

*A Sourcebook for Werewolf: The Apocalypse™  
Changing Breed Book 4*

# TRIAL & ERROR



OH, GAIA, WHAT HAVE I DONE?!

A MOMENT OF HORROR EXISTS FROZEN IN TIME.  
THE WORLD STANDS STILL WHILE THOUGHTS RAGE WILDLY,  
SEEKING A WAY TO UNDO WHAT SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN....



HE TAUGHT ME SO MANY THINGS...  
THE WAYS OF HERBAL HEALING.



...AND OF PROTECTION.



HE BROUGHT ME TO URSA'S TOOTH  
AND TAUGHT ME AS MANY RITES  
AS HE COULD...



...UNTIL IT WAS TIME FOR  
ME TO LEAVE AND STRIKE  
OUT ON MY OWN.

THAT WAS THEN.

...THIS IS NOW!



GET AWAY FROM ME!  
YOU'RE NOT AMOS!



URSA'S BONES!  
THAT WAS CLOSE!



ROOAAA-WOOR!



CRUNCH



OH, GREAT MOTHER GAIA,  
HOW CAN I SEND THIS THING  
BACK WHERE IT CAME FROM?



NMPH... NO... NOT AGAIN...  
MUST WAKE...





SHE HAS SLEPT FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY...

...BUT HER LONG SLEEP IS OVER.



SHE CALLS HERSELF TESSA SPEAKS-TRUTH...

SOMETHIN' BAD'S OUT THERE...

...BECAUSE SHE DOES.



FEAR AND BLOOD IN THE AIR. LET'S FIND THE FEAR FIRST.



MMMM... BAKED BEANS AND S'MORES - THE TRUE BACKWOODS BANQUET!

CAN THERE BE A BETTER MEAL?

I DOUBT IT. I DID YOU HEAR THAT?



...SAY PETE, YOU STILL GOT THAT BEAR MACE?

"GULP" ... YEAH...



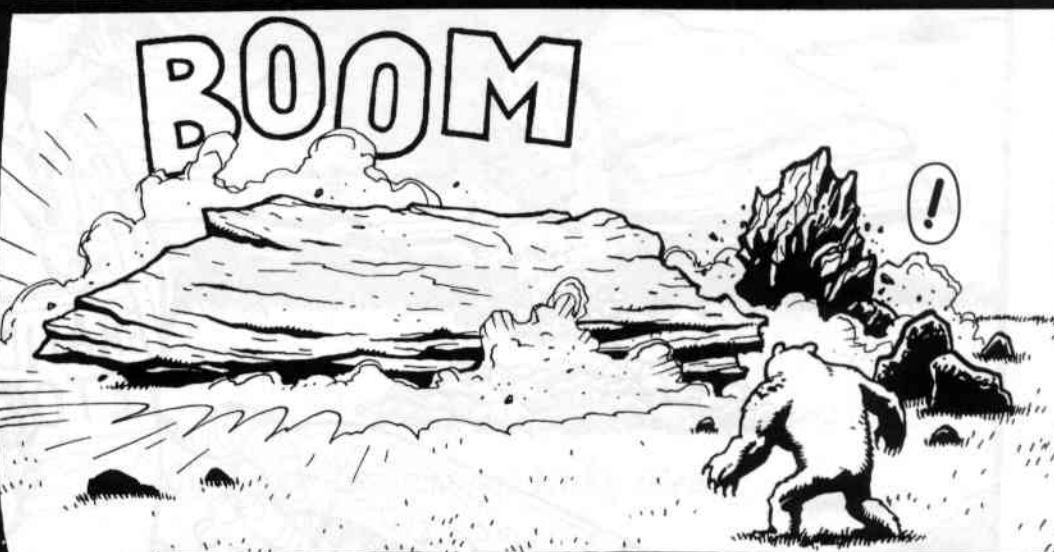
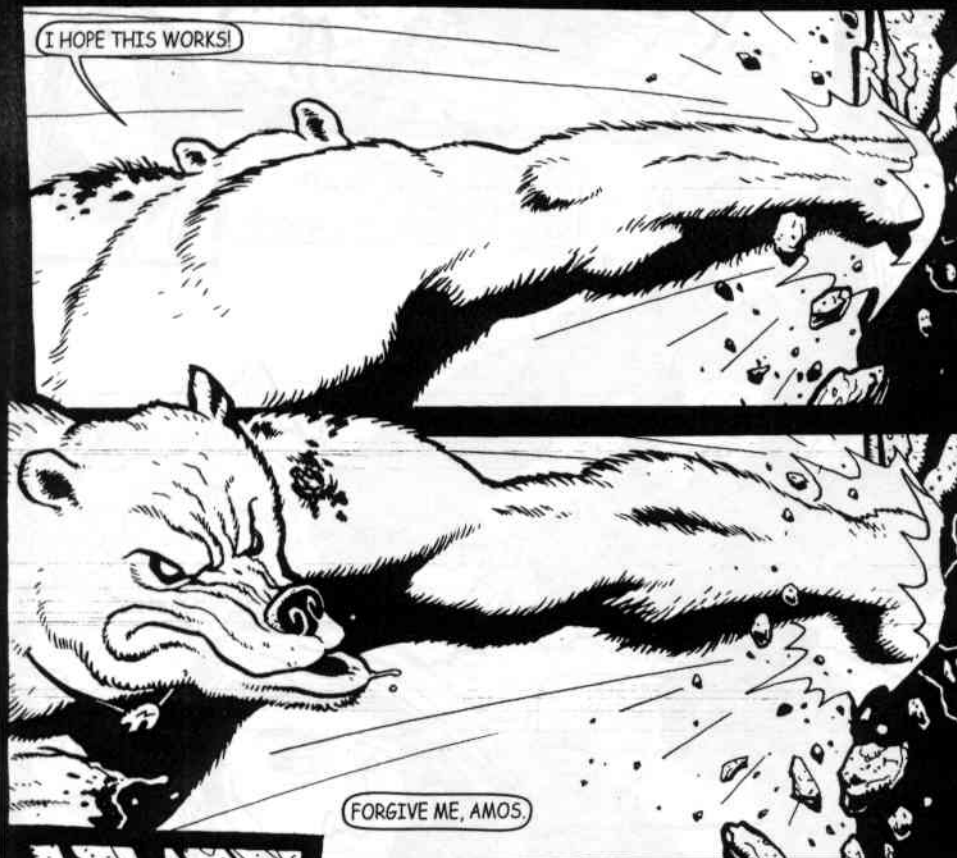
YAAAAAAA

FSSST



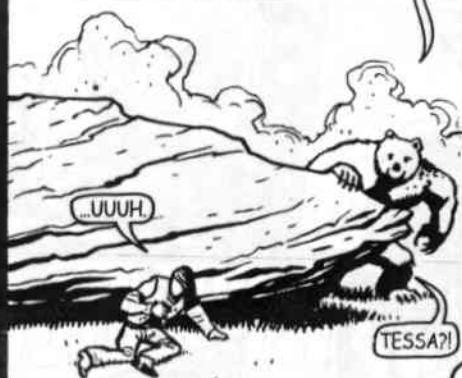








I'M SORRY AMOS.  
I SHOULD HAVE LEFT YOUR BODY TO GAI.  
YOUR SPIRIT IS ALREADY WITH HER...



I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD -  
CRUSHED BY...

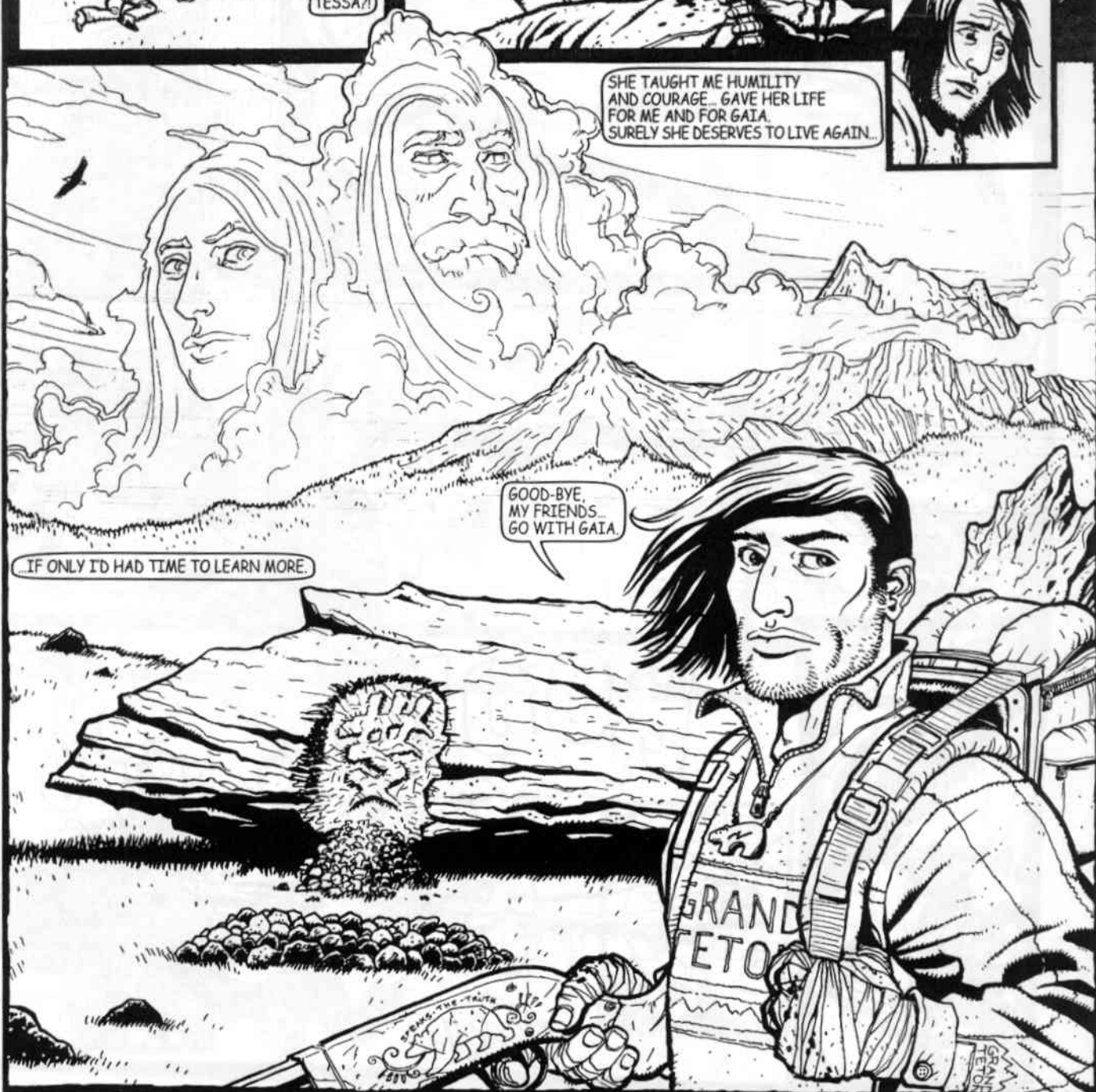
"KOFF" - YOU DID WELL, MICHAEL. THE WORLD IS  
FREE FROM THE LIKES OF THAT WYRM-SCUM.  
TO GIVE MY LIFE IS A SMALL PRICE... TO... PAY...



TESSA?



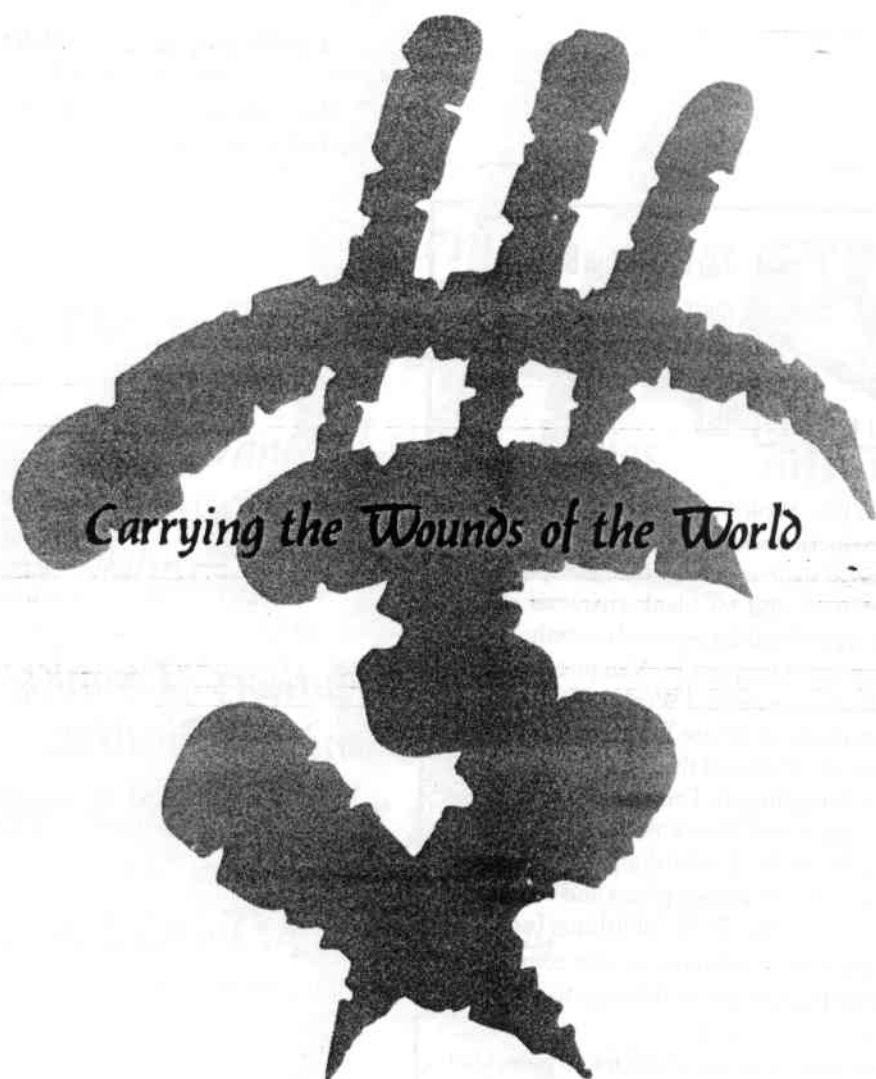
SHE TAUGHT ME HUMILITY  
AND COURAGE... GAVE HER LIFE  
FOR ME AND FOR GAI.  
SURELY SHE DESERVES TO LIVE AGAIN.



GOOD-BYE,  
MY FRIENDS.  
GO WITH GAI.

IF ONLY I'D HAD TIME TO LEARN MORE.

# GURAHIL™



*Carrying the Wounds of the World*

*By Jackie Cassada and Nicky Rea*



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This is for Buck, Bill Bridges, Sam Chupp, Ethan Skemp and Carla Hollar. You each know why. Thanks from both of us.

# GURAH!™

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# Introduction: The Journey of Ursa Minor

Last night, I dreamed about bears again. Along the shores of a mighty river, hundreds of bears gathered to feast on the bounty of the water. I watched the magnificent creatures as they stood poised, ready to lash out with their powerful forefeet at the silvery salmon that rushed headlong to their spawning grounds. I glimpsed the sudden strike, heard the repeated slap of paw on water as one great bear after another secured its meal. The air around me smelled crisp and cold and pure, not like the stale, acrid fumes that permeated the city where I grew up. There, breathing was a chore rather than the joyous response to life it was meant to be.

Despite the idyllic scene in front of me, I felt an ominous presence growing closer. I looked beyond the bears and the river, toward the line of tall mountains that formed the backdrop of my dreamscape. Above the mountains, a mass of dark clouds gathered. These towering monoliths weren't natural thunderheads, but clusters of malevolence and corruption. Suddenly the dream began to collapse in on me, threatening to swell and twist into a nightmare. I tried to wake myself up, but I failed miserably. My body became a cumbersome burden, forcing me to remain rooted to the spot as my heart started pounding with fear and the feeling of dread grew stronger....

If the bears even noticed me, they accepted me as part of their existence — or perhaps as part of the dream they shared with me. I wanted to join them, to shed my clumsy human form and take on the elegance and mass that was Bear. I knew I had to take my place among them.

The massive storm drew nearer, preceded by a low rumbling that seemed to come from the earth as well as from the heavens. Soon, the terror seething within that looming darkness would engulf everything in its killing shadow. The word "Apocalypse" sounded in

my head like a whisper hiding behind a thunderclap — and it seemed a precise description of what I saw. I took a deep breath and reached down inside myself for the courage to join the bears, to share in the danger and the beauty of their existence. Maybe, just maybe, I could make a difference.

Then, it happened. My body coupled with my desire, and I felt myself begin the Change....

I woke to the sound of running water. The smell of bear surrounded me as I sat up and wriggled out of my sleeping bag. The dream still itched at the edges of my consciousness, and I looked around my small campsite for signs that would explain the elusive message in my sleeping vision.



Everything used to be so simple. I lived with my parents in Portland, Oregon. I went to school, where my grades were good enough so that a career in medicine wasn't out of the question. I spent most weekends hiking outdoors with my parents and learning a lot about survival in the wilderness. Now I think I know why they pushed me so hard to learn how to "rough it." At the time, sleeping under the stars and foraging for edible plants just seemed like fun, even though few of my friends saw it the same way.

Then it happened. I stayed late at school one afternoon to finish a science experiment. By the time I was ready to leave, it was almost dark. Only a few cars were left in the parking lot — one of them belonged to Mr. Parker, my biology teacher, who was going to give me a ride home. The left front tire was flat, so we got out the spare and jack. I offered to help, but he just told

me to stay out of the way. So I sat back and watched as he started to put the spare in its place.

Time slowed down then; I can't remember the next moments in anything but slow motion. Mr. Parker leaned forward to position the tire and his knee hit a patch of grease next to the jack. He slipped, pushing the tire under the car and falling forward, jostling the jack. The chassis slammed to the ground, pinning Mr. Parker underneath it. He screamed. The jack, now tilted at a weird angle, was all that kept him from being crushed by a couple of tons of metal and in another few seconds, the weight of the car would spring the jack free and clear.

I remember screaming, feeling helpless to do anything except watch my favorite teacher die. Suddenly, something inside me snapped — and I wasn't helpless anymore. I towered above the car, my body boiling with strength. Grasping the fender with both hands — no, not hands anymore — I roared, lifted the chassis and flipped the car over into the next parking space. Mr. Parker was unconscious and his chest was bloody — but he was still breathing. I felt myself shrink again; that's the only way I can describe it. Exhaustion battered at my bones, and every muscle in my body ached, but somehow I managed to get to a pay phone and call for help. Then I collapsed on the ground and started sobbing.

My parents came to get me at the hospital, where I'd gone with the ambulance to make sure Mr. Parker would be okay. I didn't say anything to them on the way home, but they'd talked to the EMS crew about the accident. When we got home, my Dad sat me down in the kitchen while Mom fixed coffee for all of us. Dad just looked at me for a few minutes, staring hard enough that I thought he could see right inside me — and maybe he could.

"It's time," he said. "You've found the Bear" — I heard the capital "B" in his voice — "and now there are some things you need to know."

By the time Mom joined us at the table, Dad had gone over how both of them were Kinfolk and that I was a true werewolf — a Gurahl. Mom just listened to him talk, her eyes shining with happy tears. They'd known what I would become from the time I was little — or at least they suspected. All this time, they'd kept silent about it, not wanting me to grow up feeling different. Then they dropped the other shoe.

Dad handed me a map of the Northwest, with a heavy line drawn all the way from Portland up to Alaska. "Here's where you have to go to find out the rest — what we can't teach you. You'll have to get there on your own, without any more help from us than this map, because the journey is part of your becoming."

I left home the next day, with a backpack, a bedroll, the map and an old black-and-white photograph Mom must have shoved into my backpack at the last minute. Three days later, after hitching a ride with couple of fellow travelers — relics from the '60s, microbus and all — I finally discovered the snapshot. It was old and ragged, with those crimped edges that you find in fancy family albums. The picture showed a tall, rangy man with wire-rimmed glasses, thinning hair and a big "smile-at-the-camera" grin on his face standing on a grassy hilltop in front of a stand of pine trees. He was wearing faded overalls, a plaid shirt and work boots. Standing next to him,

reaching nearly to his shoulders, was a huge Kodiak bear. The man had his arm stretched out as far as he could across the bear's shoulder (do bears have shoulders?). The bear, like the man, was staring at the camera, and after staring at the picture for a minute or two, I realized that the bear was grinning, just like the man. On the back of the picture, Mom had written, "My parents — your grandparents."

I stared at the picture for a long time — front and back — until my ride dropped me off near the Canadian border. That was the last ride I hitched. I hiked the rest of the way along the route my parents had mapped out for me, spending my days feeling my body grow harder and stronger with the exertion, passing the nights rolled up in my sleeping bag thinking about the photograph.

Then I started dreaming about the bears. At first, I just saw a single bear, a big golden-brown, hollow-eyed grizzly that nudged its way into the corners of whatever dream I happened to be having at the time. Then, more bears started appearing — black bears, brown bears, polar bears — crowding my dreams like friendly aunts and uncles at a family reunion.

Of course, bears more or less preoccupied my waking hours as well. It's not every day you find out that one of your relatives walked on four legs and grubbed for bugs under rotten logs. I never knew my grandparents. Dad's folks died when he was a kid, and Mom's parents — the individuals in the photograph — were killed in a small-plane crash somewhere over the Canadian Rockies. I was 11 at the time, and all I remember is Mom crying and Dad comforting her.

I thought about my past constantly as I traveled, trying to find clues that might have tipped me off about what I was. Somehow, I knew I had to find a way to smooth the transition between the person I was before the Change and the person I was slowly becoming. The wilderness treks with my parents now loomed like huge signposts to destiny in my head. The lessons I had learned came in handy as I tramped my way up the coast, finding my food growing along the side of the road or swimming in a stream. Aside from the nature lore my parents had gifted me with, I couldn't find anything in my past that slapped me in the face and said, "You're not who you think you are." After a while, I gave up trying to sort things out and just concentrated on where I was going.

That's when the dreams turned into instructional videos. I started giving the dreams names. There was the "How Bears Catch Fish" dream, the "Hibernation" dream, the "Bears Forage for Food" dream and the "Mating Bears" dream (that one was pretty unsettling at the time). The most significant dream, though, was the "Shapechanging 101" dream — in which a bear slowly transformed from its ursine form into a huge, hulking creature — a thing that was disquietingly familiar — and then kept changing until it appeared completely human. I counted five different forms in all. Then it shifted back from human to bear, reversing the process. I woke up in the middle of the night from that dream, determined to see if I could learn by example. I left my campsite and went off into the woods a little ways to try it out. It worked.

After that dream, I threw away my map and just let my feet carry me onward, trusting an inner compass that directed my path.





Now I think I'm at the end of my journey. The river that ran through my dreams last night lies just ahead of me. If I still had my map, I might know its name, but somehow, I don't care. Someone has been watching me from a distance, waiting for me to come to this place at this time. The bear-smell grows stronger, and I wonder, for a moment, if I should change into bear-form before the watcher appears. Somehow, I know I've been invited here and the one who called me means me no harm. I guess there's no danger in just standing here and waiting for my future to catch up to me, but I hope it doesn't take too long. The river looks inviting, and I'm hungry enough to eat a dozen salmon! Plus, the skies are clear for now, but maybe it's the calm before the storm — the Apocalypse. If so, I have a lot to learn from someone, and I need to learn it as fast as I can.

## *Ursa Rising*

For too long, the Gurahl have slumbered, withdrawing from a world desperately in need of their healing and protection. More than a century ago, when the taming of the Savage West ripped loose the bonds of the Storm Eater, a few werebears returned to the world to help heal the wounds caused by its ravages. Most Gurahl, however, remained quiescent, reluctant to rouse themselves to action lest their presence provoke the wrath of the Garou once again.

Now, in the last quarter of the 20th century, the Children of Bear return in small but significant numbers to reclaim their

ancient protectorates and reestablish ties with their human and ursine Kinfolk. The earth shakes with the awakening of the Ones-Who-Slumbered. The emergence of a few precious new cubs, young Gurahl who do not know first-hand the tragic legacy of the Wars of Rage, brings a glimmer of hope for the survival of the gentlest of Gaia's Changing Breeds.

Once the Gurahl acted as nurturers and teachers, healers and protectors for all of Gaia's creatures, yet the War of Rage drove them into hiding for centuries. Rumors suggested that the Gurahl had abandoned the Earth forever. Will their return shift the balance in the final battles to save what's left of the world, or are the Gurahl emerging just in time to be devoured, one and all, by the Apocalypse?

## *Theme and Mood*

Hounded nearly to the brink of extinction, the Gurahl have somehow managed to survive. Though their numbers are small, they have begun to take an active part in the affairs of the world. This tenacity in the face of near-annihilation forms one of the main threads of this book. The Gurahl possess patience and a sense of perspective — qualities all too rare among the Changing Breeds. The werebears take the long view of history; unlike the hair-trigger Garou, who act on impulse, the Gurahl move at a much slower pace. Although they recognize the need to act against the Wyrms, they also fear the results of rash and thoughtless behavior. Their disappearance after the War of



Rage was a strategic retreat, dictated by necessity, but their absence has deprived Gaia's creatures of their greatest healers and nurturers. Now the bears are back, hoping against hope that they have not slept too long, and that they aren't moving too slowly.

A profound sadness surrounds the Gurahl. The tale of their betrayal during the War of Rage leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of those who tell it, and it falls harshly on the ears of those who hear it. Ironically, Gaia's healers still bear the scars of the millennia-old wrongs done to them by their once-beloved siblings — the Garou. There is, however, a slim strand of hope that promises an end to the sorrow. With the birth of new cubs, the Gurahl have the chance to stage a comeback and to take up the task for which they were created once more. Maybe, just maybe, the new generation will have time to grow into fullness and lend its might to Gaia's children.

A sense of desperation now drives the Gurahl to action. Some older werebears, as well as many of the new cubs, believe that they must learn to hone their Rage, sharpening their anger in the fires of necessity so that they may become weapons against the Wurm as well. Desperate times demand desperate measures, and in these final days before the Apocalypse, even the Gurahl must unleash the full fury of their Rage.

### The Real Tale of Rip Van Winkle

*Eyelids still crusty with the sleep of centuries, Rip Van Winkle halts uncertainly at the entry to his cave. The sun's glare seems more harsh than he remembers. The air smells different as well — heavy with noxious fumes and strangely unsatisfying as it fills his lungs. Unfamiliar noises assault his ears; in the place of the joyous tumult of bird songs, he hears a blaring cacophony of toneless sounds, loud buzzes and clangs, and odd, zooming sensations.*

As his vision clears, he sees that much has transpired since his ensorcelled slumber. Where once vast plains and endless forests covered the land, grotesque ant-mounds of stone and glass now crowd together, choking the life from the earth. Everywhere he looks, there are people — chattering, screaming, running, jostling one another for space where space does not exist.

"I've slept too long," he thinks to himself, shaking the last vestige of sleep from his thick fur. "The wise ones who sought my counsel must be dead, or else the world would never have come to this pass."

Rip Van Winkle contemplates turning his back on the shambles that is the modern world, but then he thinks again. "If I surrender again to the temptation of peaceful sleep, if I remain hidden and safe for another century or two, what will remain of the world when I awaken again?"

Sighing with the acceptance of the enormous task that lies before him, Rip Van Winkle gives a full-body shrug, transforming himself (for the first time in several centuries) from black-furred bear into middle-aged man. Squaring his shoulders and pulling himself upright, he strides, naked and vulnerable, into history once again.

Perhaps the Gurahl have waited too long to rejoin the battle for Gaia's survival, but late reinforcements are better than none at all. In some ways, the "return" of the Gurahl is not a true re-emergence, for Bear's sons and daughters never truly departed — not entirely. A few Gurahl have always remained, hidden among their human and bear Kinfolk as teachers, healers, protectors and — when necessary — as willing sacrifices for the survival of their





families. Even among the Gurahl who chose to hibernate, a few made certain to awaken from time to time to monitor the world around them. In particular, the Gurahl watchers studied the temperament and development of the Garou, waiting to see if the passage of time had given the most volatile of the Changing Breeds an opportunity to reflect on their mistaken assumptions about Gaia's healers. However, the Gurahl are stubborn as old trees, and not even the passing millennia seem to have softened their opinion of the Garou. Ultimately, their unwillingness to let old wounds heal might prove fatal.

Some Gurahl even disappeared forever into the Summer Country, abandoning their earthly bodies for Umbral spirit-bodies and reunion with their totem spirit. The ones who remained behind, in hibernation or in hiding, bided their time, waiting for the proper moment to announce their presence once again.

That time has come.

## Lexicon

**Arcas** (ARE-kus): The stage of a Gurahl's life that corresponds with the New Moon; similar to a Ragabash Garou.

**Arthren** (ARE-thrun): The near-human form of the Gurahl, corresponding to the Garou's Glabro shape.

**Bhernocht** (BEAR-noct): A state of overwhelming sadness and despair that resembles the Harano experienced by some Garou.

**Bjornen** (Bee-YORE-nen): The cave-bear or near-bear form; the Gurahl's version of Hispo.

**Buri-Jaan** (BOO-ree-ZHAWN): This is the name given to a Gurahl who serves as mentor to a new werebear; also, the period of mentorship (from the mentor's point of view).

**Council of Autumn**: The Great Council of all the Gurahl tribes; the most important of the Gurahl gatherings.

**Fests**: Informal meetings among the Gurahl.

**Gallivant**: The early period of a Gurahl's post-Change life; a time of wandering and wondering.

**Geth-Rura** (GETH-ROOR-uh): The place of dark combat, a realm on the edge of the Dark Umbra where a Gurahl goes to fight the Death Bear.

**Hibernation**: For Gurahl, this is a period of suspended animation, attainable through a Gift or rite, resembling the deep winter slumber of normal bears.

**Kieh** (KEE-yuh): A Gurahl auspice that resembles that of a Garou Theurge; the word itself means "doctor."

**Kojubat** (KOY-yu-baht): One who speaks the truth; the Gurahl equivalent to a Galliard Garou.

**Kovi** (KO-vee): Literally, "bear-child," the title used for Rank One Gurahl.

**Mangi** (MAN-GEE): the Death Bear, one of the triple-aspected forms of Bear.

**Matae** (Mah-TIE): "Wise one," the title assigned to Rank Five Gurahl.

**Pattern Breaker**: The name by which the Wyrn is known to the Gurahl.

**Powwow**: Intertribal Gurahl celebrations.



*Howlspire 98*

**Rar-Azgai** (RAHR-azh-GUY): The name given to the Gurahl tongue.

**Regalia:** Tribal gatherings where Gurahl of the same tribe discuss common concerns.

**Rishi** (REE-SHEE): The Gurahl auspice that denotes a "wise one" or a peacemaker; the equivalent to a Garou Philodox.

**Sorna** (SORE-nuh): "Caring one," the name given to Gurahl who have attained Rank Three.

**Talchwi** (TALL-chwee): "Honorable parent," the title for Gurahl of Rank Four.

**Tapestry Maker:** The Gurahl's name for the Weaver.

**Ursa Major:** the Great She-Bear, one of the triple-aspected forms of Bear.

**Ursa Minor:** the Little Bear, one of the triple-aspected forms of Bear; also, First Cub.

**Ursus:** The normal bear form of the Gurahl; also, Gurahl born from bears.

**Verden** (VURR-din): "Full-grown," the title used to designate Rank Two Gurahl.

**Yarn Spinner:** The name the Gurahl give to the Wyld.

**Uzmati** (Ooz-MAH-tee): A warrior Gurahl, similar to the Ahroun Garou.



## Selected Bibliography

### Books

Several books, all published by Voyageur Press, present observations on the nature and physiology of bears of all types. *Bears: Behavior, Ecology, Conservation*, by Edwin A. Bauer covers the life cycles and habitats of brown, black and grizzly bears.

*Polar Bears: Living with the White Bear*, by Nikita Ovsyanikov, details the habits and behavior of polar bears in the High Arctic.

*River of Bears*, by Tom Walker, documents the annual gathering of brown bears in the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary in Alaska.

*Black Bear: Seasons in the Wild*, by Tom Anderson, describes the life and times of the black bear.

*Grizzly Bears*, by Gary Turbak, provides an introduction to these controversial animals.

Part of the Reflections of the Wilderness Series published by ICS Books, *Grizzly Reflections* and *Black Bear Reflections* — both by Ken L. Jenkins — offer illustrated mini-guides to both types of bears.

*Giving Voice to Bear: North American Indian Myths, Rituals, and Images of the Bear*, by David Rockwell, reveals the importance of bears and bear lore in the rituals and lives of tribal cultures.

*Great Bear Adventures: True Tales from the Wild* collects accounts of encounters with bears by naturalists, hunters, novelists and scientists.

*Mark of the Bear: Legend and Lore of an American Icon*, edited by Paul Schullery, brings together more observations by numerous experts and bear aficionados.

*Polar Dance: Born of the North Wind*, by Thomas D. Mangelsen and Fred Bruemmer, celebrates in lavishly illustrated splendor, the beauty and mystery of the polar bear. (This book is a visual treat.)

*The Sacred Paw: The Bear in Nature, Myth, and Literature*, by Paul Shepard and Barry Sanders, reconstructs the mythos of the bear and its importance as cultural icon, literary symbol and force of nature.

*Shardik*, a novel by Richard Adams, uses the framework of fantasy to tell a powerful (and ponderous) story of a man's epic relationship with a creature that is part bear, part god.

### Films

*The Bear* follows an orphaned bear cub through its first year of life. Without undue sentimentality, this award-winning film presents a powerful (and, at times, touchingly humorous) portrait of the species.

*Alaska* boasts spectacular scenery, a coming-of-age story about two kids in search of their missing father and a polar bear cub who steals the show.

## How to Use This Book

Gurahl offers a peek inside the world of the werebears. Together with *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* and the *Werewolf Players Guide*, this Changing Breed Book provides enough information about the history, society and culture of the Gurahl as well as rules for character creation to enable you to create living, breathing characters for your stories or chronicles.

**Introduction: The Journey of Ursa Minor** gives an overview of the Gurahl and a brief look at their animal side.

**Chapter One: The Dance of the Centuries** presents a look at history through the eyes of the Gurahl, including their take on the War of Rage and the reasons for their apparent withdrawal from the world.

**Chapter Two: Painted Faces** describes the society and culture of the Gurahl including where to find them and how they feel about the other creatures of the World of Darkness.

**Chapter Three: The Song of Making** gives a run-down on character creation, including a complete list of the Gifts and rites that make Gurahl different from (and, in some cases, similar to) other Changing Breeds.

**Appendix One: Children of the Bear** introduces some ready-to-play beginning characters as well as a gallery of famous or noteworthy Gurahl.

**Appendix Two: Stories for the Telling** includes some real world information on bears for those who are interested, as well as some tips on telling Gurahl-based stories.

The rules and guidelines presented in this sourcebook elaborate and expand on the information presented in the *Werewolf Players Guide*, and where contradictions arise, this book supersedes previous material. As always, feel free to use all, part or none of the contents of these pages in your own chronicles.



# Chapter One: The Dance of the Centuries

*I danced in the morning  
when the world was begun,  
I danced in the moon  
And the stars and the sun.  
I came down from heaven  
And I danced on the earth...*

— Sydney Carter, "Lord of the Dance"

## Once Upon a Time

Welcome, cub. Come and sit.

My name is Rendon Sheatheclaw of the River Keepers, and I have chosen to follow the way of the Talesingers. I have invited you to my den so you may learn the ways of Gaia's guardians now that your Change is upon you.

### First Greeting

You will forgive me, I hope, that I currently lack one of the items specified to give you your first Ritual of Greeting as it should properly be performed. I hope that you shall take my greeting in the spirit it is meant and overlook this shameful lack on my part. You see, until a day or so ago, I did not realize that your First Change had already occurred. I ask your forgiveness that I was lax in this duty. It has been so long since we have welcomed a new cub, yet now three of you seem to have sprung up in the last decade — easy, now; you will meet the others later. Normally, I would postpone this meeting until I had your Changing Gift ready, but it is too important for you to understand who and what you are, and your place among the Gurahl,

for me to delay our meeting. Please excuse me that I have not finished your gift. It will be ready next week.

Why should I give you any gift at all? That explanation is part of who you are, but it must wait while I make you the proper greeting and teach you to do the same for me. For now, you merely need to copy what I do. You will discover variations in the ritual later based on who you are greeting, the time of year and day, whether the meeting is accidental or planned and if you simply mean to pass one another by or stay and speak together. Even such things as whether you are there to petition another of our kind for help or to give warning of danger have an effect on the kind of greeting ritual you use. Here is a short version of the one I should offer you at your first greeting:

"Welcome, young sister. Welcome to knowledge of Gaia and Her creation. Be easy in all your forms, and walk lightly upon the Earth. Know that you are Gurahl, protector, healer and nurturer, first-born of the Changing Kind. I am Rendon Sheatheclaw, Talesinger of the River Keepers. To meet you is my honor. I will not ask your name, for as yet, you have none among our kind. For now it is enough that you are a sister to me.





I ask that you accept this gift which I have made for you. Keep it near you that you may always remember who you are. When you look at it, remember the name of Rendon Sheatheclaw, your first teacher among your true people."

This is the part where I would give you your gift — usually a work of art I made just for you, one which I will never repeat in the same exact pattern or color. For now, I gift you with this feathered hair ornament. The colors are symbolic of earth and water. The beadwork shows a salmon leaping through a stream. Please wear it and know you are welcome among us, new cub. You are our hope for the future, and we are grateful that Gaia has chosen once again to send us younglings. Though the dark days draw near, with strong, young Gurahl by our sides, we may yet prevail.

"Take this bit of fish and these berries. I have prepared them for us. Taste each. These are the fruits of Gaia, which I bequeath to you. Their sweetness is all we need to tell us why we nurture Gaia's creation. The fish has been salted to remind us of the tears that have been shed in protecting these resources. Use them wisely. Never fail to offer Gaia's bounty to any in need. Here is a bowl full of fresh spring water. It symbolizes life, for all creatures die without water. Drink deeply, knowing that some day you may know the secrets of life and death. Protect those gifted with life. Know when it is wiser to help a creature that is too old or too damaged to survive face death with dignity. Here is a pouch filled with aloe, sweet grass, pine needles and willow bark. I give you the gift and duty of healing others. Never stint in offering healing to other creatures who are of Gaia."

Now we give one another our hands and pull one another close. Do not think of this as merely a human-style hug. Through it, we show trust in one another and come close enough to learn one another's distinct smell. Take a deep breath. Now, even at a distance, we will know one another in the future. Give praise to Gaia and honor to Her creation. The ritual is ended.

— No, cub, not all of our greetings are quite this long. Show some patience while we have time for formalities — plenty of time for hurrying soon enough.

— You will receive your formal welcome at the autumnal equinox, but for now I grant you this private sharing. Before you approach the Council of Autumn, you must know the history of your people — who we are, where we have come from and what we yet hope to accomplish. It is a long tale, but not an arduous one, I hope.

## *The Dance Commences*

In the old days, we Gurahl would have danced this tale for everyone to see. We would have measured the time since our first awakening in the world with careful steps, marking the rhythm of our lives' seasons with stately movements and joyful gestures. We rarely dance now, and then only on the most formal occasions. That joy has been corrupted for us, turned into a shameful spectacle of ridicule and cruelty. But that telling comes later in my tale.

If you would learn about your heritage, little cub, you must listen to the words I speak, appreciate the pictures I will show you, but pay most attention to the dances I teach you, steps that we once danced to tell our stories so that no one could misunderstand. Even if you forget my words and no longer call the pictures

to mind, perhaps the patterns of the dance will be enough to convey the majesty, the grace and the sadness of our tale. Someday, it will be your turn to teach this to younger Gurahl. Watch now and move with me, for I do that which none of us does happily in this day: I dance the Dance of the Centuries.

## In the Beginning

*Stand quietly, feet apart and ready to move in whatever direction I do. Sway back and forth, feel the pulse of the Earth beneath your feet. Now, slowly, lift your foot. You are now one with both earth and air. Gradually move forward until your toes dip into the pool of water. Turn your face to feel the warm sun. Water and fire are now a part of you as well. Breathe deeply, hold the breath inside you and know that spirit completes the pattern of the dance which is you.*

*Now we turn and turn again, moving our arms up over our heads and swinging them slowly back down again. When we have finished this movement, we will assume our bear forms and repeat it. This is the turning step, the beginning of the pattern. It serves as the first movement in our Creation Dance, just as the world took on form and began to spin its way toward time.*

## Gaia's Creation

Our legends say that when Gaia first walked the pathways among the stars, She chose a bright one with clear yellow light near which to make a home for all Her children-yet-to-be. She settled near the star's warmth, though far enough away that his fierce fire would not burn Her new children when they were born. Just as we have done, She lifted her feet and turned, performing the Creation Dance. As Her feet passed, earthpaths sprang into being, reaching out from Her in all directions and becoming land. She waved Her hands and called winds into the world. She sang, and the spirit of Her song became the fire at the Earth's heart.

Sitting down upon the new lands, Gaia combed out Her hair and it curled away from Her, becoming rivers and seas. She passed Her hands over the land, and it was covered with grass and trees and flowers. Then She invited Her sisters and brothers to visit with Her in Her new home. These became the planets and moon. Finally, as She moved across the land, She laughed with joy and cried with longing for the beauty She saw. From the laughter and tears arose children to share the world with Her.

When we Gurahl first danced this step (which we perform in honor of Her), it was as we rose up from within the Great Mother. As She birthed us, we nuzzled at Her warm body, inhaled Her green and earthy scent and followed Her as She moved. She called us forth to serve as protectors of the land and all that dwelt upon it, and we were happy to become Her sacred guardians. Our natures called for us to be nurturers and protectors of the Earth and its creatures — including humans.

The Garou would tell you that humans ruined the world, but we were created to cherish them just like Gaia's other creatures. Many among both the Changing Breeds and humankind remark on the similarity between bears and humans, citing our expressive faces and our upright posture when we walk on two legs. We know the truth of the matter. It is not we who resemble humans — it is they who copied us, learning our erect stance and how to express their feelings as we do.





Some will tell you that we existed before time itself; others claim that we arose only after humans inherited the world from the great lizards and the animals of prehistory. Those who note that we breed with humans as well as our bear kin will ask how we could have arisen before humans existed. I was not there, so I do not know the truth of it. Many of our lorekeepers and scholars argue this point, some saying that Gaia created us from the very bones of the Earth and gave us the ability to breed with our close kin later. For myself, I think dwelling on such questions leads to the same kind of arrogance which plagues the Garou. What more glory can we ask for than to know we were the first of Gaia's Changing children?

## Legends of How We Came To Be

Different tribes of Gurahl explain how we came to be in different ways — sometimes several creation stories exist within the same tribe. Perhaps one of them is the true story. It may also be that they are all correct. Myth has a way of mocking those who want their history too tidy. One of our favorite tales claims that a certain tribe of humans gave up their settled life and moved to the mountains. There they imitated the animals. Gradually, they grew long paws and became larger. Some of those became Gurahl and others bears.

Another story mentions that we sprang from inside hollow hills, awakening and nosing our way out into the sunlight when we first smelled the heady aroma of Gaia's bounty. This, they say, is why we still prefer caves, for we long to return to our underground homes when snow blankets the land and erases the scents that enticed us out.

Still another tale concerns the mating of the Great Bear of spirit with the flesh-bodied Ursa Major to produce Ursa Minor, the joyful cub, a creature of both matter and spirit. They say new stars filled the sky, growling in birth, when the cub sprang forth, and at that moment, we were born of the cub's love for his mother and father.

In the end, it doesn't really matter how we came to be except in the fact that it was Gaia who called us into being, and we became the best loved of Her Changing children.

## The Calm Before Corruption

We were not Gaia's only younglings, however. Long before our own birth, the Mother had three other children. Because She sought balance in the world, the Great Mother gave birth to those we now call Yarn Spinner, Tapestry Maker and Pattern Breaker — those whom others call the Wyld, the Weaver and the Wyrn. Yarn Spinner whirled through every part of the world, creating bright pockets of matter. Tapestry Maker took those pockets and arranged them into garments and crafted things, and Pattern Breaker saw the bright, new items and broke them apart so there would always be room for newly created objects to exist.

At that time, the balance was in no danger. We were able to interact with humans as protectors, nurturers and teachers. We wanted to help our hairless and clawless little brothers and sisters. Some of us even gave our lives for them, sacrificing our

own flesh and skins in times when the naked ones would have starved or frozen. Seeing our devotion to the rest of Her creation, Gaia gave us a great gift, one we do not share with the other Changing Breeds — the gift of returning life to one who has died. This great honor we reserved for those who nobly sacrificed themselves for others. Many human tribes celebrated our connection with them, forming bear cults and healing societies to whom we taught the rudiments of our lore.

## Pattern Breaker's Madness

Such idyllic times could not last. As mankind became more settled, Tapestry Maker grew in power. She saw that Pattern Breaker was tearing asunder her beloved creations, and she shed bright tears over her loss. As any good brother would, Pattern Breaker tried to dry her tears and begged to know how he could make her happy again. What he didn't notice until it was too late was that Tapestry Maker's tears fell over him as he comforted her, forming a woven net all around him. In terror of being confined, he thrashed mightily — vainly trying to break the strands of sorrow that enmeshed him. When they failed to break, he fought harder, only to bind himself more firmly. Maddened beyond sanity, Pattern Breaker lashed out at anything he could reach, breaking things that were never meant to be destroyed and sowing corruption without regard.

The Dance of Creation, as it was meant to be, faltered and died. It was succeeded by a never-ending series of off-kilter steps vainly trying to regain balance.

*Step forward and lift your head. Turn it first to the right, then the left. Crouch down and put your palms on the ground. Again, turn your head both ways. This step is known as the Balance Point. On all fours, we achieve stability we cannot attain on two legs. This is the reason why we have four legs in bear form; that we may feel the four corners of the earth, savor the balance and expel your breath. Now slowly rise again, taking a gentle breath as you stand upright.*

*Lift one leg, bending your knee so it is almost level with your chest. You must thrust out your arms to maintain your balance after only a short time. Hold the position, even if you feel like you may stumble. Now try to turn in place (like we did before) by circling your one remaining foot in a circle. Not easy, is it? This is the step we call Gaia's Predicament. It reminds us how truly precarious our Mother's hold on the Earth has been since the corruption of the who is now called the Wyrn.*

## The Changing Children

As Gaia discovered jobs that needed doing, She created the other Changing Breeds. She created the Mokolé to be Her memory when the world became so large that it was hard to recall everything we needed to know. The Bastet became Gaia's eyes, watching what transpired with their secretive, slitted pupils. The Corax became Her messengers — mostly because no one could keep them quiet anyway, and She felt it was better that they have something important to say rather than repeating idle chatter. And so many others were born as well, each with a special purpose. We welcomed all their help in seeing to Gaia's creation.

It was supposed to be our job to protect and heal the land. We tried to be everywhere the Wyrn was, nurturing new growth, guarding what we could from his diseased touch and



healing that which his coils made foul. Pattern Breaker had grown too large, however. Even on four legs and perfectly balanced, we were completely overmatched. Seeing and feeling the Earth's pain, we knew we could no longer fulfill our duties. Lifting our voices in song to the Great Mother, we asked Her to send us more brothers and sisters to help us. She too felt the pain of the world as it was corrupted. Gaia knew that despite our best efforts, trying to heal what was already broken was far more difficult than keeping it from being ruined. She determined that rather than make more healers, She would create warriors, fierce defenders dedicated to fighting the Wyrms. That way we Gurahl could concentrate on healing and preservation, and we could leave the battle to Her new children, the Garou.

## The Garou

Our lorekeepers often say that the Garou were birthed from Gaia's pain over our inability to cleanse the Wyrms' corruption. She did not blame us, knowing that in his corruption, Pattern Breaker had become too large for anyone to heal until his ongoing rampage ended. To curb his excesses, She made the Garou. We welcomed the advent of our newest siblings and introduced them to the other Changing Breeds. We were proud that our youngest brothers and sisters would help us defend Gaia. As we were commanded in the beginning times, we cherished them and sought to teach them.

*Swing your arms exuberantly skyward. Skip from one foot to the other, then whirl in a circle. Laugh aloud with pure, clear joy and hold your arms forward as if ready to embrace someone. Present your open palms. We call this the Joyous Stride. It signifies how we felt about our new siblings.*

At the time, we also taught humans many secrets, passing on our knowledge of Gaia's land that they might learn how to plant and grow crops to feed themselves. All we asked in return was that they honor our other kin, the bears. Who would have been better suited to strike such a bargain? We and our bear kin (except for those of the frozen North) eat everything that humans do — grains, fruit, meat and vegetables. By teaching humans to plant crops, we helped them survive, and we made it less necessary for them to hunt and kill so many of Gaia's other creatures. We maintained the balance.

Just as we taught humans, we sought to teach the Garou skills they would need to fight the Wyrms. We taught them the Rite of Purification and the Rite of Passage. We taught them to ask the spirits for Gifts such as Mother's Touch and Sense Wyrms so they would have warning of the Wyrms' presence and be able to heal themselves when wounded. Another thing we tried to teach them was harmony, the skill of balancing their own feelings to give themselves peace and tranquillity. This lesson, however, they could not learn.

Truly, it was neither side's fault. We did not recognize that Gaia had given them Rage so they might strike quickly and ferociously, rather than slowly and with great strength. They saw no use in our stubborn patience, thinking us too slow, even cowardly. We did not understand one another; indeed, we could not understand, for we are vastly different creatures.

We found it best to live separate from one another, each maintaining a certain territory for which she claimed responsibility. Somewhere within that range, each Gurahl kept a

special Den to which she retired to rest and regain her energy. Many of us also kept a home within a village or settlement so that we might be available to teach the humans there, to lend them our strength and to heal them. We offered these gifts to the land and animals within our range as well. Humans trusted and honored us, and we tried to teach them how to live off the land without causing damage to it. We needed to be solitary, for there were few of us, and we had much territory to cover.

The Garou found our ways indecipherable. To them, only their kin among the humans counted as creatures of Gaia; all others were but parasites on the land. They tried to cull humans like herdbeasts, hoping to keep their numbers at a consistent, unchanging level. They might as well have told wildflowers not to grow. Our wolf brothers thought our attempts to teach humans were highly suspect; one does not teach the enemy one's secrets. The Garou lived and fought as a pack, unlike us. They had to confront the corruption spewed forth by the Wyrms, and there was greater chance of success in battle when several warriors attacked together. Humans honored Bear, but they greatly feared Wolf. Where they asked for our help, they implored Wolf not to bring them harm.

## Prelude to War

*Stand quietly, shoulders slumped forward and hang your head. Now rock from side to side, slowly. Lift your foot until it just clears the ground and take a step forward. Now slide your other foot sideways and move to follow it. Take a step backward with the original foot. Lift your head and arms as though beseeching the heavens for an explanation. This is the Step of Sadness and Regret. We dance it to commemorate the pain we felt at the worst era of our history. Many call this time the Great Betrayal. I call it the Wasteful Misunderstanding.*

We should have seen what was to come, but we were not made to be suspicious. As we taught the Garou more of our lore, they became jealous of what they did not know. We counseled them to be patient, for even our own kind do not learn our deepest secrets and greatest rites as cubs. Some knowledge may only be understood by those who have drunk deeply of life's experiences.

That is not to say that youths such as yourself are incapable of understanding how something works intellectually, but that sometimes it is necessary to grow wise in life before you truly appreciate what it is you have been taught. No wise parent gives a baby matches, because the baby cannot comprehend what all the consequences of lighting those matches might be. In the same way, no elder Gurahl places the burden of our most secret knowledge on the shoulders of those too young to make informed choices.

## The Gift of Gaia's Breath

The Garou discovered that we Gurahl held knowledge of a great Gift taught to us by Gaia, a way to give the dead life once again. In our earliest days, we used the Gift extensively and discovered to our regret that it was best to save such a powerful manifestation for very special circumstances. All of us determined to use the Gift only for those who nobly sacrificed themselves for others, and then only rarely.

I see you do not really understand. Why would we allow our friends and siblings to die when we only needed to use Gaia's Gift to make them live again? Perhaps the easiest answer is that



we are not like Tapestry Maker. We do not insist that because something existed, it must always exist. We live our lives, and many of them have been quite extended, encompassing centuries. But when it is time to die, why should we cling to this existence — or be forced back to it by well-meaning others — when our spirits can go back to Gaia and be made into a new being? Even those of us who choose not to be made anew find great happiness in the Summer Lands, where we rest from our labors. We only restore one of our own when that one is cut off in her prime or when it seems as though her work is unfinished.

There is a more sobering side to this as well. When something has served its purpose, it is time for that thing to move aside and make room for that which is new. If it doesn't do so, the old thing sometimes becomes trapped in place, refusing to be moved, and it rots from within. Mere continuation without corresponding growth and a deepening of understanding is pointless. Further, it can be dangerous. I would hesitate to approach some of our kind who have slept for centuries, for I have no knowledge of what has befallen them during their long hibernation. Many will undoubtedly awaken renewed and ready to take up their place in the world once again; others may have become twisted and corrupted.

