

BLOOD-DIMMED TIDES™



A WORLD OF DARKNESS® SOURCEBOOK

BLIND-DIMMED RIDERS

BY SEAN JAFFE, CLAYTON OLIVER, ETHAN SKEMP AND ADAM TINWORTH

CREDITS

Authors: Sean Jaffe, Clayton Oliver, Ethan Skemp, Adam Tinworth

Developer: Ethan Skemp

Editor: Aileen E. Miles

Art Director: Aileen E. Miles

Layout & Typesetting: Pauline Benney

Art: Andrew Bates, Joe Corroney, Steve Prescott, Jeff Rebner, Alex Sheikman, Drew Tucker

Cover Art: Steve Prescott

Cover Design: Pauline Benney

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AND THE SEA SHALL GIVE UP HER DEAD

Commander Jaime Rodriguez, United States Coast Guard, hates the sea. It's a horrible sentiment, he knows, for a man in his position, but he's never felt anything but hatred and contempt — and, yes, more than a little bit of terror — for the thing that defines his existence. On a night like this, he can almost imagine that the sea returns the sentiment.

USCGC *Thetis*, Rodriguez' ship, plows doggedly through the 25-foot waves of the Caribbean at 14 knots, an excellent speed to be making in some of the worst weather of the decade. She's a good vessel, 270 feet of solid Pittsburgh steel, and the 103 men and officers of her crew are some of the best in the Coast Guard, certainly the best their captain has ever served with.

Rodriguez doesn't give a damn about that just now. He'd rather be anywhere but where he is. His mind's eye still holds the last satellite weather image received before lightning blew the main communications mast to hell and gone. There isn't a clear patch of sea for a

good 200 miles in any direction. Rodriguez can imagine the situation in the Bahamas, the Keys, southern Florida: mass exoduses away from the coast, families huddled in bathrooms or basements... wives and children and parents praying for his crew to come back. *Don't think about that*, he tells himself.

The captain turns away from the railing, unsnaps his safety line, and steps back onto *Thetis'* bridge. Back to work. "XO, status?"

The executive officer of *Thetis* is Lieutenant Commander David Jordan. He's served under Rodriguez for over a decade now, and they've developed an eerily smooth partnership. Jordan looks up from the chart table to meet his captain's gaze, and his own eyes say *Skipper, we are well and truly fucked*.

Rodriguez nods curtly and jerks his eyes at the bridge crew. *Don't I know it. But don't say it that way. Morale.*

Jordan clears his throat. "Damage control party's almost finished rigging a temporary radio antenna.

We've still got GPS feed on our own position and the target's still broadcasting too. Good Lord willing and the creek don't rise any higher," one corner of his mouth quirks up in an ironic smirk, "we'll be on her in another half-hour."

The target. *Don Diego Santiago*, a Spanish-flag tramp freighter whose captain either didn't read or just plain ignored the weather reports that all but screamed for every sensible shipmaster in the Caribbean to head for the nearest port. Four hours ago, *Thetis* was within five minutes of dropping anchor in a sheltered Bahamian cove when the *Santiago's* distress call came in. A seam in the freighter's forward hold, patched one too many times instead of replaced in dry dock, had split and water was pouring in through a three-foot gash in the hull. In calmer seas, the ship might have been able to make the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico under her own power. In this weather, it's a coin toss as to whether *Thetis* will reach the *Santiago* in time to take the crew off before she goes down.

"XO, grab a vest and a safety line. We're going to go inspect that antenna."

Jordan quirks an eyebrow, but he follows Rodriguez back out onto the weather deck, pausing to pull on an orange rain slicker. He snaps the free end of his lifeline onto the railing and gives it an experimental tug — he's long since learned Rodriguez' viewpoint on safety.

Once the door to the bridge shuts behind them, the captain turns, running a hand over his hair. "How bad off are we, Dave?"

The XO considers for a moment. "Crew's a little spooked at losing comms, but they're not too scared of the storm. Too focused on getting *Santiago's* crew off right now. Once we're done with that and heading out of this crap, they may start to worry a little more, but I don't think we're going to have any serious problems."

"And the ship?"

"Well, be glad we offloaded the *Dolphin* back at Nassau. Between the wind and those few surges that have come over the flight deck, we would've lost any tie-down chains we could've put on a helo, and there's no way she'd fly right now anyway. Aside from that, it looks like losing most of the commo mast was inevitable — metal fatigue that was in the maintenance logs from three months back." Jordan pauses for a moment, frowning. "How are you holding up, Skipper?"

Going after three for three, Rodriguez wants to say. He settles for a grimace which he thinks is a grin. "Fine, Dave. Upholding the family tradition of brave service on the sea." And dying on it. *Granddad fighting at Midway, Dad saving a tanker off the coast of Maine... and my sorry ass looking for a ship full of idiots in the*

middle of Hurricane Harry. One more empty coffin. He turns his head and spits, clearing his mouth of salt spray and the taste of fear. "Let's go check on that DC party."

Atop the ship's superstructure, two seamen in life vests and soaked coveralls crouch over a temporary antenna from the ship's stores. A battery-powered drill whines in protest as it forces home a last screw. The leader of the damage control team glances up and snaps a brief salute to the captain. "All done here, sir. Probably won't get anything long-range but this oughta give us enough coverage for five or ten miles."

"What about radar, son?"

The seaman winces. "Hard to say, sir. That one's gonna be a little harder to fix. I don't rightly know as we can get it done in seas like this. Got some exposed wiring bundles that we've gotta re-route."

Rodriguez nods curtly. "Understood. Get below and dry off. Well done."

"Thank you, sir!" The seaman slaps his assistant on the shoulder. "You heard the captain, let's go."

Jordan eyes the replacement antenna warily. "Jesus, Skipper, this looks like something my youngest kid woulda made with an Erector set."

"In these seas?"

"You've got a point. Let's move."

Back on the bridge, Rodriguez accepts a cup of coffee from a young ensign and runs a towel over his head. "Naviguesser, how are we doing?"

"Still on course to *Santiago's* GPS coordinates, Captain. Two miles, ETA twelve minutes."

The radioman tenses. "Captain, I've got UHF and VHF comms back, short-range only. Sir... I'm getting something that the direction-finder says is coming from *Santiago's* position, but I can't understand it. It's garbled, lightning or something... they're not making any sense, something about being under attack..."

Rodriguez' blood chills. He grabs a spare headset and settles it onto his ears in time to hear "—eat, this is *Don Diego Santiago* to *American Coast Guard* ship. *We are under attack, can you assist?*"

The captain leans over the microphone and keys the "transmit" switch. "*Santiago*, this is *USCGC Thetis*. We are en route to your position. Who is attacking you? Over."

"Coast Guard, we are holed at the waterline and sinking rapidly. Can you help us?"

Rodriguez hammers the radio console with his fist. "*Santiago*, say again who is attacking you!"

A long moment of silence as the radio operator on the *Santiago* keys his microphone without speaking. A sharp, staccato hammering sound comes over the ra-



dio. “—nable to ... —ack from pira— ... dead me—” A blast of static cuts off the transmission as something out in the storm flares red-orange. Moments later, a long, rolling crash echoes across the water.

The captain stands silent for a long minute. “XO,” he says slowly, “sound ‘general quarters.’ All hands to the arms locker by sections, and send two men to unmask the deck gun for action.”

Ignoring the commotion on the bridge, Rodriguez picks up a set of light-amplifying binoculars and walks out onto the weather deck again. He leaves his safety line behind. In a few moments, he thinks, being swept overboard will be the least of his worries. The captain raises the glasses to his eyes.

The *Santiago* is burning fore and aft, her superstructure a shattered wreck. As Rodriguez watches, two crewmen leap into the ocean. Neither one is wearing a life vest.

Rodriguez sweeps his line of sight across the seething water. For a moment, the ghost-gray vessel blends into the sea and sky well enough that his gaze passes over it before his mind grasps its shape.

The ship is a DDE, a destroyer escort, all long since broken up for scrap or sold to third-world nations. Rodriguez knows the type from family albums, photos of his grandfather's service in the Pacific. She's lean, swift, and carries a half-dozen guns to *Thetis'* one. The storm is abating, and the captain can clearly see the black flag fluttering from the warship's mast, can even pick out figures on her deck and bridge. As he watches, the nameless vessel cuts loose with another salvo, hammering the doomed *Santiago*.

In the strobe-like flashes of fire from the other ship's guns, Rodriguez can see the faces of the other ship's crew. A few of them have noticed the approach of *Thetis* and are turning to appraise the new arrival. Something cold and slimy reaches up from the depths of memory to caress his soul.

When the captain was ten years old, he had a nightmare about his father. In the dream, Javier Rodriguez returned from his cold, wet grave to be with his son. His flesh was bloated and gray, his proud blue uniform was tattered and torn, and crabs crawled in and out of the empty sockets from which they had eaten the eyes. Javier opened his mouth to speak and the only thing to emerge was a hoarse, rasping sound and a tiny fish. Then, slowly: “Jaime. She let me come back for you, son.”

Through his spotting glasses, Rodriguez locks eyes with the captain of the nameless ship as they gauge each other's strength and he knows that, even were their vessels equally matched, he could not fight this battle.

The sea has brought his father back to him.



INTRODUCTION: RISING TIDES

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*
— William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"

Ghost ships. Half-glimpsed leviathans. Heartless, alien predators oblivious to pain or fear. Drowned men walking the rotten decks of sunken galleons. Cold, lightless chasms where no human can survive — and yet something *does*.

If you didn't think the oceans were a valid setting for a horror story, maybe you should reconsider.

It's easy to see how some people consider the land the end-all and be-all of their existence. After all, you

can't farm the sea; you can't walk on it, can't shape it to your liking, and above all you can't even survive underwater for long.

Although the oceans might seem a bit, well — empty at first, it doesn't take long to realize that first impressions aren't everything. The seas are an excellent setting for a horror story, as Peter Benchley found out a while back — to say nothing of Lovecraft and his peers before him.



You want references? Look at the source material available; cinema alone is full of possibilities. *Jaws* is one of the finest horror movies of all time. *The Abyss*, *Deep Star Six* and *Leviathan* all offer ideas for what might be found on the sea floor. *Dead Calm* was based on the “nowhere to run” premise of being adrift at sea. There are about a thousand Caribbean pirate movies that offer historical figures and plot ideas for **Wraith** stories. Just wandering your local video store should turn up plenty of potential inspiration.

Then there’s literature. H. P. Lovecraft alone (notably “Call of Cthulhu” and “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”) could inspire some of the most terrifying stories you’ll ever tell. *Mutiny on the Bounty* and *The Caine Mutiny* are much more about desperation and madness than they are about rebellion, and both are stories that could only happen in the isolation of the sea. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is a classic look at the cursed at sea — more than a little appropriate for your next **Vampire** or **Wraith** game. Even *Moby Dick* has a lot to offer a horror game — would you really have wanted to be aboard the doomed *Pequod*?

Finally, don’t forget a good old book of folklore. If your players aren’t stirred by names like the *Marie Celeste* and the *Flying Dutchman* — well, now’s your chance to change that.

Convinced yet? Good. Come on in.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Although it’s a fact that virtually all the major players in the World of Darkness tend to rely on humanity in some capacity or another, there are some who’ve managed to strike out on their own into the far vaster world of the seas. This book deals with those individuals, whether the hermit Gangrel who have given up on land existence in disgust, or the reclusive and regal merfolk who subsist on dreams almost entirely different from those of humanity. To be sure, these individuals don’t have much influence over the rest of the World of Darkness, and can’t effect too many changes on humanity and its works. Nonetheless, there’s something to be said for the silent depths and the alien worlds found there. The sea’s song is very, very inviting — and this book is all about the supernatural creatures, alive or

undead, that have heeded that call in the World of Darkness.

World of Darkness: Blood-Dimmed Tides can be used in one of two primary ways: to take your usual group of characters into the ocean for the space of a story or two; or to run a story (or possibly even a chronicle) in a primarily aquatic setting, with characters such as merfolk or Void Engineers. The choice is yours, really.

Chapter One: Seas of Darkness is a primer of sorts on the ocean; it certainly can't top a full oceanography course, but it's an excellent starting point for staging an aquatic story. In addition to the basics, there's also detail aplenty on where the World of Darkness' oceans vary from our own, with Umbral rules and other notes peculiar to the game environment.

Chapter Two: Denizens takes a look at the five main supernatural groups in the World of Darkness, and the specific adaptations each of them have made to surviving the black deeps.

Chapter Three: Spinning Yarns is a guide to telling stories using the rules and background in this book. It includes advice both on single stories featuring existing characters, and on running stories and even chronicles with specifically ocean-going characters.

Chapter Four: Lurkers presents the terrors of the deep, whether gilled fomori or pelagic beasts left over from the beginning of time. There's also advice on using such creatures to best effect in your games.

Finally, the **Appendix** contains some quick-and-dirty systems for swimming, weather conditions, and yes — drowning.

A FINAL WORD

It can be pretty easy to fall into the "Aquaman" syndrome, particularly if you live someplace landlocked and your players haven't seen much more of the ocean than the occasional National Geographic special or *Baywatch* episode. You know what we mean — the point when the group starts chuckling about using Animalism to "call their finny friends" or making campy Red Lobster jokes. In that light, the thought of telling horror stories with an oceanic backdrop might seem kind of silly.

We'll try to convince you otherwise.





CHAPTER ONE: SEAS OF DARKNESS

*I believe what the prophets said
That the oceans hold their dead
But at night when the waves are near
They whisper and I hear "*
— Savatage, "The Wake of Magellan"

In all of our stories written and told about the sea, man loves the sea, fears it, needs it, is repulsed by it, or tries to control it and inevitably fails. He never, ever understands it. It is common knowledge that, despite our incredible technological advances, this has not changed much. Even expert oceanographers admit that there is much more "out there" than what we know. Prone to look to the skies as we are, this same concept translates into a sense of wonder when we consider outer space — but under the waves, it can become more of a sickly gut feeling.

There is a distinct reason for this. The blue-green waters which gave life will just as quickly claim it when the unwary venture into the murky depths. The oceans of the World of Darkness are simultaneously deadly and fragile — much more so than the "mundane" waters of our own world.

THE CHAIN OF BEING

Much like the rainforest or savannah, the web of life undersea is connected by very strong strands. Everything, from tiniest diatom to the largest Rokea warrior, serves an equally important purpose in keeping the chain of life going. In the mundane ecosystem, energy from the sun is absorbed by the smallest creatures (plankton) and makes its way down the chain as shrimp eat plankton, squid eat shrimp, fish eat squid, and so on up to the largest creatures such as humans, sharks and whales.

The supernatural energy that runs through the world (called Gnosis, Quintessence, Chi and a host of other names) is distributed in a rather different fashion. The energy of the world pools in various areas much like nodes

or caerns; most of these are dark undersea caverns called Grottoes. These Grottoes supply raw energy to a highly specialized race of very rare creatures called Rorqual. The Rorqual are a strange, supernatural form of cetacean, half spirit and half flesh. These creatures (which are physically indistinguishable from other whales and dolphins) are able to gather and process the Grottoes' energy. They do so and supply this quintessence to the creatures of the deep — merfolk, murdhuacha, Rokea, and the like — that may need it.

The Rorqual are a mystery to most occult scholars. Some claim they are shapeshifters from a time before humans were born; others believe they are Kami, Gaian spirits inhabiting flesh bodies much in the same way that Banes inhabit fomori. All Rorqual (although this is not a great number; some speculate that there are mere dozens at the most) are quite sentient, with strange and varied powers. Some can even take a human form, but the vast majority of their abilities are geared specifically toward taking the raw power of the Grottoes and distributing it, usually though touch, to the native creatures. Rokea can regain up to five points of Gnosis from a Rorqual, and fae can harvest the same amount of Glamour. Naturally, this vital service keeps the Rorqual safe from many oceanic natives, including the depraved Murdhuacha. The death of a Rorqual is the death of all

those whom it would feed with its power — and one never knows who that could be.

Sadly, there are still those willing to claim all the Rorqual's power for their own. The few Mariners (aquatic Gangrel) that exist are outside the oceanic society, and see nothing wrong with helping themselves to the potent vitae of a spirit-powered cetacean. Similarly, the Bane-possessed fomori of the deep and the malevolent Chulorviah have their own plans for the Grottoes and spirit-essence, and these plans do not at any stage involve kindly sharing with the shapeshifters and fae of the deeps.

THE VASTNESS

Even the mundane undersea world is more spectacular than almost anything above the ground. A completely alien environment, the world below the surface teems with life in all directions. We see things with the perspective of solid ground to keep everything level. But the spatial perceptions of even the smallest fish are geared toward a completely three-dimensional world. Stimuli continually come from above and below as well as left, right, in front and behind. Countless fish never come in contact with the sea bed at all.

Another thing to keep in mind is exactly how vast all of this space really is. We're talking about millions of tons of



RORQUAL AS PLAYER CHARACTERS

For a one-shot story set deep in the ocean or even near the shore, it may be interesting to let a player take the role of a Rorqual. These creatures are very complex and require quite a bit of forethought. If the story's goal is stymieing the prince of Tampa's plots or planting a nasty virus in the local Magadon installation's computers, a Rorqual is hardly going to be appropriate. These creatures' only responsibility is to their place in the undersea ecology. However, it can be highly rewarding to roleplay something completely alien for a few nights. The Storyteller is of course encouraged to treat the possibility as *highly optional*.

Storytellers should probably only allow smaller cetaceans, such as dolphins or porpoises, as Rorqual characters. No rules for Rorqual character creation are given; the Rorqual's role doesn't really lend itself well to an ongoing presence in a chronicle. Storytellers who are truly interested in letting their players take a Rorqual's role should check out **World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary**, which has some guidelines for highly unorthodox characters. Similarly, the rules for Kami in the **Werewolf Storytellers Guide** can also be helpful, as long as you bear in mind the intensely modified Physical Attributes that a being as long as a small truck would logically possess.

Rorqual are "living caerns" — smaller Rorqual can hold up to one hundred points of "Gnosis," which they call "Steep." Larger Rorqual are theoretically capable of holding five or ten times as much (another reason not to allow them as player characters). Of course, the player shouldn't overuse this

power; the Steep doesn't belong to the Rorqual or to the Rorqual's personal friends, but rather to the oceans as a whole. Once this power is depleted, the Rorqual must go down to a Grotto to replenish, or else she will sicken and die.

The following are a few sample Rorqual powers. Storytellers should feel free to make or modify others; however, remember that the Rorqual were not meant to fight, and they have no real offensive powers as such.

- **Breach:** The Rorqual can make a spectacular leap from the water that has a purifying effect on the waters around her. When she reenters the water, she may spend as much of her carried Steep as she likes; each point spent cleanses five gallons of water from toxins such as crude oil, or purifies one gallon of water tainted with supernaturally active toxins. Naturally, a Rorqual will only use such a power as a last resort, as they do not consider the energy they carry to be theirs to spend.

- **Human Form:** Some Rorqual can take human form. Naturally, a shapeshifted Rorqual's Attributes are adjusted accordingly; a Rorqual in human shape will only rarely have over 3 in any Physical or Social Attribute.

- **Song of the Sea:** The Rorqual sings a sad, haunting alien melody to coax the power of the Grottoes into his body. It usually takes about ten minutes for each point of Steep he absorbs. Naturally, this makes it a long, slow process, and the Rorqual may have to surface for air once or twice during the song.

water, thousands of miles in every direction. If you want to hide something, anything — a city, a continent, a dead god, a giant lizard — sink it. It is, in most cases, as good as gone. We know more about the reaches of space than we do about the sea floor: an ominous thought.

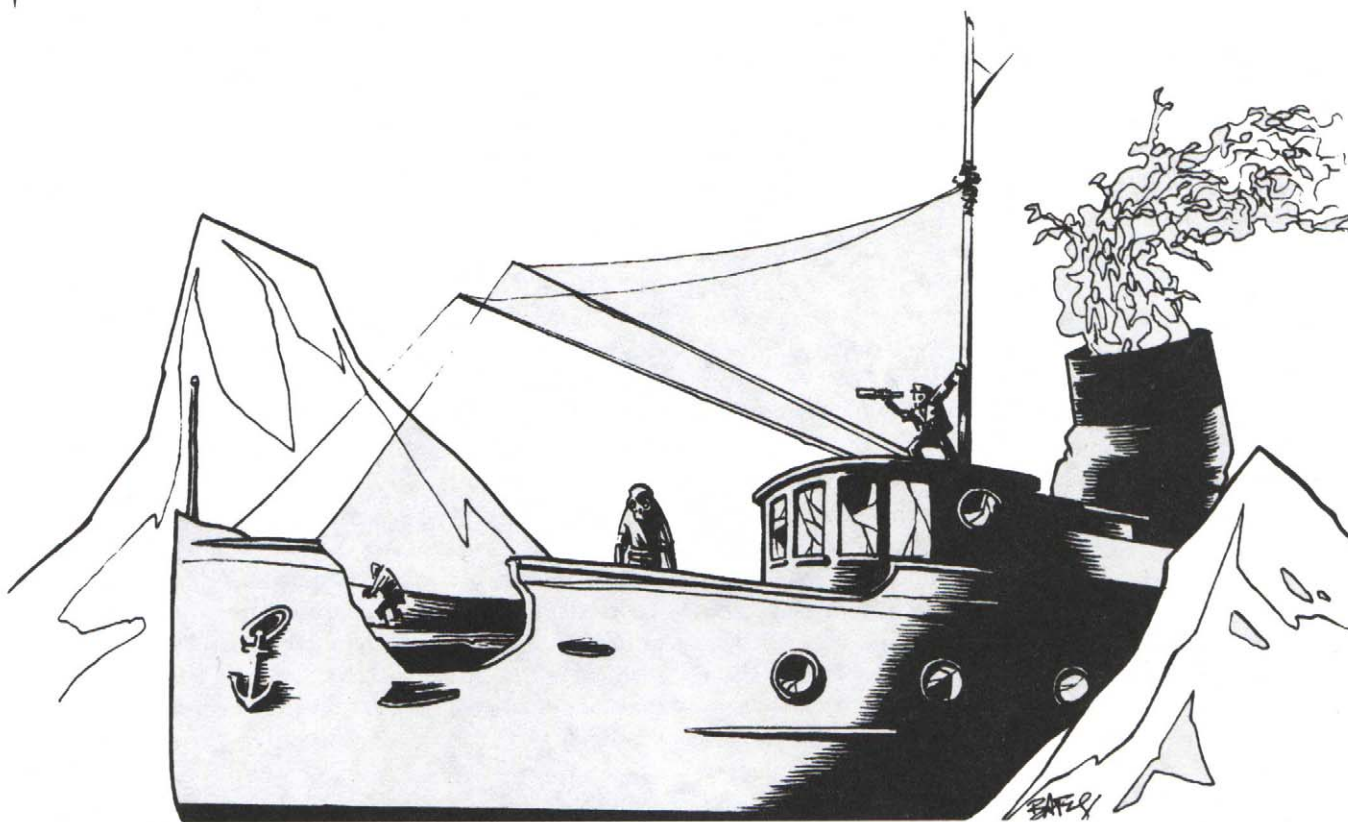
There are four major oceans: the Atlantic, the Arctic, the Indian, and the Pacific. The Atlantic stretches between the east coast of North and South America and the west coasts of Europe and Africa. The Indian lies between Africa, Asia, and Australia. The Pacific, the largest ocean, stretches from Asia all the way to the western American coast, from the Bering Strait all the way to Antarctica. Lastly, the smallest ocean, the Arctic, stretches from the North Pole out to the Arctic Circle. Each and every one of these is full of potential hooks, and is an environment well worth exploring.

THE ARCTIC OCEAN

The smallest ocean is also the least hospitable. The northernmost parts of the planet are home to a hell of ice and freezing cold waters. Almost nothing lives here, save for a few highly specialized creatures. Even humanity has had pathetically little luck with this area, and the general consensus is that there is little that the Arctic sea can offer in the way of animal life or human expansion.

The water is thick with icebergs, almost all of which are much larger under the water than they appear above it. On top of being hazardous, this area appears barren and devoid of anything warranting special attention, outside of the obvious need for scientific research.

However, like the continent of Antarctica, the Arctic Ocean is replete with occult significance in the World of



Darkness. Magi in particular have long looked at the polar waters as an untapped frontier, a place where the energies of the spirit world boil close to the surface and go largely untapped. There are rumors aplenty of Nephandic circles that have sunk themselves in terrible frigid chantries, working their blasphemous rituals in terrible closeness to their dark masters.

In fact, magi are hardly the only ones who believe that there are... *things* below the Arctic crust, things of impossible alien malevolence. The Wendigo werewolves maintain that a severed talon of the Wyrms itself lies buried in the half-frozen silt below the top of the world, and that terrible aquatic monsters and Banes swirl around it in constant vigilance. Some vampires, mostly Sabbat, mutter stories of rivals and acquaintances who suddenly left their affairs and traveled north, pulled that way by some imperceptible summoning. Even Spectre vessels have been sighted in the Shadowlands of the Arctic Circle, cutting asymmetrical patrols through, across and under the phantom ice as if searching for — or protecting — something.

What does all this mean? Of the few who have heard these rumors, not one can say for certain. Perhaps it has something to do with the supernatural evil that stretches its hand across Russia and Siberia. Perhaps the Gauntlet

and Shroud are worn particularly thin there, so far from humanity, and certain Malfean creatures are testing the strength of the barrier. Perhaps the original children of Lilith, who some say fled to the ends of the earth long ago, are now waking and readying to return to the world. Certainly as the end times of the world draw nearer, more and more supernatural forces are set in motion. There is almost certainly something stirring beneath the polar ice of the Arctic — but to date, there are no answers, only questions, as to what it (or they) might be.

THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

The Atlantic Ocean, the first gateway from the Old World to the New, is largely famous for being the tie between Europe and the United States. Home to countless trade routes, ships and shipwrecks, the Atlantic is also home to one of the most infamous stretches of water known to man — The Bermuda Triangle.

THE SARGASSO SEA

Stretching from the West Indies to the Azores is a sea choked with olive-brown seaweed, a sea with a centuries-old ill reputation among sailors. The Sargasso Sea's waters

are very deep, very clear, very blue, and boast an unusually high salt content and temperature. Its currents are so slow that seafarers used to believe their boats were mired in the ever-present sargassum weed, rather than stuck in near-motionless waters. There's very little native life; apart from the organisms that cling to the seaweed and the occasional spawning mass of eels, the waters are largely free of large aquatic life. Here the compass points to true north instead of magnetic north, making this already singular sea even moreso. With few land masses anywhere nearby and sluggish currents that make ship travel difficult, the Sargasso Sea has been avoided by sailors for centuries. Ancient legend makes the sargassum weed out to be equipped with a malignancy that borders on the paranormal.

In the World of Darkness, the legends of the Sargasso Sea's menace are all too true. With little to eat save the occasional bounty of eels, few living things frequent the area. Even the Rorqual visit these still waters only infrequently. This is a place of the dead.

The power of Memoriam fuels the Sargasso of the Shadowlands. Many relic ships that went down with all hands aboard crossed over the Shroud, only to reappear here drenched in ghostly seaweed. Several of these ships have never left the Sargasso, unable to pull themselves free of the power holding them there. These ships have, virtually without exception, given in to Oblivion — now the wraithly vessels of the Sargasso are a Spectre fleet that poses a very real threat to trespassers. Their powers of Pandemonium and Outrage are well-refined to work on sargassum weed, giving new life to the rumors of seaweed dragging ships down below the waves. Worse, their victims have a horribly increased chance of joining them aboard the rotting decks of their spectral hulks....

THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE

An vast triangle that stretches between San Juan, Miami and Bermuda, this area is still one of the greatest mysteries of the known world. While often debunked by nay-sayers, the Triangle of the World of Darkness has an undeniable occult power to it. Ships and planes have disappeared completely within the Triangle, never to be found again. Part of the explanation is certainly that a good portion of the Triangle is occupied by the Sargasso Sea. Another explanation is that some observers have noted is that the Gauntlet is peculiarly low in some portions of the Triangle, dropping as low as 1 on some moonlit nights. At such a time, it's entirely possible that mundane craft might accidentally stray into the Penumbra, or that certain Umbral denizens might wander into the physical world for a few brief minutes. What happens next is pure conjecture — but it's likely unpleasant.

THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The cradle of seafaring civilization, the Mediterranean has a special place in the hearts of many supernaturals. The Lasombra who choose to sail often do so around Iberia and North Africa; similarly, the Aegean Sea is the protectorate of the Black Fury werewolves. There are merfolk aplenty in the warm waters, and they occasionally mingle with the fae who are drawn to the Glamour of the Mediterranean coastline.

However, the Mediterranean is far from idyllic. The Followers of Set and Assamites are making plays to control the shipping industry in their own back yards, and are encountering quite a bit of resistance from the European Kindred. This inevitably leads to deadly power-games and midnight operations, with many a neonate being sent to the sharks below. Similarly, the local Rokea are more than a little irritated with the sudden (at least to their long-lived eyes) burst in human populations, and are not above devouring the occasional vacationing family of four in the name of thinning the herd. They take a similarly dim view of local vampires, and are slowly beginning to make their presence known in the dance for Mediterranean control.

THE BALTIC SEA

Situated between the Scandinavian peninsula and mainland Europe, the Baltic Sea is a sea in mortal peril. It is ravaged by pollution, as factories dump tons of untreated cooling fluids, cleaning solutions and industrial waste into its waters. The ecological mismanagement of the old USSR still haunts the sea, despite the meager cleanup efforts that the locals can manage to muster. However, the Baltic Sea is notorious among some supernaturals for an entirely different reason.

Its southwestern shore (and in fact, a good third of its waters, including the entire Gulf of Finland) has been off-limits to supernaturals since 1992, when the ancient hag Baba Yaga raised the Shadow Curtain. The Curtain, an invisible wall which prevents supernatural entities from crossing its borders, cuts from Turku Abo in Finland across the sea to Poland's shoreline. Any supernatural trying to cross this border from either direction finds himself halted; boats carrying vampires lose power and stall at the Curtain's fringe, while Rokea trying to swim below are hunted and harried by powerful frost-spirits in the waters.

There are precious few Rokea in these waters, and the only fae to be found are a scattering of selkies who hide in the Gulf of Bothnia. The Baltic Umbra is a dangerous place, where powerful water-spirit Banes such as Rusalki and Vodianoï vent their spite on weaker spirits and trespassers.

Much of the water behind the Shadow Curtain is poisoned, and the rest is gradually becoming more and more at risk. In many ways, the Baltic Sea is the worst off of the World of Darkness' waters; its situation is dire, and there is almost nobody left to help.

THE CARIBBEAN

Although no longer the hotspot of seafaring it once was, the Caribbean still draws its fair share of outside interest. Vampires aplenty roost in its isles, and their power is unquestionably strong here. Still, the Rokea are strong in these waters, and a number of Mokolé quietly slink among the local inlets and marshes. The merfolk of House Syrinx have their traditional seat of power here, in the coral city of Qryll.

Even so, the most dramatic presence in the Caribbean lies across the Shroud. Drawn by the Memoriam of wild pirate tales, wraiths flock to these tropical waters in droves. Many even come to relive their golden years; there are more than a few Legion officers who were buccaneers in life. The booming Necropolis of Port Royal is the "home port" for most of these relic ships; for details, see Chapter Two.

THE INDIAN OCEAN

The Indian Ocean covers the waters between Africa and Asia, down along Australia. Home to such hot spots as the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean is no stranger to violence. Due to its remote nature and temperate climate, it also serves as a popular tourist spot for wealthy Europeans. Several islands stand within its boundaries as well, such as Madagascar, Sri Lanka, and the Seychelles. Although known for smooth sailing, the Indian Ocean does have a monsoon season, and no structure at sea — boat, rig or even coral reef — is safe from the storm's raging fury.

THE PERSIAN GULF

Made infamous by the conflict of the early '90s, the Persian Gulf is a place suffering from many of the same problems as the Baltic Sea. Under the cover of the Gulf War, several unidentified parties took steps to maximize the oil spills and similar disasters along the ocean. This has had the effect of making the area extremely inhospitable to merfolk, Rokea and their ilk, while converting it to fertile breeding ground for aquatic Banes and fomori.

THE AUSTRALIAN COAST

The Australian coastline is as dangerous a place as any for trespassers, for the local Rokea are strong indeed.

They have something of a pact with the scattering of Mokolé that inhabit the coast; which has led to some interesting "agreements" of late. As a result, few non-shapeshifters (and few Garou as well!) are welcome along these shores. Similarly, the Chulorvian menace has yet to spread fully to the Great Barrier Reef — but several of Pentex's holdings are working on ways to properly "manage" the resources there.

THE PACIFIC OCEAN

The largest and deepest ocean, the Pacific runs from the west coast of the Americas to the Pacific Rim of Asia and Australia. The empty vastness of the Pacific extends in virtually every direction, dotted with islands and giant ships. The possibilities of the Pacific are almost endless, from the frigid waters of the Bering Sea to the equatorial ocean around the Galapagos Islands.

SEA OF JAPAN

The waters between China and Japan are quite inhospitable to casual supernatural travelers. The Sea of Japan is fully under the control of the *shen*, in particular the Same-Bito weresharks that patrol its waters and the wraithly Heiké crabs of the Japanese shores. One particular Grotto at the bottom of the sea is in fact a gateway into the Dragon Kingdom of Umi, an Umbral realm of the Eastern seas. By decree of Umi, Western supernaturals are not welcome in the Sea of Japan unless strictly escorted by representatives of the Dragon Kingdom. The Dark Kingdom of Jade considers the Sea of Japan likewise off-limits to Western wraiths; it stings Yu Huang that he has yet to take Japan fully for his own, and he refuses to suffer the insult of Western ships plying the Shadowlands waters where even he cannot travel at his leisure. Although the Jade Kingdom's ships are not an absolute power in the Shadowlands of this sea, they are nonetheless a very real threat to outsiders.

PHILLIPINE SEA

Stretching from the southern coast of Honshu down to Melanesia, bordered by the Philippines to the west and the Mariana Trench to the east, the Phillipine Sea is split down the middle in a border dispute. The western and northern portions of the sea are claimed by the *shen*, who do not idly tolerate sightseers. However, the *shen*'s power is rather more limited here than it is in the Sea of Japan, and as a result, several Western Kindred are doing their utmost to infiltrate the Phillipine and Indonesian ports in an attempt to safely learn more about the Kuei-jin. Neither side has complete influence in this area, and so the situation is especially tense.

THE MARIANA TRENCH

The deepest part of any ocean — in fact the deepest part of the planet's surface — is the Mariana Trench in the Pacific. The trench stretches over 1500 miles, and is over 36,000 feet deep at its lowest point.

The Mariana Trench also houses the ocean's most powerful Grotto. Although dangerous, this area was first probed by EFD explorers Don Walsh and Jacques Piccard in a bathyscaph called the "Trieste" in 1960. Since then, a few EFD squid teams have ventured into the trench, as have two cabals of Tradition mages. The Tradition mages believe it to be somehow connected to the Umbral Realm called the Chasm — or the Abyss, as the Garou call it.

The trench certainly supports life. Tiny, vicious looking fishes like the gulper eel and the viperfish dart around in a cold black environment lit entirely by their own bioluminescence, continually searching for prey. The EFD teams are reported to be particularly vulnerable to hallucinations in this environment, and have claimed to see vast, bizarre abandoned alien cities or strange, aquatic monsters. To date, there has been no substantial evidence that these claims are anything other than pressure-induced hallucinations. The closest thing to "proof" so far has been the return of an unmanned research vessel that was covered with

THE ATLANTIS QUESTION

Astute readers may notice that we haven't mentioned a thing about the fabled sunken city of Atlantis so far. For that matter, there's nothing on Lyonesse or any other, similar lost kingdoms. This is intentional.

There's no doubt that Atlantis itself is one of the most enduring legends there is regarding the ocean. However, nothing will kill that mystique quicker than giving a latitude and longitude for the ruins. The supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness themselves can't agree on the true nature of Atlantis, if indeed it ever existed. Was it a city secretly ruled by Cainites? Were the inhabitants magi who sank their own island with the backlash from their sorceries? Is there a Necropolis somewhere under the waves, with its wraithly inhabitants somehow clinging on to unlife? What's going on, really?

Perhaps the most likely answer is that Atlantis' truest form lies in the Dreaming, a creation of human imagination. However, the truth is left completely in the Storyteller's hands. If you want to use Atlantis, Lyonesse or the like as plot hooks, be our guest. If you're worried that your players will only make Aquaman cracks if you play that card, then don't. You know best what interpretation suits your chronicle. Use it. We don't mind. Really.

dents. These dents were of an appropriate shape to be created by large, powerful versions of a cephalopod's suckers. While the resemblance is undeniable, Progenitor marine biologists agree that the tentacles that would have these suckers would have to be over fifty yards long.

PROJECT: DEEPWATER

Under the Pacific, a blight swells on the sea floor. The undersea arcology/Technocratic research platform, under the public cover of an Endron mining rig, has become a veritable Agar dish for the spiritual taint of Chuloryiosis. While the original mission of the installation is noble, it has been corrupted beyond repair since then. Worse, it has proven a source of great Banality, strangling the nearby coral city of Xinxux. Deepwater is killing an average of one mer per week, and the Rokea are beginning to organize a planned attack — a Gorge — against the undersea arcology. Worst of all, though, the installation has cut the Rorqual off from the Gnosis-rich environment of the Trench, originally the most powerful Grotto in the world. As the Rorqual suffer, cut off from their undersea energy source, all suffer as the ecology of the seas is dealt yet another blow.

PLYING THE WAVES

He always thought of the sea as La Mar, which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her, but they always said as though she were a woman. Some of the younger fishermen — those who use buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats bought when the shark livers had brought much money — spoke of her as El Mar, which is masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant, or a place or even an enemy. But the Old Man always thought of her as feminine, and as something that gave or withheld great favors. And if she did wild or wicked things, it was because she could not help them. "The moon affects her as it does a woman," he thought.

— Ernest Hemingway, "The Old Man and the Sea"

THE SURFACE

To put the ocean in perspective, consider your current surroundings. If you are at home, there are most likely at least a dozen human beings within a mile of you — more likely, many more than that. Buildings, litter, underground wires, telephone poles and other structures dot your perception of the world around you. The signature clutter of humanity surrounds you. Even forests, deserts and other remote areas are cut through with roads and power lines. In the ocean, however, the Wyld is still strong. Despite our obvious incursions, the seas are still

basically the same as they were thousands, even millions of years ago. At sea, it is easy to go for days, weeks, even months without evidence of humanity. The occasional wreck still sits, entirely claimed by nature, on the sea floor, and boats dot the sea's undulating surface. However, it is truly a testimony to our insignificance that we still don't understand, much less inhabit, seven-tenths of our own planet.

AT SAIL ON THE SEAS OF DARKNESS

Though the World of Darkness is full of strange realms to explore, the ocean seems to rest largely ignored. Still, there are a number of ways for inquisitive characters to become involved in the strange environment of the World of Darkness' seas. The most obvious one, of course, is setting sail.

Research vessels, bristling with sensors, carry Void Engineers down to the ocean floor. Bone Gnawers and Ratkin alike still stow away aboard vast cargo ships that seem to be going someplace interesting (particularly until trouble at home cools down). Genteel vampires enjoy their pick of the rich transient population on board luxury liners, and wraiths still sail their ghost ships back and forth across the Tempest and the sunless seas of the Shadowlands. There are even a few floating mage Chantries, as well as the rare island freehold-boats whose courts (often menehune) still maintain ties to the merfolk — or to their Thallain counterparts. However, one gang of sea dogs warrants special attention, and that is the collection of 18th-century

acquaintances who have somehow managed to hold on in some form or another even into the present.

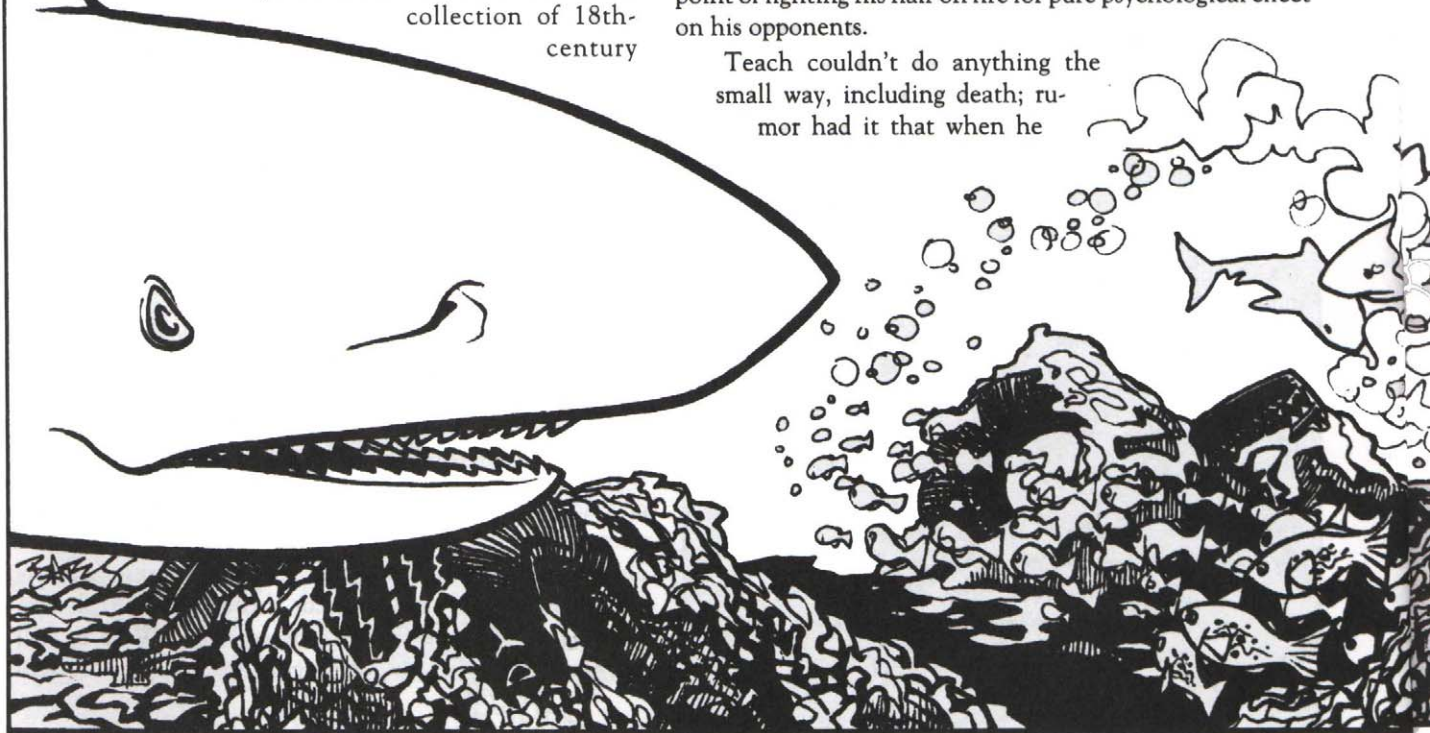
PIRATES!

The great age of piracy lasted from the late 1600's to the mid-1700's, and no other time has contributed so many legends to the lore of the sea. And in the World of Darkness, not all of the bloodthirsty raiders in search of gold were human. Of course, piracy was still largely the province of mortals, it being rather difficult for a vampire or werewolf to conceal its nature for months on end in the tight and not at all private confines of a ship. But the wild, glamorous tales of privateering and piracy drew many a changeling to the ocean, where they battled through a nautical dance over gold, rum and Glamour. And although a few wraiths took to piracy on the other side of the Shroud, it's certainly true that a great many pirates who died unfulfilled took to wraithhood. No matter who tells the tale, it's certainly agreed that this age produced some of the most dangerous and fantastic personalities in the World of Darkness.

BLACKBEARD

While many historical names evoke dread — Adolf Hitler, Napoleon, Idi Amin — these names are feared for the power they held over others. No man alone holds a candle to Captain Edward Teach — Blackbeard — for sheer personal dangerousness. A nearly seven-foot barrel-chested mountain of a man, Blackbeard was known to frenzy in battle to the point of lighting his hair on fire for pure psychological effect on his opponents.

Teach couldn't do anything the small way, including death; rumor had it that when he



was beheaded in his final shipboard combat, his decapitated body swam three times around the ship in search of its head. Too evil to die, he wound up frightening off the reaper in his own fashion — to this day, he still helms a vessel on the other side of the Shroud, a fiery spectre of the Carolina coast who has become every inch as big as his legend.

STEDE BONNET

An odd case of a pirate, it is a widely held belief that Stede Bonnet was henpecked at home, and ran away from his nagging wife for a life of piracy on the high seas. Rather than stealing a ship, the wealthy Barbados plantation owner bought the 10-gun sloop *Revenge*, recruited a crew, and was off.

After a running (and for the most part, losing) rivalry with Blackbeard himself, Bonnet was caught and tried in Charleston, South Carolina. He managed to bribe the guards and escape, although he was soon recaptured. However, his escape hadn't been in vain. Bonnet had attracted the attention of a Lasombra noblewoman some time ago in Barbados, who finally revealed herself to Bonnet and assured him that he'd yet survive. The records declare that Bonnet was hanged in November of 1718 — however, he now pilots a very modern sloop in the service of his clan. He has no idea that his old rival persists in ghostly fashion; as cold and cruel as he has become over the years, were he told the truth, he would probably spend his nights puzzling over how to exact a centuries-old revenge on a wraith.

RACKHAM, BONNY & READ

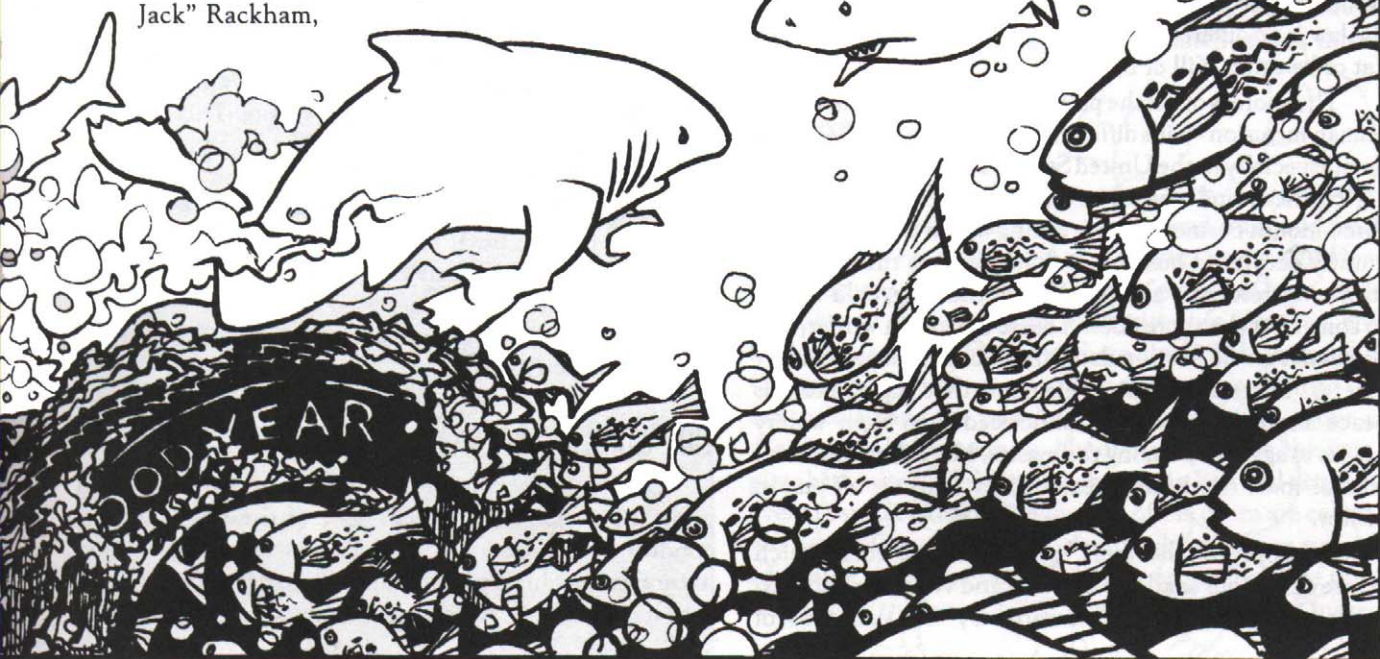
It's rare that three pirates of notoriety share a ship. However, this was exactly the case with "Calico Jack" Rackham,

Anne Bonny and Mary Read. The three were all pirates in the early 18th century, although Bonny and Read had to wear men's clothing for the most part in order to get away with it. Bonny and Read signed aboard Rackham's ship in 1719; their actual sex wasn't kept secret from the crew for long, but few of their shipmates would dare cross these two. They were as fierce as any man aboard, and by their own accounts, fiercer than Rackham himself.

