 'em out of their element and they're like scared little kids.

I like scaring little kids. Don't you?

WRAITHS

Dead people can be a royal pain in the ass. They can do crap to you that's just plain weird, and you can't hit back. Plus, if you're in the habit of making people get suddenly dead, those people tend to be a bit annoyed afterward.

The good news is that, for whatever reason, there have been a lot fewer ghosts around lately. I don't know why this is and I don't care. It just makes my life easier.

THE DISSENTING OPINION

Yeah, yeah, I know. You're sitting there wondering why we've got such a bad opinion of everyone. "Surely," you're saying to yourself, "surely not every redcap feels that way. Surely there are some Seelie redcaps who have a higher opinion of, say, the sidhe than I do of the crud on the bottom of my boot. Surely..." Well, you get the idea. The answer, if you've gotta know, is that yeah, there are a few of us out there who, for whatever misguided reason, are into that sort of thing. Now I'm no expert on the way they feel, but I can make a guess. And if you don't like what I come up with, well, you're free to try to find a Seelie redcap and ask yourself. Good luck if you guess wrong, though.

BOGGANS

They're hard-working bastards, sort of a blue collar kith. That's the best thing about them. Not a pretentious bone in their bodies. You know where these guys stand on everything, even if it's on the other side of the line. You can't always like 'em, but you can at least respect 'em.



ESHU

Hey, they talk to us. Maybe we're just another audience — and let's face it, these guys are desperate for an audience — but at least it's nice to be able to talk to someone without promising six times that you're not gonna bite their arm off.



NOCKERS

They're decent to hang around with if you can get them to shut up. They want to tell you how every last detail of whatever they've made works when you just want to know how to use it to turn big problems into little ones. Fortunately, it's pretty easy to get them to shut up. You just find the right spot and squeeze.



POOKA

They're harmless, and they're the only kith that doesn't really give us much crap. That's probably because they're not in a position to give anyone crap, but there you have it. Who cares about motivations? It's results that matter.



SATYRS

The satyrs are the only other guys out there who really know what it's like to need to cut loose. Everyone else is a little too restrained. These guys understand what being hungry — for something — is. It isn't often that

you meet someone who knows where you're coming from, but this is as close as we get.



SIDHE

There's something to be said for discipline and order, and the best of the sidhe have that. They're not all stuck-up pricks. Some of them really care, and really do a lot of work to make their fiefdoms better. You just have to make sure you hook up with the right kind.



SLUAGH

Well, none of the stories they tell about the sluagh have ever been proven. That's got to count for something. Maybe. One of these days.



TROLLS

Trolls give good scrap. You can respect 'em for being tougher than just about anyone else out there, and for knowing how to control that. It'd be real easy for them to lose control and just go nuts, just like it'd be easy for us. But they don't, and more power to 'em for it.

...and that's it. Remember, though, the opinions here ain't necessarily the opinions of management. I wouldn't bet anything important on any redcap you meet feeling this way. Then again, I ain't you, either.



HUNTERS

People, as a rule, are nuts. That's a given. However, some people are nuttier than others. If you see a guy standing there and squinting at you like you've got three heads, get scarce, fast. You never know if he's looking at you or really looking at you, and you just don't want to take that chance.

Besides, you can always come back for him later.

THALLAIN

So there are these stories about things that are like us, but worse? Worse? How, I ask you, can there be anything worse than a pissed-off redcap who's feeling hungry and looking at you? Please.

Besides, even if there were something like that, you think I'd tell you about it and give you one more reason to treat me and my kind like freaks? Good lad. You're getting smarter.

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

The world is a big, scary place. It's got dark corners and scary things in it, and it links to places that you ain't never dreamed of. Some of those links are open. Some ain't. And some that used to be closed ain't closed no more, which means that bad things are coming through.

We've seen these things before, long ago and far away. They're legends, even to us — the things from back home in Arcadia. They're not supposed to be here anymore. They're not supposed to want to be here. They're not even supposed to be able to last long in the cold, hard world.

But I've seen 'em. They're back. And that means that redcaps just might have to turn into monster hunters again.

A BIG HEAD STORY

There used to be Nunnehi like us. At least, that's how the stories I've heard go, and I know better than to doubt stories, right? Anyway, these Nunnehi were called "big heads" because they were nothing but giant heads that could fly around under their own power. Big heads would eat any damn thing they came across, and they were always hungry. They'd even eat people, not that I see anything particularly wrong with that.

Anyway, there's a story about how one time, a brave was alone in the forest doing something or other (the version I heard he was Lenape, but I don't exactly deal with folklore experts on a regular basis, so go figure) when a big head came and sat down next to his campfire. Now, the brave knew that he was screwed, because a big head would as soon eat him as look at him, but this one was feeling chatty. It looked at him with its one big eye (Yeah, they had one eye. It doesn't matter much, in the long run) and said "What are you doing?"

Now the brave, who was quicker on the uptake than the big head, decided that lying through his teeth was the better part of survival, so he gestured to the coals of his fire and said, "I'm cooking nuts." The big head decided it was in the mood for an appetizer and said, "Oh? Let me eat them." The brave said "Sure," got out of the way, and watched the big head chow down on a pile of hot coals.

Scratch one big head, and I don't mean because of dandruff. The brave put out what was left of the fire and got the hell out of there, and lived happily ever after, or something. And that's the end.

So, what have we learned from this story? If you were paying attention, you learned several things:

One: There used to be Nunnehi named big heads that lived around here. The important phrase there is "used to be."

Two: Big heads were really, really dumb. This explains why there are no more big heads.

Look, we're appetite, OK? We're hunger. We are that sort of thing given shape and form and nasty, sharp, pointy teeth. But there's a reason we're still here and the big heads aren't, and that's because we're smarter than they were. Just deciding that you've got a big mouth and the world is your smorgasbord ain't enough. It never has been. If that's all we were, we'd be gone now, too.

We're not, though. We're still here. Think about what that means.



AND NOW FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT... RIVER HAGS

Sure, most of us come from the same basic blueprint. After all, when you've got something that works, you stick with it. Sharks ain't the most advanced fish in the sea, but the basic design does exactly what it's supposed to. That's why they've been around so long in more or less the same shape. Some of the variations on the theme haven't worked out, but by and large, the basic design works just fine, thanks. And when you think about it, there ain't that many differences between sharks and us. You eat and you keep moving — what else do you need?

Be that as it may, however, there are a few cadet branches of the good old redcap family tree. The folks I'm talking about ain't exactly redcaps, but they're closer to us than anything else, and if you go back far enough on the family tree you might start finding the same names on

both sides, if you take my meaning. Then again, you might not, but you get the feeling that your grandpappy and their great-grandma's fooled around a bit when they thought the grownups weren't looking.

What I'm talking about here is, big surprise, river hags (though I'm told that some of them prefer the term "flumeno-carnivo-kithanians" Whatever. When you're muck-green and have a mouth like a sewer grate, I suppose you'll take whatever you can get.) and their ilk. Now, I've heard some folks get up on their high and holy horses and declaim that river hags started out as goddesses of particular streams and whatnot, and that they got uglier and more antisocial as the old ways fell out of favor. I don't know anything about that. What I do know is that you do find river hags living in places where the banks are treacherous and the waters are fast and deep. You find them in places where rivers tend to swallow small children without a trace. You find them, in other words, in places where the river feeds.

Sounds like us, don't it? That really sounds like us.

So for all intents and purposes, you can lump us and the river hags together. How can you tell the difference? Well, first of all, why would you want to? I mean, if you're close enough to be wondering about identifying marks, you're too close, if you know what I'm saying. Still, let me give you a basic overview:

LOOKS

They're ugly. Next question?

Oh, you want more details than that? Picky bastard, aren't you?

Your average river hag is about as attractive as a corpse that's been held underwater for a week and then spanked and sent downstream. They're either bloated as all get-out or thin and twisted like a mess of willow twigs. The bloated ones tend to have big, sloppy mouths that can take a child at one gulp, while the skinny ones just open wide when they need to chow down. Both kinds, of course, have nice teeth — if you're into concertina wire and caltrops as your models for such things. Larger hags are prone to pug noses and big ears, while the skinnier ones tend towards hook noses and sometimes no ears at all.

HAGSIGN

It's pretty obvious if an area belongs to a river hag, if you know what to look for. They leave signs all along their territory — usually skeletons of river animals draped in duckweed or some such. The signs aren't plastered in the middle of the highways, but they're there if you have the brains to look for them. Hags aren't stupid people. They'd rather keep you away than have to maul you.

The heftier hags tend to have short arms and short fingers. They're more interested in letting dinner get close to them before stuffing it into their mouths. Skinnier ones are proactive. They'll come up to the banks and reach out, wrapping those long fingers around the ankles of whatever's come too close to the bank and pulling them in.

River hags come in a wide variety of colors, but none of them are attractive unless you're either a slough or a dung beetle. There's bloated corpse white, river muck green, decaying leaf brown, mottled variations on all three — you get the idea. A lot of them have yellow eyes that actually glow in the dark, and they can see underwater as well as you or I can see on land. I've heard talk about a "nictitating membrane," whatever the hell that is, but the short version is that they're built to be very good at what they do.

And no, what they do isn't very nice.

HABITS

They eat. They patrol their sections of river. Every so often, they put on their nice clothes and go to town. What more is there to it?

OK, there's plenty more. River hags are pretty much tied to a particular river, if not a particular stretch of river. Their mortal seemings always end up living right on the water, with some sort of job that ties into the whole thing — fishing, piloting a tug, writing reports as an environmental whackjob, you get the idea. That way, whenever they need to get into the water, they can do so with a minimum of fuss. That also means they know good places to hide the bodies. That is, for those rare occasions when they leave bodies, anyway.

When they're at their haggish best, the ladies tend not to leave the water. Rumor has it that they can't do so for more than a few days at a time, anyway, and they have to stick close to their home rivers. Water ain't just water, it seems — it's got to be the specific stuff. It's a tradeoff, I suppose — we've got our deal, they've got their rivers. On the whole I think we got the better deal, but it's not like I've had extensive debates with anyone on the matter.

River hags tend to go after three sorts of folks: The mean, the stupid and trespassers.