Finally, I must tell you the greatest danger in using this Gift. The time elapsed between a beloved Gurahl's death and his resurrection is vitally important. If the one using the Gift is not present when the other Gurahl dies, she is taking a terrible chance that it has been too long and that the Gurahl's spirit has moved on. Do you see that blackened copse yonder? That is the

result of a cub's foolishness in calling forth something he couldn't control. When it has been too long, something else returns rather than the Gurahl's spirit. I cannot begin to tell you the horror and destruction a Bane-spirit inhabiting the body of a Gurahl can wreak. I hope that you never discover that knowledge for yourself. Later, perhaps, I will explain in more detail this most precious of Gifts and what else we Gurahl know of it. Now, let me continue with my story and my dance, for you have greater need of this knowledge than the other just now.

Like greedy children, the Garou wanted everything, and they demanded immediate gratification. They believed that we should give them our knowledge of the Gift of rebirth because they could use it to bring back warriors killed fighting the Wym. While we grieved along with them for the loss of their brave brothers and sisters, we could not give them what they demanded.

## The First Great Council

*Stand and stretch forth your arms at shoulder height as if encircling the shoulders of others. Though we do not have a full circle, we will act as though we do. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a circle filled with other Gurahl. Move to your right, crossing one leg behind the other. Now move forward as though closing the circumference of the circle. Drop your arms and turn to face outward. Bring your arms up again, and move to your right. Step outward as though allowing the circle to expand. Face inward again and repeat the steps to the left. Outward, and repeat again to the left. Now, move around the entirety of the circle as though weaving in and out with others until you return to your original position. This is the Circle Dance of the Council where*



*we all meet to reach an accord. You will need to know the steps when you attend the Council of Autumn on the equinox.*

Meeting together in our first Great Council, we talked long concerning the Garou and what we should (and should not) teach them. Perhaps you believe that we were arrogant in assuming we knew what was best. It is possible you are right, but we had lived long in Gaia's world, and we knew it far better than our younger siblings. We spoke of their great, uncontrollable Rage. We thought about their precipitous natures, how they failed to think things through before taking action. While we saluted their strength and bravery in battle, and knew that they rarely had the luxury of long thought before making decisions, we decided the risk was simply too great. We could not trust Gaia's greatest blessing in the hands of the Garou.

We knew they would use it on every fallen warrior, thinking this Gift would make them invincible. Never had we found occasion to try to use the Gift more than once on the same Gurahl, but we suspected the Garou would try it over and over — with disastrous consequences. They would corrupt themselves from within, never realizing what it was they brought back into their midst. Gaia's warriors would become Pattern Breaker's Bane-wolves. What was meant to bless would become a curse once bequeathed to our younger Changing kin. As we feared, the Garou did not understand, even when we tried to explain it.

## The War of Words

Choked by jealousy and bewilderment, they demanded that the Gurahl share all of Gaia's Gifts or else. We refused. Some of us were greatly saddened to deny them what they wanted so badly; others had begun to resent the Garou, reprimanding them for their insolence and berating them for their Rage. The Garou spoke with the other Changing kin, telling them all that we were hoarding Gaia's Gifts for ourselves. They pointed to our habit of living alone rather than in packs, implying that we were weak and had something to hide. Rumors began circulating that the Gurahl had fallen to the Wym.

Some among the Children of Changing Forms believed the Garou, thinking that if Gaia chose them to root out the Wym and its minions, they should know who was corrupt and who was not. Many who had formerly been our friends avoided us; those we counted on for their support withdrew it. Now we truly found ourselves alone.

## The Great Ice

The Ice Age began, and the Garou — looking for a fight — blamed this harsh period on the Gurahl, charging that we were trying to destroy the warriors of Gaia in retaliation for telling the others we had fallen to the Wym. I do not believe that all the Garou were full of jealousy and perfidy. Not all knew it was a lie. Many had no reason not to believe whatever they were told. I have always regretted that more Garou failed to challenge what their leaders told them — that the Ice Age was proof that we were corrupted — but I suppose subservience and loyalty to the pack is bred into them.

Whatever the reason, the Garou pointed to the coming of the ice as proof that we had given up our guardianship of the

land. Using that as the excuse, they began to attack us and urge the other Changing Breeds to do likewise.

A few Garou used the bridge created by the ice to cross into the Pure Lands in search of new homes far from the tumult. Many Gurahl went with them. Among these Garou, fewer believed the lies. Many welcomed our company, and we each found new kin among the people and animals in our new homes. Many tribes who honored Wolf and Bear alike learned from both of us.

But the damage had been done, and it would not be contained. Though the effects were lessened in the Pure Lands, elsewhere, we found ourselves embroiled in the War of Rage.

## The War of Rage

Somehow, we should have found a way to stop it. We know now that we should have remained true to our own natures, but it has always been difficult for those who advocate peace to remain pacifists in the face of battle. We should never have responded to force with force of our own. Still, I wonder: Could we have defused the Garou's Rage by refusing to respond to it, or would we all have perished under their fangs and claws? We'll never know, for we didn't make that choice.

Led by their elite, a tribe known as the Silver Fangs, the Garou declared war on us. You may have heard about war or seen it on your television. Even there, far removed from you, it seems terrible. It's even worse when the combatants are those who should be allies. Always before, we had been able to protect ourselves and those under our care. Now we found ourselves at a tremendous disadvantage.

Wherever they sought us out, we fought back. For the first time, we let our aggressions rise to the surface, matching the Garou blow for blow. As great in strength as we were in healing, we inflicted horrendous damage on our foes. The pity was that we turned this strength against our own little brothers and sisters. Despite our formidable strength and endurance, we were not made for battle as the Garou were. Nor could we stand alone against an entire pack. We fought; they died and we died. But there were fewer of us. One by one, we fell before their attacks, and when we fell, we left our lands and people unprotected. Some Garou turned their Rage on our unprotected Kinfolk, slaying them in the belief that they eradicated the Wym's minions by doing so. Many human tribes who honored us and called us kin were completely wiped out during this time. Our bear kin were also slain by the Garou during the War of Rage. Perhaps if we had been more concerned with saving them than with fighting back in a losing battle, they would still exist.

In many parts of the world, though some of our Kinfolk survived, the native Gurahl population was completely destroyed. The Okuma, once the proud tribe of Asian Gurahl, were all lost to what is known in the East as the War of Shame. Russian Gurahl subsumed many of the Okuma's Asian Kinfolk into their own tribes, which have since become a part of our own group, the River Keepers. Some of the few Okuma Kinfolk left also joined with the Mountain Guardians, but since that tribe was a late arrival (split from the River Keepers once we reached the Pure Lands), more ended up with us than with them. Strangely enough, I have heard that the War of Shame came many centuries after the War of Rage, long after the



Garou calmed down. But that story comes later. For now, you only need to realize that the War of Rage destroyed many Gurahl and decimated many tribes of our Kinfolk.

Initially, our bear Kinfolk, more cunningly hidden and living in more remote areas, were better off. Then the true toll became obvious. In each place where Gurahl guardians were destroyed, the bears soon declined. Nowadays, almost all the bears in those regions are gone.

Still, there was worse to come than the deaths in battle. It wasn't enough that the Garou tried to kill us. Many of Gaia's warriors were more interested in capturing and torturing us and our Kinfolk to force the secret of Gaia's Breath from us. The fortunate ones died quickly; none betrayed the secret, a testament to our implacable natures (what many call our stubbornness).

We believe that the Garou tried to persuade or compel the other Changing Breeds into declaring war on us as well, seeking to justify their own attacks and to force all others to acknowledge their leadership of all Gaia's children. Some among our talesingers even claim that this was the real reason for the war, so that the last born could assume the rightful place of those born first. Each responded in its own way. Our Changing brothers and sisters have their own stories to tell of their choices during the War of Rage. We have very little information concerning their actions, and that knowledge comes to us second-hand, from the Corax. Of necessity, we were removed from our kin (even the other Changers) during that time.

We know that the Corax gave information to the Garou, but then helped many of us escape from almost certain death. They have told us that the Nuwisha turned and left, and that

## Silverhair and the Bears

Once a family of bears lived in the depths of the forest. They dwelled in a large cave full of beautiful items that they crafted by hand. During the daytime, they wandered through the forest, greeting the other animals and making certain that all was well in their territory. At night, they returned home and prepared the food they had gathered during their daily rambles, then they sat together and spoke of what they had seen and worked on that day. Occasionally, other bears would come to visit them, seeking healing or comfort, which the bear family gave freely to their cousins. Other animals came to them as well, and the bears never turned anyone away. Their reputation throughout the forest as gentle souls, ready to aid creatures in need, spread beyond their lands until it reached the ears of a young wolfchild named Silverhair.

Silverhair heard tales of the bear family and determined to find out for herself just how much of what she heard was true. She traveled to the forest where the bear family lived, but instead of introducing herself to them, she decided to watch them for a while.

From a hidden place not far from the bear family's cozy cave, Silverhair spied upon the family's daily activities. She noticed that every morning, after greeting the sun, the two adult bears and their rambunctious cub would go off into the forest. Late at night, they would return home, their arms filled with the plants and herbs they had gathered. Occasionally, they brought home fresh meat.

Every few days, a wounded or sick bear from another part of the forest would come to visit the family. The next day, that bear would go away cured of his sickness or healed of his wounds.

"They must be working magic inside their cave," thought Silverhair. "If they possess great secrets of healing, I need to learn these for myself and for my brother and sister wolves." Still, instead of calling on the bear family directly, Silverhair waited and watched, for she was too proud to ask the bears for anything.

One day, a delegation of bears came to visit the bear family, carrying with them a bundle of bones and a bear skull. They stayed with the bear family for three days and nights, and when they finally took their leave, a strange bear accompanied them — one who had not been part of the original group.

Silverhair thought about what she had seen and decided that the extra bear visitor had somehow been reconstituted from the pile of bones the other bears had brought with them.

Silverhair realized that the bear family's "magic" was powerful indeed, if they could re-create a living bear from nothing more than bones. "I must have this secret for myself and for my brother and sister wolves," she thought. "The bears are wrong for keeping this secret for themselves."

The next day, she waited until the bear family had gone off into the woods. Then she crept up on the bears' cave and stole inside. She spent the day searching for the secret of rebirth, scouring every inch of the cave in case she missed its hiding place. She examined the pieces of artwork the bears used to decorate their home, breaking some of them in the process. She sampled all their stores, in case the secret had to do with eating or drinking particular foods.

Finally, exhausted by her search, Silverhair grew tired. "I'll just lie down," she said, "and rest for a little while before I leave." And so she fell asleep, dreaming strange dreams about bones that came to life and bears that performed ritual dances around a fire.

The bear family returned to the cave and found their home in a shambles. Many of their most precious artworks lay in pieces on the floor of the cave. Broken food-storage containers littered every surface.

"Who could have done this?" the father bear roared, shaking in anger at the destruction of his life's work.

"What did we do to deserve this?" the mother bear wailed, looking at the spoiled food and the ruination of her favorite paintings.

"Whoever did it is still here!" screamed the bear child excitedly, pointing to the sleeping figure in the back of the cave.

The sound of the bear family's voices woke Silverhair. Frightened and dismayed at being caught, she sprang to her feet and tried to run away, but the bear family stood between her and the cave mouth. Silverhair decided that she would try to bully her way out of the situation.

"You are hoarding the secret of rebirth," she said. "I came to get it from you since you won't tell anyone else about it."

Father bear shook his head sadly. "We do not hoard anything, little child," he said. "We know many kinds of healing, and we are happy to share our knowledge with those who ask for it. If you came to us hurt, we would heal you. If you were sick, we would cure your illness. If you hungered, we would give you food. All you had to do was ask."

"Give me your secrets," Silverhair demanded.

"No," said Mother bear. "Because you tried to take them for yourselves, you have proven that you are not yet old enough or wise enough to possess them. Go away until you have need of us. Maybe, when you are older and wiser, we will share some of our knowledge with you."

"Leave, or I'll pull your silver hair out of your head," threatened the bear child, standing as tall as he could in imitation of his parents.

Silverhair stomped to the mouth of the cave, past the bear family. She glared at them before she left.

"My brother and sister wolves need your magic," she said. "You have no right to keep your knowledge from us. Without it we may all die, and it will be your fault if we do!"

The bear child gave Silverhair a shove and pushed her out of the door. Then the bear family set about the task of picking up the pieces of their shattered home.

Silverhair returned to her wolf brothers and sisters empty-handed and embarrassed. Too proud to admit total defeat, she told them a different version of the story of her attempt to learn the secrets of the bear family.

"The bears are deliberately hiding the secret of rebirth from us because they want to control who lives or dies. Their power has corrupted them, and they are not worthy of acting as guardians of so potent a form of magic. I tried to ask them to share their knowledge with me, but they refused. In fact, they attacked me and threatened me."

Thus, Silverhair aroused the anger inside her brother and sister wolves, and they determined that if the bears would not share with them the secret of rebirth, they would take that knowledge for themselves — by force if necessary. And this they tried to do.

— from "The Storysongs of Shoshona Medicine-Bear"

The Kinfolk of the Gurahl preserved this story as a parable of the War of Rage. By telling it to each other, they honored their Gurahl kin during the long centuries of their absence. Finally, the tale became so widespread that it reached the ears of other humans. Eventually, the story found its way into writing, where humans now know it in its vastly different form.



the Bastet fought the Garou tooth and claw. The Mokolé, the Rokea, all the others (including many Changing children who did not survive) realized that they were next, and they refused to join. The Garou helped them along, deciding that preemptive strikes against the other Changing Breeds were necessary.

Somehow the Garou became convinced that they should be first in Gaia's sight. From there, it was only a short step to thinking they should be Gaia's only beloved. We knew then that there was no way for us to persuade them of our innocence or stop the War. Our presence was causing our Kinfolk, both bear and human, to suffer. Further, others among the Changing children were being forced to choose sides or fight for their own survival. So long as we remained, the Garou would have a focus for their Rage. The only answer was to disappear and hope our younger siblings' Rage would abate if they no longer felt threatened by our position as Gaia's first-born.

## *The Withdrawal*

To avoid utter destruction of both ourselves and our Kinfolk, the surviving Gurahl held a Second Great Council to discuss our options. In actuality, we had no options but one: to retreat from the world. Many of the oldest ones — far too many — had to abandon their bodies and enter the Umbra. Some went to the Summer Lands seeking happiness and a reward for their services to Gaia. Others fully retreated into their secret Dens or Umbral pockets and entered an almost permanent hibernation. Happily, the Garou (and many others among the Changing Breeds) assumed we had all abandoned our Earthly existence. Believing that the secret of rebirth was lost to them, the Garou indulged in a final rampage, after which their Rage finally cooled. Despite a few more flare-ups, our withdrawal signaled the end of the War of Rage.

## *The Centuries of Quiet*

Throughout the course of most of human history, the Gurahl have had only a peripheral part in things. As humans became ever more settled, the Garou tried to control them through the Impergium. Had we been there, we might have been able to stop them, but we were missing. The same might be said about a lot of situations in the years that followed. Very few of us still interacted with our human kin. From such meetings, tribal Kinfolk learned our secrets of healing and of sacred dances. We continued to teach them respect for Gaia. Bear cults, most dedicated to healing and the ritual hunting of bears for sustenance, proliferated among those tribes. More of us contacted our bear kin, keeping those channels alive as well.

For the most part, though, the Gurahl slumbered, awakening now and again to monitor things. The greatest secret among the Changing kin — known only to us and the Corax (since we were unable to keep it from them) — was that despite our apparent disappearance (and assumed demise), we remained in the world or just beyond it. Some of us even now remain locked in slumber, but the rest of the elder Gurahl have each spent some time traveling from one area to another, maintaining a watch on those regions we once nurtured.





## Great Grandfather, Great Grandmother

It became a tradition passed down from one Gurahl to the next that at least one of us would always be awake to watch and help as we could. That one is known as the Great Grandfather or Grandmother. It is that Gurahl's responsibility to travel throughout the world encouraging the protection of our bear kin while seeking to perpetuate the traditions of those tribes who still honor Bear as a totem. It is a thankless job, and one that takes its toll. You see, no one of us can continue, day after day, to hold back the unstoppable tide that threatens to overwhelm Gaia in the name of progress and man's ascension. Eventually, the Great Grandfather sickens from the poisons and sadness of the world, and he must return to his Den to cleanse away the stench. Before doing so, he is charged with awakening another and passing on all that he has learned. That one then becomes the new Great Grandparent. In this fashion, we have kept abreast of some of the changes in the world and tried to keep a paw in when we could.

## Inevitable Decline

It is hardly surprising that since most of us slept in hidden realms, our race declined precipitously. We were not unaware that this would happen. In fact, we decided it was best. None of us truly wanted to bring new children into the world when they had little to look forward to except fear and deprivation. Further, we feared that if we did have children while embroiled in the war, our cubs would not be true Gurahl, but pseudo-Garou — taught to fight and attack rather than nurture and heal, encouraged to foster ferocity rather than compassion and understanding. You see, we knew ourselves quite well. Though we had lived to heal and help, it took only a few short years for us to throw off our nature and respond to attacks with our own hatred and Rage. How much more vulnerable would our children be if they were brought into a world consumed by war among the Changing children?

We know the answer to that. Of those few who were born during that time, almost all entered their Uzmati time before they had matured fully. Urged on by their Rage, many who should have lived long, productive lives instead fought and died when they were little better than cubs. The wars took so many cubs before the younglings even had a chance to learn what they truly were. There were so few of us to be mentors to them, and of those, many were afraid to leave hidden shelters and seek out the newly Changed. Most of the lost cubs went mad with fear over what seemed to be some sort of possession taking hold of them. Others were killed by the superstitious who believed the untrained cubs were dangerous monsters there to prey upon their own children. Eventually, as Kinfolk stopped mating with Gurahl and we stopped mating entirely, there were no more Gurahl children born. The only ones of us left were the elders, most of whom preferred to sleep rather than once again take up the guardianship entrusted to them by Gaia.

In this, we were wrong. Once the Garou's Rage abated, we should have returned and resumed our duties. Simple fear would not have deterred us. Instead, what made us withhold our

healing powers was our own hurt. We felt we had been betrayed. We had asked Gaia for help and She had instead created the Garou, who in their Rage turned against us. Some of the truly ancient among us asked why this should be. Why should we nurture Gaia's creation? She had not stopped Her vicious Garou from killing us. Many forgot that Gaia had opened the way into the Umbra for us to escape, that She had taught us the Gifts to soothe our wounds and even to restore those who had died. They remembered the pain, the hurt and the anger; they clutched old wrongs to their hearts and fed on despair. Thus, some of us fell to darkness. It is painfully ironic that many Gurahl responded to the Garou's charges of Wyrmtaint by taking on such taint in reality. It is an old wound, one that has not yet healed.

The humans, meanwhile, proved that without our guidance, they could find new things to believe in. Wars blazed across the face of Europe, Asia and Africa as humans became more numerous and fought for territory or ideology. For the most part, we were not involved. We slept and allowed the Great Grandparent to move from place to place, trying to ease suffering and prevent the tribes who still acknowledged our teachings from perishing.

## The Bear King

There were still a few moments of hope and greatness left to us. In the islands that would become known as Britain, there arose a Gurahl who became the leader of his human tribe. His deeds — both in warfare and in peace — became so famous that stories wove themselves around him. Using the great strength that was his in all his forms, the Bear King defeated those who would harm him or his kin. Even to his enemies, he showed mercy and advocated peace so that there would be time to plant and reap without the turmoil brought on by constant warfare. The king took as his wife a woman gifted with her own powers of healing and knowledge of life. Together they created a land filled with prosperity, a golden kingdom that became a shining beacon of hope.

Some say it was the jealous fae who brought him down, while others claim that the Garou of the islands attacked in force, believing the Bear King possessed the knowledge they had fought the War of Rage to obtain. Whatever the truth of the matter, strife struck this kingdom with the force of a thunderbolt. The queen disappeared. Some claim she was to blame for the war, but most believe she fled into the Umbra to draw off pursuit from her gravely wounded husband. The mortally wounded king was spirited away to a secret island Denrealm where he could be healed and enter hibernation, some say, awaiting the day when the world was once again ready for his wisdom. From stories surrounding his time of rule, however, sprang legends that rang within the hearts of mortals. So enamored of his greatness were they, that they re-created him again and again (or perhaps he arose from hibernation again and again in an attempt to better the world, always returning to sleep when the world disappointed him). It little matters which is true; the important thing is to remember his service to Gaia and her creation. When we need him most, I believe that Arturus will once again arise to lead us.



## *The Hunt and the Sacrifice*

Many human tribes in the Pure Lands and in the cold lands of northern Europe and Asia celebrated the ritual killing of the bear as central to their religions and to the survival of their peoples. A festival lasting several days re-enacted the tale of Bear Mother and her Son, the Cub whose formal death as a willing sacrifice brought necessary food, clothing and tools to the tribe. In many cultures, this festival also marked the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter. During this time of year, the spirit of the sacrificed Bear descended into the Underworld where he assumed the role of guardian of the dead. In the spring, with the fertile reawakening of plant and animal life from beneath the snow, the Bear re-entered the world, reborn to the Bear Mother in order to give his life once more, at the proper time, to his tribe.

## *The World Moves On*

A new religion advocating peace and brotherhood arose. For a time, we had great hope that its advocates would bring about an era of healing and understanding, but they too fell to the evil and greed of a few. They even hounded those who honored Bear to worship their god or be put to the sword. Considered barbarians and heathens by these so-called civilized folk, many Kinfolk bloodlines died out as members of the tribes were converted and forced to forget the old ways on pain of death.

Soon, only scattered tribes living in remote areas remembered Bear and the teachings of the Gurahl. Our bear kin fared little better. Hunted in inclement climes for their fur, bears became little more than curiosities in many places. In others our kin were feared because of their strength. Humans who knew nothing of Bear became convinced that his children were fierce and vicious. Believing it showed others how brave they were, humans who had forgotten how to live close to the wild paid hunters to capture bears and bring them to the cities where they were used for "bear baiting." Never heard of it? Bears were shackled to stout poles, starved into near frenzy and forced to fight for their survival against dogs, other wild animals or groups of men with spears.

Yet, this "entertainment" was not the worst punishment inflicted on our proud kin. Many will never understand why what I am about to speak of affected us so deeply. I hope you are not one of those.

*Link hands with me. Step lightly to one side. I will move in the opposite direction. This brings our arms to shoulder height, elbows bent, with one set of linked hands held before each of our faces. Feel our oneness. Close your eyes and savor our connection to Gaia.*

*Ah! You didn't expect that, did you? I've drawn blood and hurt you. Don't worry, the pain is minor and it will heal. Imagine that the pain was much worse and that you had no way to know I inflicted it upon you to make a point.*

Someone discovered our greatest joy and made it into our greatest shame. They took our sacred dances and turned them into a grotesque spectacle. Our bear kin suffered cuts, punc-



tures, burns and whippings that forced them into a shuffling parody, a pain-filled clumsy movement humans called dancing. The advent of the dancing bear ended our joy in the dance. Because our innocent kin suffered such humiliation and pain, even today we find dancing distasteful and difficult. What was once both sublime and sacred has been forever sullied and profaned by this crime.

Centuries passed, and things got worse and worse yet. The wars continued. Vampires clotted Europe so thickly that the humans rose up in a terrible frenzy in retaliation, burning everyone who seemed even vaguely suspicious. Plagues struck humanity, and I cannot even say that we were necessary to heal them — as soon as the sicknesses passed, the humans boiled up again, as numerous as ever.

Then our worst fears were realized: European humans discovered the Pure Lands. Neither our bear kin nor our tribal Kinfolk were safe any longer — and we, who should have been their protectors, were trapped in slumber. I wonder even now if the invader Garou had confined themselves to displacing our tribal folk and hunting our bear kin, would we have awakened? I have no way of knowing. The blessing disguised in this disaster was that they went far beyond terrorizing our kin, forcing us to once again take an active part in the affairs of the world.

## The New Spring

When the European Garou came to the Americas, we Gurahl reemerged in force — not at first, but later as the problems they loosed became too dangerous to be ignored. We hoped that our Kinfolk had grown strong and numerous enough in the Pure Lands to care for themselves. We prayed that the Garou had learned from the War of Rage. Our kin were strong, but not strong enough. The Garou, on the other hand, had apparently learned nothing. This time, they were not after our kin directly, but attacked their own kind. The tribes of the Pure Lands, the Three Brothers as they called themselves, became the victims of the European invaders. Pushed from their lands and forced from their sacred places, they lost control of Banes that they had bound when they first came to the Pure Lands.

The horror known as Eater-of-Souls was destroyed almost before we were fully awake. The Croatan sacrificed themselves to stop it. Some among us felt the spirits of the Croatan pass on their path back to Gaia. We stirred in our sleep. Some among us spoke in dreams to others, asking if we should arise and see if Gaia's Breath could save these noble spirits. The Great Grandfather considered entering the Oeth-Rite to fight the Death Bear for the Croatan's return. In the end, Gaia made known to us that this was not the time.

We fully awoke as the invaders moved westward. Taking over caerns and driving out the native Garou, the Europeans unbound a major Bane that had melded together with the unbridled mania of the Weaver — a twisted fusion of both called the Storm Eater. Its screaming presence, tearing through the Umbra, proved a more effective wake-up call than millions of alarm clocks. The Garou couldn't handle it alone. As discretely as we could, the Gurahl emerged from our Dens and offered our help to the native Garou. Most of them kept our

## The Tale of Sleeping Bear

When Gaia birthed the first and dearest of Her Changing children, She invited Her three oldest children — Yarn Spinner, Tapestry Maker and Pattern Breaker — to a feast in honor of Gurahl. Luna, Helios and the other Incarna came to the celebration as well, and all showered praise and gifts upon the newborn Gurahl. Only Pattern Breaker remained aloof from the festivities, for he had dreamed a dream that made him angry and resentful.

One by one, the guests spoke words of blessing over the newborn child. Gaia smiled proudly as She heard Gurahl receive gifts of strength and healing, compassion and wisdom, hardness and long life.

Finally, near the end, Pattern Breaker could not contain his anger. He stepped boldly up to the cradle where Gurahl lay looking up at the world with baby-fresh eyes and placed a shadowy hand upon the bearchild's brow.

"I see the seeds of my downfall in your eyes," he scowled. "I cannot afford to let you live past childhood. When you have grown to maturity, those you cherish will find and slay you." With those words of doom, Pattern Breaker ripped a hole in the world and disappeared through it.

Everyone was appalled at Pattern Breaker's words. Gaia wept, and floods blanketed the surface of the Earth.

But three guests had arrived late to the party, and after discovering from Luna what had gone so terribly wrong, they informed Gaia that they might be able to help. Ursa Major stepped up to Gurahl and kissed his forehead. "You will not die," she said. "Instead, you will fall into a deep sleep that will last until someone awakens you in the hour of the world's greatest need. I cannot alter entirely the words of Pattern Breaker, but this much I can do for you." Then Mangi, the Death Bear, approached Gurahl and, leaning down, whispered something into the babe's ear. "I give you a great secret that no one else but you will ever know. Let the knowledge that you can overcome death itself comfort you through your long sleep." Last of all, Ursa Minor stooped up to Gurahl's cradle and tickled the bearchild's belly. "I can give you a childhood full of joy, so that its memories can sustain you during your nap."

Time passed, and Pattern Breaker's words came true. The cherished little brothers of the Gurahl, the wolf-children, rose up and tried to destroy their oldest sibling. Instead, they drove most of the Gurahl into centuries of slumber, just as Ursa Major promised.

When the Storm Eater raged across the Umbra, something inside sleeping Gurahl whispered that the hour of greatest need was at hand. This whisper broke the enchantment of the Pattern Breaker, and Gurahl awoke to take his place in the world again.

— from "The Storysongs of Shoshona Medicine-Bear"



involvement — and our return — quiet. As usual, however, the Corax blabbed the secret. Most of the Europeans refused to believe it, but our effectiveness was lessened by having to look over our shoulders for the attack we feared was coming.

This was a bittersweet time for us, an age when we once again made ourselves known to our human Kinfolk. We were welcomed in the tribes as healers and providers. Many appealed to us for strength and sustenance just as earlier tribes had done. Where we could, we answered them. The tribes honored Bear in all the totem's forms — father, mother and little bear. They kept Gaia's laws and learned what we had to teach them. For a time, we again hoped that our long years of exile were over and that we had at last recovered from the War of Rage. Perhaps if we had been given a little more time, we could have recaptured ancient times, come back in triumph to cleanse the corruption left in the Storm Eater's wake, but the invaders gave us no time. Inexorably, they took more and more land from our kin, stealing their hunting grounds or planted fields, confining them to barren strips no one else wanted. In return, we did the only thing we could — we bathed the earth in blood, blood of mockery, human and shapechanger alike. Some Gurahl even stood shoulder to shoulder alongside Uktena, Wendigo, even a few European Garou — if you believe that — to defend what we could from despoilment.

We couldn't save our people from their fate, but because of this time, we were able to renew our ties to our Kinfolk in hope of a better future. When the threat had finally been sealed away, we were afraid to go to sleep for long periods, for either

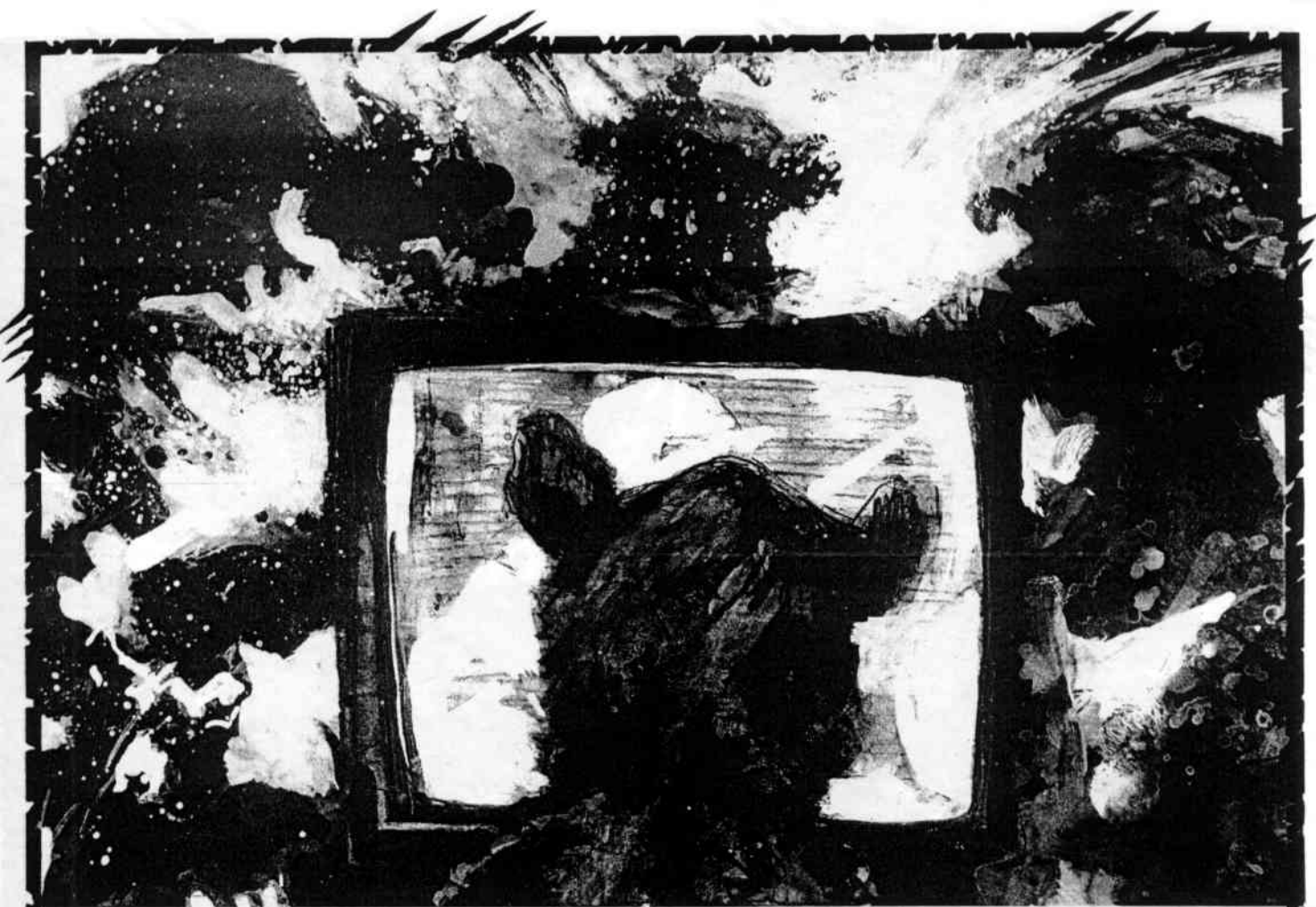
our Kinfolk or the other Changing Breeds might need our help at any time. Though true Gurahl children were still rare, a precious few were born just before the turn of the century, produced when we relaxed our taboo on mating. We trained them to act as agents to protect as much of the wild lands as possible. Further, we hoped they could revitalize us, giving our eldest a new reason to wake — the chance of having new cubs to teach and cherish.

## Modern Times

As you have probably surmised, we have taken heart from the successes (however small) we achieved when we helped the Garou defeat the Storm Eater. More and more of us awaken each year. New cubs are being born again for the first time in centuries. Perhaps our time of waiting is at last over and we may take our rightful place in the world again. It would be wrong to hope too much, to ask too much, for our bear kin all over the world still suffer greatly and our human kin languish in some of the poorest communities known to man. There are so many humans, so many that are poorly taught and have become sick in their spirits. Yet we hope. We hope we are not too late, that we have not slept too long, that Gaia still accepts our service.

*And now we've come almost to the end of our dance. Lift your head and stand with your feet apart, just at shoulder width. Now leap into the air, raising your hands as if you might catch the stars in your fingers. Do you smell the change in the wind? Bow to me as I do to you. This is the Step of Acknowledgment,*





*performed when we each see one another as we truly are, knowing the other to be the first born and beloved of Gaia, healers, providers and teachers.*

This, young one, is my gift to you — the Dance of the Centuries. You are among the new born, our greatest treasures. Take what I have told you, remember the steps, even if you never dance them again. I know that you are like the little bear just now, full of the self-confidence and the energy of youth. You have many triumphs and mistakes yet in front of you. Remember my words to you, but do not let them weigh you down. Be inquisitive, revel in your strength and the joy of a summer day. These too I bequeath to you, for to heal others you must have hope. There will be time enough for the darker duties later. For now, dance the dance you are given and know yourself for what you are.

A question? Of course. I am here to teach you.

Of course you may make up new steps to the dance, small one, but we have not done so in many years. It is the shame that keeps us from it, I suspect. Many other elders might be shocked that you seem to want to dance, even to the point of creating new steps! I will try to keep an open mind, and we will rehearse the steps you wish to show the others.

You don't want to rehearse them? Spontaneity? That is something few Gurahl practice. We are a very ritualistic people immersed in the old ways of doing things. But you are very young. You may even be the future of our race. Perhaps it is time we broke from old traditions. It may even be that such views are needed if we are once again to become a force in the world. So dance, young Gurahl. I will beat out the time and rejoice that you are not ashamed!





# Chapter Two: Painted Faces

*After a storm the leafy tree is no longer solid,  
but the pine still throws a full shadow.  
It has found a place to be.  
For a thousand years it will not give up this place.*

— Tao Yuan-Ming

## *Apart and Together — The Gurahl Lifestyle*

So you think you're ready for the Council of Autumn, do you? What have you done that we should acknowledge you as one of us? How many stories of our heritage do you know? In fact, just what do you know about being a Gurahl at all aside from the usual "we're healers and nurturers" line?

What's the matter, did you think we all talked gently and slowly? Are you surprised at my harsh words because I'm female? I see you are. Okay, I'll say this once. Listen and try to understand.

My name is Tanya Trains-Her-Cubs-Right. I am nurturing and gentle — I try to be kind — but I follow the She-Bear totem, Ursa Major, mother of the First Cub. It is in my nature to be caring and protective, but I am *fiercely* protective. A mother doesn't prepare her children for life by being too gentle; she pushes them to achieve all that they can. She stands behind them, ready to catch them should they fall, but at some point, she has to step back and let them stand on their own.

So, I say to you: What do you know about being Gurahl? You've heard our history, and maybe you've developed some preliminary opinions, but do you know why we mainly travel alone? What happens at our meetings? Must you defend your chosen territory from other Gurahl? How about from other Chang-

ing Breeds? What makes the River Keepers different from the Mountain Guardians? And what do you plan to do when winter's cold makes you so sleepy you can hardly keep your eyes open?

You see, you aren't prepared. My question wasn't so cruel after all. Sit down next to me. I don't bite unless you fall asleep while I'm talking. I'll tell you the answers to many of those questions and maybe, when the Council of Autumn comes, you'll be ready to tell the elders who you are.

Now, since I barked at you before and you want some reassurance that I can be the motherly kind, I'll start by telling you a story.

### *Why the Bears Don't Live Together*

A long, long time ago when Gaia made all the places on the Earth and all the animals to live in them, She asked each kind which place they'd like most. First Bastet gracefully moved forward and looked at Gaia with her slanted, slitted eyes. "My kind loves both sun and moon," she purred. "Anywhere warm where we may slink beneath the moon when She is present is fine with us. Of course, we prefer interesting places...." So Gaia granted Bastet a place in the

jungles and the savannas and among the high mountains where her people could find what they wanted.

Next Corax swept forward. "We need places to build our nests," he cawed, "But we like spots where we can see what's going on. And where there's plenty of food — carrion would be best. Oh, yes, and don't forget the pretty-shinies!" Gaia smiled and gave them places near corn fields and in forests near human habitations where there was lots of room for nests and plenty of fodder for gossip.

Then Garou stalked forward, growling. "We need forests in which to run and hunt, and hills where we can build our dens. We need plains nearby filled with prey beasts for those times when hunting is lean. We want clean water and room enough for our people to grow and spread out across the land in our packs. Forests and mountains and hills and plains. That ought to do it!" And Gaia gave them what they asked for, though She looked a little sorry to hear their greed.

Rokea's skin was itching, and he thought he'd like to live in the deeps, far away from the dry, oppressive glare of the sun. Mokolé also wanted water, but she liked sun as well, so she asked for rivers with nice embankments nearby where she could sun herself. Gaia gave Her blessing to each.

Ratkin wanted some place where he could remain hidden, but from which he could emerge to sneak around and make off with choice tidbits from other people's tables. Ajaba laughed and said she'd take some place where she could grab the lion's share when he wasn't looking. Ananasi wisely asked for hidden places to spin her webs. Again, Gaia assented.

Nagah asked for the bottoms of rivers in a jungle setting, hissing out that her place should not be confused with that of any other. Nuwisha fell over laughing when Gaia asked him his preference and finally answered, "I don't care, so long as it's interesting — both for my people and for those who must live near us." Gaia smiled and agreed.

Then She looked around and realized that Gurahl was not there. She sent Nuwisha to awaken Her slumbering child (which he did by tickling Gurahl's feet with one of Corax's feathers). At last, when the sleepy werebear stood before his mother, he realized that most of the places had been taken. He thought and he thought, wondering where on the Earth there might be a place for him... and at last he had an idea.

"Mother," he yawned, "Since I am often sleepy, especially in winter time, could I be granted a cave where I can curl up and be cozy until spring thaws the Earth? In return, I renounce my people's claim to any other portion of your creation. Let our younger siblings have it all. So long as we have a cave to call our own, we will act as the protectors of all the other places and the creatures that live within them."

Gaia smiled to hear such wisdom from Her gentlest child, but then She asked, "Will caves be big enough to house you? You are not so small as Ratkin nor as agile as Bastet." And Gurahl answered, "Then let us each live alone."

And that has been the way of it among the Gurahl from that day to this, except among our polar cousins, and they weren't there when Gaia gave out living space; that's why they live on ice. And if you don't believe my story, you may ask the Great Mother Herself.

## Together

Not only do we usually live alone, we most often travel alone as well. The three exceptions to this are during the Gallivant, while we are mentoring a younger Gurahl and when we form groups to handle specific problems. Of course, none of

this necessarily counts for the Ice Stalkers. They're fey folk in more ways than one, and they don't follow all the rules.

## The Gallivant

The first year or so after a young Gurahl undergoes her First Change is critical. A few younglings are marked by elder werebears who expect them to make the Change. They watch new cubs closely, eventually gathering each one into our fold. Each one then receives a Buri-Jaan who assumes responsibility for teaching the new Gurahl about herself, her true people and her place in the world.

Others must endure the Change alone. Soon after they Change, however, they either feel a call from another of their own kind to learn what they need to know or a desire to seek him out. You nod. You understand, then? You remember the dreams and visions that came to you? Well, some of those dreams were sent by your prospective Buri-Jaan. I understand a few even come from Gaia or Bear. Of course, it's not always clear exactly *who* sends the visions, but most fledgling Gurahl manage to travel where they need to be to meet with their mentors due to this tutelage.

An unlucky few seem to be blind to the visions and deaf to the call. They don't know themselves for what they truly are. Instead they cringe in fear and self-loathing at the monstrous thing they've become. Denying their heritage, they refuse Gaia's summons, most often sinking into insanity or a murderous killing spree that ends with their deaths. A few survive to become what we call Abandoned Cubs — but we'll speak of those poor creatures later.

Right now, you're a new cub, one of the lucky majority who accept their natures. Now you enter into a time of life known as the Gallivant. This is a time both of concentrated learning and carefree rambling. New Gurahl almost always start their existence under the Arcas auspice, governed by the spirit of Little Bear or First Cub. As such, it is your time to be curious, childish, playful and funny while still picking up knowledge of who and what you are. In essence, it's an extended romp under the light-handed guidance of an elder mentor, much like a mother bear instructs her cub using play as a teaching aid. Being Arcas doesn't mean that you learn nothing serious — rather, you are allowed this joyful time to get to know Gaia's beauties and bounty so you'll know what it is you were born to protect and nurture. Enjoy it while you can, cub, because we can smell the charnel fires of the Apocalypse from here, and you have plenty of work ahead of you. Thank Gaia that we have time for you to experience a Gallivant at all.

But now I'm being frightening, eh? Well, hush and I'll be gentle again.

## The Buri-Jaan

Sometime after our first few years as Gurahl — usually after experiencing both the Arcas and Uzmati auspices — many of us are called to become Buri-Jaan. This word most closely means "mentor," but it also carries the connotations of parent, elder sibling and one who has achieved certain honors. It's quite rare for a werebear under the rank of Sorna to be trusted with mentorship. As a Buri-Jaan, an elder werebear accepts a newly Changed Gurahl and embarks on a year-long escapade with him,





during which she instructs him in the ways of the Gurahl and prepares him for his acceptance as a full member of his tribe.

Occasionally, she discovers that the period of teaching needs to extend to two years. This is not seen as a strike against either her teaching or her pupil's abilities; often it serves the purpose of preparing a young werebear for a particularly arduous task he will be called upon to perform. Such destinies may be revealed to either the Buri-Jaan or another elder who confers with the mentor as to the best course of instruction for her important pupil.

While the Buri-Jaan treats this responsibility with the utmost seriousness, she also usually finds a renewal of purpose and a return to almost childlike delight in Gaia's wonders as she enjoys the antics and discoveries of her pupil. For this reason, many Gurahl choose to give up protecting a specific area in order to serve as Buri-Jaan to young werebears year after year — this works best if there's a sept of Garou or other shapeshifters to look after your land. In some cases, where the need is great and there aren't enough mentors to go around (a rare occurrence until quite recently), a Buri-Jaan will take on two cubs. This devotion doubles her burden, but increases her potential amusement as well.

Don't give yourself airs if your own Gallivant lasts two years, young one. It may not portend any great deeds in your future — some younglings just can't get the hang of scooping honey from a nest. Yes, I'm kidding. Gurahl humor. I thought you were supposed to be Arcas...

### *Loners Versus Packs*

Bears — except polar bears (here we go singling out the Ice Stalkers again) — rarely travel together. A mother may travel

with her cubs while teaching them, but once they are grown, she sends them on their way. Mating is often a matter of meeting the right bear at the right time, spending a few, brief hours or days together, then separating again. Mother bears feel affection for their cubs and protect them fiercely, but there is no devotion among bears similar to that between wolf lifemates.

We tend to follow that same pattern. We walk alone in the areas we guard unless we're currently acting as mentors or have just given birth to a cub. We use a ritual that tells us who our optimal mate is, and it isn't always the same one as the last time!

Promiscuous? No, we're not. Another Changing Breed holds that distinction. Like Gaia's wild creatures, we choose the strongest and most healthy with whom to mate. This is the best way we know to ensure having hardy children. That's not promiscuity; it's survival.

While we often prefer solitude, many younger werebears find satisfaction through traveling in groups. Often such excursions (with other young Gurahl or with members of the other Changing Breeds) signal the first real freedom. Yes, you're able to make your own choices and mistakes without a nosy mentor poking his nose in to correct you. This may be a time of hanging out with other young creatures while waiting for maturity to catch up with you, at least among those still in their Arcas stage. These treks can be anything from carefree larks to semi-serious attempts to find worthy foes to challenge. Despite our penchant for going it alone, many lifelong friendships develop from forming a "pack."

Gurahl who have entered their Uzmati phase often have other reasons for banding together in a group. Some become vigilantes, bent on punishing those who defile Gaia's wild lands





and creatures. Others may need a small army to take on tougher foes. While such tasks usually don't occupy a particular Gurahl for longer than he remains an Uzmati, it never hurts to have allies one can call on in a pinch.

Though it is less common, older Gurahl may find it convenient to join groups as well. Kojubat may need support from others while searching for old songs and stories. Further, moving in the circles of the other Changers, our songmakers and talesingers learn their stories and hear their thoughts on the world. From such knowledge, they say, comes understanding of both others and ourselves. One of our best known Kojubat, Blackback Ferraday, has written a whole saga based on the tales he heard while a part of a mixed Changers band.

It should come as no surprise that the Kieh join others who have interest in the occult. They often delve into dangerous areas seeking fetishes or magical gear that might be too dangerous to be left unattended or in irresponsible hands. A Kieh's wisdom has been known to be the only thing to stand between an acquisitive Corax and some shiny trinket with enough destructive force to split a mountain or poison a forest.

Even the Rishi have their reasons for group interactions. They not only elucidate and interpret Gaia's laws for us, but for other Changers as well. Some laws cross species boundaries, and we are Gaia's first-born, after all. Hearing how other Changers handle their affairs helps us decide if we are still doing it right ourselves, and as those charged with keeping the peace among us, the Rishi need to understand the others so that peace is not lost in misunderstandings.

I know I've mostly spoken about banding together with either Gurahl or other Changing Breeds. That's because it is most common for us to interact with them or with our Kinfolk. A Gurahl can often travel with Kinfolk, both bear and human, in wilderness settings, but for obvious reasons, you'll have to leave the bear kin at home when visiting the city.

Far less common, but still possible, are the few times we have traveled with non-Kinfolk humans or with other... supernatural creatures. Don't let the elders tell you it never happens. Some of the fae — particularly those who take on animal form — can be immensely creative, and I have nothing against those magi who respect nature. Don't be too quick to judge, but don't act the fool either. Use your nose and examine your potential companions with a clear mind and a just heart. Those who aren't worthy usually show their true colors fairly quickly. I myself once briefly joined forces with one of the walking dead and an honorable Garou, if you can believe it! Perhaps I'll tell you the story someday, if you ask politely.

No, not right now. Don't distract me.

## *Alone*

As you've probably gathered by now, most Gurahl walk alone. We don't have the luxury of packs and septs full of companions ready to shoulder the burdens for us. Most often we have no support at all. When we put it on the line, we aren't risking anyone else but ourselves. That's why you most often find us in nurturing or healing roles. It just isn't very smart for a werebear to get involved in a fight if she doesn't have to.

Being alone doesn't mean we never meet others of our kind or other Change Children. We aren't that exclusive. When other

Gurahl enter our territory, we generally know it fairly quickly. We don't immediately rush out to give battle, but we don't always hurry out to greet them either. Smells and signs of foraging tell us fairly accurately where the other one is and what she's up to. If either of us wants to meet with the other, we can scratch out a message on a tree or follow our noses until we get close to the other Gurahl. Once in the neighborhood, so to speak, it's considered polite to sit down and ask permission to approach.

Other Changers are welcome depending on their type and what they want. Nuwisha and Corax are okay by me; even certain tribes of Garou are fine, so long as they aren't there to try to take over. Any of the others, I'd want to know what they were doing in my protected realm. Still, we rarely have a problem with those who just pass through, or even some of our kin who take up residence nearby. We just aren't territorial like the werewolves.

You know Gurahl are seriously angry though whenever we actually engage in battle, because we're our own army. Every one of us is forward scout, general, combat troops and medical corps all rolled into one being. Besides, it has to take a lot to motivate us to battle, because we know that if we get our asses kicked, there's nobody else to pick up the pieces.

That's the drawback to being alone, but there are advantages. Sometimes it's exhilarating to be on your own, the only large creature for miles. You can enjoy both the silences and sounds of Gaia's creation without having to politely acknowledge someone else's inane yapping and chattering. You can go where you want to go without having to consult a carload of friends who each need to make "just a short trip to the whatever" first. You make your own hours, getting up with the sun, going to bed with the moon. You don't have to dress if you don't feel like it. Finally, if there's something you have to do, you have the satisfaction of accomplishing it on your own. Likewise, if you fail, you've no one to blame but yourself.

Many of us become so accustomed to being alone that it's sometimes hard for us to return to our social sides. There are tales of Gurahl who upon meeting hikers or campers, turned and fled rather than having to remember how to speak the language. Personally, I think that's taking things a little too far. When you don't remember how to be human, you need to indulge in a little interaction. That either means joining a group, taking on the role of mentor, or attending a meeting. Of the choices, going to a meeting is probably the most nerve-jangling in the short run.

## *The Settled Among Us*

Now that you know without a doubt that we live alone and travel alone, I'm going to tell you about how much hogwash that is. Now don't get difficult. These are still exceptions to the rule, but many of us adopt this lifestyle for at least part of our lives. So don't feel like you have to be the Lone Ranger type all the time, because it just ain't so, paleface.

This next thing may be hard for you to understand, but here goes. Some of us do take lifemates. Not exclusive breeding partners, but bears or Kinfolk with whom we take up residence for a good portion of the time. This is something of a new thing for us, though it was once more common in ancient times. Back in those days, people (at least the ones we usually associated with) thought nothing of the strong hairy man who came home once

every few months to visit his wife and children or the bear-wife who traveled far from home and came back with a cub by her side. Things were different then.

During the years we went into hiding, that practice all but ceased. We dared not expose our Kinfolk to the Garou's claws by living with them or even visiting them openly. I guess you could say that the settled home life was based more on our human side than the bear instincts. After all these years, some of us are trying to revive the custom of keeping a normal home and devoting part of our time to our families, but during the intervening years, we've become accustomed to the ursine way of life.

Still, even though we aren't exclusive when it comes to mating, we care very deeply about our husbands and wives, and we make devoted parents. Many of us give up several years to remaining "human" in order to raise our non-Gurahl children. As our mates are invariably Kinfolk, they don't berate us when we decide to leave. They know as well as we do that we wouldn't go if someone else didn't need us more than they did.

While foreign to the ursine Gurahl who make up the majority of our numbers, this practice allows many of our homid siblings a stability that many of them find lacking in a solitary existence. Since they are more used to a settled home life, they respond better to having a home and family they can live with or visit when the mood strikes them. We have found, in fact, that more homid Gurahl are now being born among us, an occurrence that might be related to this lifestyle.

## *Meetings*

Several kinds of meetings attract our interest despite our rumored solo natures. Such meetings range from a chance encounter to organized get-togethers held with specific purposes in mind. Most of these types of meetings have been revitalized during the last century, as enough of us are now awake to make meetings of more than four Gurahl possible.

Sometimes.

## *Fests*

*Did you hear the one about the two werebears? They high-fived as they crossed paths on a barren mountain top, and they called it a wild revel.*

— Nuwisha witticism

Jokes aside, whenever two Gurahl meet, you have the makings of a fest. A small one, but a fest, nonetheless. Most often fests occur when a handful of Gurahl decide on a place and time to meet. We hold them for numerous reasons, and they can happen at almost any time. Sometimes, we just want a little company. Occasionally, we pass along news to those who patrol more remote areas. Most often, we look for opportunities to introduce our new cubs to others who can give them a different perspective. But there's almost always news to share in this world.

Sometimes fests are held in honor of events which have great impact on our Kinfolk, such as the salmon run (an absolute necessity for certain of our bear kins' survival) or to celebrate the harvest. Then we combine fishing or harvesting with talk, feasting and showing one another the creations we've been working on during the year. Fests become like miniature art fairs when that





happens. Some share stories or poems, others reveal the carvings they've been making. Everyone has something she's in the process of creating or a finished work to show off. Sometimes, we trade our handiwork for other items made by those talented in areas we lack. This necklace I wear was made by my friend Jeremy Nimble-talon. I gave him an embroidered belt in return.