When all three were captured in 1720, Rackham was sent to the gallows — and tumbled out on the other side of the Shroud. Read and Bonny "pled their bellies" to escape — both were pregnant, and the law forbade hanging them until they gave birth. No records attest to the final fate of the two women, although it would seem that Mary Read, at least, came through the Shroud herself after dying of a fever in prison. She and Rackham have apparently survived centuries of existence as wraiths, and have joined up with Blackbeard's crew of Renegades. The Hierarchy, needless to say, is not amused.

THE UNDERSEA WORLD

Nowhere is the division between the known and the unknown so clear as the surface of the sea. While the waves are home to countless ocean liners, oil rigs, Jetskis, cannery ships and other human vessels, the ocean itself is in no way man's domain. The depths are an alien landscape of canyons, mountains, volcanoes,



BLIGHTED WATERS

Although the polluted marine ecosystems outside of cities are unlivable to most pelagics, there are certainly things that can and do exist down there.

Amid the strewn wreckage of car accidents, rotting mattresses, shopping carts, and decaying carnival rides that line the floor of the filth-choked waters of the Hudson River near New York is a colony of Chulorviah. Boston Harbor's disgusting muck is home to a reasonable hive of murdhuacha, and there are rumors of a warren of adaptive Nosferatu in London's Thames River. These deadly ecosystems are extremely valuable to those who can survive in them, most often wraiths, vampires, murdhuacha, Chulorviah or other fomori. This value stems from these lairs' almost complete inaccessibility to air-breathers — and their proximity to unwitting victims.

trenches, and reefs that are home to hundreds of thousands of strange creatures.

Virtually everything is different here. The colors, the shapes, the light — even spatial relations are completely different in this subaqueous reality. Everything happens in all three dimensions, and everything is locked in a fight for survival.

The shore is where the water and land meet, and as such, it's home to countless crustaceans and small fishes. The amount of life in even a small tide pool is staggering, as hermit crabs, starfish, clams, mussels, sculpins, worms and thousands of other creatures fight for survival. This microcosm of the ocean is some of the best research one can get, as the law is no different here than it would be six miles down. Eat or be eaten. Kill or be killed.

The shore is often the part of the ocean most subject to human intrusion — it's difficult to find virgin beaches these days, especially in the United States. The waves and sun are big business, and several towns are subject to a two- or three-month business season, during which the entire community does good business and quietly uses the profits to stow away resources and supplies for the long, cold winter to come. But the shore doesn't cease to exist in winter, and the waters are no less populated in the cold. They are simply quieter. There are certainly elements that appreciate this peace and quiet to emerge unnoticed from their watery homes to again live among the masses. More than one small coastal town has been threatened by such an off-season visitor.

Offshore are the reefs, great crests of rock which create dangerous shallows for boats and veritable smorgasbords of sea life. Usually created by the skeletons of

billions of tiny coral polyps, reefs create a perfect environment for hundreds of species to live and breed. However, the polyps need a surface to attach to, leading to the creation of man-made reefs. There are a number of reefs built over refuse that would otherwise go to waste — old tires, wrecked cars, junked ships. Once in place, a reef can increase the aquatic population of an area exponentially. Rokea slews commonly patrol reefs, and often make their homes there.

Further out is the continental shelf, the deeper part of the water, where pelagic society really begins. The continental shelf is where the actual continents continue into the ocean. Here, sharks, whales, eels and a host of other creatures start to appear in force. Dolphins and whales are often more common farther out, as well. The "Sunlight Zone," where the majority of oceanic life is concentrated, extends to about six hundred feet down.

Open sea is where the continental shelf drops off into the actual sea basin. Here, the depths can easily exceed five miles. The average depth, however, is about four kilometers. Here a new pelagic level exists, often called, believe it or not, "The Twilight Zone." This name actually refers to the light level caused by the muted sunlight above. This is where the mer society exists, the merfolk building coral cities as the twisted murdhuacha hives infest old wrecks of sunken human structures. Mer are only found within one hundred miles of any continent under the oddest circumstances.

Beyond the dim water of the Twilight Zone is the dark, forbidding water of the Abyssal Zone. Here, below 3,000 feet, the pressure would easily implode an unprotected human, and none but the mightiest Rorqual can brave the depths. The water is often freezing, except in the boiling-hot volcanic areas. Life here is rarely over a few inches long, often hideous, needle-toothed, bug-eyed bioluminescent monstrosities that put even the most atrocious of land-based monsters to shame. This is where the undersea blends with the Deep Ocean, and often the "within" of these icy depths give way to the "without" of the Umbra. The deepest part of the ocean is the Mariana Trench in the Pacific: It's over seven miles straight down. Those few Void Engineers that have braved this forbidding realm agree that it is a deserted wasteland — although some few rant about vast and marvelous abandoned cities before visiting DIMH.

THE SCARIEST PLACE ON EARTH

One of the most forbidding sites on the planet is the undersea wreck. A grim reminder of the frailty of our condition, the wreck is a testament to the power of nature as she quickly claims anything that may fall back into her cradle. A wreck can be any structure — boat,

plane, submarine, building — anything manmade that now lies abandoned at the bottom of the sea. Crusted over with barnacles, choked with seaweed and home to prey, predators and other, more sinister things, every wreck has a story to tell, and it is almost always fraught with tragedy and death. Every boat full of decaying passengers once on their way to a better place, every

SAMPLE WRECKS

OLD CAPE MAY, NJ

*There rolls the deep where grew the tree
O Earth, what changes hast thou seen!
There where the long street roars hath been
The stillness of the Central Sea
— Tennyson, "In Memoriam"*

On the southernmost tip of New Jersey lies Cape May, the oldest seashore resort in the United States. Although it has a faithful tourist population who craves the town's rich Victorian History, the majority of the city has been claimed by erosion and sudden floods, now existing in the gray-blue waters of the Atlantic. Beautiful houses with gingerbread trim, century-old churches and even a complete trolley system now stand still amid the barnacles and gossamer seaweed of the ocean. The beauty of this place was so great that it almost broke the hearts of a group of traveling merfolk performers to see it so abandoned. They now live in the decayed houses and buildings despite the admonishments of others of their kind. Their critics claim the habitation of wrecks to be the domain of the *murduacha*, and not befitting proper merfolk. The playful natives counter that "merfolk" and "proper" don't belong in the same sentence.

THE BERTHA KAYE

*—As prophesied by the Ancients, battles will be fought
in the air by warriors who ride the wind.*
— Translation of the Chinese inscription on a monument in Chanyun, China, to a Flying Tiger

The Bertha Kaye is a B-25 Mitchell bomber that went down in the South Pacific during World War II after a successful bombing run on Japan. Seemingly home free from Japan, the crew was forced to sit and wait in silent horror for their own deaths after gunfire from a cloud-hidden Zero ripped both wings off the plane. She plummeted into the ocean, but it still took her thirty seconds to hit. This eternity resonated deeply with the men on board, each of whom still tend to her — their Fetter — every day.

rusting fighter with the withered remains of a once-young patriot still clutching the controls, every rusted trolley car and crumpled submarine speaks the same words to the living:

"Somewhere along the line, something went very wrong."

THE CORAL CITIES

Content to let their Thallain counterparts live in the "dirtwalker refuse" of abandoned hulks, merfolk are proud of their own bio-architectural marvels, the coral cities. While bearing almost no resemblance to our versions of cities, the vast coral edifices of the aquatic Kithain are nonetheless beautiful: Sprawling, colorful bioluminescent web works of anemones, mollusks, and of course, coral. The cities provide shelter from the harsher temperatures outside, and are entirely powered, heated and governed by living creatures within.

An experienced merfolk bioarchitect can grow a new wing in weeks. He accomplishes this by creating frames of bone or cartilage, then using a certain chemical mixture to attract coral polyps to the frame. Soon the polyps fortify the frame and make a livable structure for the merfolk within.

THE SEAS OF DARKNESS

The denizens of the World of Darkness are a quiet, insular lot, who all too often know next to nothing about those who share their world. Vampires can't be bothered to learn about the Wyrms — magi have "bigger things" to worry about than Spectres. This delicate equilibrium falls apart when an outside factor enters the picture as a complete unknown. For this reason, most of these creatures try to avoid the sea — there's risk enough to be found ashore without having something completely alien at your throat as well.

VAMPIRES

The Camarilla, more concerned with the issues that threaten its own domain than with exploring odd (and potentially very dangerous) new realms, keeps well clear of the oceans. Only a tiny few of its members have made attempts to carve out a bit of territory in the seas, and these are usually from one of three clans. The animalistic Gangrel have seen a few of their number retreat into the ocean to escape the Jyhad, for personal desires, or out of sheer animalistic madness. Naturally, these are the vampires best suited to adapt to a subaqueous life, and virtually every Mariner (for so the vampires of the deeps are called) was once a Gangrel. The Nosferatu, although not quite as adaptable, sometimes maintain part or, rarely, all of their warrens in the water-filled sewer pipes. Other Kindred

find these submerged mazes almost impossible to navigate, and (depending on how deep the Sewer Rat has tunneled) often suffer from "depth sweat" (see Appendix) underneath their own home cities. An enterprising Nosferatu can also create the equivalent of an underwater spawning pool, where fish, crustaceans and even sharks can be bloated into hideous monsters and trained as guardians, once placed on a diet of the Nosferatu's corrupted vitae. And an added bonus is simply that their victims sound completely mad: Is the Prince of Kansas City really going to believe that the Toreador primogen was consumed by piranha?

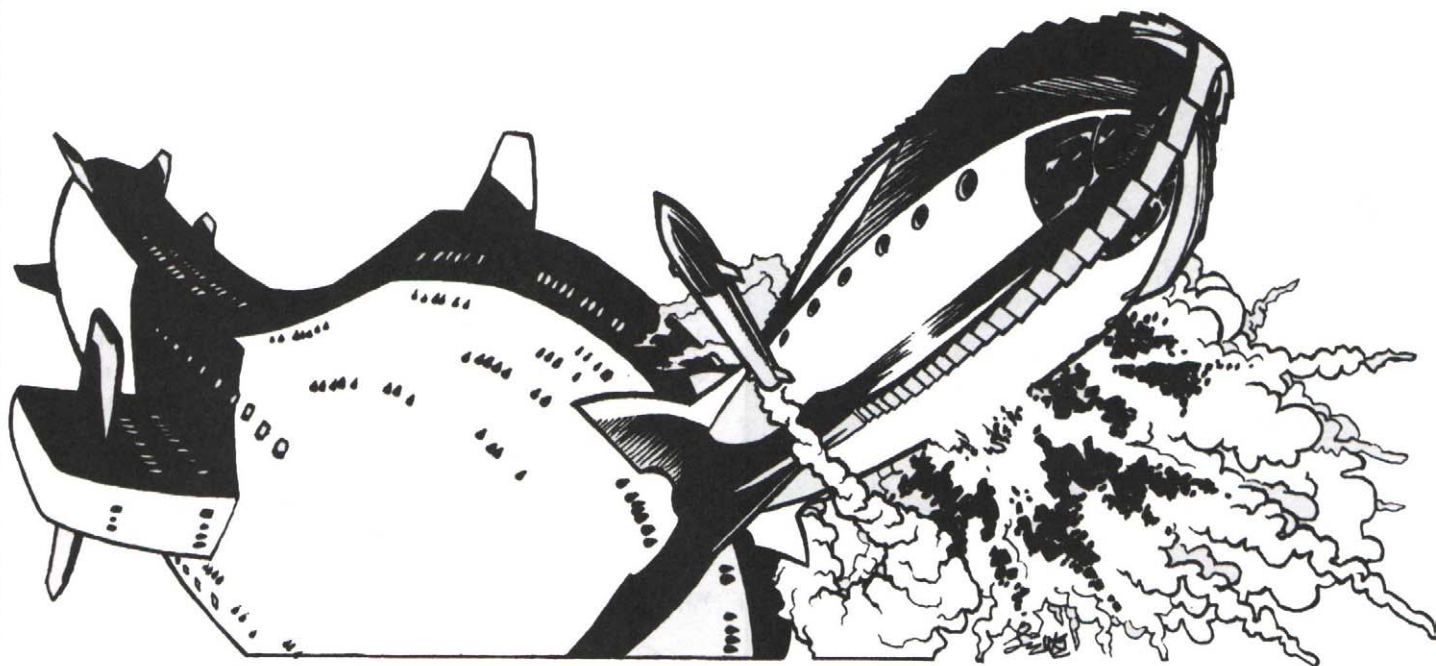
The last, and most malignant Camarilla presence under-sea is nothing more than mere rumor. Nonetheless, some find it not too far-fetched to believe that there may be an entire Tremere chantry submerged in the Atlantic, maintaining their haven via Thaumaturgy and testing the full potential of Neptune's Might.

The Sabbat, however, strongly suspects the existence of one or even several Antediluvians resting under the waves. After all, what better place to hide? Several Mexican packs have recently set out, volumes of rumor and occult lore stored on board, to follow the clues and see what develops. These *Vampiros de La Mar* packs, maintaining boats as communal havens, have spread as far as the Pacific rim and New York Harbor. They practice a bizarre new Auctoritas Ritae that was developed in Canada, wherein rather than burying a new recruit, they chain her to a weight and sink her to the bottom.

The most disturbing trend, however is that of the mad. Several vampires whose Humanity or Path has dwindled to nothing, rather than fleeing randomly from victim to victim, begin a long, slow steady march to the waves, and do not stop until they have disappeared beneath the moonlit tides. None say where they are going or why. None are found after disappearing beneath the waves. Although it isn't frequent enough to be a true trend, it is a disturbing recurrence with, as one observer put it, "possible... implications."

WEREWOLVES

The ocean makes for strange bedfellows among the Garou. Although some of the loftier tribes are loath to admit it, the greatest "Sea Dogs" alive today are — as they have often been — the Bone Gnawers. The Gnawers still boast a generous amount of sailors and dock workers among their Kin and themselves, and their ties to Rat make them naturals at sea. Oddly, this means that the Bone Gnawers actually have a certain amount of authority at sea, and sometimes even Shadow Lord and Silver Fang alphas find themselves hoisting the mainsail and tying the rigging under the direction of a Gnawer packmate. Only the Glass Walkers are as familiar with modern naval craft as a tribe, and even they tend to have rather poor hands-on experience — so to captain a small vessel, usually the Gnawer is the Garou for the job. Oddly enough, this gives the Gnawers some sort of



credence among the Get of Fenris, who recognize a mutual seagoing heritage.

A few scattered septs, recognizing the necessity of swallowing their pride and seeking out allies among the other Changing Breeds, have attempted to make contact with the weresharks. They've so far met with mixed results; although the Rokea know very little at all about the War of Rage waged between shapeshifters, the weresharks are aloof at best (and savagely hostile at worst). The Rokea have maintained balance in the oceans for thousands — possibly millions — of years, and don't consider other shapeshifters (or other supernaturals) capable of improving on their efforts. As far as they're concerned, land-dwellers are trespassers on the ocean, no matter who they say they represent.

MAGI

Although magick has always been a boon at sea, magi have generally kept above the waves and left the undersea realms be. The 19th century saw an increase in undersea expeditions, by more than just the Watchers of the Void. Today, the proliferation of advances in travel has encouraged more and more willworkers to seek privacy in the ocean. At least two traditions boast floating chantries, boats that serve as Horizon Realms and Nodes for the magi within.

The Order of Hermes ship *Verditius* still sails to this day. Although the high-class yacht would now be unrecognizable to its original 13th-century shipwright, the *Verditius* is still a powerful chantry made even more versatile by its obvious mobility. In a similar vein, *Ahab's Ghost* plies the waves for the Sons of Ether, who appreciate the luxury and research opportunities that the chantry provides.

These are by no means the only aquatic magi, however. A small faction of the Cult of Ecstasy has set out to experience the sensation (or lack thereof) of venturing through arctic and tropical waters alike, while a group of Okinawan Akashics try to interpret the waves into their special form of Do. Of course, none of these are so well versed in the magick of the sea as the Polynesian Kopa Loei, who maintain ties with the menhune and the spirits of the deep.

The Technocracy continues to fund Project: Deepwater, while high-tech EFD subs can be found just about anywhere gathering samples and hunting out the *Nautilus*-esque creations of the Etherites. The Progenitors and Syndicate would be stuck without the Miami Connection, a trade route between South America and Florida that supplies most of the American populace with the Pharmacopeists' creations. Iteration X is experimenting with an combat hydrofoil in the Florida

Keys, and the concept of a floating chantry appeals to the New World Order, who would enjoy a station of influence in international waters. This last is still an idea being debated by the convention, although common opinion seems favorable.

Finally, the Nephandi are wholly notorious for their adaptation to the ocean depths. Galarus' Drachus Vachor is only one example of how readily the Nephandi embrace the cold depths of the Umbral ocean as an atmospheric reflection of their philosophy. To many of the Fallen, the deep sea environment serves as a reminder of what the world will be like once they force Ascension on it.

WRAITHS

The Shadowlands at sea are dull and foreboding: always moving, but never quite fast enough, always gray, but never quite breaking to storm. The walls between the Shadowlands and the Tempest are paper-thin here, and it is easy to go from one to the other without even knowing it. In a similar vein, the Shroud is lower here, and the proliferation of legends about ghost ships is no coincidence.

At sea, far from the ports of the Hierarchy, the enforcement of the Dictum Mortuum is considerably more lax. Ghost ships are easily the most available vehicles in the Shadowlands, although the largest, such as the *Lusitania*, are often refitted as the Hierarchy's battleships. The Hierarchy's navy is easily the strongest of all the Dark Kingdoms, and the others know this. Oddly enough, local Anacreons often quietly hire navigators and helmsmen from among Les Invisibles — what these Caribbean wraiths specifically do for the Hierarchy is a mystery. All Dark Kingdoms possess ghost ships, and The Dark Kingdom of Jade and the Dark Kingdom of Ivory boast excellent armadas. Odd reports have also filtered in about some grand ship being created by the wraiths of Swar in the Indian Ocean.

Heretics and Renegades also enjoy the freedom that the oceans bring. Although some of the less desirable elements among both groups become slavers, the heart of Renegade activity in the water is really piracy. Hierarchs can't hope to keep up with all of the Renegade prates in the water. A center for this activity is the long defunct city of Port Royal in Jamaica. Here, wraithly pirates relive their days of rum and plunder, Shadowlands-style.

CHANGELINGS

The sea has always been the domain of the mer, as far as the Kithain are concerned. Of course, there have been Kithain seafarers — the eshu in particular — but for the most part, the Kithain have left the oceans to their aquatic

counterparts. Over time, the two groups drifted apart, and now, most younger Kithain aren't aware that the merfolk exist, yet very few are surprised by the idea — after all, it makes sense. Trying to convince a blue-skinned monster with the strength of a giant that mermaids *don't* exist is theoretically as hard as convincing a normal person that they *do*.

Even so, the mer are in trouble. No one group so keenly feels the sting of Project: Deepwater as they do, having recently suffered the death of nearly two-thirds their number. The mer are desperate, and are coming to the shore for help. However, the land-based Kithain certainly have their own problems, and more often than not, when a strange fae enters a Duke's court and demands the compliance of everyone within, she's laughed out of the building. But the mer's lack of humility and social

graces do not discount the incredible danger presented. These changelings are dying in huge numbers.

Back on land, some sluagh claim to be able to live underwater for long periods of time, and more than one nocker has cobbled together a leaky, Jules-Verne-esque contraption that more often than not sits in a corner because there are few Kithain brave enough to take it to sea, including the nocker who built it in the first place. The rare changelings that do actually go out on these journeys are almost always eshu — salt water is in their veins, and they still remember the days of glory off the Barbary Coast. The most "aquatic" land-based fae, however, are the rare pooka gifted with fish, gull or even dolphin affinities. The mer despise these "false Apsarae" for their carefree ways, but the pooka shrug it off as mere jealousy.

THE UNDERSEA TRIAT

The alleged rulers and creators of the seas, both Umbral and physical, are an alien trinity of deity-figures that some occult scholars call "the undersea Triat." The exact nature of these three legendary entities is left up to the Storyteller to decide. The "right" answer will probably depend on whether the game in question is **Werewolf**, **Changeling** or **Mage** (undead things are notoriously unattuned to things of the spirit world and the Dreaming). As such, consider the following information legend alone; a more precise definition would probably undercut the cosmology of some game or another, and *that's* no fun.

- **The Fish Bearer:** The mer know this ancestral figure as the male "Fish Father," Vatea. The Rokea call the Incarna the female Kun, the "Mother of Fishes." These are only two of the entity's faces; this legendary figure is allegedly capable of quickly changing its mind, its shape, its gender and its location. The Fish Bearer is, as tales have it, constantly attended by a haze of millions of its children. It is commonly depicted as a huge fish which combines aspects of many of its children (pufferfish scales, lionfish fins, eel tail, shark teeth, etc.). Some mer claim that Vatea has human legs; this is an idea that bothers all of the mer — such a thing would imply a certain alienation between themselves and their spiritual father. The Rokea affirm no such thing; Kun is simply the incarnation and mother of all bony fishes, and has nothing to do with the creatures of Unsea.

- **The Tentacled One:** Qyrl to the Rokea and Dagon to the mer, the Tentacled One is a creature of

nightmare. The Rokea see her as mother to all spineless, soft creatures of the ocean, parent to jellies, octopi and squids. Garou Galliards recount the name of Kraken, and murmur that the Tentacled One is the underwater head of the Hydra. Mer legends (as well as a few human occult texts) paint this horrible entity as a dread, primordial thing that lies in wait for the time to return to the land where it was worshipped as the god it was. In all cases, the Kraken is seen as an entity of corruption and malevolence, a creature vaster than an island and impossibly old. It is known to have a fierce rivalry with its "sibling," the Fish Bearer, and their struggles color the legends of mer and Rokea alike.

- **The Shelled One:** Easily the most mysterious and withdrawn of the undersea Triat, the Shelled One plays a rather enigmatic and minor role under the sea. The Rokea know her as C'et, the parent of all crustaceans. Relatively unmolested by its siblings' rivalry, the Shelled One is content to make her presence known in small ways — the perfection of a single pearl, the mathematical precision of a snail's shell, and even the colorful symmetry touching the Fish Bearer's millions of children are all the marks of her presence. The Garou, who are fond of reinterpreting things to fit their own methods, consider the Shelled One to be one of the Weaver's many facets. They might be right; the undersea Weaver-spirits known as Scuttlers have a habit of leaving the various Crab-spirits and suchlike be as they go about their tasks. Professional courtesy? Mistaken identity? Who can say?

PENTEX

The corrupted captains of industry within the halls of power at Pentex know all too well the resource value of the seas. As their holdings increase in every direction, the oceans run black with filth. Pentex is the driving force of corruption behind the sinister Deepwater Project, although this is far from their only aquatic venture.

Mr. Klieg, the sinister fomor that hired on with the company in the early '20s, has not aged since his application was accepted. He is now Pentex's Project Coordinator for all oceanic pursuits, answering directly to the board. Klieg is actually a Chulorviah, perhaps the most powerful (and self-aware) Enfolded alive today, and Qyrl only knows what he is capable of doing. Klieg is somewhat nepotistic when it comes to hiring other Chulorviah to powerful positions within Pentex; it usually takes a while for Petyranos allies to be fully trained for their positions, but Klieg considers the results well worth it.

Hallahan, a fishing company, supplies several United States canneries with tuna that was caught at the price of the lives of hundreds of dolphins a year. Hallahan's Asian counterpart, Ichibashi, is one of the largest whaling firms in Japan. Pentex is spending quite a lot of money in order to continue their whaling and mass fishing operations, particularly in areas likely to snare more dolphins and porpoises. Mr. Klieg is apparently quite conversant with the power of the Rorqual and wants to learn a way to get at it. He'll kill as many as it takes to learn their secrets; after all, every dead Rorqual is another nail in Gaia's coffin.

HUNTERS

The various mortal factions of the World of Darkness are for the most part completely unaware (or deliberately ignorant) that its horrors stretch beyond the boundaries of the shore. The Inquisition, the United States government and the Arcanum have no conclusive proof of any sub-aquatic supernatural threats, although the Special Affairs Division of the FBI is investigating the existence of some sort of "shark-thing" hunting off the Hawaiian shores of Oahu. Similarly, the Boston Chapterhouse of the Arcanum has a murdhuacha egg case pickled in formaldehyde, labeled and resting quietly on a shelf behind several far less important items. A few Benandanti have gone to sea with wraithly assistance, but turned up little in the aquatic Shadowlands.

On the other hand, the Asian hunter group known as Strike Force Zero have learned of the existence of Project: Deepwater while on the trail of an unrelated case involving a cluster of Thai Nezumi. A strike team is currently prowling Guam, under orders to learn more about this phenomenon.

THE DEEPTSEA UMBRA

*Tonight I go under to see
What shape my watcher will be
Tonight I go under to see
Tonight I bleed
— Course of Empire, "Persian Song"*

The Umbra of the waters is a bizarre, kaleidoscopic experience that can be at once beautiful and terrifying. The water spirits surround visitors to their domain; some are calm, some churning and angry, but all are united in the great colony called Sea. Fish-spirits, called "Apsarae," swim every which way, and can have a very disorienting effect on viewers. As one travels further and further down, there is less and less light, but unlike the physical world, it feels as though there is less and less pressure being exerted on the body as one goes deeper, until the whole of reality seems gossamer and thin. Many Umbral travelers have surmised that this is because the umbra is a loop, and if one goes deep enough that's exactly where they will end up — the deep Umbra.

The average Gauntlet at sea is 5, and this can drop dramatically in some places. Grottoes commonly have a Gauntlet of 2 or even 1, and the Umbra and physical realm are virtually indistinguishable in such places. There the Umbrae tend to merge, leading to some spectacular effects; it's not completely unheard of to see a plesiosaur swim by, or a sea serpent, or even a cybernetic pressure suit. Distance is sometimes known to fluctuate here, particularly as one goes deeper. Regrettably, the Penumbra ocean is as inhospitable to air-breathers as its physical counterpart; visitors must still have some means of breathing under the waters. However, the duration of such things is extended almost indefinitely; a dedicated scuba tank won't run out of air on the other side of the Gauntlet. It was meant to provide a means of breathing for its user, and in the Umbra, purpose is everything.

APSARAE

Apsarae are the bizarre spirits that govern the creatures of the sea. The spirits of ordinary creatures can seem quite alien from an anthropomorphic viewpoint — but Apsarae are stranger still beyond that. The Apsarae are commonly split into two camps, the Boned and the Unboned. Apsarae of the Boned variety symbolize sharks, fishes, sea turtles, porpoises, and eels. On the other hand, Unboned Apsarae are represented by creatures such as lobsters, annelids, crabs, jellyfish, mollusks, and nudibrachs. The Boned Apsarae tend to fall into alliance with The Fish Bearer. The Unboned associate with the Tentacled One or the Shelled One, whichever one is closer to their nature. As spirits go, they appear to be

nothing more than rank and file in the Umbral ecology — but when need be, they act with a strange unity that's baffling to outside observers.

THE SHADOWLANDS

Day after day, day after day

We stuck nor breath nor motion

As idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean

Water, water everywhere, and all the boards did shrink

Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink.

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

Due to the oddly solid nature of the water to wraiths, the ocean is really not much more than a desert to a wraith lost at sea. Cold, alone, tripped up by the waves underfoot and subject to the constant torments of her Shadow, most often those who are lost only find their way home as Doppelgangers. Walking on the water is not easy — the chances of being slammed between the waves are high, and the dappled, constantly changing surface is the roughest possible terrain. Maelstroms can be particularly devastating at sea.

The sea can sometimes act as a window between the Shadowlands and the Tempest as well. Wraiths can find themselves far closer to the Labyrinth than they really want to be by abusing this ability to walk on water. Water is somewhat more solid further out, and though a wraith does not actually sink in more shallow waters, it is a bit more natural around piers and harbors.

The bustling ports of the Hierarchy keep plenty of wraiths busy, both overseer and thrall alike. These ports of call are constantly active loading and unloading valuable cargo on it's way to or from Stygia. Ports in coastal Necropoli are often positioned conveniently near the forges to keep transport of goods neatly convenient.

At sea, the Shadowlands are dull, gray, and opaque, as if intentionally hiding something. Every so often things have bubbled up from the waters to wreak havoc — Nihils full of gibbering Spectres, shadow-eaten ghost ships



with Oblivion-tainted crews, and, of course, the high king of the bad asses, Gorool himself. While there have been no definite sightings of the monstrosity since his disappearance with Charon, there has been a disturbing increase in reports of huge black shapes snaking through the water, long black tails cutting the waves, and entire Hierarchy convoys mysteriously disappearing.

PROJECT: DEEPWATER

Tailliez and Dumas questioned me on every detail. We reveled in plans for the Aqualung. Tailliez penciled the tablecloth and announced that each cubic meter we claimed in the ocean would open mankind to 300,000 cubic kilometers of living space.

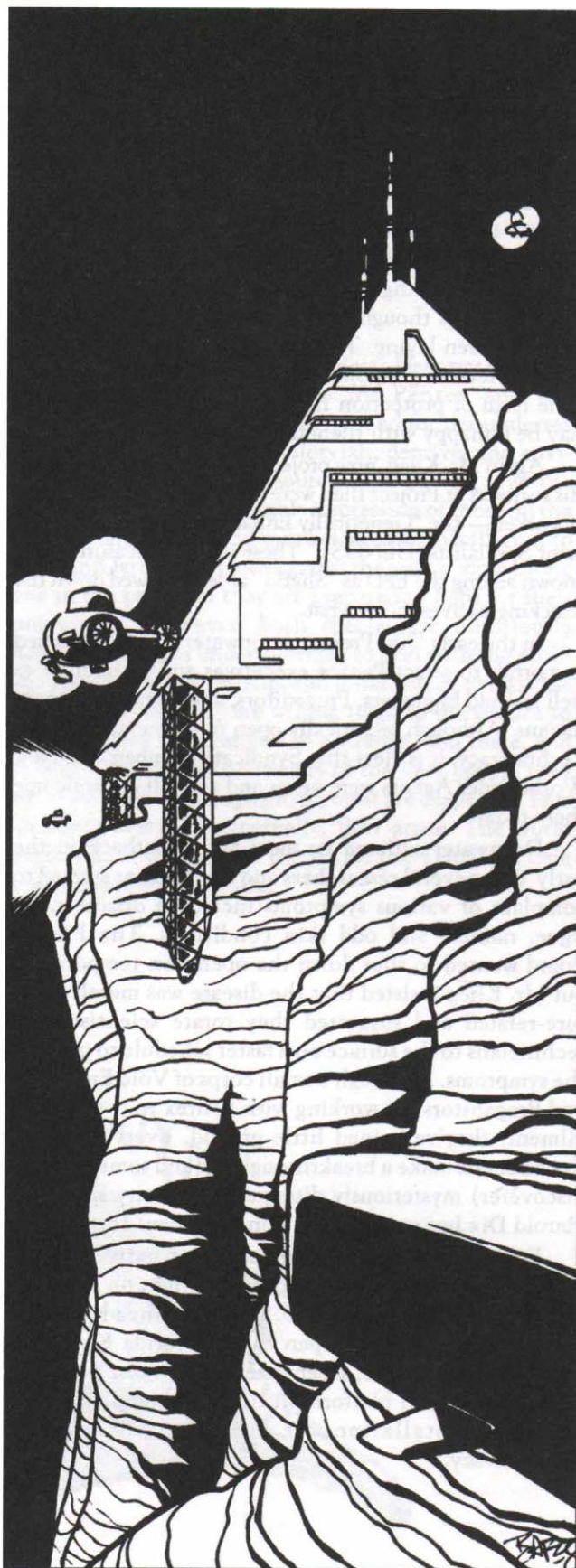
— Jacques Cousteau, "Menfish"

HISTORY

In 1910, a small but vocal contingency of the Void Engineers that would come to be known as the Earth Frontier Division (EFD) revealed that they were interested in attempting to create a colony under the water. Their project schematics were all in order and would have had the Project open for colonists by the late fifties. Despite the obvious viability of the program, the New World Order had other ideas. With the backing of the Syndicate, they quashed the project almost immediately, demanding that the Void Engineers have space exploration up and running before the end of the century. Deepwater appeared to be sunk — and would have been, too, had there not been a case of serious happenstance in favor of the colony.

In the mid-'20s, a young company called Premium Oil hired on a drilling expert named Mr. Klieg. Mr. Klieg was remarked as bearing an odd resemblance to company founder Jeremiah Lassater's son Jacob, despite his having died in a boating accident years ago. Klieg brought a slightly waterlogged copy (no one was quite sure where he had obtained it) of the Void Engineer's plans straight to the Board of Directors, who saw great potential in the idea of an underwater colony pumping millions of gallons of crude back to the surface. Premium Oil sent a group of representatives to certain... contacts of theirs among the Void Engineers, and after a several martini-lunch, a deal was struck. In return for a mining claim, Premium would gladly supply the EFD with the necessary funding to begin Project: Deepwater. Shortly after this point, Premium Oil became Pentex Incorporated.

A site was determined in the center of the Pacific Ocean, near the edge of the powerful Mariana Trench, about half a mile down. Although initial construction didn't start until the late '30s, and despite the obvious



delays caused by World War II, Deepwater built up a great deal of momentum in the '50s. It was about this time that the EFD first started to notice resistance as well — native resistance.

Technicians were found with their suits punctured and slashed, as if pierced by some kind of polearm. Others started to come in mutilated and defiled, often housing all manner of subaqueous carrion feeders in their bloated corpses. The last straw was when an entire team of technicians went missing save for their hands, severed roughly at the wrist, as though bitten, still clinging to the cable they had been laying. The aquatic building teams could not be forced at gunpoint to go back to the site without some form of protection from sharks and whatever else may be unhappy with them down there.

Again Mr. Klieg, now project overseer, had just the fix. His contacts at Project Iliad were able to supply a new breed of worker — the “Genetically Enhanced Nautical Enforcement Specialists (GENGS).” These security measures, now known among the EFD as “Sharks” at least slowed down the attacking natives. Somewhat.

In the early '70s, Project: Deepwater officially opened its portals to select Pentex executives and researchers as well as Void Engineers, Progenitors, and Iteration X technicians. Although technically open to all members of the Technocracy, it is clear that Syndicate members and New World Order Agents were never and are still not welcome there today.

Deepwater suffered its most recent setback in the early '80s. Several researchers and technicians started to complain of various symptoms including dizziness, fatigue, nausea, and odd skin conditions. The Project Board wanted to shut down the operation temporarily, but Mr. Klieg insisted that the disease was merely pressure-related and suggested they rotate scientists and technicians to the surface on a faster schedule to prevent the symptoms. Although a small corps of Void Engineers and Progenitors are working with Pentex to combat the ailment, they've gained little ground. Every time the Technocrats make a breakthrough, it (and sometimes its discoverer) mysteriously disappears. Security specialist Harold Dix has voiced some concern about this.

Despite the increased frequency of native attacks and the disease problem, Deepwater is right on schedule to open to the Masses in 2010. There are already smaller experimental branches open in the Florida Keys. Although not complete, Deepwater is the most powerful undersea research platform in the world, and an indispensable installation for both Pentex and the Technocracy.

GEOGRAPHY

Deepwater is not some half-Umbral construct or otherworldly outpost. Its original mission statement was cheap, comfortable living for Sleepers — and it has actually managed this. This doesn't mean there are no magi on board or that it doesn't tap a node — indeed, all of the ocean is starting to feel the effects of the loss of the Mariana Trench's Quintessence — but it is very much present in the physical world, and mundane divers could easily reach the platform. The threat of Paradox means, of course, that the installation must be built slowly and carefully, and as coincidentally as possible.

Located in the Pacific Ocean, on the edge of the Mariana Trench, Project: Deepwater is stationed about half a mile down, on top of a rocky undersea plateau. The

DEEPWATER AND CHULORVIAH

*All the submerged direct you
Up from a hole in the Sea
Swimming the floor of perception
In through your ears while you sleep
— Course of Empire, “New Maps”*

It's obvious that Pentex and the Technocracy have different ideas for Deepwater, and neither are very good for the surrounding native creatures. While the Technocracy is interested in creating a research platform from which to explore the deep ocean, Pentex is concerned with breeding Chulorviah and unleashing them upon their enemies topside. The Kraken-Born fit quite well with the Omega Plan, and as far as Pentex is concerned, having otherwise rational human beings slink off into the water and degenerate into mindless terrors isn't a bad thing at all.

What Pentex doesn't know, of course, is that the Chulorviah are sworn to an entirely different head of the Hydra than the megacorporation is. Mr. Klieg has kept his true allegiance quite secret from his corporate “superiors,” but it's a sure bet that he is acting on the best interests of the Chulorvian elders, not Pentex. His tentacles are coiled throughout every level of Deepwater, from the lowest laborers to the highest corporate overseers. Only a few employees are developing suspicions (mostly *barabbi* or Pentex operatives “in the know”), and those who do are starting to wonder if Mr. Klieg himself is all that human in origin. There is the matter of those sunglasses he always wears....

installation covers about one square mile of sea floor, about the size of a large casino. The central installation resembles nothing so much as a gigantic white ceramic pyramid on stilts. Although not recognizable as such, twisting down from each corner of the pyramid is an oil drill. The ceramic is of a special design to resist barnacles, coral polyps, and other creatures that would otherwise affix to its surface and alter the weight balance between the four sides. There is a scintillating white glow from underneath the construct: the moon pool in the pyramid's central chamber. This football-field-sized opening in the bottom of the installation is where the submersibles dock. Inside, the central chamber is huge and vast, taking up the entirety of the first ten floors of the arcology. This chamber is a humid tangle of drills, pumps, pipes and cranes. Recessed along the walls are four "inclimators," peculiar slanting elevators. Offices and labs are all built into the walls.

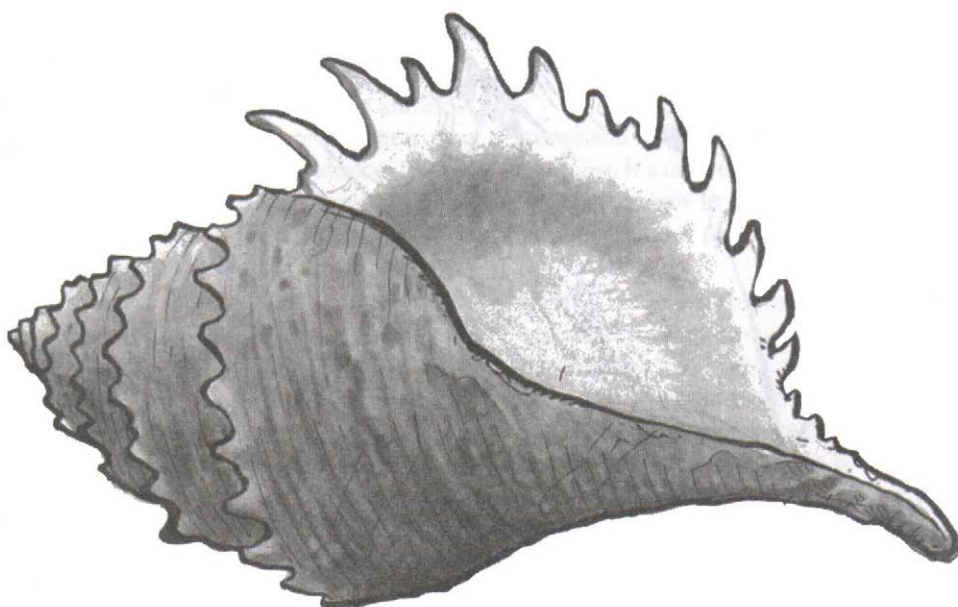
The actual arcology is much smaller and sits above the central chamber. The higher up in the pyramid one goes, the nicer the surroundings, as bleak white spartan rooms start to give way to beautiful aquatically-themed lounges and mahogany-trimmed boardrooms. The very uppermost tip of the arcology is an observation center composed of four six-foot thick panels of technomagically reinforced glass. There are additional wings, modular labs, and mining facilities that snake out from under the main pyramid like tentacles, but these fluctuate in form and number from year to year.

In the Umbra, Deepwater has attracted thousands of Scuttlers and is literally crawling with the aquatic

arthropods. These creatures infest every level of the installation. In the Shadowlands, however, Deepwater is even more disturbing, as it appears in a haze of bloated dead fish, crustaceans, and human bodies. As one gets closer to the installation, the haze of bodies becomes a diseased, almost impenetrable soup. Those who penetrate the murk to reach Deepwater in the Shadowlands find the installation in fine condition — it's just everything around it that's dead.

DEEPWATER NOW

It goes without saying — Project: Deepwater is corrupt. It plunders the oceans for Pentex and the Technocracy, acts as a breeding ground for the undersea abominations called the Chulorviah, deprives the environment of a necessary resource, and doesn't give the natives a particularly favorable impression of those on the surface. Many Rokea and mer believe the installation to be Dagon/Qyrl's vengeance against the sea for some wrong done in the past, and they are prepared to fight for their homewaters. However, both species are notoriously underequipped and underinformed to deal with the problem. They need outside help, and it has gotten so bad that some (well, some mer) are willing to go to the surface to get it. But they are strangers in a strange land there, and are often ignored by the leaders of the very people they turn to for help. Although proud, most are desperate. This will affect everyone eventually, they argue. The world does not have to sink into the sea for the Tentacled One to win. Quite the opposite.





CHAPTER TWO: DENIZENS

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
— William Shakespeare, *The Tempest**

It's true that most of the intrigues, atrocities and skirmishes that shape the face of the World of Darkness take place on land. It's also true that whether by choice, ill luck or perceived duty, most of the supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness tend to be "where the action is." And so, for the most part, they keep to the land.

But those that don't...

It's an entirely different world on board a ship, and ten times as different under the waves. The vampires, shapeshifters, magi, wraiths and fae that have taken to the seas have all adapted in some way or another to their new lives. For some, the change is largely cosmetic, and they manage to get around the seas in much the same way that they'd find ways to get around other difficult environments. Others, though, have wandered down entirely new evolutionary paths, and are barely recognizable for what they once were.

This chapter deals with the five major supernatural groups and the parts they play in the oceans of the World of Darkness. It's material for Storytellers and players alike, and is meant to serve as inspiration for maritime stories, with or without "native" protagonists. Adapt, ignore or utilize it as you see fit.

Just remember that as on land, there isn't an overwhelming sense of community between the oceans' various inhabitants. To a Mariner vampire, a Rorqual is a food source; to a mer, a Rokea is a bloodthirsty, alien maniac. Although marginally more capable of uniting to some extent when their communal home is threatened, these creatures are no more "buddy-buddy" than are their landborne counterparts. The World of Darkness is a paranoid, isolationist place where trust is hard to earn and never free. Anything less would be, well, optimistic.

BLOOD IN THE WATER

Seeing death as the end of life is like seeing the horizon as the end of the ocean.

— David Searls

As most vampires will tell anyone foolish enough to ask, the high seas are no place for the Kindred. There's no convenient prey to feed upon, no mortal society to hide within, and no secure havens to provide shelter from the sun's deadly light. Indeed, until the 20th century, sea voyages were considered nigh-suicidal for vampires. Two clans, however, defy "conventional wisdom" and have long been at home on the sea: the Gangrel below its surface and, surprisingly, the Lasombra above it.

GANGREL OF THE DEEP

It should come as no surprise that some among the Gangrel have adapted to what has been termed "the most alien environment on Earth." Many creatures that inhabit the depths of the seas are far stranger to mortal eyes than most Kindred ever could be. The sea-dwelling Gangrel, however, have evolved (or devolved, depending on one's point of view) into entities that even the Nosferatu who know of them find monstrous.

PHYSIOLOGY AND APPEARANCE

Students of Kindred physiology are still debating the validity of labeling the aquatic Gangrel a separate bloodline. The most common opinion is that the Mariners, as they refer to themselves, form a separate branch of Clan Gangrel that is roughly the same distance from the main bloodline as is the City Gangrel *antitribu* line of the Sabbat. The Mariners, or Gangrel *aquarii* (single: Gangrel *aquarius*) as they are labeled by Tremere scholars, practice the same Disciplines as do their land-dwelling progenitors (Animalism is equally effective on all creatures, regardless of habitat, and Fortitude allows survival at depths that would injure or destroy a less resilient being), but display several unique adaptations of both the Protean Discipline and their own forms.

The most pronounced trait of the Mariners is their rapid adoption of animal features (rapid relative to "mainstream" Gangrel, that is). Gangrel *aquarii* stray from human appearance and socialization due to their necessarily limited contact with kine and their unappealing physical resemblance to the particular creatures of their own habitats. Few can pass through mortal society without attracting undue attention if they have roamed the seas for more than a few decades, and those who have inhabited the ocean depths for centuries are often mistaken for monsters even by their own progeny. Sea-dwelling Gangrel tend to develop the features of the animals with which they most commonly associate — serrated shark teeth, circular lamprey mouths, octopoid tentacles, bony

squid beaks, scaled skin and vestigial (and unnecessary) gills have all been reported by various Kindred who have had the opportunity to observe Mariners. Needless to say, the appearances of these individuals greatly impair their social abilities (in game terms, any Gangrel *aquarius* loses one Social Attribute point for every three animal features he gains, rather than one point per five features as "normal" Gangrel do).

DEMOGRAPHICS AND AGENDAS

The Gangrel have never had a unifying purpose past survival, and this carries over to the Mariners, who claim neither Camarilla nor Sabbat membership — and are usually reluctant to claim membership in their own clan, preferring to think of themselves as "individuals." They are an exceedingly rare breed — best estimates place their numbers at thirty or less worldwide. However, they seldom sire childer, so most are of relatively low generation compared to the Kindred population as a whole. Their Embraces are never spontaneous or ill-considered; the gift of unlife is granted only after a year or more of observation of the prospective Mariner. Subjects are taken from all races and ages; the only unifying qualification is a deep and abiding love of all the faces of the sea, placid and frightful alike, and this judgment seems to be more instinctive than any manner of bloodline policy. An oceanographer, two marine biologists, a lifeguard, and a salvage diver swim alongside naval officers and colonial-era explorers in the Gangrel *aquarii* line. Few subjects maintain contact with any aspect of their mortal lives after the Embrace due to the rapid loss of rapport with humanity as a whole, and most prefer to prey upon sharks, whales and other marine mammals rather than kine (although the occasional shipwreck or midnight beach party does provide an invigorating buffet for the hungry Mariner). The Rorqual are the occasional delightful discovery, as their blood is as potent as that of any Lupine — however, there's no easy way to discern a Rorqual from another cetacean, and the Mariners have learned that the spirit-infused animals have their own defenders.

Gangrel *aquarii* are still able to function in the surface world (some have traded information to enterprising Nosferatu in exchange for lessons in basic Obfuscate techniques). However, they choose to ignore it for the most part, only dealing with mortal society if it directly impinges upon their domain. Several potential marine disasters have been averted by the timely intervention of a Mariner, the most recent being the near collision of a Royal Navy guided missile frigate and a Saudi Arabian-flag supertanker off the coast of Italy last year. It should be noted that this does not stem from any particular concern for human morality on the part of the Mariners; the incident cited, witnessed by a Ventrué on board the frigate, involved the brutal deaths of five crewmen

on board the tanker who tried to prevent the Gangrel from taking the ship's helm. When later asked about his motivations in the incident, the Mariner replied, "I did it not for you, land-walker, nor for myself, but for my Mother."