Mean is a no-brainer. I mean, let's face it, anyone who's a rat bastard to a hag's stretch of river isn't going to be on the list of favorite people. A hag's got to live in her river, after all, and if you choke the damn thing with sludge and boxtops and dead fish, odds are that whoever's living in the middle of that crap isn't going to be happy. Anyone who makes that sort of mess is fair game, and I wish 'em luck if they get too close to the water's edge at the right hour of the night.

Trespassers are a whole other kettle of fish, but again, you can understand why exactly they're not welcomed with open arms. (Well, they are, but in the non-idiomatic sense.) River hags are very protective of their territory. They don't like unannounced visitors. If you're going to go see a hag, the best thing to do is to stand well back from the water, announce you're coming and then throw a dead sheep or something in there. If you're lucky, you'll see a bit of thrashing around as the bribe vanishes, and then you'll get the high sign to come on down for a visit. If not, then turn around and go home. If they don't want you there, then you don't want to be there.

However, there's no shortage of idiots in the world. You'd be amazed at how many people (okay, sidhe and their toadies) think there's nothing better to do on a Sunday afternoon than to go down to the local scenic riverbank and try to clobber a river hag for the sheer fun of it. We've got a word for this where I come from, kids. The word is "dumb." First of all, if you don't bother a hag, she's not going to bother you. Second of all, challenging a hag on her home turf isn't the wisest tactical move. And third of all, even if you manage to win the fight, what exactly have you proved? It's not like she won't be back the next day, unless you used cold iron, and even the stodgiest and snottiest sidhe don't do that too often. It's a lot of risk, for very little gain — it's not like the hags are keeping anyone from crossing the river anywhere else except their little patch of turf, but time and again, that just ain't good enough for some.

As a result, the hags tend to get very defensive about anyone who comes trotting in uninvited. Even idiots who have no idea that it's river hag territory tend to be antisocial once they figure out who's in charge, and the hags don't bother putting up with that.

Stupid is a bit more difficult to quantify. This is mostly the "tragic accident" category — pets drowned, little kids who played too close to the water's edge, you get the idea. It's not nice, no. It's mean and vicious and cruel. But you know what? So's the world.

Look, river hags weren't put here to make the world a nicer, happier place. They're here as a reminder that rivers are dangerous places, that riverbanks are slippery and water doesn't let you go once it has you. They're not supposed to protect puppies or save kids from drowning. Don't try to fit them into some black-and-white morality of good/bad. They've got a job to do on direct orders from the universe, and they do it. End of story. Don't blame them for what they are or what they have to do. You don't have to like it, but that's the way it is.

FIGHTING SOGGY

River hags take tremendous advantage of the fact that they can stay underwater basically forever. Get into a fight with one and she'll try to drag you into the water, then hold you down until you drown. There's nothing fancy about it. They'll just grab a hold of you and pin you until you stop doing all those stupid things like breathing. Most of the time, they'll have beams or branches or

boulders ready to stash you under, so they don't even need to hold you down themselves. They'll just swim off about five feet, then, and watch you drown.

If the snatch and grab doesn't work, they're still pretty tough. They're strong as hell and have teeth like, well, like a redcap's, and the skinny ones tend to have claws, too. Plus, they can bend like a slough after a six-pack of Mad Dog and try to rip your guts out with their feet. It's a whole different style of fighting underwater, and they're damned good at it.

Get one up on land, of course, and it's a whole other story. But generally they're too smart to fall for that sort of thing. Generally, that is.

MAIDENS ON THE RHINE AND OTHER CRAP

Now, you might have heard stories about how sometimes river maidens are just these sweet, innocent pretty young things. If you believe that, I've got King David's winkie in a bag to sell you, cheap. That's just bullshit, an illusion. Oh, sure, a lot of hags are good at making themselves seem pretty for an hour or a day — the upper limit seems to be a year and a day, in most cases — but in the end, it all goes wrong. Most hags are smart enough to use good looks just as a lure to get particularly choice specimens into their nets. Others fall for that whole romance trip. You've got to pity those, because there's no way it can ever work out long term. It's sad, really, but then again, they should know what they're getting into.

PLAYING RIVER HAGS

Playing a river hag is similar to playing a normal redcap character, but there are some caveats:

• ATTRIBUTES

A river hag cannot have an Appearance of more than 1.

• ABILITIES

A river hag must take at least two dots in the Skill: Swimming, and one dot in Brawl

• BACKGROUNDS

River hags are, for the most part, solitary creatures, and that should be reflected in Backgrounds chosen for the character.

• BIRTHRIGHTS AND FRAILTIES

River hags get the usual redcap package, plus an added Birthright and Frailty. The former is the ability to breathe underwater indefinitely, the latter an inability to stray from their home river for more than a week. At the end of that period, the hag is forced to return home and immerse herself immediately, regardless of circumstance, or else wither at the rate of one level of aggravated damage per day (which cannot be healed outside of the hag's home waters).

• ROLEPLAYING

River hags are, by and large, not well liked in Kithain society. Furthermore, their unique situation regarding their home rivers makes it difficult to integrate a river hag into a group. With that in mind, Storytellers should confine the action to an area around the hag's home stretch of river, or provide a plot device allowing the hag's player to stay involved if the game moves too far away (though that can make for a compelling plot hook on its own).

A player wishing to take the part of a river hag in a game needs to have a very good reason for one of these solitary creatures to join up with other characters. Moreover, there is the whole question of how comfortable someone should be playing a character who may well have drowned children. Saying "my character is the nice river hag" just doesn't cut it, and a Storyteller should think long and hard before allowing a river hag character in her game.



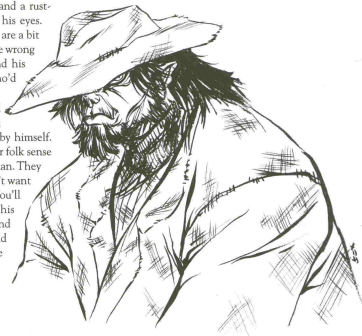
CHAPTER FOUR: LEGENDS

SHABBYMAN

Shabbyman wears an old coat and a rust-colored hat, pulled down low over his eyes. He's short and squat, with arms that are a bit too long and legs that bend in just the wrong way. They say his eyes are blue and his smile is kind, but there's no one who'd know who's still among the living.

Shabbyman lives in alleys and side streets, under manholes and around the corner, but he's always by himself. Even if they can't explain why, other folk sense something wrong about the Shabbyman. They don't want to get too close, and don't want to stay close if he gets near them. You'll never find Shabbyman warming his hands around a trash barrel fire and telling stories with others; folks would rather be out in the cold than share warmth with the Shabbyman.

They say Shabbyman's got some peculiar appetites. He likes children, or so the story goes, nice plump little girls and boys who wander away from home.



Shabbyman's the real reason sweet, innocent little children shouldn't run away from home, because he's waiting for them. When they go one block too far or make the decision that they're not going back, that's when the Shabbyman knows who they are. When they stop for the night or turn into a dark place to hide, that's when he knows where to find them. And then they lay down to sleep or close their eyes and pray that it's all going to go away, that's when he's suddenly there.

They say he's looking for the taste of innocence, and that once he finds it he'll fall to dust. He hasn't found it yet, though, and so he persists. He's been seen in every corner of the map, in every city and freehold. He doesn't bother wilders or grumps, though he's been known to tip his hat and laugh at those who recognize him. If politely escorted from a duchy, Shabbyman will go, but if anyone tries to force him out, the price in tears and blood is always high.

Shabbyman is welcome in no court and no kingdom, not that this troubles him much. He's old, so old that no one can remember a time when there weren't stories of the Shabbyman lurking in the alleys and tenements. There are stories about him, or someone who looked very much like him, stalking the streets of New York during the draft riots of 1863, and in a hundred places and times since then. Whether any of the tales are true or not has become immaterial; he has become legend. Every unexplained disappearance of a childling—or a child—gets laid at his feet; every newly discovered atrocity provokes speculation that Shabbyman has somehow been involved.

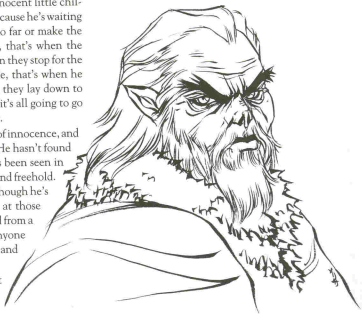
And by making Shabbyman part of their nightmares, the other fae have made Shabbyman himself into something far, far worse than he could ever have been on his own.

Changelings are creatures of dream, after all, made from imagination and fevered belief. What, then, might happen when changelings themselves dream one of their own? What if that dream is a nightmare?

And that is the story of Shabbyman, or at least its beginning.

SIMON COLD

Simon's one of the oldest of the redcaps in the Kingdom of Apples, but "old" doesn't mean "slow," "tired" or "well-behaved." In truth, he's one of the wickedest souls the kith has ever spit out into the world,



and he's working hard to remove the words "one of" from his description.

Simon lives in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, a huge tract of pine forest, swamp and bog that stretches over 1/6th of the state. Most of the Barrens are impenetrable forest, dotted here and there with small communities of greater or lesser repute, old ironworks and the occasional state park. The rest of the Barrens is left to wild animals, wilder people and legends—including Simon Cold.

You have to go deep into the Barrens to get to Simon's place, though there's no good reason to want to. He lives in a shack way the hell and gone off the few roads that cut through the thickest parts of the Barrens, but the cabin's just the center of his domain. The forest for miles around is dotted with snares and traps, both real and chimerical, and the woods are filled with critters he's found, named and tamed. On second thought, "tamed" is perhaps the wrong word—"broken to his will" seems more appropriate. Every Friday and Saturday night, Simon calls the beasts to his shack and then follows them on his own little Wild Hunt, and heaven help any soul who gets in his way.

Simon's also fond of inspecting what he catches in his traps and letting the meat age properly, as he puts it. A traveler caught in one of Cold's snares can expect to see Simon's grinning face within the hour, but may not

be released for days. Then again, considering what Simon does to those who stumble into his web, being caught and hung upside down by the ankle for a week may seem a kindness.