Fests provide us with a chance to see friends we don't often meet, some much-needed relaxation (without the need for the more formal and ritualized behavior expected at Regalia or Council) and the opportunity to show off our talents. All but the most insular werebears love attending fests. They're a luxury we won't be able to afford forever.

## *Regalia (Tribal Gatherings)*

Each of our tribes hold meetings that most members try to attend if they can. All are held in late spring once we are assured that our bear kin are off to a good start for the year. We hold Regalia in hidden areas far from civilization to lessen the chance that clueless humans will unwittingly intrude. Gurahl come from far and wide to meet with others of the tribe and discuss problems we're all facing. For example, the River Keepers may hold long discussions, receive reports and make plans to deal with the pollution of rivers where salmon runs provide the tribe members and their bear kin with food. The Mountain Guardians may meet in regards to stopping clear-cutting in wilderness areas they call their own. Ice Stalkers may decide on the best course of action to stop seal hunting by everyone but native tribes so that their polar bear kin don't starve. Certainly, the failure of the white acorn

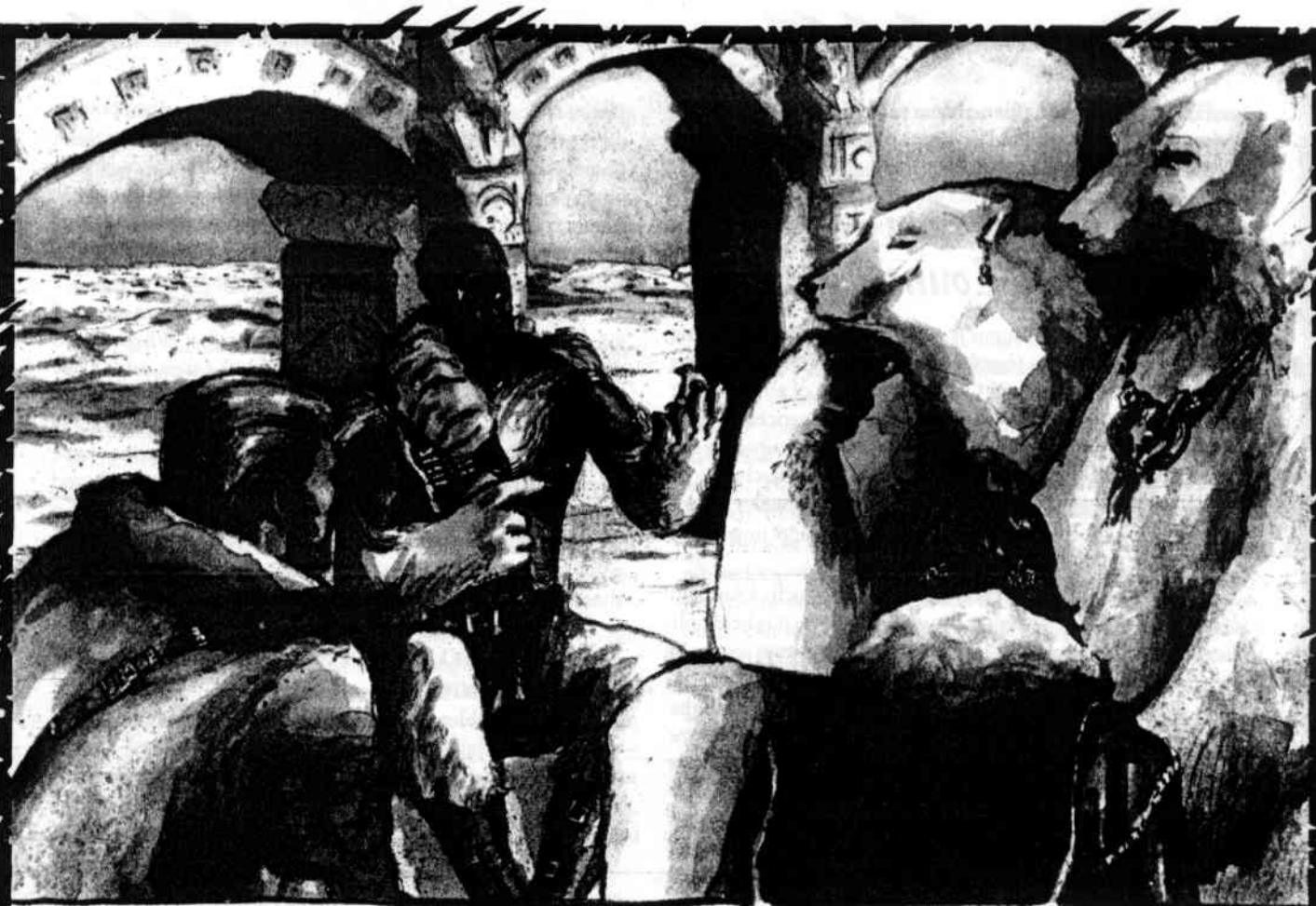
crop and how to supplement their black bear kin's diets will be of great concern to the Forest Walkers this year.

Regalia are formal affairs, with ritual and ceremony attached to everything from greeting one another properly to presenting arguments in council. At each Regalia, a leader (facilitator might be a better word since it lacks the connotation of having the final say in things) is chosen to oversee the next one. A few particularly charismatic folks are chosen more than once, but we generally share the burden fairly evenly.

Did I say burden? I meant "honor," of course. What do you mean, "Are you an Arcas?" Whatever gave you that idea? Listen to what I'm saying, or I'll make you chase your tail!

One of the most stirring spectacles during the Regalia is the tribal version of the Dance of Creation. You haven't really seen it until you've attended a Regalia and seen the costumes and facepaint of the participants. Each handmade costume carries the traditional colors in feathers, beadwork and embroidery, but each is an individual expression of its wearer. Facepaint is also governed by individual inspiration. Aside from the traditional patterns depicting earth, air, fire, water and spirit, the intricate designs convey the story of that particular Gurahl's life and deeds. Often, you can tell what rank another Gurahl is simply by looking at how ornate her dancing costume and paint are. Many choose to show their affinity for a chosen auspice by utilizing a particular color as the background hue in their regalia — yes, that's why we call the meeting by that name. White stands for Arcas, black for Uzmati, blue for Kojubat, red for Kieh and green for the Rishi. Got that?





We don't display our works during Regalia, but we often exchange gifts with special friends. In addition, during the mornings, many of our greatest crafters hold informal classes to teach their skills to others. First-year artworks by those who were presented as new cubs at last year's Council of Autumn are judged by older crafters who work in the same medium. While there is some amount of criticism involved, the usual intention is to encourage the younger artist and help her learn new techniques. Naturally, new talents in leatherworking, cloth dyeing, embroidery, feathering and beadwork are much sought after at this time.

Regalia is traditionally a festival of good cheer, and many of the elders continue on with their planning as if there were no other concerns. I'll tell you this, though: Many of us younger sorts, those born in this century, feel you can't ignore the opportunity to further our most serious duties at this time. The world is a very bad place right now, so you'll see some folks at Regalia who dance and exchange art and drink and laugh — but have shadows in their eyes, and talk quietly amongst themselves when the sun's far behind the horizon.

Aside from the more serious concerns of Regalia, we welcome this tribal gathering as a time to renew our ties with old friends and to meet new Kinfolk. Lots of rituals for finding the optimal mate are held during Regalia! It's a time of feasting, when each of us shows off her best new recipes — and let me give you a warning, young one — don't trust anything from old Uncle Ironjaw's table. He's our resident good-time Charlie with his peyote muffins and mushroom-cactus root tea. It'll have you dancing, all right.

## *Powwows (Intertribal Celebrations)*

Summer signals the time for powwows, where Gurahl from different tribes meet, feast, show off their best works and tell one another the epic story cycles of each tribe. There's usually a lot of music, but never any dancing; it's shameful to dance before the other tribes. Damn those that made it so, and the hell if I care saying so!

Although there are several powwows, each lasting a few days, most Gurahl attend only one or two during this time. No werebear has such a safe, easily protected area that she can afford to be away from it for several weekends.

That sounds a little like we have hundreds of us out there, doesn't it? Actually, a large powwow usually draws 10 to 20 Gurahl at most, along with a couple dozen Kinfolk. Smaller ones may top out at a dozen people; from what I heard, there were maybe four powwows in all the Americas last year. Four. Still, we enjoy one another's company, and we hope to increase as more of you new Gurahl are born.

Sometimes it seems like we know all the faces, even at gatherings far from our usual range. When that's not the case, powwows give us the chance to make friends with new members of other tribes, exchange viewpoints and learn less familiar stories. Although we all enjoy having a chance to gather together without needing to discuss serious matters, the ones who really thrive on powwows are the Ice Stalkers. They always seem to know instinctively which powwows will be the most fun, or

maybe they bring it with them. If you're planning on attending a midsummer revel, you could do worse than follow the white fur brigade headed toward a particular party.

## Council of Autumn (The Great Council)

The Council of Autumn is our most important gathering of the year. It too brings together all the tribes, but this time for serious purposes. The Great Council, made up of all the eldest from the four tribes holds sessions to hear grievances, rule on matters of import to all Gurahl and welcome new cubs into our society. Though all Gurahl are welcome, not all choose to meet. Some have no interest in making their views heard; others feel it is foolish for us to leave so many places unguarded to hold such an affair every year.

Unlike the powwows, everything at the Council of Autumn is governed by ritual. We enter the grounds where it is held only after undergoing a ritual cleansing, and then we always approach from the direction associated with our tribe. Ice Stalkers from the north, River Keepers from the south, Forest Walkers from the east, Mountain Guardians from the west. Each tribe claims territory within the meeting grounds in those quadrants and sets up living quarters to last for the duration of the Council.

By tradition, on the first night of the Council, the Ice Stalkers host the River Keepers at a feast while the Mountain Guardians welcome the Forest Walkers in the same manner.

No real business is conducted before the feasts.

When the meal is over, the new cubs from

all the tribes are sent into the central area of the encampment, where they undergo a further cleansing ritual to prepare them to meet their elders. Once all are ready, criers move through the camp summoning everyone into the cleared area of the Great Council Ring. The four chosen elders, each representing one tribe, welcome us all and officially open the Council of Autumn with the call to a song in praise of Gaia.

Each representative goes to a tribe that is not her own and asks a blessing over all members of that tribe. When that is done, we send up a roaring summons for the new cubs. They enter the center of the circle and stand before the chosen four. Each speaks her name and also names her Buri-Jaan, formally thanking her mentor for teaching her. Once the tribes have heard their names, the new cubs spread out across the circle and dance the Dance of the Centuries for the assembled tribes. This is both a great joy to us — to see our ways passed down to a new generation — and a terrible sadness, for we remember the shame that the humans inflicted on our kin.

When the dance is concluded, each cub is required to recite the Code of Ursa. After the recitation, the four chosen elders go to each new cub.

The first elder gives the cub a small cup of honey mead while saying, "I give you the fruit of Gaia's creation."

The second elder rakes her claws across the cub's bare arm, saying, "I give you the pain of the world, that you may feel the suffering of others."

The third elder places his hands over the new-made wounds, soothing them with healing balm while saying, "I give you the gift of healing. Use it wisely to cure the pains of others."



Finally, the fourth elder gives each cub a sprig of evergreen saying, "I give you this symbol of eternity. When all other trees are brown, it keeps its greenery. When lands are plowed under or burnt over, the first tree to return is the evergreen. Keep this and know who you are. Now you are Gurahl."

The whole camp rejoices and welcomes the new cubs into our midst. We tell songs and stories late into the night, and then we sleep.

Each succeeding night, a new tribe hosts a different one until all have been hosts to one another. During the days, the Council meets. Since we have no king and no tribal leaders beyond those whose rank accords them the courtesy of listening to them, the Council decides things by accord. If the majority of those present believe something to be a good idea, then we adopt that policy. Dissenters are given a year — until the next Council of Autumn — to come up with convincing arguments why we should not. After that time, if the majority still feel we should do whatever it is, we put the practice into effect.

Not everyone wants to attend Council; those who do not occupy their time with creating art, cooking for the feasts, caring for any cubs too young to be presented and sharing stories. Even this routine has the feel of ritual, however, for there are certain times set aside for performing these chores and recreations — mostly so that rambunctious singing or play cannot distract or disrupt the Council. When the Council is over, we all depart, each returning to our protected area revitalized and connected with others of our kind for another year.

## Great Grandparent's Summoning

This meeting is the rarest kind we have, and it happens only in the greatest emergencies. Should news reach the Great Grandparent of some terrible calamity that the werebears might avert or help fight, she mystically sends out a summons to all Gurahl — asleep or awake — to join her at a certain spot prepared to defend Gaia's creations. To the death if need be. When we receive the summons, we gather our healing paraphernalia, take up whatever weapons we have and answer.

There is no hanging back and assessing the situation. If a Great Grandparent calls, the event is both urgent and potentially deadly. The last summons came when the Storm Eater took shape and was loosed in the Umbra. The next, I fear, will be when the Final Battle itself begins.

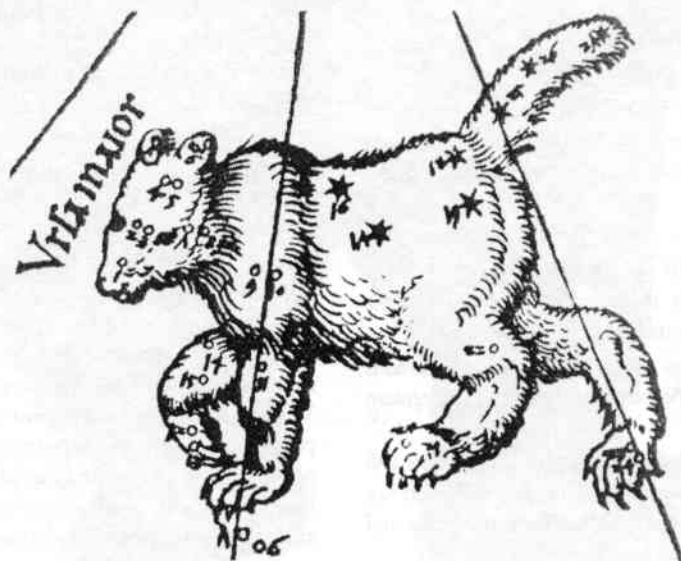
## Tribes

We Gurahl recognize four primary tribes, with a few localized offshoots or extinct groupings. Membership in a werebear tribe does not necessarily relate to a Gurahl's racial background or Kinfolk species; instead, it describes or acknowledges the individual's affinity with and dedication to a particular geographic feature. This preference manifests in the tribal names: River Keepers, Mountain Guardians, Forest Walkers, Ice Stalkers.

Because there are so few Gurahl in the world today, tribal affiliations often come about out of necessity rather than by predetermined conditions such as ethnic heritage or place of birth. Our most generous speculations put the total werebear population (not counting those still sleeping in the Umbra or in hidden Dens) at somewhere around 200 — less than any single Garou tribe. For this reason, new cubs tend to gravitate toward the tribe that needs them most and for which they feel the strongest kinship. This fluidity provides us with both advantages and disadvantages.

On the plus side, we stand a reasonable chance of keeping the tribes we have from dying out, like some of the forgotten Gurahl tribes. If the Mountain Guardians need bolstering, the chances are good that some young werebear will discover that he belongs with the Guardians. On the minus side, we don't have the strong sense of tribal identity of other Changing Breeds such as the Garou or the Bastet. Of course, when you come to think about it, our lack of cliquishness may not be such a disadvantage after all.

So, here are the four main tribes of Gurahl — who they are, where they live, where they come from and what they do. I can't vouch that everything I say about each tribe is absolutely accurate or unbiased, but I hope I can give you a clear picture of each group.





# Forest Walkers

## The Forest Walkers' Legend

The Gurahl who call themselves Forest Walkers like to tell this story about their purpose in Gaia's scheme of things. Listen...

When the Gurahl arrived in the Pure Lands, some sought the rivers or mountains. Some Gurahl, however, found homes in the great forests that blanketed the New World, taking endless delight in exploring the leafy fortresses that provided shelter from the weather and supplied a wide variety of fruits, nuts, grubs and other tasty morsels. The humans who accompanied these forest-bound Gurahl settled just outside the forest, while the bear-folk made their homes within the forests' depths.

Pretty soon, the Gurahl of the forest noticed that their bear-kin were undergoing a transformation, growing smaller and darker with each generation until many of them became completely black.

"Why is this happening?" the forest Gurahl asked the bears.

"For protection," the bears answered.

At the same time, the Gurahl perceived that the humans seldom came into the forest anymore, even to hunt or gather berries.

"Why is this happening?" the forest Gurahl asked the humans.

"For protection," the humans answered.

"Protection from what?" the Gurahl asked both humans and bears.

"From the killing shadows that hide beneath the forest floor and lurk high in the branches of the tallest, darkest trees," both humans and bears answered as one.

The oldest and wisest of the forest Gurahl, a venerable Rishi named Kari Woodsinger, decided to get to the bottom of the danger that threatened those who dwelled in and around the forests. She summoned all the werebears who cherished the woodlands to a council and gave them their marching orders. By ones and twos and, sometimes by threes, she sent them out to explore every tree, every cave and every hidden place within the forests of the Pure Lands.

For seven cycles of the seasons, the Gurahl tramped through the forests. In most places, they found nothing unusual. In other places, however, the Gurahl discovered nests and hives of monstrous creatures, misshapen and Bane-ridden. For seven more cycles, battles raged throughout the woodlands, as the Gurahl fought the horrors that had secretly terrorized the humans and bears under Gaia's protection.

Finally, though at great cost to the Gurahl of the forest, the creatures of the Pattern Breaker fell to the werebears' onslaught.

"We have driven away the shadows," the Gurahl told the humans and the bears. "The forests belong to you once again."

"What if these hideous things return?" the bears and humans wanted to know. "How can we be sure that the forests will remain safe for us?"

Kari Woodsinger answered with this reply: "The forests will stay safe because we will make certain that the foul things do not return. From this time onward, we will walk the forest paths and

drive away anything that does not belong there." She looked at the bears and smiled. "Your smaller size and dark color suit you well, little brothers and sisters," she said. "From now on, the forests will belong to the black bears, for that is how you will be known." Kari then turned her attention to the humans. "The forest will once again provide you with meat and other foods," she said, "but we will teach you to walk soundlessly within the woods, so that you need not fear that your noisy steps will attract the attention of those who might do you harm."

From that time onward, the Gurahl who cleansed the forests of their malignant shadows took the name Forest Walkers, to remind them of their duty.

## Tribal Background

More than any other Gurahl tribe did, the Forest Walkers had their origins in the Pure Lands. Though some of them lived in the great forests of the Pacific Northwest, the majority of them settled in the eastern woodlands of North America as well as in the rainforests of Central America and Mexico. Wherever they set up residence and staked out lands to protect, the Forest Walkers involved themselves intimately with the lives of their human and bear Kinfolk, teaching them all manner of skills that enabled them to prosper in their woodland homes.

With the coming of the Europeans, the Forest Walkers and their Native American Kinfolk suffered the earliest onslaught of European expansion. Some Forest Walkers joined the Croatan in sacrificing themselves to banish Eater-of-Souls from the Pure Lands. The Walkers worked alongside the Ukena Garou to protect both Gurahl and Garou Kinfolk from the American troops who came to relocate them in the 1800s. In some cases, the Forest Walkers placed their Kinfolk in hibernation within the Umbra, enabling them to escape notice and re-emerge after the initial wave forced migrations. A few Forest Walkers accompanied their Cherokee kin on the Trail of Tears, helping to ease the suffering of that long and tortuous march to "Indian Territory."

Many of the Walkers grew disheartened at the damage done to the Pure Land by the European settlers. Like so many Gurahl, they withdrew into their Dens and blocked out the tides of "progress" that flooded the lands they had worked so hard to cleanse.

In recent years, the Forest Walkers have returned to a world bereft of most of their Kinfolk. They now work hard at revitalizing their breeding stock and recouping their losses. Walkers have involved themselves in human affairs whenever possible, though they try not to call attention to their presence, preferring — like most Gurahl — to act behind the scenes. Participating in civil rights and Indian rights movements, aiding in environmental restoration programs and working to

restore the black bear population has brought the Forest Walkers into contact with many humans and other Changing Breeds, breaking a centuries-long pattern of isolationism. Like other Gurahl, the Forest Walkers prepare for the Apocalypse, but do so in their own way, by collecting as many stories as possible in the hopes that some of them may contain information that will prove useful in defeating the Wyrms' armies.

## Home Territories

The most versatile of the Gurahl in terms of their habitat, the Forest Walkers range across the breadth of the United States as well as into Mexico and parts of Canada. They have introduced themselves into the diminishing forests of Europe, and they have also traveled to the rainforests of South America and Africa, hoping to make alliances with the local Changing Breeds (primarily the Bastet) in the hopes of acquiring new Kinfolk to bolster their ranks. Finally, they are making tentative efforts to enter Asia and begin breeding with the native bears there such as the spectacled bear, but they are stymied by the inexplicable clannishness of the native hengeyokai, who seem to prefer the company of Eastern Garou to that of Western Gurahl.

## Culture and Kinfolk

The black bears of North America form the backbone of the Forest Walkers' ursine Kinfolk network, but the Walkers also draw members from grizzly, brown and polar bear stock. In South America, the spectacled bears have provided the Walkers with a few precious Gurahl — harbingers of a new lease on breeding stock or else the last contributions of a dying species.

While homid Forest Walkers used to come almost exclusively from Native American Kinfolk families, in the 20th century, the Walkers have embraced African-Americans, Hispanic and European ethnic groups, drawing on the available human population as resources for the future. Though not native to the rest of the world, the Forest Walkers have recently begun to travel to Europe and Asia in the hope of increasing their numbers before it is too late.

More so than any other Gurahl tribe, the Forest Walkers cherish storytelling as the supreme form of artistry, as well as a prime source of collecting and dispersing information and cultural identity. Nothing pleases a Forest Walker more than gathering together a few master storytellers and sharing tales with one another. In fact, the highlight of any council of Forest Walkers is the storytelling "olio," in which each participant tells his or her favorite tale. Storytelling competitions serve as occasions for awarding Renown among the Walkers. Stories, in fact, serve as ways to teach younger Walkers the ways of the Gurahl and the traditions and ceremonies of the tribe. In the Gurahl dialect spoken by the Forest Walkers among themselves, the word "Buri-Jaan" translates as "Giver of Stories."



## Tribal Organization

Unlike the River Keepers and Mountain Guardians, Forest Walkers tend to form small groups (usually two or three individuals) for mutual support. They regularly attend council meetings and powwows, since they enjoy the chance to tell their stories and learn new ones. As with other Gurahl, Forest Walkers revere their elders and heed their advice while still maintaining an independence of action.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Storytelling Expertise:** Forest Walkers grow up on stories and develop a facility for remembering and telling stories. They begin with a free dot of Performance (emphasis on storytelling).

- **Easily Distracted by Tales:** The lure of a good story has led many Forest Walkers away from more immediate and important pursuits. Only a concerted effort of will can keep a Forest Walker from veering from a chosen course of action when confronted by the possibility of an intriguing new story or a new version of a beloved fable — or a deed that might make a fascinating new saga if the Gurahl survives it....

## Appearance

Most ursine Forest Walkers resemble their bear parent in their natural form. When they take Homid form, they appear

## Stereotypes

- **Ice Stalkers:** We don't see enough of our northern brothers and sisters. Any chance we get to trade stories with them and share information is grounds for celebration.

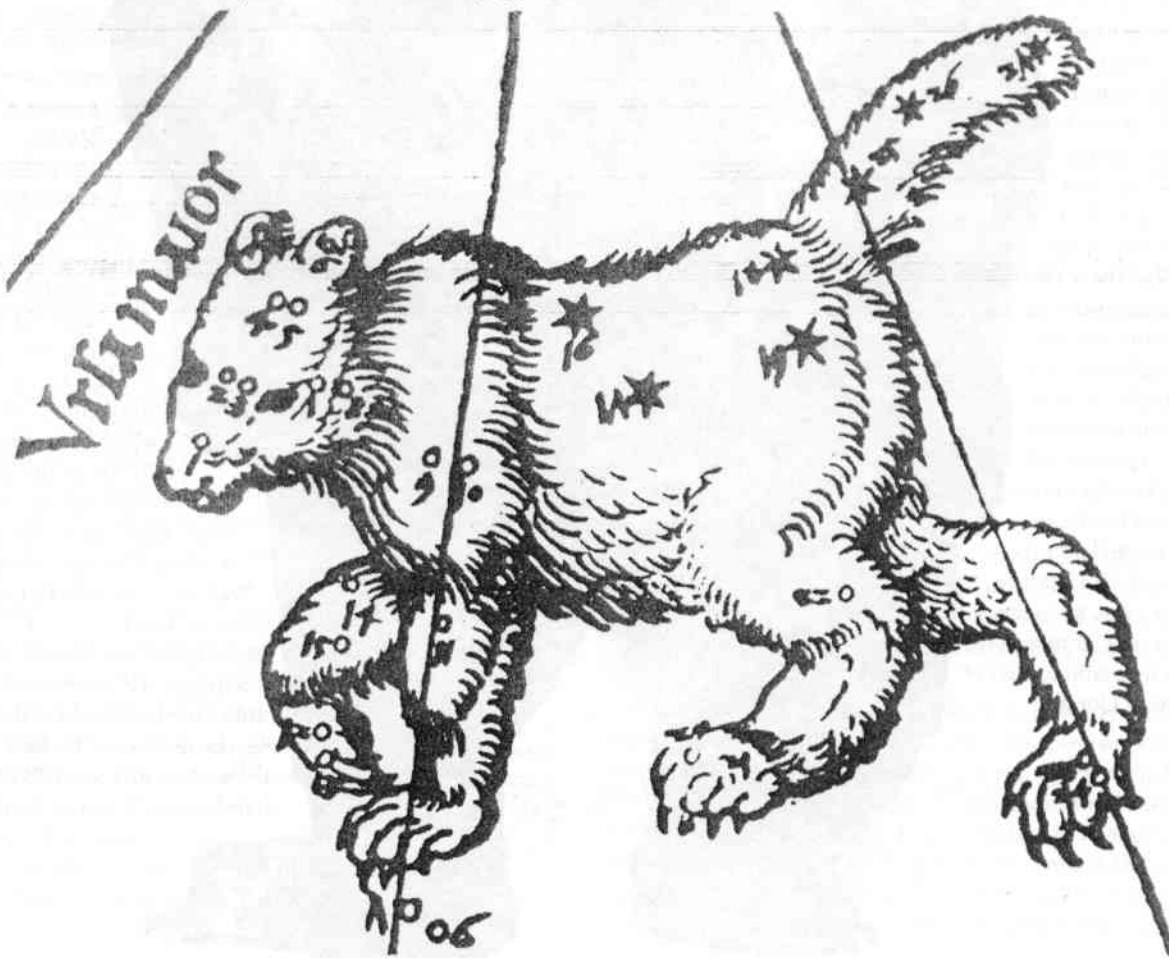
- **Mountain Guardians:** Sometimes the Guardians play a little too rough for our tastes. We don't shirk from a fight when one is necessary, but these bears define "macho," male and female alike!

- **River Keepers:** We think they don't know how to enjoy themselves. Their dignity too often gets in their way. Otherwise, they make good allies and enjoy our stories.

as small, stocky individuals, usually with black, dark brown or auburn hair and features copied from the local human population. Homid Forest Walkers come in all colors and ethnic variations, but most of them retain a smaller-than-average (for a werebear) size. The ursine form of human-born Walkers usually resembles the black bear so often associated with them.

## Quote

*If a tree falls in the forest, you can be sure that one of us will hear its death cry and avenge it.*





# Ice Stalkers

## Song of the Ice Stalkers

Ice Stalkers often tell this story at the beginning of winter, when the endless night that claims their frozen lands for half the year brings about thoughts of darker times. Hush, listen and remember how the Stalkers' greatest work of art saved the Gurahl from total annihilation.

The War of Rage was going badly for Mother Bear's children. Hounded on every side by their treacherous near-kin, the Garou, Gaia's first-born cried out to Ursa and the Great Mother for delivery. As if in answer to their pleas, many Gurahl had dreams and visions of a vast new land that lay just beyond the rising sun. A wide stretch of icy water separated that haven from the rest of the world, however, and the Children of Bear despaired of reaching it. Nevertheless, they trusted in their visions and set out, along with their Kinfolk — and a few Garou who, like them, were sick of fighting — to find the way to safety.

When the Gurahl finally reached the shore, they took one look at the expanse of dark, choppy waters laden with treacherous ice floes and lost faith.

"How will we reach this place that Gaia has promised us? If we try to cross the icy water, we will die of cold long before we drown."

It was then that Sedna Stalks-the-Glacier, a Kojubat Gurahl known for her love of winter and her talent for crafting images made of snow, felt the loving caress of Ursa's paw within her spirit. "I know a way," she said, "but it will take all of you to help me bring something wonderful into being."

Her confidence inspired her companions and they listened to her directions. With one heart, they began to build. As they labored, Sedna sang to the ice and snow:

Grow strong and hard, find the spirit of stone within your substance

Ice and snow, become as sturdy stone.

Her song calmed and fortified the icy chunks and mounds of snow. Slowly, steadily, a bridge took shape. Sedna looked at the rushing waters, and knew that unless they grew smooth and calm, the new creation would collapse from the onslaught of the waves. Again she sang, this time to the water:

Ease your troubled fury, find the spirit of ice within your substance

Raging water, become as glassy ice.

At the sound of her voice, the water grew calm and still, making a gentle murmur as the bridge of ice arose above it. With renewed hopes, the Gurahl continued their labor. The bridge grew longer and wider, and the refugees of the War of Rage took their first tentative steps onto the bridge, following in the footsteps of its builders. Some Gurahl had second thoughts about the precariousness of their situation, spreading their fear among the humans and bears who traveled with them. Sedna sang the third part of her song to her brothers and sisters:

Grasp your dreams, find the spirit of the stalker within your substance

Beloved brothers and sisters, become as bold stalkers.

Encouraged by Sedna's song, the first Gurahl to cross the bridge from their old world to the Pure Lands took the name of Ice Stalkers, to remind them of their journey and of the singer whose music led them to safety and to a new home.

## Tribal Background

Much of the history of the Ice Stalkers lies frozen in silence, buried in the heavy cracks of the frozen centuries and hidden under the layers of snow that cover their icy homeland.

Born in the northernmost parts of the habitable world, the Ice Stalkers jealously guarded their stark and awe-inspiring home from the Wyrms' corruption. Some Gurahl believe the Stalkers called down the ice in the earliest times to freeze the creatures of the Pattern Breaker into immobility, making them easy prey for the werebears who hunted them and bound them. Rumors persist that beneath the frozen waters of the Arctic, Wyrms-creatures lie imprisoned in impenetrable fortresses of ice.

Those who assert that the Gurahl brought the Ice Age upon the world may not be far from the truth; the Stalkers grow silent whenever anyone suggests that they might have summoned the great walls of moving ice as a means of cleansing the earth and making the marks of the Wyrms more easily traceable against the barren whiteness of ice and snow.

The Ice Stalkers were some of the first Gurahl to travel across the land bridge (actually an ice bridge) to the Pure Lands. Finding the land not so different from the icy regions of Siberia and northern Russia, they liked what they saw and decided to go no further than the glorious frozen lands that looked so much like home.

Though the Ice Stalkers remained apart from most of early human history, they served essential roles among the Inuit and Aleut tribes of the North American Arctic as well as the Yupik peoples of Siberia. Their primary concern focused on their polar bear kin, however, strengthening the species and overseeing the balance of nature in the far north. The Stalkers kept a careful eye on the Wendigo Garou, their closest neighbors among the Changing Breeds, staying out of the paths of the fierce werewolves as much as possible and ceding to them large portions of the polar regions. Occasionally, an Ice Stalker traveled south, usually to meet with Gurahl from other tribes; thus, the Stalkers did not remain ignorant of the course of history. Their most frequent contact with humans other than the tribes that lived in the polar regions consisted of encounters with seafaring hunters, who braved the icy waters of the

northern seas to hunt the great whales, seals and sea lions for their meat and skins. These confrontations often ended badly for the humans.

Later, as whalers and other sea-going hunters developed more sophisticated hunting methods and sturdier boats, the Stalkers sometimes met their match — and the animals of the northern ice suffered as a result.

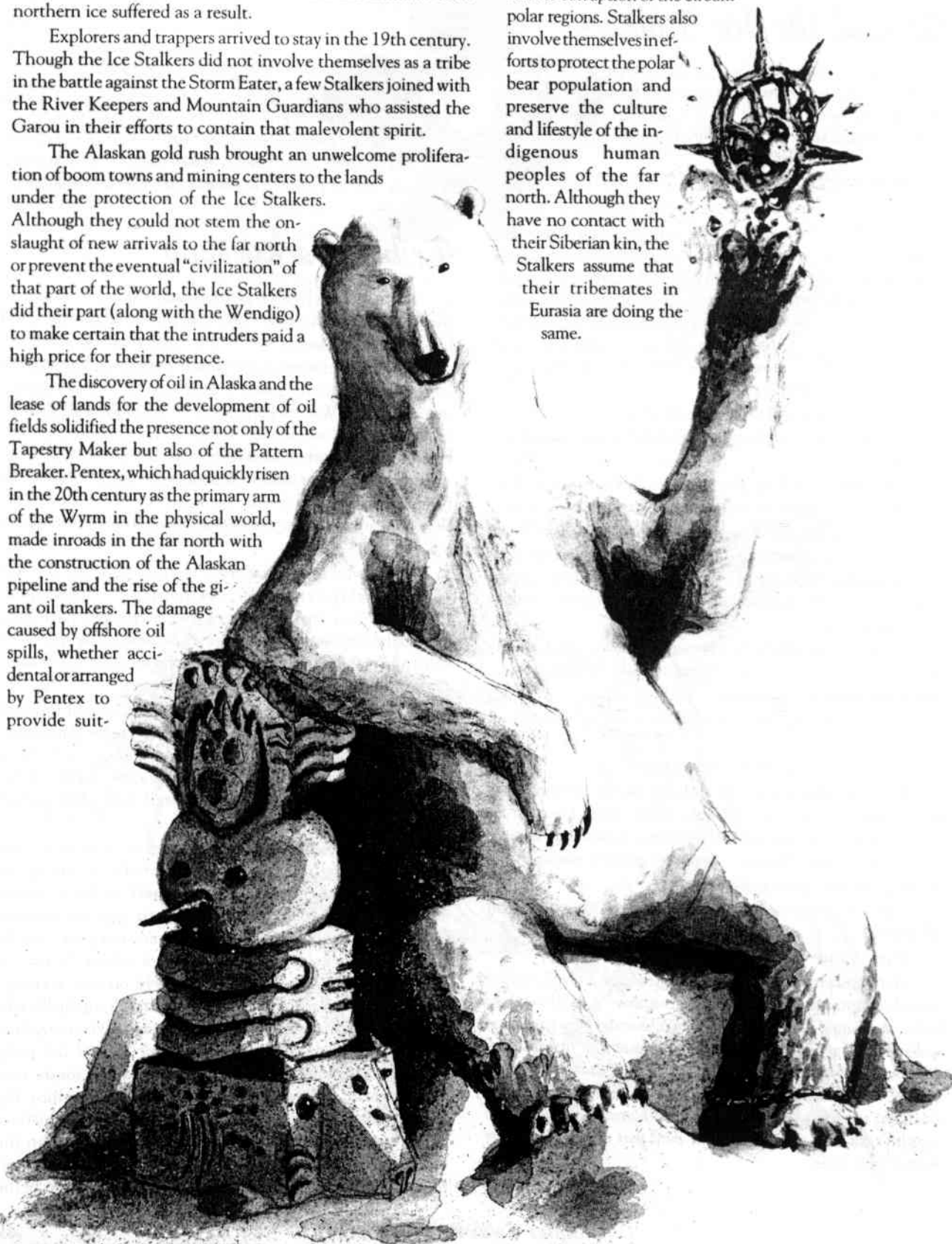
Explorers and trappers arrived to stay in the 19th century. Though the Ice Stalkers did not involve themselves as a tribe in the battle against the Storm Eater, a few Stalkers joined with the River Keepers and Mountain Guardians who assisted the Garou in their efforts to contain that malevolent spirit.

The Alaskan gold rush brought an unwelcome proliferation of boom towns and mining centers to the lands under the protection of the Ice Stalkers. Although they could not stem the onslaught of new arrivals to the far north or prevent the eventual "civilization" of that part of the world, the Ice Stalkers did their part (along with the Wendigo) to make certain that the intruders paid a high price for their presence.

The discovery of oil in Alaska and the lease of lands for the development of oil fields solidified the presence not only of the Tapestry Maker but also of the Pattern Breaker. Pentex, which had quickly risen in the 20th century as the primary arm of the Wyrms in the physical world, made inroads in the far north with the construction of the Alaskan pipeline and the rise of the giant oil tankers. The damage caused by offshore oil spills, whether accidental or arranged by Pentex to provide suit-

able habitats for the Wyrms' creatures, roused the Stalkers to new heights of Rage. The wrath of the Ice Stalkers soon came to equal that of the Wendigo in both intensity and violence.

Today, the Ice Stalkers work furiously to repair the damage caused by human and supernatural opportunists, and to prevent further corruption of the circumpolar regions. Stalkers also involve themselves in efforts to protect the polar bear population and preserve the culture and lifestyle of the indigenous human peoples of the far north. Although they have no contact with their Siberian kin, the Stalkers assume that their tribemates in Eurasia are doing the same.



Some Ice Stalkers believe that the first battle of the Apocalypse will take place on the periphery of civilization in the deceptive and forbidding lands of the frozen north. If that happens, the Stalkers plan to be the first to meet the Wyrms' armies.

## Home Territories

The circumpolar regions of the far north make up the harsh and demanding homelands of the Ice Stalkers. Lately, the Stalkers have tried to expand their territories to the warmer climes of Canada and Scandinavia. One or two daring members of the Stalkers have visited Antarctica in hopes of learning what lies buried beneath the ice there, but they have made no attempt to transfer any of their Kinfolk to the southern polar regions.

## Culture and Kinfolk

The Ice Stalkers have the most homogeneous breeding stock of any of the Gurahl. Most of their ursine Kinfolk come from the polar bears, although occasionally a brown bear or grizzly's cub grows to join the Ice Stalkers. Human Kinfolk, while still primarily drawn from the Inuit and other tribes of the far north, now come from many different ethnic groups as the Stalkers, like the other Gurahl tribes, try to grow more numerous. Currently, most Ice Stalkers come from ursine Kinfolk.

The cultural lives of the Ice Stalkers reflect their isolated existence in a land composed of ice, snow, glaciers, frozen waters and still more ice. The Stalkers excel at hunting and ice fishing. Although the Stalkers are technically omnivores, capable of eating most kinds of food, the scarcity of fruits, grains and vegetables in the Arctic forces them to take most of their nourishment from animal flesh.

Stalkers, like their polar bear kin, have highly inquisitive natures and a tendency to engage in aggressively impulsive behavior. They anger quickly, and they find many ingenious ways to express their resentment or dislike. Their curiosity seems to have no limits, and often they poke their noses into anything that piques their interest, regardless of the consequences. They make good gossips and informants, since they greet every person they meet with a thousand impertinent questions and don't give up until they have gotten the answers. One of their own stories explains how the Stalkers got their inquisitiveness — along with their impulse to share their discoveries — from an encounter with Raven. The tales are ambiguous as to whether Raven cursed them or blessed them with this quality. Their curiosity sometimes gets the Stalkers into trouble, such as when their enthusiasm over some new discovery leads to a sudden shift into Ursus or Bjornen form in order to unearth some buried object without making certain that there are no humans nearby to witness their transformation. They rely too heavily on the Delirium and on the human knack for rationalizing away the miraculous or the supernatural to protect them — which doesn't always work.

The Ice Stalkers have developed a strong artistic streak, even more than most Gurahl. Accustomed to wasting nothing, the Stalkers fashion intricate jewelry or useful items from the tusks and bones of the animals they kill for food. Their scrimshaw

work brings them great Renown at powwows and festivals. Many Stalkers create art from their environment, sculpting ice or building huge snow statues in the frozen wastes.

## Tribal Organization

More so than most Gurahl, the Ice Stalkers gather in groups, sometimes with as many as four or five Stalkers making up a semi-permanent "family unit." Frequently, an Ice Stalker Buri-Jaan keeps her cubs with her for two or three years, to make certain that the new Gurahl know how to survive in the treacherous Arctic lands. They congregate more than any other tribe.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Artistic Ability:** The Ice Stalkers have an innate talent for making beautiful things. They receive a free dot in Crafts at character creation.

- **Insatiable Curiosity:** When confronted by a puzzle or enigma, Stalkers have a hard time resisting the urge to investigate it further. This penchant for distraction can pose a problem when more important matters require their immediate attention.

## Appearance

Most Stalkers come from polar bear stock and resemble their ursine parent; those who come from other bear species, of course, have the natural form of that type of bear. In Homid form, ursine Stalkers generally take on the appearance of the native human tribes of the far north. Human-born Stalkers look like their Kinfolk; most come from Inuit or Aleut parentage, though occasionally a Stalker's Nordic or Slavic features testify to some other ethnic heritage. The Ursine form of homid Stalkers most often resembles the polar bear.

## Quote

*How can you look on the never-ending play of light and darkness that transforms snow and ice into miracles of artistic beauty and claim that we live in a barren land? Are you blind?*

## Stereotypes

- **Forest Walkers:** Their stories of the woodlands fascinate us. Their sociable temperament mirrors our own, and their stories help us pass the long winter nights.

- **Mountain Guardians:** The Guardians' tempers are even shorter than our own. We enjoy meeting with them and challenging them to ice-fishing contests, where we stand a fair chance of winning. Of course, it doesn't pay to best them too often.

- **River Keepers:** They seem to disapprove of our curious natures, but we think they don't ask enough questions. They make good fishing companions, and they are formidable allies in battle.



# Mountain Guardians

## Story of the Mountain Guardians

Mountain Guardians tell this story of our beginnings. Other Gurahl regard it with skepticism, but don't dare say so to our faces. At any rate, it's a good story and it goes like this...

Unlike the Gurahl who crossed the land bridge into the Pure Lands so long ago, we had our origin on the North American continent. The wolves, bears, humans and Garou who made the difficult passage to a new and supposedly untouched land immediately began to spread out all over the place, naming and claiming everything they saw. The Gurahl, however, reacted differently. They took one look around and realized that their numbers were far too small for them to protect and nurture this vast new territory. Like the Garou, Ursa's children sensed the presence of the Wyrms beneath the surface of the Pure Lands, and they realized that it would take a new kind of Gurahl to drive out or destroy the servants of the Pattern Breaker.

The Gurahl searched far and wide to find a model for the new creature they would form. Finally, one Gurahl, a Kieh known as Slowfoot Groundshaker, thought to look up — and there he saw what he needed. Towering above his head, almost touching the vault of the sky, loomed the great western mountain ranges.

"We must become like the mountains," he declared. "But how?" He placed himself into a long sleep to dream the answer to his question.

The world turned a few more times before Slowfoot Groundshaker received a vision of what had to be done that woke him from his slumber. While the rest of the Gurahl, who by now called themselves River Keepers, traveled toward the river valleys of the Pure Land, Slowfoot and a handful of companions who shared his vision set out to scale the treacherous and unforgiving peaks of the Rockies and the Cascades. At each mountain top they crested, one of the Gurahl entered the Umbra and sacrificed a part of his or her body to the spirits of the mountain before going to sleep for the night. (Yes, I know you must wonder how one who had just severed her hand or foot could fall asleep while consumed with great pain, but this is how the story goes, so accept that it happened!) Upon waking, the maimed Gurahl discovered that the severed part had regenerated. Furthermore, in the place where the sacrificed hand or foot had been laid as an offering, a new bear stood, heavy with cub, waiting for someone to lead it back into the world.

These were the first grizzly bears, and now you know why their name sounds so gruesome.

By the time Slowfoot and his fellow Gurahl had completed their task, they had exhausted themselves with the pain they had suffered over and over again. Many of them sought out Dens in the sides of the mountains they had climbed and entered a long period of sleep. The grizzly bears, however, settled in along the mountains. Many of their cubs, magically conceived in the Umbra, became Gurahl, similar to the River Keepers, but different in subtle ways. These new Gurahl — the first Mountain Guardians — bore within them the fierceness of the jagged mountain peaks and the inner strength that

comes from enduring great pain. The molten fury that lay within the hearts of many mountains burned in their breasts, teaching them the ways of the warrior. When the new Mountain Guardians bred with the humans of the Pure Lands, claiming some of them as Kinfolk, they chose the fiercest and strongest ones to father or bear their children. This is why the Mountain Guardians, unlike many other Gurahl, do not hesitate to join in battle and so often prove successful when they do. We carry inside us the strength and anger of the mountains who helped in our birth. And so ends my story.

## Tribal Background

The early history of the Mountain Guardians parallels that of the Pure Lands, for they had their beginning only after the Gurahl crossed the land bridge into the Americas, seeking to escape the excesses of the War of Rage. The Garou who traveled to the Pure Lands — the Uktena, Croatan and Wendigo — also felt the need to declare an end to hostilities, and while relations between werebears and werewolves never reached the point of intimacy, the Gurahl and Garou of pre-Columbian America made an effort to coexist for the good of the land they claimed as their own. In the lands where the Wendigo held sway, the Guardians walked carefully, lest they provoke the werewolves to anger. Nevertheless, among the Inuit, Athapascan and Salish peoples of the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, the Guardians served as shamans and wisdom keepers. The Guardians enjoyed a greater sense of cooperation and coexistence with the Uktena and the Bastet tribes that inhabited the American West. Relations with the human tribes prospered as the Native Americans honored the Children of Bear and Wolf (among other totems) and often accepted the presence of shapechangers in their midst as evidence of the attention of the Great Spirit.

While the three Garou tribes of America labored to contain the Wyrms and bind its minions into sturdy prisons, the Guardians assisted by offering healing or spiritual resources and by scouring their chosen mountain territories for remaining traces of Wyrms-taint. For many centuries, it seemed as if the spirit of the Pure Lands had arisen to enfold human, animal and Changing Breeds in a harmonious accord.

Despite the general absence of hostilities between the Garou and the Gurahl, the Guardians — like their River Keeper brothers — found it expedient to spend much of their time in seclusion or hibernation. Better not to tempt fate, they thought.

Then the Europeans came, and with them arrived the Garou most directly responsible for the War of Rage. Sensing trouble in the making, the Guardians (along with the other Gurahl in the New World) withdrew en masse. This proved a costly mistake for the Guardians and for their Kinfolk.

The war between the European and American Garou ran its course behind the scenes of the unfolding of the "taming" of the

American West. The loosing of the Storm Eater finally woke many of the sleeping Guardians, who roused themselves to aid in its ultimate defeat near the end of the 19th century. When they had time to look around, the Guardians noticed that the grizzly bears they had so lovingly nurtured had almost vanished from the continent, while their human Kinfolk had either perished as victims of European greed or languished on reservations far from their rightful homes. While some Guardians succumbed to the despair of Bhernocht, a few tried to repair the damage.

Today, the Guardians occupy themselves with efforts to prevent the

disappearance of the grizzly bear and with Indian rights movements designed to reclaim lands for the displaced Native American tribes who served as their Kinfolk. As the strongest and most warlike of the Gurahl, the Mountain Guardians realize that their skills as fighters may place them alongside the Garou in the front lines of the Apocalypse. To this end, they strive to hone their combat abilities as well as their protective instincts. Like the mountains that contain smoldering cauldrons of inner fire, the Guardians stoke their fury carefully against the day when they, too, must Rage.



## Home Territories

At one time, the Mountain Guardians, like their grizzly bear kin, made their homes throughout Canada, the American West and much of northern Mexico. Today, some of the Guardians reside with their bear kin within national preserves and parks. Others have traveled to different parts of the country and journeyed across both oceans to find ways to expand their Kinfolk and to extend their guardianship to other mountains of the world.

## Culture and Kinfolk

The Native American tribes of western North America once served as the primary source of human Kinfolk for the Mountain Guardians. Many of these families died out or disappeared during westward expansion of the United States in the 19th century. Recently, the Guardians have expanded their search for new Kinfolk to include a broader spectrum of racial and ethnic backgrounds, hoping to increase their numbers. Some Mountain Guardians now come from Asian-American or Hispanic American stock, while others evince their European ancestral heritage. A few Guardians have traveled to Europe and Africa, though they are reluctant to impose on populations already claimed by other equally endangered Changing Breeds. Rumors persist that the shapeshifters of Asia, who have proven inhospitable to many western Changing Breeds, do not accord visiting Gurahl the same coolness. They might even allow some interbreeding with humans in their lands. Humans who enjoy pushing their physical limits (such as mountain climbers, cavers and athletes) or who show a talent for martial skills (such as boxers, wrestlers and martial artists) attract the attention of the Mountain Guardians.

While the grizzlies of North America have long provided Kinfolk for the Mountain Guardians, their endangered status has caused the Guardians to seek ursine Kinfolk among other species of bears. Occasionally, Mountain Guardians arise from matings with polar or spectacled bears.

Much of Mountain Guardian culture revolves around contests and challenges. More competitive than most Gurahl, the Guardians frequently engage in wrestling matches, weightlifting contests and long distance races to test their prowess against other tribe members. Older Guardians often test the capabilities of their cubs by challenging them to mock battle as a way of judging both their skill and their courage.

Few Mountain Guardians know how to back down from a challenge of any kind, whether physical or mental, even when doomed to fail. Among the Guardians, winning a contest ranks as less important than putting up a good fight. In most mock combats, both winner and loser gain Renown (though the winner receives more). The effort counts almost as much as the victory.

Some Gurahl believe that the Mountain Guardians place such great emphasis on ritualized combat in order to control and channel their innate aggressive streak. A more prevalent opinion among the Guardians stresses the importance of honing battle skills for their coming battles against the Wyrms.

## Tribal Organization

Mountain Guardians tend toward solitude even more than most Gurahl, relying on occasional meetings between individuals and attendance at the important Gurahl festivals as their primary means of contact with others of their tribe. The Guardians consider the oldest active tribe member as their leader (in those rare instances which call for a tribal spokesman), but each Guardian acts independently, with the exception of cubs during their Gallivant year. Mountain Guardians prize individual initiative and self-sufficiency almost as much as they value physical and mental prowess.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Strongest of the Gurahl:** Mountain Guardians have an advantage over other werebears when engaging in activities that require physical strength. (In game terms, they have a -1 difficulty to Strength-related rolls, and Feats of Strength are adjusted by one degree in the Guardian's favor.)

- **Challenge-bound:** Guardians find it difficult to refuse to accept a challenge or a dare, even if they know they are hopelessly overmatched. A Guardian may attempt to resist this urge with a Willpower roll (difficulty 9).

## Appearance

All Mountain Guardians tend toward physical bulk, exuding a larger-than-life presence in the company of others. Guardians born into human families exhibit the physical traits of their human parentage. In Ursus form, homid Guardians usually resemble grizzly bears. Mountain Guardians who come from ursine stock resemble their parent species in Ursus form, while they generally choose their Homid appearance from observations of local humans.

## Quote

*We keep our vigil from the high places of the world. When the Apocalypse begins, we will meet it first, for we will see it coming.*

## Stereotypes

- **Forest Walkers:** They may not stand as tall as we do, but their audacity deserves respect. They tell great stories and have a wealth of information to share — in eight different versions.

- **Ice Stalkers:** Their reputation as social busybodies often distracts others from their potential for belligerence. They rival us for aggressiveness; more power to 'em.

- **River Keepers:** Stoic and trustworthy, they still manage to look down on us for our hot tempers and aggressive behavior. Maybe they should pay more attention to getting ready for the final battles. No wonder we lost the War of Rage.



# River Keepers

## The River Keepers' Tale

In the beginning times, when Gaia's first-born set about to explore the Earth and find places of their own to care for and protect, the world looked very different than it does today. I'm not talking about the smog-filled skies and concrete cities that spoil so much of the landscape. Instead, I'm referring to more basic aspects of the Earth. Mountains moved, in those early times — getting up and stomping around from one place to another until they found a new horizon to lean against. Rivers ran wherever their passions took them, snaking around hills and valleys or racing in cascades down the sides of the steepest mountains. It was hard to keep up with all the changes and harder still for the Children of Bear to stay with any one place long enough to get to know the territory.

After a while, things got out of hand. A few of the oldest Gurahl (and we weren't very old in those days) got together and decided that all this running around and moving about from place to place had to stop.

The rivers proved especially difficult. They were having too much fun dashing and skittering all over the land, running uphill and downhill in a frenzy of pointless activity. All over the world, rivers vied with one another to see who was fastest, biggest, longest, curviest or rockiest. Some rivers tried to grow as large as possible, overflowing their banks to snatch smaller rivers to add to their size. Floods washed over the Earth, drowning many of Gaia's four-footed creatures, uprooting trees and creating huge morasses of mud and mire where once green fields and flowering meadows held sway.