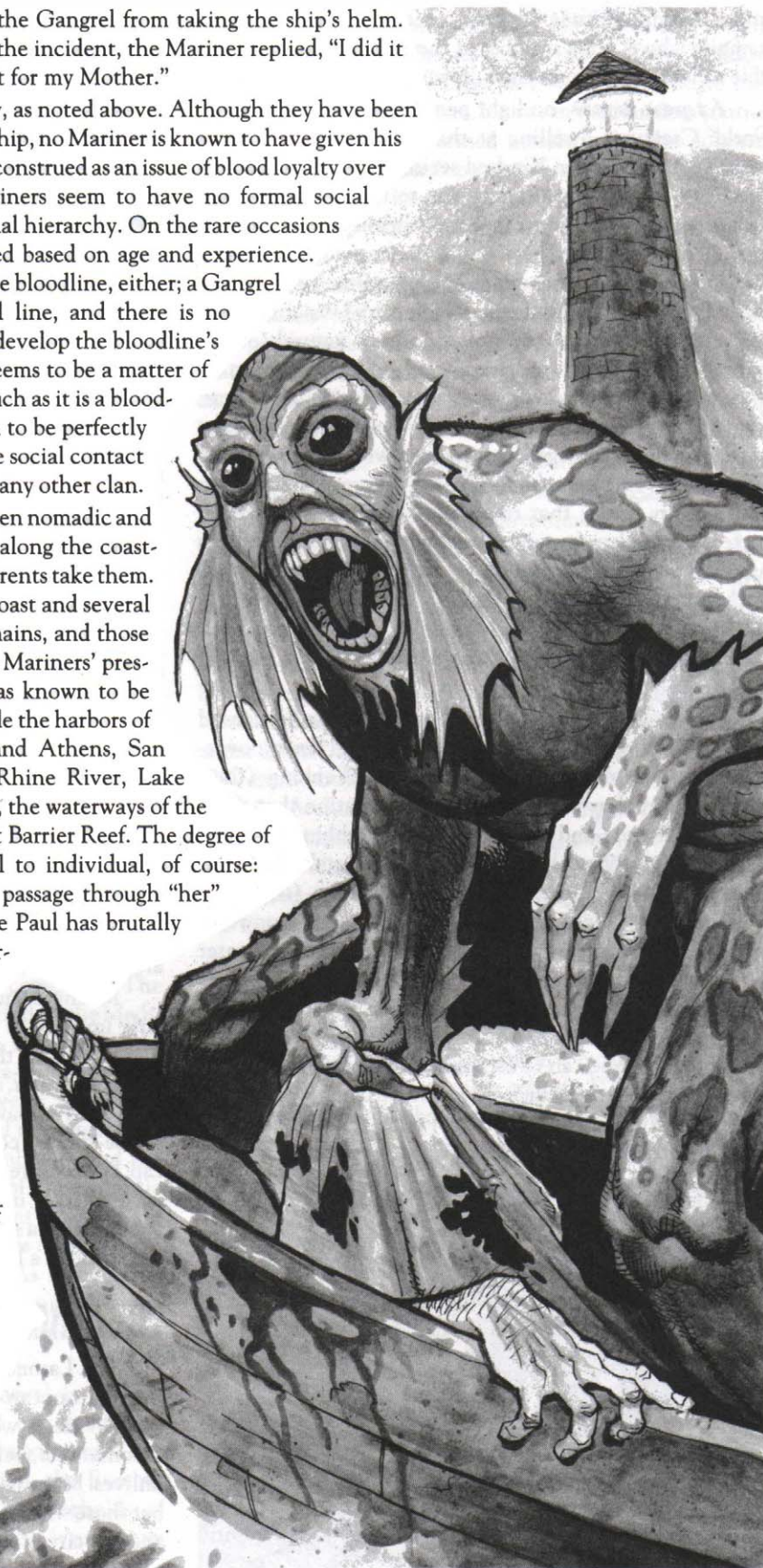
Mariners likewise shun Kindred society, as noted above. Although they have been offered both Camarilla and Sabbat membership, no Mariner is known to have given his allegiance to either sect. This should not be construed as an issue of blood loyalty over organizational loyalty, however. The Mariners seem to have no formal social structure of their own and almost no informal hierarchy. On the rare occasions that two Mariners meet, respect is accorded based on age and experience. There are no clear lines of descent within the bloodline, either; a Gangrel *aquarius* may claim a sire of any Gangrel line, and there is no guarantee that the childe of a Mariner will develop the bloodline's aquatic features. Gangrel *aquarii* heritage seems to be a matter of temperament and personal preference as much as it is a blood-linked trait. The Mariners themselves seem to be perfectly at ease with this, though they share no more social contact with land-based Gangrel than they do with any other clan.

The Mariners are equally divided between nomadic and sedentary individuals. The former migrate along the coastlines of the world, roving aimlessly as the currents take them. The latter often claim a certain section of coast and several hundred square miles of ocean as their domains, and those shore-bound Kindred who are aware of the Mariners' presence usually give them wide a berth. Areas known to be claimed by members of this bloodline include the harbors of New York City, Buenos Aires, Odessa, and Athens, San Francisco Bay, the entire length of the Rhine River, Lake Michigan, portions of the English Channel, the waterways of the Congo Basin, and two sections of the Great Barrier Reef. The degree of territoriality shown varies from individual to individual, of course: Tatiana of Odessa allows all Kindred free passage through "her" port, while the Mariner known as Machete Paul has brutally destroyed at least two Sabbat packs who pursued Camarilla Kindred into the East River.

There is only one site that is known to be home to more than one Mariner. Lake Nyasa in southeastern Africa hosts a group of at least four Gangrel *aquarii*, a number unheard of elsewhere in the world. Reports indicate that they guard the lake and its environs with ruthless efficiency. Thus far, it has been impossible to determine what, if anything, this brood protects.

ADAPTATIONS

The variation of Protean practiced by Gangrel *aquarii* is not unique to the bloodline, simply because of the mutability of the Discipline. Any Gangrel may evidently acquire the ability to make any or all of the alternate transformations known to the Mariners, although some instruction



and a certain aptitude are both necessary. At present, no vampire who is not a member of the Gangrel line has been able to learn to perform the following transformations.

At great depths, no light penetrates from the surface world. Creatures dwelling at these levels go without or make their own. Even Kindred seeing through the Eyes of the Beast encounter difficulty due to the different visual properties of water and air (see the Appendix). Most Mariners discard enhanced eyesight in favor of a more reliable method of navigation: sonar. The bloodline's specialized use of Protean • (which they call Dolphin's Unsight) grants the underwater traveler a limited form of natural (or unnatural) sonar that is sensitive enough to replace vision for most tasks. Obviously, this power does have its limitations: a vampire navigating by Dolphin's Unsight cannot read the text of a book salvaged from a shipwreck, nor can he differentiate between two fish by the colors of their scales. The sensory acuity that this power bestows is, however, perfectly adequate for navigation or combat out to about a hundred meters. Past that range, details begin to fade (+1 difficulty per 50 meters past the first 100 on all rolls that rely on visual/sonar sense, including hit rolls in combat). Dolphin's Unsight is effective only underwater — it is useless on land.

Although it is a marvel of adaptability, the humanoid body is not designed for swimming. Gangrel *aquarii* overcome this limitation with Phocidae Webbing (their version of Protean ••), a minor transformation that elongates the fingers and toes and creates webbing between them. This vastly increases swimming speed and maneuverability at a minimal cost in fine manipulation (triple the character's base swimming speed values when this power is in effect and negate all difficulty penalties for underwater movement, but subtract two dots from the character's Dexterity when any action is attempted that requires fine manipulation or an opposable thumb). The webbing is wickedly sharp and can be used in close combat to devastating effect (Strength + 2 dice of aggravated damage, difficulty 6 to hit, with no damage dice pool penalty for underwater brawling attacks).

Obviously, the typical wolf-form granted by Shape of the Beast is even less suited to aquatic activities than is the human form. Mariners who have mastered the Protean Discipline to this degree often take the form of an aquatic predator. The most common form is that of a shark (+2 to all Physical Attributes, aggravated bite damage of Strength + 3 dice, and quadrupled swimming speed), but those of barracudas, moray eels, and even octopi have been reported (Storyteller's discretion). Likewise, Mariners' aerial forms depart from the traditional bats and ravens, instead resembling albatrosses or sea eagles.

No adaptations of the Earth Meld or Mist Form powers have been reported. Evidently, the former is sufficiently

effective for interment in the sea floor and mist and fog are common enough on the ocean's surface that no particular comment is elicited by a sighting of such phenomena. Undoubtedly, the elders among the Gangrel *aquarii* have developed powers that are even more bizarre, but no confirmed reports of these have circulated as of yet.

REPRESENTATIVE PROFILE

The most well-known member of the Gangrel *aquarii* line is the individual known as Machete Paul (presumably, Paul acquired his moniker through his choice of personal armament). As mentioned above, this Mariner claims the waters and docks of New York City as his domain and jealously defends his territory from any and all incursions. Camarilla Kindred found swimming or boating are usually given a marginal amount of leeway in the form of one verbal warning; Sabbat members are attacked on sight. Paul justifies this dichotomy on the grounds that Camarilla vampires are less likely to cause massive property damage to the area surrounding his home.

Unlike many Mariners, Paul's hunting habits mark kine rather than animals as his primary prey. He usually feeds on dock workers, vagrants, seamen, and the occasional lost tourist. Paul also keeps a close eye on all Kindred movement through the port, employing wharf rats and seagulls as spies. He is known to share information with local Nosferatu, but does not involve himself in Kindred affairs past the occasional conversation. The few individuals who have inquired into Paul's past and the reasons behind his unique choice of domain have learned little, but it is widely believed that Paul was some sort of seaman or naval officer in his mortal life and was Embraced in or around the New York area.

Machete Paul can still pass for human, albeit a particularly unpleasant specimen thereof. He spends most of his nights roaming the docks, alternately prowling on shore and below the water, and thus constantly reeks of fuel oil, sewage, and other unsavory substances. He is usually garbed in grease-stained coveralls and a New York Yankees baseball cap. His eyes are a dead gray like those of a shark, and his skin is going scaly in patches. In the rare instances that he has encountered a superior enemy, Paul has been seen to assume the shape of a large moray eel and disappear into the water.

THE BLACK BANNER FLEETS

The Lasombra are the one clan who possess extensive ties to the ocean. The Gangrel have maybe a double handful of individuals who deal with the water; by contrast, the Lasombra *all* feel its call at one point or another in their unives. Many never recognize the compulsion for what it is, but those who heed it find within themselves both the peace and ferocity of the sea.

LASOMBRA PELAGICITIES

Despite their public image as a cold, staid, and reserved group, the Lasombra do have one crack in that otherwise darkly shining image. When the wind whips through the rigging and waves rise above the deck, many members of the clan assume the aspect of the ocean, becoming as tempestuous and reckless as any Brujah. This behavior, oddly enough, is excused by clan elders, so long as the clan's interests are not endangered to an extreme degree. In centuries past, many Lasombra neonates and ancillae made their fortunes and reputations as explorers, privateers, or outright pirates. Clan elders commanded shipping empires or military fleets, though the latter practice was sharply curtailed after the Spanish Armada debacle (perhaps due to the execution of several of the clan's most proficient admirals).

No member of the clan has ever found a completely satisfactory explanation for either the pull of the sea or the loosening of inhibitions that is tied to the Lasombra psyche. Most do not question it and simply accept it as a facet of their blood, a minor annoyance at worst. Scholars among the Lasombra believe that the mystical Abyss from which the clan's Obtenebration powers flow is somehow spiritually tied to the deep ocean, and the call of the sea is actually the sinister tug of this shadowy nothingness pulling the Lasombra toward it in a gradual downward spiral. The more adventurous members of the clan laugh off this hypothesis, albeit with a touch of nervousness — the Lasombra are known to have lost at least two prominent elders in the course of deep-sea explorations in the past decade.

NAUTICAL AGENDAS

The Lasombra still control more ocean shipping tonnage than the rest of the Kindred world combined. The majority of shipping companies headquartered on the Mediterranean, in South America, or on the American East Coast are almost guaranteed to be Lasombra-held, and most ships registered to these corporations have at least a few crew members who have been conditioned to protect clan interests. Through this control, the Lasombra — and the Sabbat — have a near-foolproof means of transatlantic personnel transport, provided that supplies of vitae are placed on board the vessel and the vampires on board are adequately hidden from the mortal crew. As many cargo ships contain industrial-size refrigeration units and are laden with literally thousands of shipping containers, these are not often major difficulties.

Lasombra control over the world's naval forces has never been as extensive as it was in the era of Spanish colonial expansion. Indeed, the major naval powers of the modern world — the United States, China, the Russian Federation, and Great Britain — are all strongholds of powers other than the Lasombra. However, this is not to say

that the clan has no military power to bring to bear on the high seas. The Lasombra no longer take a direct hand in military matters, for the most part — such indelicate manipulations are frowned upon. However, the clan does control a small private fleet of armed vessels under the nominal registries of several Mediterranean nations. For the most part, these are not large ships: 300 feet or less in length, armed with heavy machine guns and a few with one three-inch cannon, certainly not capable of fighting a surface action against anything except an unarmed yacht or freighter. However, several South American nations are known to have purchased small (cruiser-class or less) warships from the United States in the decade after the World War Two, and an unknown number of these vessels are believed to be under Lasombra control.

Furthermore, unconfirmed reports indicate that the Lasombra have recently acquired a new flagship for their fleet. In late 1995, the Iranian government purchased three Kilo-class diesel-powered attack submarines from the Russian government and incorporated them into their navy. One of the vessels disappeared in mid-1997, and world intelligence officials assumed that the submarine had been sunk in the Persian Gulf after colliding with a supertanker. Recent reports, however, have placed an unidentified Soviet-built submarine at a Mediterranean harbor known to be under direct Lasombra control. The destruction of the British Ventrue-owned luxury yacht *Hampton Star* with all hands (and six Archons in service to the Ventrue Justicar) in a North Sea storm last winter has been tentatively linked to this vessel. Camarilla officials are advised to observe the utmost security precautions in planning ocean voyages until this matter can be investigated further.

THE ANTITRIBU FACTOR

The sudden increase in Lasombra naval activity is in direct response to a similar buildup and escalation of hostilities on the part of the Lasombra *antitribu*. The few Lasombra who do not claim Sabbat membership have been in a constant state of war against their parent clan since the destruction

COLORS

The flags flown by a ship are a highly important symbol of its ownership or national allegiance, even in the modern age of instant radio identification. Lasombra pride does not allow a ship owned by the clan to leave port without raising the Lasombra naval ensign, a plain black flag flown directly under the flag of the ship's nation or registry. Ships in the Lasombra *antitribu* pirate fleet fly a variation of this flag crossed crimson rapiers on a black field. Once out of sight of land, many Lasombra captains fly no colors other than those of the clan, raising national flags only while approaching port.

of the Lasombra founder during the Anarch Revolt. This conflict has taken place primarily on the seas due to the superior power base of the Sabbat Lasombra, and the *antitribu* have recently taken the upper hand in these guerrilla-style naval conflicts.

The Lasombra *antitribu* pirate fleets are based primarily in the Caribbean. While this may seem a suicidal location at first glance, considering the Sabbat and Setite domination of much of the region, the conflicted nature of the area makes it an ideal home for one more faction — and all the more so if that faction is more competent and less fractious than its rivals. The ports of Jamaica, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, and other island nations are ideal homes for naval raiders to hide between sorties, and the docks are ripe with fences willing to move several tons of stolen computer processors or automobile parts with few questions asked. The *antitribu* also maintain at least two secondary staging grounds in the Mediterranean: Israel is rumored to be one such location, but Assamite control of that nation makes such a proposition risky at best.

The *antitribu* pirate fleet is composed of perhaps a dozen ships, with an equal mix of armed attack vessels and fast bulk cargo ships. These are sent out in pairs to raid known Lasombra-owned freighters. The usual tactic is for the armed vessel to approach under false pretenses, fire a warning shot into the target's radio antenna, and use a searchlight to flash a Morse code warning for the victim to heave to and prepare to be boarded. The pirates then board the vessel, bring their cargo ship alongside, and quickly move as much of the victim's cargo as their own ships can hold. The *antitribu* or their trusted ghouls Dominate away the target crew's memories of the incident, replacing them with those of a sudden storm that swept their cargo and radio mast overboard. This tactic has cost the Lasombra at least \$45 million in the last fiscal year, and it is believed that the *antitribu* have sold most or all of their hijacked goods to finance the expansion of their fleet.

The Lasombra *antitribu* do not, of course, use all-Kindred crews on their vessels — such a proposition would be suicidal for all but the shortest voyages. Instead, each ship is captained by one vampire, with a second one serving as executive officer on the most sensitive missions. The remainder of the crews are composed of ghouls and mercenaries — the former are Blood Bound to silence, and the latter are Dominated into believing that their contract-holders are mortal pirates.

LASOMBRA NAUTICAL QUALITIES

As mentioned above, the indefinable relationship between the Lasombra and the ocean produces some odd traits in members of the clan. The most common is known as Pelagic Compulsion (a 2-point Flaw), wherein the afflicted

Lasombra feels inexplicably drawn to the sea at the expense of his ability to concentrate on other matters (+1 difficulty to all Willpower rolls if the character has been out of sight of the ocean for more than 24 hours). This call can be temporarily satisfied by an extended sea voyage, and is most often felt in the first 50 years of unlife. Pelagic Harmony (a 3-point Merit), a rare state of mind that runs counter to this disorder, seems to grant the reverse effect, giving added mental equilibrium (-1 difficulty to all Willpower rolls) if the character is on or within sight of the sea.

Some Lasombra are even more closely tied to the ocean, their moods mirroring its own in bloodthirsty counterpoint. An individual with this condition, termed Poseidon's Call (1-point Flaw), finds her stability directly tied to that of the weather, calming as the skies clear and growing progressively more bloodthirsty as a storm mounts (rolls to resist frenzy are at -1 difficulty in completely calm weather, but +1 difficulty on rough seas, +2 in the middle of a thunderstorm, and +3 during a hurricane). Individuals cursed with this instability are sometimes also blessed by a strange Weather Sense (1-point Merit), which seems to provide occasional warnings (with a Perception + Survival roll, difficulty 7) of impending inclement weather, even that which stems from unnatural causes.

The clan seems to afford a certain amount of prestige to members who captain their own ships. The amount of responsibility bestowed by such a position is not to be taken lightly, but promising neonate members of the clan are sometimes given the captaincy of a Cargo Ship (3-point Merit) or, more rarely, an Armed Vessel (5-point Merit). Serving as the executive officer of such a ship (a two or four point Merit respectively) does confer a certain amount of esteem as well, though not as much as the privilege of command. The *antitribu* line is also known to award prestige based on captaincy, but this is rarer due to the small size of the fleet (these Merits cost one more point for Lasombra *antitribu* characters).

PERSONNEL DOSSIER SUMMARY: ARCHON-CAPTAIN KLEIST

Embraced in the late 18th century, Kleist is a rising star within the ranks of the Lasombra *antitribu* fleet. He has served as a Camarilla Archon under Justicar Xaviar for the past half-century, campaigning extensively for more representation of the "minor" bloodlines within the Camarilla, and has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for a possible Camarilla-Lasombra *antitribu* treaty and mutual defense arrangement (this agreement is of particular importance to the Camarilla due to the rising number of encounters with Cathayans on the American West Coast and the increasing Sabbat domination of East Coast ports).

Recently, Kleist was called to Jamaica by the notorious Alfonso Lopez (see **Clanbook: Lasombra**) to take com-

mand of the newest warship of the *antitribu* fleet. At the request of the Brujah and Gangrel Justicars, Archon Kleist was given a letter of marque by the Camarilla, making him the first *antitribu* pirate to be officially supported in his actions against the Sabbat. His current whereabouts are unknown, but he is suspected to be stalking the shipping lanes of the mid-Atlantic.

Archon-Captain Kleist is a tall, lithe man of mixed Spanish and Germanic heritage, with long black hair and piercing silvery-blue eyes. He is reputed to be a master of Obtenebration, and has displayed powers that rank him as an elder in generation if not in years. Kleist was a highly proficient Archon during the period in which he directly served the Camarilla, and is a swordsman of enough repute to have served as a champion in the duels of several Ventruue and Toreador.

Kleist's ship is the *Black Aegis*, a 270-foot vessel built to the plans of a U.S. Coast Guard *Famous*-class cutter. The *Black Aegis* is registered as a Bahamian research vessel used to probe tropical storms, but the "weather observation instrument" assembly on the foredeck actually disguises the vessel's original main armament, a 76mm automatic cannon. The vessel is crewed by approximately 80 ghouls and Central American mercenaries under the command of Kleist and his Executive Officer, a former U.S. Navy SEAL named Randall Thomas.

THE BLOOD OF GAIA

The Garou rarely consider the entirety of Gaia when they declare themselves Her protectors. They preserve the sanctity of Her forests and tundras, and even occasionally foray into Her deserts or rainforests. But when the werewolves proudly pat themselves on the back for protecting their mother, they conveniently forget that three-quarters of Her ecology is largely closed to them. There they are secondary, if that important. The proud Garou must give way to the Rokea, the weresharks who ignored the War of Rage because it couldn't come to them. Here the shapeshifters in charge are strange, alien creatures who have for the most part forgotten the nearly-useless human half of their natures. Where there is a duality to all other shapechangers, in the seas all that the Homid form really affords... is the ability to drown.

So what would compel the Garou to leave their familiar territories behind and start cutting the waves? Plenty. Several of Pentex's subsidiaries have fleets of ocean vessels, which provide Gaia's defenders with plenty of work, whether it's trying to clean up or contain the latest "accidental" Endron oil spill, or "encouraging" certain Hallahan fishing boats to stop their blatant (and intentional) overfishing practices. A dedicated and skilled Glass Walker hacker might unravel the paper chase back

to Project: Deepwater, and realize that if Pentex wants what's down there, the Garou probably don't want them to get their hands on it. The depths are a good shortcut to the Deep Umbra, which may prove important if the pack needs to contact a reclusive Incarna (particularly Uktren, whose water-spirit nature makes it particularly close to the Umbra of the deeps). Totems such as Shark or Dolphin (both in the *Werewolf Players Guide*) occasionally accept Garou packs, and may require their children to lend a hand offshore. And, of course, there's the rising threat of Kraken, which the Garou have yet to discover but need to, before it discovers them.

There's already a war going on out there. The Garou still have yet to get involved.

THE GAROU NATION AT SEA

As the Garou Nation as a whole goes, there's not much priority placed on the oceans. Individual septs may have differing opinions, but it's not likely that the Black Forest Get or the American Midwest Glass Walkers are going to send packs out to the coast on errands — there's plenty of trouble at home. Nonetheless, it's not inconceivable to find Garou on board ships or using Gifts to navigate underwater. The Garou can't pick and choose where their enemies are found, and they can't ignore trouble.

The Black Furies have long held the Aegean Sea as their protectorate, and one of their greatest caerns is on the island of Ecube (which the Furies call Miria). The island is privately owned, and the waters around it are particularly treacherous. The Sept of Bygone Visions, keepers of the caern, admit visitors only via Moon Bridge; a group of spirits help guard the nearby waters.

The Bone Gnawers are inveterate sea dogs, but don't have any important holdings in coastal regions. Nonetheless, the Gnawers remain one of the most prolific of tribes (not that that means much in these times), and have the best distribution on coastal cities around the world. If a traveling pack needs a local guide to take them out to sea, they're most likely to find a Bone Gnawer if they find anyone at all. Similarly, the Children of Gaia are fairly well spread throughout the globe, but tend to have inland protectorates more often than not. That doesn't keep them from going where they're needed; a few of their number have traveled to the Persian Gulf and the Baltic Sea in order to help with various cleanup efforts.

The Fianna, unsurprisingly, used to have a number of caerns scattered throughout the British Isles. Although their holdings have shrunk with their numbers, they hold some measure of power in Ireland, Wales and Scotland. There are still a few secret caches and hiding places on the smaller isles surrounding Britain, and the Fianna still hold this area as their responsibility.



If they could get away with it, the Get of Fenris would claim all of the North Sea as their territory. In fact, in times past they were able to claim that very thing. But the Middle Ages ended some time ago, and even the fierce Get are fighting a losing battle to maintain control. Seafaring is part of their nature, and there are still several ships owned by Get Kin plying the northern waters. Still, the Get have managed to maintain a caern on the shores of the Baltic Sea, on the other side of the Shadow Curtain — something that no other tribe can boast.

The Glass Walkers are moderately well-versed in maritime skills; more than one owns a private yacht, and most can easily charter vessels in a time of need. In particular, the Hong Kong Glass Walkers have a number of connections across the Indian Ocean. Conversely, the Red Talons are obviously not much for shipboard activities — but several of the Siberian, Alaskan and other northerly Talons are moderately well-versed in traveling the ice cap of the Arctic Ocean.

The Shadow Lords have no coastal holdings, but for every Lord who claims that it's wasted effort to learn something as "irrelevant" as seamanship, there's another who sees opportunity in the oceans. They share this attitude with the Silent Striders, who aren't predisposed toward ocean travel, but are always prepared for whatever it takes to get where they need to go.

The Silver Fangs keep largely to their inland caerns, which is something of a reversal from earlier times. Many felt, some time ago, that *noblesse oblige* compelled them to journey to whatever new lands were found, the better to bring the local territory under the Garou Nation's protection. However, the years have proven that they weren't always welcome wherever they went, and now that the world is largely mapped, the Silver Fangs' sense of adventure has dimmed somewhat. By compare, the Stargazers are much more given to wandering, and are often found on pilgrimages both on dry land and not.

The Uktena and Wendigo, unsurprisingly, protect the waters around the Americas over any others. In particular, the Pacific Northwest and Newfoundland are areas where the once-Pure Ones have decided that inland, coast and water are all under their protection. But even they have their odd "side diversion;" the Uktena are noted for traveling to the Caribbean and Australia in recent years, as well as having a few Ainu relatives in northern Japan.

THE ROKEA

It's impossible to discuss the Final Battles of the oceans without mentioning the Rokea. The weresharks were designed long ago to endure and to persist — and that they've done. They were also charged with the duty

of protecting Gaia's lifeblood as best they can. That too, they've done. But now as mankind spreads more and more quickly every year, the Rokea are finding themselves somewhat — and the thought is virtually incomprehensible to them — out of date.

The Rokea's dedicated purpose isn't what people expect. They weren't designed to heal, or to watch, or to remember, or even to stalk and destroy. According to the Rokea, they were created to endure. They are models of perseverance, even more resistant to disease than their landwalking Changing cousins, and doggedly stubborn when roused to action. Contrary to popular opinion, they don't launch savage attacks against their neighbors, nor do they "go looking for trouble." The Rokea patrol, and they watch, and whatever they discover that disturbs the status quo is torn to shreds without explanation nor apology.

Perhaps the most dangerous thing about the Rokea is that they're found anywhere sharks are found — and several places where sharks aren't. Some of their number manage to survive in the lightless areas of the ocean. Others have managed to endure the Arctic waters of the north, and a rare few have even adapted to coastal life among humans. It's a troubling thought, but they may well even outnumber the Garou — after all, the Garou have many enemies, shrinking territory and a dwindling birth rate. The weresharks have many enemies, although not so many as the Garou — but their territory is still largely their own, and they have little difficulty producing new generations. They will be the last to go — and, some say, perhaps the only sentient creatures strong enough to survive the Apocalypse. They are a threat to anyone trespassing on their waters, and a still relatively unknown factor in the grand scheme of things — even the Mokolé, their closest allies among the shapeshifters, and the merfolk who share their waters cannot truly claim to know the Rokea mind. These

creatures appear to be single-minded and impassive for the most part, only broken by the savage bloodthirst of Frenzy — but still waters, as they say, run deep.

Although the Rokea aren't completely enamored with tool use, they aren't totally unfamiliar with the concept. They craft fetishes of their own, just as other shapeshifters do; most common among these are weapons such as coral spears which duplicate a Fang Dagger's effects, or turtle-shell amulets that protect them from the dangers of depth pressures. They don't bother with clothing, but some ritually scar themselves in "tribal" markings.

Of course, space precludes a truly in-depth look at the Rokea (at least, if we're going to talk about anything else). The final word on the weresharks will appear in the forthcoming Changing Breed book **Rokea**.

THE OTHER CHANGERS

Some shapeshifters, of course, just aren't likely to be found in the waters unless desperation drives them. The Corax are virtually useless underwater in any form but the vulnerable Homid, and are in no way likely to give up the possibility of flight for even a few minutes. Inveterate explorers that the Nuwisha are, they *have* found one or two things amusing about the undersea, but prefer to keep their paws occupied topside — after all, there are more people to teach and prank there. The Old Man, if the stories are true, may have spent some time as a Rokea — but that would make him an anomaly, as the shark-folk are virtually bereft of humor and aren't good company for werecoyotes. Cats and water jokes aside, the Bastet are far too proud and territorial to enjoy being anything less than the masters of their surroundings, and the Ananasi have plenty of dry-land concerns to keep them occupied.

The Ratkin aren't quite as finicky. Like their spiritual cousins the Bone Gnawers, the wererats have stowed away on boats ever since, well, people were building boats. They spread to the New World on European ships, and have visited most other continents the same way. Some have even passed around their own version of the Gift: Spirit of the Fish, in order to help tunnel out highly inaccessible warrens. Although they have no particular love for the sea, they're out there as well as everywhere else; as always, the Ratkin do what they must to survive.

The few werebears that survive aren't much for the open sea, save for the members of one tribe — the arctic Ice Stalkers. These Gurahl have little enough to do with ships, but are in their own way guardians of the Arctic Ocean. Unfortunately, there are few enough of them to go around, particularly with the new stirrings under the ice cap.

Although the Mokolé rarely venture far from the coasts, they can rather neatly adapt to an oceanic environment. Some of the Australian Mokolé of "saltie"

FISHER'S GIFT

Level Three, Gnosis 6

This fetish typically takes the form of a dried strip of fish or carved length of whalebone. Upon activating the Fisher's Gift, the owner can swim as quickly as he can run in Hispo form, and breathe underwater as well, just as if he were using the Gift Spirit of the Fish. In addition, the owner can withstand pressures down to 7000 feet or so. However, the Garou must clench the fetish between his teeth for as long as he wants to benefit from these powers, which can lead to troubles if he gets in a fight and reflexively bites his opponent. To craft a Fisher's Gift, a Fish-spirit must be cajoled into entering the vessel and agreeing to share its power.

stock have been known to regularly “patrol” several miles from the beach, and there are apparently wererocodiles scattered throughout Polynesia. There would almost certainly be rumors of terrible plesiosauroid and mosasauroid reptiles single-handedly sinking Hallahan fishing vessels — if anyone were to survive such attacks.

Finally, the communal structure of the Eastern shapechangers, the *hengeyokai*, is worthy of mention. The Sea of Japan is firmly considered their territory, as are small portions of the Pacific and Indian oceans. As a whole, they are somewhat more conversant with shipboard life and plying the Umbral undersea, although this certainly varies from court to court. Their version of Spirit of the Fish hasn't yet made it into the common Gift-lore of the Beast Courts, but it certainly seems to be available for ambassadors to and from Umi.

DEEP MAGICK

Not all magi are tied to the continents by virtue of their social agendas. To be sure, most prefer to remain within easy reach of the people they're trying to bring to Ascension — but the willworkers' penchant for sequestering themselves in Horizon Realms tends to hint that the hermit's role isn't all that unpopular. And frankly, the Umbra isn't for everybody. For some, the alien but still much more familiar vista of the seas is the perfect retreat.

One attraction is certainly obvious: There aren't any Sleepers native to the ocean floor, and the odds are pretty minuscule that one will drop by at an inconvenient time. The ocean is also one of the last few stretches of physical wilderness, still relatively free from the Technocracy's eyes and a subtler place to get by than an Umbral realm. There's plenty of food (as long as you like fish), and not all that many threats that might give a mage trouble. Or at least, so it seems.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Using magick to survive underwater isn't all that difficult. Life 3 can grant gills, sonar, a more pressure-resistant body — all that stuff. Matter 2 and a reworked oxygen tank are excellent for converting exhaled carbon dioxide back into more oxygen, prolonging one's stay. For obvious reasons, these are the most popular Effects among seagoing mysticks.

In fact, with a little practice, the already dangerous pelagic environment becomes a mage's best friend. It takes very little Forces magick to alter ocean currents, temperature or depth pressures to one's advantage. A touch of Life can visit various ailments of the deep (such as nitrogen narcosis) on a foe without risking the touch of vulgarity. Entropy

breaks down scuba equipment rather easily; Spirit magick can be very potent down where the Gauntlet is thinner. The underwater environment is already a risky place for visitors; a clever mage can take advantage of that and make his enemies sorry they ever chased him down there.

THE TRADITIONS AT SEA

Not all of the Traditions hear the call of the ocean. For the most part, the Celestial Chorus and Euthanatos are rather more interested in social affairs than in solitude, and they rarely venture far from human society (or the subgroup of their choice). The Virtual Adepts aren't generally much for maritime pastimes, either (surprise, surprise).

One can find the occasional Akashic Brother or Cultist of Ecstasy on or under the waves. These people don't come to study the indigenous life, naturally; more likely, they're there to experience the sea itself, to immerse themselves in the feel of tide and current, water and light. Of the two, the Akashic Brothers are more likely, for their studies of water and its movements always offer something new to their understanding of Do. Ecstatics all too often simply get bored and move on.

Similarly, the Verbena are sometimes found in small covens along the coast or under the waves. Their mastery of Life makes them more than capable of taking refuge underwater, something that several of their Tradition did during the Burning Times. Their attraction is often to the classic cyclical nature of the tides, and the connections of ocean, moon and womanhood. However, they are little involved with the turnings of the “aquatic Triat,” and many prefer the affairs of the physical world to that of the undersea Umbra.

The Order of Hermes, interestingly enough, has plenty of scholarly interest in the seas. Even in medieval times, they were the ones to bind winds into rope knots and ceramic jugs. Nowadays, several of their members keep yachts at hand, all the better for studying storm and sea magick right at the source.

The Dreamspeakers, too, have several of their number among the waves. Many of these are drawn from islander cultures, shamans who call on the totem-powers of the spirits of storm and ocean. Of these, the most prolific are the Polynesian Kopa Loei, who are known to take oceanic spirits as their totems. The Kopa Loei have a loose organization amongst themselves, and try to keep on speaking terms with the ocean's denizens. They actually had tenuous contacts among the merfolk of Xinxux, before the death of that coral city, and are rumored to be on speaking terms with a few of the weresharks themselves. The Kopa Loei are powerful in the ways of Spirit, but also study Life with great dedication; as a result, they are quite adept at navigating their coastlines and reefs with or without boats.

But the real Tradition pioneers of the waves are the Sons of Ether. According to their lore, the very father of their philosophy, Aretus, was a traveler as well as a philosopher, ranging from Troy on to Rome and possibly even to Britain. Jules Verne's Captain Nemo is in many ways the quintessential Etherite, a man driven to change the world through Science but preferring the solitude of the ocean to the ignorant, prejudiced countries of man.

The Sons have several craft on and above the waves today. At least two, *Ahab's Ghost* and *The Electric Prospero*, are notable for chasing, harassing and even sinking Void Engineer craft with a vengeance. Their quick escapes seem to imply that the ships are Umbraworthy, and that their captains know a few shortcuts to the High Umbra. *The Electric Prospero* in particular boasts an armament that would do Doc Eon proud, including a handily electrified hull and cannons that seem to duplicate the fabled Lemurian Lightning Guns (although they, alas, are without the glyphs that ward off Paradox). Strangely enough, the Sons of Ether don't actually know the name of the *Prospero's* captain — at least, that's what they keep telling anyone who asks.

THE TECHNOCRACY

Nothing sums up the Technocracy's ocean effort like the Deepwater project: important but not critical, pioneered largely by Void Engineers, emphasizing research rather than control and causing rather more trouble than the Technocrats realize. In many ways, the frontier of the seas is about third priority — it doesn't influence Masses firsthand as much as the cities do, and there are rather fewer reality anomalies boiling up from the depths than there are sliding in from the Umbra. As such, it doesn't receive much attention from the higher-ups; there's certainly no need to divert powerful resources like HIT Marks and Universal warships to "pacify" the seas. Better to lock down the Gauntlet on land first — then it'll be time to see about making sure the oceans are safe.

As a result, the New World Order and Syndicate have only peripheral interest in exploring the oceanic frontier. Iteration X enjoys the challenge of outfitting the Earth Frontier Division, but doesn't really have that much to gain from aquatic exploration that it couldn't get from land-based resources. The Progenitors, however, have taken a distinct interest in the possibilities — every new life form catalogued offers new possibilities in genetic and chemical advances. The relatively Paradox-free environment and the abundance and diversity of local life forms make for an ideal research environment, and Progenitors have been working in seaside laboratories for a long time. After all, it's far easier to refine a new life form away from the Masses and gradually acclimatize it to the surface than it would be to whip the new beastie up from scratch in the middle of

Chicago. The Progenitors are crossing their fingers with Project: Deepwater; if it goes well, they want similar research stations in the Arctic, the Atlantic and along the Great Barrier Reef.

However, there's no Technocrat that enjoys the possibilities of the deep ocean more than a Void Engineer. Wherever there's a dark, cold grotto in the ocean floor that just might be teeming with undiscovered life, you can bet there's a Void Engineer requesting permission to get down there and have a look.

VOID ENGINEERS

The Void Engineers love frontiers, and are delighted that the Earth still has a few for them to explore. In particular, the Earth Frontier Division (or EFD) is the branch charged with mapping out all the unknown portions of the planet. Needless to say, the ocean is priority one for the EFD. Their undersea operatives are the most numerous of the division; they're called the Aquatic Exploration Teams, or "Squids" to their fellow Void Engineers.

The EFD has limited files on many of the creatures they've discovered below the depths. They are well aware of the presence of *some* sort of sentient, supernaturally powerful shark with a malignant attitude; however, they have no idea that these sharks are in fact shapeshifters. The Mariners are as of yet a rumor to the Squids; however, a few fleeting sightings and a little common logic seem to dictate that an aquatic variety of vampire is more than possible, it's likely. The Squids don't believe in ghosts *per se*, but are developing a slowly growing file on extradimensional "echoes" that seem to occur frequently around shipwrecks and the sites of ocean disasters; the wrecked hulk of the *Titanic* in particular seems to host several odd fluctuations in the dimensional fabric. However, the EFD's most common victims, the merfolk, are nothing more than a side note to the Squids; tragically, the mere presence of a Squid is enough to strip a mer of his *fae mien* and drown him on the spot. Only one mer's body has been recovered by EFD, but they classified the gill-less cadaver as a deceased mage; the corpse's odd hairlessness and other evolutionary adaptations were officially dismissed as a peculiar atavistic throwback.

The current director of the EFD is Isabel Dubhe, a lean woman who seems to be in her mid-30s. Dubhe is almost literally possessed by the demon of discovery; she devours each new report from her field teams, and often wrangles permission from her superiors to go "personally check up on" particularly interesting endeavors. Dubhe was part of the original survey team for Project: Deepwater, and has visited the facility on roughly a bimonthly basis, just to see how things are going. Tragically, her obsession with the grander scope of things has left her somewhat blinded to the

corruption that's leaking into the EFD by way of their Pentex allies; she's hands-on only in the field, and would prefer that others deal with the fiddly bits necessary to keep an operation running. This is all the opening that Project Iliad needed.

Needless to say, the Earth Frontier Division has developed a number of ways to deal with the undersea environment. The most common is the Costeau Mark III, a roughly Winnebago-sized submarine which can accommodate a four-member Aquatic Exploration Team, but can be piloted just as neatly by a solo operative. A common variant adapts some of the "cargo space" into travel tanks where GENES are stored; in such fashion, a single Squid can neatly drift into a "problem site," drop a payload of bioengineered killers, and return to pick them up in an hour or two.

THE NEPHANDI

It's not patently obvious exactly why, but the Fallen seem to have always had an affinity for the ocean's depths. Perhaps it's a taste for metaphor — the seas encompass the whole world and are bright and clear at first glance, but only on the surface. Below, the waters are lightless and cold — and the midnight waters at the heart of the ocean are far and away the greatest portion of all the seas. In that respect, establishing an seabed Labyrinth is almost an exercise in symbolic meditation; to reach the heart of the unholy place's power, one must sink below the sunlit facade and dive into the hostile void beneath.

The depths are in many ways perfect hiding places. Only the Void Engineers and the Sons of Ether descend there with any regularity, and even these visitors are few, far between — and usually alone. There are things of antiquity on the ocean floor, eroded monoliths that grant insight to those who have come after. Paradox, of course, is weak — a seductive lure all its own to those Fallen who have a taste for power and dislike masking their strength.

But worst of all, there are allies down here. The undersea paths into the Deep Umbra are very useful in reaching Those Beyond. What's more, the hoary coils of the Kraken are quite perceptible to those who know what to look for, and the Nephandi are just such a group. One or two Ahrimans have learned of the existence of the Chulorviah, and have begun negotiations to learn the tentacled ones' spiritual wisdom in exchange for certain... favors.

METHODOLOGY

Xsiaquotal Labyrinth, off the coast of Santa Barbara, is a perfect example of a Nephandic underwater chantry. Headed by the Gilledian Marcus Delarey, the place is a maze of tunnels carved into an undersea cliff. Although the Labyrinth is filled with air, it's a long dive to get there. The Labyrinth is only an afternoon's travel, or less, depending on who's making the

travel arrangements) from the heart of Santa Barbara, so there are ample human resources to be had while still maintaining the solitude that the Nephandi so prize.

The Nephandi themselves tend to use Life magick to survive underwater, at least until they're home. The acolytes they... recruit don't have that option. To that effect, the Fallen have devised several varieties of items to help their new servants make the journey. These Talismans and devices take several forms, including huge air-filled bubbles usable as diving bells, peculiar collars that tap directly into the wearer's blood supply and keep the oxygen levels high (Siren's Tears and Breather Collars; for more information on these devices see **The Technomancer's Toybox** pg. 75), half-symbiotic mollusks that clap over the wearer's mouth and filter the ocean water into air, and so on. These things are typically vulgar, since they're designed for the un-Awakened's use; most Nephandi prefer to drug their new recruits just enough to take the edge off their disbelief.

When it comes to defending their lairs, the Nephandi are quite versatile. A typical Labyrinth's defenses might include allied spirits of corruption (often with a Kraken motif), magickally engineered guard-beasts, terrible currents that dash visitors into the jagged rocks (unless they know the secret of navigating past), sections of lightless and freezing-cold waters — the list could go on and on.

MARAUDERS

The Mad Ones, as always, are hard to stereotype. They have no common practices amongst themselves, so there's no real way of pigeonholing their tendencies for land-based or maritime activities. They do tend to be creatures of the Umbra first and foremost, and there's little documented evidence of them taking to the water; of course, there's a lot of water for a Marauder to get lost in. Although a *Flying Dutchman*-esque galleon loaded with insane, near-omnipotent delusionaries is a terrifying concept, it's one that hasn't been verified by any reliable source.

Yet.

WATERY GRAVES

The rotted wood of the wharf looked barely able to sustain the number of chained wraiths that stood on it. Trisha was prodded at sword point towards the water's edge by the Centurion, who was clearly nervous.

Slowly a rent appeared in the sky, just above the surface of the sea, the edges crackling with energy. Through the hole spilled an eerie purple light. Around her Trisha could sense the Legionnaires tensing. Through the gap sailed a vast clipper, its ragged sails billowing in an unseen wind. A series of crude patches lined one side of the ship.

The Centurion breathed a sigh of relief. "Your ship is here, Thralls. Safe journey." The sarcasm in his voice told her that it would be anything but that.

While Kindred may find sanctuary in the sea, Rokea call it home and magi treat it as a new frontier, wraiths have an uneasy relationship with water. For a start, precious few of them can move through it with any ease. More significantly, though, it deprived many of them of life.

Some people claim that drowning is a "nice" way to die. For a few that might be the case: a feeling of womb-like comfort fills them as their brain dies. For most, though, the slow asphyxiation as one is forced to breathe fluid is a panicked, terror-ridden final experience. The final moment of death can take anything from a few seconds to a few minutes. Extremely cold water often speeds up the process, causing shock and hypothermia, but occasionally it forces the body into a coma-like state. Then death can take hours.

Given that most drowning victims are also meeting their end thousands of miles from friends, family and homes, is it any surprise that so many of those who die at sea become wraiths?

Few wraiths who are born from individual drownings last long. Left Cauled and alone, isolated from the rest of wraith society (and even their Fetters) by thousands of miles, those that don't stumble into Nihils or get caught by Spectres are easy prey for their Shadows.

The vast majority of wraiths who die at sea meet their end in a shipwreck. Few other peacetime accidents cause as much loss of life at once. A shipwreck offers manifold ways to die: drowning, either in the sea, or trapped in a compartment as water fills it; explosions; crushing as the ship disintegrates; even exposure, if you survive the wreck itself and are left floating in the sea.

CRAWLING FROM THE WRECK

Not every ship that goes down will reemerge as a relic on the seas of the Shadowlands. For a vessel to cross the Shroud, it has to have a significance above that it has to its crew (unless the crew is extremely large). If only a few hands go down on an ordinary, unremarkable vessel in a largely unreported sinking, it is unlikely to become a relic.

However, if the wreck is one of which the news will spread, and its loss will touch the hearts of many, it may well cross the Shroud. Some appear instantly at the moment of their destruction. Others take time to appear, as the word of the loss spreads in the Skinlands, and its impact is felt among loved ones.

Military ships cross the Shroud with more frequency than their civilian counterparts, especially in wartime. The trauma and wholesale loss of life – from gunfire or torpedo hit, fires that rage through the ship and the sinking itself – make it more likely. Still, not all torpedoed ships have won

enough affection (or take enough crewmembers to the bottom) to give them form in the Shadowlands.

Merchant ships do pass through the Shroud as well. While recent advances in technology have made losses at sea more infrequent, in years gone past many merchant ships would founder with no chance of rescue, and little hope of the crew's loved ones ever discovering their fate. Such ships would appear gradually in the Shadowlands, over a period of months on occasions, as the slow realization dawned that the ship would never be returning.

Many of the crew that died when the ship went down will appear as wraiths on the deck of the vessel. There most will remain until the vessel is found by another Ghost Ship, or one of the hands has enough strength of will to remove their own Caul.

GHOST SHIPS

The damage that took the ship to the bottom appears on the vessel, whether that be a gaping hole under the waterline or terrible charring on the hull. A ship that sank in a storm will appear awash with water, never mind how much bailing the crew tries. Inside, the ships are damp and clammy. Anything stored below decks ends up crusted with plasmic mold.

Unless a wraith skilled in Navigation and Argos takes the helm and invests sufficient Pathos to get the ship underway, most vessels will drift around the site of their demise for all eternity. However, relic ships are such a valuable commodity that few are left that long. They are prized not only for their inherent value but for the relic cargoes they may carry and the souls that are on board.

BOARDING ACTIONS

Most relics are found by another ghost ship from one of the main underworld factions, known as Reaper or salvage ships. The Reaper ship will heave to a short distance from the newborn relic. Launches full of trained wraiths travel the distance between the two. If the newborn relic is moving slowly enough (and the water still enough, such as in the Shadowlands of the Sargasso), the wraiths may simply run across the solid surface of the sea.

They throw grappling ropes onto the gunwales and board the vessel. They move quickly to contain any Cauled wraiths aboard and then try and recruit, or capture, any that have removed their own Caul. A wraith skilled in both Argos and Navigation takes the helm, and both ships set sail for the nearest Necropolis harbor.

In the last century, such actions have become increasingly dangerous. Many wrecks open Nihils, sucking weaker souls straight to Oblivion. As ships and their crews have grown bigger, larger wrecks can even cause small, localized Maelstroms.