It's been said that Simon got his name from his habit of leaving the heart of the Barrens during winter to go trading and hunting. Since others only saw him during winter, he picked up the name "Simon Cold" as a result. A more intriguing (and slightly less believable) version of the tale has Simon bringing winter winds with him out of the heart of the forest, but even the most persistent eshu has trouble finding anyone who admits to believing that any more.

Thankfully, Simon doesn't venture outside the Barrens often. He's content to let folks come to him, though no one's quite sure why they do. For a while there was interest among certain sidhe circles in putting an end to Simon, but every attempt came to naught. The knights' spurs and other accouterments were returned home, eventually, but of the knights themselves there was never any trace.

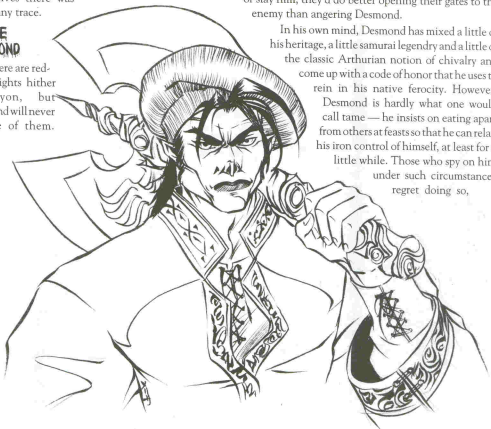
SQUIRE DESMOND

There are red-cap knights hither and yon, but Desmond will never be one of them. That's

not to say that he hasn't been offered the honor. Indeed, he's refused it more times than he cares to count. He just won't accept it under any circumstances, usually begging off by claiming that he hasn't yet "earned the right." Desmond is a veteran of more battles, ambushes and brawls than any three knights one would care to name. What it will take for Desmond to feel that he's finally ready for knighthood is unknown, but the suspicion in certain circles is that it involves moving mountains, shaking the very pillars of heaven or emulating the Twelve Labors of Hercules. More sober souls suspect that Desmond won't be happy until he gets himself killed in the line of duty, but they keep such thoughts to themselves.

At the moment, Desmond is an itinerant warrior, moving from embattled court to embattled court offering his services. Those who treat him graciously can expect his help, which is impressive indeed. Those who treat him rudely or roughly, he leaves to their inevitable fate without a word. As for those who seek to lay hands upon or slay him, they'd do better opening their gates to the enemy than angering Desmond.

In his own mind, Desmond has mixed a little of his heritage, a little samurai legendry and a little of the classic Arthurian notion of chivalry and come up with a code of honor that he uses to rein in his native ferocity. However, Desmond is hardly what one would call tame — he insists on eating apart from others at feasts so that he can relax his iron control of himself, at least for a little while. Those who spy on him under such circumstances regret doing so,



at least briefly. Desmond is not fond of his less civilized side, and will go to great lengths to hide it from view.

Desmond is tall for a redcap, and unusually broad. His cap is rather dull, all things considered, and no one has ever witnessed him re-dyeing it. Generally, Desmond wears nondescript clothes. The only remarkable item he carries is a short-handled, double-bladed axe, which he swings with great skill and, should the occasion call for it, delicacy.

WEEDY PEG

Weedy Peg lives down by the riverside. She's not the first hag to live down there and she won't be the last, but she's there now, and the ladies of the court tell the childlings not to go down there. "Weedy Peg will get you," they say, "if you venture too close to the water. Weedy Peg will pull you in."

They're wrong, of course. If Weedy Peg waited for her prey to get to the waterside, she'd starve. She's a proactive sort of hag, though she's careful not to let word of that get out.

Indeed, Peg is careful to let herself be seen only by the riverside, and then only for brief occasions. Too long a glimpse and folks might notice that she's not as old as one might think, or that she doesn't look too much like the Weedy Peg who used to haunt that particular stretch of river. In truth, Peg's the latest in a long line of river hags who've called this particular stretch their own; when the old one's about to move on, her heir mysteriously arrives and sets up camp. The old hag instructs her successor as to the legends and secrets of the place, and then expires about as gently as a redcap might.

The new Weedy Peg then makes the name and position officially hers by eating her predecessor, but only as a mark of respect. The chain has continued unbroken for centuries, and there's no reason to expect that this Weedy Peg will be the last one. She's just another link in a long and notorious chain. And if this one looks a little young or not quite snaggle-toothed enough, well, none of the witnesses will be around long enough to complain.



CAPTAIN WRACK

In these dark times, bands of marauding redcaps seem to be everywhere. They waylay travelers, sack the occasional freehold and otherwise terrorize the landscapes, and do so with an unrestrained ferocity that inspires both legends and sleepless nights in their opponents — or potential prey.

Of all the redcap bands, none is more fearsome than the one led by the self-titled Captain Wrack. Wrack's a fearsome fellow, all tangled limbs and sharp teeth, and he keeps perhaps the most vicious band of redcap cutthroats in Concordia under his iron thumb. When he turns them loose, they're an unholy terror, but when he says the word, they're as quiet and well-behaved as church mice. That's when one should fear them the most, however, as Wrack is no doubt thinking up some new devilry to inflict upon the countryside.

Captain Wrack came by his title and troop honestly; that is to say, he bullied, beat and bit his way up the chain of command. When he was but a childling he organized a gang of ruffians and thieves that terrorized the court of Portland, but he soon graduated to bigger things. A stint as a hunter of chimera didn't satisfy his innate bloodlust, so he moved on to bigger and better prey. In short order he was declared an outlaw and a price put on his head, but that tack backfired. The longer he endured as a hunted criminal, the more his fame grew and the more other miscreants flocked to his banner.

These days, Wrack has over two dozen redcaps and others fighting under his bloody rag banner, all well disciplined and out for the kill.

They show no mercy when they fight, for they know they'll be shown none, and in the meantime, at least, they've not suffered a single defeat.

As for Wrack, he takes the forefront in every battle, swinging a scythe that is half again as tall as he is, but which he moves with inhuman speed. He's everywhere on the battlefield at once, and fights like he's got eyes in the back of his head. In between fights, he's a meticulous planner and strategist. He wastes few words, and can whip his troop into a frenzy with a few pointed sentences. He is, in truth, one of the most dangerous Kithain loose in all of Concordia.

What's worse is that in the last couple of months, he's dropped clear off the map. No one knows where he or his followers are, and that makes everyone — putative friend and foe alike — very nervous indeed.





CHAPTER FIVE: ANOTHER MAW TO FEED



THE BUSHWHACKER

Quote: *Mister Fancypants Duke is going to be riding through here later this morning. He's gonna look really pretty when he does it, too. He's gonna have his bright, shiny armor on, and his bright, shiny sword, and his bright, shiny shield, and he's gonna think that nothin' in the world can touch him. And you know what? I'm gonna shove it all right down his throat, just to prove him wrong.*

Background: Every schoolyard has one kid like you. There's always one kid who likes wrecking everyone else's games, knocking down everyone else's sandcastles and breaking everyone else's toys. Oh, sure, there were reasons for your being a little slice of hell on earth, but the other kids didn't know or care. They closed ranks against you, which meant that you had to be that much more aggressive to get their attention. Breaking toys turned into beating other kids up, and when the thrill of simple fisticuffs failed, you got your hands on a knife.

That's when your past and your future caught up with you in one fell swoop. Your little escapade with the knife got you thrown out of school. Getting thrown out of school got you thrown out of your house, not that you were sad to leave that place behind. And suddenly, on your own in a world much bigger and scarier than the schoolyard, you discovered what you truly were.

Other Kithain found you, scrounging out a life in the gutter, but they learned quickly that you weren't interested in their company. They left you alone, and that's how you liked it; anyone who got too close was liable to end up as dinner.

Things changed, though, when everything went to hell in Concordia. You didn't give a rat's ass about politics, but the people who'd been scrupulously avoiding you did, and suddenly you were very, very useful to them. A proposition was made: You had carte blanche to do

whatever the hell you wanted, as long as you did it to the right people. You laughed and signed on. Someone actually wanted you to turn yourself loose? It was a dream come true.

In your "benefactors'" eyes, you're a loose cannon pointed at the enemy. In your eyes, they're giving you an excuse to do what you want anyway. In the meantime, you're both getting what you want out of the arrangement. You wreak havoc on the nobles and their supporters wherever you find them and then vanish back into the night. Your teachers never thought you were that bright, but you've discovered you've got quite a knack for planning and preparation — at least where ambushes and bushwhackings are concerned.

Sooner or later, you know that the enemy is going to come after you in force. That doesn't bother you one bit; you'll send the survivors screaming for their mommies. After all, you already know what it's like to take on the whole schoolyard. The stakes may be higher now, but nothing else has really changed.

And that's why you're going to win.

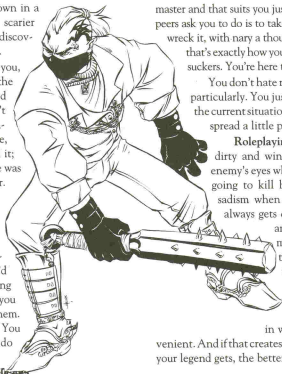
Concept: You're an utter liability in peacetime, but now war is here and you're in your element. You live to tear things down, and now you're getting your chance. You answer to no commander and no liege; you're your own master and that suits you just fine. All that your so-called peers ask you to do is to take what the other side has and wreck it, with nary a thought to the consequences, and that's exactly how you like it. Stand-up fights are for suckers. You're here to win, and to win your way.

You don't hate nobles or sidhe or anyone else particularly. You just hate everyone equally, and the current situation gives you the best chance to spread a little pain around on your terms.

Roleplaying Hints: You live to fight dirty and win, and to see the fear in an enemy's eyes when he figures out that you're going to kill him. Indulge in penny-ante sadism when you get the chance. Word always gets out about that sort of thing, and it makes future targets that much more scared of you. If they're scared, they're that much easier to bring down.

You've got bigger appetites than even most of your fellow redcaps, so sate yourself

in whatever manner seems convenient. And if that creates stories as well, hey, the bigger your legend gets, the better.