Finally, one Gurahl named Yuliya Finds-the-Way had a revelation. She realized that the rivers' frantic escapades resulted from a need for attention and the lack of a specific purpose. Yuliya gathered together a group of her closest companions among the Gurahl and explained her plan to them. When she had finished, each of her friends traveled to the current site of one of the great rivers to offer each river the following proposal:

"Let us be partners in the world. You need something to give your existence meaning, and I am prepared to give it to you. Choose one path to take through the world, and I will make my home near your banks. I will visit you to bathe in your clear waters and feed from your bounty. I will protect you from those who try to change your course, call down the rain when you need replenishing and sing songs to you of what goes on in the places where you are not. You will be my river, and I will be your keeper. When I return to Gaia's bosom, others like me will come. I will summon many animals to keep you company. Bears will fish from your banks, and otters will play their games to amuse you. You will not need to exhaust yourself rushing about the world."

Each river agreed to Yuliya's pact, claiming one part of the world as its own and confining itself to its chosen route. Seeing the bargain that the mighty rivers had made, the smaller rivers clamored to gain their own "keeper." In time, every river in the world had its own Gurahl (though some Gurahl claimed more than one river) who watched over it and reminded it of how important it was to the

surrounding land. From that day on, those Gurahl who chose to honor the agreement between Yuliya and the rivers took the name River Keepers for themselves. This is why you can find River Keepers in so many parts of the world, wherever mighty rivers plow their steady and immutable courses to the sea.

## Tribal Background

Long ago, River Keepers flourished wherever human tribes or groups of bears gathered along the banks of the great rivers of the world — the Nile, Amazon, Mississippi, Volga and the myriad other waterways. In ancient times, River Keepers served the human populations as shamans and weatherworkers, offering cures for illnesses and wounds, calling the rain to water the land or fill the rivers after a drought and, in times of great need, sacrificing themselves for the people under their care. Among the bears who congregated near the rivers that provided them with rich sources of food, the River Keepers served as leaders and guardians.

Once the most numerous of the Gurahl, the River Keepers' numbers diminished greatly after the War of Rage. The victorious Garou killed scores of Keepers and drove others from their river homes, leaving the care of the now-abandoned rivers of the Amazon and Nile to the few Bastet who survived. Many of the human tribes who served as Kinfolk of the River Keepers fell to the ravages of the Impergium or became the victims of one of the many wars of human conquest that swept over the lands. The bears who formerly came under the protection of the River Keepers suffered as well, becoming popular prey for human hunters.

Over the centuries, a few River Keepers have come out of hiding whenever they sensed a great need for their presence. Though they seldom came to prominence in human affairs (a result of their desire to remain hidden after the War of Rage), River Keepers sometimes acted as advisors, teachers and spiritual leaders to chieftains, kings and tsars. The brown bear that symbolizes Mother Russia stands as just one of the many tributes to the River Keepers' efforts to nurture the creatures of the world.

In North America, the River Keepers stayed active longer than they did in many other lands, assisting the Uktena, Wendigo and Croatan in their struggle to drive the creatures of the Wyrms out of the Pure Lands. Even there, however, the River Keepers kept a low profile, fearing to upset their tenuous coexistence with the Garou — particularly the curious Uktena. Like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, many River Keepers in the Pure Lands chose to spend most of their time in hibernation. The coming of the Europeans to the New World and the unleashing of the Storm Eater brought many River Keepers (as well as the other Gurahl tribes) back into the world

in the last century. What they saw saddened them, for the new settlers shattered the harmonious accord between human and bear that had previously existed in the Americas. The River Keepers accept their share of the blame for the near extermination of bears in 19th century America.

Today, the River Keepers focus once more on protecting and encouraging the growth of the existing bear population throughout the world. In addition, they work with humans dedicated to cleaning up the pollution that threatens the network of rivers that criss-crosses the Earth. As the Apocalypse grows nearer, the River Keepers have come to recognize that their affinity for the rivers of the world may hold a vital key to turning the tide in Gaia's favor. The ancient pact that bound them to the care of the world's rivers (and to the spirits linked to those waterways) might provide the armies of Gaia with unexpected and powerful allies in the final battle.

## Home Territories

Although they once ranged throughout the fertile river valleys of the world, most River Keepers currently reside along the Earth's more remote waterways. In America, members of this tribe favor Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, but they have made a concerted effort to assert their presence along the shores of the Mississippi, Ohio and other rivers. The European River Keepers have quietly tried to maintain their bonds with the rivers of Europe, but are finding that their Kin cannot freely roam the rivers' banks as they once did. The rest of the tribe has no hard information about their tribemates in Russia and Siberia, but it is presumed that where the brown bears of Eurasia survive, so do their Gurahl kin. River Keepers can only assume that they still maintain at least a token presence in those lands. In essence, where there are rivers, there are (or should be) River Keepers.

## Culture and Kinfolk

Human Kinfolk of the River Keepers, though few, inhabit many regions throughout the world. Many still hold to the old ways of their tribal ancestors, but a few have adapted to the fast-paced, urban lifestyle of the 20th century.



River Keepers come from the Native American populations of North America, the indigenous tribes of South and Central America, the Ket, Evenk and Ostiak peoples of Siberia and the Scandinavian and Baltic populations of Europe. In fact, humans whose bloodlines nourish the River Keepers make up some of the most diverse and vibrant group of Gurahl Kinfolk. Unfortunately, many of them have forgotten their ancient ties to Ursa's Children due to the long absence of the Gurahl. In some cases, other Changing Breeds have assimilated the River Keepers into their own Kinfolk breeding stock.

While the brown bears that once proliferated throughout Europe, Asia and North America offer the largest population of ursine breeding stock for the River Keepers, other bear species, including the Himalayan (or moon) bear, the sloth bear of India, the Malayan sun bear and the spectacled bear of South America also contribute to the tribe's diverse bloodlines. On rare occasions, River Keepers have arisen from black bear, grizzly and polar bear stock.

Today, the resurgent River Keepers actively seek to expand their Kinfolk base, concentrating on rebuilding their old tribal stock and assimilating new bloodlines. Many River Keepers, like the brown bears most closely allied with them, exhibit a reluctance to approach most non-Kinfolk humans. Thus, they tend to stay away from heavily populated urban centers. Although they prefer to find new Kinfolk among wilderness-lovers and environmental activists, the River Keepers also look for humans with good survival skills and combat-readiness. The War of Rage has taught these Gurahl a valuable lesson. Upholding the ways of peace often necessitates clinging to the knowledge of war.

The culture and customs of the River Keepers reflect many of the traditions of their human wards. The ceremonial exchange of gifts, known among some Native American tribes as "potlatch," plays an important role in River Keeper society. When members of this tribe come together, an elaborate show of generosity and gift-giving takes place. Gifts take many forms — not all of them tangible. Stories, poems, information or tidbits of news rate as some of the most valuable "gifts" exchanged between River Keepers. Of course, no River Keeper turns down a material present such as a painting, a cleverly carved wood flute or a loaf of fresh-baked bread. The most valuable presents consist of those that celebrate the spiritual side of the Gurahl. The teaching or sharing of Gifts and rites among the River Keepers thus becomes part of the giving process. Often the prolonged exchange of gifts takes on the nature of a contest, with the Gurahl giving the best gift gaining Honor Renown in the process. The River Keepers also share gifts with their human friends or potential mates.

Along with the custom of gifting, River Keepers consider hosting to be a sacred duty. Guests of these Gurahl become an honored part of the "family" for the duration of their visit, receiving the best foods, the best sleeping place and numerous other marks of favor. As they give, however, the River Keepers expect to receive, often becoming cold and aloof when their guests fail to reciprocate in quality if not in kind.

## Tribal Organization

The River Keepers do not maintain a formal tribal structure. Members of the tribe meet with one another informally to exchange information, and they try to have at least one large gathering a year (usually during the Council of Autumn). Most River Keepers travel alone within their self-appointed protectorates, although two or three River Keepers sometimes form a "family group" for extended periods of time. Elders of the tribe serve as advisors and teachers rather than leaders.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Affinity for Water:** All River Keepers enjoy aquatic endeavors such as swimming, boating, rafting or scuba diving. (In game terms, River Keepers automatically have Swimming 1).

- **Weakness for Fish:** River Keepers find it difficult to pass up the chance to enjoy the bounty of the rivers or lakes. Even seafood restaurants exercise a compelling attraction for these Gurahl, occasionally distracting them from more important matters.

## Appearance

Homid-born River Keepers exhibit the full gamut of human physiotypes, from Native American to Nordic, with a smattering of Hispanic, African and Asian features thrown in for good measure. Although they tend toward stocky, powerful physiques, a few slender, wiry River Keepers do exist. Hair, skin and eye color vary widely, depending on the human parent's ethnic background. Ursine River Keepers generally resemble the species of their bear parent.

## Quote

*We stay close to the life blood of the earth, honoring still our ancient pact. The rivers provide us with everything we need and teach us the value of mobility. Those who seek to pollute our rivers or change their courses will have to answer to us.*

## Stereotypes

- **Forest Walkers:** They lack dignity and poise, but make up for their inadequacies with their ingenuity and daring. We are willing to welcome our curious kin back to the lands they once left behind.

- **Ice Stalkers:** Curious and gregarious, they never pass up the opportunity to stick their noses in other people's business — and houses and territories. Compliment their artistic endeavors, and they will be your friends for life.

- **Mountain Guardians:** We have much in common with these close kin, but they have a mean streak wider than our rivers and taller than the mountains they claim as their own. Don't make one angry — and don't offer to go a few rounds with one and expect to win.



# The Code of Ursa

Listen well, young one, for the songs I am about to sing for you are those you must take into your own heart and keep always as the laws by which you live. You will hear them many more times before you must sing at the Council of Autumn, but you might as well start memorizing them now.

The Code of Ursa is known to all Gurahl, and it forms the basis for our society. It has been handed down since the earliest times when Chewanna First-Mother and Goloyé Seeks-After-Death first sang its stanzas.

## Cherish the Cubs

*We thank you, Gaia, for sending us children  
May we be worthy to cherish and teach them.  
We will defend them, see that they honor you,  
Nourish and nurture them, heal them at need.  
This do we promise, this shall we do.*

That stanza is only a portion of the verses dealing with this section of the Code of Ursa, but it's representative of the whole song. Gurahl take their roles as parents and mentors very seriously. We feel it is our job to provide everything new cubs need, from food to spiritual guidance to practical training. Then we step back and let the younglings see if they can handle things. By preparing young Gurahl for their futures as thoroughly as we can, we show that we cherish our young and acknowledge that they are our future as a race.

## Protect the Land

*Smell the green and growing grass.  
Feel the wind that sways the trees.  
Hear the heartbeat of the Earth.  
Taste the fruits of summer's breeze.  
Look upon the sun and moon.  
See the Totems in the stars.  
Know the Earth must turn and grow.  
The duty to protect is ours.*

This edict is our primary responsibility and the reason for our existence. All else stems from it. Again, the words are obvious, perhaps because our first language doesn't leave much room for ambiguity. The land and all its creatures were given into our care by Gaia Herself. She made us the caretakers, the nurturers, the protectors of Her creation. We failed in that duty during the long centuries of our exile when we feared to show ourselves. We hope Gaia has forgiven us our cowardice. Now we have returned, and we hope to atone for our long absence. Whatever happens to us, we will not shirk our responsibility again.

## Heal the Sick

*Mother Bear, send down your healing light.  
Hold forth your paw and lend your healing might.  
Little Bear, send laughter on the way.  
Give us your joy, chase pain and fear away.  
Bear of Death, please turn your face aside.  
Do not reach out, let this one here abide.*

One of the greatest gifts given to us is the power to heal those who are sick or injured. It is the second most important aspect of being Gurahl. Unless a creature is so corrupted that there is no hope for him, we do not begrudge our healing to any. Even those Garou of the tribes most responsible for hunting and killing us deserve our help. Those who ask our help or those we find sick or injured in our travels are given our healing touch. Sometimes the task is arduous, requiring many days or even months of our care, but this is what Gaia asks of us. We do not use our special Gift of Gaia's Breath on anyone other than Gurahl, however. Only a very few of us have ever used it at all. We don't even know if it could be used on the other Changers, much less humans or animals. Until and unless Gaia commands us to try it in such a case, we will not do so. All other healing we can give someone, however, is given fully and with no bitterness or enmity — at least, that's the way it is supposed to be. We are a stubborn people, and many of us aren't so good at forgiveness.

## Nurture the Needy

*Hey, brother, the cold winds blow,  
all the Earth is covered in snow.  
Hey, sister, the fields are bare,  
the forests are empty of even a hare.  
How will you live through the winter's blight?  
What will you eat on this cold, harsh night?  
Brother, take my coat, I no longer need it,  
Sister, take my flesh, your children may eat it.*

At one time the Gurahl actually did what the song speaks of. In times of great need, they gave up their own flesh that their Kinfolk and other human tribes might live. Giving this gift to those weaker than ourselves was a direct way of protecting and nurturing those under our care. So long as the bones could be gathered together, other Gurahl could bring the one who sacrificed herself back by invoking Gaia's Breath.

We still have the responsibility for trying to see that those within our protected areas and those whom we encounter in our travels have the sustenance they need. Another aspect of this law has been spoken of many times and is practiced by most werebears — the idea of nurturing others' spiritual sides as well. Many humans desperately seek for some sort of mystical or religious experience to give them hope. They want answers to their questions and guidance concerning what is right and how they should treat the Earth. We can help them through example and by teaching them to listen to what Gaia is saying. The spiritual aspect of nurturing was what gave most of the tribal bear cults their power by granting them greater understanding and a feeling of oneness with Gaia's creation.

I know of no incident in modern times when a Gurahl has sacrificed herself as we used to do to feed or sustain those in need. Perhaps in this day of refrigeration and fast food restaurants, the literal giving of ourselves is no longer needed. Still, we never turn away a hungry soul, whether it desires sustenance or spiritual awakening.

## Teach the Suppliant

*Turn and learn, remember now  
Buri-Jaan will teach you how*

*And in the fullness of your days  
Teach to other cubs our ways....*

Soon after her First Change, each Gurahl receives word of a mentor awaiting her. For the next year (at least), the elder werebear travels with the younger one, teaching her all he knows of Gurahl history, culture, societal norms and world view. The young one learns of Gaia and of her place in Gaia's creation, how to guard and protect and the Gifts and rituals she must know to find acceptance within her tribe. This mentorship creates a very close bond that is never really severed, despite the fact that pupil and teacher go their separate ways once the intensive instruction period is over.

While many of us feel that teaching the young fulfills the requirements of this portion of the Code of Ursa, others argue a different case. These werebears believe that as Gaia's first-born they have a duty to teach their younger siblings, whether that teaching takes the form of lore, rituals or the knowledge of Gifts.

Accordingly, we Gurahl were once far more free with our knowledge. Our charity enabled other Changing Breeds to profit from our lore and gain Gifts they would otherwise have been without. Still, many complained that we doled out our knowledge too sparingly. The Garou weren't the only ones who thought so, mind — just the most aggressive about forcing the issue. For our part, we didn't want to give out our secrets, before the other Changing kin were ready for them. Our refusal to share the Gift of Gaia's Breath ostensibly caused the War of Rage.

In consequence, we Gurahl have tended to keep our wisdom to ourselves ever since that time, fearful of the time bomb we might be creating if we entrust dangerous knowledge to those not ready to handle it maturely. During modern times, we have shared mostly with the Corax, and then only minor Gifts and less important lore. Should anyone not Gurahl demonstrate to our satisfaction that she has attained the degree of responsibility and caring we deem necessary, this part of the code would allow us to infuse such a one with our most powerful knowledge. Until then, we hope that Ursa and Gaia understand our reticence.

## ***Breed Wisely***

*Look with heart and mind and soul  
To find the one destined as your mate.  
Look with eyes unclouded,  
Look with eyes unshrouded,  
Trust to luck and love and fate  
To find the one you'll have and hold.*

Though we have lived long on the Earth and our numbers have dwindled, the Gurahl produce no metis children. With our Kinfolk population shrinking with each passing day, you might wonder that we are able to avoid the sort of inbreeding that causes deformities. One reason we are so blessed is a ritual that allows us to find a suitable mate for ourselves, one whose characteristics will compliment our own and produce a strong child. The ritual points us in the right direction and opens our eyes to the possibilities.

Over the years, a few Gurahl have chosen to ignore the strictures that forbid us to breed with one another, yet even they produced no metis children. Any joining that might produce a metis is invariably childless — either the union



proves sterile, or any conception aborts. I believe that Gaia decreed this. Unlike the Garou, we are solitary protectors, sometimes overseeing vast reaches of some of the most hostile territory on Earth. We don't have the luxury of depending on a pack to fall back on; we have to take care of ourselves. If we can't do that due to infirmity, we can't protect Gaia's creation or help other creatures. So, knowing that a deformed werebear might easily become a dead werebear, our Mother spares us the pain and takes the infirm ones back before they're born.

## Cleanse the Tainted

*Bring the bough and make the circle,  
Spread the river's sands within.  
Bless the circle with pure water,  
Gird it with the mountain's stones.  
Welcome in the tainted person,  
We shall make him whole again,  
Mother, father, son or daughter,  
Strike them clean with Ursa's bones.*

As those meant to protect Gaia's creation, we have a duty to keep the world as pure as we possibly can. Whenever we encounter someone who is tainted with the feel of the Wyrms or made unclean through the intrusion of malignant or malicious spirits, we try to wash his spirit free of whatever infects it. We may do this through a process as simple as talking things over, or the cleansing might call for a powerful ritual.

Though we are no less repulsed by fomori than any other Changer, we know that not every one of them invited the invading Bane inside. Rather than killing the host, we have learned a ritual that allows the victims to throw off the shackles of the controlling spirits and be themselves once more. In cases where illness or insanity can be cured, we do so willingly. If the Silver Fang leaders of the Garou would come and ask our help, for example, we could cure them and be done with jealousy.

## Guard the Secrets

*Shh! Shh!  
Do not whisper to the winds.  
Hush! Hush!  
Tell not your enemies or friends....*

Once, when the world was younger (just as we were), many among us thought it was our duty to teach all we knew to those who came after us. Few among us even considered what this portion of the Code of Ursa meant until the start of the War of Rage. Seeing the destructive jealousy and anger of the Garou when we told them they were yet too immature to have knowledge of Gaia's Breath, many of us realized for the first time why this stricture is part of the Code. We now guard our secrets, making certain that none of them leak out to cause trouble. Most Gurahl now believe that our refusal to share our secret lore is the main meaning of this command.

I think differently. Although I believe that we're meant to keep babies from playing with things they don't understand, I think one of the primary meanings of this passage is that we must keep our knowledge of many secret things safe so it will be accessible if we ever need it.

## Rights of the Elder

*Laughing cub or warrior bold,  
Whisperer of tales untold,  
Mighty mystic, judge of souls  
Canny indeed are the old!*

In many cultures, especially during modern times, the young see elders as outmoded and useless. Among the Gurahl, we cherish our elders as fonts of knowledge. Our elders speak with the voice of experience, and they perform their duties aided by decades (in rare cases, centuries) of well-practiced rituals and Gifts. Those whom we consider elders often count many spirits among their allies and have traveled through each auspice, learning what each part of their personality has to offer. We revere such elders for their wisdom and experience, and we hope to profit from what they can share with us. All too often, however, our eldest remain locked in slumber, unable to assist in training our younglings.

This portion of the Code of Ursa reminds us of the respect due our elders. In a very few cases, these Gurahl have survived since the War of Rage; some even fought in that sad conflict. Their longevity (and their unique viewpoint) entitle them to special treatment. Therefore, when we meet in council, any elders are accorded the privileges of the best seats, the finest food and the right to speak first. They may also claim the right to speak again after everyone else has done so. Their songs and poems command great attention and respect, while their works of art are considered featured items when we display our handicrafts. Should any elder claim the right to act as Buri-Jaan to a youngling, any other claimant steps aside, realizing that the knowledge the elder can impart to the new Gurahl far exceeds her own. In essence, our elders are considered irreplaceable treasures. They are living repositories of first-hand historical knowledge and of many spirits' Gifts unknown to younger Gurahl. It should be no surprise that we treat them like others treat royalty.

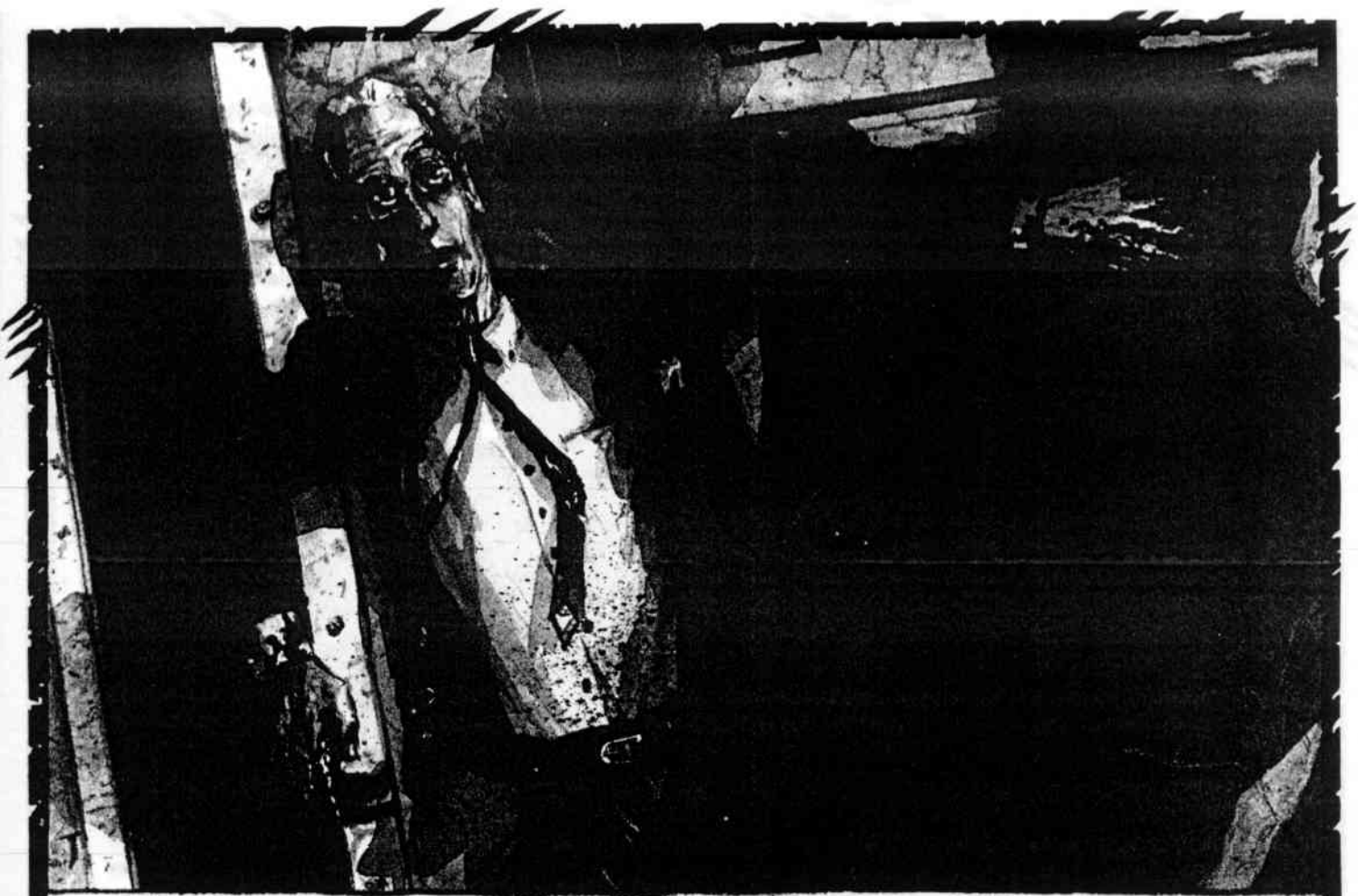
## Remember Your History

*Year of flood, month of rain,  
season of the golden grain,  
birth of cubs, loss of mate,  
time when we became a state.  
Spring's awakening, summer's light,  
Through the raging wars we fight.  
Autumn's bounty, winter's pall,  
Youngling, I remember all.*

Whoever said, "Those who don't remember history are doomed to repeat it," must have been a werebear. While it was never our duty to serve as Gaia's memory, as a people we are preoccupied with our history and that of the other Changing Breeds. Perhaps it's because so many of us slumbered for so long that we became reflective and introspective. Such states of mind lend themselves to historical assessments. Certainly, our concern with tradition is tied in thus as well.

Many Gurahl will tell you to remember your history. What they usually mean is to examine what we — as Gurahl, not as individuals — have experienced over time. What many such advisors actually mean is to remember what happened long ago in the War of Rage. They want all Gurahl to live with that sorry





time as a constant companion — always waiting just out of sight to be dragged out whenever we deal with any other shapeshifters. Sadly, this singular time has forever marked some of our eldest, making them less willing to extend their trust. They would warn you against doing so as well. While I understand their motives in trying to arm you against being too naive, I (and most others) think this portion of the Code goes far beyond that.

To me, this tenet is a command to recall all the experiences I (or other Gurahl) have been through. Only through doing so am I able to decide how best to handle certain situations. For example, if I remember hearing that Mabel Wears-Her-New-Coat-Hunting successfully used a certain rite in a particular situation, why should I risk something different? I already know from her tale of the event that her action was helpful; by emulating what she did, I will most likely be successful too. Through remembrance of others' experiences (our shared history), we can discover the answers to problems vexing us now.

A further interpretation of this admonishment is that it allows us to make quick judgments concerning things we may never have encountered before, but which we know others among us have. If you have never before met a Nuwisha, for example, you might not know how to react or to respond to one. You might ask yourself, "Can I trust such a creature? What does he really want from me?" Now, if you know a thing or two about what your grandfather went through when *he* dealt with a werecoyote, you'll have a little more foundation to go on.

My cautionary note to this is that you shouldn't be so caught up in history that you blind yourself to changes in the present. We

Gurahl are sometimes so bound up in tradition that we fail to open the door when a new knock sounds on it.

### *Punish the Guilty*

*Look, look,  
Look deeply into heart and mind;  
Judge, judge,  
Judge the actions that you find.*

This part of the song goes on for quite a few more verses, most of them warning us to be certain of our facts before taking action, then laying out various responses to everything from rudeness to mass-mayhem. In some ways, it serves as a kind of touchstone for us, allowing us to see how Gurahl responded to wrongdoing (and its perpetrators) in the past.

And that regimentation is the main danger in obeying this part of the Code. Many conservative Gurahl seem unable to step outside the strict observance of punishments for wrongs committed and make their own decisions in the matter. If the song details a particular action to be taken against polluting rivers, for example, certain werebears — usually the elders — try to exact that specific retribution from the polluters, whether such actions are still effective nowadays or not. While public shaming and then tearing apart a well-poisoner might once have been the proper way to handle things, doing so today is more likely to get the Gurahl arrested.

I think the main value of this portion of the Code lies in reminding us that we *are* Gaia's protectors, and as such, we have

a duty to punish those who harm her creation. Rather than slavishly following specifics, however, we need to decide how serious an offense is, then work out some sort of retribution which helps us rectify the wrong rather than just punishing the guilty. If an industrialist wants to build a factory on prime wetlands, for example, and he pays off the locals to do so, we don't kidnap him and drown him in a bog. That way just leaves the door open for a different entrepreneur to come along and do the same thing. Instead, we wait until he invests millions in surveying the site, paying off bribes and gaining local permits, then we hit him with a lawsuit designed to tie him up in court for six years and cost him billions if his shady practices come out. We can always drown him later if things don't go our way.

On the other hand, if a young Gurahl is rude to her elders at the Autumn gathering, shunning just might be the answer after all.

## *Avenge Wrongful Slaying*

*Why, hunter, did you slay my sister?*

*She was heavy with her unborn sons.*

*Why, hunter, do you cry so loudly  
when to you the death-bear comes?*

Essentially, this is our way of saying, "an eye for an eye."

Some of our younglings are shocked when they first hear this part of the Code. We spend so much time telling you about our nurturing hearts, our reliance on rituals, our artworks and our traditions, that we sometimes forget to mention this particular practice. While it's true we'd rather educate people about Gaia's creation and all our parts in it, sometimes, that just isn't enough. When other ways fail, it's time to let our anger dictate our actions. We have as much reason to vent our Rage as the Garou, and we usually control ourselves much more rigidly, but often we end up responding in the same way.

"Wrongful slaying" used to mean killing females of child-bearing age or taking too many creatures or plants from a particular area. Nowadays, it means much more. In the modern world, few people have the need any more to actually hunt creatures for food or to gain warm furs to protect them from the cold. We have huge farms to provide us with everything from vegetables to orange juice, and pharmaceuticals to heal our illnesses. Why would anyone want to take more than he needs, whether it's rare plants to ease pain or a deer used as meat for a family? I have never understood that sort of greed, nor do I understand the competitiveness among hunters that sometimes results in the killing of some of the best breeding stock among the so-called "game animals." Still, I comprehend hunters far more readily than those who kill for profit or to remove what they consider a nuisance. I don't understand thrill-killers at all.

Even worse are those who — apparently oblivious to the impact — wipe out entire ecological pockets to build something in the area. I mentioned the industrialist in regard to punishment, and that's exactly the sort of thing that might call for you to Rage after all. Circumstances may conspire to make it more effective for you to vent your ire rather than coldly going through the motions of a lawsuit. If the builder ignores warnings or rashly goes ahead and bulldozes the land to make his

project inevitable in an "it's done, so it's too late to complain about it now," move, off the bastard. It's what you'll feel like doing, so go ahead. Just don't get caught.

In any case, you'll probably respond to each situation you encounter based on its severity and specifics. If something offends you or repulses you so deeply that your immediate response is the desire to tear apart whoever is responsible, then you should probably go ahead and let your Rage loose. No one says your Rage has to be expended in killing anyone, if that's not your style. Tear her Rolls Royce into jacks and thimbles; she'll get the message. I once heard the tale of Jessamy Juniper-Eater, a Gurahl who lived during the time of the westward expansion. The legend tells about her exploits against the idiots who rode moving trains through the plains and shot buffalo as they moved along. Several of those shooters later awoke to find their rifles twisted into interesting shapes and the bloody print of a large bear paw left on their bedroom wall. Only a few ever dared to kill buffalo again. Those that dared, only did so once before Jessamy found them.

Some among us feel that these last two parts of the Code were added after the War of Rage. They argue that we became a more vindictive and angry race after fighting for our existence against fellow Changelings, and that our Rage was not born of Gaia at all. These Gurahl claim that Rage was a curse from the Wym. While it gives us an edge in battle, it still corrupts us, diverting us from our original purpose as caregivers and healers. That's a debate that (pardon the pun) rages hotly among our more scholarly brethren. I believe that Gaia would not have expected us to act as protectors without giving us some ability to fight for Her. We may not have the same advantages as the Garou, but we certainly aren't helpless either. Our Rage gives us greater strength to take down a foe quickly or else gifts us with the stamina to see a fight through to the end rather than making us speedy power-houses. Whether we would have it so or not, we possess a spark within us that makes us livid when we witness an outrage. I don't believe that makes us corrupt; I think it makes us morally responsible enough to act as the protectors of Gaia's creation.

## *The Art of Life: Philosophy of the Gurahl*

You've already heard quite a bit about our penchant for creativity, but I thought I'd add just a little to your knowledge of why we indulge in artistic endeavors when some feel we should devote our every moment to actively protecting our chosen territories. My answer to our critics is that by choosing artistry, we are protecting that which Gaia placed in our care.

We believe that Gaia's creation should exist in a balance. Our place in maintaining that balance lies in being nurturers as well as protectors. Nurturing extends to caring for our own and others' emotional and spiritual sides just as thoroughly as we tend to their bodies. Art and ritual are our expressions of that care.

As nurturers, we have developed a philosophy that includes beauty and creativity as essential parts of our lives and the lives of those we tend. Though we deplore the Weaver's excesses, we don't shrink from the idea of creation itself, from the thought of taking raw materials and using them to make something. We see it as a way for us to emulate Gaia. Our art,



whether we are creating paintings, embroidering, composing music or constructing poems, is a small tribute to Gaia's own act of creation.

Don't misunderstand me, though. We aren't solely concerned with some nebulous "beautification" of our surroundings. Our art goes beyond creating physical objects or ephemeral works like songs and stories. Some of us feel our very lives are art — expressions both of Gaia's beauty and Her violence. Thus we strive to create something that embodies our ideas of preservation even as we try to protect Gaia's own creation from being destroyed.

To say it the short way: We enjoy making things. We indulge in all kinds of handicrafts from scrimshaw and beadwork to quilling, painting, sculpting, basket-weaving and pottery-throwing, but we go beyond the physical. Many of us are master song-crafters, storytellers, dramatists, riddlers and humorists. You've already heard about dancing and the joy and shame it brings to us. Beyond that, we involve ourselves even more deeply when we construct elaborate costumes for ourselves and paint our faces for special dances. All of these practices enhance our lives, helping to shape us and giving us outlets for our feelings and energy.

Yet it goes deeper than that. When we dance the Dance of the Centuries, we open ourselves to the feelings we express through the movements and we reveal ourselves as a people. When we couch our teachings in songs, riddles and stories, we preserve our lore while providing a memory aid for our young. Some of our arts are designed to teach us the patience we need in tending to the injured and ill. You can't create sculpture worth having by wildly whacking at the wood or stone. You have to study it and discern what shape lies inside it. The same holds true when you assess a creature's or an area's affliction. Likewise, it's only when you concentrate and move your hands with precision that embroidery turns out well. Just so, applying drastic measures to healing something that demands a light touch can be as damaging as doing nothing at all. Even these concerns, however, concentrate on the practical rather than the spiritual side of our art.

I like to compare art and life with fishing. If you jump up and down and make a fuss, the fish get scared away and you come home empty-handed. But, if you sit quietly and patiently on the bank or out on top of the rocks in the river, sometimes they jump right into your hands. If you think I'm rambling, I apologize, but explaining metaphysics and philosophy was never my strong point.

Let me take one more stab at it. Why do you think we are so concerned with ritual? We werebears surround ourselves with very stylized practices, adhering to strict forms of behavior when we meet formally. That ritualistic behavior extends to our greetings to one another, to determining precedence and to granting one or another the right to speak in Council at any given time. It is a drama that allows each of us to assume a role through which we interact with others.

We even indulge in challenge displays when we disagree. Those contests call for an upright posture, an aggressive show and a formalized method of actual challenge. The challenge might incorporate tree-shaking, roaring and even battle, in extreme circumstances. This violence has its own ritual, though. Most often, such challenges reveal the winner not through the werebear

who draws first blood, but the one who can be most insulting in her roaring or whose stance is most impressive. It's not only a good method of turning our aggressions to more constructive uses, it still allows us to become angry with one another — and even inflict defeat on a rival — without the necessity of actually injuring any of us. That way we save our violence to deal with those truly deserving of our wrath.

We use ritual and create works of art because we choose to immerse ourselves in them as expressions of our creative spirits, a side of ourselves we don't want to lose or neglect. We can only nurture others when we care for ourselves and keep ourselves healthy in spirit, and our spirits cry out for something more than eternal vigilance against corruption. We celebrate ourselves, that which is given into our care and Gaia Herself by doing so.

## Where the Bears Are

*In the place that is my own place, whose earth  
I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing,  
a great sycamore that is a wondrous healer of itself...  
In all the country there is no other like it...  
I see that it stands in its place, and feeds upon it,  
and is fed upon, and is native, and maker.  
— Wendell Berry, "The Sycamore"*

### North America

Most of the Gurahl I have spoken of reside in North America. All four tribes have good representation here, though we still aren't what you'd call numerous. Sadly, even our scarce numbers far exceed our kin who dwell elsewhere. The Americas provide a home to the greatest number of Gurahl and our bear kin of any other place on Earth. Though we've been trying in recent times to reverse the trend, we are a diminished people who may have slept too long to change our kin's inevitable extinction. Still, while we remain, and while new Gurahl are being born, we have some hope.

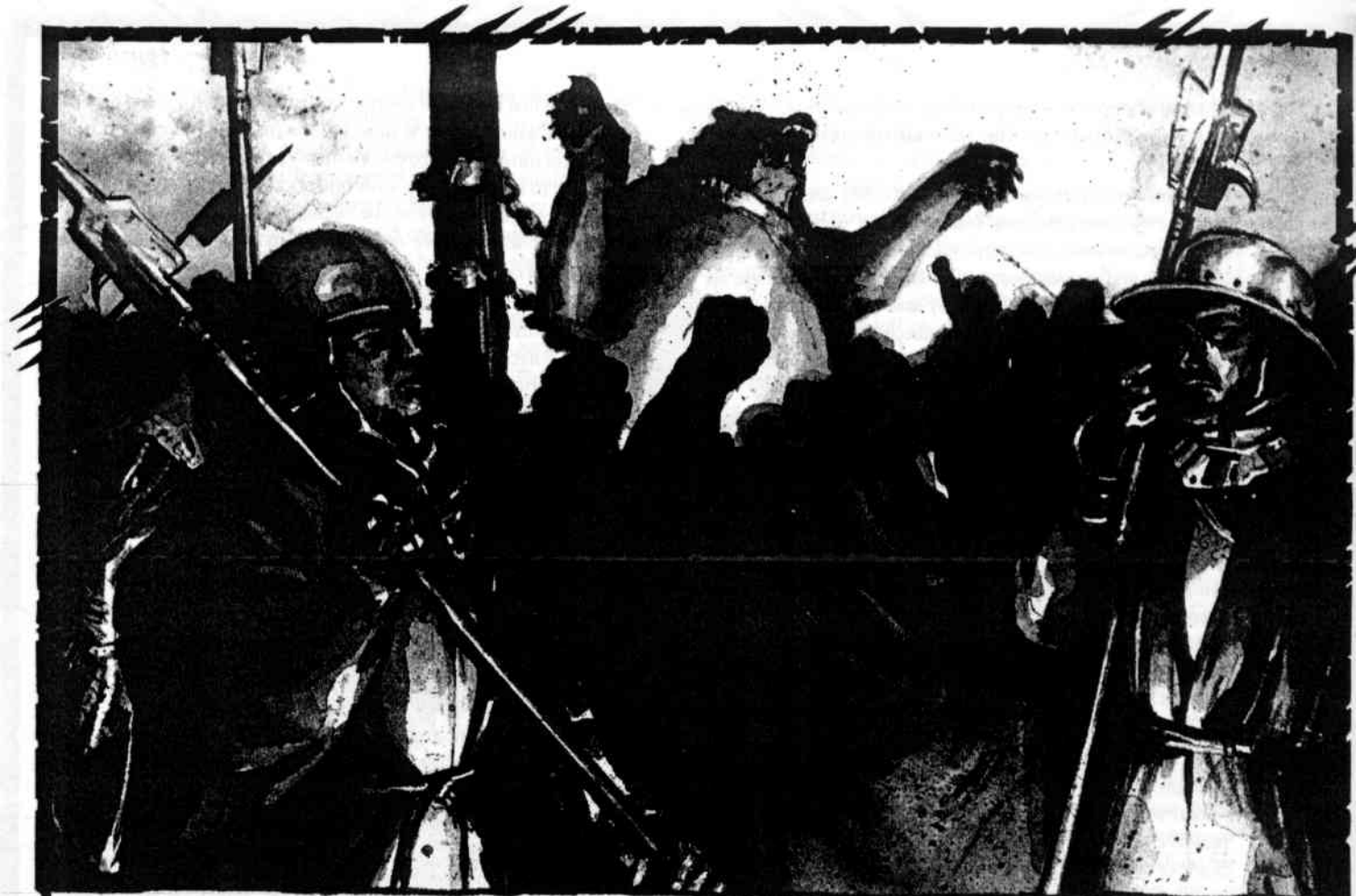
### South America

Three of our tribes have a small presence in South America. River Keepers, Forest Walkers and Mountain Guardians all have a few places they call protectorates. Though we have made a concerted effort to breed with the native spectacled bear, they are exceedingly rare, and we will most probably lose them before too much longer. If only there were more of us, we might save them, but the governments have no resources to "waste" on almost-extinct species that probably cannot be saved. For the most part, we leave a great part of South and Central America to the Bastet whose claims to the area are indisputable.

### Europe

Our kind has many of our roots in Europe, and despite the ever-present Garou population there, we never truly left. Brown bears originated there, and the precursors of the Ice Stalkers come from Siberia and the Scandinavian Arctic. Some members of these species still exist, though most bears in Europe face extinction in the very near future. Nonetheless, there have always been River Keepers there, and some of the American Keepers have left





for Europe to bolster their ranks. Indeed, you can probably find representatives of all our tribes there, where the land is wounded but no less our ally. The worst of it comes in Eastern Europe and Russia, which are places most inhospitable to — and in some places, virtually walled off to — our kind. Nonetheless, we are too stubborn to give up so easily. We have made recent approaches to a Garou who possesses knowledge of events in Russia; perhaps he will be able to tell us what it is that bars our entry there.

## Asia

Panda jokes aside, Asia is home to several types of bears. Even the panda at one time shared an ancestry with our bear kin. Now, they are a species unto themselves. Like many of our kin, they too face annihilation, so we retain great sympathy for the panda, our almost-kin. The native werebears, called Okuma, all perished in the War of Shame, creating a situation in which both our human Kinfolk and bear kin were left without guardians. Thus, the moon bear (native to the Himalayas, Tibet and Japan), the sloth bear (once found from northern India to Sri Lanka) and the sun bear (known in northeastern India, southern China, Burma, Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra) all now exist on the very brink of extinction. All have frightfully small populations left, and their wild areas have been ravaged. Some land is completely denuded and unable to support life. The governments and people of these lands have little time for (or interest in) preserving bears when many humans can barely subsist.

The native shapeshifters, who call themselves “hengeyokai,” resist the intrusion of western Changers into their territories. Because there exist no native werebears, however, a few of us have


been allowed to cautiously enter these lands and begin breeding (in small numbers) with some of our remaining native human Kinfolk. Although we also hope to breed with the native bears, saving them may prove a vain hope. That we slept too long and ignored Asia for far too long will undoubtedly prove one of our greatest shames as a race when we must watch our bear kin die out one by one. What happened to kill the Okuma? If it was the Garou, why do the Stargazers stand side-by-side with the Khan in the eastern septs? Sadly, we don’t know — and we missed our opportunity to learn, or to do something about it. We should have sent new protectors long ago and we didn’t. It was easier to hide and to sleep, and now all we can do is be witnesses to the last days of those who did not deserve to perish.

## Africa

Africa doesn’t support any bears or werebears except for the few Gurahl who have visited those lands. In essence, Africa belongs to the other Changers, and we don’t encroach on their territories.

## The Arctic

I already mentioned the polar bears found in North America, ranging from the Hudson Bay and Baffin Bay in Canada to Alaska and the north pole. Likewise, our white cousins can be found in Greenland, Scandinavia and Siberia. What might not be so obvious to many outsiders is that a few black bears and many brown bears and grizzlies roam the sub-Arctic portions of Canada, Alaska and parts of the northern United States. Many



Gurahl from this stock find a common cause with the River Keepers and Mountain Guardians, but an almost equal number join with the Ice Stalkers.

## Australia

So far as I know, there are no Gurahl in Australia and no bear kin either. A few Gurahl might be found in Sydney sometime, taking in the sights. (Yes, that's a joke).

## Gurahl and the Umbra

The Umbra is our "otherplace," a region beyond the bounds of the physical world where things assume their true forms. Unlike the Garou, who possess the luxury of stepping sideways into the Umbra by peering into a reflective surface, we must take a more direct and brutal method to enter it. I have never been sure why this is so. My guess is that we exist so much in this world as its protectors and nurturers, the world just doesn't want to let us leave it behind, even for a short time. Since we can't just slip through a mirror like Alice, we have to actually break out of the material world and into the spirit one. Luckily, the rite that allows us to do that is relatively easy and simple. It creates a temporary "hole" or doorway so we may pass through from one world to the next.

A few Gurahl are lucky enough to possess an Umbral Glade. Such a place is a green, growing landscape filled with Gnosis. It rests within the Umbra and attaches to a secluded Den in the material world. Access to the Umbra through the Den and into the Glade is as easy as walking through an open door — but then, the spots are secluded and you have to know what you're looking for. Few Gurahl leave such sites untended.

Once we're actually in the Umbra we travel through it like anyone else. In essence, you think about where you want to go, and you head in the direction which feels "right." There are paths through and even guides available for those who feel a little strange about traveling an unknown territory. Many of those spirits who act as guides for our kind when we are in the Umbra owe us for healing them in the past. We are able to perform this service for them, and the spirits recognize our friendship.

In fact, had it not been for friendly spirits we had helped in the past, we might not have survived the War of Rage. Some of the Umbrood we had helped in the past hid us from the Garou who searched the Umbra for our Glades and Dens. Others taught us the Gift of looking like spirits of the Umbra so that we might pass unnoticed. The Garou may think they are the best-loved by the spirits, but we know the truth of the matter. They give their help and loyalty where they deem fit, and rarest of all do they proffer their friendship. Yet we still count many Umbrood as more than allies.

We usually enter the Umbra for specific purposes rather than on explorations or pleasure jaunts. When we cross over into the other world, it's usually to find someone or something or to fight the Death Bear. This dangerous undertaking is far too difficult for new cubs, so be warned!

Sometimes we also make the crossing in order to find teachers. We learn many things from the spirits. For their part, the spirits are sometimes curious about life among those with

solid bodies, so we get our own turn to teach a rapt audience. Many of us have formed close friendships and mentor relationships with certain spirits over time, and we may even count on them for aid in times of crisis.

Our eldest sleep within Umbral Glades because these places are the most secure. Usually a spirit or a group of spirits agree to watch over a resting place in return for something they want. This can be easy, like the spirit who asks a certain Gurahl to acquire a piece of shiny river rock and bring it to her. Conversely, the spirits may test a Gurahl (asking a favor of her or requiring her to retrieve a series of items that can only be acquired through negotiation with a powerful spirit or supernatural). Should the Gurahl satisfy the spirit of her good intentions and need for privacy, she can find no better protector and friend.

## Little Sisters and Brothers: The Other Changing Breeds

*There's a world I can't forgive  
And this life won't let me live  
How it looks to you — ain't the way  
It appears to me  
There's so much I've got to lay down  
This rage shakes roots from the ground  
I've got to bury it now  
— Van Zant, "Rage"*

We have equally complex relationships with the other Changing Breeds and the supernaturals in the world. As you've probably noticed by now, we are a rather slow-moving folk. We take a while to make up our minds. Often, we don't judge others until we've had a good, long look at them first. Even then, we can usually see some positive aspects to most creatures — even the Garou. Corrupted mimics such as fomori are another story. We slay the ones that cannot be saved, counting it as a service we do them, freeing their ravaged bodies from enslavement to Banes. Even with fomori, however, we take a good look before acting; we do have a way to save those who aren't too far gone. Personally, I think we are a very tolerant lot, especially considering the attacks on us by the Garou. Then again, we do believe some Garou tribes are better than others.

As a people, we have not yet agreed to let the Garou know for certain that we have returned to the world. We most often deal with ronin, Silent Striders or Stargazers, and we often find common cause with the Uktena. Some Uzmati werebears work alongside certain Wendigo, but most of us prefer more controlled, level-headed daily lives. Still, many Changers and a few other creatures know that the Gurahl walk among them.

Sometimes we've found it best to join with others to battle a common foe or protect a commonly held place. When we do so, our successes usually prove so startling that I wonder why we don't form coalitions much more often. Then again, we don't love everybody!

It's probably just best for me to run through the various types and give you a capsule view of what most of us think. First though, a caution against getting too chummy with other Changers — you just never know what they might be up to.

## The Elders of Winter

This name is the one we give to those ancient Gurahl who remain locked in slumber. Most of them hibernate in Umbral Glades or Dens, unaware of events happening in the material world except as disturbing dreams. Every once in a while events transpiring near their resting places may awaken one of the elders, even enticing the ancient one from his lair to investigate the disturbance. Some prove to be helpful and caring individuals who lapsed into sleep to hide from Garou wrath or because their sorrow was too great to go on living at the time. These elders sometimes reenter our society, and we welcome their insight and formidable powers.

Others, those who placed themselves in hibernation because their Rage had grown too great to control, sometimes awaken with their wrath still boiling. Such elders may simply need a way to vent their anger — and the mountains shake and boulders splinter as they work through their Rage — or they may have degenerated into almost mindless killing machines, incapable of their primary duties anymore. While we hold deep sympathy for these survivors of the War of Rage, we cannot allow them to rampage through lands we protect. Sadly, even our vaunted healing powers often prove unable to quell the fires that burn within their hearts. Some of the spiritually wounded ancients cannot be healed until they learn to forgive or to put aside the horrors they witnessed (or in which they participated). Much potential wisdom is lost when we must force such deadly Gurahl back into hibernation, hoping they will dream the healing they so desperately need.

## The Best Kept Secret

In the beginning, Gaia entrusted Her oldest children, the Gurahl, with many Gifts, and She taught them numerous rites so that they could, in turn, share them with others. For the most part, the Children of Bear willingly instructed the Garou and the other Changing Breeds. The Gurahl kept the secret of restoring life to the dead to themselves, however, for they did not trust their younger brothers and sisters — particularly the hot-tempered Garou — to display the wisdom and self-restraint to use this power wisely. The War of Rage was the tragic result. Still, the Gurahl kept their secret close to their hearts, lest any of the other Changing Breeds take the Gift of Gaia's Breath or the Rite of Fighting the Death Bear from them and misuse it.

Despite many attempts by members of several Changing Breeds (most obviously, the Corax) to steal the knowledge of how to bring the dead back to life from the Gurahl, none have succeeded — well, almost none.

The story goes like this.

Long ago, a tribe of Kinfolk fell upon hard times. Drought ruined their crops and drove away the game animals, leaving the people with nothing to eat as the harsh winter approached. A young Uzmati took pity on the humans; they were, after all, his human kin and he could not let them starve. Changing into bear form, he wandered into their midst and offered himself as a sacrifice so that they could feast upon his flesh. The tribe rejoiced at their good fortune and killed the Uzmati, happy with the unexpected gift of food. As soon as the Uzmati's meat had been stripped from his bones, other Gurahl came to claim what was left of their brother. They took the bones to a secret



place, where they intended to perform the Rite of Fighting the Death Bear to reunite the spirit of the noble Gurahl with his body.

Four Gurahl entered the Umbra to perform the rite (which was successful), but only three returned. When those who participated in the rite tried to find their missing brother, no one could remember the identity of the fourth werebear. The three who enacted the rite re-entered the Umbra, hoping to find some trace of the missing Gurahl. Instead, they found an empty bearskin that smelled strongly of coyote. With sudden dread, the three Gurahl realized that their most secret rite was no longer a secret — at least to the children of the Trickster. They decided to say nothing of the theft to anyone, but they watched carefully for signs that the Nuwisha possessed the knowledge of the secret of raising the dead. So far, Coyote's children seem to have kept the secret, as if simply having the knowledge was enough. Nevertheless, whenever a Gurahl and a Nuwisha meet, an unspoken question always hangs in the air between them.

— from "The Storysongs of Shoshona Medicine-Bear"

## Garou

The legacy of the War of Rage colors our feelings about Gaia's warriors. Those Garou we get along best with tend to be Galliards or Philodox, and I won't tell you we truly like all the tribes. Most of the time, we do remember that the Garou were once considered our little brothers, and some of them still evoke feelings for them in us.

## Black Furies

These courageous females revere the Mother and understand the concept of protection rather than mere savagery. We have little blame to lay at the Furies' door.

## Bone Gnawers

In the days when the Storm Eater ravaged the West, many Bone Gnawers sought places in the high mountains where they panned for gold and lived on the leavings of the more fortunate. Some of these Garou were directly responsible for awakening Gurahl in hibernation when they stumbled into our dens. As their carelessness allowed some of our most powerful members to help combat the Storm Eater, we thank them for doing so. And we apologize to those whose discoveries awakened Gurahl who were still enRaged. We commend their spirits to Gaia. Nowadays, sad to say, we sometimes find our bear kin competing with the Gnawers for the best trash heaps.



## Children of Gaia

What can I say about a tribe that so obviously tries to be peaceful and open-minded? I know many folk who believe that these Garou are the most sympathetic and most gentle of their kind. They may be, but their politically correct stance and rhetoric always seem to come after the fact when people are willing to admit they were wrong and are looking to assign blame for the fiasco. It's never the Children's fault; they always try to do their best, but somehow, that best always emerges after the Garou have achieved their objectives. Call me suspicious, but they always strike me as "protesting too much."

## Croatan

These noble Garou, one of the three tribes that crossed into the Pure Lands, no longer exist. They sacrificed themselves to rid these lands of Eater-of-Souls, a hideous Wyrmbest. Sometimes I wonder if we will follow in their footsteps, the few of us sacrificing ourselves to stop some terrible corruption and heal the land once more. Whatever their actions in the War of Rage (and they were not among the worst), the Croatan made up for them with their costly victory. It's a pity more Garou don't emulate their selflessness.