The number of Mortwights born on such ships has increased rapidly and combat has become a common occurrence during boarding actions. The Dutchmen have taken to using ships with a hold full of marines to mitigate the threat. Still, the ferocity with which newly-born Haints and Mortwights can fight makes capturing such a ship a risky venture indeed.

MARITIME HAUNTS

A very few vessels gain enough Memoriam that they become mobile Haunts. These are the ships that are discussed and argued over by the living for years after their loss. Such finds are deeply prized by Renegades and the Hierarchy alike. They can stay at sea for much greater periods than most vessels and need no Pathos to move. More importantly, the crew gains sustenance from the ship itself. Famous Skinlands ships like the *Lusitania*, the *Bismark*, the *General Belgrano* and the *Prince Alexsei* all now have pride of place as Haunts in Shadowlands fleets.

When capital ships — usually dreadnoughts and super-dreadnoughts in earlier centuries, but aircraft carriers in recent years — gain this status, they often become the flagship of a Legion's fleet. For example, the *HMS Ark Royal*, the fourth ship to bear that name, was retired and broken up in the 1980s. It became the focus of so much public attention in the UK, including a best-selling single, that it gained Haunt status. The ship is now the flagship of the Iron Legion — much to the great irritation of the Smiling Lord who has the previous *Ark Royal*, sunk in World War II, in his fleet.

It is possible to artificially create a mobile Haunt through use of the Argos art: Moving Haunt and the Lifeweb art: Splice Strand (see *Sea of Shadows*, p. 90), but few wraiths have the knowledge to do this and they don't share it readily.

THE LEGIONS AT SEA

*On them gleamed the moon's wan lustre,
When the shade of Hosier brave
His pale bands was seen to muster
Rising from their watery grave;*
— Richard Glover, "Admiral Hosier's Ghost"

Since the first trireme passed through the Shroud into the Shadowlands, the Hierarchy has coveted relic ships. Once Ferryman guided them across the Sunless Sea to the Far Shores. Each carried a full cargo of wraiths seeking Transcendence.

Nowadays, the Legions seeks them for a more mundane purpose: military advantage. Each advance in naval technology offered the Deathlords the chance to steal a

march on their rivals. During the American Civil War, both the USS *Monitor* and the CSS *Virginia*, the first true Ironclads, where eagerly sought by the Legions when they were lost at sea.

Wholesale destruction of ships, such as the loss of the Spanish Armada, the scuttling of a German fleet at Scapa Flow and the carnage of Pearl Harbor, have seen the Stygian navy change virtually overnight. Entire Renegade settlements have surrendered when the might of 10 newly-formed

THE DUTCHMEN

Gradually the gloom seemed to clear away, and a lambent pale blaze to light up that part of the horizon. Not a breath of wind was on the water — the sea was like a mirror — more and more distinctly did the vessel appear, till her hull, masts and yards were clearly visible.

— Captain Frederick Marryat, *The Phantom Ship*

For much of Stygia's history the responsibility for retrieving relic ships lay with two Guilds: the Harbingers and the Oracles. Many of the tactics used to this day were developed by them during the 16th Century as Britain and Spain vied for naval supremacy, with the consequent loss of many vessels.

Their greatest challenge came in 1588 when around 60 ships from the Spanish Armada were wrecked all around the coasts of Scotland and Ireland by both the weather and Lord Howard of Effingham and Lord Henry Seymour's fleets. The vast majority of ships were recovered as relics, but precious few made it into the possession of the Legions.

The reason became amply clear a decade later, when the ships were instrumental in the Guilds' attempted *coup d'état*, blockading the military wharves of Stygia. With the failure of the revolt and the Breaking of the Guilds, Charon made relic salvage the responsibility of the Legions. Many Legions, particularly the Emerald and Grim, swiftly recruited experienced wraiths from the Guilds into their own ranks to create dedicated salvage teams.

After the chaos that erupted in the Shadowlands following the Great War, Charon moved responsibility for salvage once more, this time from the Legions to a newly formed, independent order, answerable only to the Deathlords as a whole. Thus the Order of the Crested Wave was born.

In recent decades, younger wraiths in the Order have come to describe themselves as "Dutchmen" after the legendary *Flying Dutchman*, a phantom ship which is believed to appear to doomed vessels. Much to the chagrin of elder wraiths, the name has stuck.

relic battleships have borne down on them from the gray mists of the Shadowlands seas.

While many of the ships find their way to the Tempest and the Iron Pier in Stygia's military wharf district, many remain attached to the Necropolis ports. Warships are far from the only relics that tie up there. Freighters and troop ships are both valued as one of the safest and easiest ways to move around large numbers of troops, relics and artifacts.

STYGIAN SLAVERS

"It's simple. You want a load of cargo shipped, you use the safest and most effective method. For sending our tithe of Thralls to Stygia, nothing beats a ship."

— Therese Honeyball, Overlord of the Emerald Legion, Necropolis London

It was no coincidence that London, a port, was chosen as the first Necropolis. The Stygian economy is based on the wholesale movement of Thralls, and while the Midnight Express and the Harbingers have their role to play, there's nothing like a ship for getting people from place to place.

Both the Legions and independent Reapers maintain a large number of slaving vessels. These fleets are a rag-tag armada of anything from 17th century Guineamen through to modern freighters. The age of the relic matters little: the conditions are equally inhuman on every ship.

The large hold spaces are filled with lines of soulforged chains, to which the Thralls are manacled for the duration of the voyage. Unlike their Skinlands predecessors, Stygian slavers have no need to carry food or water for their cargo. The risk of disease is nonexistent and breathing isn't a concern, so Thralls are crammed into holds at a density that leaves them barely enough room to move.

Crew, paranoid of the chances of rebellion and glad of the chance to torment those of lower station than themselves, often forbid the Thralls from talking to each other and viciously beat those who do. The captives may be shut up in the darkness of the hold for weeks on end with only the moans of their fellow captives and the incessant whispers of their Shadows for company.

Some Thralls, especially those who do not yet understand the nature of the afterlife, seek escape by hammering their Corpus against the ship's bulkheads until they drop into Harrowings, often at the urging of their Shadows. Others just fall to Catharsis and wreak havoc in the hold.

To prevent this, the Legions make a single concession to the cargo's welfare: a shipboard Pardoner. Wooden planks are positioned around and across the hold, allowing the Pardoner to examine the Thralls on a regular basis in relative safety. Those she deems in danger of becoming Shadow-eaten are pulled out for immediate Castigation.

Even so, slavers generally lose at least 10% of their cargo before their arrival at another Necropolis or Stygia. Most consider this an acceptable attrition rate.

CHARTING A COURSE

For security's sake all ships on legitimate business follow standard trade routes between the major Necropoli and Stygia. Custom sees captains taking their Stygia-bound vessels to three miles out before shifting to the Tempest. While Spectral incursions through a newly-opened passage are rare, most Anacreons prefer the danger well out to sea.

Cargo-carrying ships travel in convoys whenever possible. The principal cargo vessel will take the center position, with the smaller, faster moving warships around it. Harbingers flit from bridge to bridge, carrying orders between the convoy commander and the captains of each of the ships.

Specialized uses of Argos and Lifeweb can be used to navigate a ship with surprising accuracy. There are few other options. Relic compasses simply don't work in the Shadowlands and artifact ones are rare. Without a Harbinger, Monitor or artifact compass aboard, a ship is restricted to traveling along coastlines or sailing through the Tempest where a wraith skilled in Argos can use the Orienteering ability.

Ships are at their most vulnerable when piercing the barrier between the Tempest and the Shadowlands. Each ship must come through separately and, if there's a spy in the crew of any vessels, Renegades can strike quickly and easily, knocking a single ship out of the convoy for boarding and capture. And the seas of the Shadowlands certainly aren't short of Renegades.

RENEGADE SHIPS

"Aye, there's nothing like the sight of a Hierarchy captain, tied to the stern of the ship by the Moliated remains of his first mate, being dragged into a Harrowing."

—Matthew Gaughan, Irish freebooter aboard the *Houge*

The problem of Renegade ships is probably greater than anyone in Stygia realizes. Ships whose crew free themselves from their Cauls are often long gone from the wreck site before the Dutchmen arrive. Some ship-borne Renegade communities date back to before the Hierarchy made any organized attempts to harvest relic ships.

Mutiny is not uncommon on Hierarchy ships which have been away from home port too long. The Legions often take advantage of the fact that wraiths don't need food or water to stay at sea for periods that living captains wouldn't contemplate. The long separation from Fetters is not easy for any wraith to bear. It's lucky for the Deathlords that most crews have agendas that don't bring them into conflict with the Legions.

While the Stygian navies have a distinctly British military feel to them — an inevitable side-effect of centuries of naval domination — Renegade ships are a much more diverse bunch. Many choose to protect the wrecks which house their bodies and Fetters and only stray from the site to visit other, landlocked Fetters. Others indulge in the difficult task of keeping open communication lines between geographically scattered Renegade groups. They sail from Necropolis to Necropolis, beach under the cover of night, and attempt to escape before the Hierarchy patrols find them.

Other borderline Renegades include the few explorers that have not been tempted by the chance to explore the mysteries of the Tempest. The map of the Shadowlands is not as clearly drawn for Stygian scholars as it is for their Skinlands counterparts.

The Legions pay explorers good money to bring back information about wraith communities on islands as yet unbeholden to any of the Dark Kingdoms. A few brave captains take their vessels to the shores of the Dark Kingdoms in an attempt to chart their geography more fully. The disappearance rate among these expeditions is appalling and some Hierarchy officials are beginning to question whether the foreign rulers are learning more about Stygia than Stygia is learning about them.

Still, most Renegades simply try to live a quiet life outside the auspices of the Hierarchy. Few possess the strength to try and compete with its navies and wisely choose to keep their heads down.

PIRATES & PRIVATEERS

The amount of trade that the Hierarchy commits to the sea is an irresistible target for many with an eye to a quick obolus. During the 17th and 18th centuries, pirates, and their semi-sanctioned cousins the privateers, were a constant threat to shipping.

Life at sea was dangerous and often short. Both privateer and pirate frequently found themselves blasted through the Shroud by the guns of various countries' navies.

Famous deceased Skinlands names like Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard, have long been thorns in the side of the Hierarchy. The 11th Legion, an elite Stygian unit with ships made of Stygian steel and sails woven from Moliated wraiths has been assigned to hunt them down, with little success.

While the pirates expected a poor reception from the authorities of the Shadowlands and certainly weren't disappointed, the privateers soon found themselves chafing under the tighter restrictions of the Hierarchy. Many of them went Renegade in short order, and found safe harbor in a familiar place.

THE BROKEN CHAIN

The losses during the Africa to America leg of the slave trade — the infamous Middle Passage — were horrific. Anywhere from 20% to 50% of the slaves on board would perish of disease, hunger, dehydration or simply through losing the will to live. The death toll was usually in the hundreds. Even the crew suffered fatalities: disease claimed them just as easily and they had little protection against the illnesses endemic to Africa. By the time a Guineaman reached port, it would be carrying several wraiths.

A group of wraiths of ex-slaves took to riding ships to reap the dead slaves and capture and punish crew who perished. On the occasions when a ship went down, they were uniquely placed to capture its relic. When enough had been seized, the group launched a series of lightning raids against Stygian convoys, with patchy but increasing success.

In the centuries since, the Broken Chain, as the organization was dubbed, has become one of the most

organized and focused Renegade groups. All the ships and crews are sworn to fighting the Thrall trade in the Shadowlands. They target Thrall ships exclusively, ignoring relic-based cargoes.

Captured ships and those ex-Thralls who wish to join the Broken Chain are taken to one of a series of camps on the African coast, which are tolerated by the native wraiths. Artificers keep their forges stoked, ready to turn the captured Hierarchy crewmen into repair materials and weapons.

The group maintains many links with Renegade communities all around the Atlantic. Liberated Thralls who don't want to join the crusade are helped to find a new circle of wraiths.

There is even some cordial, but distant, contact with the kingdoms that make up the Dark Kingdom of Ivory. However, too many former slaves remember being sold into slavery by their countrymen to return to their arms too easily.



PORT ROYAL

Port Royal in Jamaica, which was obliterated by an earthquake and tidal wave in 1692 with the loss of nearly 2,000 people, was the most notorious port on the face of the planet. Once known as the "wickedest city in Christendom," many of the buildings of the town and much of the port passed into the Shadowlands of the Caribbean, known as the Mirrorlands.

The town smelt vile even when it lived. In the Shadowlands the rank stench is overpowering. The mountains behind the town tower over it like the dark, jagged teeth of some vast beast about to swallow it whole. The ships moored in the dank waters of the port fly a hundred variations of the Jolly Roger, the traditional skull-and-crossbones pirate flag.

Forges off the docks belch smoke into the sky, as captured mariners are smelted into patches for the ships, cutlasses, and chains for Thralls. Warehouses along the seafront hold captive Thralls whose fate has yet to be decided. Rowdy taverns are dotted along the harbor, in which Sandmen weave dreams of drink, doubloons and debauched nights for the obolich pirates.

The port remains a safe haven because the Mirrorlands are a dangerous, Maelstrom-ridden area, and

few Hierarchy ships ever venture there. The majority of sailors have no idea quite why Les Invisibles, the wraiths of the Caribbean, leave the town alone; most presume that the sheer number of ships there is reason enough. Rumor has it that the senior pirates patrol the borders of the Mirrorlands, keeping it free from Stygian or Dark Kingdom of Ivory interference.

Smaller pirate Necropoli can be found along the north coast of Africa in what were the Barbary States in the mid-17th century. Ignored by the rulers of the kingdoms that make up the Dark Kingdom of Ivory and beyond the reach of Stygia, the pirates based there are free to harass Hierarchy ships traveling between the Necropoli of the north Mediterranean coast.

PIRATE TACTICS

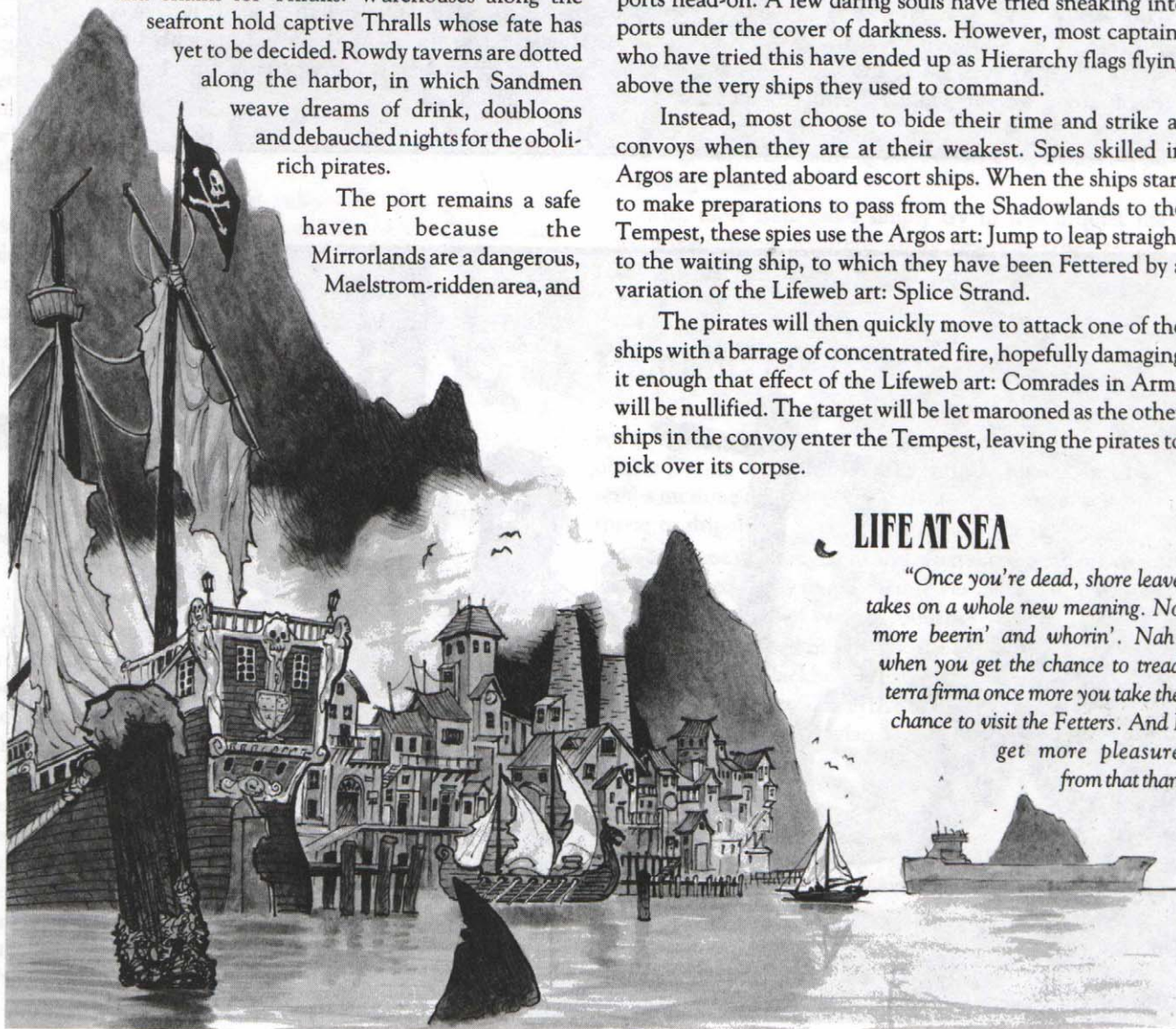
Pirate bands wouldn't dream of attacking Hierarchy ports head-on. A few daring souls have tried sneaking into ports under the cover of darkness. However, most captains who have tried this have ended up as Hierarchy flags flying above the very ships they used to command.

Instead, most choose to bide their time and strike at convoys when they are at their weakest. Spies skilled in Argos are planted aboard escort ships. When the ships start to make preparations to pass from the Shadowlands to the Tempest, these spies use the Argos art: Jump to leap straight to the waiting ship, to which they have been Fettered by a variation of the Lifeweb art: Splice Strand.

The pirates will then quickly move to attack one of the ships with a barrage of concentrated fire, hopefully damaging it enough that effect of the Lifeweb art: Comrades in Arms will be nullified. The target will be let marooned as the other ships in the convoy enter the Tempest, leaving the pirates to pick over its corpse.

LIFE AT SEA

"Once you're dead, shore leave takes on a whole new meaning. No more beerin' and whorin'. Nah, when you get the chance to tread terra firma once more you take the chance to visit the Fetters. And I get more pleasure from that than



I ever did from the booze and birds."

— James Meeks, helmsman, SS *Athenia*

The existence of a ghost ship crew is not an easy one. Isolated from their Fetters, often by thousands of miles, and deprived of the chance to experience the emotions that drive their Passions, many crew members become easy targets for their Shadows. Small wonder that few ships sail without a Pardoner on board. Even so, frequent periods in dock and extended shore leave are needed to keep a crew functioning effectively.

Renegade ships can ill-afford to weigh anchor in a Necropolis, and so must make do with occasional visits to smaller waterside communities where the Hierarchy maintains little or no presence. The captains of these vessels begrudge every second spent at anchor, for that is another second they are vulnerable to detection and capture. The only way a captured pirate returns to sea is as a soulforged repair to a holed vessel.

Crews are generally smaller than their Skinlands counterparts. Only a handful of wraiths are needed to run a relic vessel: a navigator who is either skilled in Argos or Lifeweb, a helmsman, and if the ship is Tempest-bound, a Harbinger.

The condition of the ship is largely irrelevant if it stays in the Shadowlands seas. A gaping hole in the side won't let in water there. But if the ship intends to make the trip to the Tempest, it damn well better be watertight. Such ships carry a much larger complement of sailors, ready to work the ship once the environment becomes 'real' to the ship within the confines of the Sunless Sea. An Artificer or two doesn't go amiss when repair work needs to be done quickly.

Shadowlands crews inevitably carry a large contingent of combat-skilled wraiths. Those who possess Arcanoi that can be used offensively at range are particularly valued. Keening and Outrage are often used in ship to ship combat, prior to boarding actions. While most Hierarchy captains avoid Hunters, they are often found aboard Renegade vessels, using Dark Ether to make it harder to target key parts of a ship.

The lucky few wraiths that crew floating Haunts have life somewhat easier, but many of them have Fetters that are on the seabed, and inaccessible to them. This creates an added tension to their existence. Wraiths that have an innate ability to travel through water command high prices for their services.

THE DEEPWATER THREAT

Recently, several wraiths with Fetters deep in the Pacific Ocean have been dropped into Harrowings by their unexpected destruction. Investigations into this have uncovered a large underwater station being constructed by unknown forces. The Deathlords have yet to form a policy on

this 'Deepwater' for, while it undoubtedly poses a threat, little action can be taken without blatant violation of the Dictum Mortuum and none of them wishes to be the first to suggest *that* course of action.

This sort of threat to a Fetter has led many wraiths to seek out Puppeteers in the hope that they can be taught to Rise. After all, if a wraith's corpus can't pass through the water, surely its former body is the next best thing, especially as there's none of that pesky breathing to worry about. The Puppeteers are, of course, more than happy to let these desperate wraiths put themselves in debt to the Guild.

HERETIC SHIPS

In the time of the Flaying and the Third Abomination, Heretic ships were a common sight around the coasts of South America. Isolated from the Hierarchy, and only competing for ships with a less skilled nautical culture, Heretics acquired relics in unprecedented numbers. And they lost every single one of them when Stygia took the Flayed Lands for itself.

The modern Heretical cult that is organized enough, and contains enough skilled wraiths, to capture and hold a relic ship is a rare cult indeed. However, there does exist one cult that has achieved a degree of success: The Seekers of the Tempestuous Seas.

Founded in the early years of this century by former Able Seaman Phillip Thompson, who perished in San Francisco bay in a particularly embarrassing botched shipboard initiation ritual, it draws on the conceptual similarity between the sea and many parts of the Tempest. Cult members firmly believe that somewhere deep in the Atlantic ocean lies a pathway to the original calm, still Sea of Shadows and the Far Shores. All who find this path will achieve Transcendence.

The cult maintains a small base in a cove on the coast of Argentina, and from there launches regular expeditions to find the their hallowed Atlantic Passage. Their technique is simple: find a Nihil and sail into it. Not surprisingly, precious few of these ships ever return to report the failure of their expedition.

Much of the cult's activity is focused on "liberating" vessels from the "heathen" Hierarchy. Lacking the resources to capture a ship at sea, the cult relies on methods others rightly dismiss as suicide: raids on poorly organized and defended Necropolis ports. After a couple of lucky escapes, the cult has become surprisingly adept at this sort of operation. That may eventually prove its undoing: it has finally come to the notice of the Hierarchy, which is even now hunting it down.

SPECTRE SHIPS

"Oh, there's always some willful SOB who pulls off his own Caul, but they're easy to deal with. They either cooperate

or you clap their sorry ass in irons. But if they turn round and you find yourself staring into the goddamn Oblivion-shot eyes of a Haint, then you know you're in real shit."

—Martyn Atkinson, Dutchman marine, Necropolis Boston

Until the early part of the 20th Century relic retrieval was relatively easy. If you could hold off the Renegades until you claimed the ships, you were fine. Then, in 1912, word came from the Oracles that the newly-launched RMS *Titanic* would sink on her maiden voyage. A convoy of three ships from the Emerald Legion, one cargo vessel loaded with marines and two small warships, were dispatched to shadow the giant liner's voyage. None of the ships were ever heard from again.

Two weeks later a second group of ships arrived on the scene to find nothing but a huge Nihil spewing a localized Maelstrom into the Shadowlands. They barely escaped intact and several crew members were lost to Oblivion or Harrowings.

During the First World War the reason became clear. Where once destroying a ship was a slow, difficult process, the new torpedoes and explosives could send a ship and its crew to the bottom more quickly than ever. Just as on the battlefields of Europe, Mortwights were being born on the newly formed relic ships in large numbers. It dawned on the Legions that Spectre ships were being created for the first time and that the biggest ship ever built had been lost to the forces of Oblivion.

New Spectre ships often don't always have the organization to fight off the Legion's experienced Reaper ships, and many of those that manage to do so fall to infighting between the newly-born Spectres. Those that survive inevitably end up in the Tempest — the Mortwight's skill in Tempest-Weaving instinctively draws them to the nearest Nihil and through it to the Tempest.

This is what happened to the *Titanic*. The most monstrous, most famous lost ship of all is now the flagship of Oblivion. And recent years have proven even more troubling to Hierarchy fleets, as they watch the Quick devour everything *Titanic*-related and shudder at the thought of the Memoriam the Spectre ship must be accumulating....

OTHER SHORES

"There's no way I'm going back to the shores of the Jade Kingdom. If dodging the damn Bugis ships wasn't enough, there's them bloody crabs that come scuttling over the sea at you, with the human faces on their backs yelling something incomprehensible. I've never seen anything move so fast. They tore one of the ratings apart in seconds."

— Captain Peter L'amie of the *Bucentaure*

Ships of the West have learned to keep to their own waters. The strange Mirrorlands are unwelcoming to

THE FALKLANDS WAR

*You had told me that you shall always be their property
And that I would have to share you with her
But now as I stand at the site and cry
I realize in her arms you now rest*

— Elaine, "For a Member of HMS Sheffield's Ship's Company"

The greatest influx of ships into the Shadowlands in recent years came in 1982. The Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic were held by the United Kingdom, but claimed by Argentina. In 1982 the Argentines invaded.

The British Government responded by dispatching a naval task force. The Dutchmen didn't need the Oracles to tell them that it would be worth sending a flotilla of salvage ships along with the fleet.

The first decisive naval action of the war saw the submarine *HMS Conqueror* sink the *General Belgrano*, with the loss of 321 lives. The relic *Belgrano* appeared in the Shadowlands with unexpected suddenness as the news of the sinking flashed across the Skinlands news services. With it came a minor, localized Maelstrom that tied up many of the ships in the Dutchmen's flotilla.

Two days later, *HMS Sheffield* was sunk by Exocet missiles and it appeared in the Shadowlands equally quickly. Over the next few days four more Royal Navy ships were lost, along with a commandeered merchant vessel, the *Atlantic Conveyor*. All become relics.

The Dutchmen were already stretched to their limit. Then, on June 8, disaster struck. With the Maelstrom raging around the islands, they were hard pressed to keep control of the ships they had. The *Belgrano* had been dispatched back to Necropolis Buenos Aires and the *Atlantic Conveyor* to Stygia, while the British warships, and what crew had come through as wraiths, were pressed into service.

Word came from the Oracles that another, smaller sinking was imminent at Fitzroy. The *Sir Tristram* and the *Sir Galahad* landing ships were on shore — but there was a delay in disembarking the troops. Argentinean aircraft caught them in the open, in daylight. 50 men and two ships perished in flames and agony.

The recently captured, but badly undermanned, *HMS Ardent* was sent to the scene — and was swiftly overrun by the Mortwights born of the disaster. It, along with the *Galahad* and *Tristram* vanished into the Maelstrom. All three ships have been seen harrying Stygian convoys in the Tempest in the years since.

inexperienced wraiths. What's more, the Bugis ships hold much of the Pacific and the seas of the Jade Empire with such strength that few Stygian ships dare venture there.

The might of the Jade Kingdom's navy was felt during the clash between Stygia and the Yellow Spring during Word War II, and the near-sacking of Necropolis Boston. While the Jade Kingdom's fleet is known to have suffered many losses during the Japanese rebellion and in clashes with ships crewed by *funa-yurei* (a class of Japanese wraiths who perished at sea), Yu Huang's alliance with the Bugis has strengthened in recent years.

However, Stygia has been recruiting some of the bolder non-affiliated explorers and offering them considerable amounts of oboli to scout the current condition of the Jade navy. The few that have returned with reports have refused point-blank ever to repeat the trip.

The Jade Kingdom's shorelines are guarded by fearsome wraiths which bear a striking resemblance to the Heiké crabs of Japanese legend. Described by the returning sailors as being like "barghests with intelligence," they are more than likely the reason behind the disappearance of the other exploration vessels.

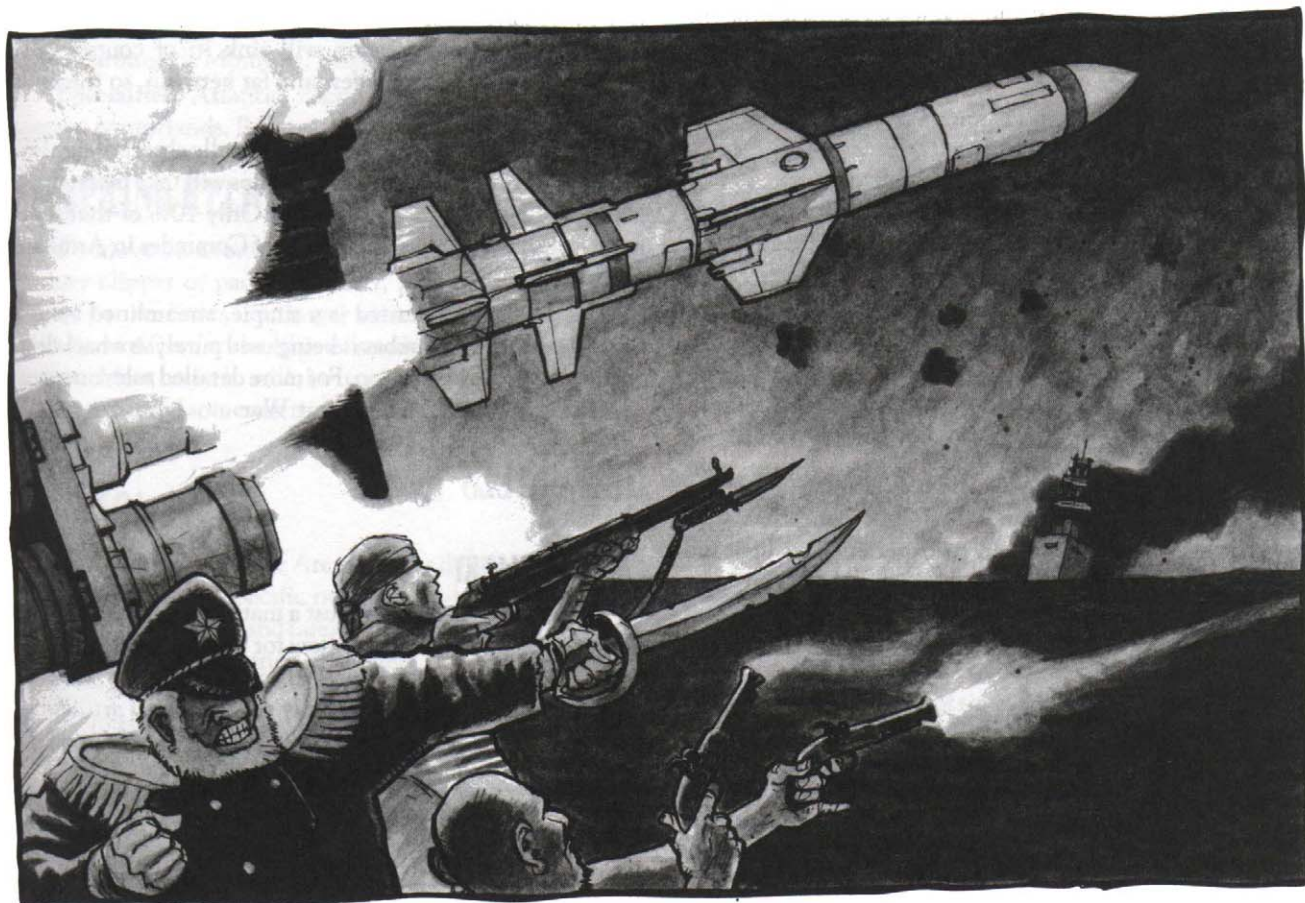
RULES

WRAITHS AND WATER

To a wraith, water is quite simply solid. More Heretical circles have formed trying to explain this than most Stygian mariners would care to count, but there is no avoiding the fact, unless they possess the Drowned merit (see Merits and Flaws, below).

However, this doesn't mean that falling overboard is any safer than in the Skinlands. Always presuming that the wraith doesn't go incorporeal as a result of the fall, she finds herself stranded on the ocean, unable to catch up with the fast-moving ship. Unless the vessel is prepared to go back for her, the unfortunate wraith is in for a long walk home with only her Shadow for company....

Wraiths can choose to swim if they wish, but to do so one must spend a level of Corpus to become Incorporeal. However, if he has not surfaced by the time a number of turns equal to his Stamina have passed, he loses another Corpus Level and will continue to do so until he surfaces. Deep-sea diving is a very easy way to end up in a Harrowing.



MERITS AND FLAWS

Wraiths who perish at sea, or who had a strong maritime connection in life, tend to have some common characteristics. The following merits and flaws should be available only to wraiths who drowned or who lived a nautical life, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Drowned (3 to 6 point Merit)

You finished your life in Davy's Jones's Locker and you started your afterlife there as well. As a result, you seem to be able to move through water more easily than most wraiths. When taken as a 3-point merit, Drowned allows you to spend six hours underwater without harm. After that, you lose Corpus levels normally. For 4 points you can spend 12 hours underwater without harm, and for 5 points 24 hours. For 6 points you can survive indefinitely underwater.

Natural Helmsman (1 point Merit)

Your place is behind the wheel of a ship. You can steer her through the waves of the Shadowlands seas as easily as you could a Skynlands ship. The difficulty of any tricky maneuver is reduced by two.

Seadog (2 point Flaw)

You love the sea. She is your lover, your mistress, the very reason for your existence. When away from her you become listless and lacking in direction.

You lose one point of Willpower per week away from the sea. You must make a Willpower roll to resist any opportunity to return to sea once more.

Creature of the Deep (2 point Flaw)

You listened to too many hoary, clichéd tales of ghosts of the deep from old sailors while you were alive. The idea of a bloated corpse bedecked in seaweed, dripping water gave you pleasant chills down your spine during those long nights at sea. When you died at sea, those tales twisted your corpus until you were the image of your nightmare. The difficulty of all social interaction rolls is increased by one. Should you appear to the living, they react to the Fog as if their Willpower were two lower.

Landlubber (3 point Flaw)

The sea is a terrible place. The constant motion of the waves, the unknown creatures that lurk beneath....they weren't something you wanted to experience in life, and you're no keener to experience them in death. You must make a Willpower roll to board a ship or step onto a body of water, and whilst at sea the difficulty of all physical rolls are increased by one.

NAVAL COMBAT

Naval combat is rarely fought to destruction in the present day. Relic ships are a rare and valuable resource and capture is the highest priority on every captain's mind. Thus

most assaults consist of a fast artillery barrage, followed by a fiercely fought boarding action.

If the aim is to destroy the opponent's ship, the trick is not to hole the ship, but to destroy its image. By targeting everything that makes the ship distinctive, such as sails, masts and deck features, the attacking vessel can cause its victim to simply disperse, as it loses its connection with mortal memories.

It is recommended that the ranged combat element of the battle be used as backdrop rather than the focus of the battle. If none of the characters are skilled in using a ship's guns, merely describe the resolution. Should a character be using one of the guns, follow the system below to get some measure of their impact on the battle. The character will only be marginally involved in what's happening. Focus on the boarding actions and the ferociously fought hand to hand combat, which fits better with the very personal nature of **Wraith: The Oblivion**.

System: To use ships' guns, a gunner must roll Dexterity + Naval Artillery at difficulty 5. If he doesn't possess a specialty in the relevant type of gun this rises to 9. Most guns can be fired every other turn, with the exception of cannon, which take two turns to reload and one to fire.

Pre-twentieth century weapons do 8 dice of damage. Those from this century do 12 dice. Hits from missiles or torpedoes can be assumed to cripple the target. A second hit from such a potent weapon will sink it; of course, relic missiles and torpedoes are few and far between, so this isn't as easy as it seems.

An average size relic ship can generally absorb about 100 "Corpus" levels of damage. Larger ships will take more, up to about 200 levels for a capital ship. Only 10% of that total need be inflicted before the effects of Comrades in Arms are nullified.

This system presented is a simple, streamlined system that assumes naval combat is being used purely as a backdrop to the main boarding action. For more detailed rules on naval combat, see **Wraith: The Great War**.

NEW SKILLS

NAVAL ARTILLERY

Firing ship's guns is not just a matter of knowing how to use the weapon, but how to allow for the movement of both your ship and the target. This skill covers the whole gamut of naval artillery, but does not apply to land-based artillery.

- Novice: You can hit a stationary ship moored right next to you.
- Practiced: You can hit a ship a short distance away on the open sea.
- Competent: You can hit a fast-moving ship in fair weather.

- Expert: A glimpse of hull through a fog bank is all you need to get a hit.
- Master: The people who sank the *Bismark* come to you for advice.

Possessed by: Navy gunners, Pirates

Specialties: Cannons, Culverins, Small Bore Guns, Large Bore Guns, Torpedoes, Missiles

NAVIGATION

This skill measures how well you are able to take a ship from A to B, without visiting C, D and E on the way (unless you wish to, of course). To use this skill, some information on where you are positioned is needed, and normally a map as well.

- Novice: You can sail from one side of the harbor to the other without getting lost.
- Practiced: You can direct a ship to a port on the same continent.
- Competent: You can navigate across oceans with fair accuracy.
- Expert: There isn't a port in the Shadowlands you couldn't reach.
- Master: "Cape Horn, in a Maelstrom, blindfolded? No problem, guv."

Possessed by: Navigators, Explorers, Smugglers, Pirates, Harbingers, Monitors, Ferryman

Specialties: Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic, Indian Mediterranean, Mirrorlands, Rivers

POWERING RELIC SHIPS

To move an average-sized relic ship, such as an 18th century clipper or paddle steamer, requires two points of Pathos per six hours. For larger vessels, this increases to a maximum of five for the likes of an aircraft carrier or an oil tanker. Most vessels will be powered by large Soulfire globes, mounted somewhere secure within the ship's superstructure.

ARCANOI

Variations of the basic Arcanoi have developed over the years to address the specific needs of sea-borne wraiths. In particular, use of Argos and Lifeweb has allowed Shadowlands positions to be determined accurately when artifact timepieces and compasses (see **Guildbook: Spooks & Oracles**) are unavailable.

Transporting ships between the Shadowlands and the Tempest is a two stage process. First the entire ship, crew and cargo need to be bound together as a single entity. Then the whole "unit" is pushed through into the Tempest. The Arcanoi needed to do this were once fiercely protected

by the Harbingers Guild. In the centuries since the Breaking, they have become common enough that every Legion and many Renegade bands will have the skills needed to sail ships smoothly between the two.

NEW ARTS

Argos

• **Fix Bearings** — A wraith using Fix Bearings in the Shadowlands can extend their senses through the Tempest enough to get a sense of their exact location. Fix Bearings evolved out of a skill developed during the Fourth Great Maelstrom. Harbingers caught in a Maelstrom in the Shadowlands needed a way of establishing their location, and this art was born as a result.

System: The player makes a Wits & Argos roll (difficulty 7) and spends a point of Pathos. A success will identify their position, and an approximate route to their destination. The more successes achieved, the faster and safer the route.

••••• **Safe Passage** — Use of this art allows a large single object to be pushed from the Shadowlands to the Tempest, or vice-versa. Anything that isn't part of that object, for example wraiths on a ship, will be left behind unless bound to it by use of the Lifeweb art: Comrades in Arms. The art was originally developed to push large relic buildings and vehicles through into the Tempest for transport to Stygia.

System: The player makes a Strength + Argos roll (difficulty 9). The number of success determines the length of time it takes to successfully effect the passage. Failure means the object remains where it is. A botch will cause severe damage to an object as it passes through, at the Storyteller's discretion and will cause the Harbinger to be thrown deep into the Tempest, as per Oubliette.

Use of the art costs 4 Pathos.

Lifeweb

•• **Triangulation** — By sensing the relative location of two known fetters, usually his own, a user of this art can determine his exact position in the Shadowlands. This art is the reason that for centuries Monitors were the preferred helmsmen on relic ships.

System: The player rolls Perception + Lifeweb (difficulty 8). The art costs 2 Pathos per use.

••• **Comrades in Arms** — Comrades in Arms allows a wraith to bind together the crew, cargo and ship as one "unit" for a short period of time. This allows certain Arcanos to be used on the whole group as if it were a single object. The most common use is to allow a ship and its crew to pass easily between the Shadowlands and the Tempest through the use of the Argos art Safe Passage. This art cannot be used with hostile intention, however, you can't Obliviate an entire ship just by using Comrades in Arms.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Lifeweb (difficulty 9).
The binding costs 3 Pathos to make, and costs 1 Pathos per hour to maintain.

HEIKÉ CRABS

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6
Social: Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 2
Arcanoi: Keening 4, Chains of the Emperor 2
Passions: Protect the Jade Kingdom (loyalty) 5
Fetters: 1 point remaining
Willpower: 6
Pathos: 5
Angst: 8/5
Permanent Corpus: 8
Equipment: none

Image: Each one of these creatures appears as a giant, armored crab, with razor-sharp claws on the end of each of its legs. A human face can clearly be seen on the Heiké's back.

Background: Ancient Japanese legend tells of the Heiké clan which lost a long contest with the Genji clan. At Dan-n-ura in the Straits of Shimonseki, the Heiké perished utterly. But their warriors lived on in death as Heiké crabs, huge armored beasts, with the faces of the men they once were visible on their back.

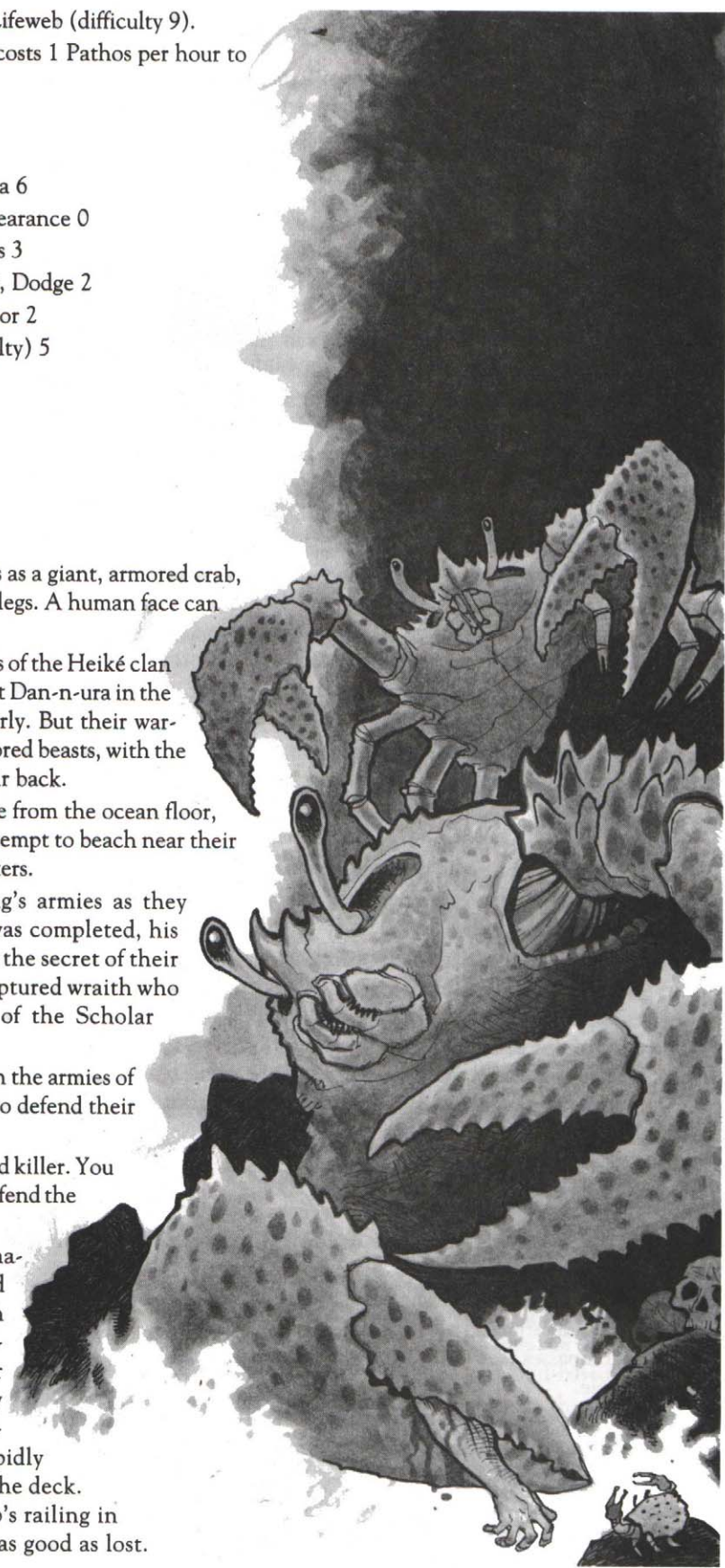
Heiké cluster round strange flames that rise from the ocean floor, called Oni-bi or demon-fires. Any ships that attempt to beach near their Oni-bi will be swarmed by these ferocious fighters.

They caused much trouble to Yu Huang's armies as they sought to invade Japan. Once the invasion was completed, his generals made it their first priority to discover the secret of their creation. Eventually it was tortured out of a captured wraith who taught the variations of Moliate and Way of the Scholar before he was sent to Hell.

Since then warriors who have served well in the armies of the Jade Kingdom are offered this opportunity to defend their land and families from invading foreigners.

Roleplaying Notes: You are a single-minded killer. You and your fellow Heiké brothers and sisters will defend the land of your families, or die in the attempt.

Storyteller Notes: Before their transformation, all Heiké were cunning and skilled warriors, and much of that ability stays with them. While they have lost some of their intelligence, it is more than made up for by their new-found ferocity. Their attacks are rarely subtle, but they attack *en masse* and in a coordinated manner. Their claws allow them to rapidly scuttle up the hull of a ship, then jump onto the deck. When three dozen Heiké scabble over a ship's railing in such a fashion, the defenders' fight is almost as good as lost.



THE MARY ANNE – A SAMPLE RELIC SHIP

HISTORY

The *Mary Anne* was a haggboat of the Royal African Company, the official British slave trading company. Her captain, Patrick Ness, was a 40-year old Scotsman. He was well used to working the Triangle route, carrying manufactured goods from Bristol to Guinea, trading them for slaves, which he carried to Jamaica, where he traded them for sugar, which he took home.

The *Mary Anne* set sail from Bristol on her last voyage in early May 1702. She made good time to Guinea, and had a relatively successful trading trip down the coast, acquiring 467 slaves and a fair amount of gold and ivory. The ship weighed anchor for Jamaica in late September, reaching São Tomé nine days later.