REDCAPS™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: **Unseelie**
Legacies: **Savage/Hermit**
House:

Seeming: **Wilder**
Kith: **Redcap**
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Social

Mental

Strength	●●●●●	Charisma	●●●●●	Perception	●●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●	Wits	●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Skills

Knowledges

Alertness	●●●●●	Crafts	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	●●●●●	Drive	●●●●●	Enigmas	●●●●●
Brawl	●●●●●	Etiquette	○○○○○	Gremayre	●●●●●
Dodge	●●●●●	Firearms	●●●●●	Investigation	●●●●●
Empathy	○○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Law	●●●●●
Intimidation	●●●●●	Melee	●●●●●	Linguistics	○○○○○
Kenning	●●●●●	Performance	○○○○○	Lore	○○○○○
Persuasion	○○○○○	Security	●●●●●	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	●●●●●	Stealth	●●●●●	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Arts

Realms

Contacts	●●●●●	Primal	●●●●●	Actor	●●●●●
Resources	●●●●●	Wayfare	●●●●●	Fae	●●●●●
Treasures	●●●●●		○○○○○	Nature	●●●●●
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Scene	●●●●●
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○

Other Traits

Glamour

Health

	●●●●●○○○○○	Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Hurt	-1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Injured	-1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	●●●●●○○○○○	Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

= Ravaging/Clusting Threshold =

Banality

= Birthrights/Frailties =

	●●●●●○○○○○
	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Experience:

Dark Appetite
Bully Browbeat
Flaw: Bad Attitude

THE CLOWN

Quote: *Hey, guys, what'll you give me if I eat this frog? That's all? What if I eat two frogs, huh? OK, they'll both be alive when I eat them — but you guys have to catch them and wash them. And no using soap this time, huh guys? Please?*

Background: It's never a good thing to come into the world and have "My God, he's huge!" be the doctor's first words. You were, to put it mildly, a large baby, and you've lived up to the promise of your infancy with verve. Early on, relatives remarked on your healthy appetite and size. Aunts were impressed by what a big boy you were, and uncles made half-serious comments about what a great football player you were likely to be. Dad was impressed by his little big man, and Mom abjured you to finish everything on your plate.

She needn't have worried. You were born with an appetite that could only be described as legendary, and you indulged it with a will. By the time you got to elementary school, your parents were actually starting to get a little concerned. After all, they knew that other children could be cruel to anyone different, and your height and weight definitely made you stand out.

In truth, their concerns had some justification. The first few months were hellish, as the smaller kids ganged up on and teased you. They used words like "fatty" and made fun of how much you ate at lunch.

Then one day, your salvation arrived. You were just finishing lunch when you noticed one of the other kids — one of your usual tormentors, in fact — looking at you oddly. He offered you a quarter if you'd eat the bag your lunch came in, too. Fortunately, you'd brown bagged it that day, so you tore a piece off and stuffed it in your mouth. You noticed as you did this that the other kids weren't making fun of you any more. They were all watching you with rapt fascination. Suddenly, you were the center of attention and you liked that.

You also noticed that the kid who'd offered you the quarter to eat the bag didn't look quite human any more, but you put that out of your mind and finished eating the bag. The other kids laughed and yelled, but they didn't make fun of you. Soon it became a routine — when the lunch lady wasn't looking, you'd eat something ridiculous to amuse your new friends.

Your parents had no idea what you were doing, but they were pleased that you seemed happier at school.

They were even more pleased that other children, especially the one who'd started the whole thing that

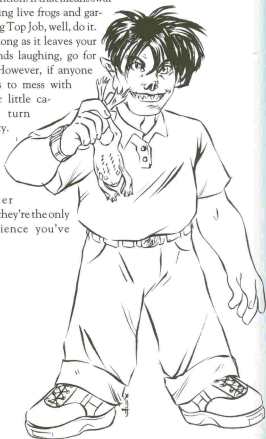
fateful day, were now coming over to play. And if occasionally they listened in and heard you and your friends playing "make believe" with elves and monsters, well, it was just good that you were developing a healthy imagination.

So now you're part of the local childling scene, and happy to be there. You've got friends to go on adventures with, and they're glad to have you with them. How could things be any better?

Concept: You're not "big-boned." You're just plain big. You're after one thing and one thing only (well, two, really, if you include food) — attention. You like having friends, and hanging onto them is the most important thing in the world to you. If you have to play the clown to get them to like you and hang around, you'll do it. After all, you figure that you were given this particular talent for a reason. Why not use it to make yourself happy?

Roleplaying Hints: Do anything within reason (and you've got a pretty generous definition of reason) to get attention. If that means swallowing live frogs and gargling Top Job, well, do it. As long as it leaves your friends laughing, go for it. However, if anyone tries to mess with your little cabal, turn nasty.

After all, they're the only audience you've got.



KITHBOOK
REDCAPS

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: **Unseelie**
Legacies: **Wretch/Orchid**
House:

Seeming: *Childling*
Kith: *Recap*
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength _____ ●●●○
Dexterity _____ ●●●○
Stamina _____ ●●●●

Social

Charisma_____●●○○○
Manipulation_____●●○○○
Appearance_____●●○○○

Mental

Perception_____●●●○○
Intelligence_____●●●○○
Wits_____●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness	●○○○
Athletics	●○○○
Brawl	●●○○
Dodge	●●●○
Empathy	●●○○
Intimidation	○○○○
Kenning	●●○○
Persuasion	○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○

Skills

Crafts	00000
Drive	00000
Etiquette	00000
Firearms	00000
Leadership	00000
Melee	●0000
Performance	●●●00
Security	●0000
Stealth	●●●00
Survival	●0000

Knowledges

Computer	●○○○○
Enigmas	●○○○○
Gremayre	●○○○○
Investigation	○○○○○
Law	○○○○○
Linguistics	○○○○○
Lore	○○○○○
Medicine	○○○○○
Politics	●○○○○
Science	●○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Chimera	●●○○
Contacts	●○○○
Dreamers	●●●○
	○○○○
	○○○○

ARTS

<u>Legerdemail</u>	●●○○○
<u>Primal</u>	●○○○○
<u>Wayfare</u>	●○○○○
_____	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○

Realms

<i>Fae</i>	●○○○○
<i>Nature</i>	●●○○○
<i>Prop</i>	●●○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Other Traits

Glamour

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
 ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
 ===== Willpower =====
 ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
 ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Health

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

$$= \text{Ravaging/CDusing Threshold} =$$

= Banalitzu:

[illegible]

=Birthrights/Frailties=

Dark Appetite
Bully Browbeat
Flaw: Bad Attitude

Experience:

--

THE OLD MONSTER

Quote: Good to see you again, Baron. I take it you need another favor? Your kind always does. Well, pull up a chair and tell me all about it, and then I'll tell you what it's going to cost you.

Background: Everyone always said your old man was crazy, but the village gossips didn't know the half of it. Pappy was into all sorts of things the preacher wouldn't have approved of — black magic, Indian rites, and doing things to the livestock that just wasn't right. One night, when he was drunker than usual, he told you that he was trying to magic some kind of spirit into you, to make sure that the people in town couldn't cheat you the way they'd cheated him.

You're not sure what he did, but somehow, somehow one of the things he did must have worked. You started seeing faces in the trees that just weren't there, and hearing voices that told you that you were different. You told Pappy about it, and he called you clever. "It's working," he said, "Lord be praised, it's working."

Finally, the day came when you just couldn't control it any more. The voices got too loud and the things you were seeing were just too strange. You left the house right in the middle of your chores, and wandered off into the woods to die. You couldn't think of what you'd done to deserve this, and couldn't imagine it any other way. That's when the others came out of the woods. Some of them you recognized — they'd been the faces you'd seen. Others were new and strange and wonderful. They told you what was happening to you, and what was going to happen, and how best to cope with it.

You stayed out in the woods for seven days and seven nights, and then headed home to Pappy. You figured he was going to beat you, but instead when you came back, he just looked at you in a way you'd never seen him look at anything before. "I figured you'd be gone longer," was all he said, and then he went back into the house.

You've been living in Pappy's house for Lord knows how many years now. Pappy himself died back in the '70s, but there was enough money to keep the place going. Now you live by yourself, taking care of the animals and raising what crops the land supports, and occasionally making trips down into the village for the sorts of things you can neither raise nor make.

Of course, that's only half of your existence. The local court knows all about you, and you know all about it. Every so often, someone in court needs a favor of the



sort they can't ask anyone else for. That's when Sir This or Lady That comes stumping down the path to your door, cap in hand, begging for the help only you can give. The favors they ask for are rarely pretty and they're never cheap, but you can help those you choose to.

Concept: You know how they talk about you at court. Everyone and their brother goes out of his way to speak ill of that lonely old redcap out on the hill, that monster. That sort of talk just rolls off you like water off a duck's back, though, because they need you. One by one, they come creeping out to where you live to ask you to kill this or destroy that. That's when you make them pay for all those unkind words. They can't do without you and you both know it, so there's no risk in rubbing their upturned noses in it. You know that if you ever slipped, they'd be on you like a pack of hounds, but you haven't slipped yet, and in the meantime, they need you.

Roleplaying Hints: Play the monster to the hilt. Act a little crazy. It makes them afraid of you, and that lets you drive the price up. Never let on all you know about a situation, and never pass up a chance to learn something you can use to your advantage. No one should ever be comfortable asking you for a favor, but then again, everyone should feel that they have no one else to ask.