## Fianna

These werewolves enjoy many of the same arts we do, especially poetry, story and song. We acknowledge their artistry in these endeavors. That is all. No Gurahl of the Pure Lands will forget that they were some of the first to maraud across our home, taking what they wanted with no regard for the folk already here.

## Get of Fenris

These fierce Garou were some of our most dangerous opponents in the War of Rage, yet, curiously, they respected us and acknowledged Bear as a mighty totem. In return, while we may still harbor hatred for them in our deepest souls, we must tender respect to our most honest adversaries.

## Glass Walkers

It took a while for many of us to realize that these are the members of the tribe we knew in the 19th century as the Iron Riders. Then, they promoted the growth of the railroads, now they cling to modern technology in the face of criticism from the other Garou. Few of us live in cities, yet we understand the Glass Walkers at least as well as their own kind (sometimes better). Because we do not shun the making of things as a sign of the Weaver's machinations, we have some common ground with the Glass Walkers. After all, they would have no cities in which to walk, had we not taught humans the arts of agriculture and handicrafts.

## Red Talons

Of all the Garou, we best understand the Red Talons, a strictly lupus tribe. We know their Rage and sadness as their Kinfolk die a little more year by year, as they disappear from places they once roamed freely, leaving the bitter ashes of near-extinction in their wake. Indeed, we understand the Red Talons all too well.

*Understand, not agree with.* Where they blame humans for all the ills of modern life, we realize that humans are Gaia's creatures too and deserve a place in the world. Where the Red Talons would exterminate, we seek to educate. But we weep alongside the Talons, for their loss mirrors our own.

## Shadow Lords

These conniving werewolves claim to be the power behind the throne of Garou society. So be it! We accept that they are much to blame for the War of Rage, seeking in their greed for power, knowledge they had no right to covet. We didn't trust them then; we don't trust them now. Should you have reason to associate with a Shadow Lord, don't believe anything she says, and sleep with one eye open.

## Silent Striders

We count the Striders among the few Garou we consider actual allies or friends. Solitary wanderers like ourselves, they seek no power other than the power of freedom. They often bring us news we would otherwise fail to hear. We make them welcome, provide them with entertainment for a night or two or ally briefly to deal with a problem, then wish them good speed as they bid us farewell again.

## Silver Fangs

These Garou consider themselves the kings and leaders of all werewolves. They were the originators of the War of Rage. In their pride and arrogance, they sought to wrest from us what did not belong to them. They made demands rather than asking for our help, which told us they were not ready to learn our lore. I cannot prove that the instability which afflicts the Silver Fang tribe is a punishment sent upon them for their shameful actions, but I suspect their madness may only be cured through the use of our gift of healing. We will not know if this is so until they come to us in a properly contrite manner and ask for our help. If they had only asked rather than demanding, much pain might have been averted. Even in our sorrow and anger with the Silver Fangs, we do acknowledge our common roots, for they arose in Russia as did our brown bear kin.

## Stargazers

Strangely, while most other creatures see the Stargazers as inoffensive and somewhat "spacey," we wonder why our Asian kin were so thoroughly decimated in the War of Shame. Could it be that these peaceful Garou reached out to the Okuma, pointing to their love of the stars and our fascination with the constellations of Ursa as common ground, then treacherously slew them when they let their guard down? I have no proof that this is so, but whenever I am tempted to accompany a Stargazer on a trip to admire the heavens, I always wonder what those long-ago stars witnessed.

## Uktena

This tribe of Garou was one of the three who came to the Pure Lands and helped bind the Banes here. Intensely and insatiably curious, the Uktena would like to know all our secret lore, and some of them might not be too picky even now about

how to acquire that knowledge. They were fierce opponents during the War of Rage, but our quarrel with them was short-lived. In coming to the Pure Lands, we all had too much to do to fight one another. Many of the tribes who bred with the Uktena came to revere Bear as a healing totem, an occurrence that helped us smooth relations between us. Still, not all Uktena are to be trusted. They speak much of being displaced by the European Garou, but they say little concerning the takeover of our places and those of the other Changers who made the Americas their home.

We do have many things in common with the Uktena (and the Wendigo, for that matter). All of us feed our spirits through crafting and performing. Some of our customs are also similar. We are more likely to be found in Uktena company than in the company of most other werewolves. We just need to remember to be careful what we say around them and not reveal too much.

## Wendigo

The Wendigo, the Garou who inhabit the northern United States and Canada, seem to embody all the Rage bestowed upon the Garou. Their anger burns as brightly as it did 100 years ago. We understand their pain. Like the Uktena, the Wendigo practice handicrafts and arts that we also embrace. Proud and fierce, the Wendigo bred with the Plains Indians and have had to bear their Kinfolks' displacement along with their own. Rumors that they practice cannibalism (not too surprising, considering their totem) may be a misunderstanding of certain tribal practices (after all, we used to tell their tribes to eat us when they were in need). Then again, their anger may have laid them open to Pattern Breaker's corruption.

## Cousins

We can't get out of talking about the rest of the Changer family because you might need to know some of this someday. Just keep in mind that we rarely meet some of these folks, and we often have little common ground to share with the ones we do meet. Nonetheless they are Gaia's creatures and our little brothers and sisters. If nothing else we owe them respect for that.

## Ajaba

Hyenas, hmm. I've actually never met an Ajaba. Of course, I've heard the same rumors about their animal kin that everyone else has: that they're dirty, slinking carrion-eaters whose madness expresses itself in insane laughter. Somehow I can't believe Gaia would create such a despicable animal, then craft a werecreature from it. So, maybe we shouldn't believe everything we hear. Still, I'd like to meet one before forming any judgments.

## Ananasi

The spider folk tend to occupy different places than we do. Many other shifters look on them with grave suspicions. Perhaps because we are not so against the Weaver's crafts as others, we do not automatically condemn the Ananasi because of their webs. They possess knowledge we would like to learn, though it is doubtful we have any lore to offer them in return that they would want (or that we would be willing to give them). I have heard that

they now serve the Wyrms, but I have no proof of that. Other rumors say they fight the Corrupter on the front lines.

## Bastet

Immoral, promiscuous gossips — at least among themselves — the werecats spy out everything that happens in Gaia's creation. Though we don't practice their lax ways, we sometimes compare notes and share stories with the Bastet. They too suffered the werewolves' attacks. We aid them when we can and remain friends.

## Corax

The wereravens talk too much. They flit around all over the place poking their beaks into some things they ought to leave alone. Of course, they sometimes share that knowledge, making them valuable scouts. We are ambivalent about the Corax. We feel some gratitude to them for helping to save many of us during the War of Rage, but we also know that many of them acted as spies for the Garou, pointing out our hiding places to the werewolves to start with. While I can't fault them for wanting to survive, I'm not sure I'm comfortable with the idea that they did so at the expense of other Changers.

## Kitsune

Werefoxes. I know very little about them — not even the European Gurahl are familiar with them, which is odd considering how long foxes have been both there and here. None of our origin tales, at least those that I've heard, mention them at all. They prefer the fields; we prefer the mountains and forests. I know nothing evil of them except that they are said to be clever and crafty, so I am willing to keep an open mind.

## Mokolé

And I thought I only knew a little about the Kitsune! The lizard folk suffered as we did in the War of Rage, and they also withdrew. I'm not sure what they've been up to recently, if anything, but I do know they are not creatures who want others' company.

## Nuwisha

The story I told earlier ought to tell you all you need to know about the Nuwisha. The werecoyotes are incorrigible tricksters who embody the laughter of Gaia and keep us from taking ourselves too seriously. We share a common background through our Kinfolk connection. Bear, Coyote and Raven all served as powerful totems for the natives of the Pure Lands, thus we cherish the Nuwisha as our pesty, but lovable close kin.

## Ratkin

The rats inhabit the cities and rarely cross paths with us. If they are at all like their animal kin, I'd be wary of cornering one.

## Rokea

Although we frequent rivers, we have few occasions to visit the oceans. Therefore, we know almost nothing about the Rokea. I read *Jaws*, but I have no idea what application it has to the shark people.



# Outsiders

We don't exist in a world peopled only by other Changers and humans. Many supernaturals abide in places where we rarely encounter them. Nonetheless, you should know that they exist, and you should know something about them before you take up your own protected lands.

## Vampires

The worst of the lot. These creatures are the walking dead who feed off the living to sustain themselves. Most indulge in political schemes, and not a few are the sort of tycoons who trash wilderness lands to make room for bigger parking lots. One particular kind, who call themselves Gangrel, often exist in or travel through the wilderness. Some of them cause no problems; others forget who protects the wildlands. They make

fierce opponents. Never think that because one looks young, she is a weak or inexperienced youth.

The worst thing a vampire can do to you is to change you into one of their kind. Such creatures we call the Umfalla, or Soul-dead. Garou lump them in with their vampire-werewolf hybrids called Abominations. Such mockeries are no longer the Gurahl we once knew; instead, they prey upon those they should protect. (Some of us still remember too well Sarah Childsayer who went mad centuries ago after falling prey to the mad vampire prophet, Elisha.) If you ever come across one of the Soul-dead, call for as much help as you can get, and put her down like the mad thing she has become.

## Mages

We rarely have dealings with mages. A few who practice healing magic and herbalism occasionally interact with us. For

## Language: Spoken and Written

*When Gaia first made all the creatures, everyone spoke the same language and understood one another. Each creature had its own unique voice, some high, some low, some hissing, some trilling, but all knew what the others were saying. Then certain Changing Breeds — who shall remain nameless — thought up a plot to take over everything, only they were afraid of being overheard. So they went to Gaia and said, "Mother, we're tired of sounding just like everyone else. We'd like to have our own language, if it isn't too much trouble. Besides, we need to be able to talk to one another secretly in words the Wyrms won't understand." She looked at them a long time as if searching their hearts, then sighed and said, "Let it be so."*

*So all the creatures of different types received a new language, one they could call their very own. Corax chose a tongue that sounded like mocking laughter and angry scolding, and not a little bit like gossip all lined up chattering away. Bastet received a language of languorous yowls, startling hisses and even a contented rumble. For their speech, the Gurahl chose roars and grumbles they could easily reproduce from inside their big frames, a tongue that spoke more to feelings than intellectual matters, for they wanted a language that spoke from the heart. And the Garou? Their yips and barks may make up the majority of the words spoken between themselves, but all the victims in the War of Rage, those whom the Garou pushed aside, know the truth of the matter. When you hear the wolf howl, he is crying from loneliness because he drove his brothers away.*

### — A Gurahl Tale Explaining Their Language

Like most thinking creatures, the Gurahl have their own unique language. Initially learned as a spoken tongue during their first year as Gurahl, the language is called among werebears Rar-Azgai. Even those not raised in Kinfolk families find the language easy to learn, as it is both simple (with only 22 distinct sounds, each corresponding to a scratched mark) and concerned with simplistic ideas. Rar-Azgai cannot be used to convey complex thoughts; it is more suited to expressing fairly primal ideas: hunger, danger, good food, meeting and so forth. The werebears use human language, with its greater complexity and terminology for abstract concepts when they wish to talk in depth on such matters.

The Gurahl have deliberately kept their language minimalistic, refusing to add new words to it or to try to broaden its scope. By keeping it within the realm of growls and roars, they disguise it as "normal" bear sounds. Variations can be achieved through the speaker's adoption of certain postures or through emitting particular scents when necessary. Such things may clue other Gurahl in to subtleties they might miss in the words themselves or show them that the speaker is in fact making a joke. Despite its limitations, several Gurahl songmakers and poets create their works entirely in Rar-Azgai. Many of the works so created are highly evocative and strangely moving.

The marks which correspond to each sound in the language serve as a sort of pictographic alphabet. Each mark is one that can be reproduced by a Gurahl in either Bjornen or Ursus form by using her claws. While in Homid or Arthren form, a Gurahl can cut such marks into a surface such as a tree with a sharp knife. Messages written in Rar-Azgai often serve as boundary markers, letting other Gurahl know they've entered another werebear's protected area. Sometimes when Gurahl become aware that other werebears are in the vicinity, they leave a Rar-Azgai message in the other Gurahl's path asking for a meeting. Other uses for the written language include leaving warnings of danger, marking particularly fertile areas where food is plentiful and as a reminder of direction in unfamiliar terrain. Like posture used with the spoken version, how deeply the marks are cut conveys more information than the words. Likewise, a scent left rubbed into the marks can give another Gurahl reams of information.

In recent times, the Gurahl have begun translating the scratchings into pencil or ink representations. A daring few have even devised a printed script that looks similar to runes. While these symbols lack the extra subtlety available to the depth or smell of scratchings, they do have the advantage of being a little more portable. Having heard from Kinfolk of the success of the Navajo code talkers in World War II, some werebears like to joke that if the need ever arises, their language would give the enemy real fits!



the most part, we find that they are too caught up in their own affairs — something to do with man's ascendancy over everything — to pay much attention to us. Such ambitions call for us to watch *them*, however. We've seen where such arrogance and pride lead before.

### *Wraiths*

The only time we have dealings with wraiths is when we enter the fringes of the Dark Umbra to fight the Death Bear. Then we see them more as background window dressing than as anything else. I have often wondered if they are enough like the Umbral spirits that we might find them compatible. I have heard that many possess abilities to affect the material world. If that's so, would they be willing to help us, or do they hate us for still living while they are dead?

### *Changelings*

Of all the others, we find the changelings most like ourselves. They love music, poetry, song and drama. They passionately seek out art, sculpture and other crafts. Such things give them substance to remain as they are rather than fading into the everyday human world. Aside from their love of the arts, however, we find changelings far too fickle for our tastes. They often move so fast that we lose track of what we're trying to say to them, or they change their aspects, becoming morose and sullen where, a few minutes before, they were happy and sociable. We don't understand them, but we find them interesting.

### *Mummies*

To the best of my knowledge, I've never met a mummy. I doubt the Egyptian supernaturals travel in the same circles we do. On the other hand, if they do indeed live in cycles alternating death with life as I've heard, I'd love to talk to one about our ability to raise the newly dead and how it differs from what they do.

## The Bear's Other Face

Hey there. How come you're not at Council with the rest of the folks making policy and swapping trinkets? Yeah, I guess you *could* ask me the same question. Fact of the matter is, I'm about ready to hit the road right now — I figure I've learned all I can here, and there isn't gonna be anything else other than ass-scratching and moaning about the big bad Garou for the rest of the festival. So I'm gone.

What's the matter? Haven't heard a Gurahl talk like that before? Yeah, I'm kinda different. Name's Peter, and they almost gave me the name "Peter Fire-Under-His-Ass" a couple of years back. Hell, they'd be right. I know I've been trying to light that same fire under some of the most senior and revered asses around here for a while, but they're pretty stubborn hereabouts. Hell, they're like that *anywhere*.

Quit looking at me like that. Sit down. Listen. Maybe you'll understand.

You see, way back during my Gallivant, I stopped back in at my hometown, which was on a rez. And sure enough, things hadn't gotten any better during my absence. There was a new convoy of government trucks coming to bury their leftover toxic crap just north of our water lines. It pissed me off, but I remembered what my Buri-Jaan had said, and I held in the anger. So I went stomping around one night, trying to work it off, and eventually wound up sitting on the bed of some old guy's pickup, desperate to just "talk out" some of my aggression. Didn't recognize him right off, but he was a local — can't fake that.

So I started growling about the government and its trucks and its toxic waste, and you know what? Crazy old bastard started laughing at me. I probably don't need to tell you that *really* pissed me off. I jumped up to my feet and balled up my fist and said, "You think that's funny, old man? If you think there's something funny about pain, I'll be happy to tickle your ribs, all right!"

Old bastard looked on back at me and said — and now let me tell you this, there was something harder 'n iron in his eye when he said it, but that grin was still on his face — he said, "What were you expecting me to do? Cry? Like that Indian fella on the 'Oh, please don't litter, people' TV commercials a while back?"

I tried to tell him exactly what I thought of that analogy, but he didn't give me a chance. He said, "That fella got on television and he cried. He cried because some white man figured, 'If white folks see the poor red man crying, maybe they'll be better people.' *Sure* they were."

Then he hopped on his feet and jabbed a bony finger right into my ribs and said to me, "That's what you can do, you know. You can stand there and cry and hope people get better, or you can get off your ass and *do* something. And I don't give a shit if you laugh, sob or recite poetry while you do it, just so long as you aren't standing around whining."

I sat down then, and all the fire went right out of me. The old coot took another swig of his firewater and passed me the flask; it was potent stuff, and I only took a lot of it. We talked a while; turned out he knew things. Eventually





I stumbled drunk back into my folks' cabin. The next morning, I got up and I went out and I did something.

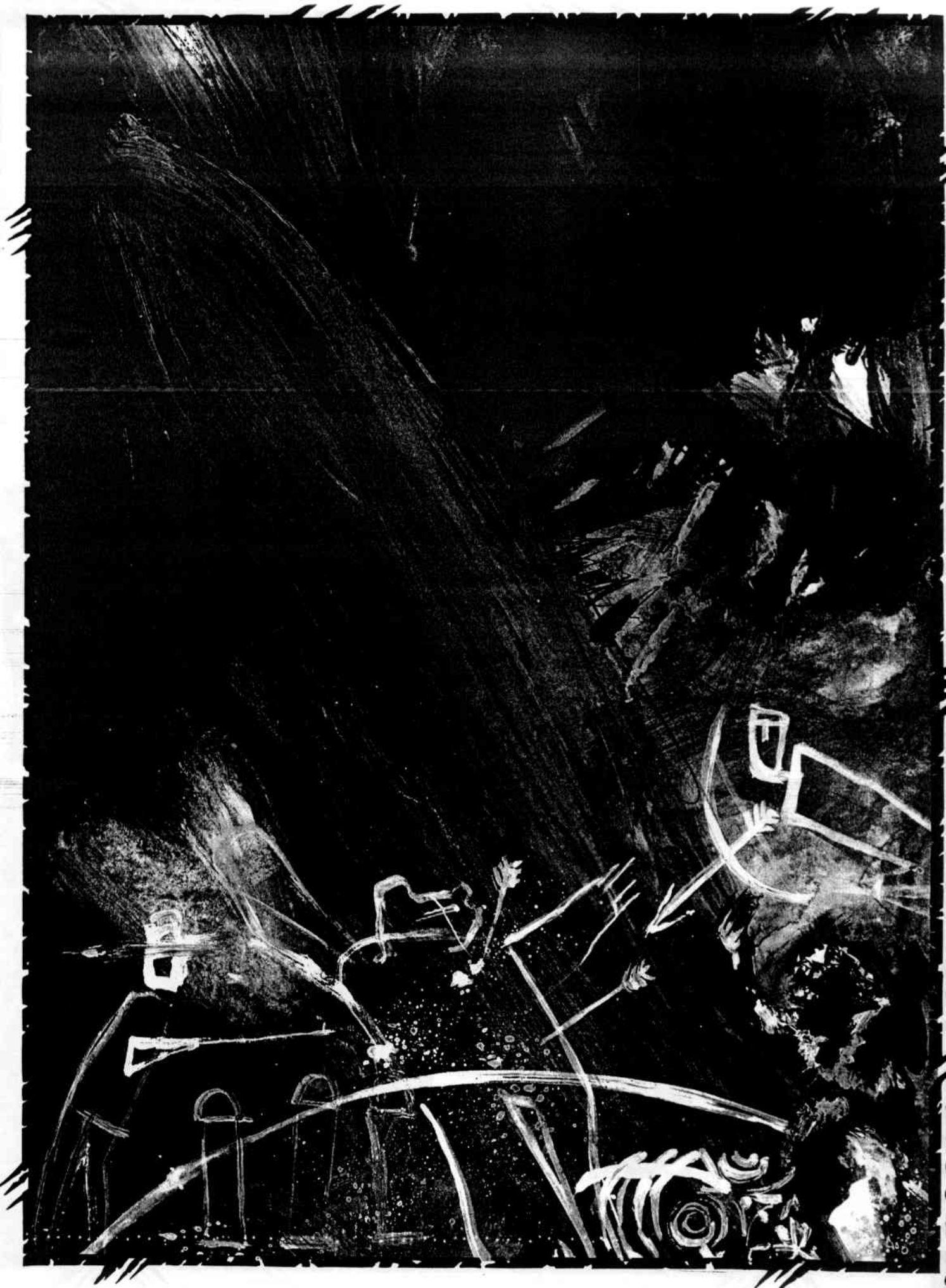
No, kid. Don't ask. Let's just say I got away with it and leave it at that.

Last couple of years, I've been a hell of a lot more active — Uzmati and proud — and my Buri-Jaan's despairing something fierce. But I've gotten shit *done*. So go on back in and listen to the stories and learn about how important it is to do things patiently and steadily. But remember —

not everybody believes we have enough time to watch the trees grow and educate the next generation of human kids. That old guy had the right of it; I used to figure him for Gurahl, but now I'm thinking he was something else, somebody who had his priorities a little clearer and better-ordered.

Hell. I'm leaving. Say bye-bye to Tanya for me when you see her. Here, you can finish the bottle. It's good stuff, but don't let it go to your head.





# Chapter Three: The Song of Making

## The Gift of the Bear People

Once upon a time, when the people had no food, the hunters of the tribe went out to search for game animals. Luck was with them, for they came upon a giant bear, who lay dying on the side of a gently sloping hill.

"Our work is done," said the chief of the hunters. "We need only to wait for the bear to die and then we can bring his body home to our families. We will feast all winter on the rich meat, while our women can make clothes from his hide and tools from his teeth and claws and bones."

"We must do more than wait," replied the wise woman who accompanied the hunters on their trek. "We must ask the bear if he will allow us to take his body after his spirit abandons it." The wise woman knelt down beside the dying bear and looked into his eyes. Before she had time to voice a prayer to his departing spirit, the bear reached out with a huge paw and touched the side of her face.

"Your petition is granted before you ask it," the bear said, speaking in a voice that sounded like little more than a tortured growl to the hunters but which rang clearly in the heart of the wise woman. "All that you want I will do for you except for one thing, and in return for granting me this one request, I will give your people a gift. You may have my flesh for food and my hide for clothes and blankets. You may take my teeth and claws and make things of use and beauty out of them. All I ask is that you bury my bones deep in the earth, for I come from the earth and I would like to return my elements to it."

The wise woman's eyes filled with tears and she nodded her head. "We will do as you ask, oh mighty bear," she whispered. The bear returned her nod.

"This, then, is the gift I give to you. Each of you here must eat a piece of my heart and share in my life-blood. That way, you will

always carry a part of my spirit within you. Your children shall inherit my strength and my patience. A few of them will become something more, a union of your people and mine. With the gift of my flesh, I claim you as my Kinfolk."

The bear closed his eyes and died, and the hunters, under the direction of the wise woman, did as he had asked.

— from "The Storysongs of Shoshona Medicine-Bear"

## Prelude: The Bear Awakens

Even as a child, you knew you were different from all those around you. It wasn't because you were bigger than the other kids in your class (although you probably were) or stronger than your older siblings. Something else seemed to lie dormant inside you, waiting for the opportunity to break out of its shell — or come out of its cave. You might have seemed a little slower than your peers, but you weren't dumb by a long shot. You thought things out carefully, rarely acted in haste and didn't say anything unless you had worked out all the implications beforehand. If you were lucky, your teachers recognized you as a methodical student; if you weren't, you suffered through lots of remedial classes.

With the greatest of luck, you had parents who seemed to understand your strangeness. They might have dropped hints here and there that you were somehow set apart from other children. They encouraged you to spend time in the great outdoors, they drove you to junior first-aid classes and they answered your questions about why the human race was ruining the environment.



In all probability, however, your parents proved less than understanding of your "otherness." They either tried to shove you into a conventional mold or, failing that, wrote you off as a problem-child. You might have suffered physical abuse from parents who hated or feared you, teaching you from your earliest days that, no matter how hard you tried to fit in, you would always walk alone.

No matter what your circumstances, you felt responsible for taking care of those who were younger or weaker than you. Your childhood enemies were the class bullies, your friends' abusive parents — or your own — and the people who thought that might make right and that weak meant "easy mark." Sometimes you dreamed of being a doctor or a police officer or a therapist. Sometimes you just wanted to get even with all the tormentors in your world.

You felt an affinity with growing things and with nature. If your parents kept a garden, you offered to help tend it. You joined a scout troop, not for the company, but for the chance to go camping and hiking. Whenever you saw piles of litter along the highway or trash dumped down the side of a mountain, your heart ached as if someone had punched you. You felt the scars of strip-mining and clear-cutting as keenly as if someone had carved great bleeding gashes into your own skin. And no one understood why the sight of a dead possum in the middle of the highway filled you with sadness and unreasoning anger.

As you grew older, the thing inside you (whatever it was) grew stronger. Sometimes, in your dreams, you felt your body changing, growing larger and more monstrous. You saw visions of a burnt, desiccated land — and woke up in a cold sweat, certain that you had experienced a prediction of the future. At the same time, your drives to protect others grew stronger, until they became almost compulsive. Your parents had to warn you about smothering your smaller friends with over-protectiveness. Their admonitions didn't help.

Then something happened to provoke your First Change. If you were lucky, it took place away from the eyes of others. More likely, however, it did not. Now that you know more about your true nature and the psychological effect called the Delirium, you understand why no one else seems to remember precisely what happened. At the time, however, you became a creature of raw, uncontrollable emotions — you didn't much care who saw you or what they thought about it. Maybe you were responding to something that threatened the life of one of your self-appointed charges; maybe you finally witnessed your best friend's father whip his child with a belt buckle. Whatever the circumstance, the "thing" inside you burst forth and made you realize that whatever you were, it wasn't human.

If your parents were Kinfolk (and were aware of their bloodlines), they took you aside and tried to soften the impact of your First Change. They explained that you were a bear-spirit clothed in human flesh and that you carried within you the legacies of both human and bear. Then they sent you in search of a teacher, another Gurahl who would serve as your Buri-Jaan, or mentor during the first year or two of your new life.

Or perhaps you suffered through the terror of the First Change by yourself. You waited for the world to end — for the police (or the men in white coats) to come for you and lock you

away in an asylum, where monsters like you obviously belonged. That didn't happen. Instead, you felt a summons. Something drew you away from your home and family, and it led you into the wilderness that you loved so much, leading you through dreams and visions and instincts to a secluded place where you met your teacher.

Little by little, slowly, methodically and sometimes painfully, everything about your life began to make sense.

## Becoming a Gurahl

If you think you want to play a Gurahl, first take a look at what Gurahl are not. Werebears rarely charge into battle at the head of an army of Gaia's warriors. They make lousy spies, since slinking in the shadows doesn't come easily to these lumbering giants. Gurahl don't ooze sensuality like the Bastet or live for the next great prank like the Nuwisha. They aren't gifted with gab — or flight, for that matter — like the Corax. Why, then, should you consider playing one of the Children of Bear?

Well, there are lots of reasons to play a Gurahl. Gurahl are about as close as you'll get to the classical hero archetype in the World of Darkness. The image of the strong, gentle protector just about sums up what the werebears are all about. While the Garou are ripping the world apart in a desperate attempt to perform radical surgery to save it, the Gurahl work behind the scenes trying just as desperately to repair the damage caused by both the Wyrn and Gaia's warriors. However, this relative calm doesn't make the Gurahl a group of non-confrontational pacifists. In order to protect the weak, you have to be able to fight the strong, and the Gurahl have the ability to do just that.

Gurahl have an extra dimension that carries its own appeal. They are figures as tragic as any Garou, their ancestors persecuted for crimes they didn't commit, hounded into near extinction and self-imposed exile. Finally, after centuries of absence, they have returned to the world to try and pick up the pieces. The odds that they will succeed, however, are slim to none.

Werebears live life at a different pace from many of the other Changing Breeds. They appreciate the slow rhythms of the seasons and the cycles of change that mark the movement of time through space. Gurahl are attuned to the Earth, to the Great Mother of all life. They feel the Earth's pain beneath the axes of the clear-cutters and the great machines of the strip-miners. They die a little with the disappearance of yet another species of plant or animal from the earth. Their anger is as great as that of the Garou, but it does not run as hot. It smolders, driving the Gurahl to Herculean efforts to make things better — even at the cost of their own lives.

Most Gurahl, unlike many Changing Breeds, genuinely like humans. They feel responsible for the puny, hairless, tool-using creatures. They remember a time when humans actually walked softly on the land and weren't blind to the spirit world. They see what humans just might have to offer the world (given the proper teaching and guidance), and they weep for what humanity has done to the world. Pity and horror exist in equal measure within the Gurahl; and above it all is love — for the Earth Mother and all Her children.

Still interested? Good.

## Gallivant: The First Year

Gurahl cubs come under the influence of an older Gurahl who serves as their teacher, Buri-Jaan and companion during the first critical year or two after the First Change. Young Gurahl need a lot of guidance in making the transition from their lives as "normal" humans or bears to their new existence. Like a mother bear keeping watch over her cub, the Gurahl's Buri-Jaan takes responsibility for making sure that his charge possesses the knowledge necessary to survive in a world that has suddenly become much larger, much more complicated and far scarier than it once was.

The first thing a young Gurahl learns is the Dance of the Centuries. The cub hears the stories about how the world was made, how the Gurahl came to be and how they nearly died at the hands of their little brothers and sisters, the Garou.

This period in her life may be the first time the Gurahl cub has ever heard of Gaia or Garou. Unless she comes from a family of Kinfolk who chose to impart some secrets to their Gurahl-child, the cub must completely revise everything she thought she knew. She learns about the Pattern Breaker's destructive madness and the Tapestry Maker's compulsive behavior. She accompanies her Buri-Jaan on journeys across the countryside, learning by doing — and by witnessing the travesty that misguided or evil creatures (some human, some not) have made of the world. She receives encouragement to explore her own limitations, to take delight in all five of her forms and to make the most of her newfound abilities.

Her Buri-Jaan gradually introduces her to others of her kind, assuring her that although she may often walk apart from others, she is never truly alone. The young Gurahl learns her first rituals, recites the Code of Ursa with her Buri-Jaan and questions its applications. One day, when she is ready, her Buri-Jaan takes her into the Umbra, and there, the cub learns her first Gifts and sees the world as it once was, as it still might be.

Finally, the young Gurahl attends her first Council of Autumn. Here, at the annual gathering of the elders of the Gurahl, she meets the movers and shakers of her kind. She participates in the formal, private dances that she has practiced with her tutor and relives, with the movements of her body, the history of the Gurahl. She, at last, comes home.

## The Time of Changes

While some Buri-Jaan remain with their cubs for longer than a year, they usually do not remain for more than two years. Sooner or later, the young Gurahl needs to make her own way in the world. She may, if she desires, seek out companions; many fledgling werebears enjoy traveling in small groups. Occasionally, she may strike up a friendship with members of other Changing Breeds. She may even befriend one of the more tolerable of the Garou, but that is a rare occurrence.

As she matures, her auspice changes. The Gurahl learns how to become an active protector and advocate for the Great Mother and her creation. She begins a great work of art which will take her an entire lifetime to complete, summarizing all that she was and is and will become in one masterwork of painting, music, poetry or some other act of creation. This creation is called the Lifework, and for many Gurahl it is the last center of peace in a





world at war. The study of mystical energies and the powers of Gaia will occupy her for a period, when once again her auspice changes. Finally, to complete the cycle of her changing auspices, she learns to use what she has learned to interpret the will of the Great Mother.

At some point in her life, she sends out a call to another young Gurahl. This time, she acts as Buri-Jaan to a cub, directing her fledgling's paths with a gentle hand and a world of patience. Eventually, the years take their toll on even the strongest Gurahl. One morning, she wakes to hear the call of the Death Bear, a soft insistent voice that announces to her the beginning of a new life within the arms of Mother Earth Herself. Understanding rhythms and cycles, the Gurahl will answer the summons, believing that she will find, in the Death Bear, her Buri-Jaan for yet another cycle of existence.

## Traits

Gurahl see themselves as healers and protectors. As such, their mind-set diverges from that of most of the other Changing Breeds. They lack the boiling tension of the Garou, the compulsive need for mischief of the Nuwisha, the insatiable curiosity of the Bastet and Corax and the deviousness of the Ratkin. Instead, they represent the implacable rhythm of the changing seasons, the slow movement of the planets through the heavens, the steady procession of life from seedling or egg through maturation and death. Unlike most of the other Changers, who are either carnivores or carrion-eaters, the Gurahl are omnivores; they do not have to rely on killing their prey for sustenance.

Despite their differences, Gurahl share some basic traits with the Garou. Silver affects them in the same way as it does Garou, and they regenerate with equal speed. Likewise, the Crinos form of the Gurahl evokes the Delirium, though it is reduced by two levels. The major differences are as follows:

- The Gurahl have auspices, but they process through each of the five types as they age. Furthermore, they can shift from one auspice to another after they have experienced all five. Usually they settle into one auspice that suits them best.
- Rage is dependent on breed, rather than auspice.
- There are no metis Gurahl. On the rare occasions when two Gurahl have mated, conception does not occur or, if it does, the child dies within the womb.
- Gurahl use Rage in a different fashion than the Garou do.
- The pull of the seasons affects Gurahl, making them sluggish in the winter; some actually hibernate for most of the cold months of the year.
- Gurahl gain access to the Umbra in a different manner than the Garou. Instead of stepping sideways, the Gurahl learn a relatively simple rite which enables them to rend the Gauntlet temporarily, creating a "hole" for them to pass through.

In general, Gurahl characters follow the same rules for Attributes and Abilities as the ones outlined in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. This chapter details the differences, embellishments and modifications to those basic rules. Where the information presented in this chapter conflicts with previously published material on the Gurahl, the contents of this sourcebook supersedes the earlier versions.

## Breeds

All Gurahl come from matings between a Gurahl and either a human or a bear, or from the union of two Kinfolk. Because Gurahl choose their mates carefully, following a specific ritual that dates from the time of their creation, metis Gurahl do not exist. The werebears believe that the lack of metis represents a special blessing from Gaia that reflects the solitary lifestyle of the Gurahl. Metis Garou, however despised, can still find support and grudging acceptance from a pack. Gurahl, after they leave their Buri-Jaan, must fend for themselves in most cases; deformed or inherently flawed werebears can't survive on their own. Thus, even if two werebears ignore the Code of Ursa and mate, their union is sterile or else produces a stillborn child.

## Homid

At one time, Gurahl bred with humans and bears in a near-equal ratio. The War of Rage changed that, making it nearly impossible (except for the few Gurahl who remained hidden among the isolated tribes of northern Europe and the ones who migrated across the land bridge with the Pure Ones) for the werebears to mate with their human Kinfolk. Within the last century, however, the numbers of homid Gurahl have increased slightly, although they remain fewer in number than their ursine cousins. Needless to say, a Changing Breed that relies more on wild creatures than humans for breeding will likely be sparse in numbers indeed. The Gurahl are no exception.

While this comeback indicates a new strength and versatility among the Gurahl, it has not been without difficulty. Many Kinfolk lines died with the end of the tribal cultures that housed them. The decimation of the North American Indians in the 18th and 19th centuries, for example, resulted in the disappearance of entire families of Gurahl Kinfolk.

Many Gurahl now born to human parents (or to unions between one Gurahl and one human) grow up in tribal societies dwelling in remote areas of sub-Arctic Europe and Asia, or else they experience life on a tribal reservation (mainly in North America). Because their lives usually reflect tribal values rather than those of the high-tech, high-stress modern world, homid Gurahl grow up with a greater appreciation and reverence for the natural world. In some cases, extreme isolation from civilization produces cultural "naifs," who need basic instruction in manipulating common mechanical devices or using computers, VCRs and other technological wonders. Other human-reared Gurahl lead lives that differ little from "normal" humans, feeling completely at home with the World Wide Web, CNN and championship wrestling.

The Gurahl have attempted to develop new Kinfolk families among humans to make up for the ones lost over time. Usually, they choose as mates those humans who show a predisposition toward wilderness life or who work within the healing community. Because of this preference, Gurahl born within the last two decades often have parents who are naturalists, park rangers, doctors, herbalists or environmentalists.

Beginning Rage: 3

Beginning Gnosis: 4



## Ursine

By far, the majority of Gurahl alive today come from ursine stock. Before the population explosion that occurred after the end of the Impergium, most of the world consisted of human-free wild lands; wisdom thus dictated that bear-born Gurahl could more easily exercise their duties of protection. The War of Rage drove a number of Gurahl into hiding in bear-form, where they continued to breed and, occasionally, beget true sons and daughters. The endangered status of bears in the modern world, however, threatens a lessening in the number of Gurahl born to bears in the wild.

Today, ursine Gurahl usually grow up within the confines of protected habitats or national parks. These individuals usually retain their birth forms until necessity demands a shift into one of the other forms, usually as a response to some sort of threat that a "mere" bear could not handle. Some ursine Gurahl actually prefer to remain in either Homid or Arthren form after their First Change out of curiosity and wonder at the capabilities of their new shapes; these Gurahl generally develop a reputation as reclusive wildlife experts or survivalists.

A number of ursine Gurahl spend their cubhood in zoos or other environmental habitats that attract large numbers of human visitors. These Gurahl have a passing familiarity with humans by the time of their First Change (usually necessitating a quick escape from their homes, often with the assistance of human Ktn).

Ursine Gurahl, in particular, harbor a special grudge against humans (such as poachers, clear-cutters or sport hunters) whom they recognize as direct threats to their existence as bears.

Gurahl who begin life as bears suffer from the same restrictions as lupus Garou with regard to choosing beginning Abilities.

Beginning Rage: 4

Beginning Gnosis: 5

## Natures and Demeanors

The Werewolf Players Guide lists numerous Archetypes for use in fleshing out the personality of a character through the concept of Natures and Demeanors. Some of these Archetypes suit Gurahl characters better than others. *Amas*, *Explorer*, "Lone Wolf" (in this case, Bear) and *Survivor* reflect the solitary lifestyle of many Gurahl, while *Builder*, *Caregiver*, *Academy*, *Martyr* and *Visionary* emphasize the more reflective and compassionate aspects of the werebears. *Bureaucrat*, *Director*, *Judge* and *Traditionalist* Archetypes highlight the structured focus of many Gurahl, while *Cub*, *Curmudgeon* and *Gallant* offer variations on the stereotype.

Other Archetypes do not fit most Gurahl characters. Few werebears emerge as *Connivers*, *Deviants*, or *Rebels*. But of course, there are always exceptions. No two Gurahl are alike; the only thing you need to take into consideration is whether or not your choice of Nature and Demeanor suits your Gurahl character.

## New Archetype

### • Teacher

Everything you have experienced has added to your store of knowledge, and you wish to share your information with others. You look forward to the time when you can act as a Buri-Jaan to someone younger and less worldly-wise than you, but in the meantime, you plan to practice on anyone who crosses your path. "Did you know that..." is one of your favorite conversation openers, along with "Let me explain" and "I thought you'd never ask." Your companions sometimes tease you about your pedantic approach to life, but you take it in stride. Someday, they will need to know something vital, and you will be there to supply them with the knowledge that they need.

— Regain Willpower whenever a pupil of yours demonstrates that he has learned a lesson you taught him.

## Auspice

Gurahl have stronger ties to Gaia than they do to Luna, but the phases of the moon exercise their influence on the Children of Bear just the same. Unlike the Garou, however, who fall under one auspice that governs their place within the pack, the Gurahl move through all five of Luna's major phases in the course of their time on earth. In some ways, the Gurahl response to the effect of the moon resembles the earth's slow passage through the seasons.

While Gurahl auspices roughly correspond with those of the Garou, the werebears have different names for these aspects of Luna.

### Arcas — The New Moon

The ancient Greeks tell the story of Callisto, a priestess of Artemis, who had a child by Zeus. As punishment, Hera turned her into a bear. Callisto's son, Arcas, pursued his mother to a mountain top, but before he could catch her, Zeus turned him into a bear as well and placed both mother and cub in the heavens. That's one story the humans tell about Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. Our buri tales about Great Mother Bear and First Cub make far more sense....

A Gurahl's First Change opens her to a new way of looking at herself and at the world around her. Like Arcas, the Bear Cub of the heavens, new Gurahl embark on a time of exploration and questioning. Arcas exhibit a playfulness and inquisitiveness that rival that of many Ragabash Garou. This "time of wonder," called the Gallivant, usually lasts for the first year or two of a Gurahl's post-Change life, ending when the fledgling cub experiences his first serious battle after parting with his Buri-Jaan.

### Uzmatti — The Full Moon

In the language of the Gurahl, the word Uzmatti means "aggressive protector." Among the Miwok, Uzmatti came to mean grizzly bear. Of course, the human voice gives the word a different inflection and, thus, limits the meaning....

When an Arcas Gurahl leaves his Buri-Jaan to begin his (usually solitary) travels, he comes under the influence of the Full Moon and becomes an Uzmatti, or warrior-Gurahl. While

Uzmatis do not walk the razor's edge of frenzy, as do their Garou Ahroun cousins, they do feel the song of battle deep within them, and they stand prepared to fight any who threaten their protected lands or creatures. Many Gurahl remain Uzmatis for several years, particularly if they dwell in a region where they must constantly battle Wyrms-creatures or other hostile entities. Eventually, however, something occurs to propel the Uzmatis into his next phase of existence. In some cases, he acquires a mate and family, necessitating the cultivation of his nurturing tendencies at the expense of his aggressive instincts. In other instances, a Gurahl may simply feel that it is time to move on to another stage of life.

## Kojubat — The Gibbous Moon

The Ket people of Siberia used the word "kojubat" to stand for the concept of absolute truth. A loose translation of the meaning of the word is "honest as a bear." The Ket are very wise people to have grasped so completely the essential nature of our lorekeepers.

After walking the path of the warrior for a while, Gurahl turn to the Gibbous Moon for guidance, embarking on a period of learning and remembering. Kojubat Gurahl learn to relate the experience they have gained during their Arcas and Uzmatis periods to the overall pattern of their lives. As Kojubat, Gurahl spend time learning the songs, stories and lore of the Gurahl. If they have not already begun their Lifeworks, Gurahl usually do so at the onset of their Kojubat phase. This auspice corresponds roughly to the Garou Galliard. Kojubat Gurahl enjoy a great deal of respect from other werebears, since they represent the embodiment of the knowledge imparted by Gaia to Her gentlest Changing children.

## Kieh — The Crescent Moon

The Tewi word for doctors is "kieh," which also means bear. I won't go so far as to say the Gurahl taught the hairless ones everything they know about healing, but they had to learn from somewhere....

Once a Kojubat has spent enough time absorbing the lore of the Gurahl, she takes on her Kieh auspice and comes under the influence of the Crescent Moon. During this phase, a Gurahl's mystical tendencies reach their peak. Most Kieh are elders among the Gurahl. As such, they devote much of their time and energy to the performance of mystical rites and to expanding their knowledge of Gaia's Gifts. Some Kieh become Buri-Jaan to new Arcas Gurahl, passing on what they have learned during their own Kojubat years to their young charges. While Kieh have much in common with Theurges, they do not evoke the same feelings of distrust among their own kind as do the seeds of the Garou.

## Rishi — The Half Moon

The Gurahl word for counselor or peacemaker is "Rishi." The Hindus refer to the seven stars of Ursa Major as the Seven Rishis or the Seven Bears, and they see the Great Bear as the symbol of the ever-turning cycle of seasons and the source of natural wisdom.

The last moon phase to exert its influence over a Gurahl is the Half Moon. By the time he becomes a Rishi, a Gurahl has usually acquired a substantial body of experience and knowledge. Often, he has become an important member of his tribe.

The Gurahl place great emphasis on age, seeing the accumulation of years as a testimony to the wisdom of the accumulator. Rishi act as peacemakers, mediators and judges among the Gurahl. Younger Gurahl accord them respect and reverence, listening to their words and heeding their counsel.

## How Auspices Really Work

In the old times, when Gurahl could expect to live out their lives in a patterned progression, most Children of Bear made the transit through the five auspices only once, reaching the revered status of Rishi near the end of a full life. Due to the demands of the modern world and the signs of an impending Apocalypse, Gurahl born in the 20th century do things differently. A Gurahl's age no longer serves as the sole determining factor for her progression through the auspices. Unfortunately, many Arcas Gurahl find their Gallivant cut short by the sudden advent of some great misfortune, such as the unexpected death of a Buri-Jaan or the need to battle one of the Pattern Breaker's destructive brood. Such an event precipitates a rapid change from Arcas to Uzmatis long before the change would normally take place.

Likewise, an Uzmatis may decide after only a short time that he needs to study the lore of the Gurahl and shift from his warrior phase to his Kojubat auspice. It is not unusual for a Gurahl to run through all five auspices in the first decade of his existence, a phenomenon which would have occurred only rarely before the War of Rage.

In addition, many Gurahl proceed quickly through one or two auspices only to find that the next phase of their life seems to take forever to complete. Moreover, after completing one passage through Gaia's phases, most Gurahl settle upon one auspice that seems particularly suited to them. It is not uncommon, for example, for elderly Gurahl to recover their Gallivant, or "wonder time," by assuming their Arcas phase and entering a "second cubhood" in which they engage in lighthearted play and even pranks. Such Gurahl, when they become Buri-Jaan, use humor and laughter to teach their adopted cubs. Other Gurahl, especially those whose natural affinities lie in the healing arts, revert to their Kieh auspice and spend the rest of their lives as healers. Of course, some Gurahl long to return to the active life of the Uzmatis, choosing a path that leads them into direct confrontations with the enemies of Gaia and the Gurahl.

## Gifts and Auspice

Once a Gurahl enters a particular auspice, he becomes eligible to learn the Gifts associated with that lunar phase (subject to the limitations of his Rank). As he progresses from one auspice to another, his ability to learn Gifts expands to include his new Auspice Gifts. In addition, he retains the capacity for learning Gifts from previous auspices. Thus, Gurahl who have gone through all five moon phases may choose Gifts from all of the auspices. Thus, a venerable Rishi may decide to learn a few Arcas or Uzmatis Gifts in order to round out her knowledge of Gaia's blessings even though she has already passed beyond those auspices. Of course, learning too many Gifts outside one's auspice is considered irresponsible, the mark of someone who didn't learn all he should have during his previous moon phases. It's not unheard of for Gurahl to lose Renown for relying on hindsight in this manner.



## Gnosis

A Gurahl's beginning Gnosis depends on his breed. The werebears refresh their Gnosis pool through meditation or by means of the Rite of Replenishment. Those Gurahl who are fortunate enough to possess an Umbral Glade in conjunction with their Den (see Merits and Flaws) may assure themselves of a regular supply of Gnosis.

Like the Garou, the Gurahl expend Gnosis to activate certain Gifts and fetishes, or in the course of enacting many of their rites. Silver items temporarily lower a Gurahl's Gnosis score by one point per item carried; lost Gnosis returns within 24 hours after the offending items have been discarded.

## Rage and its Uses

*Watching Jacob Treeshaker go into battle was like watching a volcano get ready to blow its top. He'd stand there and shake all over, rattling the teeth in your head if you were standing too close. Then he'd give a loud yell and gather the fire of Gaia into his massive fists—or paws, if he happened to be wearing one of his bear-forms. The ground would tremble as he stomped toward the poor critter on the receiving end of his anger. With another ear-shattering bellow, he'd rear back with one arm and let go with a wallop that could knock over a tree. If that didn't do the job, he'd connect with the other fist. Usually, that was enough. Then he'd just sit down on the ground and stare at what he'd done, spent like a balloon with all the air gone out of it....*

— Sadie Kate Fourclaws

The Rage of a Gurahl equals in intensity but differs in form from that of the Garou. The ancient bear-cults of northern Europe paid homage to the battle-fury of the bear in their word for "those consumed by battle-lust" — berserker (or bear-serker).

Gurahl employ Rage to increase their strength in battle rather than their speed. Where the Garou rely on the preternatural rapidity of multiple attacks, a Gurahl (especially in Crinos) can sometimes fell an opponent with a single blow or a vicious bear hug. Gurahl may spend Rage in order to augment their Strength to twice what it is in Homid form. For example, a Gurahl character whose Strength in Homid form is 4 may spend enough Rage on a one-for-one basis to add up to 4 more dots to her Strength, regardless of her form.

Gurahl may also use Rage to increase their Stamina to as much as twice that of their current form. This means that a Gurahl whose Bjornen form has a Stamina of 4 may increase that Attribute to 8 in that form. A Gurahl can also combine increases in Strength and Stamina by dividing spent Rage between the two Attributes subject to the above limitations. Strength and Stamina bonuses due to spent Rage last for only one turn.

In addition, Gurahl may acquire extra Health Levels by converting Rage points on a one-for-one basis. The additional levels, however, do not heal previous damage. A Wounded Gurahl who spends two points of Rage to add to her Health Levels gains two additional "Wounded" levels which she must lose before she becomes Mauled. Rage spent to increase Health Levels before taking damage counts as extra levels of Bruised,

which enables Gurahl to avoid taking damage entirely, or to remain at one of the other levels for a few turns before finally falling to Incapacitated. This gain lasts for a scene, or until the Gurahl takes enough Health Levels of damage to lose them.

## The Price of Rage

This versatile usefulness of Rage reflects one of the many significant differences between the Gurahl and their more impulsive Changing kin, the Garou. The Children of Bear enjoy great flexibility in combat because of how they use Rage. The ability of the Gurahl to channel their Rage in multiple directions allows them a greater mastery over how they choose to express their bottled-up anger. Even in the throes of their Rage, the Gurahl manage to maintain their reputation for deliberate (though no less deadly) action.

On the other hand, Gurahl regain Rage relatively slowly, and they are slower to anger than many of the other Changing Breeds. Unlike the Garou, who gain Rage with relative ease, Gurahl must work hard at getting angry. Direct threats to lands or creatures under their protection (particularly to anyone younger or weaker than they are) arouse the wrath of Gaia within them. Seldom will harsh words or rebuffs bother a Gurahl enough to cause an increase in Rage.

Gaia created the Gurahl as nurturers and protectors. Many of the Children of Bear consider Rage a sign of weakness, a surrender to a force within them that belies their purpose. Other Gurahl acknowledge the necessity of periodically venting their spleen in order to prevent the excesses of a frenzy. Nevertheless, spending Rage often upsets the equilibrium of a werebear so much that, once she has expended her Rage, she will withdraw from society long enough to spend time in meditation and regain her composure. Only the prospect of imminent danger can speed up the process whereby a Gurahl recovers lost Rage. Stewing over past wrongs goes against the temperament of most Gurahl, who would rather spend their time going about Gaia's work than soothing their bruised egos. This is not to say that Gurahl don't hold grudges, only that they are able to put them aside to perform their duties.

## Frenzy

Gurahl do not frenzy as easily as do the Garou, but on rare occasions they fail to control their bestial nature, and they give way to uncontrollable manifestations of Rage. In order to succumb to frenzy, a Gurahl's player must score five or more successes on a Rage roll (difficulty 8).

A Gurahl in frenzy doesn't flee the scene of a battle. Instead, she stands her ground and lashes out at whatever's closest, refusing to retreat even in the face of insurmountable odds. The "flight" portion of the "fight or flight" response does not exist for Gurahl. Frenzied Gurahl often charge their enemies, losing all sense of strategic approaches or reasoned assault in the desire to rip and rend and tear and...

While it is harder for a Gurahl to frenzy that it is for her bellicose Garou cousins, it is correspondingly easier for her to overcome or temporarily suppress the desire to frenzy. A Gurahl on the verge of frenzy may spend a Willpower point to abort the urge to run amok, and she may still act at the end of the turn,





although she may take no action other than movement or speech.

In all other aspects, a Gurahl's frenzy resembles that of the Garou, including the potential of achieving the uncontrollable state of fury which the Garou refer to as falling under the "thrall of the Wyrn." Such happens only rarely, and it comes about when the werebear's desire to channel his anger becomes frustrated by his inability to do so. Something snaps inside the Gurahl, and the result isn't pretty to behold.

A Gurahl must have a Rage score of 6 or higher, and she must achieve a multiple botch on her Rage roll in order to succumb to a "Wyrn frenzy." If this happens, not even spending Willpower can prevent the werebear from being ridden by Eater-of-Souls or Beast-of-War.

## Willpower

All Gurahl, regardless of breed, auspice or tribe, begin with a Willpower of 6 to reflect the inherent stubbornness and implacability of the bear. Gurahl do not easily change their minds once they have passed judgment on someone or something. Even as cubs, young Gurahl pursue their aims with great determination.

## Healing

Gurahl heal in the same fashion as Garou, by regenerating damage from normal wounds at the rate of one Health Level per turn. Wounds caused by silver or fire cause aggravated damage which can only be healed through magical means. (See *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, pgs. 159, 196-199 for more information on healing damage.)

## The Forms of the Bear

The Gurahl have five forms, which correspond to those of the Garou. The werebears change forms in the same manner as the Garou, progressing through intermediate stages. Instantaneous changes of form rarely occur unless fueled by the conscious expenditure of Rage.