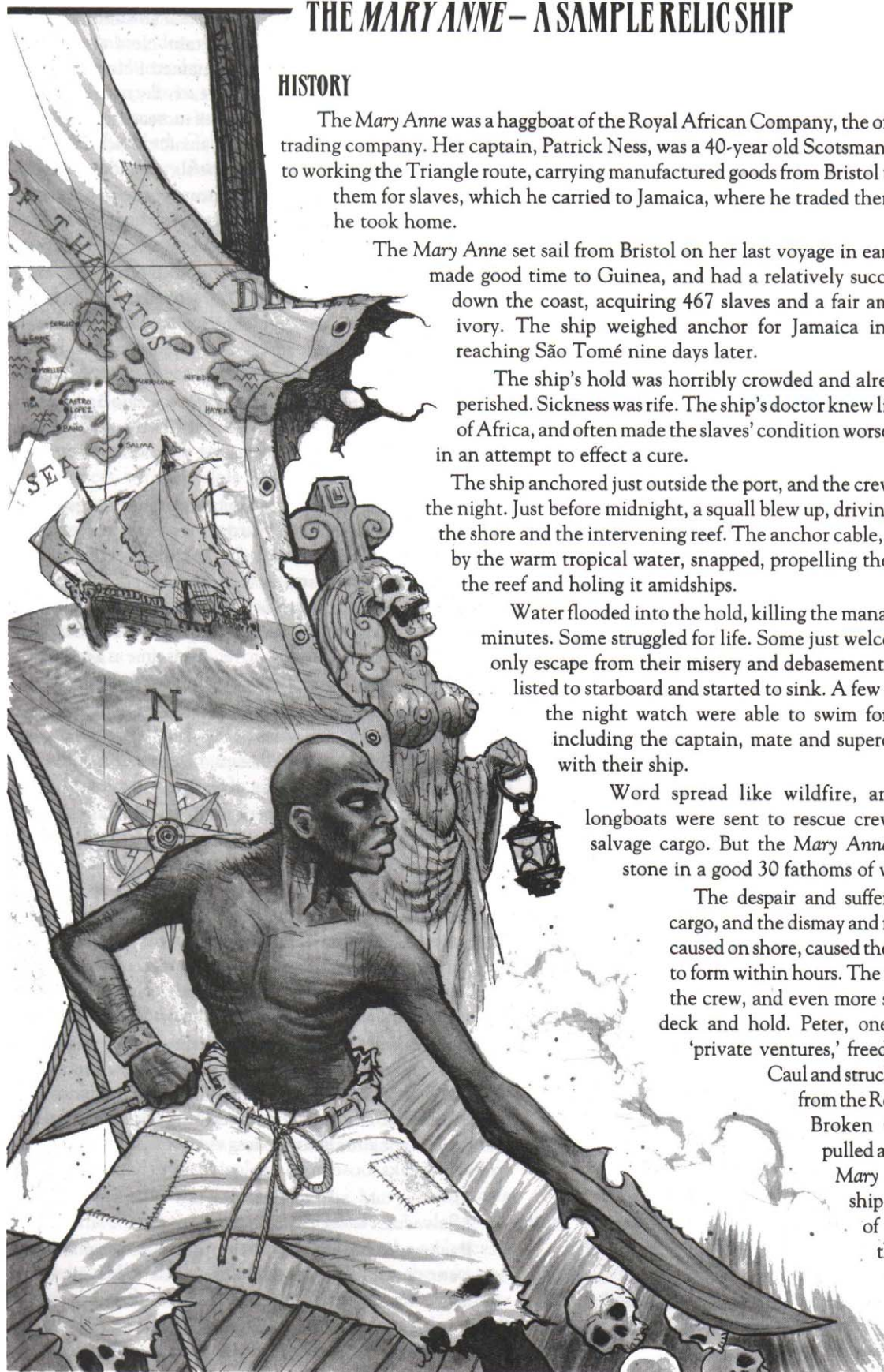
The ship's hold was horribly crowded and already 30 slaves had perished. Sickness was rife. The ship's doctor knew little of the diseases of Africa, and often made the slaves' condition worse by bleeding them in an attempt to effect a cure.

The ship anchored just outside the port, and the crew bedded down for the night. Just before midnight, a squall blew up, driving the ship towards the shore and the intervening reef. The anchor cable, already weakened by the warm tropical water, snapped, propelling the *Mary Anne* onto the reef and holing it amidships.

Water flooded into the hold, killing the manacled slaves within minutes. Some struggled for life. Some just welcomed death as the only escape from their misery and debasement. The ship rapidly listed to starboard and started to sink. A few crew who were on the night watch were able to swim for shore but most, including the captain, mate and supercargo, went down with their ship.

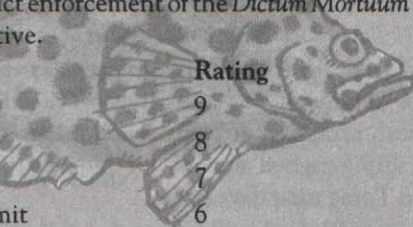
Word spread like wildfire, and several ships' longboats were sent to rescue crew and attempt to salvage cargo. But the *Mary Anne* had sunk like a stone in a good 30 fathoms of water.

The despair and suffering of the living cargo, and the dismay and fear that the wreck caused on shore, caused the *Mary Anne's* relic to form within hours. The wraiths of many of the crew, and even more slaves, littered the deck and hold. Peter, one of the captain's 'private ventures,' freed himself from his Caul and struck a deal with a ship from the Renegade group, the Broken Chain, that had pulled alongside. Now the *Mary Anne* is the flagship of a growing fleet of Renegade vessels that have been harassing the Hierarchy's slavers whenever they can.



THE SEA SHROUD

Away from human civilization, the Shroud is remarkably thin across most of the oceans. Clever wraiths have been known to take advantage of this, piercing the Shroud on ships deep in the ocean to contact relatives, or pursue Passions. The distance from Hierarchy strongholds and their strict enforcement of the *Dictum Mortuum* is an added incentive.



Location	Rating
Modern ports	9
Historic harbors	8
Inland rivers	7
The three mile limit	6
The open sea	5
The open sea at night	4

A TOUR OF THE SHIP

The *Mary Anne* wasn't built as a slave ship. She spent the early years of her career carrying tobacco and textiles and was only modified for human cargo a few years before she sank. The oak-built ship is 40 meters long and 11 wide. From deck to keel is about 7 meters. Three main masts dominate the ship, although one of them leans at a precarious angle. Seven sails flap in an unfelt wind, decay eating into their very fabric. A figurehead of a buxom young woman with a skeletal face adorns her prow.

A single row of portholes and gun ports line each side of the ship. Five relic cannons are mounted on each side. The *Mary Anne* has been damaged and repaired many times in her career as a ghost ship. The rotting hulk is lined with a series of patches to its superstructure, each of which bears the screaming face of a captured and soulforged slaver.

The planks of her deck are warped and twisted, as if left in the sun for far too long. Some bear the distinctive texture of soulforged plasm. Towards the stern of the ship lie the officers' quarters, with the helm in front. At the very rear of the ship lies the captain's cabin.

Beneath is the gundeck, with the crew's cramped quarters to the rear. Finally, deep in the bowels of the ship, lie the holds. Her holds reek of despair and death. Occasional moans of misery drift out of shadowed corners. The darkness is almost palpable and few wraiths will willingly spend more than a few minutes down below.

NOTABLE CREW

•Captain Peter

Background: It was common practice for captain and senior officers to have their own 'personal ventures' aboard ships, carried at the company's expense. Peter was exactly one half of such a venture.

Captured during a war between the Ashanti and Dagamba peoples, he was purchased by Captain Ness along with another slave, and the pair were renamed Peter and Paul. The captain would spend a few hours each day teaching them carpentry and cooperage in the hope of increasing their value when the time came to sell them in Jamaica. They were kept in a separate hold from the rest of the slaves, along with the mate's and supercargo's private ventures, in the hope that they would escape disease. It didn't help them escape the water.

Paul's soul never entered the Shadowlands. Peter, in an outburst of anger, ripped his own Caul off and stumbled to the deck, barely noticing the relic chains clutched in his hand. He found Ness and ripped off the captain's Caul before beating him senseless.

He then set about freeing the 32 slaves who had crossed the Shroud, and stowing the crew in the hold. Shortly afterward, just as Peter was beginning to wonder what to do next, another ghost ship pulled alongside.

As a gesture of goodwill, the captain of the other vessel sent a skilled helmsman across and lead the *Mary Anne* to safe harbor on the African coast. Ness was soulforged into a set of manacles that Peter carries and uses on each successful capture. The *Mary Anne* shortly became another member of the Broken Chain. All the while, Peter continued to use the Anglicized name that Ness had given him; he has no desire to relive his time as a tribesman who was sold by his own kind. "Captain Peter" will do.

The last decade has been particularly hard to the ship and crew. The influx of modern warships into the Hierarchy forces has lead to the loss of several allied ships. Peter spent months in a depression and underwent a bout of Catharsis as a result.

He's been doing this for centuries now, and is beginning to wonder if he is really making a difference. Perhaps the time has come to sail the *Mary Anne* into the Tempest and seek the Far Shores....

Image: Captain Peter is a striking, if painfully thin, African male, apparently in his mid-twenties. His eyes are hard, and his face is set in a pointedly neutral expression. Peter wears nothing more than the pair of ragged trousers that he died in, and a chain wrapped round his waist.

Roleplaying Notes: Anger seethes under your skin: anger at the Ashanti who enslaved you, anger at the whites who bought you, anger at your own people for being too weak. You are careful to keep this anger in control, and project a calm, emotionless exterior. But in times of stress, it breaks loose in an explosive rage that frightens all around you.

•Salvador Noval

Background: Salvador was a professional seaman who first went to sea at 14. He had an unremarkable career on various Portuguese ships, until he was abandoned in Bahia, Brazil as his captain sought to reduce the wage bill and get some sort of profit from the voyage.

He drank away most of the little money he had, and died behind a drinking den, murdered for a single coin. He was reaped by the Hierarchy, which was in the process of establishing a Necropolis in the town. Trained as a Monitor to allow him to return to sea as a navigator, his first voyage, aboard the *Elizabeth Galley* went badly wrong, as it was captured by the *Mary Anne*.

During the engagement, the *Mary Anne*'s navigator had disappeared into a Harrowing from which she never returned, so Salvador was slapped in chains and put to work. Over the next few years he actually came to believe in the cause, and now his greatest regret — the complete failure of his life — is feeling a faint balm.

He has recently taken Trisha under his wing and is finding her enthusiasm for the cause quite invigorating.

Image: Salvador would be almost classically good looking, if he weren't a little pudgy. His long, black hair is tied back in a ponytail. He wears a loose white shirt and tight black trousers, with a cutlass hanging from his belt.

Roleplaying Notes: Salvador has become quite the buccaneer since he was granted his freedom. He often regales the crew with the battles he has been in and tells them just how much he'd like to be with them on a boarding action, trading blows with the Legionnaires. It's such a shame that the captain insists that he stays at the helm.

• Trisha

Background: Patricia Black was born to a good, middle class home. Like all good, middle class girls, she rebelled. Her chosen form of defiance was involvement in environmental protests. Her parents dismissed it as standard teenage rebellion and were sure she'd grow out of it. They never got the chance to find out. Trisha died under the wheels of an overly-enthusiastic bulldozer during a demonstration against the construction of a by-pass.

She was reaped by a relatively kindly Reaper, who explained the workings of the Hierarchy. She thought about it for about two minutes, then decided that it had to go and hooked up with a Renegade group in short order. She threw herself into their subversive activities with far more enthusiasm than knowledge.

Precisely six weeks later she found herself convicted of a flagrant breach of the Dictum Mortuum and manacled in the hold of a ship bound for Stygia. The moment she was locked in a dark hold with two hundred other souls, many of whom were sobbing uncontrollably, she started to grow up.

When the ship was captured by the *Mary Anne*, she jumped at the chance to join the crew. She has come to suspect that Peter has lost his enthusiasm for the cause she embraces so wholeheartedly. She has thought of broaching the subject with the rest of the crew, but has yet to find the courage.

Image: Trisha is a plain, stocky girl in her late teens. Her left nostril is pierced and her mousy hair is cut short and is in

constant disarray. She wears combat trousers and a shapeless, sleeveless vest.

Roleplaying Notes: Trisha bursts with enthusiasm 90% of the time. The other 10% sees her slip into a melancholy that can last for days. She's showing distinct signs of growing up, and her temperament becomes more stable the more she sees of the Shadowlands.

THE SEA-DREAM

Fickley and Wittenger watched the endless depth flow up past them as they sank toward the icy bottom. Wittenger triggered the radio toggle inside the helmet of his bulky suit. At least it wasn't so far down that they needed breathing fluid. No one liked that stuff. Davidson's voice crackled over the radio.

"You guys might be interested to know that I translated the runes you found on that debris."

"Why are you keeping us in suspense?" quipped Fickley.

"Well... I still don't know what it means. It's Gaelic, I think. It says "murdhuacha."

"Meroocha?" snickered Fickley.

"Well, yeah — but it's not spelled like that. Heads up, boys — you hit bottom soon."

Their feet lit gently upon the upper deck of the *Nada Jane*. Already the tanker was covered in waving seaweed like dead skin, and a school of fish darted out from under the prow. Wittenger smiled. It hadn't taken very long for nature to put this relic to use. He chuckled, then quickly followed Fickley, who was already making his way below decks.

The two divers found themselves in a long hallway. An eel snaked past, revealing a shape in the hallway. Suddenly, Fickley stopped, then ran forward. His voice was barely audible over the radio.

"Look at this."

Wittenger approached him, choked, and felt his gorge rise.

A single sailor, shirtless, hung from the wall by thin filaments, not unlike those that connect a mussel or a barnacle to a rock. One of his eyes was missing, and his hair waved in the current. A crab darted across his face. His mouth was fixed in a rictus grin, wide open, but most eerie were the bright orange bubbles that hung from his mouth like a last breath. Wittenger peered closer.

"Jesus, Fickley — these are human."

Fickley leaned in. Indeed, in each of the tennis-ball sized eggs was an unmistakably human fetus. What's more, they seemed to twitch and die under the two scientists' scrutiny.

"Fetuses? What the hell is this? What the hell is going on here?" Fickley backed up, panic clearly visible on his face.

"This isn't possible, Wittenger! What the hell! What the fuck is going on?"

Fickley started to turn, but his jaw dropped in the fascination and fear that only came with mortal pain. He gaped down at his belly in shock. Protruding from his diving suit, accompanied by a

spreading cloud of scarlet, were three sharp spikes of — seashell? He looked back up at Wittenger, mouth working helplessly. Then he fell forward, revealing a horrific creature filling the hallway behind him. The thing was at least seven feet tall, and it looked like nothing more than a kelpy, skinless human corpse covered in a clear gel — at least, that was from the waist up. The bottom half of the creature seemed to be a tangle of tubes and veins that snuck out from under its ribcage to become a knot of wavering tentacles like those of a jellyfish. Clear muscles around his waist pulsed, jellyfishlike, to keep him upright. The monster smiled and relaxed its grip on its trident as it picked up Fickley's still flailing body with its tentacles and withdrew back through the rent bulkhead.

Then Wittenger began to scream and run.

As he fought to push himself through the half-lit waters, his helmet radio crackled. "What the hell is wrong, Wittenger?" came the near-shout. Where's Fickley? What was that noise? What's this shit about human fetuses? Dammit, talk to me, Wittenger!"

Wittenger ignored the broadcast as he shouldered open the nearest door and stumbled in. His heart dropped as he looked around him. Crabs and lobsters scuttled across the scattered plates and skewed tables. But the walls... The walls were coated in dead sailors, arms and legs at obscene angles, mouths open, exhaling the orange bubbles. Some of the orange things were the size of volleyballs.

Wittenger stood up, defeated, as the doors to the kitchen burst open, spilling out at least a dozen more of the monsters. They scuttled, pulsed, snaked across the tables toward him. He felt something on his shoulder and turned to see a beautiful female face, framed by soft, kelpy green hair. Her breasts were large and firm, and her hips tapered into a single, long, seductive tentacle.

"Murdhuacha," he whispered.

She smiled and put a finger to her green-blue lips before she punched out the glass to his visor. Instantly, the air shot from his lungs, and the fear and shock of pain gave way to sheer ecstasy. He felt her small, strong hands in his hair. He felt her cold, soft mouth on his own, and something small, round and hard entering his throat. She finished the kiss as her mate placed his companion on the wall, both smiling, mouths open, as tiny orange strings of beads wavered in the current.

THE AQUATIC COURTS

Dear Diary:

It was late this afternoon when everything turned upside down. Fiorello and I were at the Winter Court in Greenwich Village, as we wanted to ask Duke Justinian about rights to the new artists' collective on the lower East Side. Seemed some Unseelie: "Lord Apoxys" was scooping up all the Glamour for himself. Court was in session as usual, all the pomposity and decorum of a regal ceremony and all the substance of a daily walk in the park. As Fio and I patiently waited our turn, we both heard this pulpy squishing, like wet clothing coming in from behind us. The troll guard banged the butt of his

polearm twice on the floor, as per, before he bellowed, "Announcing Lord Schul and Lady Qualyssa of... er... House Lorelei and House Syrinx, respectively."

The room dropped silent. I asked Fiorello if he had ever heard of House Syrinx. He mumbled something about Pan and shrugged his confusion. I watched the door.

The first thing I noticed was their beauty. It was irresistible; I wanted to reach out, to touch them. Far from the untouchable beauty of the sidhe, the alien loveliness of these two made me want nothing more than to feel their iridescent skin and wrap my fingers in their deep green hair. Fio was worse, just like you'd expect from a satyr. The two stood proud and dignified, despite the circus-style gapes and gasps their alien looks warranted. Finally the Duke bellowed for quiet.

A hush swept over the crowd as the two proceeded to the throne. They didn't kneel. Duke Justinian waited for them to speak, eyeing Lord Schul appraisingly.

Lady Qualyssa spoke first. She explained at great length, as though each of the words was an effort, that she and Lord Schul were high-ranking nobles of the "merfolk" kith, and as the "First-dreamed of Vatea," they were the first among all Kithain, and we were to immediately drop everything we were doing and aid them against the unknown invaders to their lands.

When the laughter subsided the two just stood there, expressions calmly expectant, as though they had just ordered a child back to cleaning his room. Justinian calmly explained through his smirk that the Winter Court of High King David would probably get around to this task as soon as they had put a stop to all Banality, mended ties between commoners and nobles, cleared the streets of vampires and given Concordia back to the Nunnehi. The laughter began anew. For the first time, the two newcomers looked worriedly at one another. The jokes kept on coming, and the laughter kept rising.

"STOP IT!" I cried — well, rasped. It was still about the loudest noise I had ever made. The whole room fell silent and looked right at me. I felt like a butterfly on a pin.

"They need our help!" I whispered as loudly as I could. "Can't you see they need us?"

Justinian smiled his wry Solomon smile.

"So be it, then. They need the help of a proper noble and they shall have it—" his eyes leveled at me — "Sir Draper."

Old Scratch was right. Nobody appreciates a wiseass slough.

HISTORY OF THE MER

We sat in my apartment. No use being subtle about taping the conversation — they wouldn't have clued if the recorder had taken up an entire wall. Lady Qualyssa picked up a lighter and fiddled with it as though it were the

key to all the world's problems; Lord Schul poked at the light bulb while shielding his eyes. I tried to get them to stop; neither listened to me. I finally touched Qualyssa on the arm to get her attention, and she recoiled as though I'd sliced her open.

"You dare!"

This was beyond arrogance — she was genuinely amazed that I would have the gall to touch her. She immediately launched into the "First-Dreamed of Vatea" shit again. Swallowing my pride (and my desire to knock her lights out), I calmly asked her what the hell she was talking about. She sighed — although this was nothing new; every breath of air was like an effort for her — and began her wild story.

THE LEGEND OF DAGON AND VATEA

"Before the Kithain, before the sky and the land, there was the sea. Sea was home to only two creatures then, and these two were Vatea and his brother Dagon. Both were comfortable in Sea's warm embrace, but soon, Vatea found his fickle and curious nature was stifled under the waves. He longed to see what was going on in the new 'Not-Sea' that was rising from his beloved and familiar waters. He asked Sea for permission to go on land, and Sea agreed. Vatea summoned all his strength, and held his breath as he heaved onto the land. It was like nothing he had ever seen — so static and barren, not like the colorful, constantly-moving world he was used to. The only thing he saw as a saving grace for this place was the previously unknown to him phenomenon called fire. He pitied the Not-Sea, and he decided he would create children for Not-Sea. Vatea closed his huge eyes and dreamed a beautiful race created in his own image. These gods were created from water and fire, wild and ever-changing, and he loved them. However, all of the dust and fire dried his huge gills, and he had to return to his home under the waves. Unable to part with his most favored among these children, he gave them 'Apsarae' — fish spirits — and took them back to his home."

I made a note. These guys made the sidhe look like boggans. These had to be the absolute most pretentious, stuck-up, self absorbed creatures in the entire universe. The sidhe, the chimerae, even the vampires — no one could hold a candle to this. Still, their story, if self-serving, was intriguing, and shed an odd light on the Tuatha De Danann and the Prodigals. I asked Qualyssa to continue.

She spat, "The upstart Dagon wanted children of his own and lunged for the Not-Sea, ignoring both his brother and his mother. He heaved out of the water and frightened the children of Vatea, so much that some pledged their lives to him immediately in return for his promise not to hurt them. He lived like a god in his time on Not-Sea, and he became corrupt and cruel. Finally, Vatea and his children found Dagon and started to pull him from Not-Sea, and

Dagon kicked and screamed and bit the sky. They gave one final heave, and Dagon splashed back under the waves, although he left a great bleeding hole in the sky that withered and weakened the land-dwellers forever after."

I swear, noble or no, I was gonna be sick.

"Meanwhile, Dagon, in his throes, took some of the children of Vatea's dreams and corrupted them with his vile ichor. These poor, blighted souls became the twisted murdhuacha, our sworn enemies... until now."

"Muroocha?" I started laughing. "Watch out for the scary muroocha, they're gonna get ya with their nasty claws! Uh... I just think it's a funny word, you know? Muroocha. Think about it. Muroocha. None... none of you are laughing. *Ahem.* Right."

They both looked at me like they were reading the Wall Street Journal. Qualyssa continued her story.

"Finally, Dagon slept soundly, and Vatea retreated to the deepest Grotto."

There was no ignoring the fact that she'd definitely put a capital on that. I held up a hand and tried to cut in.

"Sh!"

"Okay..."

"Finally, Dagon slept soundly, and Vatea retreated to the deepest Grotto. We fought long and hard against the Murdhuacha, and the dirtwalkers — you withered land-dwellers—"

I winced.

THE SUNDERING

"The dirtwalkers continued to make their forays into our territory. We were content to let them have their little earth-clods to run around and kill each other on, but they seemed intent on trying to wrest the world from us."

"Excuse me?"

"Earth covers only about three-tenths of the planet. Do the math. We rule the world. Now let me finish my story." She pursed her lips. "You certainly talk a great deal for someone with such a little voice."

I fumed.

"We fought back, but soon reached an agreement of sorts. You see, we live under the waves, and you were content to sort of criss-cross the surface. So we ignored you unless we were in the mood for play. You don't breathe in our world unless we help you, but you do seem to enjoy drowning quite a bit. Oh, not at first, but eventually, that thrashing around gives way to such bliss."

I started to quietly scan the room for any fishhooks Hard Angus might've left behind — teach these bastards a lesson, I thought. But then I remembered what Angus's own kind themselves were historically responsible for, and calmed down a bit.

"We were happy to play with the dirtwalkers when we could, and fight the blighted murdhuacha wherever their hives cropped up, but there was something more on the horizon for us. You see, thousands of years after Dagon was defeated, a new problem arose. As the dirtwalkers began to scud over more and more of the ocean, we started to die. In great numbers, we succumbed to the Cold they brought, until we took a lesson from the selkies, who had learned it from... you."

I crossed my arms and treated them to a smug smile.

"The selkies had learned to hide within humans. We decided that they had it right. It was far preferable to harming any of Vatea's children, and we began to sink their ships and sing their crews overboard for breeding stock. After all, the men..."

"Only men? You didn't breed with human women?"

Lord Schul shook his head and clicked as though I had made some huge *faux pas*.

"Men are secondary, and weaker than egg-layers. They wouldn't be missed. We didn't want to deplete the stock."

The gum fell from my mouth. I looked up at Lord Schul.

"You're... okay with this?"

He contemplated the back of his hand, waiting. It wasn't until Lady Qualyssa gave him a brief nod that he answered with a very terse, clipped "yes." I was amazed. It was like some Arabic cultures, but reversed. I wondered what the Moral Majority would think.

"We took as many human men as we could and bred with them. It was disgusting and degrading, and many refused. Of course, they're all dead now.... The Coldness."

"Banality."

"Yes."

MURDHUACHA

"Tell me something: What are these Muroocha or whatever you talked about? The "Children of Dagon," or some such."

She made a spitting noise. "The murdhuacha are as hideous as we are beautiful, as twisted as we are noble—"

"If this comparison continues they must be some humble bastards," I muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing, go on...."

"The murdhuacha are animals. They infest the hulks of your sunken vehicles, and they breed in your drowned bodies. Their lives revolve around hunting and killing."

"Thallain." I whispered. I understood their contempt—I remembered the revulsion and loathing I experienced the first time I met a bogie. Although some sluagh make nice-nice with the bastards, I wanted nothing more than to rip the bogie's snot-eating face off. Suddenly, the whole thing made

a lot more sense. A whole ocean filled with Kithain who felt this way about one another churning the waters pink with their battles—it was one hell of an image.

"Yes; that sounds right. The murdhuacha take their Apsarae from the unclean creatures of the sea—the squids, the jellyfish, the crabs and worms, as we take ours from the children of Vatea."

"Ew." I wrinkled my nose at the idea of a mermaid-like half-man half-worm. Sounded like us and the redcaps had just been joined in the "born of nightmare" category.

"They breed in the still-warm bodies of their kills. They like humans best, and they will mate as the water is still pink with blood. Their women are your "sirens"—entanglers who lure humans to drown to incubate their eggs."

"Have you talked to Sigourney Weaver about this?"

"Who?"

"Nothing." All this talk of mating had made me curious, however.

"Now, can I ask you something really offensive? I thought you mermaids were supposed to be all kinds of horny and sex-crazed, like aquatic satyrs or something."

"We love to play, but mating is very sacred. If you like I can..."

MURDHUACHA LEGENDRY

*I'd like to be
Under the sea
In an octopus's garden
in the shade...*

—Ringo Starr, "Octopus's Garden"

Unsurprisingly, the murdhuacha have a slightly different take on things. According to them, Dagon was first on land, dragged into the Sea by a jealous Vatea. Dagon purposefully bit down on the sky, knowing the wound would weaken the land-dwellers for his imminent return. When he re-entered the water, Sea was very angry with Vatea and banished him to his trench. Exhausted from the whole ordeal, Dagon fell into a deep sleep, and dreamed the murdhuacha by placing a piece of the night sky in a bubble, creating the very first murdhuacha egg. The First Murdhuacha, Nuck, grew swiftly. Eventually Nuck wrapped his father Dagon in the shred of sky he'd taken from the heavens. Dagon's words as he fell asleep were a promise that he would awaken and sink the land he loved so much into the sea for his favored children.

The murdhuacha believe that Dagon is now stirring, soon to awaken and help his children to their manifest destiny. The merfolk are blissfully unaware of this new chapter in the saga....

She pulled her wrapping off over her head. My jaw hit the floor with it. She was so alien and beautiful, so perfectly smooth, with shining, iridescent skin and long, wavy green hair. I snapped out of it.

"No! No, that's okay... He's... watching!" I motioned to Lord Schul.

"He won't mind. He can help."

She started to unbutton my shirt. Half of me wanted this more than anything, but...it was just so weird! If only Fiorello could see me now! His horns would turn green!

"I...uh... need to hear your story." I blurted, hating myself. The secrets of these Kithain were just too enticing. Damn my sluagh blood.

Making no effort to cover herself, she sat back down in her chair.

"We mated with the humans until we had a good breeding stock going, and then Queen Merasi decreed that we were to never interact with the humans again. The law has rarely been broken since — until now."

"You keep saying that. What's going on 'now' that's so damned important?"

"The Drowning."

THE DROWNING

"About fifty years ago, we suffered a horror so great that it still chills me to this day. Suddenly, so abruptly that none of us were ready, thousands of us... our husbands, or children, or friends and relatives were struck by a wave of the Coldness — Banality — so intense that our Apsarae vaporized instantly. Some of them just imploded as they reverted to their human forms in the depths, others choked and struggled in pain and confusion as their gills lost their fae power and all they had left were human lungs. They died... horribly."

Her sea-bitch demeanor cracked as a single tear escaped her eye. At this point I was a wreck. I can't deal with simultaneously hating, pitying, and wanting someone all at the same time.

"My mother was among them. Naturally we wanted to know what had happened, and even as we reeled from the loss, we sent team after team to go and find the source of the destruction and destroy it. However, we knew we had found the site, oddly, when the teams stopped returning. The entire city of Xinxux, in what you know as the Pacific, was dead."

I suppressed the urge to ask about mer cities.

"A Rorqual was the first to discover what had happened."

"Rorqual?"

"What you would call a freehold."

"What? I thought you said it discovered the... Oh, just go ahead and explain."

"The Rorqual came to us, explaining that the dirtwalkers had taken Vatea's Trench as their own, and that they could no longer take the power from this place to bring to us. You see, the Rorqual are our freeholds, but they are not the cold wellsprings of power that you know. The Rorqual are huge, beautiful, intelligent creatures, the chosen of Melusine."

"I... um... wait a minute. Whales are your freeholds?"

"Yes. Whales, and sometimes dolphins."

"Oooohhh...kaaaay..."

"The dirtwalkers called this place 'Deepwater,' and they plan to live there in droves. This metal hive is the first of many. If the humans come, we will die. Their Coldness erases you — makes you like them, and that's bad enough for your kind. To us, however, it is certain death. As the Coldness takes us, we can no longer breathe, no longer swim. We just die."

"Jeeze. I see. I... I don't know what to say. I'm sorry."

"For the first time ever, we called a meeting with the leaders of the largest of the murdhuacha hives. Although we hated them, and they us, we knew that they were the only ones we could really trust in this situation — they are in just as much danger as we, and have suffered just as greatly. At this summit, we reached a conclusion: As weak and withered as you landbound are, you are our only hope. We come to you and your courts for aid."

"But I'm... I'm just a..."

"Take us to here."

She pointed to a picture of a castle taped to my fridge.

"But... that's just a picture!"

"We've heard talk of a castle in the Castle. The Castle Mountain."

"Castle in the castle mountain? Castle... Cat-Skill! The castle in the Catskills! Tara-Nar! You want to go to Tara Nar!"

She nodded.

THE MERFOLK AND MURDHUACHA

Dear Diary:

This is getting weird. Late last night, after they tried to learn to sleep without water holding up their bodies, they drew straws and Lord Schul wound up in the tub. Mental note: I gotta buy more salt. Anyway, Qualyssa came into bed with me, and found the most interesting way to wake me up. I turned and tried to kiss her, totally caught in her spell, but she slapped me and stormed out of the room, starting up with the "You dare!?" business again. More confused than angry, I went into the bathroom, as I am wont to do when awakened in the middle of the night, and was about to do my business when I jumped at the sight of Lord Schul lying back in the tub. It was damn near overflowing, and his dark gray-brown



skin heaved contentedly with each breath flowing over his gills. At first I thought he was wearing some kind of cloak, but I realized it was... well... him. He looked like a bizarre cross between a man and a stingray, his wings folded around him like a great leather vampire cloak.

"Hello," he muttered, half asleep.

I choked a bit at the sight of him. Bunny ears and goat horns were one thing; this was a stingray-man kicking back in my damned bathtub. I didn't know whether to laugh or scream.

"Hello," I managed.

Dr. Vocabulary strikes again. I forgave myself. What do you say to a giant stingray-guy in your tub as you fiddle with your zipper? Besides, my people aren't known for being verbose. The tension broke with the sound of Lady Qualyssa knocking over a lamp.

"You tried to kiss her, didn't you?"

"What?"

"Kissing. When you touch mouths."

I nodded; he shook his head as though talking to a slow child.

"What? What'd I do?"

"We've told you that sex is play, yes? It is a simple thing, not all that important. However, kissing is intimacy. We don't kiss casual bedmates, or even our relatives. We don't even kiss our most beloved partners save as a means of foreplay."

I blinked. "So basically I could screw Lady Qualyssa all night long and it wouldn't be considered intimate, but one peck on the cheek and that's too forward?"

His lip curled. "I don't care for your tone, but yes. One of the important things about kissing is that it... stimulates us in certain ways that sex cannot. The female cannot conceive unless she's been properly stimulated in such a fashion — therefore, kissing to us is the first step in true *mating*."

I coughed. That *would* be seen as forward, I guess. "So what makes you this great cultural bridge all of a sudden?"

"I once watched an ocean liner for a few days — picked up some things. Don't tell the Lady, or she'll have my head."

"Silence is my middle name. Virgil Silence Draper. By the way, if you tell anyone my name is Virgil, I'll have your head."

He smiled and swished his barbed tail.

"Then I shall call you Silence."

"Okay... cool. So..." I sat on the commode and tried to make conversation with the giant stingray man in the tub. As Will Smith once said, this rated about a 9.0 on my weird-shit-o-meter. I sighed.

"So, you're a stingray?"

APSARAE

"This is my Apsara, yes."

"I thought all merfolk had fishtails."

"Rays are fish."

"You know what I mean."

"We are born looking like humans, almost. Our children, the nereids, are universally—both merfolk and murdhuacha—born with gray skin, large eyes, webbed hands and feet."

"And gills."

"No, no gills, actually. The nereids are kept breathing by their mother's milk."

"So that's why these fish-women still have breasts."

"Yes, exactly. When a nereid gets to be a certain age—"

"His voice cracks, and he starts to notice certain urges—"

"May I finish, *Silence*? When a nereid gets old enough, usually about one year, she is taken to a Grotto, a very mystical, sacred place. The parents then place the nereid in the Grotto and wait. The next animal that enters the Grotto bonds with the child, and becomes her Apsara. In my case it was a stingray. In Lady Qualyssa's case it was what you call an oarfish. But there have been all kinds — blowfish, sharks, eels, salmon, tuna, lionfish, dolphins..."

"And if it's a crab or a jellyfish, the kid becomes one of those murdhuacha?"

"Yes. The murdhuacha are truly hideous. Most commonly, they appear as we do, but instead of a fish tail, a single tentacle..."

"Yikes. So what happens next?"

"The mer emerges from her grotto, a fresh young nix. Some call young merfolk "fry." This bonding is very important. It's not some random process — the Apsara that connects with you in the Grotto is the one that you *are*. Before that point, you're not... you're not whole. Your Apsara is part of your fae soul. This — me, for example. I am calm and quiet, and yet I am venomous when angered." He wagged his barbed tail for emphasis.

"Qualyssa is an oarfish — beautiful and strong, with a temper to match. And you might be a sculpin or reef fish — so curious that you may ignore danger."

I smiled. This was the closest to a compliment I was gonna get from these yahoos.

"We spend the majority of our lives as nixes. Both Qualyssa and I are nixes. Soon, though, the hair will go blue-gray, or white as foam, and the Coldness will seep in, and we shall be Naugs."

"Grumps."

"Yes, it is unpleasant. Such is time."

"No, I meant that's what we... ah, forget it. No — no, wait. I want an answer. What's with this attitude you guys have? I mean, we're all Kithain here, but you still act like you have something special about that makes you somehow better than us. More so than the sidhe — and I didn't think that was possible. What... What is it with you?"

Lord Schul considered the question carefully.

MERFOLK PSYCHOLOGY

"We don't understand how you topsiders can ignore Sea, or worse yet, just dump refuse into it as though it would never return. The seas are your world, your planet. How tiny and claustrophobic it must be to inhabit only a few insignificant specks of dirt amid the entirety of the oceans! What's more..."

He nudged the curtain back and peered out the window distastefully.

"You can't even seem to keep those clean. You all fight and bicker for these small scraps of land, leaving us to rule the planet in your absence. It's like... it's like... Imagine having a mansion, and your children only live in one room. Imagine these children make such a mess it makes you want to vomit when you visit them. Soon their mess spills out into your living space. Before long, you realize that they have lived and grown in their own filth for so long that your own children are poison to you. You can't kill them — they are your children. So what can you do? You retreat. And you disdain these filth-choked creatures. You disdain them for ever visiting the mansion in the first place. You disdain them for living like animals, and for squabbling like eels amid the dung. And you disdain them for making you give up entire sections of *your* house for their own waste."

I slowly nodded.

"And you hold me responsible...?"

"We hold you responsible collectively. You, the Kithain, the older brothers, for not doing something. You humans, the youngest, for not realizing. All of you. All of you."

He looked pretty steamed and rested his chin on his fist.

I blinked as my memory of what I really wanted to ask him came back to me.

"Hey, Schul, You're really okay with all this subservient crap? I mean, really — between us guys here."

MERFOLK SOCIETY

"I know my place. The egg layer must be protected if the society is to continue."

"Society?"

"You're an odd one, dirtwalker. Yes, of course we have a society. It's nothing like what you know, but it's a society nonetheless. We are ruled by a system of nobles, but since all of us are noble, this can lead to some conflicts. So we have three houses that more or less balance each other. I am of house Lorelei. Our job is to protect the others. House Melusine are our scholars and Syrinx is the most noble house. Each of us does our part for the betterment of everyone. We do work hard, but we play even harder. Ends and means. Merfolk society, on the whole, is geared toward getting what needs to be done out of the way so that we can create and sing and dance and enjoy ourselves. You land-dwellers have confused that."

I frowned my disapproval of being made the representative of everyone with feet.

"We miss some things, don't get me wrong. We used to feed from human dreams, like you. But we just found the humans too poisonous, and when their Coldness grew greater than their dreams, we had to turn somewhere else. We take our power from the sea, as we take everything from the Sea. Were it not for the Drowning, you might never have heard from us again. We live well — at least, we did. In the coral cities all are artists, and the cities are places of great beauty. I myself was something of a renowned singer back in Qlzua."

"You sing?"

He opened his mouth and made a noise so slight I almost couldn't hear it. That's something, coming from a sluagh. He frowned.

"I suppose it carries better underwater."

"I guess it does. I thought you guys would talk by sign language or something."

"Oh, we speak the same way as you, just at a different frequency. Any Kithain can do it, with training. How did you think we knew your language?"

"Point."

"After we go to your Castle Tara-Nar, I should like to ask Lady Qualyssa if she would like to take you back to Qlzua with us. I am personally of the opinion that we need to reestablish contact with you dirtwal—er—land—dwellers."

"Wouldn't I drown?"

"Haven't you ever heard of mermaids taking fishermen down to live with them? Just because we don't do it anymore doesn't mean we can't. Remember what I said about mermaid's milk? It doesn't only work on nereids. Anyone who drinks of it can live underwater for a day, and with steady doses, indefinitely. I'm sure Qualyssa will be happy to help. Then you could see how we live and what we do, and why we are in so much danger."

My white face reddened, but I understood.

"I think I'd like that, Schul."

I went back to bed and dreamed about mermaids.

Dear Diary:

Well, OK, so this isn't really my diary. They have this special woven kind of "paper" made out of weird seaweeds to write on instead. I've learned a shitload here in Qlzua, especially about what rat-bastards us land-dwellers can be.

We tried to get into Tara-Nar, but the "nobility" were too busy with their own concerns to talk to us. The business of the High King going missing has really put a lot of people on edge, and the court made it perfectly clear that they weren't about to take on any new priorities. Probably because they were still covering for the ones responsible for his disappearance. Pricks.

I decided to take Schul up on his offer. I was just so pissed off at the whole surface world, at that point.

That night, Qualyssa and I consummated our relationship. She finally started to get over her whole superiority complex, and I guess she was impressed with my display back at Tara-Nar. She was everything I've ever looked for in countless Goth clubs and on dozens of city streets. I really hope this is lust, but it feels like more. I don't want to relive some cheesy eighties flick. I don't want to fall in love with a fish.

Well, anyway, enough of that. I'm living in Qlzua now, and man, it's weird. I got used to the pressure change quickly enough, but the whole weightless thing is irritating. It's great if you've got an Apsara, but some of us have legs. Coral cities don't really take that into account.

We left by way of the harbor. They gave me this biker's squirt-bottle, and I took a few pulls off it — the taste was, erm, interesting. Then we just jumped in. I spent some time holding tightly to Qualyssa, and then, suddenly, I just didn't really need to breathe anymore, and speech, although tingly, came naturally. Even to me. The water was a murky gray, and the floor beneath us was littered with debris. Fascinated, I swam down to it, Schul guarding my butt with that pitchfork of his. He keeps insisting I call it a trident. Whatever.

MURDHUACHA HIVES

The grayness led me to think it was raining up topside. We were a ways out before I first noticed it. I asked them to follow me as I swam down to a big black shape in the silt — a truck, a big rig, rusted beyond recognition, lying crumpled and dead next to a few battered pieces of guardrail. It chilled me, this hulking gravesite lost and forgotten, so far from its home. Then I noticed the outline of a familiar shape — a dog? It certainly looked like a dog. Without thinking, I dove closer. It was a dog, all right. Poor pooch was half-rotted, his fur swaying in big clumps in the current. Worse, though, were the strings of golf ball-sized bubbles hanging from strands down the back of his throat. I got closer, to find the dog had been connected to the trailer by weird, organic-looking plastic strands. I started to back away, suffering from the first case of the willies I had ever experienced. I thought we sluagh were supposed to be immune to that!

I came around and poked my head in the cab. A human skull, jaw half open and tiny crustaceans in its gleaming eye sockets, stared back at me. I banged my head on the rearview mirror as I pulled my head back. Suddenly, something touched my ankle. I lost it, and flipped out completely, thrashing and struggling.

Looking down I could see that a huge tentacle had snaked around me. Another came around my wrist. Almost paralyzed with fear, I watched the murdhuacha emerge from a hole rusted in the side of the trailer. I began to regret ever having laughed at these guys.

She must have been twenty feet long. Kelpy green hair, a sweetly seductive face, grayish-white skin, large chest and flat stomach that tapered to a single, coiling tentacle. Her arms were long — too long, and ended in sharp claws. Her whole body undulated with each of her breaths, which seemed to come from a tiny tube sticking right out of the center of her clavicle. Suddenly, a flash of speed, and I saw a three-pronged polearm sticking out of her tentacle, which let me go immediately. I dove backward as she filled the water around her with opaque black murk. I looked up, and it was Lord Schul and three other merfolk I didn't recognize. One was a large female riding on the back of a sea turtle, who carried a shell-carved shield with a symbol of a shark's tooth etched on it. She retrieved the trident and tapped it against her shield to shake the sand from it.

"It was my fault," I gasped, looking back at the trailer. "I disturbed her nest."

"That's why I didn't kill her — although she would not have done you the same courtesy. Let's go."

CORAL CITIES

When I first saw Qlzua, I was amazed — it really was breathtaking. Imagine a cross between a coral reef and Times Square — light and color really just assaulted me upon my arrival. According to the merfolk, this is only visible chimerically, and to any passing humans, it resembles an uninteresting lump of rock and coral. Not so to Kithain. Located on top of an undersea mountain, Qlzua looked like a giant, shimmering starfish, six "arms" or districts stemming out from the central citadel. Despite the coldness of the water around me, the city was pleasantly warm.

Situated deep in the Hudson Trench, Qlzua is perched atop Cairn Mountain in the Atlantic Ocean. The mer tell me there are also several other large coral cities. Atlane is located off the coast of southern California, Hiath is hidden somewhere within the Great Barrier Reef, Drasch is somewhere in the Mediterranean, Qryll is in the Caribbean, Quaguin Gateway is near Hibernia, and of course, Xinxux used to be in the South Pacific. Well, the city is still there, it's just... silent.

Despite their arrogance on land, I was really treated rather well... eventually. When I first arrived here, there was a hell of a ruckus — half the natives wanted to poke me and see what I was made out of, and half wanted to kill me and the mer I rode in on. Eventually a messenger from the queen said that I was to be allowed into the city, and that she wanted to meet me. The merfolk, once they got over their fear of me, turned out to be halfway decent Kithain. The food's incredible, although weird (and raw, and sometimes still moving — that wouldn't bug a redcap, and it doesn't bother me much), but you don't come to a submarine city populated with fishpeople without expecting to make allowances that way.

There are shopping districts, art districts, food districts and military areas. The merfolk tend to barter. When I saw the place from far away I had assumed that the light was produced by energy stolen from sea-floor cables, but that's not the case. The whole city, rather, is alive. Period. The walls are coral, the lights are a bioluminescent fish, (occasionally bred to be certain colors or shapes) the "vehicles" are all either animals or chimerae. (Sea turtles and hippocampi are particularly popular down here.)

Fish dart in and out of the streets like pigeons and other birds in a normal city. Odd smells, colored water, and ringing voices make for a disorienting but beautiful environment.

The city itself is an intentional work of art, interpreted a hundred different ways by its own denizens. Art is everywhere here. The merfolk claim that it's in their culture, but there's a sadness under the beauty that betrays a sense of loss. I think the merfolk secretly miss human dreams and human dreamers — this earthy-crunchy Glamour of theirs is not really their bag. They are dreams of alien cultures across or under the sea. No wonder they hate us so much. I think, for all their posturing, they're jealous of us. We still, after all, take our dreams from the source.

I've got another day here in Qlzua. Qualyssa and I are going to a play tonight, and tomorrow I meet with the Queen. I've never felt so damned important in my life. If I wasn't underwater, I'm sure I'd be sweating.

Epilogue
The queen knew I was coming. David's court listened to me after all, and sent a noble lord to help. He should be here a few days after I leave. Lord... Lord Apoxys or something. He's going to be... Wait... he was the one ravaging the artists! Why would the king send an Unseelie lord to help? Something's up — I need help. I've sent an Apsara chimera with instructions to bring these pages to the nearest land-based freehold. If you find them, please bring them to someone who can help. An entire kith is counting on you. Please.

Merfolk

(Mur-foke)



Ancient and unknowable, the merfolk pose something of a problem to the Kithain. The arrogance of the mer is tempered only by their truly alien natures, for merfolk never mate with dreamers. Mating exclusively among their own kind, the merfolk claim that they are the sole legacy of the Tuatha De Danann, the oldest fae on Earth, dreamed long before any human ever set foot on land. When curious changelings ask how this could be, the merfolk are disconcertingly vague and ambiguous.

Merfolk society is complex and matriarchal, based on the same conventions of nobles and fiefdoms that ordinary Kithain are used to, but the similarities end there. These changelings almost never take their Glamour from human dreams anymore — in fact, it's as if their whole society is

structured around the evasion of humanity. More than any other Kithain, merfolk equate Banality with death — if they lose their

seemings, they can no longer breathe. Instead, merfolk take their Glamour from the sea, much as Nunnehi harvest it from the land. The powerful cetaceans called Rorqual bring the dreamstuff to the merfolk in their coral cities — vast, bio-architectural masterpieces that resemble reefs to the untrained eye.

Merfolk revere a powerful entity called “Vatea” — their creator in their legendry, and according to them, the creator of all life. Vatea was the one who gave them

Apsarae, or fish-spirits. All mer, merfolk or murdhuacha, have an "Apsara" which is the sea creature to which the particular mer is attuned. While the vast majority are the fish-tailed people of legend, there are still seahorse, eel, shark, turtle, porpoise and even the rare whale merfolk. The Apsara of the changeling determines her house and even her social placement, to some degree. The majority of shark merfolk are warriors, and porpoise mer are predisposed to become scholars. It's not certain if the grafted Apsara influences the young nix's personality, or if the nereid already has a disposition that attracts a predestined sort of Apsara to the Grotto. The merfolk don't ask the question all that much themselves; what will be will be, and there's no point in arguing with Vatea's will.

Appearance: Merfolk are beautiful. Not with the unattainable beauty of the sidhe: rather, the merfolk's is an alien and seductive beauty that inspires more lust than awe. A mermaid is often a seductive mix of her two natures, her upper body is warm and inviting as her lower body tapers into a sultry, muscular tail. Although merfolk are most commonly silver, blue or greenish, some, especially those with reef-dwelling Apsarae, are awash with bright and vivid color. On the rare occasion that a mer is bonded with a particularly ugly fish, like a flounder or an oyster cracker, their features become more human, although they still tend to have the fishlike tails and coloration. A mer's sexual organs aren't fully external, although they haven't bred far enough away from their human roots that they've moved to external fertilization. When they walk on land, their tails split into humanlike (if scaled) legs, although their coloration is still piscine.

On the rare occasion that one sees a mer out of her fae mien, she is always tall, lithe, muscular and save for her head, completely hairless. These adaptations are the product of hundreds of years of breeding on the ocean floor — a mer's human body is designed to be one with the Apsara it is bonded to.

Lifestyle: The merfolk are certainly an odd lot. the product of a totally alien mindset, the mer are simultaneously deadly serious and playful, highly ritualized and completely freespirted, repressed and yet libidinous as a drunken prom date. The first thing one will notice about a mer is his incredible arrogance. Of course, as far as they are concerned, they have every right to be arrogant. After all, they do rule the world.