REDCAPS™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: *Unseelie*
Legacies: *Rogue/Panderer*
House:

Seeming: *Grump*
Kith: *Redcap*
Motley:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●	Charisma	●●●●	Perception	●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●
Stamina	●●●●	Appearance	●●●●	Wits	●●●●

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●●	Crafts	●●●●	Computer	●●●●
Athletics	●●●●	Drive	●●●●	Enigmas	●●●●
Brawl	●●●●	Etiquette	●●●●	Gremayre	●●●●
Dodge	●●●●	Firearms	●●●●	Investigation	●●●●
Empathy	●●●●	Leadership	●●●●	Law	●●●●
Intimidation	●●●●	Melée	●●●●	Linguistics	●●●●
Kenning	●●●●	Performance	●●●●	Lore	●●●●
Persuasion	●●●●	Security	●●●●	Medicine	●●●●
Streetwise	●●●●	Stealth	●●●●	Politics	●●●●
Subterfuge	●●●●	Survival	●●●●	Science	●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds		Arts		Realms	
<i>Chimera (axe)</i>	●●●●	<i>Chicanery</i>	●●●●	<i>Actor</i>	●●●●
<i>Contacts</i>	●●●●	<i>Primal</i>	●●●●	<i>Fae</i>	●●●●
<i>Remembrance</i>	●●●●		●●●●	<i>Nature</i>	●●●●
<i>Resources</i>	●●●●		●●●●	<i>Scene</i>	●●●●
	●●●●		●●●●		●●●●

Other Traits

	●●●●●●●●
	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□□□□
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	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□□□□

= Ravaging/CD Using Threshold =

Experience:

Glamour

	●●●●●●●●
	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□□□□
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	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□□□□

Willpower

Banality

Health

	Real	Chimerical
Bruised	□	□
Hurt	-1 □	□
Injured	-1 □	□
Wounded	-2 □	□
Mauled	-2 □	□
Crippled	-5 □	□
Incapacitated	□	□

= Birthrights/Frailties =

Dark Appetite
Bully Browbeat
Flaw: Bad Attitude

THE RELUCTANT DEVOURER

Quote: Look, I didn't want it to happen, OK? He just kept pushing me and pushing me and never letting up, and I just snapped. I'm really sorry about it, but I mean, he never should have gone after me that way in the first place. Besides, I told him I'd buy him another dog, so what's the big deal?

Background: All your life you've had a sense that people were trying to force you to be something you weren't. Your parents insisted that you were going to make a wonderful doctor one day, even though you really wanted to be an architect. They made you take piano lessons when you really wanted to learn how to play saxophone. Dad decided that you needed to learn tennis when really, all you wanted to do was ride your bike as far as you could. But they just blithely ignored you because, after all, they knew best.

So you grew up a little screwed up and a whole lot angry. School wasn't any better, because you kept on being shunted into classes you didn't want to be in for the sake of your parents' vision of your future. The other kids knew that you weren't happy and, like the predators they always are, they closed in. They'd push and prod until you couldn't take any more, and that's when you'd lose it. You'd "spaz," as your peers so eloquently put it, and that inevitably got you sent to the nurse's office — or worse.

It was during your "spaz attacks," as schoolyard legend called them, that you began seeing things. Wisely, you kept this to yourself. Everyone already thought you were crazy, and saying that you saw things that weren't there wouldn't have helped matters. Instead, you just kept your mouth shut and

tried to keep your temper, and got a lot of practice in apologizing when you failed.

Alas, there came a day when one of your classmates pushed you a little too far, a little too hard, a little too fast. You snapped and tried to bite his nose off, and while you were engaged in that little tussle you realized what you really were, more or less. Elucidation came later, at the hands of other Kithain, but in that instant in the schoolyard you stopped worrying about being different and instead gloried in it.

Unfortunately, that self-acceptance didn't do much to placate your victim's parents, your parents or the school. It was suggested that your parents send you to a private school where your "special needs" could be better attended to. Your parents, wanting to avoid scandal (and potential lawsuits) complied.

Even at the new school, you struggled with your temper. However, you made a few interesting discoveries. One was that if you stopped fighting it, it made slipping into that other state that much easier, and that much easier to control. The other was that there were other kids like you — well, maybe not just like you — at the school.

They were other kids who could shed themselves and step into that other world where you weren't quite yourself anymore. They'd also been handed a raw deal and sent here for being "odd" or "strange" or "a discipline problem," and the band of you formed an uneasy alliance. It's still you against the world, but at least there's more of "you" now. And hopefully, that will be enough.

Concept: You don't like losing your temper. You don't like losing control, primarily because when you do, the end results are always unpleasant. Still, it's so hard to keep your calm, especially when everyone seems intent on pushing you and teasing you and making sure you blow your stack. You've even got the suspicion that some of the other Kithain kids set you off for fun, just to watch, and that makes your blood boil. If you ever find proof that they've been up to that sort of thing, there's going to be blood on the floor.

Roleplaying Hints: Do your best to keep your temper, regardless of provocation. There's always something to push you over the edge, though, regardless of how hard you try. Apologize profusely after losing your cool but if anyone pesters you too much about how you lost it, you're perfectly justified in getting angry over that. Do your best to make people see what a sweet-tempered, nice guy you really are, and if they disagree, demand to know why, right now.



Seeming: *Wilder*
Kith: *Redcap*
Motley:

Strength	●●●●	Charisma	●●●●	Perception	●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●
Stamina	●●●●	Appearance	●●●●	Wits	●●●●

Attributes		Skills		Knowledge	
Alertness	●○○○○	Crafts	●○○○○	Computer	●○○○○
Athletics	●○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	●●●○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Gremayre	●○○○○
Dodge	●●●○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Investigation	●○○○○
Empathy	●○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○	Melee	●●○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Kenning	●●○○○	Performance	●○○○○	Lore	○○○○○
Persuasion	●○○○○	Security	●●○○○	Medicine	●○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Chimera	●●●●●	Legerdemain	●●●●●	Actor	●●●●●
Contacts	●●●●●	Soothsay	●●●●●	Fae	●●●●●
Dreamers	●●●●●	Wayfare	●●●●●		●●●●●
Resources	●●●●●		●●●●●		●●●●●
	●●●●●		●●●●●		●●●●●

Willpower

[illegible]

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

		Real	Chimerical
Bruised		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Dark Appetite
Bully Browbeat
Flaw: Bad Attitude

CAPTAIN UNDER A BLOODY BANNER

Quote: *Those boys over there are scared of us, lads. I can smell it. They're ready to piss their pants because a troop of big bad recaps is about to come over the hill and kick the living snot out of them. I'd sure hate to disappoint them. What do you say?*

Background: You were as young a childling as anyone could remember. You came to court as a creature of perhaps three or four, but the duke and his courtiers could see you were something special. Some of them felt that you were dangerous, that you should be sent away or have the Glamour burned out of you so you could never trouble them again. This was wise advice, and sensible. The duke, however, decided that instead he would take you into his household, and train you in the ways of nobility so as to best put your potential to use.

The duke, bless his kind heart, was wrong.

Oh, he tried his best. He taught you the sword and the bow, and the way of chivalry as best he knew it. He insisted that you be treated as an equal by his courtiers and knights, and he showed you loyalty when there were attempts to slander your name. All in all, he could not have treated you better had you been his son, or his heir.

In the end, it made no difference. Blood calls to blood, and soul calls to soul, and you simply couldn't adhere to the standards he demanded of you. You fought dishonorably, you killed unnecessarily and you indulged in earthier pleasures than were deemed fitting. Regretfully, sadly, the duke exiled you from his sight.

You felt shame at your exile. You felt anger. But deep down, in the truest part of your soul, you felt nothing at all.

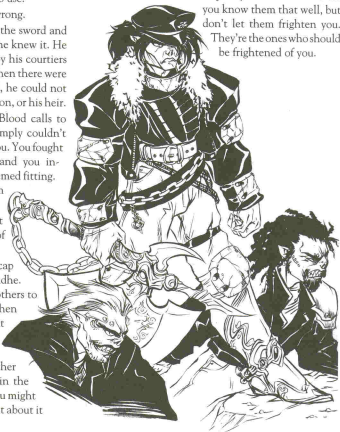
Word got around fast about the redcap who hadn't been good enough for the sidhe. Some other Kithain wanted to jeer you, others to fight to see how tough you could be. Then there were a very few who seemed to want something entirely different. They wanted you. They were looking for vengeance for the Night of the Iron Knives and every other indignity inflicted on the "commoners" in the past few decades, and they thought that you might be interested in helping them. You thought about it

for a while, and realized that they were right. You wanted payback. You wanted payback against them all.

Now you run with a squad of redcaps under your command. They're good lads, and they'll follow you to the end because you know your business and you know the enemy's, too. One of these days, you might even find that duke who taught you so much. It's time for him to see how much you really learned.

Concept: You're a soldier with an agenda, one that happily coincides with your backers'. You want to tear the whole stinking court system down from the top because of what it did to you. You take good care of your troop and make sure there's good booty and better eating wherever you go. You're not going to treat them the way you were treated.

Roleplaying Hints: Take care of the troops first, because the lads will take care of what you want to do but can't do by yourself. Work toward controlled destruction, not wanton. You're after effect, after all, not body count. Respect your enemies because you know them that well, but don't let them frighten you. They're the ones who should be frightened of you.



REDCAPS™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: *Unseelie*
Legacies: *Ringleader/Wayfarer*
House:

Seeming: *Grump*
Kith: *Redcap*
Motley:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●●

Social

Charisma ●●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●●
Empathy ●●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●●
Kenning ●●●●●●
Persuasion ●●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●●

Skills

Crafts ●●●●●●
Drive ●●●●●●
Etiquette ●●●●●●
Firearms ●●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●●
Performance ●●●●●●
Security ●●●●●●
Stealth ●●●●●●
Survival ●●●●●●

Knowledge

Computer ●●●●●●
Enigmas ●●●●●●
Gremayre ●●●●●●
Investigation ●●●●●●
Law ●●●●●●
Linguistics ●●●●●●
Lore ●●●●●●
Medicine ●●●●●●
Politics ●●●●●●
Science ●●●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds

Contacts ●●●●●●
Holdings ●●●●●●
Resources ●●●●●●
●●●●●●
●●●●●●

Arts

Primal ●●●●●●
●●●●●●
●●●●●●
●●●●●●
●●●●●●

Realms

Actor ●●●●●●
Fae ●●●●●●
Nature ●●●●●●
●●●●●●
●●●●●●

Other Traits

Glamour

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□

Willpower

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□

Banality

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□

Health

	Real	Chimerical
Bruised	□	□
Hurt	-1 □	□
Injured	-1 □	□
Wounded	-2 □	□
Mauled	-2 □	□
Crippled	-5 □	□
Incapacitated	□	□

==Ravaging/CDusing Threshold==

==Birthrights/Frailties==

Experience:

Dark Appetite
Bully Browbeat
Flaw: Bad Attitude

THE SCOURGE

Quote: *Appetite's nothing without control, sonny. You give into it and it'll get you killed faster than you can say Jack Robinson. You control it, though, and you can do some marvelous, marvelous things. Just watch.*

Background: All the other dukes and barons said that your liege was daft to take on a redcap as a household knight. "It'll never work," they said. "He'll go feral. Eat your throne right out from under you."