### Homid (difficulty 6)

When in human form, Gurahl resemble "normal" humans in every way. Although they do tend to be taller and more muscular than the average human, they do not betray their "bear" natures in any obvious fashion. Human-born Gurahl possess the physiotype of their ethnic heritage; those who come from Scandinavian parentage are usually light-haired and big-boned, while Gurahl who rise from Native American Kinfolk tend to have darker skin and hair, as well as a more compact, muscular body. The varieties of human forms which may conceal a Gurahl soul are limited only by genetic possibilities. Ursine Gurahl in human form tend to retain their overall pigmentation; because coat color varies widely in both brown and black bears, ursine Gurahl exhibit almost as much range in Homid appearance as do their human-born cousins. The timbre of a Homid-form Gurahl's voice is often deep and rich; they speak with care and do not rush either their words or their thoughts.

## Arthren (difficulty 7)

The Arthren, or near-man, form of the Gurahl resembles the "hairy wild-man" image of popular stereotype. A Gurahl in Arthren form grows in size as well as mass, nearing the upper extreme of typical height and weight for humans. While this change in form is not enough to evoke the Delirium or to elicit suspicions of "supernatural" transformations, a Gurahl's Arthren form succeeds in inspiring awe, intimidation or outright fear in the Gurahl's opponents. Arthren Gurahl possess deep, churlish voices that lend a guttural sound to their speech. Otherwise, they can speak normally.

## Crinos (difficulty 6)

Like the Crinos form of the Garou, the full man-bear shape of a Raging Gurahl conjures nightmares of terror in the minds of those who behold it. Standing from 10 to 16 feet tall, a Crinos Gurahl also gains substantially in mass; the Crinos form of some Gurahl elders towers over 15 feet and weighs in at more than 2,000 pounds. The face of a Crinos Gurahl acquires the snout and muzzle of a bear. Non-retractable claws extend up to nine inches from both fore and hind paws, while the fur in Crinos form becomes stiff and wiry, offering additional natural body armor to absorb damage. In this form, Gurahl can rip full-grown trees from the ground with little effort, upend large vehicles (such as logging trucks) and heave giant rocks at their opponents. Speech in Crinos form becomes limited to single words.

## Bjornen (difficulty 7)

The near-bear form of the Gurahl stands as a reminder of the prehistoric cave-bears who stalked the earth in the first days. These huge creatures are both taller and longer than modern bears. Their paws end in elongated claws, and their jaws sport sharp fangs. Bjornen Gurahl tend to think more like bears than humans. Instinct, rather than logic, drives their actions. In this form, Gurahl lose the capacity for human speech entirely, although they can still communicate in the Gurahl tongue and the language of bears.

## Ursus (difficulty 6)

Ursus Gurahl resemble normal bears. Homid-born Gurahl take on the ursine form most natural for them; if they come from Forest Walker Kinfolk, they tend to assume the ursine form of a black bear, for example. Gurahl born among the Inuit peoples of Alaska generally adopt the polar bear as the model for their own Ursus form, and European Gurahl tend to change into massive brown bears. Gurahl in Ursus speak the bear-tongue and an abbreviated version of the speech of the Gurahl. Although homid Gurahl retain some aspects of human thought patterns, they find it easier in Ursus to think like a bear.

## Totem

Bear, a powerful Incarna that stands very close to Gaia, has a special relationship with the Gurahl. In actuality, Bear has a triune manifestation. As the Great She-Bear (or Ursa Major), Bear shares many qualities with Gaia herself. She stands for all

that is compassionate, maternal, nurturing and life-giving. The Great She-Bear is the All-Healer who touches her children with love and protects them from harm.

As the Death Bear, known to some tribal people as Mangi, the Spirit Hunter, Bear assumes a masculine aspect. Mangi guards the entry to the Otherworld of the dead, and he takes charge of the spirits of Gurahl who enter his domain on the way to reunion with Gaia. Mangi represents the anger of Bear over the pain and injustice perpetrated on the children of the Great She-Bear, his consort. While Mangi is the totem of Death to the Gurahl, he also stands as the way to rebirth, for only with his permission may Gurahl return the spirits of the slain back to their bodies.

The First Cub (also known as Little Bear or Ursa Minor) completes the trio that makes up the Bear totem. Just as bear cubs are some of the most playful creatures that walk (or gambol) across the surface of the Earth, First Cub represents the joyous spirit of discovery that marks the early years of a Gurahl's post-Change existence. The First Cub reminds Gurahl that playfulness and lightheartedness are often as important to saving the world as seriousness and dedication. Why save the world, in fact, if only to populate it with a myriad of gloomy faces?

## Choosing a Face of the Bear

All Gurahl have Bear as their totem, but most Gurahl favor one aspect of Bear over the others. It is not uncommon for Gurahl to shift their devotion from one of Bear's faces to another dependent on the circumstances of her life. Many Gurahl identify with the Little Bear immediately after their First Change. As they age and begin the cycle of changing auspices, Gurahl frequently find themselves drawn to either Ursa Major or the Death Bear. Uzmari Gurahl often see the Death Bear as symbolic of their own purpose in life — the defenders who are sometimes called to offer themselves in sacrifice that others might live. Kieh respond to the mystical aspect of the Death Bear's role as guardian of life and death. Kojubat and Rishi Gurahl may feel a special closeness with Ursa Major, who emphasizes the power of creation and mediation.

### Form Statistics

Arthren	Crinos	Bjornen	Ursus
Str +3	Str +5	Str +4	Str +3
	Dex -1	Dex -2	
Sta +3	Sta +5	Sta +4	Sta +3
Man -2	Man -3	Man -3	Man -3
App -2	App 0		
Per +1*	Per -1	Per +2*	Per +2*
Difficulty 7	Difficulty 6	Difficulty 7	Difficulty 6

\* Bears have generally poor eyesight, but their other senses (particularly smell) more than make up for their visual limitations. The plusses to Perception rolls refer primarily to the Gurahl's enhanced sense of smell, and they are subject to factors such as wind-direction and the presence or lack of distinctive competing odors in the vicinity.

## Marks of the Bear

Bear provides the Gurahl with a few enhancements in order to help them fulfill their purpose in Gaia's plan. In the interests of balance, however, Bear also inflicts some corresponding disadvantages on his children so that they can better appreciate the give and take of life. (Please note that Gurahl receive these powers rather than the Traits given in *Werewolf* on pg. 261; those powers represent what Bear has to teach to Garou willing to listen to him.)

### Adamant Will

Gurahl begin with a Willpower score of 6, which puts them on the high end of the scale for most Changing Breeds. As protectors of the weak and helpless and as caretakers of the Earth, Gurahl need to be able to exert their will in the face of those who would harm the creatures or places under their care. Gurahl gain one automatic success in any opposed Willpower roll that directly involves their compulsion to defend and protect.

This stubbornness of will also makes it more difficult for supernatural creatures such as vampires or mages to influence the mind of a Gurahl. Any roll involving attempts to Dominate or use Mind magick on Gurahl suffers a +2 penalty to its difficulty. Gurahl are very difficult for wraiths to possess (or even to Skinride). Thus, the Restless Dead likewise suffer a penalty to difficulty of rolls to take over the body or soul of a Gurahl that is increased by two.

In general, Gurahl find that whenever they are engaged in a contest of wills over something they consider to be part of their sacred duty to Gaia, they have a boost from Bear to aid them. Storytellers may, at their discretion, reflect this strength of will by lowering the difficulty for normal Willpower rolls made by Gurahl characters or raising the difficulty of opponents' rolls against the Willpower of the werebear.

### Intractability

To offset their strong will, Gurahl have a corresponding stubborn streak that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to change their minds once they have set on a course of action. Werebears surround themselves with traditions and rituals, which sometimes blinds them to new ways of doing things. Whenever someone opposes a Gurahl's decision and attempts to convince the werebear to alter her way of thinking, the Gurahl must make a concerted effort to overcome her own mind-set in order to do so. The player must score at least three successes on a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) in order to give credence to an opposing viewpoint or idea, regardless of how well it is argued.

The trick, of course, is to get to the Gurahl before she has had a chance to make up her mind.

### Keen Smell

Bears have an extraordinarily refined sense of smell, using their noses to locate sources of food, mating partners or the presence of intruders in their lands. In all forms but Homid, Gurahl have keenly perceptive noses that can smell enemies coming long before they can see them.

The difficulty on Perception rolls in which odor is a determining factor is decreased by two for Gurahl. Attempts to track individuals by smell are also easier (-1 difficulty) for the werebears. Gurahl can make positive identifications of people through recognizing their perfume, cologne or natural body odors. Additionally, they can sniff out tainted or poisoned food, and they can smell whether the water in a river is safe to drink. They are excellent early warning systems for forest fires, and they can often "smell" a change in the weather just by sniffing the air.

While some of the advantages of having a keen nose can be translated into game terms, other aspects of the Gurahl's olfactory enhancements should be played out through descriptions of how things smell and what information can be obtained from the odors in a given area. (Note: This "advantage" can sometimes backfire on the Gurahl. Excessively strong or pungent odors can distract a werebear or cover up subtler, more important smells.)

### Poor Eyesight

Just as their sense of smell exceeds the average, Gurahl suffer from poor eyesight. They aren't blind, nor do they need to wear glasses. In fact, most Gurahl in Homid have normal eyesight. What they don't have is the vision of an eagle.

### Bhernocht

Occasionally, a Gurahl fails in her duty and abandons her perceived responsibility for another, more ephemeral, course of action. When this occurs voluntarily, rather than through duress, the werebear suffers a one-point loss of Willpower, and she forfeits the advantages she gained from possessing Adamant Will. If the Gurahl does not resume her stated purpose (such as the protection of a particular person or area), her Willpower continues to decrease by one point per day (in addition to any deliberate expenditures of Willpower) until it reaches zero. When this occurs, the Gurahl enters a state of profound depression and despair known as Bhernocht (literally, the "dark night of the bear").

A Gurahl who has given way to Bhernocht becomes listless and apathetic, obsessed with a sense of her own failure. Unless she finds some way to escape her overwhelming feeling of worthlessness, a Bhernocht-struck Gurahl soon enters a state of deep hibernation (either through the use of biorhythmic control or through an extreme form of seasonal lethargy). Rousing a Gurahl who has fallen into a Bhernocht-inspired slumber requires the use of sustained force or the Waken Gift. Once awakened, the Gurahl must still recover from Bhernocht. This process requires the re-accumulation of Willpower through either the resumption of his abandoned purpose or the dedication to another purpose of equal importance.

Emergence from Bhernocht should involve roleplaying rather than arbitrary rolls of the dice. The progress from despair to rekindled hope and renewed purpose offers the opportunity for those intense moments of personal drama that add depth and impact to a chronicle.





Neither are they particularly attuned to how things look. A Gurahl gazing out over a field from a vantage point atop a mountain is less likely to see something approaching than he is to smell it. In fact, Gurahl usually smell something first — thus eliminating the necessity of seeing it.

Nevertheless, whenever the player of a Gurahl in any form but Homid needs to make a Perception roll based solely on sight, the difficulty increases by two. This is not a usual occurrence, however, because most creatures possess a distinct odor which serves the same function to the Gurahl as sight does to others.

### ***Biorhythmic Control***

Gurahl possess the capacity to alter or regulate many of their internal biorhythms, consciously imitating the natural metabolic and systemic processes of their bear kin. Thus, the Children of Bear can effect changes to their metabolism that enable them to endure and survive under harsh environmental conditions and severe hardships. Even if they do not possess the Biorhythms Talent (see p. 86), most Gurahl can make small adjustments in their body's functions, such as raising or lowering their body temperature a few degrees to cope with external temperature extremes. Ursine Gurahl need to take at least two dots in Biorhythms, since they were born as bears and have all the working parts of a "natural" bear in *Ursus* form. Gurahl who practice this Talent gain greater expertise in using it, and they can perform amazing feats of internal bodily regulation.

### ***Seasonal Lethargy***

Because Gurahl have a deep connection with the Earth itself, their bodies respond to the changing seasons in ways that do not always prove advantageous. In winter, when many of their bear-kin seek out sheltered places in which to hibernate, Gurahl experience a psychological desire to tuck themselves away somewhere warm and safe. Gurahl do not hibernate every winter; instead, they become sluggish and lethargic (literally "under the weather"). This seasonal retardation of their natural alertness and energy manifests itself in small but significant ways. Usually punctual individuals oversleep in the morning, becoming habitually late. Gurahl can function normally as long as they keep busy; periods of inactivity result in an overwhelming desire to "take a nap." Many of the effects of seasonal lethargy are roleplaying guidelines only. Other manifestations have clear effects in game terms. During winter, Gurahl players have one less die for initiative rolls, to simulate the Gurahl's internal sluggishness. In addition, a Storyteller may exact similar dice penalties (or increases in difficulties) for rolls involving reactions to ambushes or awareness attempts.

### ***Abilities***

Gurahl characters have the same basic Abilities as their Garou cousins, with one exception: few Gurahl have the temperament or inherent duplicity that lies at the heart of the Subterfuge Ability. While a player may make a case for his Gurahl's possession of this Ability, it does not appear on the basic Character Sheet. Players who wish to do so may still buy Subterfuge as a Secondary Ability.

When choosing Abilities for your Gurahl character, keep in mind the qualities that are appropriate for an individual whose makeup combines bear and human elements. The **Werewolf Players Guide** lists numerous Secondary Abilities that allow you to tailor your character to suit your image of what he should be.

## Talents

Except for the substitution of the new Biorhythm Talent, the choices for Talents remain the same as those outlined in the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** basic rules. While you may pick any of the available Talents, some are more appropriate than others. Particularly suited for Gurahl characters are Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Empathy, Intimidation and Primal-Urge. While Dodge is strategically useful in combat situations, few creatures who grow to the size of a small tree in Crinos form excel at sudden evasive actions. Expression applies only to Gurahl whose concepts involve public speeches or persuasive skills. Streetwise, while not impossible for werebears, remains peripheral for non-urban Gurahl.

Useful Secondary Talents include Instruction (to reflect the Gurahl's position as teachers of others) and Swimming, a handy Ability for any character who spends a lot of time in wilderness settings.

## New Talent: Biorhythms

Like the bears who are your near-kin, you have the ability to make changes in your metabolism and other bodily functions. These alterations may consist of small tweaks to such aspects of your physiology as body temperature (useful in withstanding extremes of heat and cold) or large-scale system shutdowns that allow you to survive catastrophic circumstances (such as being trapped in a cave-in or buried under the snow after an avalanche).

While ursine Gurahl must take two dots in this Talent to reflect their basic bear heritage, human-born werebears may find this Ability incredibly useful in many circumstances. Advanced levels enable Gurahl to "fine-tune" their metabolism so that nearly every part of their body comes under their conscious control. Practical applications include control of respiratory functions, pain management, fertility and blood circulation. This Talent may not be purchased by non-Gurahl.

- Novice: You can make minor adjustments in internal body temperature and heart rate.
- Practiced: You can mimic the process of hibernation by slowing down your metabolism.
- Competent: You can exercise phenomenal control over your respiratory and involuntary muscle systems.
- Expert: You can isolate single portions of your metabolism while leaving others untouched.
- Master: The most renowned yogis in the world have nothing on you; you can go so far as to stop your heart and restart it after a prolonged hiatus.

**Possessed by:** Ursines, Biofeedback Specialists, Holistic Practitioners, Yogis, Elders

**Specialties:** Circulatory System, Breath Control, Fasting, Fertility, Enduring Pain, Total System Shutdown

## Skills

All the Skills listed in the basic rulebook for **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** are available to Gurahl, with the following caveats. Ursine Gurahl accept the same restrictions as lupus Garou in choosing beginning Skills (i.e., they may not choose Drive, Etiquette or Firearms except through "freebie" points or during play). Skills that seem particularly suited to Gurahl include Animal Ken, Leadership, Performance and Survival. Melee, Repair and Stealth, while not forbidden to werebears, are less fitting for Gurahl than for other Changing Breeds.

Secondary Skills which can add flavor to a Gurahl's repertoire include Hypnotism and Meditation, both of them associated with the werebears' reputations as healers and counselors.

## New Skill: Fishing

You are versed in the many techniques of catching fish. While you do not practice your "art" for mere sport or recreation, you can usually provide fish on demand for an entire assembly of hungry Gurahl. This Skill comes in handy when you need to live off the land as well as feed your less wilderness-savvy companions.

- Novice: You know the basics of rod and line fishing.
- Practiced: You can bring in fish from fresh and salt water sources.
- Competent: You are at home with most of the fly-tying techniques the experts write about.
- Expert: Creeling, trawling, ice fishing — you name it, you've done it.
- Master: When you stand at the edge of a river, the fish take one look at you and give up without a fight.

**Possessed by:** Professional Fishermen, Retirees, Hungry Bears, Survivalists

**Specialties:** Fly-tying, Ice Fishing, Saltwater, Live Bait

## Knowledges

Players of ursine Gurahl, like those of lupus Garou, may only buy Computer, Law, Linguistics, Medicine, Politics and Science with "freebie" points, acquire them through roleplaying or learn them during down time. Since many Gurahl feel especially close to the Earth, the Knowledges they possess may reflect their desire to know more about the living world. This is not to say that some Gurahl can't be corporate lawyers or computer systems analysts — just that such eccentric werebears are generally in the minority.

Useful Secondary Knowledges include Area Knowledge, Herbalism, Poisons and Sign Language. The various "Lore" categories, such as Garou Lore, Mage Lore, Wyrms Lore and others are also appropriate for Gurahl who have a reason to know them.

## New Knowledge: Ecology

You understand the relation of plant and animal life to the well-being of the Earth. Your comprehension of the mutual support networks of flora and fauna informs your actions and





helps you spot areas of the world that need special attention. You need at least one dot in Science as a prerequisite for this Knowledge.

- Novice: You know the basics of the food-chain theory.
- Practiced: You could teach a high school course in basic ecology.
- Competent: You understand the principles of eco systems, controlled habitats, biospheres and other technical aspects of the environment.
- Expert: You are a pioneer in environmental research and theory.
- Master: International authorities on global warming and endangered species come to you for advice.

Possessed by: Ecologists, Environmental Activists, Gurahl

Specialties: Global Warming, Endangered Species, Biosphere Management

## Backgrounds

Backgrounds establish a character's connection to the world around her. Beginning Gurahl can purchase any of the Backgrounds listed in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* with the exception of Resources (see the following for explanation). Additionally, the Totem Background does not apply to Gurahl, since each Gurahl honors one (or all) of the three forms of Bear and gains Bear's Marks automatically.

Some of the allowable Background choices may change or disappear after a character begins play; these selections simply provide a starting point for the Gurahl, placing her in the context of a larger society. Except for the following differences, the Backgrounds described in the *Werewolf* rulebook apply as written to Gurahl characters.

## Kinfolk

While Kinfolk are extremely important to the Gurahl, there are only a few groups of humans left who carry the blood of Bear in their veins. Use the following scale for determining numbers of Kinfolk as a substitute for the dot-to-Kinfolk ratio listed in the basic rulebook.

- 2 Kinfolk (same as in *Werewolf*)
- 4 Kinfolk
- 6 Kinfolk
- 10 Kinfolk
- 15 Kinfolk (a veritable horde!)

## Mentor

Like the Bastet, most Gurahl (unless they purchase the Flaw: Abandoned Cub) begin with at least one dot in the Mentor Background to reflect their tie with their Buri-Jaan. Even after a Gurahl finishes her Gallivant and parts ways with her Buri-Jaan, the elder who has overseen the first year of a new Gurahl's life remains a constant (though often distant) connection. The more dots a Gurahl chooses in Mentor, the more prominent the Buri-Jaan is in Gurahl society, although this is not determined solely by Rank, as it is with Garou.



## *The Absolute Basics: Attributes of the Gurahl*

The nine basic Attributes that apply to any character created for the Storyteller System remain the same for Gurahl characters. Nevertheless, players should use common sense in assigning priorities when creating werebears. Physical Attributes generally prevail among the Gurahl. Face it, bears are big, strong creatures. A Gurahl with a Strength, Dexterity and Stamina of 2 will never be able to stand up to the demands of his Changing Breed. On the other hand, werebears aren't the most subtle or attractive individuals. Even the best-looking ones pale before the exotic allure of most Bastet or the irrepressible charm of the Nuwisha. Since Gurahl spend much of their time apart from society, Social Attributes often receive the short end of the priority stick. A good case exists for giving first priority to Mental Attributes with regard to Gurahl characters. Bears demonstrate keen senses (with the exception of their vision) and sharp wits. While intelligence isn't really their forte, they aren't dumb, by any stretch of the imagination.

## *New Background: Umbral Glade*

The Gurahl do not congregate in caerns like most Garou. Instead, most Gurahl possess Dens in secluded spots, offering them privacy for meditation and a secure place in which to hibernate when necessary or expedient. Some Gurahl have Dens that open onto Glades in the Umbra, serving as a "mini-caern" or wellspring of Gnosis. The size and location of the Umbral Glade determines how much Gnosis is available to the resident Gurahl. If more than one Gurahl remains within the Glade in order to regain Gnosis, the total Gnosis available must be shared among those wishing to partake of it.

In addition to providing Gnosis for the Gurahl, an Umbral Glade gives the werebear an instantaneous doorway into the Umbra without the need for a rite.

- A 20 x 20 foot area, supplying one point of Gnosis per day
- A 50 x 50 foot area, supplying two points of Gnosis per day
- A 100 x 100 foot area, supplying three points of Gnosis per day
- A 500 x 500 foot area, supplying four points of Gnosis per day
- A 1000 x 1000 foot area, supplying five points of Gnosis per day

## *Forbidden Background: Resources*

Because most Gurahl lack the acquisitive and materialistic tendencies that result in amassing large sums of money or possessions, beginning Gurahl may not take the Resources Background. This is not to say that Gurahl remain dirt poor all their lives, however. Many, in fact, do achieve some level of material comfort and financial ease, but this wealth comes from in-game

experience and roleplaying, not as a matter of course. The restriction on Resources for beginning Gurahl emphasizes not only the relative lack of materialism on the part of the werebears but also the fact that so many Gurahl have only recently emerged from withdrawal and thus have not had time to build up large amounts of capital. New Gurahl, likewise, do not have as many connections to money or materials as members of Changing Breeds who have thoroughly established themselves in the modern world.

## *Merits and Flaws*

The *Werewolf Players Guide* contains numerous Merits and Flaws which provide ways for players to customize their characters with their own unique quirks, advantages and disadvantages. Though designed primarily for use with *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, most of these embellishments can apply to Gurahl. A few Merits and Flaws, however, simply do not suit the Gurahl concept, and Storytellers should consider carefully before allowing players to choose these problematic or inapplicable specialty quirks for werebears.

Merits and Flaws to be avoided include: Pack Mentality, Moon-Bound, Banned Transformation, Slip Sideways, Sign of the Wolf or Strict Carnivore. Unlikely Merits and Flaws include technologically oriented ones such as Lightning Calculator, Computer Aptitude, Expert Driver and Mechanical Aptitude. It is highly improbable that a Gurahl (of all the Changing Breeds) would suffer from Taint of Corruption or find herself in the role of Corporate CEO (that forbidden Resources Background just can't be finagled). Aside from these few examples, feel free to use or modify the existing Merits and Flaws to your heart's content.

## *New Merits and Flaws*

Gurahl have their own special quirks that distinguish them from other Changing Breeds as well as from one another. While a few of the following Merits and Flaws may apply to other Changing Breeds, most only pertain to Ursa's Children.

### *Early Maturation (3 point Merit)*

Circumstances occurring before your First Change have caused you to emerge as an auspice other than Arcas. Perhaps your transformation came late in life, striking you after you had attained full adulthood. Maybe your early years contained so much strife or upheavals that your change catapulted you directly into another auspice, skipping the "playful" stage of your development as a Gurahl.

Whatever the details, your character begins as either an Uzmati, a Kojubat, a Kieh or a Rishi. This Merit differs from the Merit: Rip Van Winkle since the Gurahl character is not one of the newly awakened old ones but is, in fact, a recent addition to the ranks of werebears. In addition, the character must choose her beginning Auspice Gift from the auspice she begins play with. (For example, a beginning Kojubat Gurahl with the Merit: Early Maturation must start play with a Level One Kojubat Auspice Gift, rather than Level One Gifts available to Arcas or Uzmati.)

## Garou Companion (3 point Merit)

Despite the history of anger and hurt that exist between Gurahl and Garou, you have acquired a werewolf as a companion. Although both of you prudently keep this relationship a secret from your respective cultures, you value the insights your companion gives you into the hot-tempered, fanatic zeal of Gaia's fierce warriors. Your Garou friend may come from any of the tribes, even the ones who once held the greatest enmity toward the Gurahl. You only see your companion occasionally, and you seldom travel together, but you feel that even a limited friendship with one of the Garou can go a long way toward healing the damage caused by the War of Rage.

## Rip Van Winkle (3-6 point Merit)

You woke up from a long slumber, and now the whole world is new to you. On the down side, you have lost many of your memories about who you were and what you knew. You know you are a Gurahl, and you remember some of the Gifts and rites you used to know, but the rest lies buried in the fog of time. On the up side, there's a strange and wonderful world outside just waiting for you to tackle it head on. It's like a second cubhood in many ways. Maybe this time, you can get it right (whatever "it" is).

Beginning the game with this Merit allows players to create a beginning Gurahl with an auspice other than Arcas. It also gives the new character a wider choice of beginning Auspice Gifts (though she is still limited in the number of Gifts she can begin play with).

This Merit requires particular permission from your Storyteller to purchase, for although the roleplaying possibilities of playing a werebear born in the 19th century — or even the Middle Ages! — are obviously fascinating, it can be extra trouble for your Storyteller. In any event, pay particular attention to choosing Abilities when creating a character of this type. Almost no late slumberers of this nature have any skill in Computer, for instance.

The number of points spent in purchasing the Merit determines what auspice your beginning Gurahl has and the Gift choices available to her.

- 3 pts Your Gurahl begins as an Uzmati, and she can choose her beginning Auspice Gift from either the Arcas or Uzmati categories.
- 4 pts Your Gurahl begins as a Kojubat, and she can choose her beginning Auspice Gift from among those assigned to the Arcas, Uzmati and Kojubat categories.
- 5 pts Your Gurahl begins as a Kieh, and she can choose her beginning Auspice Gift from those assigned to the Arcas, Uzmati, Kojubat or Kieh categories.
- 6 pts Your Gurahl begins as a Rishi, and she can choose her beginning Auspice Gift from any category.

## Umbral Affinity (3 point Merit)

Unlike most Gurahl, you do not have to physically rend the Gauntlet to enter the Umbra. Like the Garou, you are able to step sideways without having to rely on the use of a rite. You need only concentrate on a reflective surface in order to pass through the

## Reaching Beyond

Although the Gurahl cannot steal Gifts from other Changing Breeds, a few Gurahl have demonstrated the ability to use Gifts that are ordinarily beyond their Rank. This process is called "reaching beyond," the desperate attempt to channel great power in times of need. To mimic such a Gift, the Gurahl needs to have seen another Gurahl actually use it. If a cub has never seen another werebear use Urza's Coat, that cub cannot try to call on that Gift by reaching beyond.

To reach beyond, the cub's player must spend a permanent point of Gnosis and make an Intelligence + Enigmas roll, (difficulty 9). If he gets at least one success, the cub may attempt to use the Gift, although the difficulty of any rolls required to activate the Gift is increased by three. Naturally, the cub runs a great risk of botching at any stage, and the results of a botch are never pleasant. It isn't surprising that responsible Buri-Jaan rarely tell cubs that they can do this sort of thing at all (not wanting to encourage the young ones), but sometimes cubs are willing to try anything in their desperation.

Gauntlet. See the guidelines for stepping sideways in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, pgs. 175-176.

## Dancing Fool (1 point Flaw)

Despite the stigma now attached to dancing in public, you can't help but respond to music. You enjoy going to clubs, square dances, line-dancing, a ceilidh — you name it. You know that other Gurahl look down on you for giving in to this symbol of the cruel treatment of bears by humans, but their censure doesn't stop you from indulging your weakness. The difficulty of all Social rolls made to impress Gurahl who know of your vice is increased by one.

## Attracted to Humans (2 point Flaw)

The society of humans fascinates you. You enjoy watching their antics, hearing their conversation and speculating about their motives. In Homid form, this attraction does not present a problem for you. However, if you are in Ursus or Bjornen form, humans generally react to your appearance in their midst with less than friendly gestures — and you often forget to shift into Homid to go speak to them. This Flaw is particularly appropriate for ursine Gurahl.

## Clawless (3 point Flaw)

Bears' claws (and claws in general) serve as more than weapons. They assist in balance, provide sturdy grips for traveling on uneven surfaces and serve as handy scoops for getting at tasty grubs buried in rotting logs. For some reason — Urza only knows — your Crinos, Bjornen and Ursine forms are missing this important piece of anatomy, which puts you at a severe disadvantage when moving about in the wilderness (+1 to the difficulty for all movement-related actions) and hampers you in combat, restricting you to paw buffets and bites. In addition, you cannot leave messages in trees unless you use a



knife to carve the marks (and you need hands — not paws — to do the job). This Flaw is the closest a Gurahl comes to what might be considered a metis disfigurement. Fortunately, in Homid and Arthren forms, you have normal finger- and toenails.

## Abandoned Cub (4 point Flaw)

Like many Gurahl, you experienced your First Change alone. Unlike other werebears, however, no mentor turned up to explain things to you. You received no mystical summons that led you on a journey in search of your Buri-Jaan. Instead, you had to come to terms with the strange "curse" that had befallen you without any outside assistance. Maybe it drove you mad for a time, leading to institutionalization. Maybe you ran away from civilization entirely, seeking to hide your monstrous self from the eyes of normal people. Finally, somehow, you came into contact with the Gurahl and they tried to set you straight.

You now know who and what you are, but the knowledge came with great cost, and you still bear the psychological scars of that time of terror between your First Change and your present state.

If you choose this Flaw, you may not buy any dots in Mentor. (The Storyteller may eventually introduce your character to a Buri-Jaan, but that will occur, if it does, during game play.) Additionally, you may not purchase the Rituals Knowledge until you have interacted with Gurahl society enough to justify learning some of the werebears' rites.

## Gifts

When we were young and She was young, Gaia Herself taught us Gifts of healing, purification, protection and mysticism. Later, She directed us to the spirits so that we could petition them for knowledge instead of bothering Her every time a new Gurahl wanted to learn a Gift. When the Garou appeared on the scene, we taught them how to address the spirits properly so that they could learn the Gifts we already knew. I think the Garou's jealousy first began when they realized that what they learned from the spirits, we learned at the feet of Gaia.

As the oldest of the Changing Breeds, the Gurahl have their own names for many Gifts they share with the Garou. All Gurahl begin with a Breed Gift, an Auspice Gift and a Gurahl Gift. Gurahl do not have Tribe Gifts.

## Breed Gifts

Even after the War of Rage, a few of us stayed around to watch the human tribes grow and spread throughout the world. While the Garou carried on their Impergium against the humans, we hid ourselves among them and learned from them. We also taught them some of our customs, such as the burial of the dead and how to sustain themselves upon both plants and animals. Other Gurahl lived close to our bear-kin, making certain that they did not suffer at the hands of human hunters. Our breed Gifts pay tribute to our birthright and help us exist among our Kinfolk.

Breed Gifts mirror the Gurahl's connection to either her human or ursine Kinfolk. While it is possible for a homid

Gurahl to learn an Ursine Gift (and vice versa), she does so as if the Gift were one level higher. Thus, a homid Gurahl must be of at least Rank Three to learn Weather Watch, for instance.

## Homid Gifts

The Breed Gifts of homid Gurahl pertain to dealing with humans and their creations. In some cases, these Gifts endow the Gurahl with the ability to shape and control the natural world, much as the humans seek to do. Ancestor-spirits usually teach these Gifts, unless otherwise specified.

• **Persuasion (Level One)** — As the Garou Homid Gift. Use of this Gift has enabled many Gurahl in Homid form to act as teachers and leaders among their human Kinfolk.

• **Ursa's Light (Level One)** — This Gift allows the Gurahl to draw down light from the stars to use as either a directional beacon or to provide illumination for an area. Although the constellations of the Great and Little Bear need not be visible in the sky for the Gift's effectiveness, their presence enhances the Gift's power.

**System:** The Gurahl reaches toward the sky, as if to gather light from the stars. A successful Charisma + Occult roll by the player causes the Gurahl's hands to fill with a soft, white light (about the intensity of moonlight) that can either illuminate an area of 100 square feet or else cast a penetrating ray of light for 100 yards. If the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor happen to be in the sky at the time the Gift is invoked, the intensity of the light doubles as well as the range. This Gift only works at night.

• **Climate Control (Level Two)** — This Gift enables the Gurahl to alter the temperature in her immediate vicinity from five to 25 degrees in either direction, thus enabling her to make a circle of relative warmth or coolness around her that can encompass up to five human-sized individuals. In certain situations, the use of this Gift can mean the difference between survival or death from hypothermia or heatstroke.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Primal-Urge. A single success enables the Gurahl to alter the temperature by five degrees, while additional successes allow her to either increase the amount of change in temperature (in five degree increments) or expand the area to include additional creatures (one more per success).

• **Dolorous Countenance (Level Two)** — Similar to the Garou Homid Gift, Staredown, this Gift allows the Gurahl to assume a facial expression baleful enough to cause opponents to back away in shame and submission, in some cases leaving the vicinity entirely.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 7) and spends a Rage point. One or two successes so cowers the target that he retreats from the area for one turn for each success (although the target can make a Willpower roll [difficulty 8] to resist). Three successes causes the target to flee the area entirely, returning only after the Gurahl has departed.

• **Shape Matter (Level Three)** — As the Garou Homid Gift: Reshape Object. The Gurahl originally learned this power from Gaia and used it as the basis for teaching humans how to fashion tools (without the magic, of course). The werebears also taught this Gift to the Garou, who renamed it and claimed it for their own.



• **Sense Need (Level Three)** — By opening her senses to the world around her and listening to the unvoiced sounds of suffering and despair, a Gurahl can focus on the often silent call of someone in need of rescuing or succor. The legends of many people (and of some Changing Breeds) contain stories in which the timely appearance of one of the bear-folk saved the life of a lost child, wounded warrior or stranded elder. Gurahl use this Gift in their role as protector of Gaia's children.

**System:** The Gurahl clears her mind, and her player rolls Perception + Empathy. A single success allows her to "hear" the call or feel the pull of someone who needs help so long as that individual is within a mile of the Gurahl. Additional successes extend the range by ten-mile increments, to a maximum of 50 miles. No successes means that the Gurahl fails to sense anyone's troubles while a botch sends the Gurahl on a wild-goose chase, often resulting in a needless brush with danger. If no one who needs the Gurahl's help is within range, the Gift registers this fact.

• **Ursa's Coat (Level Four)** — Similar to the Garou Homid Gift: Cocoon, this Gift surrounds the Gurahl with a heavy coat of protective fur colored like a starry night. This glimmering armor provides the Gurahl with protection against fire and poisonous gases as well as rendering him extremely difficult to damage. Ursa Major teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends one Gnosis point. Attacks against a Gurahl thus clothed in Ursa's Coat must do damage equal to the Gurahl's Stamina + Rituals to cause any harm. By spending extra Gnosis, a werebear may extend the duration of Ursa's Coat for one scene per Gnosis point expended. The Gurahl can move while so armored, but at an effective Dexterity of 1.

• **Spirit Shield (Level Four)** — Unlike the Garou Homid Gift: Spirit Ward, which causes spirits to feel uneasy and retreat from the Garou's presence, this Gift distinguishes between friendly (or neutral) and unfriendly spirits in its manifestation. By tracing a sigil in the air above his head, the Gurahl creates a mystical aura around her that acts as a "do not disturb" sign for friendly and non-malevolent spirits. Bear-spirits may ignore the aura, though in most cases they do not willingly intrude upon the shielded Gurahl. In the presence of hostile spirits, such as Banes, the aura becomes more intimidating, actively discouraging malevolent spirits from attacking the Gurahl.

**System:** The player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Manipulation + Rituals (difficulty 7). Friendly spirits in the vicinity of the Gurahl see the resulting aura and respect the Gurahl's desire for privacy, maintaining their distance. Hostile spirits who attempt to attack a shielded Gurahl lose one die from their Dice Pool for every success made on the roll to raise the shield.

• **Fearless Unveiling (Level Five)** — Similar to the Garou Homid Gift: Part the Veil, this Gift allows the Gurahl to show himself in Crinos form to a specified human without invoking the Delirium. This makes it possible for a Crinos Gurahl to render assistance to or otherwise act with normal humans without driving them mad. In most cases, once the need for using the Gift passes, the Gurahl must perform the Rite of the Ban to insure that the affected human does not remember what she has seen. This does not prevent the human from

experiencing the Delirium at a later date, if she sees a Crinos Gurahl (or any other werecreature) without the benefit of this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 6). The effect of the Gift lasts until the designated human leaves the presence of the Gurahl.

• **Charismatic Presence (Level Five)** — The Gurahl exudes a compelling aura of attraction to humans. In the first days, the werebears sometimes used this Gift to place themselves at the center of tribal bear-cults in Europe, Asia and North America. They were thus able to form strong ties between Gaia and their human Kinfolk.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 8). The number of successes indicates the size of her following, according to the following table. Affected humans (who must be within sight of the Gurahl as she uses the Gift) will not take any hostile action toward the Gurahl unless the Gurahl somehow breaks their trust, and they are willing to listen to whatever she has to say (-3 difficulty to any Social rolls).

Number of successes	Size of following
1	5 individuals
2	10 individuals
3	20 individuals
4	50 individuals
5+	100+ individuals

## Ursine Gifts

The Gifts of the ursine Gurahl emphasize a close connection to nature and, in particular, a deep and abiding knowledge of the Earth itself. These Gifts tend to complement the natural abilities of the Gurahl's bear form or else enhance her ties with the wilderness. Most are taught by Bear-spirits, unless otherwise specified.

• **Heightened Senses (Level One)** — As the Garou Lupus Gift.

• **Voice of Woe (Level One)** — This Gift enables the Gurahl to use her voice as an early warning system to alert other creatures (including other werebears) in the vicinity to the presence of danger. Regardless of their species, each animal hears the cry of the Gurahl, understands its meaning and acts accordingly. The sound mimics that of a Gurahl cub in distress; hence, other Gurahl and some bears may come to the aid of the user of the Gift, while other creatures may simply flee from the implied danger.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Primal-Urge. One success sends the cry to all creatures within five miles. Each additional success expands the range of the Gift's effect by another five miles, up to a maximum of 50 miles. No successes indicates that the Gift has failed, while a botch sends an inappropriate signal to creatures in the vicinity.

• **Burrow (Level Two)** — As the Garou Metis Gift.

• **Weather Watch (Level Two)** — With this Gift, the Gurahl can sense changes in the weather and make predictions about approaching storms or other significant weather patterns with some accuracy. The Gurahl need have no knowledge of



meteorology, climatology or other human means of weather forecasting.

**System:** After the Gurahl spends one full turn gazing at the sky and smelling the air, the player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Perception + Primal-Urge. A single success allows her to determine major changes in the weather (such as approaching storms or periods of drought). Additional successes add specific details to the Gurahl's predictions, such as how soon a storm will strike, how long a dry-spell will last or the direction a tornado is turning. No successes means that the Gift fails; a botch gives the Gurahl false information.

• **Pull of the Chosen Land (Level Three)** — This Gift allows a Gurahl to find the quickest route to his protectorate regardless of where he is. If the Gurahl has been forcibly relocated to an unknown location, he may still make his way back to familiar territory, following an internal compass that leads him home. An Earth-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Perception + Primal-Urge (difficulty 7). This Gift works in the Umbra as well as in the physical world.

• **Shelter of the Earth (Level Three)** — This Gift makes it possible for the Gurahl to "disappear" amid the local landscape, making use of tall grasses, trees or other features of the terrain as camouflage. Rapid movement while so concealed gives away the Gurahl's presence and location, but slow travel is possible without breaking the natural cover.

**System:** The player rolls Dexterity + Stealth and spends a point of Gnosis. A single success provides the Gurahl with

minimal camouflage; three or more successes indicates that the Gurahl remains completely concealed by the local terrain. If there is no reasonable cover available, the Gift automatically fails (though no Gnosis is lost). A botch means that the Gurahl only thinks she is hidden, while in reality, anyone looking for her can find her easily.

• **Gnaw (Level Four)** — As the Garou Lupus Gift.

• **Sweet Swarm of Vengeance (Level Four)** — The Gurahl can summon a swarm of angry bees to surround and harry an enemy. Depending on local conditions, as few as a dozen or as many as a thousand enraged bees respond to the werebear's call. The type of swarm that arrive on the scene depends on local availability, but may consist of honeybees, wasps, hornets or any other indigenous bee. The swarm follows the Gurahl's direction, attacking any individual targeted by the werebear who summoned it. Depending on the size of the swarm and the victim's vulnerability to stinging attacks, the bees may serve as a distracting nuisance or may cause the victim's death due to anaphylactic shock (severe allergic reaction).

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Animal Ken. A single success results in the arrival of up to a hundred bees, while additional successes increase the size of the swarm. Five successes can rouse an entire swarm of bees from their winter torpor. No successes results in the failure of the Gift, while a botch summons the bees but directs them at the Gurahl rather than at their intended target. The swarm appears within a minute of being summoned.



• **Bear's Bounty (Level Five)** — Like the Garou Metis Gift: Totem Gift, this power comes from the Gurahl's relationship with his totem spirit, Bear. By pleading his case to one of the three aspects of Bear, the Gurahl can gain his totem's favor in the form of some appropriate Ability or assistance. Ursa Major, for example, might provide emergency shelter for the Gurahl or open up an avenue to safety. Mangi, the Death Bear, might endow the Gurahl with the ability to strike down an enemy with a single blow. Ursa Minor might send a bear cub to the Gurahl to act as a guide through unfamiliar lands.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Rituals. If he fails this roll, nothing happens, and the Gurahl may not ask again for one hour. If the player botches, however, the Gurahl has offended the spirit in question, and he must make the proper acts of contrition and repentance before asking again.

• **Call the Cave Bear (Level Five)** — Similar to the Garou Lupus Gift: Song of the Great Beast, this Gift enables the Gurahl to summon her prehistoric (and extinct) ancestor, the cave bear, to come to her aid. The creature arrives from the spirit world and returns to its place of origin when its task is done. This Gift only works if the Gurahl is in a secluded wilderness area.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Primal-Urge and spends a point of Gnosis. The cave bear who answers the summons remains for one scene. Only one such creature will come at any one time. While materialized, the cave bear has the statistics of a Bjornen Gurahl with maximum statistics (Str 9, Dex 3, Sta 9).

## Auspice Gifts

These Gifts represent Luna's blessings, given to the Gurahl at the time of their creation. Because Gurahl, if they live long enough, experience all auspices as they age and develop, it is eventually possible for most Gurahl to learn all of these Gifts.

### Arcas

The Gifts associated with the new moon emphasize the inquisitive and sometimes playful nature of the First Cub, for whom the auspice is named. Of course, a bear's idea of "play" does not always imply harmless behavior.

• **Open Seal (Level One)** — As the Garou Ragabash Gift.

• **Walk Like a Man (Level One)** — This Gift enables a Gurahl in Ursine, Bjornen or Crinos form to alter her footprints (already humanlike) to resemble exactly a human step. With this ability, a Gurahl may create a false trail to confuse and confound pursuers. An Ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Dexterity + Stealth. One success enables the Gurahl to leave humanlike footprints for the duration of the scene. Additional successes increase the duration of the Gift. No successes means that the Gurahl cannot alter her footprints.

• **Cajole (Level Two)** — A Gurahl may acquire some item or piece of information simply by coaxing the targeted individual. Expressions of wide-eyed innocence usually accompany the activation of this Gift. Objectives of this Gift can include anything from food and clothing to means of transpor-





tation, secret information or promises of sanctuary. A Gaffling of Ursa Minor teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Empathy. One success enables the Gurahl to obtain something minor (either an object or a piece of knowledge) from his target. Additional successes increase the importance or significance of the item or information wheedled from the target. No successes means that the Gift has no effect, while a botch angers the target, making it almost impossible to acquire anything from him.

- **Sense of the Prey (Level Two)** — As the Garou Ragabash Gift.

- **Safe Passage (Level Three)** — This Gift allows a Gurahl (and those with him) to move through the land without leaving any discernible traces of his passing. He does not leave footprints or mark the landscape in any fashion, nor do those who travel with him. A Bear-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Dexterity + Primal-Urge. A single success means that the Gift works for the Gurahl, while additional successes allow him to expand the Gift to encompass other individuals. The Gift lasts for one scene.

- **Trackless Waste (Level Three)** — As the Red Talon Gift.

- **Favor of Ursa Minor (Level Four)** — As the Garou Ragabash Gift: Luna's Blessing.

- **Rejuvenate (Level Four)** — As Gurahl (or any creature, for that matter) age, they tend to forget the playfulness of their youth. This Gift combats the burdens of age, bodily decrepitude, mental fatigue or world-weariness by imbuing its recipient with a renewed zest for life. Sometimes, this refreshing of the spirit manifests physically, by making the target feel and seem younger than her actual years. Although this Gift does not literally make the recipient younger, it does promote a desire to re-live the joys of childhood, and it often leads to a change in lifestyle that prolongs the illusion of youth and freshness. A Gaffling of Ursa Minor teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Rituals (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Each success causes the recipient to experience a temporary boost to one or more appropriate Traits, subject to the discretion of the Storyteller. Additional temporary dice may be added to Abilities such as Athletics or Primal-Urge or may return a point of lost Willpower to the subject of the Gift. In other cases, the effects of the Gift may manifest through roleplaying, as a formerly jaded individual suddenly becomes interested in his surroundings again. The feeling of rejuvenation lasts for anywhere from one scene to one week, according to the judgment of the Storyteller. This Gift cannot be used on young people or animals; only the weary of body or mind can benefit.

- **Humiliate (Level Five)** — By delivering a verbal assault, the Gurahl can psychologically devastate a group of opponents. In most cases, the loss of self-esteem engendered by this Gift causes the victims to back down from a fight or flee the vicinity. Even if the opponents manage to stand their ground and fight, their attacks suffer from the belief that they will fail. A Bear-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** After the Gurahl verbally castigates her target (which may consist of up to five individuals), her player rolls Charisma + Intimidation (difficulty 8). One success enables the

opponents to continue their intended attacks on the Gurahl, but every action suffers a penalty of two dice. Two or three successes cause the opponents to back down from the confrontation. Four or more successes means that the victims flee from the area. This Gift is a stronger and more permanent form of Dolorous Countenance, since it affects multiple targets. In addition, its effects persist for several days, sometimes leaving the victims (if they fail a Willpower roll) with a permanent aversion to the Gurahl who humiliated them. This Gift only works on sentient creatures; it has no effect on animals, spirits who lack the concept of feeling ashamed or Wyrms-creatures.

- **Natural State (Level Five)** — With this Gift, a Gurahl can cause a patch of ground to revert to its "natural" state of wildness. Cultivated fields reject their carefully planted crops and erupt in tall grasses and wildflowers; cabins (and their furnishings) lapse into ruin; clear-cut land becomes filled with saplings. While most Gurahl use this Gift to heal land that has suffered the ravages of over-civilization or exploitation, a few werebears delight in the sheer chaos caused by "trashing" a poacher's camp or an executive's cabin in the country. An Earth-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Manipulation + Repair. The number of successes determines the extent to which the targeted area reverts to its original state. One success causes only minor reversals to the area while five successes can level a small building. The user of this Gift can affect roughly 100 square feet of terrain.

## Uzmati

The full moon brings with it the Gifts of the warrior. Most Uzmati Gifts focus on enhancing combat abilities, both offensive and defensive. While the Gurahl do not have the same reputation for warlike fierceness as the Garou, their talents in battle can prove formidable — particularly when motivated by the need to protect someone or something.

- **Slash of the Death Bear (Level One)** — As the Ahroun Gift: Razor Claws. The Gurahl calls out to Mangi as he sharpens his claws.

- **Ultimatum (Level One)** — By winning a contest of wills against his opponent, a Gurahl may deliver an ultimatum which reduces the actions of that enemy to a choice between two alternatives. ("Come and get me or else flee like the coward you are!") This Gift enables the werebear to dictate the form of attack (or lack thereof), thus giving him an edge over his enemy. A Wolverine-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player must engage the attention of his enemy, then succeed in a contested Willpower roll. If he succeeds, the Gurahl may then present a pair of options to his enemy, who must comply with one or the other and may take no action not specified by the Gurahl.

- **Mangi's Strong Arms (Level Two)** — This Gift bestows added strength to the infamous "bear-hug," allowing a Gurahl to squeeze his opponent to the point of unconsciousness or death. A Gaffling in the Death Bear's service teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Primal-Urge and spends a Gnosis point while concentrating on attracting the favor of Mangi, which requires a full action. Each success adds one die to the damage caused by a successful grappling maneu-



## Learning Auspice Gifts

In the old times, Gurahl learned Gifts from the various auspices over the course of a lifetime. They no longer have the leisure to do that. In all likelihood, the Apocalypse will arrive before newly emerging Gurahl have had time to experience all of Luna's personality phases. This urgency has driven many Gurahl to seek knowledge of Gifts outside their current auspice. With some difficulty, therefore, it is possible for Gurahl to acquire Auspice Gifts not normally available to them.

In game terms, a Gurahl character may pay the experience point cost for learning a Gift outside her auspice or breed (Level of Gift x 5) and acquire a Gift of any level available to her Rank.

ver in combat. The Gurahl must expend this extra damage all at once, though she may invoke the Gift before engaging in battle and hold it in reserve until she succeeds in grappling her opponent.

- **Threaten (Level Two)** — By standing erect and roaring a challenge, the Gurahl increases her ability to intimidate an enemy, forcing him to cower in terror or retreat from battle altogether. A Bear-spirit (usually that of a grizzly or Kodiak) teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Intimidation (difficulty of the target's Willpower + 2, maximum difficulty of 10). One or two successes force the enemy to cower in terror, while three or more successes cause the target to turn and run. Five successes can incite a fear frenzy in wercreatures and vampires (i.e., supernatural creatures capable of succumbing to frenzy) or cause a human or other normal creature to fall into a coma (or drop dead) from fright.

- **Crush (Level Three)** — This Gift delivers the devastating damage of a bear-hug at a distance. This attack can break bones and crush internal organs. At the very least, it forces the air from the victim's lungs, rendering him unconscious. A Gaffling of Mangi teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Brawl (difficulty of the victim's Dexterity + Dodge). The attack lands as a normal claw strike, and inflicts aggravated damage. Additional successes add to the Gurahl's roll for damage on a one-for-one basis. The victim can attempt to soak damage normally, however, if he has taken at least three Health Levels of damage after soaking, he temporarily loses consciousness from having the wind forced from his lungs.

- **Silver Claws (Level Three)** — As the Garou Ahroun Gift.

- **Delay the Death Bear's Coming (Level Four)** — This Gift allows a Gurahl or a designated individual the capacity to sustain massive damage without dying. While the use of this Gift does not enable the recipient to engage in combat or other strenuous activities, it does keep the target alive long enough, in most cases, to allow for normal or magical healing to take place. A Jagglings in service to Mangi teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Wits + Occult (or Medicine). Each success grants the targeted indi-





vidual an additional Incapacitated Health Level, thus making it possible to sustain normally fatal damage without dying. The Gurahl may use this Gift on herself, although she may not do so if she has already reached Incapacitated.

- **Strength of the Earth (Level Four)** — As the Get of Fenris Gift: Hero's Stand.

- **Engulf the Prey (Level Five)** — The Gurahl draws on his connection to the earth, causing the ground beneath an enemy's feet to open up, swallowing the victim whole or trapping her so that she cannot escape further attacks. This Gift can encompass an entire group of foes, provided they are within close proximity to each other. An Earth-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and a point of Rage, then rolls Wits + Primal-Urge roll (difficulty 9). If successful, a yawning pit opens underneath a targeted foe (or foes). The chasm is approximately 15 feet across and at least 50 feet deep. Victims may attempt to avoid the pit by rolling Dexterity + Dodge (difficulty 9). Three successes are necessary for them to jump aside. One or two successes indicates that the victim has fallen partially into the pit. The chasm closes almost immediately after opening, trapping (and crushing) anyone inside. Even enemies only partly caught in the pit take eight dice of (soakable) damage from the impact caused by the closing of the rift, and they cannot extricate themselves unless they perform an appropriate Feat of Strength to do so. A victim whose legs are caught (and probably crushed) may not take any actions involving movement (such as fleeing), while trapped arms prevent the use of most weapons. Those caught fully in the pit take 10 Health Levels (not dice!) of damage, and they are buried alive. Unless reached quickly or able to free themselves (such as with the Gift: Burrow), living victims will soon suffocate.

- **Rage of the Mother Bear (Level Five)** — The Gurahl may invoke a white-hot anger which endows her with uncommon rapidity of movement and action. This Gift allows a Gurahl to take multiple actions during battle or to perform in emergency situations which require fast responses and desperate measures (such as pulling a companion out of the path of a speeding car or a falling tree). A Jagglings of Ursa Major teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Dexterity + Rituals (difficulty 6). Each success gives the werewolf one additional action. The werewolf must take all her extra actions in the same turn, or they are lost.