Unlike the prudish sidhe, the merfolk don't see a quick tumble (well, a quick tumble that isn't carefully covered up) as an affront to their dignity; sex is a popular form of recreation among their kind. They also enjoy eating, and merfolk cuisine is certainly an experience, although few would call it unpleasant. Artistic expression is very impor-

tant to the mer — most of the "work" that they do is actually the creation of great undersea masterpieces. The world that the mer inhabit has just enough Banality to stave off total Bedlam, outside of that, it's all for the most part free time. The merfolk enjoy their carefree lives, but can snap to seriousness in a second.

- **Nereids** are indistinguishable as merfolk or murdhuacha; any one nereid could mature into either after the Rite of Vatea, and there's no telling which it'll be. They are gray-skinned, fish-eyed babies with webbed fingers and

MER RELATIONS

Lady Relshabinia, Syrinx Baroness of the Ml'ua section of the city of Ql'zua speaks of the other Kithain:

- **Land-Based Kithain** — While noble in their own way, and certainly better than the mortal dirtwalkers, these poor, deluded creatures don't recognize their true creator. While they scabble like rats to eke out a meager living among the filth-caked humans, we rule the world without their help. We must now come to them for aid — but this does not put them ahead of us in Vatea's eyes.

- **Aquatic Pooka** — The land-based wearers of false Apsarae speak in lies and continually play their jokes. There was a time when I would have tried to eradicate these clods, but right now any help is... necessary.

- **Selkies** — One never quite knows where one stands with the selkies. While they make a wonderful bridge to the surface Kithain, and are certainly above them — after all, they do seem to have Apsarae, of sorts — can one ever really trust a Kithain who sheds her Apsara like a winter coat?

- **Menehune** — The islander Kithain aren't so bad — their closeness to the sea has taught them to fear and respect it, and what more can you ask from a dirtwalker? Too bad there aren't more of them.

- **Water Babies and Yunwi Amai'yine'hi** — The Melusine keep telling me rumors about freshwater fae like us who even have Apsarae and gills. I don't believe them — if such things existed, they certainly would have presented themselves to us by now.

- **Other Prodigals** — With rare exception, the only thing that makes the land-based Kithain worth speaking to is that at least they are not these savages. All are vicious and insane, with no respect for the natural order and no understanding of our authority. There are a few tolerable exceptions — the shark-folk, for example, seem to understand the mind of Vatea — but for the most part, there seems to be a riot of pointless activity going on up there. The only point these beasts have in their favor is that they aren't human.

toes. Although exceptional swimmers, the babies still don't have gills to help them breathe naturally, so they must rely on their mother's milk for survival.

- **The majority of merfolk are nixes.** This is the most attractive stage in their lives, as well as the most energetic. Outsiders are usually surprised to find that the nix stage of life encompasses both "childling" and "wilder"; however, the process of merfolk survival requires nothing less. Merfolk nixes are always working, playing, competing and creating. At this stage, males are called "tritons" and females "mermaids," although they go by a host of regional names as well. They love the sea and relish their lives with carefree abandon.

- **Naugs** are the strongest of their kith, their bodies honed by years of unrelenting current. At this stage, the merfolk's best years are behind her, and she "retires" to a position of advisor or teacher for the rest of the community. Most naugs have long, froth-white hair, and tritons are known to cultivate flowing beards.

BIRTHRIGHTS

- **Apsara of Vatea** — The Merfolk's Apsara, or fish-spirit, is more than a cosmetic change. The mer gains the abilities of the creature that she is bonded to, within reason. A sea turtle mer would have an armored shell that might grant an extra die of soak, a dolphin mer would have sonar, and a lionfish mer would have poisonous spikes in her fins. Merfolk also get an extra dot in one appropriate Attribute from their Apsarae. A shark, for example, would grant

Strength, not Intelligence, and a marlin would provide Dexterity or Appearance over Charisma. This added dot can take the Attribute above 5. The Storyteller decides what Apsara is linked with what Attribute.

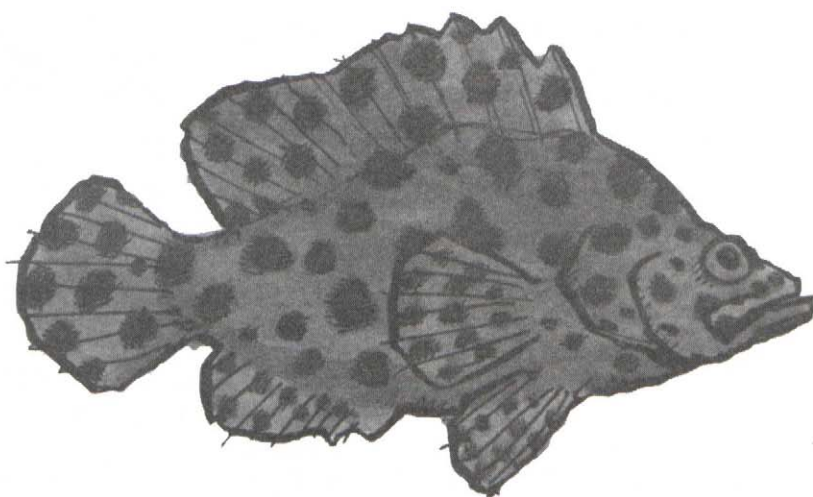
- **Gills** — The merfolk can breathe underwater as befitting their Apsarae. Although some merfolk, house Melusine in particular, don't have gills *per se*, they still have blowholes and nostrils that close off, allowing them an average of up to six hours underwater before they need to come up for air.

- **Ocean's Beauty** — Merfolk are beautiful and seductive. No merfolk can botch an Appearance-related roll, and all merfolk get an extra dot in Appearance, even if this carries them beyond five.

FRAILTIES

- **The Coldness** — Although Banality is devastating to the sidhe, it is sheer death for the merfolk. As a mer's Glamour decreases, she finds it harder and harder to breathe, until at 0, she can only breathe air, and if underwater, drowns. Even if she does survive, she is often lost, confused and naked, in the middle of the ocean with no human life to which to return.

- **Out of Touch** — The mer have cut themselves off from human society. Because of this, there are certain Abilities that are not available to them. A mer cannot purchase Streetwise, Drive, Firearms or Computer during character creation without the expenditure of freebie points (and a good rationale).



Murdhuacha

(me-ROO-cha)

Not many Kithain are so feared for their animalistic savagery as the first-dreamed of Dagon, the wild and violent merrow, the murdhuacha. These sinister aquatic Thallain are responsible for most of mankind's stories of horrors from the deep, and still occasionally pluck mortal victims from the safety of dry land to feast on their bodies (or worse) under the ever-shifting waves.

The merrow pose a confusing problem to the Kithain who know about them. They are certainly cunning and intelligent, but their society appears to be nearly completely bestial; even the alien merfolk are far too human for their tastes. While on random occasions, collectives called "colonies" crop up, the society of the merrow seems to be primarily concerned with basic, animalistic survival. Woe to the poor fool who ventures into a merrow colony, which is often based in a downed ship or plane. He won't be returning.

These Kithain seem to have a legendry that, oddly, coincides partially with that of the merfolk and partially with that of the Rokea. The primal merrow have often clashed with the weresharks, and such battles are often known to boil the waters pink with blood for miles. According to the merrow, they are the dreams of Dagon, whom most Rokea would interpret as Qyrl. As their legends have it, the merrow were born long before the fishes themselves. Dagon noticed the foam that rose up when he crashed into the sea from where he hung in the sky. Taking the piece of the sky from his mouth, he placed it within one of the bubbles, and the first merrow egg was created. Soon, the Fish-Father, Vatea, grew jealous and sent his fledgling children to change the nereids in the Grottoes, and the usurper race of the merfolk was born. The murdhuacha have taken this affront personally ever since, attacking the peaceful merfolk at every opportunity.

The merrow, while animalistic, are not stupid, and are just as capable of communication, art, technology and progress as any other Kithain. Most outsiders believe they have just retreated farthest from Banality, deep into sub-aquatic lairs and completely inhuman lifestyles. Like the merfolk, their human blood seems to have grown fairly thin, although they will occasionally steal a kiss from a drowning sailor. Some argue that they are not Thallain at all, but something far older, and something far more sinister. After all, wherever they are, there can't be enough mortal dreams to sustain them....

Appearance: The merrow are only barely human-seeming, and while the females can be strangely beautiful, the males are nothing short of hideous by human standards.



Male murdhuacha, also called "Nucks," appear to be completely skinless from the waist up. While this isn't really the case (the skin is merely transparent, like that of a jellyfish), it's no less unsettling. The females have slightly more pigmentation, but usually in the odd greens or blues of their particular Apsarae. Since the Apsara of a merrow virtually never comes from a fish or whale or any other backboned creature, merrow tend toward hideous molluscoid pseudopodia, huge lobster tails, or, most commonly, a single, coiling tentacle as if from a squid or octopus. Murdhuacha rarely wear clothing, but often drape themselves in seaweed and kelp to enhance their fearsome look.

Lifestyle: The merrow are thought by many to be the unluckier of the mer who undergo the Rite of Vatea — which they, perhaps unsurprisingly, refer to as the rite of Dagon. A murdhuacha nereid, like her Seelie counterpart, is born in human form, and grows up in a human form, although merrow nereids rarely make it very far. A female merrow lays up to six or seven hundred eggs in a (preferably human) corpse, unlike her live-bearing Seelie counterpart. Of the dozens of nereids that manage to hatch, the vast majority succumb to Banality, die of exposure, or are consumed by predators as the parents watch. Although this is hard for them, the merrow understand it is Dagon's way, that the weak should die so the strong may live.

When the time comes, the surviving nereids are taken to the nearest Grotto to undergo the Rite of Dagon, where their fate will be determined. If a fish or cetacean enters the Grotto, the merrow either leave or kill the emerging merfolk fry. But should the Grotto be explored by one of the sea's other denizens, the child emerges a full-blooded merrow. The merrow are rarely quite so beautiful as the merfolk, and their bodies can be the chitinous appendages of crabs or lobsters, the slow, brightly-colored tail of a nudibranch or, most commonly, a long coiling tentacle, as if from an octopus, squid, or even a Chulorviah. The name "Siren," after all, means "entangler."

- **Nereids** are virtually identical: slick-skinned, grayish babies with large, black eyes, webbed fingers, and a need of their mother's milk to keep them from drowning.

- **Nixes** are the most common merrow. They are hideous, elegantly animalistic Kithain that have abandoned all traces of humanity for the safety of the ocean floor. They have a grotesque look to them that would send H. R. Giger scuttling for his sketchbook. The skinless males are called "nucks" and the beautifully alien females are the "sirens" that sailors have feared since the dawn of sailing.

- **Naugs** are often very powerful and extremely savage. Eventually, an elder member becomes a draw on the colony, and at that point, the Thallain senior is chased from the lair and hunted down by the rest of the hive. If it dies, it feeds the young. If it manages to survive, Dagon most certainly finds work for this particular murdhuacha...

BIRTHRIGHTS

- **Apsara of Dagon** — The merrow's Apsarae grant them powers much like those of their Seelie cousins — jellyfish murdhuacha are certainly poisonous, sea urchin merrow are covered in sharp spines, and squid murdhuacha are often bio-

luminescent, with long, ensnaring tentacles. The Storyteller can adjudicate the appropriate bonuses as usual. The murdhuacha also gain an extra dot in an appropriate Attribute, although it almost never goes into Intelligence (and never into Appearance if the merrow is male).

- **Gills** — Unlike the merfolk, all murdhuacha Apsarae have gills, and all can stay underwater indefinitely.

- **Pelagic Nightmare** — The murdhuacha are as horrendous as the mer are beautiful. Even the better-looking murdhuacha are still a bizarre mix of human and cephalopod, jellyfish, annelid or other creature that makes for an unsettling mix. Anyone looking upon a merrow for the first time must make a Willpower roll or be frozen in shock for one turn. Usually, this is all the murdhuacha need.

FRAILTIES

- **The Coldness** — Murdhuacha suffer from the same curse as the merfolk, and Banality kisses them just as quickly. However, the murdhuacha enthusiastically call upon the Wyrd when dealing with humans, so as to procure warm bodies for their eggs.

- **Out of Touch** — These Thallain have no more contact with human society than do their merfolk cousins. They cannot purchase Streetwise, Drive, Firearms or Computer without spending freebie points or experience.

Murdhuacha Nuck Chogol of the Lusitania Hive speaks:

- **Land-Based Kithain** — The damned merfolk are right — we do need their help. But rather than marching in and telling them what to do, it's a lot easier to intimidate them into helping us. The waterlogged, half-eaten corpse of a child or girlfriend works wonders for one's motivation.

- **Aquatic Pooka** — Mmmm.... Huh? Were you saying something?

- **Selkies** — Are they with us or not? Are they part of the ocean or not? Best make up their damn minds soon, before we decide they're part of the problem....

- **Menehune** — Back in the good ol' days, we had these guys convinced we would eat their children if they didn't sacrifice enough virgins to us. Joke's on them! We took their virgins and ate their children anyway.

- **Water Babies and Yunwi Amai'yine'hi** — The dumbass merfolk still don't know we've got relatives in the lakes and streams. We've got our allies in the Winter Camp.

- **Other Prodigals** — Father Dagon's bastard half-spawn used to be our friends, but that's all changed now. This Deepwater shit of theirs has got to go. The Rokea are also a problem we just don't deserve. Stinking tooth-scales think they're so superior....

MERFOLK AS PLAYER CHARACTERS

Obviously, all this may make merfolk seem a little difficult to include in a *Changeling* chronicle, especially an ongoing one. If they are so insular and averse to Banality, then why would they ever come up at all? The answer is simple:

They have to.

This is a dark time for merfolk and *murdhuacha* — both races are threatened with extinction if they don't cooperate. If they don't act, and act now, there won't be any bodies for them to be reborn to. Since they can't really trust or rely on other pelagic supernaturals for aid, the mer must look to their wayward cousins, the Kithain. It's a dark time for the mer, that they must suck it up and go to such withered, inferior beings for help. More and more, however, it's dawning on the mer that they could learn a lot from these "dirtwalkers" — and vice versa. Slowly, arrogance is giving way to understanding.

"So what does all of this mean to me," you ask? Well, it's simple. The mer, both Seelie and Unseelie, need the help of the Kithain, and are beginning to come up and visit, in greater numbers than ever before. Here's a few hints on integrating mer into your campaign.

- Most commonly, a group of mer travel to a given area's noble (sometimes far inland) and demand his aid. While this almost always results in the mer being laughed out of town, a few more kindhearted Kithain sometimes realize the severity of the problem and agree to help the mer. Other times, the Duke or Duchess agrees to help the mer after the pelagic Kithain does some amount of service. During this time, she may be assigned to a particular household — or motley, if the noble is feeling particularly cruel.

- The characters could be on a boat or ship in transit when a group of *murdhuacha* sneak aboard unseen, and start to kill the crew and passengers, leaving the delectable Kithain for last. Eventually, a group of merfolk will arrive to deal with the problem — or perhaps aid the *murdhuacha*. At this point it is easy to link either *murdhuacha* or merfolk characters with the party, although tensions will certainly be high.

- If the characters live near a coastal city, or anywhere else even remotely tied to the ocean, a group of *murdhuacha* or even *Chulorviah* may set up shop down there. Soon enough, the characters are charged by the local lord to see what's up. As the characters discover what is going on, they realize they in fact need outside help. This odd turn of events has the land-based Kithain actually seeking out the merfolk for a change.

- Lastly, a lone mer player could be an outcast from his or her particular kith, doomed to seek shelter and companionship among the land-dwellers. Another option is that the mer actually Sained alone, and is still a very confused nereid. This strange changeling is discovered by the players and taken before the court, where the wisest elder recognizes her for what she is and tells the characters to take her to the sea at once. After she undergoes the Rite of Vatea — or Dagon — she'll be a fresh young nix, but may not want to leave her old life and friends for the cold, undersea world.

HOUSES

Each particular branch of the merfolk "trident" has its own place in mer society, representing a member of the aquatic Triat. Unlike land-based Kithain, the merfolk all believe themselves to be nobles in some capacity or another, and all pledge their allegiance to a house. Entrance into a house is typically based on the merfolk's Apsara, and each one has its own slant on undersea life.

HOUSE LORELEI

The merfolk of House Lorelei realize that their House is the representation of Dagon in the Triat; they interpret this as their duty to find and destroy his minions wherever they may be, be they human, *murdhuacha*, or even *Chulorviah*. House Lorelei is a house of warriors and hunters — the Apsarae of the Lorelei are typically sharks, eels, skates, rays, guitarfishes, barracuda and even

some of the predators of the Abyssal Zone, such as viperfish and gulper eels.

Facing off against a Lorelei in her own element is *not* strongly advised. The fighting style of the house hinges on an underwater environment; these fae are hindered on dry land, but almost unstoppable undersea. Prone to violent frenzies, a Lorelei is a creative, independent fighter, used to fighting in all three dimensions. The trident is the preferred weapon of these warriors — slashing with a sword or axe is wildly inefficient underwater, and a trident still grants the advantage of reach. Lorelei are not the disciplined, rank-and-file types that come to mind when one thinks of the word “soldier.” Even in highly organized units, the merfolk of house Lorelei operate with an autonomy that is almost unheard of on land. It’s not that the Lorelei can’t follow orders, it’s just that their unusual fighting style and diversity within their own ranks requires a degree of freedom.

Lorelei are often assigned to various missions by high-ranking Syrinx (and their Melusine advisors) based on their capabilities. An anglerfish Lorelei may get an Abyssal Zone detail while a mako would probably get something closer to the surface. Lorelei also guard the coral cit-

ies and serve as bodyguards for various other merfolk. The Lorelei enjoy a degree of safety from the weresharks, who apparently see them as something of kindred spirits. It’s not much (there’s never such thing as “completely safe” with the Rokea), but it’s better than nothing.

Boon: The Lorelei are devastating opponents in battle. All Lorelei gain one free dot in Brawl, Melee or Dodge, and this bonus doubles in the water. Similarly, Lorelei pack a vicious bite that does Str +1 damage when it connects.

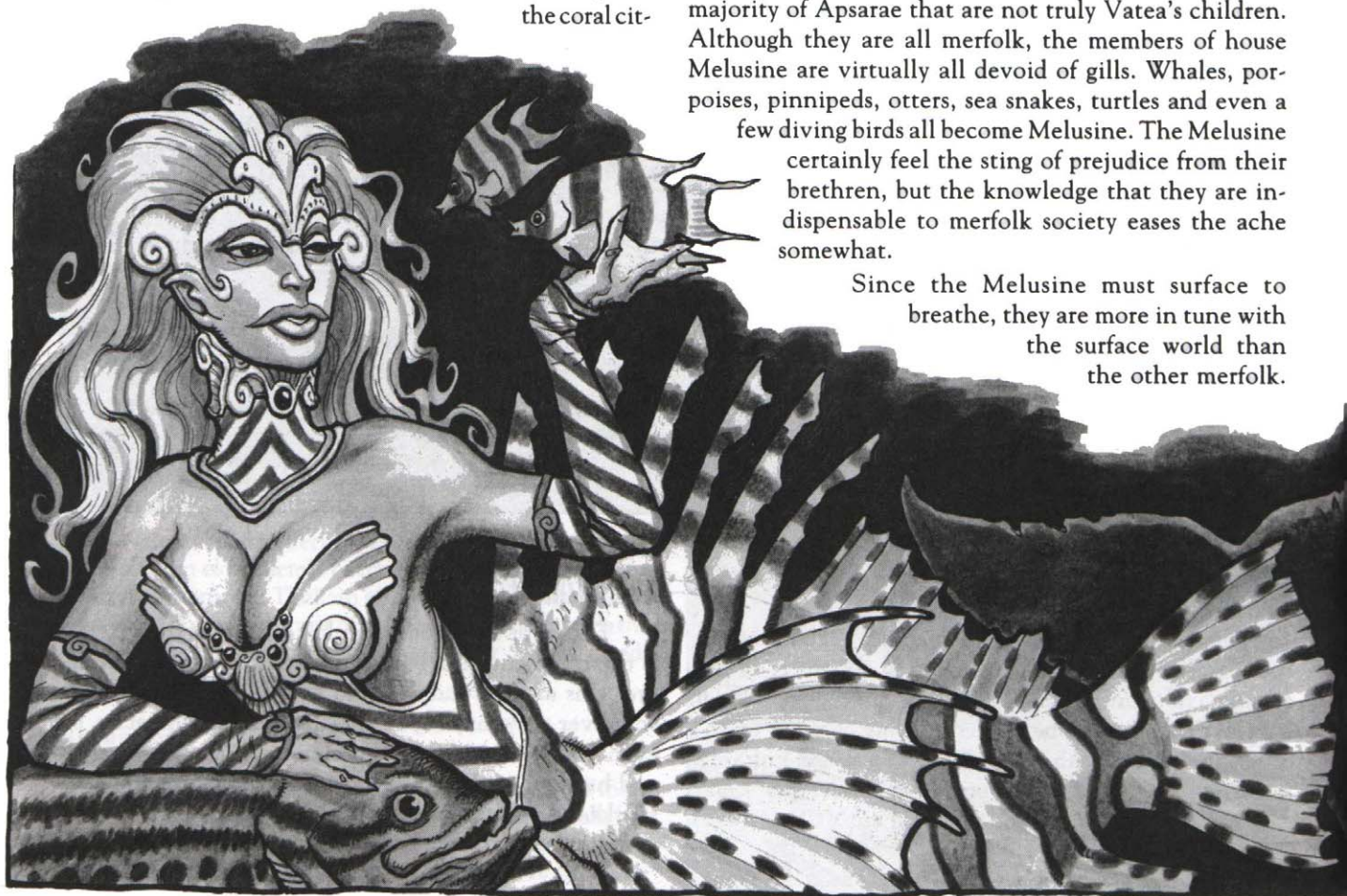
Flaw: All Lorelei, regardless of how docile their Apsara may be, are prone to frenzy at the smell of blood. When a Lorelei smells blood, she must gain three successes on a Willpower roll or fly into a maniacal frenzy, attacking anything that moves for the next five turns.

HOUSE MELUSINE

The merfolk of House Melusine, the smallest and least trusted house, are those few chosen by the Shelled One to act as his representatives among Vatea’s Children. Valued as intellectuals, the merfolk of house Melusine are the lorekeepers and scholars of merfolk society.

Oddly, House Melusine is also known for holding the majority of Apsarae that are not truly Vatea’s children. Although they are all merfolk, the members of house Melusine are virtually all devoid of gills. Whales, porpoises, pinnipeds, otters, sea snakes, turtles and even a few diving birds all become Melusine. The Melusine certainly feel the sting of prejudice from their brethren, but the knowledge that they are indispensable to merfolk society eases the ache somewhat.

Since the Melusine must surface to breathe, they are more in tune with the surface world than the other merfolk.



Some nixes even go so far as to break the unwritten law and sneak aboard a ship or an island and “go native” for a few days. While it is known that this is done, it is still not tolerated in merfolk society — the punishments vary, but are often harsh enough to startle even an Unseelie.

The majority of bio-architects and coral artists are Melusine merfolk, and even a few high-ranking nobles are Melusine. In recent years the Melusine have become indispensable for their knowledge of surface matters. This sudden need for their skill has led some other merfolk, particularly Lorelei, to question the motives of the Melusine, sometimes going so far as to even accuse this house of collaboration with the surface-dwellers. The Melusine typically ignore these accusations, and the mightier among them are quite capable of exacting vengeance should the insult be too severe.

Boon: Melusine fae are rather more in touch with the society of the landwalkers. They purchase the “forbidden skills” — Streetwise, Drive, Firearms and Computer — without restriction.

Flaw: The Melusine must all breathe air. Melusine must surface every six hours to breathe before the danger of drowning sets in.

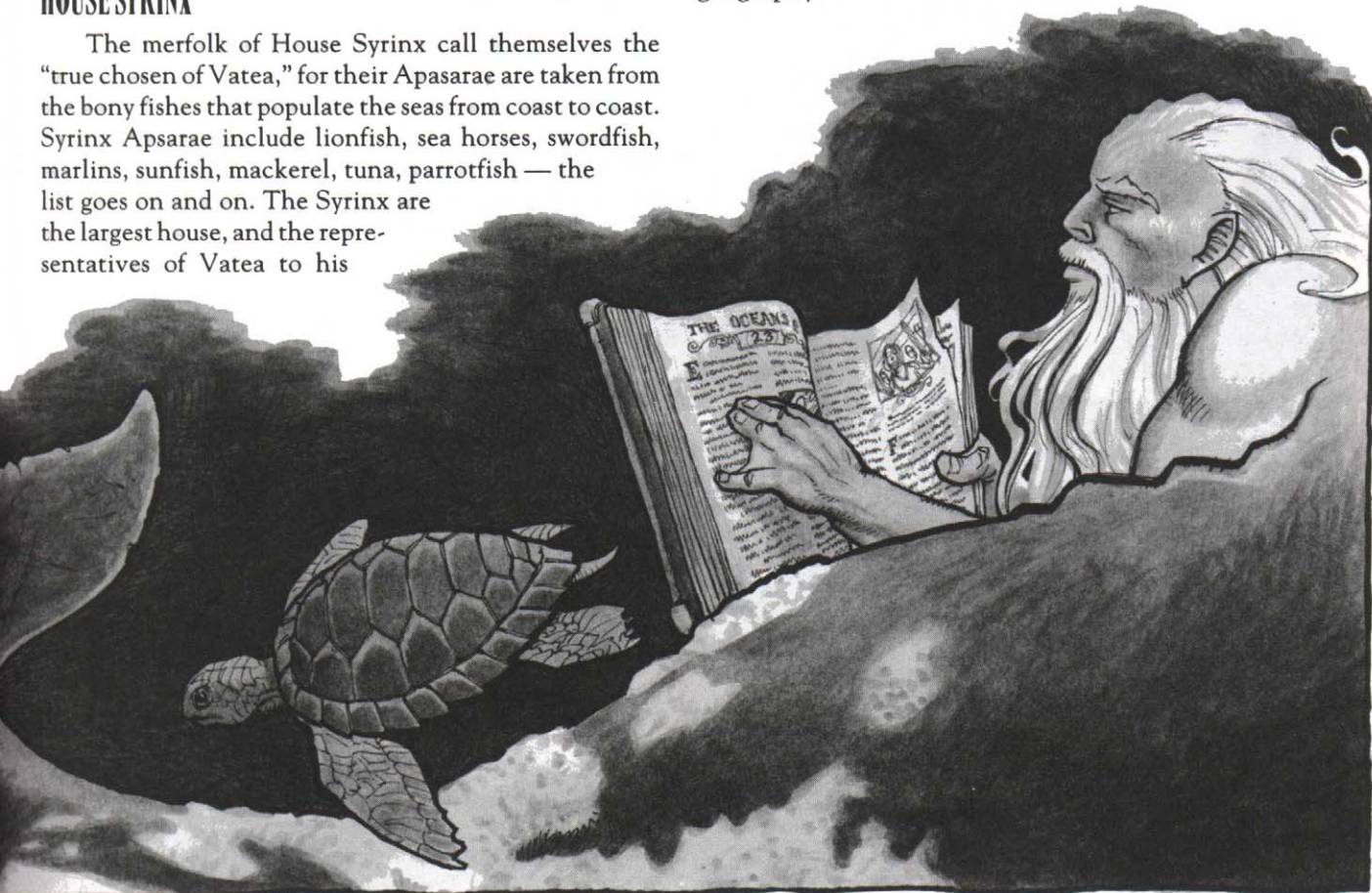
HOUSE SYRINX

The merfolk of House Syrinx call themselves the “true chosen of Vatea,” for their Apasarae are taken from the bony fishes that populate the seas from coast to coast. Syrinx Apasarae include lionfish, sea horses, swordfish, marlins, sunfish, mackerel, tuna, parrotfish — the list goes on and on. The Syrinx are the largest house, and the representatives of Vatea to his

own children. Acting as something of a mix between nobles and spiritual leaders, the merfolk of house Syrinx venerate the sea through art, dance, and music.

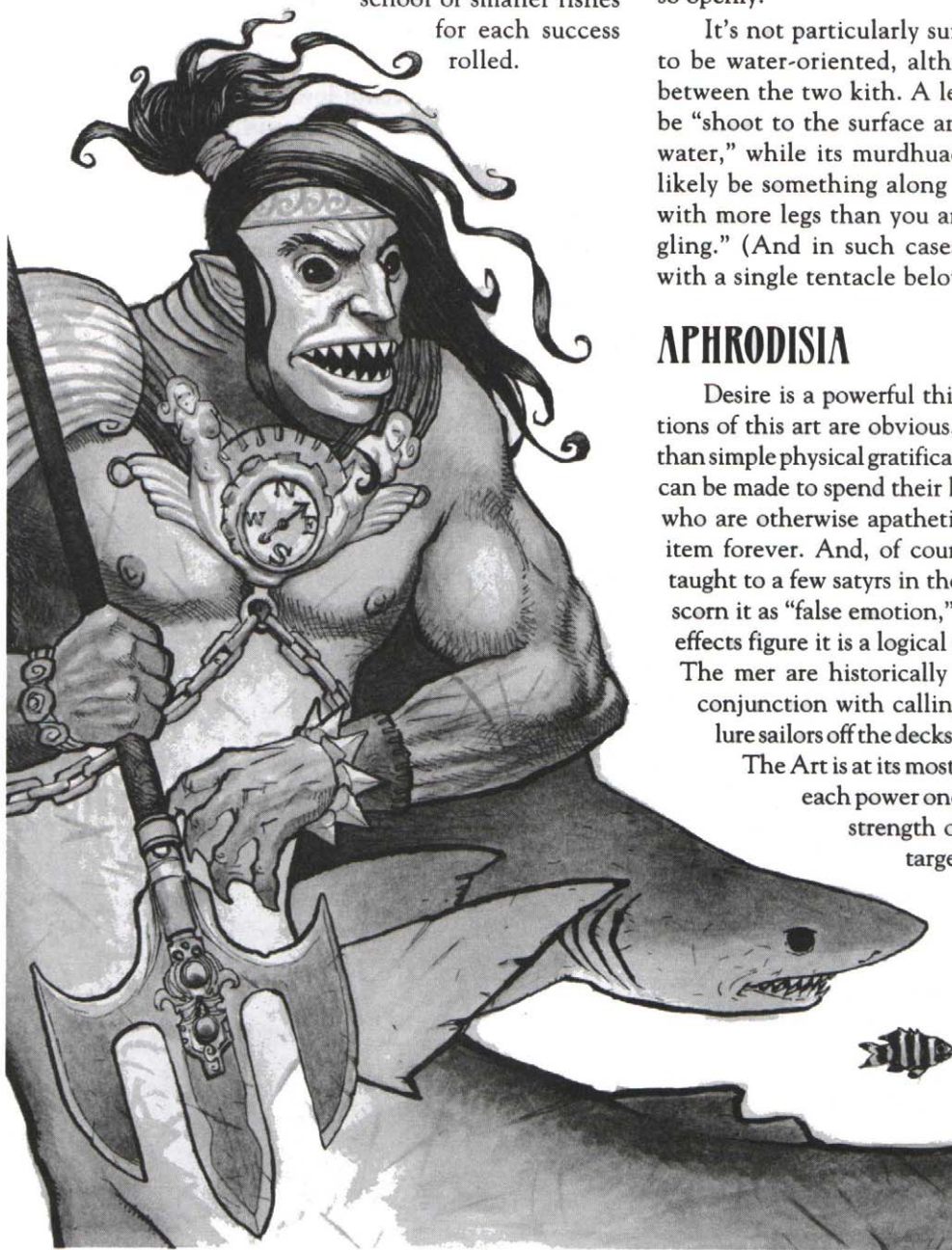
Merfolk of House Syrinx are typical of what people picture when they hear the words “Mermaid” or “Triton” — beautiful, capricious, fish-tailed water spirits who love to cavort but can be deadly when angered. It was the Syrinx who were responsible for legends of helpful sea-folk who would help the wind steer a ship or blow a sultry kiss to a lonely sailor; however, the Syrinx were just as renowned as angry sea-gods calling storms from blue skies to sink a vessel or for singing men to their doom.

Most members of merfolk society are Syrinx, and they take pride in their affiliation. Fully as large as the other two houses put together, Syrinx is simultaneously home to the highest and lowest ranking merfolk. Although the majority of “citizens” are Syrinx, so are their leaders, with the other two houses filling the political spaces between. The members of house Syrinx take their responsibility very seriously — a task which they see as being leadership of the world. After all, they are the nobility of the oceans, and the oceans are the “real world” to anyone with any knowledge of simple geography.



The current Queen of the Mer, a breathtakingly beautiful lionfish nix named Naomi, belongs to this house. Clearly disturbed by current events, it was humiliating for her to try to enlist the aid of the land-based Kithain, but she could see no other way. This is a very tense time for her — she could suffer the shame of failing all her people, or be raised on a pedestal as the greatest hero the mer have ever known.

Boon: Members of house Syrinx are more regal than other mer, and can even command the creatures of the sea to recognize their sovereignty to some degree. A Syrinx mer may roll Charisma + Survival to exert this influence; she may control one larger creature or one school of smaller fishes for each success rolled.



Flaw: More than any other merfolk, the members of House Syrinx need the water. A Syrinx loses one Willpower point for every day that she does not spend at least an hour immersed in water. Lost Willpower can only be recovered by spending several hours at a time submerged.

NEW ARTS

These arts, while for the most part not *completely* unique to the mer, are pretty darn rare out of water. The merfolk used these powers quite freely before the Sundering, but now they are loath to call attention to themselves so openly.

It's not particularly surprising that mer Bunks tend to be water-oriented, although they are very different between the two kith. A level-three merfolk Bunk may be "shoot to the surface and splash mightily out of the water," while its murdhuacha counterpart would more likely be something along the lines of "find something with more legs than you and eat it while it's still wriggling." (And in such cases, avoid the smiling merrow with a single tentacle below the waist....)

APHRODISIA

Desire is a powerful thing. While the sexual applications of this art are obvious, its practice is far more useful than simple physical gratification. Otherwise rational people can be made to spend their life savings on trash, and those who are otherwise apathetic can be made to treasure an item forever. And, of course, there is sex. This art was taught to a few satyrs in the Middle Ages; some old goats scorn it as "false emotion," but most who see the power's effects figure it is a logical outgrowth of the Song of Pan.

The mer are historically famous for using this Art in conjunction with calling upon the Wyrd, in order to lure sailors off the decks of ships and into their clutches.

The Art is at its most powerful when its wielder uses each power one by one, subtly building on the strength of the target's desire, until the target has convinced himself that his desire is not only natural, but not at all irrational.

Aphrodisia can be resisted by Willpower, although the roll to resist is automatic and unconscious; the person affected shouldn't automatically know that a cantrip is at work. The number of successes the caster scores determines just how many successes are necessary for the onlooker's Willpower roll to be able to ignore the cantrip's effects. To shrug off the cantrip, the witness must score the caster's number of successes plus one. For example, Lady Perue uses Fancy on a shiny (and drugged) apple in a bowl of fruit as Lord Talbot is scanning the feasting table. If Lady Perue gets three successes on her Fancy roll, then Lord Talbot must score four successes on his Willpower roll to be unaffected.

Attribute: Charisma

• FANCY

This cantrip gets someone to pleasantly notice something they would not have ordinarily noticed. Something of a fae guarantee of a good first impression, it makes a face stand out of a crowd or one particular item from a shopkeeper's cart leap to the eye. Of course, there's no guarantee that the item is a sure sale, or that the face in the crowd is the duke's love for life, but it does serve as the proverbial "foot in the door."

System: The Realm determines just who or what gets noticed, rather than who does the noticing. As a result, the changeling must time the use of this cantrip carefully if he doesn't want any and all onlookers to be affected. Of course, sometimes it's appropriate to affect a group, particularly at court functions.

Fancy can't be used to cancel out supernatural powers of stealth; although it could call attention to a sluagh lurking in the bushes (and the sluagh would at least get the benefit of a good first impression), it couldn't point out the same sluagh if he was obscured by Veiled Eyes.

Type: Chimerical

.. YEARN

This cantrip places a quick flash of desire in a target's mind, most likely when he is thinking about something else. The target suddenly feels a need for whatever is placed inside his mind.

System: The Realm determines who is affected; use of the Time Realm can plant a suggestion in a target's mind to be "set off" later. This is certainly one way of ensuring that your date of last evening calls you again....

The object of the target's affections need not be present at the time of the cantrip's casting, but he must be familiar with it. A changeling can't use Yearn to make

a person long for something he's only vaguely familiar with, or has seen but never paid all that much attention to. The object must stand out in his mind somehow, even if it's as vague as "that beautiful girl I saw in the window of Café Au Lait."

Type: Chimerical

... COVET

A more powerful version of Yearn, this cantrip causes the target to begin obsessing over the object of his affections. While the victim is still rational, her object of desire moves up a few rungs on the victim's ladder of priorities. She begins to lose sleep, and will find herself absently thinking about the object of her attention at peculiar times.

System: The Realm determines who can be affected by this cantrip. Covet lasts for about a day's time.

Type: Chimerical

.... CRAVE

The victim is no longer rational, and the object of his desire is his top priority. He will do just about anything that does not jeopardize himself, his closest friends or the object of his affections to be close to what he desires.

System: The Realm, once more, determines who the caster can affect. The effects of Crave last for about a scene's time.

Type: Chimerical

..... NEED

At this stage of desire, sanity goes right out the window. The victim will leap overboard to drown with the object of his affections, if that's what it takes. He's completely obsessed, and has trouble even so much as focusing on anything else. This person is irrational and dangerous, and not above destroying the object of his affections to prevent others from getting it.

System: Need lasts for a scene. The Realm, yet again, determines who the caster can affect.

Type: Chimerical

KRYOS

Ice isn't nearly so feared on land as it is in the water, but it can often spell death for the mer. Although this Art was created by the mer, trolls who witness its ice-sculpting beauty often beg to be taught its ways. Its beauty has a double edge to changelings, who sense its connection to the forces of Banality — immobility, rigidity, crystal-



line symmetry — all too readily. Although still devastating on land, the powers of Kryos all work underwater at a -1 difficulty.

Attribute: Strength

• COLD SHOCK

This cantrip makes a target bitterly cold, not quite to the freezing point, but certainly enough to cause discomfort. The cold bites down almost instantly, and it is as though the person or object had been in freezing weather for some time. Although uncomfortable to mortals, it can be theoretically devastating to cold-blooded animals. Underwater, this serves as a nasty punishment; on land it tends to see more mundane uses (such as keeping drinks cold). Tattered Mel, a pooka unfortunate enough to taste this cantrip's effects after an unwanted play for a merfolk's affections, called the effect "something like an ice cream headache when Satan's working the soda fountain."

System: The Realm determines who or what the cantrip affects. If used against a living target, the victim must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 5+ the number of successes) or lose two dice from all dice pools due to the numbing cold (cold-blooded creatures lose four dice, and are in physical pain from the effect). The effect lasts for a scene.

Type: Wyrd

•• GELID RIME

This cantrip covers the target in a thin crust of ice. Although not thick enough to hold a person, it can certainly slow a target down, and can also be used to jam up things like keyholes.

System: On land, Gelid Rime is often used in conjunction with the Scene Realm to make a slippery trap for a pursuer; it's also great for ice skating. The Realm determines who or what is covered by the ice.

The number of successes determine the thickness of the ice.

- 1 Success — "Wafer thin"
- 2 Successes — Quarter-inch
- 3 Successes — Half-inch
- 4 Successes — Three-quarters of an inch
- 5 Successes — One inch

Type: Wyrd

••• FROST FACSIMILE

This handy cantrip allows the changeling to create a tangible facsimile of an item out of ice. This changeling



is almost never caught without a weapon, and always seems to have an extra tool handy. While the facsimile is still crafted of ice (a magnetic keypad will not unlock for an ice key, and an ice crowbar is too brittle to pry anything) this is still a wildly useful art for creating diversions and handy devices.

Successes: The Realm determines what can be copied, and the number of successes determines the strength of the item created. Note that the heat of the general area can affect this outcome.

- 1 Success — Generally weak and flimsy
- 2 Successes — Not brittle, but still likely to melt
- 3 Successes — Reasonably sturdy
- 4 Successes — Not likely to break or melt
- 5 Successes — Strong as steel

Type: Wyrd

.... CRYSTAL PRISON

This dangerous cantrip actually encases a victim in a block of ice. Note that the victim is completely encased and may die of suffocation if her head is covered.

System: The Realm determines who or what can be encased in ice. The changeling can choose to localize the effects ("his gun hand" or "just his feet") at a +1 difficulty.

The number of successes determines, again, the thickness of the ice.

- 1 Success — One inch
- 2 Successes — Three inches
- 3 Successes — Six inches
- 4 Successes — Nine inches
- 5 Successes — One foot

Type: Chimerical or Wyrd

..... COLDHEART

The devastating effects of this cantrip literally freeze someone from the inside out. Unlike the choking effects of Crystal Prison, Coldheart is more of a mystical freezing, like suspended animation; the changeling can even use it on herself in times of crisis. The target of the cantrip becomes painfully cold to the touch. While frozen the target is unconscious, immune to poisons, gases, and other toxins, and all bodily processes cease. However, the frozen target is also as brittle as ice, and thawing after being shattered is highly unpleasant.

System: The Realm determines who or what can be frozen.

The number of successes determines the length of time the target remains frozen until it melts. Unless the



changeling's roll botches, she may choose to have the duration be anything up to and including her total success; for instance, if Tarshinelle gets four successes on her roll, and wants to freeze herself only for a week's time, she may do that. However, if she botched her roll, she might find herself frozen for the whole year, possibly plus change.

1 Success — One day

2 Successes — One week

3 Successes — One month

4 Successes — One year

5 Successes — Permanent (although some say that a kiss can rouse the victim)

Type: Wyrd

SKYCRAFT

Since the dawn of time, mankind has made offerings to the gods before undergoing an aquatic journey of any sort. The changelings who know Skycraft protect it well, as they understand the power of this potent Art. Masters of Skycraft can control the storms that whip the seas into their frenzy, and through this, the lives of whoever may be traveling there. (Note, however, that none of these arts have much effect underwater.)

Attribute: Stamina

• THUNDERCLAP

The cantrip produces a dramatic thunderclap and lightning flash in conjunction with some dramatic gesture, such as raising a sword or trident, or entering a room. This is most often used to create fear in an opponent, or warn ships away from certain areas.

System: The thunderclap itself is harmless, although an unwary person at "ground zero" might be temporarily stunned or deafened (Storyteller's discretion).

The Realm decrees just how the thunderclap is generated; for example, Actor or Fae indicates that the thunder will sound when the target gestures, while Nature or Prop would set the thunder to discharge when the given object is raised.

The number of successes determine how far away the thunderclap will be heard.

1 Success — Half mile

2 Successes — One mile

3 Successes — Three miles

4 Successes — Five miles

5 Successes — Ten miles

Type: Wyrd (or Chimerical)

.. COMPASS WINDS

The changeling can create a strong wind and direct it at a given object. This wind lasts as long as the changeling maintains concentration on the object. Its strength is variable, but can be enough to push a ship or knock over a grown man.

System: The Realm determines the target of the cantrip, and the number of successes determines the wind's strength. Note that merfolk must remain at least partially above the surface in order to concentrate on maintaining the wind.

The number of successes determines the wind's strength.

- 1 Success — 10 miles an hour
- 2 Successes — 20 miles an hour
- 3 Successes — 40 miles an hour
- 4 Successes — 50 miles an hour
- 5 Successes — 80 miles an hour

Type: Chimerical or Wyrd

... DARK SKY

The changeling can darken the sky with low-lying stormclouds and create an ominous fog to cloak a specific target. The fog works both ways, naturally; those who are cloaked in fog have no easier time seeing out than others do seeing in. The effect can be disastrous to a ship or aircraft, as well as potentially dangerous to an individual.

System: The Realm determines who or what can be cloaked.

The successes determine the visibility within the fog.

- 1 Success — Hazy; forty feet visibility
- 2 Successes — Cloudy; twenty feet visibility
- 3 Successes — Murky; ten feet visibility
- 4 Successes — Thick; five feet visibility
- 5 Successes — Pea Soup; maybe your hand in front of your face.

Type: Chimerical or Wyrd

.... STORMCRAFT

The changeling using this cantrip can summon down the clouds themselves in the form of a terrible storm. This storm wreaks its fury relentlessly on the subject of the cantrip until the changeling ceases to concentrate — however,

sometimes the storms can rage out of control and begin working destruction at random. Often, the storm has an ominously human appearance, like a sneering human face or an angry old man (these are usually more common in the chimerical castings).



Systems:

The Realm determines the cantrip's target; for instance, Prop can call down a storm on a vessel. Naturally, the most common Realm used with Stormcraft is Scene.

At the time of casting, the Storyteller should secretly roll the character's Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to determine the changeling's level of control over the storm. If the roll is successful, the storm disperses when the changeling bids it to or ceases concentrating. If the roll fails, the storm may linger on for a while, or wink out prematurely. A botch, naturally, means that the storm becomes uncontrollable, and probably starts working devastation on things the changeling would rather remain safe.

The number of successes determines the strength of the storm.

- 1 Success — Drizzle
- 2 Successes — Shower
- 3 Successes — Thunderstorm
- 4 Successes — Tempest
- 5 Successes — Monsoon

Type: Wyrd or Chimerical

.....CALL LIGHTNING

This devastating cantrip holds a place of fear in the hearts of all Kithain, as the user actually uses his body to channel a lightning bolt down from a cloudless sky and fry his victim. Often only used in times of extreme urgency, Call Lightning does an unholy amount of damage to a target.

System: The Realm simply determines the target.

The lightning bolt does five dice of damage to its target, plus one extra die for every success on the roll. The damage is considered aggravated unless the lightning strike is chimerical in nature.

Type: Wyrd or Chimerical

NEW TREASURES

Merfolk Treasures are almost always organic in form; no mer has ever tried to infuse Glamour into a wetsuit or glass bottle. Even the *murdhuacha*'s occasional metal weapons are always salvaged things, bits of sharpened metal worked into a framework of carefully woven kelp and shaped coral. Although their Treasures would disappoint a nocker's sense of aesthetics, they are nonetheless works of art, the products of lazy Caribbean dreams — or vivid North Sea nightmare.