Well, those nay-sayers were wrong. You took everything they could dish out, stood up to it, and turned your rage loose on those who truly deserved it. You were the one who killed the chimera no one else could, who won the battles that seemed lost, that kept the faith that others abandoned.

Slowly, the rest of the court noticed. The jibes never went away, of course, but they were fewer now, and tinged with respect. There weren't any snickers when the duke called for you to eat at his table. And more than one would-be knight saw the discipline you brought to your own training and tried to emulate it. You just made sure that they saw what happened when you let that discipline slip on the battlefield as well.

Now everything looks like it's going to hell, but that doesn't concern you. You know your place, and you know your friends. You know where you stand, and with whom you're willing to be counted.

Concept: You don't control your appetite, you direct it. You know what you could be and you don't like it. You won't let yourself be controlled that way. Instead, you bind your natural urges up with honor and duty, and make something better of yourself than what you might be otherwise. At least, that's how you see it, and it lets you sleep nights.

Roleplaying Hints: Keep a very tight rein on yourself. Figure out what appropriate targets for your anger are and show them no mercy, but otherwise do your best to turn yourself to ice. Make a great show of formality and knowing your place and rank. It's good to have a place to belong, after all. It's very, very good.



REDCAPS™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court: **Seelie**
Legacies: **Paladin/Knave**
House:

Seeming: **Wilder**
Kith: **Redcap**
Motley:

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●●●● Charisma ●●●●● Perception ●●●●●	Dexterity ●●●●● Manipulation ●●●●● Intelligence ●●●●●	Stamina ●●●●● Appearance ●●●●● Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●●●	Crafts	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	●●●●●	Drive	●○○○○	Enigmas	●○○○○
Brawl	●●●●●	Etiquette	●○○○○	Gremayre	●○○○○
Dodge	●●●●●	Firearms	●●○○○	Investigation	●○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Leadership	●●○○○	Law	●○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○	Melee	●●●●●	Linguistics	○○○○○
Kenning	●○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Lore	○○○○○
Persuasion	○○○○○	Security	●●○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Politics	●○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Arts		Realms	
Mentor	●●000	Soothsay	●0000	Actor	●●000
Remembrance	●0000	Wayfare	●●000	Fae	●●●00
Resources	●●000		00000	Time	●0000
	00000		00000		00000
	00000		00000		00000

Other Traits

Glamour

Health

Real Chimerical

●●●●●○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Bruised	Real	Chimerical
Hurt	-1	□
Injured	-1	□
Wounded	-2	□
Mauled	-2	□
Crippled	-5	□
Incapacitated	□	□

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Banality

●●●●●○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Birchrights/Frailties

Dark Appetite
Bully Browbeat
Flaw: Bad Attitude

Experience:

= Ravaging/CDusing Threshold =

APPENDIX: WHAT THEY FOUND, PICKING THE BONES

TOYS AND TREASURES

GAUNTLETS (LEVEL ONE TREASURE)

There's little that most redcaps detest more than a clean, fair fight. That doesn't mean that they go in for long-drawn out affairs, or pummeling their opponents into submission. Rather, they like fights to be quick and dirty, and to end up with various meaty chunks of the other guy scattered all over the floor. To that end, many redcaps will make for themselves a pair of gauntlets, and then put them to devastating use.

Gauntlets are, on the simplest level, a pair of gloves. If that were all they were, however, redcaps wouldn't be quite so fond of them. However, each redcap who makes himself a pair of gauntlets makes sure to stud them with fishhooks, razor blades, broken glass, rusty nails and

splinters. No two pairs of gauntlets are alike, and most redcaps swear they can't wear any but their own.

Gauntlets cover the redcap's fists and arms nearly to the elbow in jagged bands of rusty metal. Springing from them in every direction are blades, spikes and protrusions of all sorts, most of them serrated or barbed. When a redcap wearing gauntlets makes a fist, it sounds like bones cracking; that sound is enough to send wise changelings running.

Most of the effect of wearing gauntlets is theatrical, or if one prefers, psychological. Seeing an advancing redcap is bad enough; seeing one wearing dozens of jagged, hideous weapons on each of his fists is that much worse. However, they do add to a redcap's efficiency in combat. Every time a redcap wearing gauntlets hits, 2 dice get added to the dice pool for damage. Furthermore, at her discretion the Storyteller can roll (the attacker's Dexterity + Brawl, difficulty 8) to see if any of the barbs, hooks or spines catch in the defender's tender flesh.



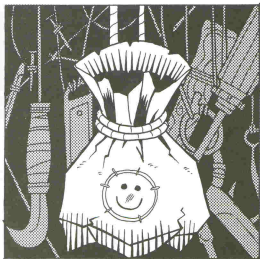
DRY DUST (LEVEL TWO TREASURE)

Dry dust is a yellowish-white powder that redcaps carry in leather pouches. As soon as dry dust is put into

any other sort of container, whether it be a silk pouch or a piece of Tupperware, it loses all efficacy. No one quite knows why this is, and frankly, few redcaps care. They just want to make sure the stuff works. The whys and wherefores don't concern them.

What dry dust does is simple. It makes whoever ingests it (though it always must be ingested in conjunction with food or drink, never by itself) ravenously hungry and unquenchably thirsty for a period of an hour. During that time, the victim will attempt to eat anything — and in some cases anyone — he can get his hands on. It costs a point of Willpower to resist the urge to eat a particular item (or pet, or loved one or, well, you get the idea). At the end of the hour, the effect ends instantly.

Dry dust has a variety of uses, ranging from assisting in poisonings to crude practical jokes. Only redcaps seem to know the secret of its manufacture, and the few who



have been questioned about it hint darkly at having ground up human bone to make the stuff. They may be telling the truth, or they may just be trying to make their interviewers uncomfortable. Either way, it speaks volumes.

REDCAP RUMBLE

As noted previously, redcaps really enjoy beating the living hell out of one another. They don't go in for simple sparring, either — they really like tearing into each other and seeing how much each can dish out and take. That means that you will find plenty of instances of redcaps duking it out while wearing gauntlets. The more blood the fight provokes, the better the audience likes it, and that's why gauntlets are sometimes called for. A redcap who can reduce his opponent to a quivering, bloody wreck without actually killing him gains the respect of his peers, at least until the next fight begins.

BLOODED GAUNTLETS (LEVEL THREE TREASURE)

There are gauntlets, and then there are gauntlets. Blooded Gauntlets bear the same relation to their more utilitarian cousins that those gauntlets do to a pair of mittens. A regular pair of gauntlets (if there is such a thing) rends flesh and hooks bone. Blooded Gauntlets, when in (or on) the right hands, do much, much worse.

Blooded Gauntlets look more or less identical to regular specimens, and it's almost impossible to distinguish them for what they really are until they're put into action. Then, however, the difference becomes readily, horrifyingly apparent.

Whereas the spikes, protrusions, blades and hooks of a regular pair of gauntlets are merely sharp and dangerous, the ones on a pair of Blooded Gauntlets are actively hungry. When they tear into an opponent, they want to stay there, and they'll do as much damage as they can. Witnesses (and the very occasional survivor) swear that the blades and whatnot actually move to rend the flesh of a target once a punch connects. The hooks snag the Blooded Gauntlet in place while the rest of the equipment goes to work, ripping its way down to bone and beyond. The poor fool who takes a stomach punch from a redcap wearing these is doomed to a few very brief moments of agony, and nothing more.

Blooded Gauntlets work like regular ones, at least initially. However, once the punch lands, the player rolls Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 9) to see if the hooks and barbs grab hold. If they do, the Blooded Gauntlet has grabbed hold and the two combatants are now bound together. That means that all of the defender's Dodge rolls are now at +2 difficulty, as are the redcap's. (Note: Weapons like swords, polearms, shotguns and the like are essentially impossible to use once the Blooded Gauntlet sinks its teeth in; the range is simply too short and there's no room to utilize them properly.) Any attempt to escape requires a Strength check (difficulty 7, and the Gauntlet does a level of aggravated damage as it's torn out), but that's preferable to the other alternative: Letting it chew its way down for a level of aggravated damage every turn.

Furthermore, this is the effect of hitting with one Blooded Gauntlet. It's entirely possible for the redcap to land a punch with one, then throw a second punch with the other the following turn and let *both* go to work.

The down side to letting Blooded Gauntlets loose is that they effectively pin the redcap to his victim until such time as they actually kill him, and while that's going on, the redcap is something of an exposed target. Once the target is dead, the Gauntlets let go. Redcaps have no control over whether or not their equipment digs in on its own, which means they can get snagged at times when

it really would have been more convenient to have thrown a punch and just moved on.

Blooded Gauntlets do not work without a pair of hands in them, but once they're put on they're almost impossible to take off (cost of 1 Willpower) while there's still an opponent anywhere in the vicinity.

THE GRINDER (LEVEL 4 TREASURE)

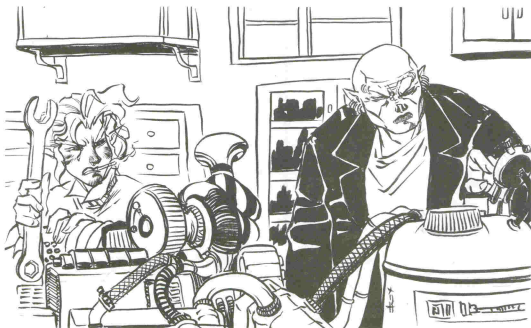
Grinders look like, to no one's surprise, old hand-cranked sausage grinders of the sort one rarely sees any more. They're all of two feet tall, and generally made from some sort of vaguely bronze-colored metal. All of them are spotted, pitted and stained. They all seem like they've seen hard use in butcher shops and slaughter-houses. Most make some sort of annoying squeak when the handle turns; all are accompanied by an unpleasant stench of old meat, dried blood and less identifiable things.