## Kojubat

The Gifts associated with Kojubat Gurahl often involve some form of lore-gathering or artistry, since these werewolves specialize in preserving the traditions and stories of their Changing Breed. Communication with Gaia's creations (both animate and inanimate) allow the Kojubat access to much hidden lore and otherwise unattainable knowledge.

- **Beast Speech (Level One)** — As the Garou Galliard Gift.

- **Stonesight (Level One)** — The Gurahl can examine a stone or large rock, seeing "through" it to determine its use, composition or potential. Of particular use to werewolves who work with stone (as sculptors or builders), this Gift also gives the viewer information such as whether or not a stone contains specific minerals or fossils. An Earth-spirit teaches this Gift.



**System:** The Gurahl concentrates on the targeted stone, while her player rolls Perception + Enigmas (difficulty 7). A single success reveals one essential fact about the stone's composition ("Its outer surface houses a crystalline interior"). Additional successes contribute more information ("The shape of an eagle in flight lurks within the stone's heart"). No successes means that the Gurahl can determine nothing useful about the stone, while a botch gives entirely false information.

• **Eyes of the Soul (Level Two)** — By concentrating on her inner vision, a Gurahl may look beyond the outward facade of an individual and determine that person or creature's true form. Similar to the Garou Philodox Gift: Scent of the True Form, this Gift allows the Gurahl to see the precise nature of the targeted individual. In this fashion, a Gurahl may identify members of other Changing Breeds, vampires, faeries, mages or persons possessed by wraiths or spirits. A Falcon-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Primal-Urge (difficulty of the target's Willpower). A single success may determine whether or not the target is what she seems to be. Two or more successes are necessary to identify the specific nature of most targets; three successes are required to tell whether or not an individual is a mage or serves as the vehicle for a wraith or a spirit.

• **Song of Terra (Level Two)** — By touching the earth and concentrating on the sensations, a Gurahl may "hear" something of the recent history of a particular place. Depending on how hard he listens, the werebear may discover what has transpired in the immediate vicinity within the past 24 hours (or longer, in some cases). Use of this Gift enables a Gurahl to uncover evidence of significant occurrences, such as acts of violence, conversations or the passage of creatures across the chosen piece of ground. An Earth-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The Gurahl places himself in an appropriate position (either standing with unshod feet in full contact with the ground, prone with an ear to the ground or kneeling with some skin-to-earth contact. When the player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Perception + Primal-Urge (difficulty 8), the Gurahl establishes a connection to the earth that enables him to learn about one or more events that have taken place within the recent past. One success provides the Gurahl with the most significant happening within the last 24 hours. Further successes extend the time period by eight hours per success (up to 48 hours) or, at the Storyteller's discretion, provide information about other events in the same vicinity. A failure provides no information, while a botch gives a false accounting of what has happened on the spot.

• **Mind Sight (Level Three)** — This Gift enables the Gurahl to read the surface thoughts of an individual creature possessing an intelligence greater than that of an animal. The Gurahl may not probe the target's mind or uncover knowledge that the target wishes to keep hidden. A Chimerling teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Wits + Empathy (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). Each success gives the Gurahl access to one "idea" foremost in the target's mind. No successes means that the werebear cannot read the thoughts of her target, while a botch gives the Gurahl a false reading. This Gift works on supernatural creatures as well as humans, although vampires, mages, changelings and members of





other Changing Breeds may resist the Gurahl's attempt to read their minds by spending a point of Willpower.

- **Mind to Mind (Level Three)** — Similar to the Garou Galliard Gift: Mindspeak, this Gift differs in that it does not require a dreamlike state for its effect. The Gurahl simply makes a mental call to those individuals he wishes to contact and, if they are willing, establishes a connection with their minds. An Ant-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Expression (difficulty of the target's Willpower) and spends a point of Willpower for each individual he wishes to contact. If an individual wants to resist this form of mental communication, she must spend a point of Willpower. The Gurahl and all those involved in the linking of minds may communicate with one another as if they were speaking aloud. Individuals inside the link may perform other actions, but they suffer a one-die penalty to actions which require concentration to accomplish. Each person must be within line of sight to maintain the connection. The effect lasts until the Gurahl breaks the link or all members leave the area of visibility.

- **Shadows by the Fire Light (Level Four)** — As the Garou Galliard Gift.

- **Probe Thoughts (Level Four)** — More intrusive than the Gift: Mind Sight, this Gift enables the Gurahl to uncover hidden information in the target's mind. The belief by many tribal people that bears have the ability to read minds may come from witnessing or experiencing the use of this Gift. A Snake-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Wits + Empathy (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). For every success, the Gurahl may uncover one thought that lies below the surface of her target, even if the subject deliberately attempts to suppress the thought. Use of the Gift on supernatural creatures requires a point of Willpower to be spent as well as Gnosis.

- **Aversion Therapy (Level Five)** — Gurahl use this Gift to rehabilitate wrongdoers or force those who cause great harm to stop performing certain actions. In essence, the werebear taps into the individual's emotions and links one or more of them with the thought of performing the forbidden deed. For example, an arsonist might have his thoughts of setting fires linked with uncontrollable sadness. So long as he even considers burning something, he is rendered helpless by wracking sobs and inexplicable feelings of loss. Such a linkage, once established, lasts for a year and a day.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Wits + Empathy (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). If the Gurahl uses this Gift on other supernatural creatures, the Gurahl must spend a point of Willpower to do so.

- **Prophetic Vision (Level Five)** — Gurahl lorekeepers credit this Gift for providing the earliest warning of the War of Rage, even though many werebears ignored or misinterpreted the omens drawn from its use. By entering a deep trance, a Gurahl may send his mind beyond the barriers of time and catch a glimpse of what the future holds. Words as well as visions come to the werebear, warning or alerting him to things that have yet to transpire. Unfortunately, these images, while vivid and often dramatic, require interpretation. Many who use this



Gift fail to understand what they have seen and heard. Gurahl believe that the disturbing images and phrases that seem to penetrate current uses of this Gift herald the impending Apocalypse. Phoenix teaches this Gift.

**System:** The Gurahl assumes a meditative state, while his player rolls Perception + Enigmas (difficulty 9). The player may spend Gnosis to lower the difficulty at the rate of one per Gnosis point. Almost immediately, the werebear begins to sense words and images, many of them distorted or extremely cryptic. The Storyteller should not make these "visions" of the future impossible to fathom, but she should try to challenge the player by leaving many avenues of interpretation open. No successes means that a vision or message from the future fails to come to the Gurahl, while a botch gives the werebear a false vision or warning.

## Kieh

Gurahl in their Kieh auspice pay particular attention to matters of healing and of the spirit world. In many ways, they serve as ministers to the bodies and souls of Gaia's creatures.

• **Diagnose (Level One)** — By studying an individual, the Gurahl can determine the general state of health, frequently enabling her to identify any ailments or diseases present in the person's body. A Bear-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The Gurahl concentrates on her target, and her player rolls Perception + Medicine (difficulty 7). One success allows her to assess the general health of the target, while additional successes enable her to home in on specific diseases such as lung disorders, stomach ailments, viruses and chronic problems. No successes means that the Gurahl cannot determine anything about the individual, while a botch conveys a false diagnosis (which could prove dangerous to the target).

• **Spirit Speech (Level One)** — As the Garou Theurge Gift.

• **Refresh (Level Two)** — In battle, the winner usually manages to achieve victory by outlasting the loser. Wounds weaken a combatant, making him more vulnerable to further damage and eventual death. This Gift enables a Gurahl to perform the equivalent of "battlefield medicine," temporarily alleviating damage to an ally (or to himself). Although wounds are not permanently healed through this Gift, the recipient may ignore any damage, giving him a second wind which often means the difference between victory (and survival) and defeat (or death). A Bear-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The Gurahl enacting this Gift must be within touching distance of her target. By spending a point of Gnosis, rolling Wits + Medicine (difficulty 6 for herself and 7 for another creature) and touching his target, the Gurahl may temporarily "heal" as many Health Levels of damage (aggravated or not) as he has successes. This effect lasts for the duration of an entire combat scene. Damage suffered after the Gift's use accumulates normally. Afterward, the damage that has been deferred returns at the rate of one Health Level per turn unless healed by a Gift or through medical care.

• **Sense the Unnatural (Level Two)** — As the Garou Lupus Gift.

• **Exorcism (Level Three)** — As the Garou Theurge Gift.

• **Name the Spirit (Level Three)** — As the Garou Lupus Gift.

• **Spirit Healing (Level Four)** — The Gurahl not only serve as Gaia's healers in the physical world, they also have the ability to repair damage done to Umbral spirits. This Gift allows a Gurahl in the Umbra to replenish the Power of a "wounded" spirit. A Bear-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The Gurahl must be in the Umbra to activate this Gift, which requires a roll of Charisma + Occult (difficulty of the spirit's Willpower). If the roll succeeds, the Gurahl may transfer a temporary point of his own Gnosis to the spirit, which it converts into five points of Power. The Gurahl may spend as much Gnosis as he deems necessary and can afford. Use of this Gift usually puts the spirit in the Gurahl's debt, allowing the werebear to call upon the spirit for assistance in the future.

• **Spirit Shape (Level Four)** — The Gurahl may assume the countenance and form of a creature native to the Umbra, appearing to other spirits as one of their own kind. In this fashion, a werebear can travel in parts of the Umbra which might otherwise prove inimical or hostile. A Coyote-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The Gurahl must enter the Umbra in order to invoke this Gift. Once the Gurahl is past the Gauntlet, the player rolls Appearance + Enigmas (difficulty 7) and spends a point of Gnosis. The Gurahl's body then assumes the appearance of an Umbral creature, usually a Jagglings of some sort. In parts of the Umbra controlled by the Tapestry Maker, the Gurahl may take the form of a Pattern Spider. A single success allows the Gift to take full effect, while no successes means that the Gurahl can not alter her appearance. A botch means that the Gurahl assumes a spirit-form whose presence attracts a number of hostile spirits. The Gift remains in effect until the Gurahl leaves the Umbra.

• **Restore Sanity (Level Five)** — This Gift allows the Gurahl to completely restore the mind of an individual who has suffered an intense mental catastrophe or who has been deliberately driven insane by an enemy. Unlike the Gurahl Gift: Ease the Fevered Mind, this Gift does not affect chronic mental states or permanent forms of insanity; it simply restores a traumatized mind to its former state. A Jagglings of Ursa Major teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Empathy and spends a point of Gnosis. Only one success is necessary to bring the Gift's recipient back from the edge of fear or trauma-induced madness. The effects of this Gift are permanent unless something else occurs to shatter the subject's mind again. This Gift cannot heal certain permanent Derangements (such as metis disfigurements or a Malkavian's madness), although with five successes, the Gurahl can cure Harano.

• **Image of the Sky Bear (Level Five)** — The Gurahl's body glows with the light of the Great She-Bear, outlining his form with seven pinpoints of light that correspond to the seven stars of Ursa Major. Using the borrowed power of the spirit of the Great She-Bear, the Gurahl may perform extra acts of healing or protection, depending on the circumstances. A Jagglings of Ursa Major teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Wits + Rituals to call down the image of the Sky Bear. He may use the



power thus gained (and represented by the Gurahl's starry outline) for up to seven actions to heal wounds (even aggravated), add temporary Health Levels or provide the equivalent of body armor. Each such action causes one of the seven pinpoints of light to "blink out," signaling the expiration of the Gift. The effects, however, last until lost through incurring damage.

## Rishi

Naturally, the Rishi's Gifts reflect the wisdom of age and the ability to properly adjudicate situations. They allow the Rishi to keep peace among his own kind, mortals and other Changing Breeds alike.

• **Befriend (Level One)** — With this Gift, the Gurahl can alter the emotions of a potentially hostile individual so that the target responds to the werebear with a friendlier attitude than he originally had. A Gaffling of Ursa Minor teaches this Gift.

**System:** The Gurahl assumes a non-threatening physical attitude, and his player rolls Charisma + Empathy. One success defuses hostility by altering it to a cautious neutrality. Additional successes improve the target's disposition toward the Gurahl. No successes indicates no change in the target's original emotional state, while a botch increases the target's hostility.

• **Truth of Gaia (Level One)** — As the Garou Philodox Gift.

• **Compel Truth (Level Two)** — By using the force of his presence, a Gurahl may force a targeted individual to speak only the truth as she perceives it. A Falcon-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Wits + Empathy (difficulty of the target's Willpower). The target must refrain from lying for one minute for each success gained. Failure means that the Gift has no effect, while a botch only seems to work.

• **Presence of the Great Bear (Level Two)** — Similar to the Garou Philodox Gift: King of the Beasts, this Gift enables the Gurahl to influence other bears (one at a time) to follow her commands and assist her willingly. A Bear-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The target bear must be within the immediate vicinity of the Gurahl (100 feet). The player rolls Charisma + Animal Ken against a difficulty which varies depending on the nature of the Gurahl's relationship with the bear (see chart). This Gift does not summon bears; the target must already be present.

Relationship	Difficulty
Sibling	3
Kinfolk	4
Feed and care for	6
Strange bear	8
Angry or hostile bear	10

• **Ways of the Tapestry (Level Three)** — This Gift allows the Gurahl insight into how pieces of a puzzle or a mystery fit together, and it can cast some light on how an event fits into the Gurahl's past, present or possibly future. A Weaver-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Enigmas (difficulty 8). Each success gives the Gurahl an important fact about the problem confronting him. The Storyteller should present these facts as hints rather than direct statements, but should not make them so cryptic as to be indecipherable.



• **Waken (Level Three)** — The Gurahl may awaken most creatures from unnatural slumber or supernatural sleep through using this Gift. By touching the targeted individual, a werebear can rouse a vampire from torpor or bring a Gurahl out of Bhernocht-inspired slumber. Occasionally, this Gift may awaken a creature affected by Rite of the Long Sleep. A Fox-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Rituals (difficulty of the target's Willpower) and spends a point of Gnosis. To overcome the effects of Rite of the Long Sleep, the Gurahl must also expend a point of Willpower. Recipients of this Gift do not necessarily appreciate its use, and they may react accordingly.

• **Bestow Ursa's Blessing (Level Four)** — A Gurahl may call down the favor of the Great Bear on an individual of her choosing, granting that person or creature some tangible bonus or piece of good fortune. A Jagglings of Ursa Major teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Occult and spends a point of Gnosis while describing the specific nature of the blessing she wishes to bestow. This boon can take the form of an automatic success in some endeavor by the recipient, or it may manifest as a temporary addition to one of the target's Attributes (such as an extra die in Strength or Intelligence). If the Gurahl wishes to make the blessing a permanent one, she must sacrifice a point of permanent Gnosis to do so.

• **Quell Mob Rage (Level Four)** — By speaking calmly and deliberately, the Gurahl can dispel the anger of a crowd, disperse lynch mobs or stop a riot before it starts. A Weaver-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Leadership (difficulty of the highest Willpower among the members of the target group) and confronts the angry crowd (which may consist of up to 50 individuals). Each success causes a step-down in hostility of one degree (i.e., hostile crowds become discontented, discontented mobs become neutral, and neutral groups tend toward friendliness). If the Gurahl rolls more than three successes, he may further manipulate the crowd to accept his own beliefs or ideas in place of the ones that sparked the initial anger.

• **Oath of the Great Bear (Level Five)** — Similar to the Garou Philodox Gift: Geas, this Gift enables the Gurahl to make an oath that an individual or group swears is binding. While the terms of the oath cannot force the recipient to act in ways that are detrimental to himself, the binding words can demand almost anything else within the victim's physical or mental capability. A Jagglings in service to Ursa Major teaches this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Leadership (difficulty of the recipient's Willpower) and spends a point of Gnosis. If the Gurahl wishes to affect a group, the difficulty of the roll is determined by the member of the group with the highest Willpower. If the victim breaks the terms of the oath, she begins to lose Willpower at a rate of one point per day. If her Willpower reaches zero, she begins to lose some other Trait or Attribute. This process continues until the victim either dies, adheres to the original oath or successfully petitions the Gurahl to release her from the oath.

• **Words of Doom (Level Five)** — This Gift enables a Gurahl to curse an individual (or an allied group of individuals up to five in number), punishing them for some gross misdeed. Some werebears believe that the origin of the Silver Fangs' tribal

insanity resulted from a curse placed upon them for their part in the War of Rage. Gurahl who use this Gift tread a thin line between serving Gaia and becoming a tool of the Pattern Breaker, since the pronouncement of a curse upon an individual or group often reflects adversely upon the speaker, touching her spirit with darkness. A Worm-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** After the Gurahl states the terms of the curse, the player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 9) and sacrifices a point of permanent Gnosis to seal the effect. The words used must specifically describe the terms of punishment along with the means for lifting or escaping the curse ("You and your descendants shall never know unsullied happiness until you return that which you stole from my people."). If the nature of the curse is particularly harmful, detrimental, or far-reaching, the Storyteller may require that the Gurahl character give up two or even three points of permanent Gnosis instead of one.

## Gurahl Gifts

These Gifts, taught to the Gurahl by Gaia and by the three-aspects of Bear, mirror the special place the werebears occupy as protectors, defenders, nurturers and healers. Unless otherwise specified, Bear-spirits or spirit-servants of Mangi, Ursa Minor and Ursa Major teach these Gifts.

• **Fiddlefish (Level One)** — By invoking this Gift and scooping her hand (or paw) into a river, stream or other body of water where fish may be found, a Gurahl can guarantee herself a nutritious dinner. Using this Gift presents the Gurahl with a fish large enough to satisfy her hunger. If a Gurahl overuses this Gift (particularly if she returns to the same spot over and over), Gaia's disapproval the implied greed or laziness manifests in a failure to procure a meal. While two or more Gurahl may each acquire a fish from one spot through using this Gift, an individual Gurahl may not snare more than one fish through the use of Fiddlefish unless she moves at least a half mile up or down stream from the original casting place.

**System:** So long as she attempts to acquire a single fish, a Gurahl does not need to spend Gnosis or make a roll for this Gift to succeed. If the Gurahl wishes more than one fish and makes the effort to relocate to another spot, the player may roll Dexterity + Athletics to see if Gaia blesses the Gurahl with additional fish. Success means that the Gurahl gains another large, tasty fish. Failure results in no additional fish, while a botch means that Gaia is displeased with the Gurahl, who must then make appropriate restitution before trying to use the Gift again. Until a Gurahl atones for a botched attempt at invoking this Gift, future uses of Fiddlefish fail automatically.

• **Healing Tongue (Level One)** — As the Garou Theurge Gift: Mother's Touch. Ursa Major taught this Gift to the Gurahl who passed it on to the Garou, who know it by a different name.

• **Ignore Wounds (Level One)** — As the Garou Philodox Gift: Resist Pain. This Gift comes to the Gurahl from Mangi, the Death Bear. The Gurahl, in turn, taught the Garou how to petition Bear for the Gift, which the wolves renamed and claimed as their own.

• **Sense Pattern Breaker (Level One)** — As the Garou Metis Gift: Sense Wyrms.





• **Sentinel's Warning (Level One)** — The use of this Gift allows a Gurahl to become alert to the presence of threats or hostile forces or individuals in his protected lands. The Gift manifests in the Gurahl's consciousness as a feeling of unease and discomfort. Unlike the Merit: Danger Sense, which is always "on," this Gift requires a conscious effort to activate it in order for it to work. Both mortal and supernatural dangers trigger the effects of this power, making it impossible for the Gurahl to determine the precise type of threat involved. A Raven-spirit teaches this Gift.

**System:** To invoke this Gift, a Gurahl must roll Perception + Alertness and spend a point of Gnosis. The Gift's effects last for one scene per success rolled. No successes means that the Gift fails to function. A botch produces false triggers which can send the werebear off on a wild goose chase.

• **Nature's Plenty (Level One)** — This Gift allows a Gurahl to locate sufficient food, healing herbs or other useful vegetation to feed or tend to an individual creature in need of his ministrations. Regardless of the seasons, enough of the required plants or herbs may be found, even if they are hidden under deep snows or only grow in normally inaccessible places.

**System:** To activate this Gift, the player rolls Perception + Primal-Urge (difficulty 7). One success is sufficient to lead the Gurahl to food or healing herbs, but not both. If a Gurahl seeks to find both herbal remedies and food plants, at least two successes are necessary (one for each class of vegetable matter sought). No successes means that the Gurahl cannot find any suitable plants in the vicinity of the Gift's activation, while a botch leads the Gurahl to non-nutritious or even toxic plants (Storyteller's discretion).

• **Ursa's Cleansing (Level One)** — As the Fianna Gift: Resist Toxin.

• **Calm (Level Two)** — As the Children of Gaia Gift.

• **Grisly Aspect (Level Two)** — By using this Gift, a Gurahl assumes a truly frightening aura, augmenting his height, mass and general appearance. If a Gurahl uses this Gift while in full Crinos form, the effect is terrifying. Gurahl often invoke this Gift to dishearten opponents before a battle; in some cases, the effect is so traumatic that an enemy flees without engaging in combat. Besides enhancing a Gurahl's horrific appearance, this Gift also enables the user to emit a pheromone that invokes a panic response among herbivores and arouses dread in even the most voracious carnivores. By provoking an enemy to flight, a Gurahl often manages to avoid having to battle an opponent head-on. This Gift is useful in cases where enemies are not Wym-creatures but are merely misguided or petty attackers. The Gift is especially effective against hunters and poachers.

**System:** To activate this Gift, the player rolls Charisma + Intimidation (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower). One success causes the target creature to falter in his tracks, often rethinking his intent to attack the Gurahl. Three or more successes routs the victim completely, sending him into a head-long rush to escape the terror that has suddenly manifested in his presence. No successes means that the Gurahl fails to evoke the proper fearsome aspect, while a botch results in an immediate attack by the enraged (and often panicky) target. The use of this Gift while in Crinos form has occasionally resulted in the sudden death of human victims from heart failure.



• **Treeshake (Level Two)** — This Gift allows the Gurahl to procure ample food for one or more individuals simply by grasping the trunk of a tree and shaking acorns and other edible tree-fruits to the ground where they can be gathered up and eaten. The tree does not have to be a fruit-bearing tree in order to give forth food, nor does it have to be "in season."

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Rituals (difficulty 7) and spends a point of Gnosis. One success provides enough food to feed one individual. More successes add to the bounty of the harvest.

• **Survival of the Bear (Level Three)** — As the Silent Striders Gift: Adaptation.

• **Dreams of the Buri-Jaan (Level Three)** — This Gift allows the Gurahl to send out a series of spirit calls or dream visions to a known cub which she has chosen to mentor. The dreams and visions so produced both act as a summons and provide directions to the new Gurahl, leading her (if she listens to them) to her Buri-Jaan.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty equal to the distance his dreams have to travel according to the table). Additional points of Gnosis can strengthen the power and persuasiveness of the dreams or visions. The Gurahl usually performs this Gift at least once every three days until the arrival of the targeted cub. It is possible to send dreams without a clear target on the chance that a Gurahl cub is "out there" waiting for some direction; in this case, all difficulties are increased by two, to a maximum of 10.

Distance separating Buri-Jaan and Cub	Difficulty
less than a mile	4
up to 10 miles	5
up to 100 miles	6
up to 250 miles	7
up to 500 miles	8
up to 1000 miles	9
more than 1000 miles	10

• **Ease the Fevered Mind (Level Three)** — With this Gift, a Gurahl can minister to victims of emotional or spiritual trauma. In this fashion, Gurahl may treat victims whose minds have fractured into multiple personalities, guide schizophrenics back from their delusional realities and heal traumatized or abused individuals. Regardless of whether a patient suffers from physiologically based mental illnesses or from stress- or trauma-related problems, the use of this Gift can temporarily remove or ease the effects of many common Derangements. Through repeated use of this Gift on the same individual, and by expending Willpower over an extended period of time, a Gurahl can permanently remove a Derangement.

**System:** For each success in a Perception + Medicine roll (difficulty 7), the Gurahl may suppress his target's insanity, emotional turmoil or Derangement for one scene. By amassing 20 successes over an extended period of time (with no intervening failures or botches), a Gurahl may succeed in the permanent removal of a Derangement or mental disease. No successes means that the Gurahl has failed in using the Gift to calm or soothe her patient, while a botch inflicts the targeted Derangement or trauma upon the Gurahl herself for as long as the Storyteller deems is necessary to overcome it. Gurahl may not



apply this Gift to themselves. Although a Gurahl may sometimes effect miraculous cures of mental illnesses through the use of this Gift, unless the root cause of the problem is addressed, the Derangement or trauma may recur.

• **Masking the Hunted (Level Four)** — Through the use of this Gift, a Gurahl can employ available terrain to form a secure sanctuary for individuals or creatures who are pursued by hunters. Brush thickens, bushes clump together into impassable growths and grasses conceal tracks or else flatten in such a way as to produce a false trail. Olfactory stimuli add to the effect of this Gift, leading astray those creatures who hunt by scent. Though the duration of this Gift is brief, it usually lasts long enough for a victim to elude her pursuers. (The Gurahl may mask up to 12 human or large mammal-sized individuals (or up to twice as many smaller creatures) with this Gift.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Stealth (difficulty equals the Perception + Alertness of the hunter) and spends a point of Gnosis to enact this Gift. A single success is necessary for the Gift to have its effect. Additional successes result in a longer duration and a more thorough false trail. No successes indicates that the attempt to provide secure cover fails, while a botch draws the hunter to the Gurahl using the Gift as well as to those under her protection.

• **Gaia's Breath (Level Five)** — Only the wisest and oldest Gurahl may learn this powerful Gift, which remains their most closely guarded secret. By using this Gift, a Gurahl can return the departed spirit to a dead werecreature, bringing it back from death. In the early times, Gurahl rewarded those among them who sacrificed themselves for others, either to provide food for human Kinfolk or who gave their lives in the protection of others. No known instances exist of this Gift being conferred upon non-Gurahl, nor has Gaia's Breath ever been used on any Gurahl who has been dead for more than a few hours.

**System:** The player must spend a point each of permanent Gnosis and Willpower, then roll Charisma + Occult (difficulty of 6 plus the number of hours elapsed since death, not to exceed a total of 10) in order to entice the departed spirit back into its dead body, infusing it with the breath of life. Only one success calls back the spirit, but leaves the body in an incapacitated (as if with aggravated damage) state unless treated with magical healing. Additional successes restore lost Health levels on a one-for-one basis. Missing body parts are not restored through the use of this Gift, although other Gifts may be used to regenerate lost limbs or eyes. Failure to achieve any successes means that the Gurahl is unable to recall the spirit to the body. A botch summons a malicious spirit (usually a Baner of some kind) into the body. Only one attempt may be made on a single creature at any time. Ever.

• **Great Grandfather's Summons (Level Six)** — In a time of great need or dire emergency, this powerful and rarely used Gift enables the Great Grandfather (or Ancient One) to send out a summons to all Gurahl, calling them to his side so that he can inform them of the reason for the call. The summons is so powerful that it can even awake Gurahl who are locked in the sleep of hibernation. Gurahl need not respond to the summons, and some, in fact, refuse or ignore the call of the Ancient One. Most Gurahl, however, gather together healing items, weapons and food, then travel to where the Great Grandfather waits for

them. This is the Gift which resulted in the mass awakening of many Gurahl when the Storm Eater was loosed.

**System:** The player sacrifices three points of Gnosis and one point of Rage. No roll is necessary.

## Rites

Ceremonies and rituals play a major part in the life of a Gurahl. The werebears originated many rites now practiced by the Garou, particularly those regarding purification and healing. As Gurahl age, they become more concerned with rituals, spending most of their time performing old rites and even creating new ones. Storytellers may modify any of the Garou rites for use with Gurahl characters, though the most typical rites will resemble Rites of Accord or Death, as well as Mystic and Seasonal rites.

Since Gurahl tend toward solitude for much of their lives, many of their rites need only a single werebear to perform them. Other rites involve interaction between two Gurahl, while some require group participation (or else draw additional strength from the number of werebears present).

Many rites require no roll to enact; others require a Charisma + Rituals roll unless otherwise noted in the description of the rite itself.

## Rites of Greeting and Leave-taking

### Level One

These simple rites involve a formal acknowledgment of the presence of another Gurahl. The basic rite used when one Gurahl meets another involves the use of language and body gestures that render mutual respect. Variations on the basic rite allow for meeting groups of Gurahl, encountering a werebear of higher or lower rank, entering or leaving the territory of another Gurahl and other kinds of meetings.

**System:** No roll is necessary unless there is some question as to whether or not one or both of the Gurahl involved in the rite have hostile or unfriendly intentions toward the other. If this is the case, the Gurahl who wishes to keep the greeting on a friendly basis rolls Charisma + Rituals (difficulty of the target's Willpower) to ensure that the rite succeeds in averting trouble.

## Rite of Rending the Gauntlet

### Level One

Gurahl have such close ties to the Earth itself that entering the Umbra requires a special rite. Unlike the Garou, who can simply "step sideways," the Gurahl must physically rip a hole in the Gauntlet before they can travel beyond the confines of the physical world. In order to accomplish this feat, the Gurahl transforms into Bjornen, tears an opening into the Umbra and steps through. The tear immediately seals itself behind the Gurahl. This action invokes the Delirium in normal humans who inadvertently come upon a Gurahl in the process of passing between the worlds.

**System:** The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Rituals versus a difficulty of the local Gauntlet. The time it takes to open a hole in the Gauntlet and pass through depends on the number of successes gained in the roll. One success means that it takes the Gurahl five minutes to enter the Umbra. Two successes shortens the time to 30



seconds, while three or more successes indicates an almost instantaneous ripping and crossing. No successes means that the Gurahl fails to tear the fabric of the Gauntlet, and he may not make another attempt until an hour has passed. A botch strands the Gurahl halfway between the two worlds. The Gurahl's affinity for the Earth makes returning from the Umbra a simple process, requiring no roll.

## Rite of the Changing Moon

### Level Two

These rites mark a Gurahl's passage from one auspice to another. The subject of the rite first undergoes a ritual cleansing, including a day-long fast and a ceremonial bath. At the end of her purification, she burns an item symbolic of her old auspice (i.e., a child's toy for Arcas or a wooden spear for Uzmati). Next she adorns herself in clothing and face paint suitable to her new auspice. Finally, she presents herself before the other participants in the rite and formally states her name and (new) auspice. The other Gurahl greet her in return, again using her name and new auspice title. A celebration usually follows the formal portion of the rite.

**System:** No roll is necessary, but all the proper steps must be followed for the rite to "succeed."

## Rite of the Healing Winds

### Level Two

The Gurahl use this ceremony to cleanse the land of noxious poisons, whether in the form of gases, liquids (such as chemical spills) or airborne viruses and biological agents. To enact this rite, the Gurahl enters the Umbra (using Rend the Gauntlet), then summons and binds a Chinook-spirit. The Gurahl then sends that spirit to the place that needs cleansing. The Chinook's purifying cold scour the land, water and air as well as creatures and vegetation, ridding them of toxins. The spirit's presence causes the temperature in the vicinity to drop up to 10 degrees, an effect which lasts for no more than 24 hours and causes no significant damage to the local flora and fauna.

This rite is a favorite of the Ice Stalkers, who regularly gather in groups to summon Chinook-spirits to send to other Gurahl whose lands need purifying.

**System:** The Gurahl enters the umbra, and rolls Manipulation + Rituals to locate and summon a Chinook-spirit. (You may use the guidelines described in *Axis Mundi: The Book of Spirits* for propitiating spirits and offering them chiminage in order to gain the cooperation of the Chinook-spirit.) The difficulty of the roll depends on the level of pollution in the targeted region. A badly poisoned area, for instance may require a difficulty of 8 or higher (to a maximum of 10 for sites of nuclear waste or strong chemical toxins). No successes mean that the rite simply fails, while a botch indicates that the performance of the rite has angered the Chinook-spirit.

## Rite of the River-Portent

### Level Two

Gurahl use this rite as a means of foretelling the future. The Gurahl enacting the rite snags a fish with his claw from a stream, splits open the fish's belly and reads the omens con-

tained within. The information gained from this rite usually pertains to the Gurahl who reads the omens and has to do with the immediate future.

**System:** After catching the fish (which should be accomplished without the use of the Fiddlefish Gift), the Gurahl rolls Intelligence + Enigmas (difficulty 8). The number of successes determines how clear and intelligible the omens and portents are.

## Rite of True Mating

### Level Two

This rite, when performed, allows the Gurahl to find a suitable mate from among her Kinfolk. Only Gurahl who have reached full adulthood (i.e., are no longer considered Arcas) may learn this rite, since the werebears do not believe in casual acts of procreation. To enact the rite, the Gurahl fashions a small bag, into which she places a drop of her blood and a cutting of her hair. She wears this bag around her neck for three days and nights, after which the empowered bag acts as a homing beacon, pulling the Gurahl in the direction of a Kinfolk suitable for mating. (Of course, the Gurahl must woo the targeted Kinfolk naturally.)

**System:** The Gurahl performs the actions described above, then her player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 7). Only one success is enough to ensure the proper functioning of the rite; more successes indicate that the Gurahl has found several suitable Kinfolk.

## Rite of the Finding the Ancient Cache

### Level Three

This rite enables the Gurahl enacting it to locate the hidden sites of the ancient treasures of his people. Before their withdrawal during the War of Rage, the Gurahl hid many of their treasures and secrets in places deep within the earth. They bound powerful spirits to guard some of these precious items; other treasures rest under the protection of Gurahl elders who lie in the deep sleep of hibernation.

By performing this rite, a Gurahl (or group of Gurahl) gain a sense of the hidden cache's location. With each enactment of the rite, the Gurahl's knowledge of where to find the sought-for treasure becomes more precise. Eventually, the rite leads the Gurahl to the actual site itself and opens a gateway or passage to the hiding place. (If the ancient cache lies in the Umbra, the Gurahl must rend the Gauntlet in order to gain access to it.) Once the Gurahl has gained access to the cache, he usually has to discover the secret to opening the complicated locks which seal the actual treasure from intruders. The form this rite takes consists of an elaborate and slow dance containing movements and steps that mimic the actions of a search party.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Enigmas (difficulty 8 or 9, depending on how well the cache is hidden). Each success gives the Gurahl a sense of where to go to locate the desired object. The Gurahl must accumulate a total of seven successes in order to home in on the cache. This requirement usually necessitates several repetitions of the rite in order to gather enough successes. A failure simply means that the rite must be performed again and that the Gurahl has come to a temporary snag in the "journey" to the cache. A botch sends the Gurahl off on an entirely wrong direction.



## Rite of the Pure Land

### Level Three

The Gurahl use this rite to purify a specific area of pollution, sickness, destruction caused by natural disasters or Wurm-taint by reestablishing broken connection between Gaia and the damaged or tainted land. To perform this rite, a Gurahl mixes her blood with a handful of soil from the land that needs purification. She uses this paste of blood and earth to describe a line around the perimeter of the designated area. A Gurahl may cleanse as large a space as she wishes, but she pays for the cost in her own blood, taking damage in proportion to the amount of blood she spills to make enough paste to outline the area. (One square mile may be purified per Health Level of damage assumed.) A group of Gurahl may choose to perform this rite together in order to cleanse very large portions of land.

Ritual dances and prayers for healing (spoken in the Gurahl tongue) accompany the drawing of the line to help focus the power of Gaia for the successful completion of the rite.

**System:** The players of all the Gurahl participating in the rite roll Stamina + Rituals (difficulty 8). Each Gurahl must gain at least one success for the rite to succeed.

## Rite of the Ban

### Level Four

The Gurahl use this rite to prevent the spread of secrets that, if known, might cause harm to their people or their Kinfolk. The rite acts as a mental deterrent, blocking the target of the rite from communicating a specific secret in any way. Gurahl frequently use this rite on humans who have either witnessed a Gurahl change forms or on those whom the Gurahl have brought to their Dens for magical healing. The Ban keeps the subject from speaking, writing or otherwise imparting his knowledge to anyone. It does not however remove the information from the individual's mind unless coercion is used to force that person to overcome the Ban. In such a case, the power of the rite is such that it actually removes the sensitive information from the targeted individual's mind (a sort of mystical self-destruct mechanism).

Some Gurahl willingly undergo the Rite of the Ban if they intend to spend long periods of time in the company of humans or non-Gurahl (especially Garou). This makes certain that the Gurahl cannot inadvertently give away any secrets.

In the old times, when Gurahl acted as teachers and sharers of information for other Changing Breeds, the Rite of the Ban was not necessary. Since the War of Rage, however, few Gurahl have gone into the world without having the rite performed upon them.

The rite itself requires the Gurahl performing it to intone a hypnotic chant, stating the nature of the information the Ban is meant to protect. The soothing sounds of the chant lull the target into a state of near-slumber from which she awakens refreshed and unchanged, except for the placement of the inner prohibition of the Ban.

**System:** The player placing the Ban must roll Manipulation + Rituals against the difficulty of the subject's Willpower + 3 (if the subject resists the rite), or against a difficulty of 6 (if the

subject cooperates with the enactment of the Ban). This rite is effective on anyone, including Garou and other Changing Breeds, vampires, mages and normal humans.

## Rite of the Freed Spirit

### Level Four

This dangerous rite enables a Gurahl (or a group of Gurahl) to sever the bond between a Bane and a fomor, returning the harried creature to his original, untainted state. Because of the inherent danger to the leader of the rite, most Gurahl are extremely hesitant to perform it. In cases where a lover, companion or friend has undergone the hideous transformation into one of the fomori, this rite provides the only opportunity to rescue that individual. A fomor usually comes to this rite unwillingly, as a captive of the Gurahl who wishes to save him. The rite takes place in the Umbra, where the Bane inhabiting the fomor is clearly visible. Using a dagger consecrated to Gaia, the Gurahl performing the rite traces a mystical pattern in the air above the bound body of the fomor. This action severs the connection that binds the Bane to the human form.

**System:** The Gurahl and the captive fomor must enter the Umbra to enact the rite. The player must sacrifice a permanent point of Gnosis and roll Willpower (difficulty 9). Only one success is necessary for the rite to work, but the Gurahl may not spend Willpower to achieve an automatic success. If the rite fails, both the fomor and the Gurahl performing the rite die instantly. A botch results in the death of the fomor and the transfer of the Bane to the body of the Gurahl who performed the rite.

## Rite of the Long Sleep

### Level Five

With the performance of the rite, the Gurahl may place an individual into a state of suspended animation not unlike the bear's own natural hibernation ability. While in this state, the subject does not age; bodily functions come to a standstill; respiration drops to the absolute minimum. This rite makes it possible to sustain Incapacitated individuals for an indefinite period of time, keeping them alive so that they can be healed (either naturally or magically) at a later date. Gurahl have used this rite to save the lives of other Changing Breeds (including Garou) as well as humans who have experienced massive bodily trauma and cannot receive immediate attention. Use of this rite on a vampire places the creature in torpor.

**System:** The Gurahl sets the conditions which determine the length of the target's slumber, usually expressed in terms such as, "Do not awaken until the eclipse of the moon," or, "Rise when the earth has completed five rotations around the sun." The Gurahl rolls Wits + Rituals (difficulty of the target's Willpower). The number of successes determines the actual length of the rite. Three successes or more indicates that rite lasts according to the conditions stated in the enactment. One or two successes means that the target may not sleep for the entire period of time designated within the rite. The Gurahl sacrifices a permanent point of Gnosis to seal the rite.

## Rite of Fighting the Death Bear

### Level Five

Whenever a Gurahl wishes to attempt to return a departed soul to its body when the individual has been dead for longer than the period of time outlined by the Gaia's Breath Gift, he may employ this dangerous rite to wrest the spirit from the lands of the dead and bring it back into the world of the living. The Gurahl first uses the Rite of Rending the Gauntlet to enter the Umbra, where he calls upon Mangi, the Death Bear, making the appropriate acts of chiminage to the Incarna before issuing a challenge for the soul of the departed.

The Gurahl then engages in Umbral combat with the Death Bear. If the Gurahl defeats Mangi in battle, he can then enter the Death Bear's realm and retrieve the lost spirit, bringing it back to its body. If the Gurahl fails to defeat the Death Bear, the rite fails and the Gurahl is cast out of the Umbra. If the Gurahl dies during the battle, the Death Bear sometimes claims the spirit of the Gurahl instead of the fallen spirit, thus enabling it to return to its body as if the rite had succeeded.

The high potential cost of this rite makes it one that the Gurahl use only rarely, and then only on other Gurahl.

**System:** After entering the umbra, and summoning the Death Bear, the Gurahl then challenges the totem spirit to ritual combat, using the rules for Umbral Combat outlined in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. The rite automatically fails if used on behalf of an individual who falls under the time limit for or who fails to respond the use of Gaia's Breath. This rite does not provide a "second chance" to bring a Gurahl back to life. Instead, it provides an alternative for a werebear who has been dead too long for Gaia's Breath to be effective. As with Gaia's Breath, only one attempt may ever be made on any single creature.

The statistics of the Death Bear are for the Storyteller to determine, but it should possess at least Rage 10, Gnosis 10, Willpower 10 and 100 Power.

## Renown

Gurahl recognize and respect certain qualities among their own kind, awarding Renown to those who show evidence that they have earned distinction by their deeds. Like the Garou, the Gurahl revere Honor and Wisdom, but where the wolves reward glorious deeds, the bears prefer to venerate acts of compassion and nurturing. Hence, Gurahl recognize Succor, rather than Glory, as their third category of Renown.

Beginning Gurahl start with three points of Renown, which are awarded to them by their Buri-Jaan as a sign that they have survived their First Change and found their teacher. Thus, Gurahl characters start at Rank One. Abandoned Cubs must receive their Renown when they finally meet with a Gurahl who agrees to act as their Buri-Jaan. Until this happens, an Abandoned Cub remains without Rank.



## Honor

Gurahl gain Honor through their devotion to the Code of Ursa and from dealing respectfully with others. The werebears place a great emphasis on tradition and formality, and those Gurahl who steadfastly preserve the ways given to them by Gaia and by the Great Bear receive the approval of their peers. Gurahl also receive Honor for assisting their Kinfolk in times of need, acting selflessly for the greater good of the Breed and refusing to give way to petty feelings of vengeance or hatred. Thus, a werebear who actively seeks to repair the rift between Gurahl and Garou gains considerable Honor for her attempt — regardless of its success.

### Honor's Precepts:

- Remember well the old ways.
- Respect those who teach and who learn from your teachings.
- Revere Gaia's creatures and treat them accordingly.

## Succor

The Gurahl acknowledge their place as Gaia's nurturers by awarding Renown for acts of healing and purification. Gurahl who regularly give aid to those in need or who act to save lives garner respect and admiration from their fellow werebears. Succor also includes such endeavors as helping preserve endangered species, reclaiming spoiled or corrupted lands and providing front-line healing in the heat of combat. Many Gurahl consider Succor the most valuable and meaningful type of Renown.

### Succor's Challenges:

- Help is never wasted, even when it isn't wanted.
- Everyone needs some sort of healing.
- Compassion is its own reward. Don't expect thanks.

## Wisdom

Gurahl value self-knowledge as highly as they regard knowledge of the Breed's place in the world. Those Gurahl who devote themselves to the study of lore and legends, or who attempt to gain an understanding of their dual nature, earn the recognition of their peers. Discovering ancient relics or forgotten stories, receiving insights about the coming Apocalypse and creating new rites (or recovering ones that have been lost) result in the admiration of the Gurahl's peers.

### Wisdom's Secrets:

- There is always more to learn.
- Hardships provide occasions for self-knowledge.
- Even your enemies can teach you something.

## Gaining and Losing Renown

Gurahl gain Renown by performing acts that fall within the three categories recognized by the werebears. Losing Renown, correspondingly, comes from committing actions that go against the creeds of Honor, Wisdom or Succor. While a small lapse in Honor or Wisdom may be overlooked, failure to heal a worthy individual or to cleanse the land of taint when it is possible to do so invariably results in a public loss of Renown.

## Rank

The Gurahl are not as status-bound as the Garou, but they do acknowledge the wisdom and experience of their elders. As a Gurahl ages, she not only passes from one auspice to the next, she also generally rises in Rank among her peers. Increases in Rank depend on gaining sufficient Renown to qualify for the next level. As a Gurahl rises in Rank, she gains the right to learn more complex and powerful Gifts and rites.

Rank titles proclaim the familial nature of many Gurahl relationships. Cubs start out as children, reflected by the form of address accorded to their Rank One title. Although higher Ranks signify greater degrees of respect, Gurahl couch their deference to one another in terms of kinship to reflect their bonds of mutual affection as well as respect.

## Gaining and Losing Rank

For a Gurahl, acquiring Rank consists of receiving the acknowledgment of the elders. The Council of Autumn serves as the primary occasion for conferring a new Rank on a deserving Gurahl, although smaller meetings also include Rank-ing ceremonies.

To gain Rank, one must recount his deeds (often in the form of a story or a dance) to the Gurahl present and receive their confirmation that he is worthy of the next Rank.

In some cases, when a Gurahl who qualifies for a new Rank finds it impossible to attend a Council, she may claim the Rank anyway and defer the actual confirmation until such time as she can participate in a Council. This honor system reflects the fact that Gurahl often spend much time away from the society of others of their kind; thus, they do not always have someone else watching them and judging their worth. Frequently, the only one to assess the value of a Gurahl is the Gurahl herself.

Losing Rank comes from deliberately going against the Code of Ursa or violating one of the three precepts of Renown. Again, Gurahl elders reserve the right to strip another Gurahl of his Rank. Occasionally, a Gurahl may voluntarily surrender a Rank to atone for some gross misdeed.

### Renown Chart

Rank	Title	Address	Renown Cost
1	Kovi	Child	4
2	Verden	Brother, Sister	8
3	Sorna	Aunt, Uncle	12
4	Talchwi	Mother, Father	24
5	Matae	Grandmother, Grandfather	32

There exists a sixth Rank, usually occupied by only one Gurahl from each tribe at any one time. This individual has no Rank "title," but is addressed as Great Grandfather or Great Grandmother or Ancient One. There is no "Renown Cost" for achieving this venerable Rank, but any Gurahl who meets one of the Ancient Ones knows it and behaves accordingly.





## Aging

The average lifespan of a bear is 15-20 years in the wild, although bears in captivity live somewhat longer. This relatively short life expectancy changes drastically for those bears who are destined to become Gurahl. Once an ursine Gurahl has undergone his First Change and takes on Homid form, he begins to develop as if he were human, aging more slowly.

Through the use of the Rite of the Long Sleep, Gurahl may further extend their lifespans, thus enabling some Gurahl to live for more than a century (though not all of this time passes while the Gurahl is awake). Under normal circumstances, a Gurahl generally lives from 70-95 years of age.

## Fetishes

Gurahl lack the inborn desire to accumulate items, but they do occasionally make and appreciate useful fetishes. Always mindful of the spirits that these fetish items contain, the Gurahl craft their fetishes with an eye for beauty as well as function. The following items provide a representative sample of Gurahl creations.

### Talen

#### *Ursa's Healing Balm*

Level 3, Gnosis 3

This sweet-smelling paste has the consistency and color of honey. When spread on a wound, it heals up to three Health Levels of damage, either normal or aggravated. It also acts as a sealant for bleeding wounds. The Healing Balm's antiseptic properties prevent infection and are useful for lowering even the highest fevers.

### Fetishes

#### *Claws of the Cave Bear*

Level 3, Gnosis 4

The daggers known as Claws of the Cave Bear contain slivers of fossilized bone from the prehistoric ancestors of modern bears. When used by a Gurahl, these daggers inflict aggravated damage on their opponents, although they do no more damage than normal daggers. In addition, these daggers give off a soft growl when in the presence of a Wyrms-creature, making it difficult for an individual carrying one of the Claws to be ambushed or surprised by minions of the Pattern Breaker.

### Mother Tongues

Level 3, Gnosis 5

These intricately carved stones resemble the fetish animals made popular by the renewed interest in shamanic studies. Each stone allows the user to understand and speak (within physical limitations) the secret language of the Changing Breed it represents. Only a handful of these stones exist — and the Gurahl hold most of them in trust against the day when Gaia's first-born feel they can once more share their knowledge with their younger Changing brothers and sisters. Mother



Tongues in the Gurahl's possession include ones that allow them to speak and understand the languages of the Bastet, Corax, Nuwisha, Garou, Ratkin and, some believe, the Mokolé. Whether or not stones even exist which correspond to the Rokea and Ananasi is a subject often debated among the Gurahl elders during council meetings. In all, about a dozen of these stones were created and only the most trusted Gurahl are allowed to use them.

### *Soul Brush*

Level 4, Gnosis 5

Looking like nothing more than a slender twig slightly frayed at one end, this fetish, in the hands of a Gurahl artist, becomes a paint brush capable of painting a portrait of its subject's true nature (as the Gift: Eyes of the Soul). Turgiv Bruzov, a noted Gurahl portrait painter, smuggled half a dozen of these precious items out of Russia just after World War II. No one knows how many more Soul Brushes Bruzov created. Like other members of the Changing Breeds in the former Soviet Union, his fate and current whereabouts are unknown.

### *Net of Stars*

Level 5, Gnosis 5

When activated, this finely woven net (similar to a fishing seine) emits a silvery glow akin to starlight. The Net of Stars has several uses. If cast upon the water, the Net fills with enough fish to feed a horde of hungry bears or several Gurahl with Crinos appetites. If successfully tossed toward an enemy in combat, the Net traps its victim in an almost unbreakable hold, rendering movement impossible until the victim is released; breaking free of the Net requires a Feat of Strength equivalent to lifting 1000 pounds. Trolling the Net in contaminated water has a purifying effect, though this only works on finite bodies of water such as lakes, wells or ponds. Bear-spirits are the preferred inhabitants of the Net of Stars.

# Gurahl Character Creation

## Character Creation Process

- **Step One:** Character Concept — choose Concept, Breed, Tribe, Auspice (usually Arcas), Nature and Demeanor
- **Step Two:** Choose Attributes (7/5/3)
- **Step Three:** Choose Abilities (13/9/5)
- **Step Four:** Choose Backgrounds, Gifts (three Level One Gifts, one each from Breed, Auspice and Gurahl groupings), Renown (3)
- **Step Five:** Finishing Touches — Record Rage and Gnosis (both by Breed), Willpower (6), Merits, Flaws and Rank (1), Spend freebie points (15)

## Concept

- **Artist:** actor, painter, poet, writer
- **Healer:** doctor, holistic healer, paramedic, veterinarian
- **Loner:** anthropologist, explorer, hermit
- **Mystic:** miracle worker, psychic, tribal shaman
- **Peacekeeper:** domestic counselor, judge, negotiator
- **Protector:** forest ranger, neighborhood-watch leader, small-town sheriff, territorial bear
- **Teacher:** guru, school teacher, self-defense instructor
- **Wanderer:** hobo, traveling storyteller, trucker

## Breed

- **Homid:** Born from the mating of a Gurahl and a human (or two human Kinfolk), you grew up among humankind. Your true nature surprised you, although you suspected that you were different. Now you know, and there's work to do.

Beginning Rage: 3

Beginning Gnosis: 4

Beginning Gifts: (Persuasion, Ursa's Light)

- **Ursine:** Either your parents were both bear Kinfolk or else one of your parents was Gurahl while the other was a bear. Your change thrust you into a totally new existence.

Beginning Rage: 4

Beginning Gnosis: 5

Beginning Gifts: (Heightened Senses, Voice of Woe)

## Auspice

- Unless you possess either the Rip Van Winkle or Early Maturation Merits (see Merits and Flaws section in Chapter Three), you begin as an Arcas

Beginning Gifts: (Open Seal, Walk Like a Man)

## Tribe

- **Forest Walkers**

Strengths: Storytelling expertise

Weaknesses: Easily distracted by stories or pieces of knowledge

- **Ice Stalkers**

Strengths: Artistically gifted

Weaknesses: Impulsive curiosity

- **Mountain Guardians**

Strengths: -1 difficulty to Strength-related actions

Weaknesses: Cannot refuse a challenge or a dare

- **River Keepers**

Strengths: Affinity for water

Weaknesses: Weakness for fish

## Backgrounds

- **Allies:** Your friends, regardless of species. They include humans and bears as well as other supernatural and natural creatures.

- **Contacts:** Humans (or bears) who exercise influence or who act as your sources of information and assistance.

- **Fetish:** An item imbued with spirit-power that lends you its magical or mystical abilities.

- **Kinfolk:** Human or bear family members who do not suffer from the Delirium and who know what you are.

- **Mentor:** Another Gurahl (known as a Buri-Jaan) who helped you through your first year or two of your new life, and who remains a counselor, though usually from a distance. All Gurahl (at least, those who are not Abandoned Cubs) are required to take at least one point in Mentor.

- **Past Life:** You have a strong connection with the memories of famous or legendary Gurahl, sometimes sharing their memories and abilities.

- **Rites:** This Background determines the number and power of the rituals and ceremonies you know.

- **Umbral Glade:** Possession of this adjunct to your Den offers you a constant cache of Gnosis as well as easy access to the Near Umbra.

## Gifts

Choose three Level One Gifts (one each from Breed, Auspice and Gurahl categories)

## Renown

All Gurahl characters begin with three Renown points, assigned as desired.