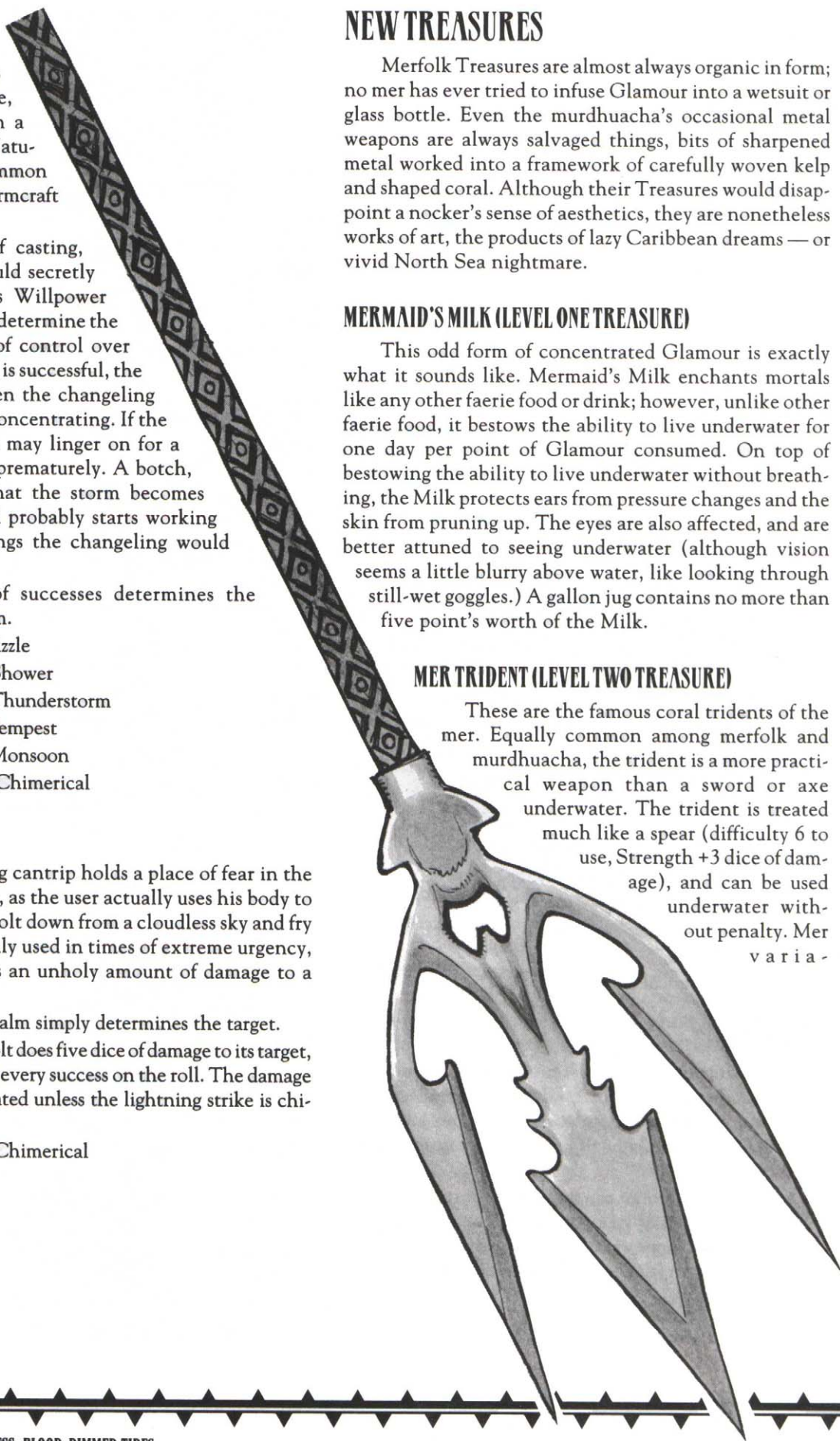
MERMAID'S MILK (LEVEL ONE TREASURE)

This odd form of concentrated Glamour is exactly what it sounds like. Mermaid's Milk enchants mortals like any other faerie food or drink; however, unlike other faerie food, it bestows the ability to live underwater for one day per point of Glamour consumed. On top of bestowing the ability to live underwater without breathing, the Milk protects ears from pressure changes and the skin from pruning up. The eyes are also affected, and are better attuned to seeing underwater (although vision seems a little blurry above water, like looking through still-wet goggles.) A gallon jug contains no more than five point's worth of the Milk.

MER TRIDENT (LEVEL TWO TREASURE)

These are the famous coral tridents of the mer. Equally common among merfolk and *murdhuacha*, the trident is a more practical weapon than a sword or axe underwater. The trident is treated much like a spear (difficulty 6 to use, Strength +3 dice of damage), and can be used underwater without penalty. Mer

varia-



tions tend to grant an extra die to melee dice pools, while merrow variations tend to leave pus-filled, festering wounds scuttling with tiny crabs. More powerful variants occur on both sides of the war.

MELUSINE'S MIRROR (LEVEL THREE TREASURE)

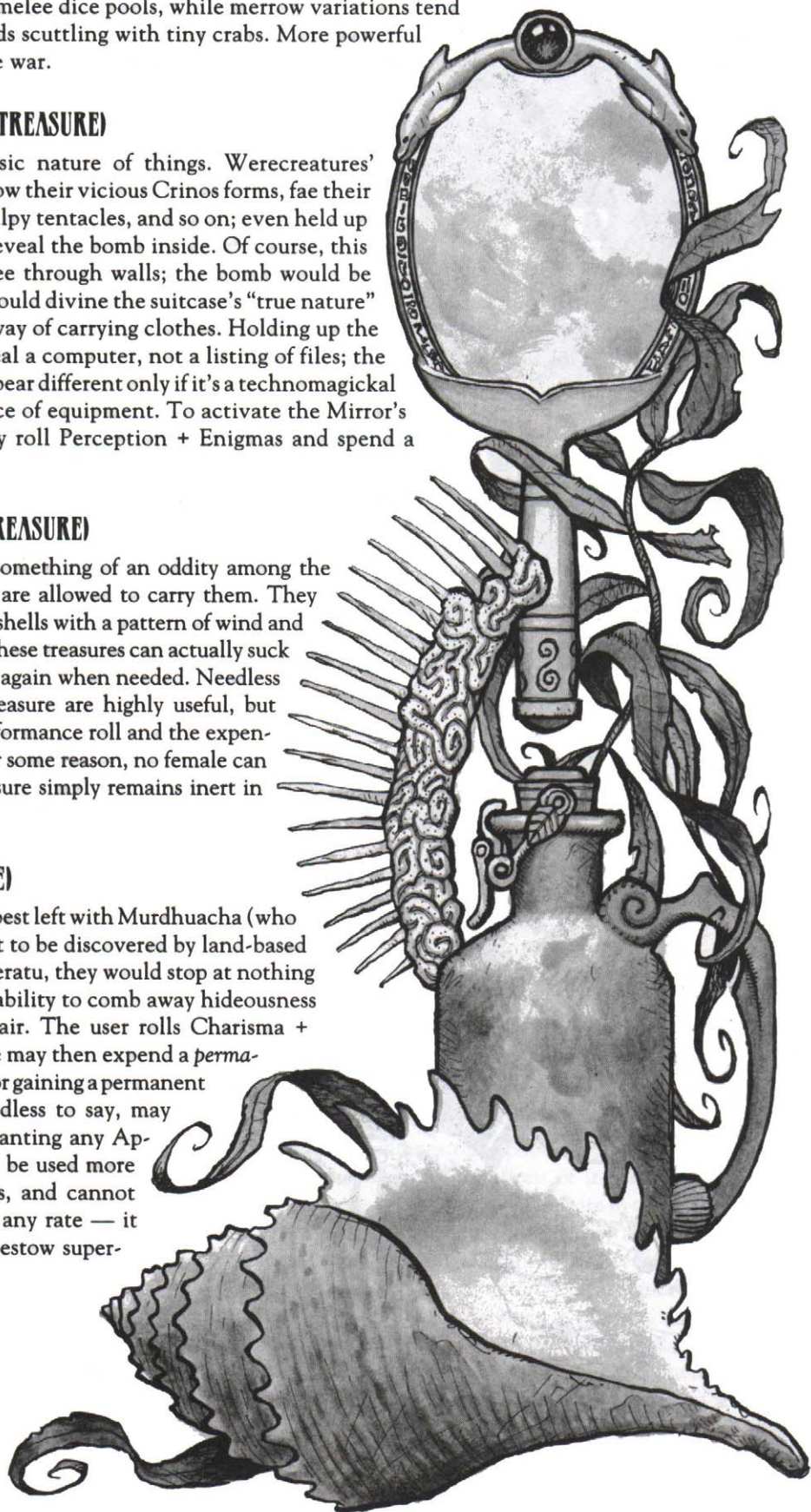
This treasure reflects the basic nature of things. Werecreatures' reflections caught in the Mirror show their vicious Crinos forms, fae their true seemings, Chulorviah their pulpy tentacles, and so on; even held up to a suitcase, for example, it will reveal the bomb inside. Of course, this doesn't make it a handy way to see through walls; the bomb would be revealed only because the mirror would divine the suitcase's "true nature" as a trap rather than an innocent way of carrying clothes. Holding up the Mirror to a computer will just reveal a computer, not a listing of files; the computer's reflection is likely to appear different only if it's a technomagickal device rather than a mundane piece of equipment. To activate the Mirror's power, its owner must successfully roll Perception + Enigmas and spend a point of Glamour.

CONCH OF POSEIDON (LEVEL FOUR TREASURE)

These powerful Treasures are something of an oddity among the matriarchal merfolk — only males are allowed to carry them. They appear as beautiful, spiraling conch shells with a pattern of wind and wave etched along their exteriors. These treasures can actually suck up an entire storm, to be blown out again when needed. Needless to say, both applications of the treasure are highly useful, but require a successful Charisma + Performance roll and the expenditure of two points of Glamour. For some reason, no female can use a Conch of Poseidon; the Treasure simply remains inert in distaff hands.

CORAL COMB (LEVEL FIVE TREASURE)

This powerful item is probably best left with Murdhuacha (who need it more than most), for were it to be discovered by land-based groups such as the Pu'Gwis or Nosferatu, they would stop at nothing to get it. The Coral Comb has the ability to comb away hideousness like leaves and sticks from fine hair. The user rolls Charisma + Expression to activate the comb; he may then expend a *permanent* point of Glamour in exchange for gaining a permanent dot in Appearance. (Botches, needless to say, may take the Glamour away without granting any Appearance at all.) The comb cannot be used more than three times before it shatters, and cannot take one's Appearance above 5 at any rate — it combs away ugliness, but cannot bestow super-human beauty.





CHAPTER THREE: SPINNING YARNS

But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien to it, but it is also a fiend to its own off-spring; worse than the Persian host who murdered his own guests; sparing not the creatures which itself has spawned. Like a savage tigress that tossing in the jungle overlays her own cubs, so the sea dashes even the mightiest whales against the rocks, and leaves them there side by side with the split wrecks of ships. No mercy, no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting like a mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean overruns the globe.

— Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Storytelling a game that's set at sea is a rather different experience than the usual landlocked story or chronicle. It can be pretty daunting, even if you did grow up in a coastal city. After all, it's one thing to visit the beach on a regular basis, but another thing entirely to picture life three hundred feet under, without breathing apparatus or wetsuit. Still, the oceans of the World of Darkness are just as immense as those of our own world, and have a hefty supply of stories of their own. This chapter is your guide to taking the various elements of the maritime environment and fusing them into a truly exotic story — or even chronicle.

It's of course important to realize that not every square mile of ocean hosts a supernatural entity. After all, the supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness are rare enough on land — it'd be ridiculous to assume that there

would be a greater concentration in the water. It's quite possible to travel from the Bahamas to the Mediterranean and never cross over the path of an unnatural denizen.

However, the scattered population of the seas' denizens has some sinister connotations of its own. The oceanic supernaturals who claim "territory" are in the minority, and the percentage of the oceans that they actually control is almost infinitesimal. Practically speaking, this means there's precious little to stop a powerful pelagic denizen from going wherever it chooses, whenever it chooses. Although the Rokea are bloodily efficient at removing what they consider "threats to Sea," they can hardly be everywhere at once. That Mariner, Rokea slew or Chulorvian swarm that just boarded the characters' vessel, tore them almost to shreds and then abandoned ship? Good luck tracking them. They

can come back to finish the job whenever they want. *Whenever they want.* Impress that onto your players, and suddenly you'll find you have a whole new dread-inducing tool at your fingertips.

MOOD

A well-crafted mood is what keeps the players coming back for more. **Blood-Dimmed Tides** stories should ooze mood — after all, you're describing an environment that's 180 degrees away from your players' everyday lives. The ocean is exotic, vast, virtually unknowable. It should inspire at least some sort of emotion in your players; otherwise, you might as well keep the story landlocked.

MYSTIQUE

When reading about the terrible privations suffered by the crew of most seagoing vessels over the course of history, one wonders why anyone in their right mind would leave the security of land behind for such an existence. Well, leaving aside the press-ganged, galley slaves and other involuntary sailors for now, it's probably due to the mystique of the sea.

The ocean is timeless, in a way. It doesn't automatically seem so when you're standing on a concrete pier with a cell-phone in hand, or when you're playing electronic slot machines aboard a cruise liner, but once you're brought face-to-face with the elements (for example, when crewing a small ship or during a dive) it becomes apparent how little things have changed over millennia. The sea is still fickle, tossing up hurricanes and waterspouts seemingly at its every whim. It shows us a serene face, but keeps hundreds of secrets from us. To many people, it's a terrible, beautiful, mercurial lover.

The lure of the sea is twofold. First of all, there's the opportunity for travel. Although it's now possible to hop in a plane and be across the globe in a matter of hours, travel by boat feels much more like, well, travel. Plying the shifting waves and feeling the spray on one's face is a lot more immediate than sitting down in a metal box and not leaving until you've hit your destination. The ocean is the gateway to the exotic; consider the difference between arriving in London by way of Heathrow and dropping anchor in Rio de Janeiro's harbor. The sea has been linked with exploration and new sights ever since Homer decided to tell a little story about a clever general who got a bit lost on the way home. Your players have been raised on this association; milk it for all it's worth.

But secondly, the mystique of the oceans relies on the oceans themselves. Sailing across the waters is an entirely different experience than walking across a plain, because there's so much more going on underneath your feet. We see



only a tiny fraction of what's going on in the ocean at any one time, and this whets our appetite for more. People have always had that tiny little temptation to jump over the railing, to sink to the ocean floor to find out what's waiting to welcome them there. Indulge your players in that temptation — sooner or later, they'll realize that's what they *really* want.

HELPLESSNESS

Nobody likes to feel helpless, and your players are probably no exception. However, a feeling of helplessness is one of the key elements of a good horror story — as well as a major element in almost every good sea story ever told. Nobody — *nobody* — can control the sea. From Homer's *Odyssey* to the inevitable news reports about buildings washed away by the inexorable sea, people have always understood that the oceans are larger, stronger and much more determined than they are. In the stories where people are given powers over wind and wave, such people are always understood to be this side of demigods. Everyone else is at the mercy of the waves.

Exploit this. Show your players what it's like to be caught in a hurricane or too near a waterspout. Demonstrate the power of the ocean, and make it clear that no Discipline, rote or fast-talking of spirits is going to shift things in their favor. If they're lucky and smart, they can increase their odds of survival — but don't give them too much more. Make the ocean itself seem alive and either uncaring or malevolent. When bringing out krakenesque horrors from beneath the ocean floor, emphasize their scale; subtly hint at how insignificant the players are next to these things. Obviously, this isn't a point you want to hammer home — that'll just get you accused of favoring the monsters (well, the monsters that the players aren't controlling). Work it quietly and subtly. Stir the waves and clouds slowly. Darken the sky. Then start building things up. If you do your job properly, the players will be on the edges of their seats when they realize how little their preparations and tactics are worth.

THEME

So just why are you planning a story or chronicle set at sea, anyway? The answer usually lies in your theme. Even if you're just thinking of dropping your players into the underwater environment for a casual night or two of roleplaying, picking a theme for the story can only improve play. Having an underlying theme coloring each scene helps give a sense of completion, reassuring the players that they've actually experienced something. There are any number of themes you can select; the following are just a couple of options.



THE UNKNOWN

Certainly the most unnerving thing about the ocean is how little we understand it. In some ways, this theme isn't too unlike that of helplessness; both stress the characters' relative inability to control their environment. However, the unknown is a step beyond; it can convey a sense of helplessness without even the security of knowing that you *are* helpless — or if there's a solution that you just can't see.

The unknown can conjure up a variety of moods, all of which are appropriate for an at-sea story. It can inspire a sense of wonder which is certainly apt for **Changeling** stories. Just as often, if not moreso, it can evoke fear.

One particular trick to use to stress this is to limit the character's senses. You don't have to go very far under the surface before light starts failing you; once you're down a few thousand feet, you can't see your hand in front of your face without a light source. Similarly, most non-native characters will be severely disadvantaged by their lack of olfactory acuity; it's a lot easier for the Rokea to smell you than it is for you to smell him. Hearing isn't much help to airbreathers, either; water does conduct sound nicely, but if all you can hear is your own breather, you won't be picking out the silent approach of the creatures behind you. Only the truly

adapted such as the Mariners, Rokea and mer are sufficiently attuned to their environments to be comfortable underwater — and even they can't see all that far, can't hear the murdhuacha hidden in a school of tuna, can't smell the vampire over the blood he's spilling. And even *sonar* isn't much help: It may be a little blip or a big blip, but will you really know *what* it is before it arrives?

Play on this theme by having things happen at night, or down below the "Sunlight Zone." The Grottoes, some of the most important places in all the seas, are almost always lightless. Project: Deepwater sits on a shelf where the only light it receives is what it can manage to manufacture itself — cold comfort. Let the players know that what they sense is only the tiniest fraction of what's going on, of what's important. To get the full story, they'll have to take some considerable risks....

VASTNESS

It's perfectly all right if your players feel self-important; they are the stars of the story, after all. However, if they're getting a little too full of themselves, nothing can bring them back down to size quite like a story set in or on the ocean. The ocean is huge and terrible, and quite indifferent to the tiny creatures that cut here and there across its face.



Even a hundred-foot-long supernatural whale is a pinprick against the vast, dark tapestry of the oceans as a whole.

As a theme, vastness is very appropriate for a horror story. It can represent the uncaring universe, or the inexorable grind of an unpleasant fate. The protagonists of a horror tale should always be in over their heads, and an oceanic setting can help drive home how futile their hopes and dreams just might be in the grand scheme of things.

Evoke this theme by taking the characters far from shore, preferably to where they can sail or travel for days without crossing a single ship's path, much less encounter land. For pelagic natives, have them range far afield, traveling for days or weeks away from their normal territory. When the players are starting to act worried, they're starting to get it.

STORIES AND GROUPS

By now, you should probably have a good idea of whether you want to take your usual gang of characters to sea for a story or two, or instead ask your players to create characters for a story (or even chronicle) with a strictly aquatic focus. Both options have their tricky spots, but either can be well worth the trouble.

LANDFARERS AT SEA

Let's face it, although there's plenty going on beneath the waves of the World of Darkness, most of the action takes place on land. The overwhelming majority of shapeshifters, magi, vampires, fae and wraiths are tied to the continents, not the ocean floor. If you're currently overseeing an ongoing chronicle, it's almost assuredly of this variety (unless you're running an Umbral game or are one step ahead of this book). But now that you know what sort of things your players can expect to deal with in the oceans, you're rather tempted to take them out for a short cruise. No problem.

For simplicity's sake, this section presumes you don't want to take your current group out to the oceans for the course of a whole chronicle — after all, you already know where your chronicle's headed, right? Therefore, a story told at sea should probably fill one of three roles: either it advances a particular plot point in the ongoing story, it fleshes out the subplot of one of the characters, or it's a strictly atmospheric diversion.

Of the three, the first one can be the trickiest to pull off, depending on the chronicle. If the chronicle's focus is on the characters' struggle to dethrone the Prince of Detroit, then there's no immediately obvious reason for them to risk traveling to the seafront to further their plots. However, even this isn't impossible. For instance, the prince might

have had a trusted Gangrel companion centuries ago, who gradually tired of playing a role in the constant machinations of the Jyhad and left for the sea. If the characters can find this Gangrel-gone-Mariner, and persuade him to offer them some advice (which should be a difficult task), they'll have inside information that few other vampires in Detroit could dig up.

Similarly, a **Werewolf** chronicle that focuses on winning a specific victory against the Wyrms might well have a period of time in which the characters must earn as many allies as possible. In this case, why not try to win over a few Rokea? Likewise, a **Changeling** chronicle with court intrigue aplenty could well benefit from the introduction of the merfolk, an obvious third party in the Seelie/Unseelie dance. Almost any overstory can have some reason to utilize one of the oceans' denizens, and in many cases it can be done quite well.

The advantage to having a major plot point be the focus of a "going to sea" story is that it fully draws the players into the story's immediacy. There's a lot at stake, and you can bet they'll pay full attention to every detail that comes up. However, the main drawback is that it's awfully easy to make the "side trip" to the oceanic environment seem forced or overly coincidental. The best way to counter this is to plan well ahead of time. If the prince lost a favored child to a Rokea attack on his yacht, have him mention her name a few sessions ahead of time — or better yet, have a councilor bring her up, only to be punished by the grieving prince. Foreshadowing goes a long way towards making a story seem much less like a "side trip" and much more like part of the overall tale.

The second option for stories at sea, that of advancing a character's subplot, is certainly easier to use. Almost any character is going to have at least one Background that might inspire a maritime story. Kinfolk sometimes take vacations; pawns might have to travel to the coast in order to expand their influence. A Treasure might have had a previous owner who'd like it back, and an Avatar might suddenly demand a trip to the ocean to relive a previous incarnation. A Past Life might remember some business left unfinished, rumors of Methuselahs slumbering beneath the silt might inspire the Diablerie-conscious, a Fetter might be lost beneath the waves in transit — the possibilities aren't limitless, but they're pretty damn close. By the time the story is resolved, the character in question may have an entirely different feeling about the person or thing that drew him into the story; or it may have simply solidified any relationships.

Although such story options are certainly easier to use and don't feel quite as forced, they are, of course, personal. As such, they have a lot more immediacy to the character (or characters) involved, but not as much to the rest of the

troupe. You'll have to be sure to come up with ways to keep the rest of the players involved.

The final option is simply to have a maritime story for the sake of a change of environment. This can be handled as something of a "breather," allowing the players to relax for a bit and get away from the usual plot. However, this is the World of Darkness — it's far more in ethos to set the story up so that it appears to be a relatively quiet side story, and then snowballs into something truly horrible. Mood and theme are particularly key to such stories; since there isn't the meat-and-potatoes of plot advancement to rivet the players, the atmosphere is what will sell them on this sort of story. A short dalliance with the powers-that-be of the deeps can help to put the immensity of the World of Darkness into perspective for your players. After all, it's pretty easy for a vampire coterie with great influence over their home city or a werewolf pack who's successfully defended their caern more than once to be pretty convinced that they're at the top of the food chain. Pointing out that the world is a lot bigger than the players can do wonders for emphasizing the horror aspect of the World of Darkness.

This option is perhaps the easiest to work into an ongoing chronicle; after all, you don't have to adjust the pacing of the main storyline or anybody's subplots. The only trick here is, of course, coming up with a hook. Again, you might want to work in some foreshadowing so the players gradually feel their characters have a reason to go to sea. If you handle it right, they might even decide themselves that a game session at sea would be just the thing!

SAMPLE STORY HOOKS

- Well, it's the most obvious one: the sunken treasure hunt. Something of value has been lost at sea, whether a Fetter in transit, an elder's fetish, a microfiche (and hopefully sealed against water) cache of important occult lore, or whatever else. The characters are up for a crash course in scuba diving at the very least; you can probably get an interesting scene or two out of this alone, depending on their particular requirements (having to take lessons at night, trying to avoid shapeshifting in a frenzy, fitting the neoprene over goat legs, and so on). Of course, it wouldn't be much of a story if there weren't conflict. Perhaps a group of rivals is trying to sabotage the characters, or maybe some of the denizens have decided to take ownership of the lost object, or best of all — both.

- One of the people important to a character — a lover, relative, ally or the like — has prolonged her seaside vacation well past the time she said she'd return. Even getting fired from her job doesn't seem to faze her. Although she reassures anyone who asks that she's fine, it becomes pretty obvious that she isn't. When the

characters track her down, they discover that she's undergone a few changes — in fact, she's infected with Chulorviosis. As the players try to discover the nature and cause of her ailment, they gradually become entangled in the schemes of the Chulorvian elder who infected her; he needs her to proceed with one of his many schemes (perhaps for her professional skills, perhaps for her knowledge... perhaps for her relationship with the characters themselves). Even if the characters manage to deal with the elder, will they be able to find a way to heal her, or is a tragic ending inevitable?

- Piracy still exists in the modern-day world; stealing yachts is certainly a step up from carjacking, even if it's a little more involved. The Lasombra *antitribu* in particular are renowned for indulging their rather anachronistic vices by ensuring that a few cargo ships never reach their destination — not only does this turn a tidy profit, but it also keeps the larder full. So what happens when the characters are charged to protect a local dignitary (a sire's favorite, a Silver Fang's unwed Kin child, a childling noble) during said dignitary's Caribbean vacation, and pirates crash the party? And to thicken the plot, what if the local Rokea aren't above taking sides, and a slew emerges to destroy the whole lot of trespassers — pirates, victims and all?

- Strange romance is in the air. Legends are full of tales of beautiful merfolk falling in love with dashing sailors, soldiers and fisherfolk — and this time one of the residents of the sea has fallen for a player's character. Of course, you can always play the merfolk card; but wouldn't it be interesting if the character's would-be paramour were something *else*? Being courted by a murdhuacha would be rather like being stalked; similarly, there's no telling just what about the character has stirred the cold heart of a Mariner, but the courtship might be rather harrowing. And, of course, there's always the classic twist of a lonely sea-tossed ghost falling for someone who resembles his or her lost spouse. Will the character reciprocate the affection, or risk angering his or her admirer with a rejection? And even if the feelings blossom into actual romance, it's not as if the two can easily be together. Will the character abandon his or her circle of friends to vanish beneath the waves? Can the paramour give up the ocean to be with the character? Ah, the possibilities...

SEAGOING TALES

After reading this book, you may well want to try out a game wherein most or all of the players take the roles of naturally aquatic or seafaring characters, and the landlocked portions of the story (or chronicle) are fleeting to nonexistent. This is certainly a more challenging approach to take, but it can be greatly rewarding. It's rare that players



BURIAL AT SEA

It's not so inconceivable that a vampire might fake a burial at sea to escape enemies; switching oneself with a body seems like a clever enough idea, after all. Similarly, a wraith whose body was buried at sea might manage to achieve Risen status. So what exactly would such characters be in for?

Well, presuming that the body wasn't cremated, regulations tend to require that the body be sunk anywhere at least three nautical miles offshore and at least 100 fathoms deep. When it's the United States Navy performing the service, they also require a regulation metal casket, with at least 100 pounds of rocks or sand inside as ballast, and at least ten two-inch holes drilled in the sides to ensure the coffin takes on water. (Thankfully for vampires who might be buried during the daytime, regulations also require the body to be wrapped in a shroud.)

The real trouble for both Risen and vampire is that naval burials also require the casket's lid to be fastened to the box with metal straps. These require a judicious amount of strength to snap — not usually too much of a problem, but it can be tricky if a vampire wants to avoid the problems of high pressure as he sinks, and it does make the “cadaver switch” a little more involved.

get to step into the mindset of something even more alien than the usual undead bloodsucking predator or man-wolf shapeshifter; they'll probably appreciate the chance to do so. The question that then arises is whether you want to simply do a story (although one with multiple sessions, in all likelihood), or try for a whole chronicle. Either one has its merits; either one can wind up being a hell of a lot of fun.

STORIES

This much is easy. A single story is an excellent option for a troupe who wants to explore the underwater World of Darkness, but doesn't want to give up the regular chronicle. A single story also has the advantage of a more diverse group of characters, if that's what's wanted. There's likely no way to rationalize a Rokea and Mariner or a murdhuacha and a Void Engineer sticking up for one another over the course of a chronicle, but they may have to put up with each other for a single story. As allies of convenience, the characters can simply agree to act together until they reach their common goal — and then all bets are off. (This can certainly lead to a “climax after the climax,” as the characters may very well turn on one another once the common threat is past. The story's final session can be very intense from anticipation indeed....)

However, do be careful with the amount of crossover. If two of your players want to play Void Engineers, and you want to do a highly Umbral story focusing on Qyrl and her spirit offspring, there might be problems. Before anybody creates a character, talk it over with them and let them know the general direction you're thinking of going; get their input as well. If everyone's roughly on the same page, then the story will have a much more polished feel.

Of course, this doesn't mean you have to tell them everything...

CHRONICLES

Here you have your work cut out for you; after all, it's unlikely that your player group has spent the better part of their hours scuba-diving and exploring the ocean bottom. Consequently, you have to be able to vividly portray the environment, as well as prepare the players for their rather unorthodox new roles. You'll certainly have to do a little research, but this doesn't mean you have to enroll in a local college's oceanography course. Travel agency pamphlets are an excellent starting point for tropical waters; a little bit of time searching the Internet for appropriate keywords can also get you information on even the most obscure areas.

Above all, it's important to convey the sensation of underwater existence. Keep the players mindful of the constant pressure on their bodies, the temperature and light, the sounds and smells of the ocean. Keep them thinking in three dimensions, aware of the fact that things are as like to approach from above or below as from behind or ahead.

There are, of course, certain considerations to keep in mind depending on the sort of game you're running and the characters involved. Crossover games are as tricky a proposition as always, and even a homogenous group has its own unique benefits and trouble spots.

- **Vampires:** This is probably the least likely of under-sea chronicles (after all, Mariners are hardly social), but there's still plenty for vampires to do above the water. The fact that the Lasombra are still indulging in piracy tends to lend at least one option for a player group; similarly, there's nothing stopping a Sabbat pack from taking over a yacht and going to see the world. An oceangoing Vampire game should probably focus on the various ports of call, with a secondary focus on at-sea stories or scenes. After all, vampires were designed to prey on humanity, so admittedly logic demands that they spend most of their time *somewhere* around the human herds.

Then again, all sorts of trouble could await the coterie or pack when they're far from shore. After all, who's to say

that the eldest of their kind haven't decided to await Gehenna somewhere below the waves — and what would it take to wake such an ancient up?

- **Rokea:** An all-wereshark game is probably not for the first-timer. The Rokea have a rich, if decidedly alien culture and mindset; it can be tricky to keep the group in character without falling into the simplistic "find food, eat, find Wyrms, kill" sequence. However, with a good dollop of creativity, there's plenty of room for three or four linked Rokea stories. For obvious reasons, it might be difficult to bring in any other shapeshifters; not only are the Rokea highly aloof, but even a Garou with a water-breathing Gift will have difficulty keeping up with those who were bred and raised in the depths. Probably the most likely Breed to work with a Rokea group would be a Mokolé with an amphibious Archid form — not only are the two most ancient Changing Breeds on passing good terms, but the image of a plesiosaur with a fighter escort of *carcharadons* is hard to beat for sheer visceral impact.

To make the most of such a chronicle, it might be best to keep the Rokea group relatively close to a coastal community; not only does this provide a little variety, but the meddling fingers of humankind are a source of constant conflict. It can be quite amusing to watch a group of shark-born shifters try to manage passing for human — even in the Pacific Islands, such a thing won't be easy. And don't forget that it's not impossible for Rokea to form friendships with land-dwellers! Admittedly, such relations are hardly sanctioned by Rokea society — but if anyone has license to be the exceptions to the rule, it's the player characters.

- **Same-Bito:** The weresharks of the East may prove a little easier for your players to grasp. Although their mindset has been cultivated into a distinctly Eastern code of duty, loyalty and obedience, they have a better grasp of the "human mind" and are therefore a touch more accessible. Certainly the politics of the Dragon Kingdom of Umi could keep a Same-Bito sentai active for a goodly period of time. Add in the possibility of terrestrial courts requesting missions from the sentai (after all, it's hard for Tengu and Hakken to deal with underwater threats), tense relations with the Rokea outside court boundaries and a goodly number of *shen* dredging the seas in search of the Great Dragons' power, and you have the making of an interesting chronicle.

- **Sons of Ether:** The Etherites' high-spirited Jules Verne approach to exploration fits in perfectly with a **Blood-Dimmed Tides** chronicle. Even before the game begins, the players will probably have a blast settling on a concept for their cabal's vessel. The cabal can spend time searching for sunken cities (Umbral pocket realms) where lost civilizations are said to have mastered strange sciences,

or they can play a Captain Nemo-style aquatic game of cat-and-mouse against the Technocracy. The players can battle against deep-dwelling Nephendi and their eldritch horrors from the blackest trenches, and very carefully stay out of the way of the Marauders mad enough to go willworking on the high seas. There's even the possibility of exploring bizarre subterranean worlds buried beneath the ocean floor — does a new passage to the Hollow Earth await?

What's more, there's certainly no reason that the Sons of Ether should be the only Traditions represented — what about a Dreamspeaker kahuna with an aquatic totem, or a Hermetic specializing in storms at sea and oceanic alchemy? Whether set in the modern world or in the Renaissance world of *Sorcerers Crusade*, this is certainly a great option for high — or dark — adventure.

- **Void Engineers:** The option of playing an all-Technocracy team of undersea explorers has a lot of potential, whether you cared for *seaQuest* or not. It certainly helps that the VEs are the most liberal of the Conventions, and therefore have a lot of latitude once away from their superiors. It would also be quite feasible to bring a couple of members of other Conventions for variety; Progenitor or Iteration X researchers would have a logical place on an expedition.

Considering the Void Engineer mentality, such a chronicle should obviously stress exploration and discovery. The Engineers love nothing more than seeing things that nobody else has seen, and they're actually fairly good at leaving their findings more or less intact when it wouldn't endanger them to do so. Down where the physical and Umbra tend to blend together, there's lots and lots to see, particularly if you find one of the holes into the Deep Umbra. If you enjoy adding crossover elements to your chronicle, the Void Engineers might be the route to go; after all, they might be hunting Gangrel *aquarii* with bangsticks one night, negotiating with merfolk the next. Since the "shoot first, ask questions later" types never really seem to do well in this Convention, there's lots of room for a variety of stories. Confront them with the tough moral choice of reporting a coral city to their superiors (and therefore dooming the mer therein) or of being disobedient to the Technocracy's vision. Have them scramble to repair their sub's defenses as the weresharks continue to stave in compartments. Give them the eerie task of finding out what's going on with the *Titanic*'s dimensional signatures. Never a dull moment with the VEs, that's for sure....

- **Wraiths:** Two words: *Marie Celeste*.

There are almost as many ghost stories set at sea as there are on land. Naturally, the potential of a seagoing Wraith chronicle is pretty tremendous. Whether Hierarchy, Renegade or Heretic, the players have ample material

to forge exciting stories. Certainly, this sort of chronicle is much more likely to take place aboard a relic ship than below the waves — but with the seas of the Shadowlands as dangerous as they are, this is only a moderate limitation.

For an interesting twist, how about having the players roleplay a historical pirate or buccaneer ship and its crew? Of course, it would probably be best to research one of the lesser lights of the Caribbean or Spanish Main — after all, not everyone can be Captain Kidd. But taking a ship with a good story and fleshing out the crew with the players' imaginations can be a great start. There's a lot more to piracy than "Arr, matey" and peg legs; add the potential of repelling Spectre vessels with relic grapeshot and Stygian cutlasses, and you have the makings of a singular chronicle.

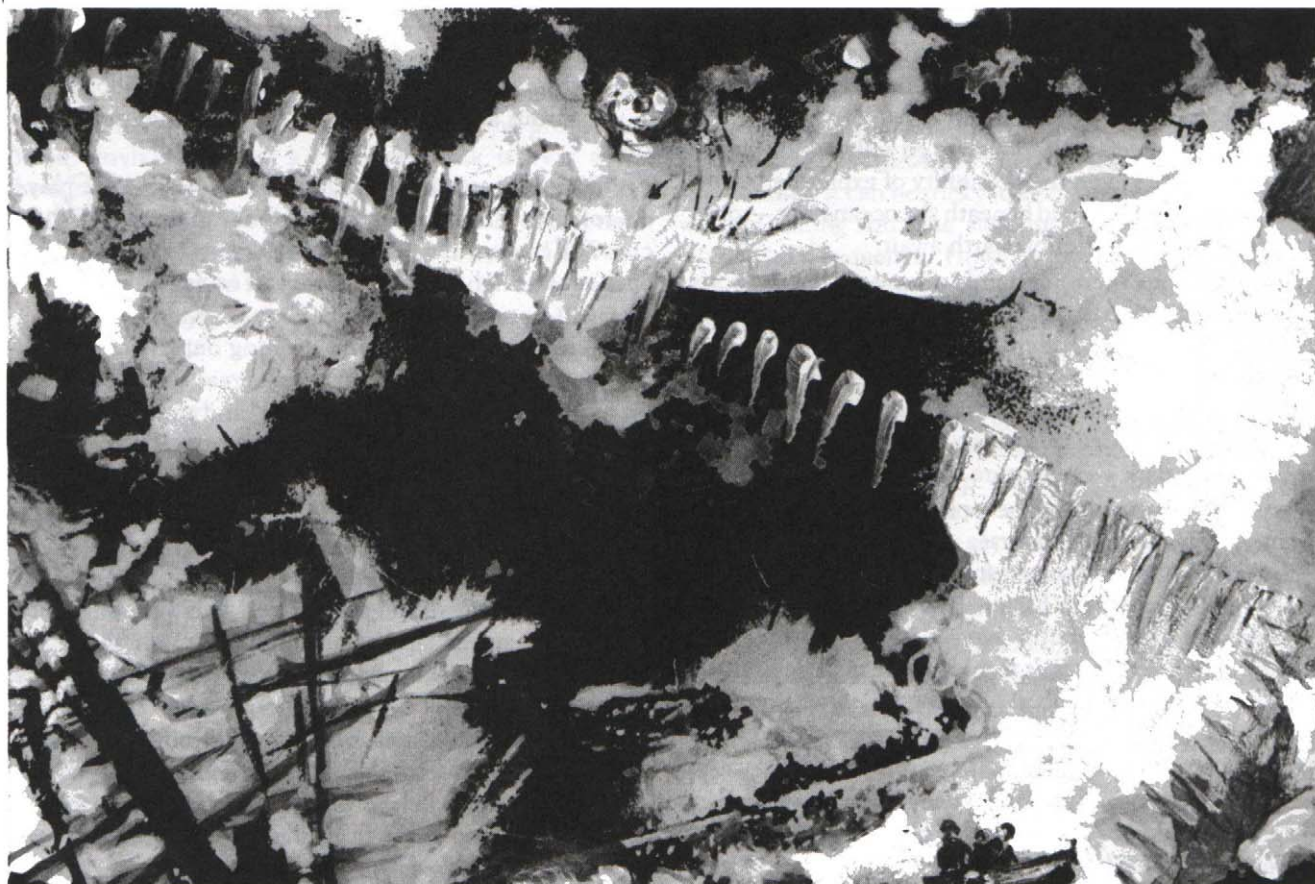
- **Merfolk/Selkies:** This is probably the most user-friendly of all chronicle options. The merfolk come in a convenient variety, and the selkies' amphibious nature makes them apt at landfaring and deep-swimming alike. Besides, you can always add a merrow or two for spice, as well as one or two of the amphibious pooka. The aquatic fae work well in stories where human contact with a Grotto is imminent; similarly, political intrigues take on a different cast down below, where the mer have less to fear from humans and more from the supernatural menaces that breed unchecked.

Furthermore, the mer have access to one of the easiest methods for bringing topsiders into the waves. Mermaid's Milk can allow a troll or nocker, or whatever other kith one likes, to visit the undersea courts for a prolonged stay. True, the visitor will probably have some problems adjusting to his new abode, such as the scanty portions of Banality and Glamour alike — but such problems only wind up enhancing a chronicle.

HISTORICAL CHRONICLES

Admittedly, setting a maritime chronicle in the past would require even more preparation, in the form of ensuring that the setting is historically believable. Still, a good historical chronicle at sea is a stunning departure from the everyday.

- **The Early Mediterranean:** Remember the sea-battle in *Ben Hur*? Ship trade was vitally important to Bronze and Iron Age cultures all along the Mediterranean. And where there was trade, there was usually a conflict of interest — and then conflict of a more martial nature. Such a chronicle could range from the explorations of early Phoenicians, to a strange supernatural retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*, to the final days of Carthage. This is a time when the great-grandchilder of Cain began to cut their teeth and explore



the world around them, when the Black Furies and Children of Gaia made their mark on human legend, when the first Seekers of the Void found that "here there be dragons." The merfolk were here as well, in this time of seductive sirens and children of Arion. Jason and his Argonauts might just be a pale, faded memory of the true, terrible glory of this chronicle's epic....

• **Going a-Viking:** The longships of the Scandinavian North were rightly famous in their day; much of Europe lived in fear of the brutal warriors that would appear from nowhere and fall on sleepy hamlets. The Get of Fenris, Gangrel and trolls in particular were all notorious for joining in such "sport." The characters might be raiders themselves, or they might be seafarers opposed to the Norsemen. There's opportunity for land-based adventure (the Vikings didn't live in their longships, after all), yes, but also plenty of chances to go to war on the water. *King Olaf Tryggvasson's Saga* in particular has a fine passage describing a Viking sea-battle, if you're interested in some inspiration.

[Of course, the **Vampire: The Dark Ages** supplement *Wolves of the Sea* has the definitive look at the Vikings in the World of Darkness, and the vampires that dwelt among them. Interested Storytellers should probably

give it a look; the cultural summaries alone are worth the price of admission.]

• **Caribbean Privateers:** Most people react very strongly to the romanticized ideal of the Caribbean pirate, and your players are probably no different. However, in the World of Darkness, piracy was no Errol Flynn movie. Each broadsides volley splintered the ship's hull, imbedding wooden shrapnel in unfortunate crew members. Grapeshot and cutlasses would kill the lucky; the unlucky would be horribly wounded, left to the tender mercies of the ship's doctor (whose operating quarters were usually painted red to hide the blood). Although the pirates of our own history weren't as cruel and barbaric (or, depending on the teller, as noble) as the myth paints them, the pirates of the World of Darkness were all that and more. Better to die than to fall into their hands. Although it would be rather difficult for a vampire or shapeshifter to partake in such a thing without revealing their true nature, who's to say that there weren't a few ships whose crews were sworn to secrecy about their officers' actual identities?

• **The Age of Steam:** The late 19th century saw great ships plying the Atlantic with their human cargo, riverboats plying the Mississippi even down to the salty waters around New Orleans, the duel of the first Ironclads — it was quite

a time. The Victorian era was heralded as a fine time to be a vampire, but the massive changes the Age of Industry brought may well have driven more than one or two Gangrel beneath the waves. Merfolk society takes a large hit during this time as the massive ships make the ocean more accessible, and the Rokea get their first major taste of what the Weaver is capable of. Excellent settings could include the Panamanian waters, the English Channel, the New England coast (or New York's harbors), or the sea around Hong Kong. It's an interesting time to be alive (or undead), and those huge freighters full of hopeful immigrants offer a lot by way of potential stories.

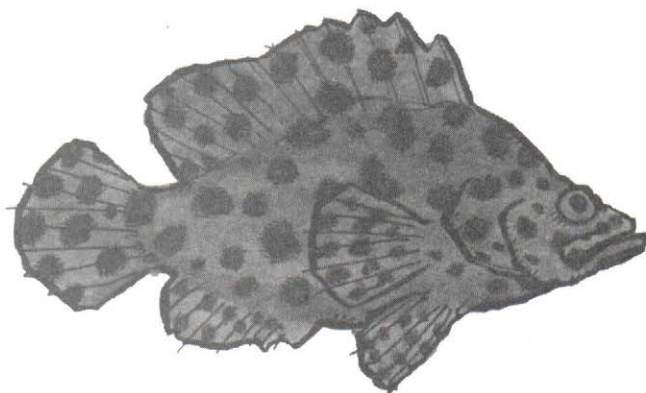
SAMPLE STORY HOOKS

- A sentai (meaning pack, or war party) of Same-Bito have arrived from the Dragon Kingdom of Umi in search of a Rorqual to present to their lord. Unfortunately, the Rorqual in question is the only one to be found for hundreds and hundreds of miles, and the local denizens aren't about to give up their only source of Gnosis and Glamour. Although the Same-Bito are polite (at first) and highly respectful of the situation, they have sworn an oath to return with a Rorqual or not at all. Perhaps the only situation feasible is for the characters to escort the Rorqual to Umi and back — and if so, they're in for an unforgiving crash course in hengeyokai etiquette.

- For unknown reasons, a formerly placid stretch of ocean floor has suddenly erupted in volcanic activity. This naturally endangers anyone or anything in the vicinity, be it sunken Fetter, Grotto, underwater research station or even — Vatea forbid — a stretch of coral city. As the characters rush to save whatever or whomever of theirs is in danger, they either come to suspect or outright discover that something supernatural is behind this geological anomaly. Is it Technocracy mages, looking to raise up a new island base in record time? Could it be a Chulorvian plot? Is it actually the work of something that lives *below* the ocean bed? Whatever it is, it's trouble. Deadly trouble.

- As the characters are attending to some important shipboard business (raiding another ship, analyzing the dimensional barriers, chasing a mortal ship doomed to sink), a cold mist overcomes them and a spectral ship (galley, yacht, galleon, sub — whatever's appropriate) looms up out of nowhere. The crew challenges the characters' vessel, whatever it may be, to a race — winner take all. The phantom ship should be more than a challenge for the characters to overcome, even if it appears clunky and unwieldy. If the race is dramatic enough (crew members lost overboard?) and the characters win, perhaps the spectral crew vanishes, leaving behind their ship (if the characters are wraiths) or a single rotted spar, bobbing on the waves (which may give a clue to the ship's origins, and possibly to where the actual shipwreck lies buried. If you're more in the mood for a recurring subplot, perhaps the spectral hulk fades back where it came from, only to start harassing the characters from that point forward. And if the characters lose the race — well, the Spectres won't take kindly to anything other than the characters abandoning their vehicle and swimming for it right then and there. Trouble of the worst sort likely ensues.

- Weak as the Gauntlet and Shroud are in the unlit depths, it's really only a matter of time before a hiccup pushes something out of the Deep Umbra and into the physical ocean. When such a freak happenstance hits the characters' territory, all bets are off on what happens next. A horror from the farthest vestiges of human imagination might boil up from the depths, or perhaps some time-lost exile like a plesiosaur, sea serpent or Cretan wraith-galley might be loosed on the area. Not only will the characters have quite a time trying to contain the newcomer, but soon they discover a new, possibly worse problem. Scuttlers by the hundred arrive, looking to seal the rent, and in the process probably strengthen the local Gauntlet and Shroud more than they should. They're too many to fight, and can call on others — what's next?





CHAPTER FOUR: LURKERS

I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of the day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind — of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

— H. P. Lovecraft, “Dagon”

The undersea world is a dark and dangerous place filled both with mystery and hazard. The following chapter details some of the unique creatures that inhabit the oceans of the World of Darkness. This chapter is in no way exhaustive; a detailed list of our very own oceans’ denizens would fill thousands of volumes of this size. Rather, this chapter should set an example of horrors lurking under the waves. Should you not find the lurkers listed below appropriate to your story, the oceans of the real world teem with life that is all too alien to surface dwellers. It should prove adequately inspirational.

A word of warning: There *are* surprises later on in this chapter. Players who want to see their first encounter with a strange new horror through their characters’ eyes (and we

hope that’s most of you) should probably avoid leafing through this section. After all, the tension and mystique of the Oceans of Darkness partly stem from the mysteries that lie deep below the surface. You’re in for a much more intense experience of it if you let the Storyteller make the introductions.

ANIMALS

The most basic place to start is with mundane sea life. The crafty Storyteller doesn’t need to be told why it would be useful to have statistics for a huge squid or great white; hence, here they are. Not only do these make excellent elements for flavor scenes, but most of the supernatural denizens of the deeps have figured out ways to make the local fauna useful.

For instance, add a few fomori powers and up the Physical Attributes a little, and voila — suddenly you have the results of the latest Project Iliad experiment, or another masterpiece of Progenitor engineering!

What's more, even the vampires who've chosen life beneath the sea can get lonely; although they might be disgusted with humans and other vampires, the life beneath the sea provides a variety of useful retainers. The *aquarii's* blood is no less potent than their land-dwelling cousins' or ghouling animal companions. Of course, it's typically easier to ghoule mammals such as sea lions, dolphins, orcas and other species of cetacean — they're easier to train, and it's much easier to get a mammal to ingest an entire Blood Point or two underwater than it is to slit one's wrist and hope the majority of the diffusing blood goes to the right place inside that shark.

Of course, mammals are handicapped by their need for air and cannot always be depended on in the deepest seas. Still, they're the most popular choice. Sharks, of course, are another obvious choice. These eating machines, however, cannot easily be trained. It's all too easy to send a would-be pet into a feeding frenzy while trying to create a Blood Bond. Eels make perfect undersea guardians; octopi make excellent spies; even schools of mundane fish can be taught to harry an opponent.

To represent a ghouled version of one of the animals below, increase the Strength by 1. Under the guidance of a vampire with Animalism, some of these beasts might act as if their Intelligence was a point higher as well.