Unfortunately, there's more to a Grinder than just the smell. It is, after all, a sort of sausage grinder. The difference is that while a normal device of this sort generally has its intake restricted to various sorts of meat scraps, a redcap's Grinder will take pretty much anything at all. A redcap with a Grinder can feed anything into it he wants, anything at all. It doesn't matter how big it is or how small. It doesn't even matter what it's made of.



Sooner or later, the Grinder swallows it down and spits it out as vaguely edible, reddish-gray paste.

It cannot be stressed enough that the Grinder can swallow just about anything. Metal? No problem. Dead bodies? Easy as pie. An elephant? It might take a while, but down it goes. And no matter what goes in, the same filling-but-not-very-tasty paste comes out. Of course, the



USING A GRINDER

While the exact length of time a Grinder takes to chew up a given item is up to Storyteller discretion — there's really not room here to put in a table for everything from aluminum foil to zebras — some rough guidelines can be established. For anything the consistency of animal or plant tissue, alive or dead, figure that the Grinder takes about one minute for every five pounds. The weight conversion from raw materials to sausage filler is about 3 to 1. No one knows why that is, but the end result is that a Grinder takes about half an hour to turn a 150 pound corpse into 50 pounds of sausage filler.

Bear in mind that feeding something into a Grinder is not the same thing as keeping it fed in. Anything that's alive and kicking when it gets fed in is going to do its level best to escape, and that means there's going to be a lot of thrashing around going on. A Grinder does one level of aggravated damage every turn a living being is fed into it without escaping.

One other factor can increase the time it takes a Grinder to chew something up and spit it out: hardness. The harder the object is, the longer it takes to break down.

Material	Time
Wood	1.5 x normal
Soft Metal	1.5 x normal
Bone	2 x normal
Stone	3 x normal
Hard Metal	5 x normal

size of the object being tossed in and the raw materials it's made from impact how long it takes for the Grinder to chew it up once and for all, but in the end, if the redcap with the crank is willing to work at it, the device can dispose of pretty much anything imaginable.

There are only two things a Grinder won't take. The first is any sort of Treasure, much to the annoyance of certain redcaps who'd love to chew up every magical doodad they can get their hands on. However, Grinders recognize that sort of thing, even when disguised (one particularly enterprising chap made a victim swallow a treasure, then tried to grind up his corpse, but to no avail) or hidden.

The second thing that Grinders won't take is a redcap's tooth. The moment one hits the Grinder's blades, the entire construction falls to pieces with a thunderous boom. Perhaps that explains why there are so few of the things, as the courts are full of tales of plucky young heroes who made great sacrifices to drop a redcap's tooth into a grinder. Of course, the fact that a tooth wrecks the whole thing doesn't do the rest of the redcap any good, if he goes in feet-first.

Thankfully, there are only a handful of devices of this sort known to exist. Redcaps who get their hands on a Grinder tend to put them to work with a will, and the consequences of such are messy and unpleasant.

LOGI'S ASHES (LEVEL FIVE TREASURE)

Lost in the popular imagery of redcaps as renders and devourers is the deeper truth, the notion that they personify hunger. A potent reminder of this ancient lineage, however, is the treasure known as Logi's Ashes. Only a few precious handfuls of the Ashes remain, and they're guarded fiercely.

Logi's Ashes look, at first glance, like regular fireplace ashes. Closer examination, however, reveals that they're still uncomfortably warm, and that highlights of flame still dance within them. Wise redcaps keep their share of the Ashes in thick leather or even more durable

pouches, and are extremely sparing when using them. They have to be, after all — the merest pinch is enough to have the desired effect, and there are no more Ashes to be had.

The rest of Concordia is quite thankful for that as well, as even a tiny sprinkle of Logi's Ashes has an egregious effect. Once some of the Ashes are scattered, all of the food and drink in the vicinity becomes as dust in the mouths of those who would partake. The effect spreads fast as wildfire, and generally extends for miles. Entire duchies have been laid waste in this manner, as any food that's brought in for up to a year and a day withers in just this fashion. As a result of creative uses of Logi's Ashes, freeholds have been abandoned, forts left desolate and some of the proudest castles in Concordia left to the birds and beasts.

Even the wildest and most vicious redcap is very, very careful about turning Logi's Ashes loose. On more than one occasion, the party responsible for the catastrophe has been apprehended and then abandoned, bound, in the center of the desolation he has caused. As the Ashes' ravenous hunger is very much a palpable thing, this is a fate far worse than death for any member of the kith.

Ingesting a pinch of Logi's Ashes causes the victim to feel the same hunger that redcaps labor under for a month.

THE HUNGRY HILL, UNIQUE TREASURE

By all accounts, the Hungry Hill wasn't so much made as it was grown, though what it was grown from and who put the effort in to do so remain blissfully unanswered questions. Still, regardless of who made it, the Hill is out there, and it lives up to its name.

Appearing as nothing more than a pleasant, grassy hill, the Hungry Hill is adept at both camouflage and deception. It changes its look with the seasons, covering itself with piles of multicolored leaves or gentle drifts of snow as the occasion demands. Only a slight depression at the hill's summit and its unnatural symmetry serve to warn the wary that something is indeed amiss.

That's because the Hungry Hill more than earns its name. Anyone foolish enough to venture upon it is in immediate and terrifying danger, carefully hidden by a few inches of green grass or winter snow. Those who stop

at the hill's peak have only a few seconds to continue on their way before the maw of the hill opens up and swallows them with a single gulp. Inside, teeth like boulders grind the unfortunate victims to pulp in a matter of seconds, and all attempts at rescue prove futile. After all, one would have to physically dig halfway through a large hillock to reach the Hill's meal, and there simply isn't time to do that before the question becomes moot.

Various individuals have attempted to do something about the Hungry Hill over the centuries but, to no one's surprise, none of the attempts have been successful. The occasional survivors don't talk about what happened much, but it would seem that the Hungry Hill has friends — or at least allies.

Thankfully, there is only one Hungry Hill. Unfortunately, it's rather more mobile than one would expect a hill to be. The Hungry Hill has an unnerving habit of simply deciding to be somewhere else. Exactly how it manages to relocate is a mystery; how it manages to do so while integrating itself perfectly with its surroundings even more so. Still, the wherefores aren't as important as the fact that it actually pulls off that feat.

WINTERBLADE, UNIQUE TREASURE

Redcaps aren't necessarily the most comfortable creatures out there when it comes to weapons. They're just as happy, if not happier, to go to work with their claws and teeth as they are swinging a sword or an axe. Those weapons they do prefer are designed for cleaving or hacking, and their swords are either built for brutal chopping or are short blades designed to be pushed into an enemy's gut and then twisted. Axes and cleavers are common, as are spiked shields that can be rammed into an enemy's face or stomach and then popped free with a minimum of effort.

However, a great many redcaps harbor a secret affection for a particular sort of weapon that one might not expect them to appreciate, namely, the scythe. Perhaps they like it because the weapon is irretrievably emblematic of the peasantry or because it is so devastatingly effective in the right hands. Perhaps because redcaps see themselves as mowing down their enemies in just the



same way, an inordinate number of them have taken to wielding scythes in the field to ruinous effect.

Most redcap scythes are ordinary garden implements, ranging from hand-held sickles to full-blown harvest tools. However, there's one particular scythe that stands out, even amidst the bloody havoc that every redcap wreaks. After all, there have been countless harvests, but only one Winterblade.

Stories say that Winterblade is the scythe that will cut away the summer of the world and plunge all into Winter. It will chill the earth where it touches and render permanently sterile any ground it rests upon. A single nick from Winterblade is enough to wither a tree of centuries' growth, and the merest scratch will drain the life from any victim. Even those whom Winterblade misses feel the chill of its passage in their very bones, and they're lucky if they can find the strength to crawl away before the blade returns.

Winterblade also takes its toll on its wielder, whose hands wither to clawed husks within seconds of grasping the haft. Soon the hollowing process takes the rest of his vitality as well, turning him to nothing more than a

skeletal, gnarled shell. However, in some unholy way the weapon sustains its user, animating him until such time as he gives up its possession. At that point, he crumbles into a pile of ash and snow, and blows away on a sudden wind. Winterblade does not, however, subvert the will of any redcap using it (and rest assured, only a redcap can hold this blade) — it merely focuses his purpose and his hunger.

Winterblade has not yet made an appearance on the field of battle. This heartens some nobles, who take very seriously the prophecies surrounding the blade's role in ushering in the Endless Winter. Redcaps who have been captured and put to the question have denied any knowledge of its whereabouts, but that does little to put anyone's mind at ease. Sooner or later, they know that Winterblade will emerge to sate itself, and what comes after can only be guessed at in nightmares.

CHIMERA

HUNGRY GRASS

No one's really sure if redcaps are to blame for hungry grass, but they're the best guess that anyone's come up with. What is known, however, is that hungry grass is both insidious and deadly, and that it's nigh impossible to spot.

In appearance, hungry grass is just like any other patch of grass one is likely to find in a meadow or hillside. It's a bit unkempt, but otherwise unremarkable. A strolling Kithain is no more likely to notice a patch of hungry grass in his path than he is to notice the difference between two ants trundling along the ground in front of him. However, as soon as he sets foot on the hungry grass, he's likely to notice rather quickly.

Hungry grass does not, contrary to some stories, reach out to tangle its prey. Rather, it simply drains the life right out of its victims, and its victims include anyone who makes the mistake of walking onto it. Those who have fallen into the clutches of hungry grass generally begin to feel ravenously hungry within the space of two

turns, fewer if they haven't eaten recently. Longer than that and the victim begins to feel weak from hunger. If he lingers long enough, he becomes too weak to move and quickly dies from hunger. Within hours, all that's left are some bones, polished clean and shining through the grass.

This particular flavor of chimera never actually strikes a target. Rather, once a victim walks on it, he begins feeding the chimera's insatiable hunger for life energies. After a victim has spent two turns on the hungry grass, it begins to drain a health level every two turns. An Intelligence + Chimeras roll (difficulty 8) is necessary for the target to understand what's happening and try to escape.

The effect of the hungry grass extends as far as the grass itself does. As for the extent of the grass itself, that varies from patch to patch. There are documented reports of growths that were tens of yards across, and there have been rumors of places where mile upon mile of meadow or prairie has been replaced by patient, hungry grass.