## Rank

Gurahl characters start out as Rank One.

## Rage, Gnosis and Willpower

Rage and Gnosis vary according to Breed; 6 Willpower

## Freebie Points

Trait	Cost
Attributes	5 per dot
Abilities	2 per dot
Backgrounds	1 per dot
Gifts	7 per Gift (Level One only)
Rage	1 per dot
Gnosis	2 per dot
Willpower	1 per dot





# Appendix One: Children of the Bear

Although they are Gaia's nurturers and healers, the Gurahl are not always gentle and tolerant. Despite the tendency to stereotype the werebears as big and lumbering (both mentally and physically), the Children of Bear demonstrate a wide variety of physiotypes and temperaments. They include Arctic explorers, wildlife conservationists, country doctors, professional wrestlers, scholars and poets. The Gurahl can't be easily pigeonholed by studying bears any more than the Garou can be by studying wolves — the Gurahl aren't bear or human. They're much more than both.

This chapter provides templates for a few ready-made Gurahl, easily adapted for inclusion in your own stories or used as guidelines to help you create werebear characters. Secondly, it presents some of the Gurahl's greatest heroes, some of whom may still slumber today. With any luck, they'll awaken in time for the Apocalypse — but as mentioned elsewhere, luck isn't always kind to the werebears.

# Veterinarian

**Quote:** *I'd rather take care of a sick bear in the woods or a colicky horse in the pasture than a human any day. Animals know how to thank you without insulting you — and they don't complain about your fees behind your back.*

**Prelude:** You grew up in rural Tennessee, the child of a country doctor. Although medicine interested you, your love of animals led you to decide to study veterinary medicine.

Your First Change took you by surprise. In one cataclysmic moment, you went from being an animal lover to being an animal yourself! For a while, you succeeded in hiding what you had become from your family and friends. Then you started having dreams that seemed more like messages from someone who wanted you to come to him. So, after you told your parents that you needed to take some time off from school and "get yourself together," you packed a few things and set off to follow your dreams.

Your travels led you into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where you found a soft-spoken giant of a man who worked as one of the wildlife managers of the park. He took you under his wing and taught you about your true heritage as one of the Gurahl. You took to your new existence readily, enjoying the rites your mentor taught you and learning the tragic history of the Gurahl with rapt fascination.

Now you operate a practice for large and small animals not far from your home, and within a day's travel of the Smoky Mountains, where you tend (unofficially) to the park's black bear population. Even though you had to delay your full participation in Gurahl society for several years, you are now ready to fulfill your responsibilities. In the battles to come, Gaia will need healers as well as fighters, and you possess the abilities of both.

**Concept:** A true healer of animals, you utilize both medical and magical practices to tend to the creatures under your care. Although you are still a "beginner" among the Gurahl, you have grown beyond the playful and battle-hungry stages into the third phase of your life as a werebear. Other Gurahl consider you a cub, because you only know the basic Gifts and rites. Your spirit has moved on, however, and you now consider yourself one of the Kieh. In time, you will learn what you need to support your claim. Meanwhile, there is work to be done, animals that need your care, and all those rituals to perform...

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are a few years older than most Gurahl "cubs." You have a maturity that others of your Rank and place in Gurahl society do not. You tend to "diagnose" any animal you come across, and you never refuse to help sick or injured creatures. Money is secondary to you; you didn't become a veterinarian to get rich, but because you knew you were meant to be an animal doctor. Your ability to function in both human and Gurahl society makes you an important asset to your kind.

**Equipment:** traveling medicine bag, four-wheel drive vehicle





# GURAH

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Breed: *Homid*  
Tribe: *Forest Walkers*  
Auspice: *Kieh*

Nature: *Builder*  
Demeanor: *Curmudgeon*  
Concept: *Veterinarian*

## Attributes

### Physical

Strength ☐☐☐☐☐  
Dexterity ☐☐☐☐☐  
Stamina ☐☐☐☐☐

### Social

Charisma ☐☐☐☐☐  
Manipulation ☐☐☐☐☐  
Appearance ☐☐☐☐☐

### Mental

Perception ☐☐☐☐☐  
Intelligence ☐☐☐☐☐  
Wits ☐☐☐☐☐

## Abilities

### Talents

Alertness ☐☐☐☐☐  
Athletics ☐☐☐☐☐  
Biorhythms ☐☐☐☐☐  
Brawl ☐☐☐☐☐  
Dodge ☐☐☐☐☐  
Empathy ☐☐☐☐☐  
Expression ☐☐☐☐☐  
Intimidation ☐☐☐☐☐  
Primal-Urge ☐☐☐☐☐  
Streetwise ☐☐☐☐☐

### Skills

Animal Ken ☐☐☐☐☐  
Drive ☐☐☐☐☐  
Etiquette ☐☐☐☐☐  
Firearms ☐☐☐☐☐  
Leadership ☐☐☐☐☐  
Melee ☐☐☐☐☐  
Performance ☐☐☐☐☐  
Repair ☐☐☐☐☐  
Stealth ☐☐☐☐☐  
Survival ☐☐☐☐☐

### Knowledges

Computer ☐☐☐☐☐  
Enigmas ☐☐☐☐☐  
Investigation ☐☐☐☐☐  
Law ☐☐☐☐☐  
Linguistics ☐☐☐☐☐  
Medicine ☐☐☐☐☐  
Occult ☐☐☐☐☐  
Politics ☐☐☐☐☐  
Rituals ☐☐☐☐☐  
Science ☐☐☐☐☐

## Advantages

### Backgrounds

*Allies* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Contacts* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Mentor* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Rites* ☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐

### Gifts

*Healing Tongue*  
*Ultimatum*  
*Ursa's Light*

### Gifts

### Renown

#### Succor

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### Honor

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### Wisdom

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### Rank

### Rage

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

### Gnosis

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

### Willpower

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

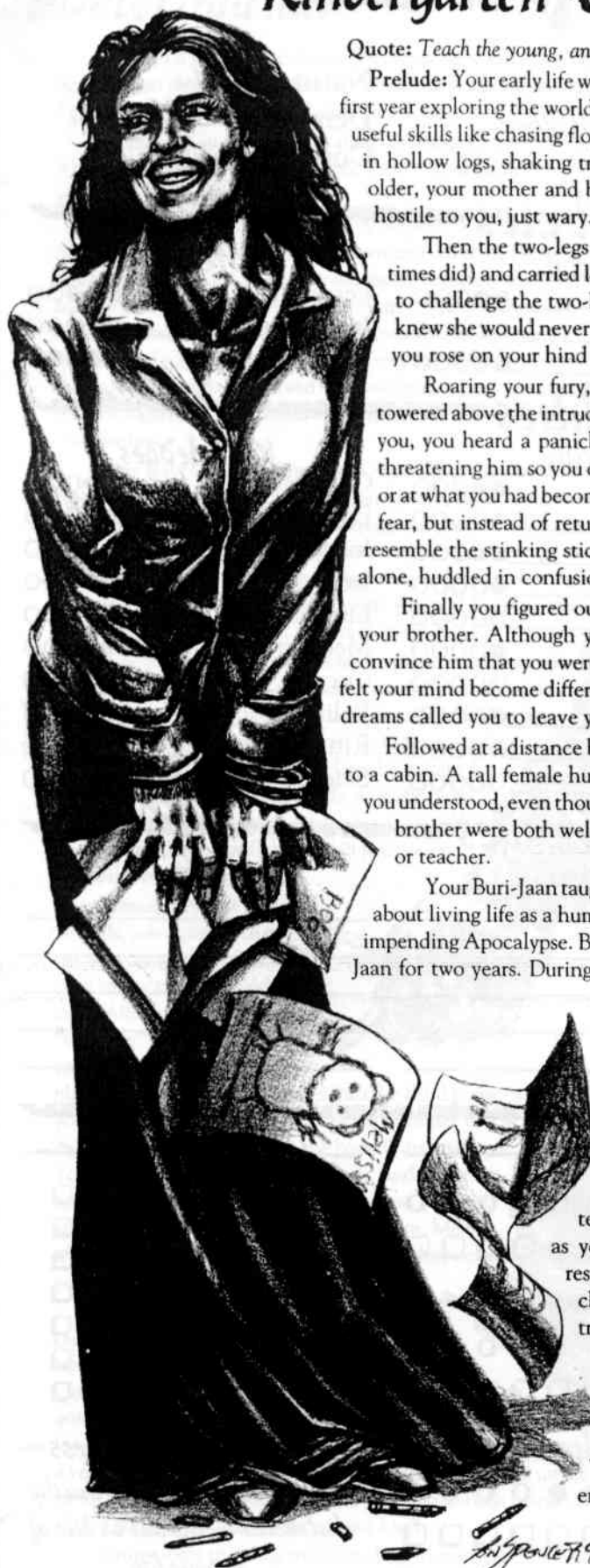
### Health

Bruised ☐  
Hurt -1 ☐  
Injured -1 ☐  
Wounded -2 ☐  
Mauled -2 ☐  
Crippled -5 ☐  
Incapacitated ☐

### Strength/Weakness

*Storytelling expertise/Easily  
distracted by stories or bits of  
knowledge*

# Kindergarten Teacher



**Quote:** *Teach the young, and they will remember the lessons that will shape their future.*

**Prelude:** Your early life was simple. Born a grizzly bear cub, you and your sibling spent your first year exploring the world under the watchful eye (and paw) of your mother. You learned useful skills like chasing flopping fish along the riverbank, digging for honeycombs hidden in hollow logs, shaking trees and smelling the wind for interesting scents. As you grew older, your mother and brother started keeping their distance from you. They weren't hostile to you, just wary.

Then the two-legs came, smelly creatures that stood upright (just like you sometimes did) and carried long tree branches that make loud noises. Your mother stood tall to challenge the two-legs, then fell to the ground smelling like blood and pain. You knew she would never get up again and that the two-legs were the cause. Instinctively, you rose on your hind feet and growled defiantly at the stick-pointers.

Roaring your fury, you felt your body growing and transforming. Suddenly, you towered above the intruders, who screamed and ran away, stinking of terror. From behind you, you heard a panicked whimper from your brother. You turned to see what was threatening him so you could scare it away, and discovered that he was staring at you — or at what you had become. You felt yourself changing again in response to your brother's fear, but instead of returning to your half-grown cub form, your body shaped itself to resemble the stinking stick-pointers. Your brother ran from you, leaving you naked and alone, huddled in confusion next to the dead body of your mother.

Finally you figured out how to revert to original form, and you went off in search of your brother. Although you found him, he shied from you. It took you some time to convince him that you were still his familiar-smelling sibling. Over the next few days, you felt your mind become different, as strange thoughts shaped themselves in your head. Vivid dreams called you to leave your home in the high mountains.

Followed at a distance by your sibling, you traveled across many valleys until you came to a cabin. A tall female human came out of the cabin and greeted you in a language that you understood, even though you had never heard it before. She told you that you and your brother were both welcome to stay with her, and she said that she was your Buri-Jaan, or teacher.

Your Buri-Jaan taught you many things, not just about your heritage as a Gurahl but about living life as a human. Most importantly, she stressed the need to prepare for the impending Apocalypse. Because you needed to learn so much, you stayed with your Buri-Jaan for two years. During that time, you developed an understanding of the ways of a

teacher. You decided to enter the world of humans and focus on teaching the children of the two-legs the ways of healing and protecting. If you could teach the human cubs properly, perhaps they would not grow into the horrid monsters that killed your mother. You fear that you may not have enough time to accomplish your goal, but you have to try.

**Concept:** Your nurturing instincts have led you to become a teacher of young children. You work as a kindergarten teacher, trying your best to train human cubs in the same fashion as your mother and your Buri-Jaan taught you. You emphasize respect for the land and its creatures, and you encourage your young charges to learn through play and exploration. Sometimes you treat your friends and companions as if they were your students.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Speak in simple terms, explaining things as you go along. Since you were born a bear, your language does not have the sophisticated polish of your homid cousins. Life and learning cannot be separated. Turn even the most mundane activities into learning experiences for yourself and those in your company.

**Equipment:** Child-proof clothing, mini-van, pocket

dictionary

# GURAH

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Breed: *Ursine*  
Tribe: *Mountain Guardian*  
Auspice: *Arcas*

Nature: *Visionary*  
Demeanor: *Caregiver*  
Concept: *Kindergarten Teacher*

## Attributes

### Physical

Strength ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Dexterity ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stamina ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Social

Charisma ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Manipulation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Appearance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Mental

Perception ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Intelligence ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Wits ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## Abilities

### Talents

Alertness ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Biorhythms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Dodge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Primal-Urge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Streetwise ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Skills

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Etiquette ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Leadership ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Repair ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Knowledges

Computer ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Enigmas ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Rituals ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## Advantages

### Backgrounds

*Allies* ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
*Mentor* ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
*Rites* ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
*Umbra Glade* ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Gifts

*Cajole* ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
*Heightened Senses* ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
*Sentinel's Warning* ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Gifts

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Renown

#### Succor

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### Honor

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### Wisdom

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### Rank

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Rage

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Gnosis

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Willpower

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Health

Bruised ☐  
Hurt -1 ☐  
Injured -1 ☐  
Wounded -2 ☐  
Mauled -2 ☐  
Crippled -5 ☐  
Incapacitated ☐

### Strength/Weakness

-1 Difficulty to strength-related actions/cannot refuse a challenge or a dare



# Wilderness Avenger

**Quote:** *To respect nature, you must come to know her. If you ignore her, the Earth has a way of getting even with you. I am one of those ways.*

**Prelude:** Your family owned and operated a rafting service in the Pacific Northwest, so you developed a love for the "great outdoors" early in life. Most of your weekends involved some sort of wilderness activity, either learning the family business or taking solo camping excursions.

During one of your trips into the woods, you stumbled upon an ill-kept camp, drawn by the smell of rotting meat. When you found the cache of newly stripped hides, you recognized the work of poachers.

You can only surmise what happened afterward. Your body exploded into something monstrous, and you savaged the camp, ripping down tents and breaking equipment with righteous wrath. Unfortunately for them, the poachers returned in the midst of your furious assault. They had no chance.

end of your journey, fearing some punishment for your violent and uncontrollable actions. Instead, you found your Buri-Jaan.

Now you work as a wilderness guide, taking individuals and groups hiking, backpacking, rock-climbing and white-water rafting. You try to impress upon your customers the importance of respecting nature, because you fear what might happen if you ever catch them ignoring your warnings. Whenever you encounter poachers, trappers or clear-cutters in your territory, you dispense with the warnings.

**Concept:** Your occupation provides you with the opportunity not only to teach humans the proper respect for nature but to protect your chosen lands and creatures from human carelessness and maliciousness. You carefully study the

people you guide, noting the ones who fail to meet your standards and



taking steps to eliminate the threat they pose. You no longer reproach yourself for removing human litter from the face of the Earth.

## Roleplaying Hints:

Your love of nature shows clearly in your actions and your speech. Drop hints about the "dangers" that befall those who desecrate the natural world and waste its precious resources. Don't apologize whenever you do give way to your anger.

**Equipment:** Hunting knife, minimal camping equipment, sturdy clothes

When you regained control of yourself, you knew that your life had changed forever. You plunged deeper into the wilderness, traveling farther from civilization than you had ever gone before. At night, your dreams replayed the horror of your murderous rampage. You dreaded what lay at the

# GURAH

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Breed: *Homid*  
Tribe: *River Keeper*  
Auspice: *Uzmati*

Nature: *Lone Bear*  
Demeanor: *Survivor*  
Concept: *Wilderness Guide*

## Attributes

### Physical

Strength ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

### Social

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

### Mental

Perception ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Wits ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

## Abilities

### Talents

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Athletics ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Biorhythms ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Brawl ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Dodge ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Empathy ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Expression ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Intimidation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Primal-Urge ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Streetwise ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

### Skills

Animal Ken ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Drive ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Etiquette ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Firearms ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Leadership ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Melee ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Performance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Repair ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Survival ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

### Knowledges

Computer ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Enigmas ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Investigation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Law ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Linguistics ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Medicine ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Occult ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Politics ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Rituals ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
Science ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

## Advantages

### Backgrounds

*Mentor* ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
*Rites* ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
*Umbral Glade* ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Gifts

*Persuasion* ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
*Slash of the Death Bear* ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
*Fiddle Fish* ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Gifts

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Renown

#### Succor

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### Honor

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### Wisdom

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### Rank

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Rage

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Gnosis

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Willpower

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Health

Bruised ☐  
Hurt -1 ☐  
Injured -1 ☐  
Wounded -2 ☐  
Mauled -2 ☐  
Crippled -5 ☐  
Incapacitated ☐

### Strength/Weakness

Affinity for water/weakness  
for fish

# Primitive Artist

**Quote:** Look at the delicate curve of the stone ball I have made; this is the shape of the earth. How can you not think it is beautiful?

**Prelude:** You grew up in the ice-bound world of the Arctic, learning the essentials of life (like catching fish through holes in the ice) from your mother. Even more curious than the rest of your species, you investigated every new thing that came into your world, especially the funny, awkward two-legs who sometimes traveled through your wandering grounds. You found yourself fascinated by everything the two-legs did, the strange dens they built and the four-legs who often traveled with them.

Your First Change came upon you in a fashion much different from most of your kind (something you discovered much later in your life). During your second summer, you followed a two-legged female and her four-legged companions on a long trek, watching them from a distance. When they stopped to rest, you crept as near as you could to get a better look

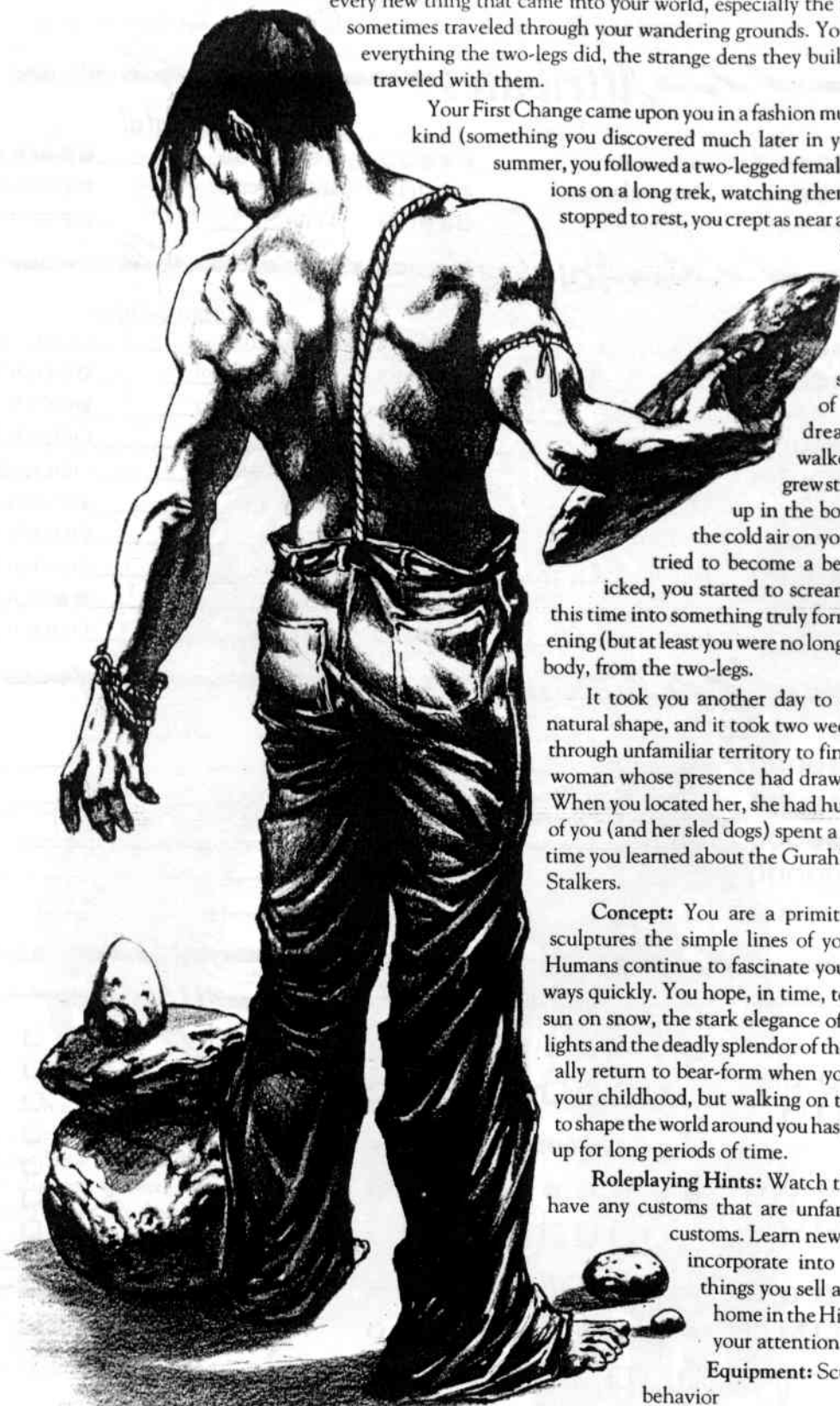
at them. After many endless days of travel, you left your familiar territory, but the lure of your new obsession kept you with them. When you slept, sheltered in the snow out of their sight, you had strange dreams, dreams in which you walked on two-legs. The dreams grew stronger. One morning you woke up in the body of a two-leg. The shock of the cold air on your skin frightened you and you tried to become a bear again. You couldn't. Panicked, you started to scream and changed once more — this time into something truly formidable and even more frightening (but at least you were no longer cold). You fled, in your new body, from the two-legs.

It took you another day to discover how to regain your natural shape, and it took two weeks of dreaming and traveling through unfamiliar territory to find your Buri-Jaan — the same woman whose presence had drawn you so far from your home. When you located her, she had human clothes for you. The two of you (and her sled dogs) spent a year on the ice, during which time you learned about the Gurahl and about your tribe, the Ice Stalkers.

**Concept:** You are a primitive artist, depicting in your sculptures the simple lines of your early life as a polar bear. Humans continue to fascinate you, and you have learned their ways quickly. You hope, in time, to teach them of the beauty of sun on snow, the stark elegance of ice-floes under the northern lights and the deadly splendor of the frozen wastes. You occasionally return to bear-form when you feel the need to remember your childhood, but walking on two legs and using your hands to shape the world around you has proven too interesting to give up for long periods of time.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Watch the people around you. If they have any customs that are unfamiliar to you, practice those customs. Learn new words. Look for new ideas to incorporate into your art — both the small things you sell and the hidden artworks back home in the High Arctic that regularly claim your attention.

**Equipment:** Sculpting tools, book on human behavior



*John G. Kennedy '96*



# GURAH

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Breed: *Ursine*  
Tribe: *Ice Stalker*  
Auspice: *Arcas*

Nature: *Visionary*  
Demeanor: *Cub*  
Concept: *Artist*

## Attributes

### Physical

Strength ☐☐☐☐☐  
Dexterity ☐☐☐☐☐  
Stamina ☐☐☐☐☐

### Social

Charisma ☐☐☐☐☐  
Manipulation ☐☐☐☐☐  
Appearance ☐☐☐☐☐

### Mental

Perception ☐☐☐☐☐  
Intelligence ☐☐☐☐☐  
Wits ☐☐☐☐☐

## Abilities

### Talents

Alertness ☐☐☐☐☐  
Athletics ☐☐☐☐☐  
Biorhythms ☐☐☐☐☐  
Brawl ☐☐☐☐☐  
Dodge ☐☐☐☐☐  
Empathy ☐☐☐☐☐  
Expression ☐☐☐☐☐  
Intimidation ☐☐☐☐☐  
Primal-Urge ☐☐☐☐☐  
Streetwise ☐☐☐☐☐

### Skills

Animal Ken ☐☐☐☐☐  
Drive ☐☐☐☐☐  
Etiquette ☐☐☐☐☐  
Firearms ☐☐☐☐☐  
Leadership ☐☐☐☐☐  
Melee ☐☐☐☐☐  
Performance *Art* ☐☐☐☐☐  
Repair ☐☐☐☐☐  
Stealth ☐☐☐☐☐  
Survival ☐☐☐☐☐

### Knowledges

Computer ☐☐☐☐☐  
Enigmas ☐☐☐☐☐  
Investigation ☐☐☐☐☐  
Law ☐☐☐☐☐  
Linguistics ☐☐☐☐☐  
Medicine ☐☐☐☐☐  
Occult ☐☐☐☐☐  
Politics ☐☐☐☐☐  
Rituals ☐☐☐☐☐  
Science ☐☐☐☐☐

## Advantages

### Backgrounds

*Contacts* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Kinfolk* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Mentor* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Rites* ☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐

### Gifts

*Heightened Senses* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Open Seal* ☐☐☐☐☐  
*Sense Pattern Breaker* ☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐

### Gifts

☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐

### Renown

#### Succor

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### Honor

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### Wisdom

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### Rank

### Rage

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

### Gnosis

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

### Willpower

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

### Health

Bruised ☐  
Hurt -1 ☐  
Injured -1 ☐  
Wounded -2 ☐  
Mauled -2 ☐  
Crippled -5 ☐  
Incapacitated ☐

### Strength/Weakness

*Artistically gifted/impulsive  
curiosity*

# Bears of Note

We remember those among us who exemplify the teachings of Bear. By telling the stories of their lives, we learn about the meaning of our own. Even though we have spent much time in slumber, we have not missed everything of significance since the Wars of Rage. One of us has missed nothing at all — or so the stories tell.

— Kuruk Songmaker, Gurahl lorekeeper

## Arturus, the Bear-King

The sixth century in Britain saw the rise and fall of many petty chiefs. Warring tribes of Saxons, Angles and Goths all vied for territory after the departure of the Roman armies. One of these chiefs, known as Arturus, sought more than power for himself and glory for his tribe. Decrying the bloodlust and battle-madness that afflicted so many other leaders of the Britons, Arturus embarked on a campaign to bring together as many of the warring tribes as possible, seeking to unite them into one large tribe that could bring healing to a ravaged land.

From his boyhood, Arturus had known that a great destiny lay before him. Born in the summer, when Ursa Major and Ursa Minor ruled the heavens and marked by the Sign of the Bear, Arturus experienced his First Change during the initiation ceremony that marked his coming of age. Led by a vision to seek out a teacher to explain the transformation that had taken place, Arturus traveled for a

year and a day in the company of his Buri-Jaan — an elder Gurahl who instructed him in the ways of the Children of Bear.

Returning to his tribe at the end of his Gallivant, Arturus quickly became a leader among the warriors of his people. When the old chief died, the druids of the tribe appointed him as the new chief.

Almost immediately, Arturus put into practice the lessons he had learned from his year of wandering. He campaigned across Briton, bringing a message of peace and prosperity through cooperation to the other warlords. One by one, he united his rival chieftains under his banner — with words when possible, with swords when necessary. Arturus assumed the title of High Chief and taught those he ruled to work in harmony with nature. To many, he became the focus of a religion which endorsed worship of the Great Mother while it advocated both peace and strength. For a time, the land and its people prospered under his leadership.

Some stories tell of how Arturus aroused the jealousy of a mighty Garou chieftain to the north and how a great battle raged for seven days and seven nights, resulting in a victory for the Garou and the disappearance of the Bear-King. Other tales hint that Arturus' grand vision grew stagnant and crumbled, broken apart by petty rivalries among his lesser chiefs. Still other versions of the Bear-King's fall speak of dark magics and vile treachery. Whatever the cause, the idyllic reign of the Bear-King came to an end.

Though wars and jealousies returned, utter darkness did not overtake the land. Many recalled Arturus' teachings and sought to show others what he had been like through passing on stories of his beliefs and exploits. The stories grew in the telling, changing to fit new circumstances, yet containing within their new forms the essential truths found in the originals. Other great leaders' stories would become entwined with that of Arturus as the centuries passed. Yet, it is Arturus' name that is remembered. Many believe that more than his name survives: Some say the Mother enfolded her loyal defender in a stony embrace to hide him from those who would do harm to his body. When at the end of things, she once again has need of his wisdom and strength, she will open her arms and breathe upon his silent, sleeping face, awakening and restoring Arturus to the world to lead her Changing children in their final battles.

## Hezekiah Blake, Hero of the Savage West

In the Savage West, lawlessness reigned over many frontier towns. Marauding bandits and desperadoes took advantage of the lack of law and order to sate their base desires. Honest men and women suffered at the hands of these outlaws who made their own rules — and broke at them at will. Creatures of the Wyrms feasted on the bounty of terror, corrupting the weak-willed and preying upon the helpless.





Things were different in the town of Bear Lake, Wyoming. The arrival of Hezekiah Blake made certain of that.

Born in 1862, while the Civil War raged across the eastern United States, Hezekiah arrived in Wyoming with his Gurahl Kinfolk parents when he was two years old. Along with a dozen other families, the Blakes settled in the new territory of Wyoming. Before long, the town of Tall Timbers grew up around them, serving as a supply station for other settlers heading on to California and Oregon.

Hezekiah grew up quickly, working alongside his parents in the fields and accompanying his father and older brother on hunting expeditions. Large for his age, Hezekiah stood out among the other children of the town, who looked up to him as a protector and leader. Young Hezekiah took his responsibilities seriously, and he prided himself on his ability to stop fights and take care of his friends' minor wounds.

A few days after the boy's 13th birthday, the Vinton Gang swarmed the town. Hezekiah returned in the evening from a solo hunting foray to find his home — and the homes of the other townspeople — in ruins, wisps of smoke still wafting from their burned out shells. Bodies littered the landscape. The men of the town — including Hezekiah's father — sprawled in the main street, their bodies riddled with bullets or sliced open by knives. The women and children, savagely mutilated, lay in bloody heaps outside their homes or in the town square. The only survivor of the bandit's rampage, a 12-year-old named Aaron, lived long enough to whisper, "They was the Vinton Gang," before he died in Hezekiah's arms.

Mute with sorrow, Hezekiah set about the agonizing task of burying his past. As he worked in stunned silence, sorting the bodies of everyone he had known into groups by families and digging graves for each household, he felt something inside him begin to burn with a white-hot fury. When the last grave had been filled, the boy-turned-man raised his head to the heavens and screamed... and Changed.

Hezekiah's Buri-Jaan, a half-Comanche Gurahl named Leaping Bear, found the traumatized boy huddled in a cave 10 days later. He took Hezekiah home to his village, where he served as a medicine worker. In addition to teaching Hezekiah the ways of the Gurahl, Leaping Bear gave the boy what he needed most — another family. Hezekiah wanted to stay with his Buri-Jaan and his new family after his year of learning was over, but Leaping Bear insisted that Hezekiah had work to do among his own people. "White men killed your people," the elder said. "Your own kind needs you to protect them from themselves."

Hezekiah spent the next four years wandering the Wyoming Territory, searching for evidence of the whereabouts of the Vinton Gang and honing his skills as a wilderness survivor and gunfighter. Finally, he tracked the gang to the town of Bear Lake, where the gang made its home. Hezekiah sensed the fear that surrounded him as he wandered into the town. People refused to meet his eyes, and no one greeted the stranger in their midst. The doors to the town's saloon burst open and the members of the Vinton Gang came out to challenge the intruder.

The fight was brief and bloody. Dogface Vinton died from a bullet to the head. The others fell in turn as Hezekiah out-fired and out-fought them one by one. In the silence that followed the battle, Hezekiah faced down the remaining townsfolk and announced the beginning of a new era in the town.

"These are my laws," he told the crowd that formed around him. "Live in peace and respect the natural world. If you can't — or won't — do that, get out of town. If you don't leave on your own, I'll see to it that you do."

Under the benevolent rule of Sheriff Hezekiah Blake, the town of Bear Lake prospered. Hezekiah trained the most responsible townsfolk as deputies so that he could leave Bear Lake from time to time. Although he said nothing to anyone about his deeds when he was away from the town, people knew that they were safer because of their sheriff's travels. Outlaws soon learned (sometimes at the cost of their lives) to give Bear Lake a wide berth.

Occasionally Hezekiah met with Leaping Bear, who told him of a dark turbulence in the Umbra and of the need to do something about it. The need grew great near the end of the century, and Hezekiah formally turned his position as sheriff over to his chief deputy. The people of Bear Lake never heard from him again.

Although the Garou ignore Hezekiah's heroism just as they shamefully ignore their own heroes of the struggle against the Storm Eater, Gurahl legends sing of his courage



and his leadership. Some say that Hezekiah died in the Storm Umbra so that others could put the Storm Eater and its minions to rest. Others say that the Gurahl peacekeeper survived that great battle then decided to trade in his star and his guns for a long sleep in the Umbra's velvet depths.

### *Ursula Berensen, "Gaia's Partisan"*

The German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, marked the beginning of World War II. On that day, Ursula Berensen, a 16-year-old native of Danzig, underwent her First Change and killed her first Nazi soldier. Filled with terror at her transformation, Ursula fled into the forest outside the city. There, she found other citizen-warriors, victims of the German invasion who had decided to fight with the only weapons they had left to them — terror and ingenuity. Ursula tried to hide her "strangeness" from her comrades, but little by little, they realized that the teenager with the fierce blue eyes and strong, well-formed body commanded the power to transform herself into a savage dealer of death. Instead of succumbing to the Delirium, however, these freedom fighters welcomed the incarnation of the ancient Bear-Mother (as they dubbed her). Ursula's companions had other, more pressing horrors to deal with.

For two years, Ursula and her comrades harassed the German armies in Poland. Whenever they could, they rescued political prisoners, Jews, homosexuals, POWs and Gypsies from German transports bound for the labor camps. Ursula's partisans funneled refugees out of Poland to safety.

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, and Ursula's education as a Gurahl took place in her dreams. Unable to unite with her Buri-Jaan, an elderly woman named Marta who was trapped in Lithuania, Ursula still managed to receive dreams from her teacher. While her comrades slept or kept watch over their secret camp, Ursula traveled long distances in her dreams, meeting with her mentor and learning the rites and Gifts of the Gurahl.

As soon as she learned something new, Ursula found a way to use it in her private war. She discovered that she could pull her companions into the Umbra with her to hide them from the soldiers and dogs that pursued them. No one questioned the sudden appearance of a hole in the universe; they accepted it as one more miracle from their Bear-Mother.

When the war finally ended, Ursula set out in search of her Buri-Jaan, determined to thank her for her dream-lessons and for helping her save so many lives. She traveled to Lithuania just as the Iron Curtain fell across Eastern Europe and the Gauntlet closed tight, locking the Western world out of the Communist-ruled lands.

Stories of her deeds, however, circulated among Gurahl Kinfolk in Europe. Those who fought alongside her — or who escaped from Nazi-controlled lands due to her efforts — also bore witness of the bear-woman who worked good in a world filled with evil.

### *Kirima Skye, "Speaker for the Northern Lands"*

The polar bear cub who would one day call herself Kirima Skye had just entered her second year when an oil tanker wrecked along the coast of her Alaskan home, spewing tons of noxious petroleum into the water and onto the shore. The spill trapped Kirima, her mother, her brother and thousands of fish and other aquatic animals, in a thick, viscous film of oil that made breathing difficult and movement almost impossible.

Only the onset of her First Change saved Kirima's life, bolstering her with the supernatural strength and endurance of her Crinos form. Kirima dragged herself away from the muck and ooze. Slowly, painfully, she recovered from the damage to her body. Her spirit, however, smoldered with anger as her newly awakened consciousness registered what had happened to her and her family.

The first humans to arrive on the scene of the oil spill — an intrepid news team — paid for their timeliness with their lives. A damage-control crew from the oil company responsible for the spill suffered the same fate, as Kirima's uncontrollable Rage filled her with a drive for vengeance against anything and everything that approached her desecrated territory. Because of the intense emotions that overwhelmed her by day and the nightmares that plagued her fitful sleep, Kirima failed to hear the insistent message of summoning sent to her from her Buri-Jaan, a Swedish-born environmentalist named Olaf Peders.





Therefore, Kirima's mentor came to her, leading a third group, made up of volunteers committed to the task of cleaning up the oil spill and trying to repair the damage to the land and coastal waters. Speaking to Kirima in the Gurahl tongue, which she instinctively understood, Olaf introduced himself and began the arduous task of teaching the new werebear about herself, her Changing Breed and her place in Gaia's creation.

Kirima caught on quickly. When Olaf and his group returned to their headquarters in Newfoundland, they brought with them a small, stocky woman with dusky brown skin and hair the color of the northern nights.

As a spokesman for the preservation of the Arctic, Kirima has gained a considerable reputation among environmental activists — and she has attracted the unwanted attention of Pentex and other minions of the Wyrms. Her impassioned pleas for the protection of endangered Arctic animals such as the polar bear, snow fox and harp seal reveal the power of her deep convictions. Twice, she has survived assassination attempts, though the assassins were not so lucky.

Periodically, Kirima returns to her birthplace, where she has carved out a Den that opens onto an Umbral Glade, to travel the Umbral Arctic in search of the spirits of her mother and brother so that she can tell them that their deaths, though cruel and needless, still served a purpose beyond their understanding.

## *Snarl Tooth Tangle Fur, "Nightmare of Yellowstone"*

Snarl Tooth grew up among the grizzly bears of Yellowstone National Park. His First Change came easily, since his Buri-Jaan, another of the park's grizzly population, was also his mother. Grrsha (her name in the Gurahl tongue) taught her son the ways of Ursa's children — how to shift easily among his multiple new forms, how to perform the important rites that make up the daily (and nightly) routine of the Gurahl, how to enter the Umbra and how to acquire Gifts from the spirits. She advised her son to study the ways of humans but not to ape them without thought. She spoke to Snarl Tooth of the other Changing Breeds and of the shameful actions of the Garou during the War of Rage.

Although he absorbed everything his mother taught, Snarl Tooth paid particular attention to two warnings given him by his mother: never trust a wolf, and always beware of humans who carry the Wyrms-stink about them.

Snarl Tooth spends most of his time in his bear-form, keeping watch over the grizzly and brown bear populations of Yellowstone. Occasionally, he assumes Homid or Arthren form and wanders the park, pretending to be one of the tourists or an off-duty park ranger. His keen nose has alerted him numerous times to the presence of "smelly" humans (ones that reek of Wyrms-taint). When this happens, Snarl Tooth takes action — and the offending individuals disappear from the park, permanently.



Rumors of bear-attacks in Yellowstone and its surrounding area have some substance, since Snarl Tooth does not waste time in niceties when confronted by fomori masquerading as humans or other human servants of the Wyrn. He acts as Gaia's defender, guardian and avenger for the bears of Yellowstone.

In Homid form, Snarl Tooth Tangle Fur appears as an unkempt young man with tangled, light brown hair and dark brown eyes. As a bear, he stands as one of the largest grizzlies in Yellowstone — weighing in at more than 800 kilograms. Although he has a gentle streak, it lies buried deeply beneath his fierce protectiveness and his hatred for the enemies of Gaia.

### *Orpheus Lightwalker, "Conqueror of the Death Bear"*

Orpheus Lightwalker began life as Amalie DuChamps, the daughter of an archaeology professor and his journalist wife. Amalie's First Change took place at a dig in Greece. The sudden appearance of a monstrous bearlike creature amid the ruins of a shrine dedicated to Demeter in an early incarnation as a bear-goddess caused the prompt abandonment of the dig and sparked rumors that the site was haunted.

Protected from discovery by the Delirium's effects, Amalie tried her best to forget the bizarre transformation she had undergone. When the dreams began, however, she realized that something had happened to alter the course of

her life forever. She left her family and traveled to Norway, where she met her Buri-Jaan, a member of the River Keepers named Grisl. The two women traveled together for a year, during which time Amalie learned what it meant to be Gurahl. When she parted company with her Buri-Jaan, Amalie continued to travel, searching out evidence of others of her kind.

It saddened her to discover just how few Gurahl existed in the world. Everywhere she looked, she saw signs of the Pattern Breaker's destructive presence and the Tapestry Maker's ever-stifling handiwork. Reaffirming her commitment to her personal trinity of Gaia, Ursa and the Yarn Spinner, Amalie worked at forging new ties among the few Gurahl she discovered. She attended councils and powwows regularly, participating in group rites as often as she could. She traveled the Umbra in search of sleeping Gurahl, hoping to awaken them and convince them that the world urgently needed their presence.

In time, Amalie received her greatest wish; she became Buri-Jaan to a new Gurahl, a young man named Demetrios. After a few months, Amalie developed a strong affection for her energetic and inquisitive pupil. Although only a few years separated them, she thought of Demetrios as her son.

The unexpected death of Demetrios, the victim of mob violence, shattered Amalie's world. Refusing to give up her charge to the embrace of the Death Bear, Amalie sought a way to bring Demetrios back from the Underworld. Entering the Umbra, Amalie found her way to the Dark Umbra, where she summoned Mangi himself and demanded that he return her adopted son to her.

Three days later, Amalie returned from her Umbral quest, her body scarred and her once-dark hair as white as bleached bones. With her was Demetrios, shaky and confused, but whole in body and spirit. Amalie had fought the Death Bear and won.

In recognition of her feat, she changed her name to Orpheus Lightwalker, to honor the memory of the legendary musician who tried — and failed — to rescue his beloved from the world of the dead.

### *The Most Ancient of Bears*

A story exists among the Gurahl that tells of a werebear whose life began in the first days and who still walks the Earth from time to time, keeping vigil over Ursa's children. No one can verify the existence of the Gurahl known as the Most Ancient of Bears, but werebears of all tribes and places tell of mysterious encounters with a wandering Gurahl who seemed to possess incredible powers and an uncanny knowledge of the past.

Though Gurahl lorekeepers have amassed an arsenal of legendry about the Most Ancient of Bears, no two stories are alike. Some tales depict this ancient Gurahl as male, others as female. All the stories have one thing in common: The







Most Ancient of Bears appears in times of great need — to rescue Abandoned Cubs and lead them to a teacher, to intervene in the wholesale slaughter of bears or to save a group of beleaguered Kinfolk from starvation or persecution.

Tales place the Most Ancient of Bears in almost every century, depicting him (or her) as a warrior in the War of Rage, a savior during the time of the Inquisition, an explorer to the New World and a harbinger of the Storm Eater's presence in the Savage West. The most common story relates how Gaia blessed one of the Gurahl with the gift of ten thousand years, but cautioned her favored one not to use them up all at once. Because of this, the Most Ancient of Bears spends long periods of time in hibernation, waking briefly every decade or so to assess the situation of the Gurahl and of the Earth. Many werebears believe that in the Final Days, the Most Ancient of Bears will awaken and remain awake and active in the world until the outcome of that great confrontation is decided. Some Gurahl believe that the increased number of rumors concerning encounters with this revered, possibly mythical figure, portend the imminent arrival of the Apocalypse. Only the Most Ancient of Bears knows the truth.



# Appendix Two: Stories for the Telling

This chapter contains a miscellany of information, including some thoughts on the importance of the bear as a part of the ecosystem, views of the bear as a cultural icon and facts about bears in the real world. You can also find ideas for creating stories specifically for Gurahl characters as well as integrating werebears into Storyteller chronicles with mixed groups. As always, use what you like, ignore what you don't — but think about it all.

## Traces of the Bear

The failure of the 1997 acorn crop in the forests of the Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains drove portions of the black bear population out of their normal feeding grounds in search of food to make up for the loss of their primary staple. While some bears found sustenance in the trash dumps and compost heaps of local residents, others found death. More than 40 bears in western North Carolina alone died from the guns of panicked humans who feared attack by the huge trespassers or from the perils of crossing the interstate. (Yes, 18-wheelers can total a bear.) No one knows if the loss of so many of these creatures sounds the death knell for the already-endangered black bear population of North Carolina and Tennessee. Many of those killed were females who had recently borne cubs. Without their mothers, it is doubtful the babies survived either.

The survival of the world's bear population remains dubious. On the verge of extinction, like so many other wild species, bears have made a comeback in the last several

decades. Efforts by environmental and conservation groups have made progress in preserving the remaining bear species, but mismanagement, acts of nature (such as the acorn failure) and shrinking habitats have undercut much of the success.

What happens if we lose the bear? Besides the obvious loss to the balance of the world's increasingly fragile ecosystem, we stand to deprive ourselves of yet another living symbol.

Since earliest times, humans have looked to the bear for more than sustenance. Prehistoric tribes in northern Europe, Asia and North America depended on bears not only for meat, furs, weapons and tools, but also as symbols of power and godhood. One of the earliest forms of goddess-worship depicted the earth-mother as a great she-bear, while the seeming miracle of the bear's annual hibernation and awakening parallels the death-and-resurrection theme central to many of the world's religions.

In the modern world, bears have come to symbolize a number of qualities—some of them in marked conflict with one another. The playfulness and innocence of bear cubs find expression in children's literature from Winnie-the-Pooh to Corduroy, while teddy bears remain one of childhood's most popular toys (and not for their association with Teddy Roosevelt). The bear as protector (and implied threat) peaked with the fire safety in the forest warnings of Smokey the Bear. The ferocity of mother bears in defense of their cubs has become a legendary symbol for maternal

solicitousness and self-sacrifice. Bears are everywhere — in our advertising, our literature and deep within our subconscious. How long after the extinction of *Ursus* will these mythic landmarks and modern legends remain?

## *The Life-Cycle of the Bear*

Since some Gurahl experience life as a bear before their First Change, the following information may prove helpful for players and Storytellers in understanding the peculiar physiology of bears.

Bears in the wild live seasonal lives, their bodies undergoing changes that reflect the passing of the year. In late spring and early summer, bears enter their mating season. Females become receptive and remain so until they mate successfully. Males seek out as many mates as possible, challenging and defeating rivals in order to gain the right to father cubs.

A female's fertilized eggs (usually two) do not immediately develop, but remain dormant for most of the summer and early fall. Meanwhile, both male and female bears spend these months roaming their territories in search of enough food to sustain them through the deprivations of the winter.

Bears eat copiously during their active months, from April to October in most climes. They then begin the search for a place to sleep as winter approaches.

During hibernation, bears undergo a unique, temporary system shutdown. For the length of their winter sleep, their kidneys and digestive systems stop functioning, and their metabolism rate drops significantly. They do not eat, urinate or defecate for the entirety of their hibernation, even if they rouse themselves for short periods of time.

For pregnant females, the changes also involve the implantation (at long last) of her eggs in the uterine wall, where they begin to develop normally. Bear cubs, therefore, are conceived in the late spring, but they are not born until the middle of the winter. Newborn cubs nurse from their hibernating mother, whose own body receives its energy from stores of fat built up over the spring and summer. With the return of spring, bears emerge from their lairs, lean and hungry after their long sleep.

## *Storytelling Gurahl Chronicles*

Now that you know how to create a Gurahl character and something of the history and society of the werebears, all that remains is to put what you know into play. It isn't as easy as it appears to create a suitable story involving the Children of Bear, since the nature and scarcity of the Gurahl make it hard to create a troupe of all werebears. On the other





hand, Gurahl-centered stories are ideal for small troupes (two or three players and a Storyteller).

## *Gurahl Only Need Apply*

Only rarely do more than two or three Gurahl gather together in one place for any length of time, but stories are, by definition, dramas that center on exceptional circumstances. Therefore, a Storyteller has several options for creating chronicles tailored for a group of Gurahl.

- **Escape:** Many players flinch at the idea of a game centered around a capture scenario, but escaping from a Pentex experimental facility or a secret government prison for supernaturals provides the opportunity to bring together werebears in greater-than-normal numbers. The actual escape may form only the beginning of a larger chronicle, in which the Gurahl characters decide to remain together for mutual support and protection.

- **Special Event:** Some unique occurrence — an emergency or impending catastrophe — has brought several Gurahl together, each of whom has a specific role to play in taking care of the situation.

- **Council Aftermath:** The various Gurahl Councils bring werebears together for discussions and celebrations. Elder Gurahl may use these gatherings as the means to select a group of young Gurahl (the characters) for an important mission, such as locating a missing elder or recovering something from the Umbra. Investigating rumors of a plot to poison an entire bear population might also cause the elders to send a few good Gurahl to get at the truth and take appropriate actions.

- **Summons from the Ancient One:** The Gurahl characters receive a summons from the Great-Grandfather (or Great Grandmother), requiring their presence. When they arrive (and locating the elder Gurahl may prove a story in itself), they find themselves assigned to go on a quest of great import. Perhaps only they can find something which will prove vital to help the Gurahl prepare for the Apocalypse.

## *Across the Changing Breed Barrier*

Sometimes a Storyteller discovers that one of her players wants to create a Gurahl character for use in a chronicle originally intended for Garou or some other Changing Breed. Adding a Gurahl to a Werewolf story can add a touch of conflict and a lot of drama to the interpersonal relationships among characters, thus adding depth to a story that might otherwise consist of the usual "stuff." Of course, the Gurahl might not meet with as much hostility as he'd expect from werewolves — with so much else to worry about, the Garou are hardly the bogeymen of Gurahl legend, with nothing else better to do than hunt down werebears. Many Garou cubs feel nothing more powerful than shame in their ancestors' dealings with other Changers.)

Finding a way to integrate a Gurahl into a chronicle filled with Garou characters, however, might pose a few



problems unless the Storyteller has a plausible reason for inserting a werebear into a wolf pack. The following examples offer a few ideas for doing just that.

- **Necessity Breeds Cooperation:** Circumstances often create situations in which natural enemies or rivals find they have to work together in order to survive; these are typically variations on the classic "You-and-your-worst-enemy-are-stranded-on-a-desert-island-together" scenario. As in the "Escape" story mentioned above, the Gurahl may occupy the cell next to a pack of Garou. When the breakout occurs, everyone escapes together and must stick close to one another to ensure that everyone survives. Other situations may call for Garou and Gurahl to work together, such as discovering a Pentex hit list with the names of four werewolves and one Gurahl on it. The five targeted individuals have a good reason to watch each others' backs.

- **Obedience Training:** Both Gurahl and Garou are conditioned to respect and obey their elders. If a venerable Rishi Gurahl decides that a young werebear needs to accompany a Garou pack into the Umbra in search of a wayward spirit, the Gurahl cub's instincts tell her that she must attempt to get along with her newly acquired companions. In a similar fashion, when a pack of Garou receive orders from their sept leader to find a Gurahl guide to help them track down a rogue werewolf or locate a Black Spiral Hive somewhere in the Sub-Arctic, the Garou must overcome their distrust of the Gurahl or face the wrath of their elders.

- **Unlikely Friends:** A Gurahl with the Merit: Garou Companion may call upon her werewolf friend (and his pack) for assistance. In this situation, the Gurahl has one sure ally in her companion, but she must prove herself to her friend's packmates. Her actions may change the pack's opinions about werebears in general — and explore issues of prejudice and stereotyping for the players as well.

## *Ways and Themes*

The theme of any good story reflects the makeup of its cast of characters. A group of comedians generally responds

poorly to tragic tales, while antiheroes feel uncomfortable in a drawing room comedy.

Stories that involve Gurahl characters (either as a homogeneous group or as part of a mixed troupe) should take advantage of and emphasize the unique situation of the werebear population in the World of Darkness.

Desperation figures prominently in the life of a werebear. Despite their emphasis on tradition and their reputation as patient healers and nurturers, Gurahl confront the reality that they (even more so than the Garou) are dying out. Most of their Kinfolk have disappeared. Their numbers are small (and growing smaller). The Apocalypse looms large on the horizon, and they have not yet begun to fight back. The werebears need more time to replenish their numbers and gather their strength for the final battle, but time is something they just don't have.

News of the birth of a new Gurahl sends a shockwave of hope throughout the werebear community. When a young Gurahl fails to find a teacher or falls into the clutches of human hunters or Pentex "researchers," desperation sets in. Preserving the future becomes a race against the clock. Drama combines with foreboding in a story that may not have a happy ending if the characters waste precious time. Injecting a sense of urgency into Gurahl-based stories helps to stress the precarious plight of the werebears.

Since Gurahl place great value in dreams and visions, portents of the approaching Apocalypse can provide wonderful excuses for storytelling scenes filled with overtones of dark and mythic proportions.

The Gurahl are caught in a trap they helped to build. By withdrawing from the world in the aftermath of the War of Rage, the werebears have taken themselves out of the loop. Now it may be too late for them to affect the outcome of the struggle to save the world from the Apocalypse. Stories that deal with making up for lost time grapple with the sadness of regret and self-recrimination for things left undone. This tragedy is the lot of the Gurahl — and the stuff of good storytelling.





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# GURAH



We sing.

Heads thrown back, our throats bared.

Muzzles pointing to the sky.

Awaken, our kin! Return once more from  
Gaia's stony embrace.

Sleep no more, for it is time.

Young ones hunger for your wisdom;

Come, sing with us the ancient songs.

We dance.

Arms thrust outward, heads lowered.

Shame rides us like a crippled child.

Hear us! Watch our stumbling steps  
across the Mother's body.

Sleep no more for it is time.

Bear kin fall to annihilation's ax;

Come, dance with us the ancient steps.

The stars that form the Mother and cub  
watch in their radiance, remote, waiting.

Mangi bides in darkness and silence,  
judgment held suspended.

The young clamor to know who they are.

Have we have slept too long?

May Gaia grant it is not so.

Arise!

— "Grandfather's Call," song of the Gurahl

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