BOGGIES

Boggies are no relation to boggans, nor are they a new kith. Rather, boggies are junior-grade versions of river hags and the like. Not exactly sentient and not exactly anything else, boggies flock in rivers, lakes and streams that either are or are likely to become haunted by river hags. Boggies, so named because they generally cluster in marshy, boggy areas, look like roughly formed humanoid figures with webbed, grasping paws. Some have stubby claws and some do not; some have lamprey-like sucker mouths and some have maws full of teeth. They range in color from dull brown to sickly greenish-yellow, and most are mottled in one diseased pattern or another. Boggies don't generally speak, though they do make soft, childish noises that hover on the edge of comprehension. Changelings that make the mistake of trying to listen too closely find themselves in the boggies' clutches, hauled to a reedy and dank death down among the weeds.

MERITS AND FLAWS

AVERSION (1-5 PT FLAW)

They say that redcaps can and will eat anything. In most cases, they're right, but a redcap with this flaw is the exception who proves the rule. A redcap who has an aversion won't eat something (or a whole category of things, depending on the number of points taken for the flaw). One point might be an aversion to strawberries, while five would be something much broader, like meat, vegetables or inanimate objects.

A redcap who accidentally eats something he has an aversion to is in a great deal of trouble. A Stamina roll is required (difficulty 6), otherwise he'll immediately upchuck everything in his stomach. Furthermore, any time he wants to do anything more strenuous than walk for the next half hour, a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) is necessary to see if another attack of nausea hits.

Storytellers should take a great deal of care not to let this flaw be abused. It's very easy to pick up points with an aversion to, say, rutabagas or left-handed can openers. Aversions should be real and important, or at least worth the points received for them.

CHICKEN CLAWS (3 POINT FLAW)

Some legends of redcaps gift them with chickens' claws in place of their hands or feet. This condition is rare, but occasionally present among modern-day redcaps, though any Kithain who suffers from this flaw is bound to be the subject of much derision from his peers.

A redcap with chicken claws for hands is at +1 difficulty for all Dexterity-based rolls involving manual dexterity, while one with chicken claws instead of feet is at the same disadvantage for all rolls related to dodging, running and so forth. Note that the claws are rather more menacing than one would guess from their name—claws are claws, no matter what animal they came from.

STOLEN TOOTH (3 POINT FLAW)

Another one of the long-standing redcap legends ascribes a rather unique weakness to the kith: A redcap can only be killed if one of his teeth is smashed on an altar stone. Many brave (and not terribly intelligent) souls attempted to prove or disprove this theory; most instead proved the parallel theory that anyone seeking something from a redcap's mouth is unlikely to be coming home.

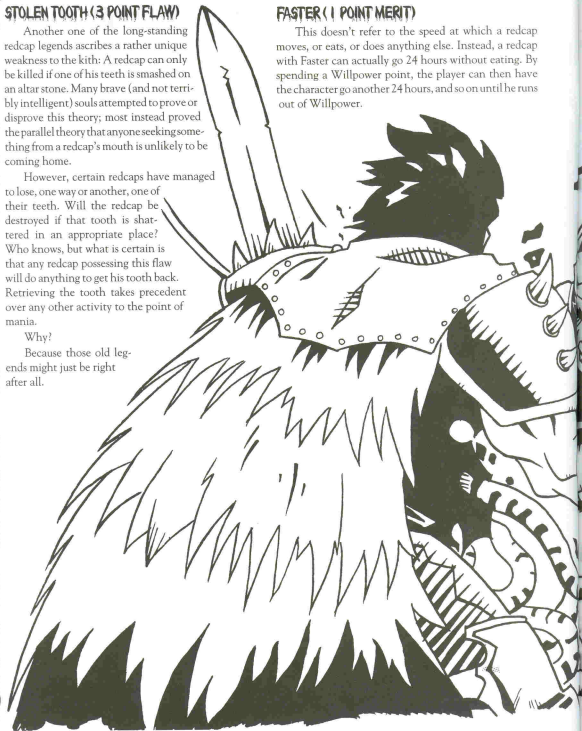
However, certain redcaps have managed to lose, one way or another, one of their teeth. Will the redcap be destroyed if that tooth is shattered in an appropriate place? Who knows, but what is certain is that any redcap possessing this flaw will do anything to get his tooth back. Retrieving the tooth takes precedent over any other activity to the point of mania.

Why?

Because those old legends might just be right after all.

FASTER (1 POINT MERIT)

This doesn't refer to the speed at which a redcap moves, or eats, or does anything else. Instead, a redcap with Faster can actually go 24 hours without eating. By spending a Willpower point, the player can then have the character go another 24 hours, and so on until he runs out of Willpower.



The down side to being a Faster, unfortunately, is that once the fast ends, the redcap is compelled to eat enough to make up for all of the days he skipped. Furthermore, he'll feel the need to do so immediately.

GRANITE SKIN (2 POINT MERIT)

Some redcaps are tougher than others. Some, in fact, are a great deal tougher than others, in part because in fae mien, their skin is quite literally, stone. The stone is not more than skin deep, thankfully — it's quite literally an epidermal layer, and that's all. However, it does make a redcap a great deal tougher than she might be normally,

as well as leaving small flakes and chips of stone behind every time she bends or flexes.

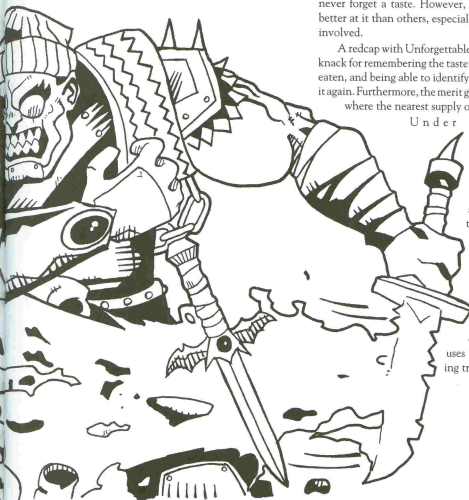
A redcap with Granite Skin has the equivalent of two levels of armor at all times, with no area of her anatomy considered unarmored. On the down side, Granite Skin also provides a +1 difficulty to all rolls involving moving quietly. The constant flaking and chipping of stone makes it nearly impossible for the redcap to move without making some noise. And let's not even discuss the romantic implications.

UNFORGETTABLE TASTE (5 POINT MERIT)

In a sense, redcaps are the fae world's most sincere epicures. They've got a taste for everything, and they never forget a taste. However, some of them do a bit better at it than others, especially when moving food is involved.

A redcap with Unforgettable Taste has a remarkable knack for remembering the taste of everything she's ever eaten, and being able to identify it instantly if she tastes it again. Furthermore, the merit grants the ability to sense where the nearest supply of that taste might be.

Under normal circumstances, that's fairly unremarkable. Being able to tell where the nearest batch of chocolate mousse or porterhouse steak is really doesn't do too much in the grand scheme of things. On the other hand, if the redcap has gotten a bite of someone, the merit serves as an excellent way to track that meal. Creative redcaps have found other uses for this power, including tracking down poisons.



REDCAPS™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Court:
Legacies:
House:

Seeming:
Kith:
Motley:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Gremayre	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Kenning	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Lore	○○○○○
Persuasion	○○○○○	Security	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Arts		Realms	
_____	○○○○○	_____	○○○○○	_____	○○○○○
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_____	○○○○○	_____	○○○○○	_____	○○○○○
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Other Traits		Glamour		Health	
_____	○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○○○	Bruised	Real Chimerical
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_____	_____	_____	_____	Injured	-1 □ □
_____	_____	Willpower	_____	Wounded	-2 □ □
_____	○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○○○	Mauled	-2 □ □
_____	□□□□□□□□	_____	□□□□□□□□	Crippled	-5 □ □
_____	_____	_____	_____	Incapacitated	□ □

Ravaging/CDusing Threshold		Banality		Birchrights/Frailties	
_____	○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○○○	Dark Appetite	
_____	□□□□□□□□	_____	□□□□□□□□	Bully Browbeat	
_____	_____	_____	_____	Flaw: Bad Attitude	

Experience:

kithbook

Societies/Bands: _____

Sain Day: _____

Merits & Flaws:

Medit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4
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74	74	74	74	74	74
75	75</				

[illegible][illegible]

[illegible]

Experience

Total Spent:

Spent On:

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Combat

[illegible]

Brawling Chart			
Maneuver	Roll/Difficulty	Damage	Actions
Body Slam	Dex+Brawl/7	Special	1
Grapple	Dex+Brawl/6	Strength	1
Kick	Dex+Brawl/7	Strength+1	1
Punch	Dex+Brawl/6	Strength	1

Animal Form	
Strength	Attacks/Damage
Dexterity	
Stamina	

ARTHUR

Description:

Workbook
REDCAPS™

Expanded Background

Contacts

Holdings

Dreamers

Mentor

Vassals

Retinue

Possessions

Gear (Carried)

Chimerical Items

Treasures

Chimerical Companions

Freeholds

Location

Description

RED CAPS™

History

Prelude

Date Ennobled:

Secret Societies:

Appearance

Chronological Age:

Mortal:

Apparent Age:

Date of Birth:

Hair:

Eyes:

Race:

Nationality:

Height:

Weight:

Fae:

Animal:

Visuals

Oath Bonds Chart

Character Sketch

KITHBOOK: REDCAPS™

HUNGER'S CHILDREN

Driven by humanity's most primitive dreams, redcaps exist within a blood-red nightmare of insatiable hunger. Despised, feared and hated by the other kith as figures of uncontrollable savagery, redcaps glory in their dark reputations and darker desires. Or do they? What lies behind their brutal energy and vicious practices?

Finally, the secrets of the redcaps stand revealed.

Their story echoes with howls of hunger and crackles with the snapping of broken bones, laying bare the hopes, the dreams and the torments of the redcaps for all to see and fear.

KITHBOOK: REDCAP FEATURES

- The redcap view of Kithain history
- An insider's view of redcap culture and behavior
- A new type of redcap — the river hag
- New Treasures, Merits and Flaws for redcaps only



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