SHARK

Attributes: Strength 2-5, Dexterity 3-4, Stamina 3-5
Abilities: Alertness 4 (scent), Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Tracking 3
Willpower: 3
Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 0-1
Attacks: Strength +2 Bite

BARRACUDA

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2
Willpower: 2
Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 0
Attacks: Bite (4 dice)

DOLPHIN

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, All Mental Traits 2
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 2

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0

Attacks: Ram (3 dice)

WHALE

Attributes: Strength 7-10, Dexterity 2-3, Stamina 8-10
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 1-3
Willpower: 5
Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, -5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 2
Attacks: Ram (Strength); bite (non-baleen whales, Strength +1)

ORCA

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6
Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3-4, Dodge 1
Willpower: 4
Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, -5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 2
Attacks: Bite (9 dice), Ram (7 dice)

OCTOPUS

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2
Willpower: 2
Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 0
Attacks: Bite (3 dice), Crush (1 die)

MORAY EEL

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2
Willpower: 1
Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 0
Attacks: Bite (4 dice)

SEA LION

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Empathy 1
Willpower: 3
Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 0
Attacks: Bite (3 dice)

SPIRITS

No examination of the World of Darkness' undersea denizens would be complete without at least touching on the inhabitants of the oceanic Umbra. These statistics and descriptions represent only the tiniest fraction of spirits found in the Penumbral seas; Storytellers should feel free to modify them as needed and stock the surroundings with plenty of spirits of their own devising.

FISH-SPIRITS

Rage 3, Gnosis 5, Willpower 4, Power 15

Charms: Airt Sense, Tracking

Image: These Gafflings take the appearance of almost any of the smaller fishes in the ocean. The state of the local Umbra is often reflected in the forms of the local Fish-spirits; in a well-maintained tropical Grotto, they shimmer with iridescent color, while the spirits too near Project: Deepwater are pale, dim, sluggish versions of their counterparts.

Description: The rank and file of the oceans' Umbral population, Fish-spirits come in a variety almost exceeding that of their fleshly counterparts. These statistics can be used to represent almost any sort of piscine Gaffling, from dogfish to tuna. They are the most common allies of aquatic shapeshifters and Dreamspeakers, although they have a prey/predator respect for the Rokea. Fish-spirits are most often used as messengers in the Umbral seas, and the occasional one makes a serviceable (if a bit dim) guide to short-cuts through the spirit world.

LUMINESCENTS

Rage 3, Gnosis 7, Willpower 7, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Break Reality, Disorient, Reform

Image: Like ever-shapeshifting bioluminescent jellyfish, or even constantly whirling neon signs, the Luminescents are things of bright light and beauty in the Penumbral realm. They have no real constant form; watching their shifting, iridescent shapes is almost like watching someone else's hallucination.

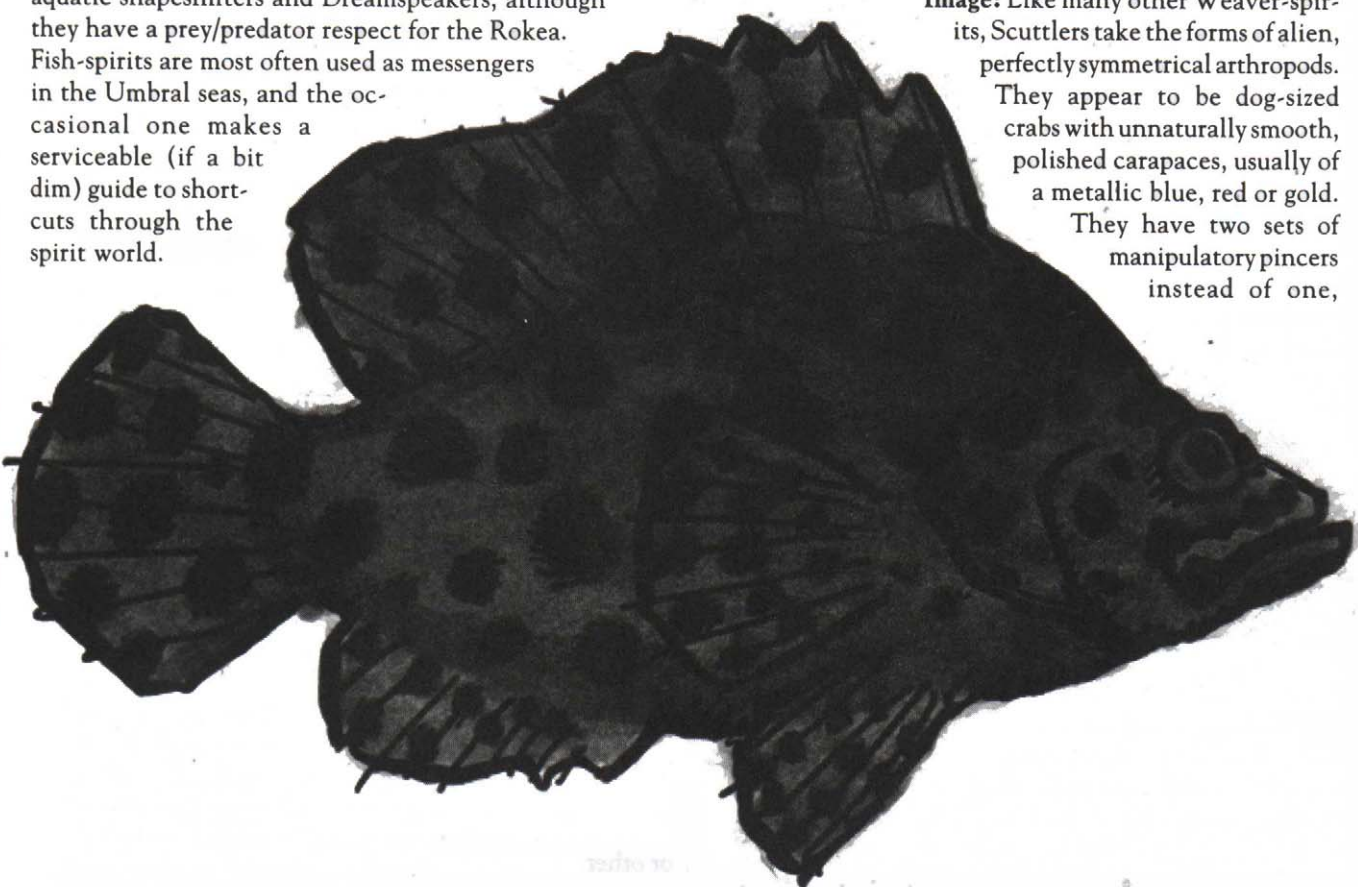
Description: Luminescents are creatures of pure change, agents of creation down where the Wyld is strongest. These Gafflings are drawn to areas where change is the rule, in particular the volcanic vents that constantly rework the ocean floor. They are capricious, alien entities, allied to nobody and nothing in particular; they are more commonly bound by force than swayed to help. Wherever they pass, the wise treat them with care; it takes no provocation at all for them to begin bending the ocean floor into some nightmarish landscape of raw chaos.

SCUTTLEERS

Rage 4, Gnosis 6, Willpower 6, Power 25

Charms: Control Electrical Systems, Solidify Reality, Spirit Static

Image: Like many other Weaver-spirits, Scuttlers take the forms of alien, perfectly symmetrical arthropods. They appear to be dog-sized crabs with unnaturally smooth, polished carapaces, usually of a metallic blue, red or gold. They have two sets of manipulatory pincers instead of one,



and use those pincers to filter reality and spin it slowly into the Pattern Web.

Description: The Weaver has little power in the undersea; the Pattern Web is the loosest of nets down below, far away from human civilization. Nonetheless, the compulsion of the Weaver is to bring order where there is none, and the ocean is no exception. Weaver-spirits have traditionally had a hard time pushing into the undersea frontiers, but as humanity slowly learns more about the ocean depths, the Weaver is right there with them.

Scuttlers are the most common form of Weaver-spirit to be found in the Undersea Umbra. They gather around drilling platforms and Technocracy Constructs, where they are usually left unmolested to do their work. An Umbral observer might note several Scuttlers hitching a ride on the hull of a submarine (even if the submarine itself isn't visible in the Penumbra). They are moderately harmless as Gafflings go, but can be dangerous in numbers; if left to their own ends, they would gladly wall off the entrances to Grottoes and weave the energy into the Pattern Web.

BL'GOTHWU

Rage 7, Gnosis 6, Willpower 6, Power 45

Charms: Airt Sense, Blighted Touch, Materialize, Reform

Image: These Jagglings look like piles of rotted kelp, shot through with tendrils of sludge and silt. Their stench is unmistakable, although it is surprisingly localized; even the vaunted olfactory powers of the Rokea cannot detect a Bl'Gothwu from farther away than a dozen yards or so. Although sluggish and almost inert when left to their own ends, they react with remarkable speed when prey draws near, lashing out with horrible tentacles of unrefined filth.

Description: Not every spirit in the oceanic Umbra is benevolent or even impassive. These Banes are things of rot and pollution, entities of silt and sewage and decay. They often crawl in the Penumbra around shipwrecks and open waste dump sites, feeding on the spiritual taint left behind. They are also notorious for overrunning beds of kelp to propagate themselves; more than one spirit of the Sargasso has gone from simple plant-spirit to Bl'Gothwu over the course of the years.

SPIRAL SCHOOLS

Rage 7, Gnosis 7, Willpower 8, Power 50

Charms: Airt Sense, Create Current (as Create Wind; by expending 20 Power, the School can generate a powerful whirlpool or even waterspout), Freeze, Healing, Reform, Updraft

Image: These Jagglings appear as great schools of quicksilver-fluid fish, whirling through the Penumbra in their trademark spiraling pattern. They seem to be utterly liquid in form, only maintaining their piscine outlines by coincidence. A School whirls so quickly that it is virtually

impossible to follow the movements of any one "fish"; such a thing is useless anyway, given that the School is one single composite spirit.

Description: The Spiral Schools are one of the more potent allies of the Rorqual and their protectors. They are embodiments of weather and wave currents, able to heal or harm anything that they encircle. As part of the Gaian broods of spirits, they are well-disposed to the Rokea and other shapechangers, who have been known to call the Schools to invoke tempests against their enemies. Approaching one is a tricky matter, however; their temperaments are as mercurial as their spirit-forms, and a mystic must be quick and persuasive indeed to catch and hold their interest.

PAKURWU TOOTH-EDGED

Rage 8, Gnosis 10, Willpower 10, Power 100

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Control Winds, Control Currents (as Control Winds), Coral Shards (as Throw Glass), Flood, Lightning Bolts, Materialize, Reef Sense (as Forest Sense), Reform

Image: The Tooth-Edged One has two common visages. When dealing with enlightened humans such as Dreamspeaker magi, she commonly appears as a lovely Polynesian woman wreathed in chains of living coral. However, when addressed by shapeshifters and other, more primal creatures of spirit, her body is covered with ridges of multicolored coral that protrude from her dark skin, and her eyes are bottomless pools of black. In either form, she carries a spear made entirely of coral; when she Materializes, the weapon is wickedly sharp at every surface, and hard enough to punch through an ocean liner's hull.

Description: Pakurwu is a unique spirit, an Incarna of coral and reef. She is royalty after a fashion, although she considers herself as not of Kun, C'et or Qyrl. She has, as would be expected, more empathy for the creatures of reefs than she does for humans, vampires, even shapeshifters or mer. Although she wears a human shape from time to time, her mentality is still that of a spirit; she can be horribly single-minded and completely unsympathetic, as well as unapologetic for her demeanor.

Even so, it is possible to invoke her successfully. Those who make the trip to her Umbral "court" and manage to propitiate her (usually by allowing her to lay them under specific geases or by making offerings of treasure taken from fresh-sunk vessels) can persuade her to offer assistance in return. Her favors often involve Materializing to stir up a storm or visit a coastline with flooding and high winds. Shapeshifters can earn a present of a different kind; Pakurwu sometimes bestows fetish replicas of her coral spear on Rokea or other shapechangers who please her. (These weapons do



Strength +3 aggravated damage, difficulty 6, but require both hands to use successfully.)

AQUATIC FOMORI

The corrupting influence of the Wyrms is not limited to the surface world. The Banes who have bothered to patrol the Umbral seas (usually corrupted spirits of fish, water or other local concerns) have found a more than adequate variety of host bodies to adapt to their own purposes.

Lacking a significant human population to inhabit, Banes possess the most aggressive and dangerous undersea denizens. For a variety of reasons, they tend to prefer sharks over all other animals, although the primal mind of the sharks offers the Banes some resistance. Eels, killer whales, octopi, barracuda and other predators are also common choices. Cetaceans such as dolphins and porpoises aren't immune either; individual Banes have even been known to possess larger species of whale, but they seem to have difficulty maintaining control. A few Garou seers and well-learned Dreamspeakers have theorized that the Rorqual somehow are able to encourage their cetacean brethren to resist the corrupting whispers of Banes. Unfortunately, the added resistance is only minor, and certainly no guarantee against possession.

The Bane's corrupting influence disfigures and mutates the host while granting great powers and increased intelligence. A common mutation is a dramatic increase in size; twenty-foot barracuda fomori are all too possible, as are fomor sharks the size of buses. As the spiritual relationship between the Bane and its host grows, the more grotesque and perverted the latter becomes. In a relatively short time, several days in some cases, the original species may be unrecognizable.

OCEANIC FOMORI POWERS

The undersea struggle creates the need for unique endowments that Banes are all too willing to provide. The list below provides examples of powers the Wyrms grants to its undersea minions, in exchange for their complete enslavement. Some abilities, such as gills, may be required for surface creatures who serve the Wyrms in such a hazardous environment. Other abilities increase the fomori's potency in their struggles with their sworn enemies, the shapeshifters.

While oceanic fomori can possess the standard fomori powers (see *Book of the Wyrms* and *Freak Legion*), many of these powers lose potency or utility underwater. The following is a brief list of possible new adaptations for

aquatic fomori. Other appropriate powers (from **Book of the Wyrm**) include Berserker, Body-Barbs (usually as fin-spines), Claws and Fangs, Exoskeleton (of a more crustacean variety), Extra Limbs, Lashing Tail (or tentacle), Regeneration, or Umbral Passage.

- **Amphibious** — Not all oceanic fomori began life under the seas; Banes often possess sailors or passengers gone overboard for whatever reason. What's more, it sometimes becomes necessary for a water-breathing host to foray onto land. Any mammal or reptile possessed by a Bane can grow gills; similarly, possessed fish or mollusks can develop rudimentary lungs capable of sustaining them out of water. In some cases, this power doesn't actually bestow gills or lungs — the host's already-existing breathing apparatus warps into a convoluted, fleshy mass of organs capable of drawing oxygen from air and water alike.

- **Angler Stalk** — A stalk, tipped with a luminescent bulb, dangles from the fomor's forehead, shoulder or other body part. The baleful light from this bulb is strangely hypnotic, both attracting prey and providing light in the deepest seas. Any creature other than a fomor or Chulorviah who views this light must make a Gnosis roll, difficulty 6, or a Willpower roll, difficulty 8. Failure means that the character is drawn irresistibly toward the light, and can take no other action but pursue the light. The hypnotic spell is broken if the victim is injured, but otherwise lasts for a scene.

- **Crab's Armor** — The fomor's skin hardens into a crablike carapace. The shell provides two extra soak dice (which can be used to soak aggravated damage); it doesn't impede underwater movement, but movement on land is treated as if the fomor's Dexterity were three dots lower.

- **Cuttlefish Skin** — The fomor can change the color of its skin with incredible speed, rippling through a veritable rainbow of hues in mere seconds. Although this ability can be used to unsettling effect in combat or social interaction, it is most useful as a form of camouflage. Any attempts to visually spot a fomor using this power are at +3 difficulty.

- **Echolocation** — Like the sonar sense of cetaceans, this Bane-granted ability allows the fomor to detect the location and shape of objects in the water with much greater range than sight and more detail than smell. The fomor can also navigate in complete darkness or hit distant targets with long range attacks.

- **Electrical Discharge** — The fomor can generate bio-electricity to stun its opponents. Upon contacting a victim, the fomor may discharge the built-up electrical charge, causing five Health Levels of aggravated damage. This power can only be used once every three turns or so.

- **High-Pressure Endurance** — While the original host body may have only been able to survive near the surface or on the ocean floor, as a fomor it can easily survive at any

depth. Where mundane creatures might implode near the ocean floor or explode near the surface, the fomor is immune to the ravages of high pressure, including most ailments such as the bends (see the **Appendix**).

- **Ink Jet** — The fomor can release a billowing gush of opaque, noxious — and poisonous — liquid. While not normally deadly, the poison causes three unsoakable Health Levels of unaggravated damage. It also creates disorientation and confusion in the victim and those engulfed in the ink suffer the dizzying effects of the poison unless they roll three or more successes on a Stamina roll (difficulty 7); even vampires are not immune. However, supernatural defenses such as the Gift: Resist Toxin affect this power accordingly. The fomor may release an ink jet as many times per day as she likes, but this causes one unsoakable, unaggravated Health Level of damage for each use beyond once per day.

- **Poisonous Flesh** — The flesh of the fomori becomes toxic to any who would ingest it. Anything biting the fomori suffers one unsoakable aggravated Health Level of damage immediately. Actually swallowing the toxic flesh will continue to cause one unsoakable aggravated wound every turn until the victim dies or the poison is expelled. As a side effect of this power, the fomor's skin color changes to a luminescent purple or green.

- **Shark Mouth** — The host body's regular teeth are replaced with a gaping maw of razored shark teeth. The fomor may attack with a bite doing Strength +3 damage; what's more it can also swallow whole anything up to half his size.

AQUATIC BREEDS

POISON SHARKS

Blood-Quick darted through the water, his tail pounding quickly from side to side as he swam. His pride was as strong as always; there was no shame in fleeing his foes, as many as they were. But there seemed to be no place to hide from the school on his trail. The pungent smell of his shapeshifter's blood surrounded him; his body had yet to heal the wound their claws had dealt. I would hunt until I caught my prey, he thought. They will do the same.

Blood-Quick caught a familiar scent in the water ahead: tiger sharks, his kind. Either I am saved or I have just brought death to cousins, he thought. Rounding a coral reef, he could feel his opponents closing swiftly. With only several hundred yards left he almost gave up, but instead put his last energies into a burst.

As he descended amongst the other sharks, Blood-Quick caught a tiny swirl of decay, a current that impossibly quickly swelled into a full stench of rot. The Rokea had spent all of his reserves; there would be no further chase. His one-time kin, now bloated with Wyrm poisons, closed on their cousin.

Description: As ruthless a creature as was ever hatched, the fomori shark retains all of its cunning, hunting instincts and acute senses while gaining an additional measure of supernatural power. The once-mindless predator gains a semblance of sentience from the Bane that infects it. No longer a simple link in the food chain, the Poison Sharks (for so the Rokea have named them) are fully and completely the jaws of Qyrl.

Image: Poison Sharks are particularly large creatures, growing to nearly fifty percent larger than average for their species. Their shagreen becomes barbed, blistered and scarred, losing its previous smooth luster.

Roleplaying Notes: Eat to live. Live for the Master. Eat for the Master.

Attributes: Strength 5-7, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5-7, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 4 (Swimming), Brawl 2

Willpower: 4

Armor Rating: 1

Attacks: Bite for eight to 10 dice.

Sample Powers: Poisonous Flesh

Health Levels: OK, OK,
OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -3,
-3, -5, Incapacitated

DIVING DEAD

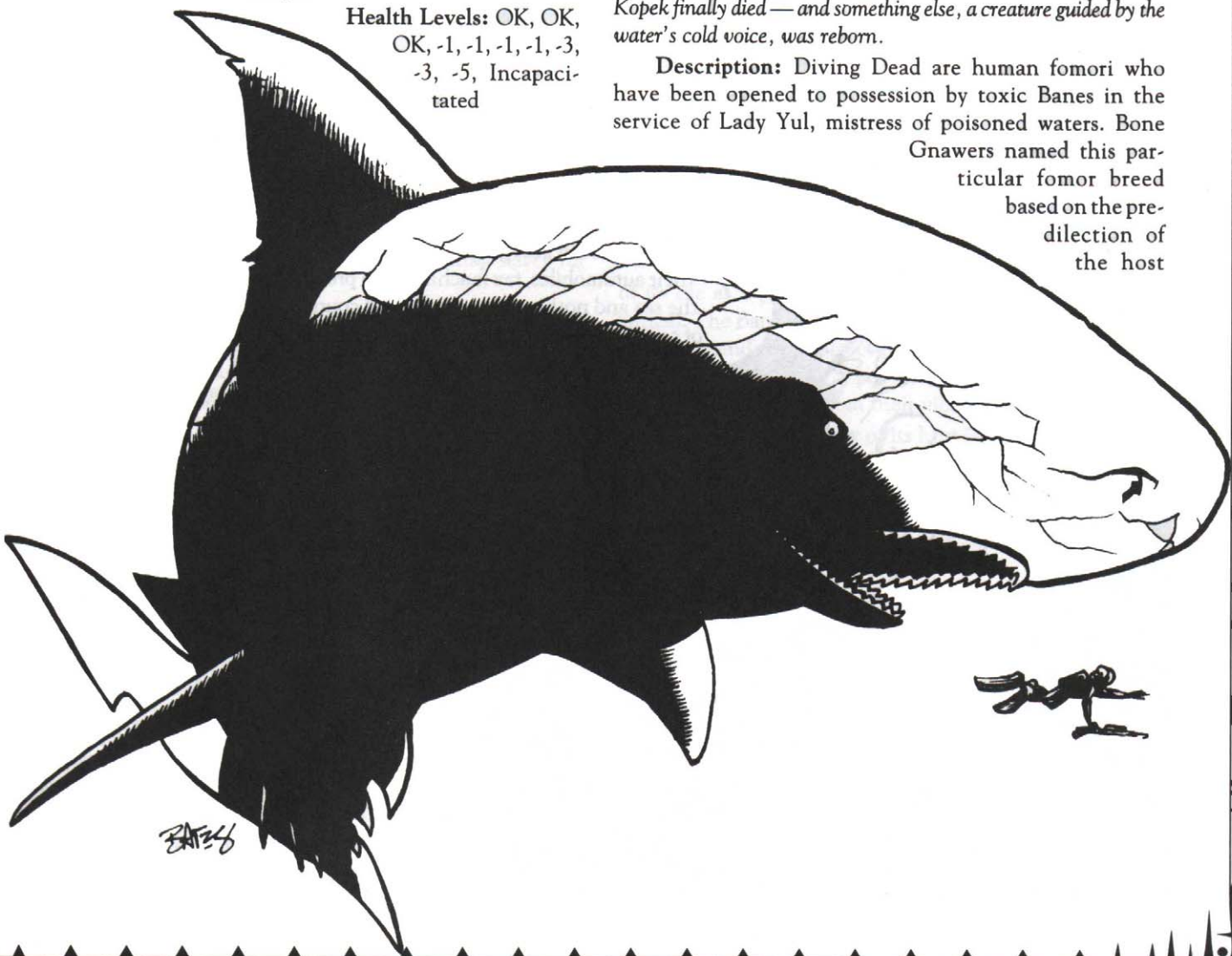
"Please, just take me away from all of this," Roger whispered. "I beg you." He stared down at the turbulent water beneath him. Always the river had been there for him as a child, a place to swim and adventure and be free. If only he could have stayed there forever. The river seemed so alive, and Roger felt so dead to everything else. Not a stir of feeling for his wife, for his desperate affair with Mary in Production, for his children — nothing but heavy weight. But the river — it would take him back unconditionally. It had promised it would.

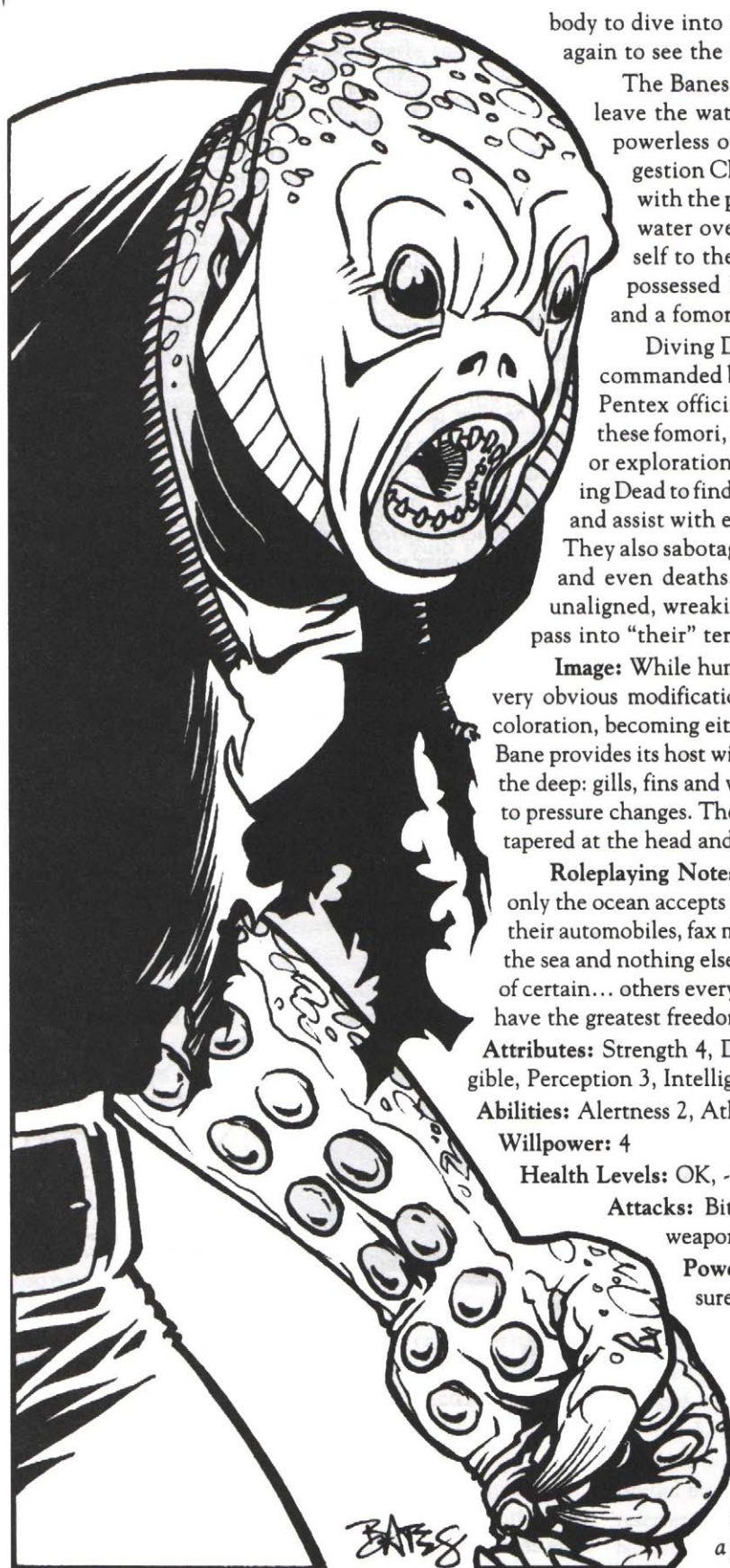
The old rail trestle was higher over the water than he remembered. Funny how things were — most things got smaller as you got older, more faded than you remembered them. Not this. The river poured itself through the rocks below with the same rushing stage whisper that Roger heard every night in his dreams. It was the sound of his childhood, a promise of when times were bright and good.

His bones splintered as he hit the surface. He tried to scream, but the murky river water filled his lungs. Like so much garbage before it, Roger's smashed body drifted down toward the sea. His lungs burning, his heart near bursting, the man that was Roger Kopek finally died — and something else, a creature guided by the water's cold voice, was reborn.

Description: Diving Dead are human fomori who have been opened to possession by toxic Banes in the service of Lady Yul, mistress of poisoned waters. Bone

Gnawers named this particular fomor breed based on the predilection of the host





body to dive into the river — sometimes dramatically — never again to see the surface.

The Banes that possess these hapless individuals cannot leave the waters to inhabit their victims; in fact, they are powerless on land. Nonetheless, they can use their Suggestion Charm on humans who have had recent contact with the polluted water. They call their prey back to the water over and over again, until the victim gives himself to the Bane and the water. Once in the water, the possessed human mutates to suit its new environment and a fomor is born.

Diving Dead have some sense of hierarchy, and can be commanded by more powerful servitors of the Wyrms. A few Pentex officials have managed to discover one or three of these fomori, and incorporate them for underwater sabotage or exploration. Pentex's natural resources arm uses the Diving Dead to find likely oil sites or particularly fragile ecosystems and assist with establishing drilling and demolition platforms. They also sabotage existing "safe" oil rigs causing leaks, damage and even deaths. However, the majority of these fomori are unaligned, wreaking revenge on anyone foolish enough to trespass into "their" territory.

Image: While humanoid in basic design, the Divers possess some very obvious modifications. The skin of the victim typically loses all coloration, becoming either milky white or completely transparent. The Bane provides its host with all the necessary accouterments to survive in the deep: gills, fins and webbed fingers and even supernatural resistance to pressure changes. The body of the victim becomes more streamlined, tapered at the head and thinner throughout the torso.

Roleplaying Notes: The surface world has nothing for you now; only the ocean accepts you for what you truly are inside. Let them have their automobiles, fax machines and premature ejaculation — you have the sea and nothing else matters. Of course, you have to bow to the will of certain... others every now and again, but what does that matter? You have the greatest freedom of your life in exchange!

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Social Attributes negligible, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Survival 2

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: Bite (5 dice); claw (6 dice); also sometimes use weapons

Powers: Amphibious, Claws and Fangs, High-Pressure Endurance

BANE LAMPREYS

We pulled one out of the drink once that was full of the little monsters. We were chasing a pack of humps and we had speared a couple of them; now we had to work fast, 'cause the Coast Guard has no sense of humor about people making a profit off stupid animals. We started reeling them



up on to the deck when we smelled something funny. You get used to the smell of the sea when you work a whaler, but this stink was nothing like that. This smelled like a rotting sewer rat boiled in horseshit.

We lowered the humpback to the deck, holding our noses the whole time. My eyes were watering all over the place — and that's when I saw what stunk. It looked like some corpses had somehow got hooked onto the body of the whale. Maybe they were whalers like ourselves who got knocked overboard by some dumb humpback. That's what I was thinking when they started moving.

They peeled themselves off the whale meat like bloated leeches letting go. I swear to God, these things were all slug from the waist down! Purple skin... mucus... Goddammit, they slid off the whale and moved for the crew.

The guys were jumping overboard left and right. If I coulda moved, I'd have been with them. One of them... They got Bill Martino then. He wailed on the freak for all he was worth, and it still sank its teeth into his chest. When he fell over — the slug dragged his body to the railing and fell over the side with him.

That's when I went for the hold. I musta spent a day under there before coming out. When I finally came out, all of the slugs and at least a dozen of our own were gone. And when we got to

the harbor, I ran off the gangplank and right into this bottle — and I'm never coming out again.

Description: This hideous creature spends the majority of its life as a parasite, feeding off the blood of any large animal. The Banes that created these deformed wretches are parasitic, tending to gather near their kin; in other words, where there are Bane Lampreys, there are likely enough Banes to create more from their victims.

If either the Lamprey or its host is attacked, the fomor detaches itself to deal with the threat. Normally lethargic when feeding, the creature wriggles its body swiftly through the water when provoked. The fomor typically attempts either to kill the threat or to attach itself to the new potential host.

Image: From the chest up, the Bane Lamprey resembles a human corpse with purplish skin and sunken eyes. The corpse's original jaw vanishes, evolving into a perfectly round mouth full of needle-sharp fangs. Below the waist, the fomor's tail extends a full four feet. The underside of its body exudes a sticky resin allowing it to cling to any surface. The Lamprey is utterly blind but possesses a keen sense of smell.

Roleplaying Notes: You remember very little of your surface life. Now all you know is the blood. Protect the host and you will feed well. If the host dies, find a new one.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1 (4 when undersea), Stamina 4

Abilities: Brawl 3

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: Bite (5 dice)

Powers: Amphibious, Lamprey Spit*, High-Pressure Endurance

***Lamprey Spit** — The fomor's saliva is a powerful narcotic, capable of knocking a Garou unconscious. Whenever a Lamprey wounds a victim, the player must make an immediate Stamina roll (difficulty 8). If the player fails to roll more successes than Health Levels received in damage, he falls unconscious. The sleep lasts for as long as the Lamprey remains attached or until the victim dies.

GENES

(Genetically Enhanced Nautical Enforcement Specialists); "Sharks"

The light in the minisub's bridge was dim and yellowish, broken only by a single flash of red. The bridge's sole occupant reached out and touched a button just under the winking red eye. "Magellan Five here. In place and..." She paused.

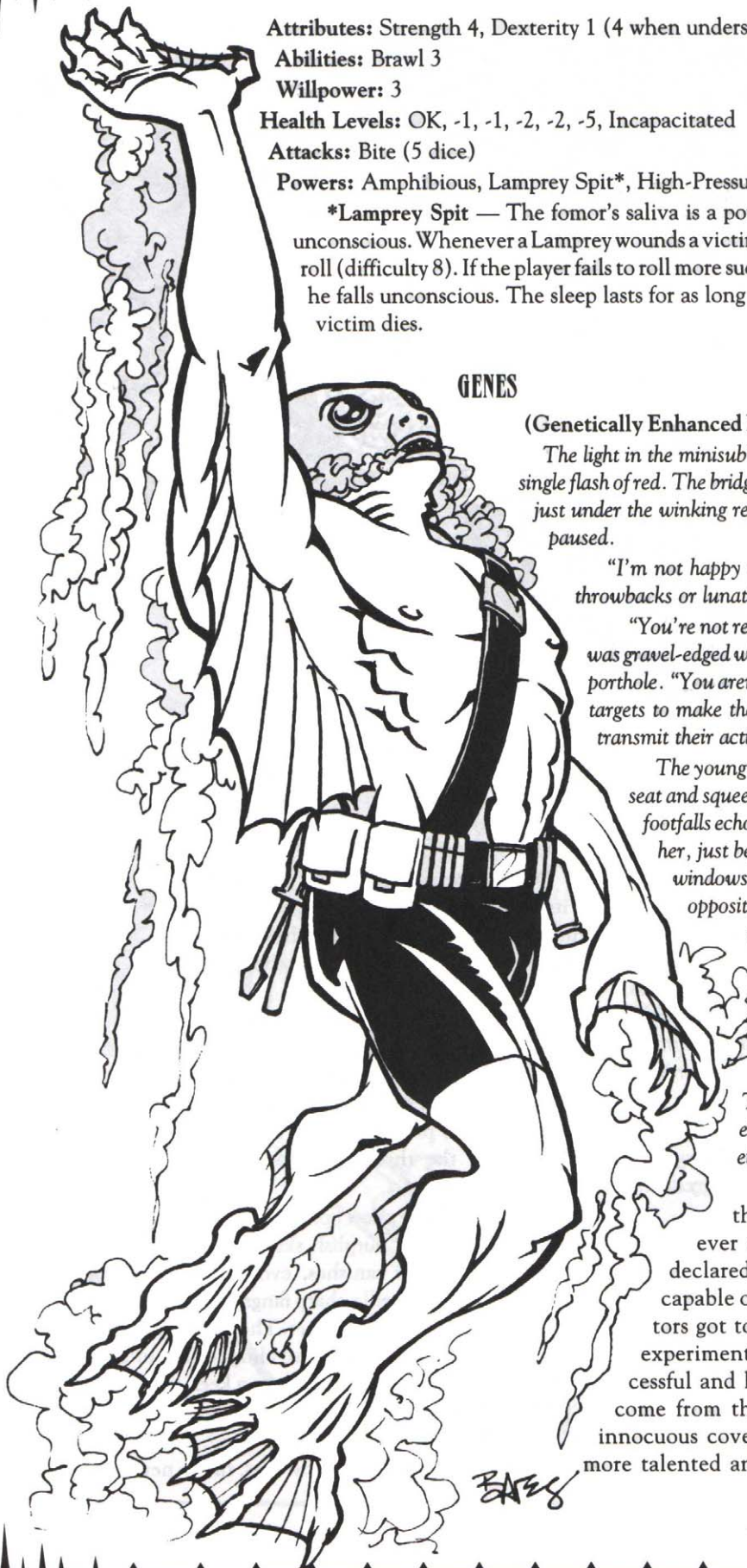
"I'm not happy with this. These are people out there, not reality throwbacks or lunatic magickworkers."

"You're not required to be." The voice echoing out of the speaker was gravel-edged with static, but still cold as the dark waters outside the porthole. "You aren't familiar enough with either the Specialists or our targets to make the decisions here. Get ready to let them out; we'll transmit their activation orders in two."

The young woman tapped the button again, then rose from her seat and squeezed through the bridge's one narrow doorway. Her footfalls echoed from the metal walkway until they stopped, with her, just before a small window set into the wall. Three more windows were spaced along the wall; four more on the wall opposite. The woman peered through the glass, but was unable to make out anything beyond but a vague dark form, bobbing slowly in its dim capsule.

"Heaven help those poor kids," she whispered. A tiny green light winked into being on the other side of the glass; a light shining from a bit of metal implanted into a gray, smooth neck. Then the Void Engineer hit the release switch, and eight windows irised in the side of the minisub, and eight forms slid out into the ocean.

Description: These pathetic wretches are the result of as nasty a bit of subcontracting as ever existed. When the Earth Frontier Division declared that they could use bioengineered "helpers" capable of assisting Awakened explorers, the Progenitors got to work. Before long, there were a number of experimental subjects undergoing testing. The most successful and long-lived of the batch were those that had come from the laboratories of Project Iliad, a relatively innocuous cover operation for a few of the Technocracy's more talented and reclusive Progenitors — or so the memo



said. These creatures, the GENES, proved highly durable, largely controllable, and remarkably resistant to the forces of Paradox (presumably because of the minuscule knowledge the Masses have regarding the deep sea).

Sadly, the GENES are *entirely* Paradox-free — because they aren't constructs. They're fomori, who draw their powers from Iliad's implanted Banes rather than any form of magical alteration. They are programmed to respond to the commands of Pentex officials first and foremost, although most operate under a stricture of "do what these people tell you until we tell you differently." Neither the Void Engineers nor the Progenitors are aware of this duplicity; Iliad's paper trail is both extensive and convincing, as the department head Francesco and his staff have neatly determined what exactly his "contractors" would like to hear. The Technocracy uses the "Sharks" strictly as security, both to defend against the native predators of a supernatural bent, and to mop up any threats from the human sector (officially pirates, but all too often environmentalists or salvage crews who get in the way).

Image: The GENES are remarkably similar to the common horror movie image of the "fish man." Although not quite as piscine as the Creature from the Black Lagoon, they nonetheless would have a difficult time passing for human. Their skin is grayish, hairless and cold, like that of a dead porpoise. Their faces are noseless and flattened; their mouths are lipless and wide, with several rows of sharklike teeth. The Sharks have webbed fingers and feet that are almost more flipper than anything else, and also boast sharklike fins at their calves and forearms. Out of water, their voices are hoarse whispers, and they are accompanied by an acrid scent. Their eyes are a dead, nonreflective black.

Roleplaying Notes: You've been remade into something inhuman; now you can never go home again. Everything's cold and dark down here — the only warmth you have is the hate that burns in you. You loathe your "employers" for making you into a monster, but have no choice but to obey them. You brutally work off your hatred on any targets you're given, all the while imagining your superiors in the throes of agony. Someday you'll get even. Until then, anyone who crosses you is a fair target for your wrath.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2 (4 underwater), Stamina 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Stealth 3, Survival 1

Willpower: 5 (2 for purposes of resisting Pentex's commands)

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: Bite (5 dice)

Powers: Amphibious, Claws and Fangs (fangs only), High-Pressure Endurance, Immunity to the Delirium, Poisonous Flesh

ANCIENT BEASTS

Some beings roamed the Earth long before humanity climbed down out of the trees. These creatures hide in the deepest trenches of the sea or other hideaways where science's prying eye has yet to explore. Emerging only when disturbed, their terrifying appearance forebodes untold disaster and death for any who witness them.

GIGANTIC SQUID

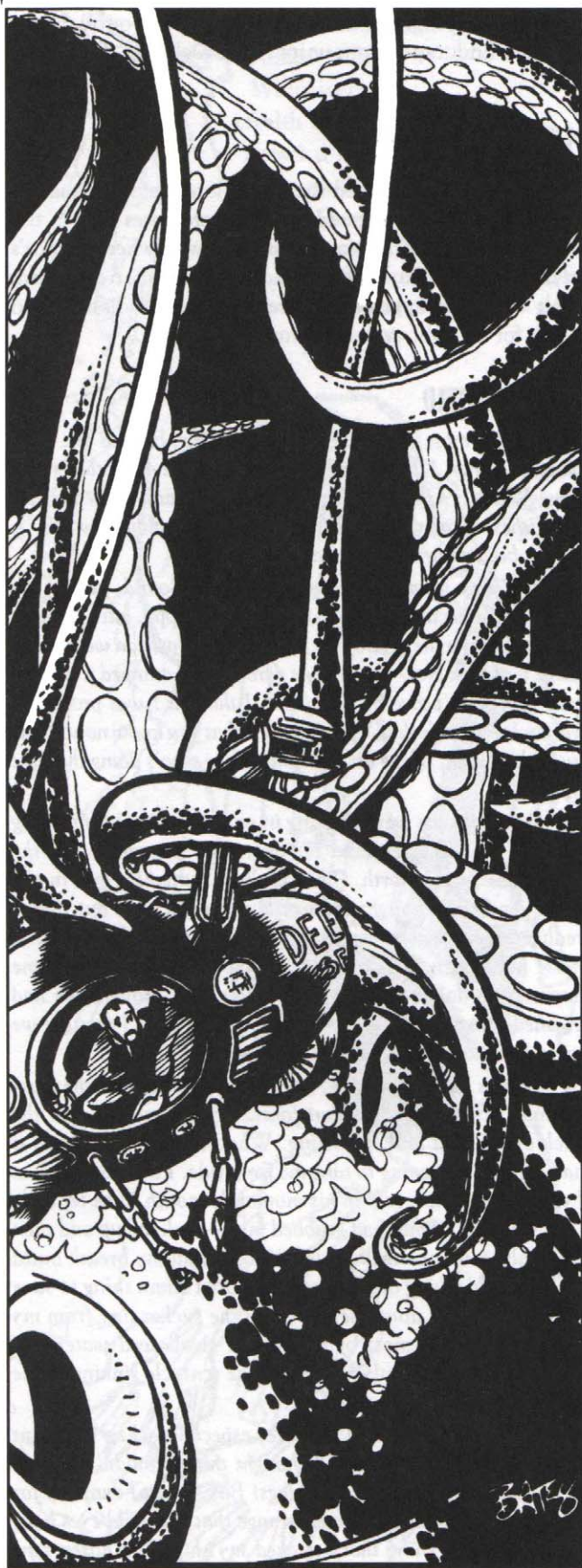
I know most of my stories begin in a bar, but this one takes place on a ship. I used to sail a lot back in those days; that's why those Wiseguy Glass Walkers gave me the name "Sleeps-with-the-Fishes. Damn embarrassing, but it was almost worse. It almost became my epitaph that one day.

We were heading into the Long Island Sound, just off the coast of Connecticut. The sea was getting choppy, but you could hardly tell from the deck of the Jackson. The Jackson was a trash barge that took New York City's garbage and dumped it into the sea. Hey, don't give me that look. I thought I was protecting Staten Island. We didn't know then, what you know now. Now just take a whiff of the air and you tell me who's doing the right thing.

Anyway, we were heading in and the storm was picking up. We couldn't see land but we could just make out the lighthouse to the north. That is until something got in the way. At first I thought the lighthouse went out, but then I realized there was something wriggling out of the water. It must have been forty feet out of the water before it came hammering down on the deck. Everybody thought we had crashed into a reef or another boat. Personally, I thought we were being attacked.

Just as I was changing, something crashed into me from behind. I tried to get up, but found myself ten feet over the deck of the boat and still rising. Whatever this thing was, it had me and was going to take me for a ride. I tried to turn but I was caught like a pup in his momma's mouth. The tentacle — yeah, that's what had grabbed me — took me up and then suddenly down under the surf. Knocked all my breath outta me. I was blacking out and couldn't do a damn thing to save myself. I guess I musta screamed as the sucker tore from my back, along with most of my skin. I swallowed water and blood, and I could only barely see the tentacle sinking to the bottom as I rose to the surface.

I thought I was dead for sure, especially when this giant shark shot past me. Just as I thought things couldn't get any worse the thing grew arms and legs! Boy, when I came up for air, I saw the most awesome carnage that these old eyes have ever seen. The thing that attacked my ship — a dozen ten-



tacles, enormous body, two huge eyes — was a squid about as big as the ship itself. What's more, there were these weresharks — Rokea, they're called — about a dozen strong, shredding the damn thing to pieces along with any of my unfortunate shipmates who got in their way. I blacked out pretty quick after that, but somehow I made it to shore. I don't know if the Rokea saved me or not — I don't see why they would — but I won't ever step on a boat again. Swear to God, Gaia or whoever else is listening.

Description: Bigger than any squid ever recorded by science, bigger even than the most far-fetched theories of marine biologists, these monsters are virtually krakens in their own right. Presumably they never die of old age; they just keep getting bigger and bigger. Only their cannibalistic tendencies keep them in check; they spawn in such great numbers that a gigantic squid can live out its whole life without varying from a steady diet of its siblings. They are creatures of extreme depths, avoiding other undersea creatures and humanity alike — but they are a severe threat to merfolk and particularly Rokea, as the weresharks see it as a ritual duty to slay and devour these beasts of Qyrl. Worst of all, it seems that these monsters are able to survive the occasional trip to the comparatively nonexistent pressures of the surface. What compels them to make such a trip is unknown; very possibly some of them are prodded to do so by their Chulorvian “relatives.”

There's one tiny mercy about these creatures' nature at least: Vampires are apparently unable to ghoul them or control them with Animalism. Something almost supernatural about these monsters keeps them from obeying the Discipline's call, and they are apparently too large to receive enough vitae for ghouling — unless, of course, the vitae were as concentrated as that of an Antediluvian....

Image: These colossal beasts are similar in appearance to their smaller cousins, save that their bodies range from 50-60 feet in length, with tentacles twice as long. They are virtually colorless, with only faint tinges of yellow, pink or purple tinting their hides.

Roleplaying Notes: Eat. Catch and crush any light that comes close. Eat.

Attributes: Strength 8-10, Dexterity 3, Stamina 10

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: Squeeze (Strength damage); bite (Strength +2, difficulty 7); envelop (difficulty 6; each success after the first adds one die to squeeze damage dice pools as the creature wraps more tentacles around its prey).

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Camouflage 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 10, Stealth 2

CHULORVIAH

...Then the other shapes began to appear, filling me with nameless horror the moment I awoke. But during the dreams they did not horrify me at all — I was one with them; wearing their unhuman trappings, treading their aqueous ways, and praying monstrosly at their evil sea-bottom temples.

— H. P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth"

It would be quite misleading to imply that one of the greatest threats lurking at the bottom of the oceans is a new strain of never-before-seen creature. Far from it. The dark menace that plagues merfolk, Rokea and now land-dweller alike is something very, very old and just as malevolent. They are creatures partly of warped spirit and partly of cold flesh, demented and mutated beasts that have bred for centuries far beneath the sun's light. They are the Kraken-Born — the Chulorviah.

The Chulorviah themselves are not truly a species in their own right, at least not by our standards. They are a peculiar strain of altered human and beast, molded into their perverse forms by a weird, infectious element that defies classification. This contagion is certainly supernatural in nature, but its precise character isn't known beyond that. A few Void Engineers have filed reports on the "Chulorviosis strain," but to date the Technocracy still classifies the strain as another form of "alien mutagenic agent." A tiny few vampires have learned of the strain; these Cainites whisper tales of a flesh-shaping contagion, and mutter darkly to one another about similar diseases among the Tzimisce.

However, there seems to be particular evidence that "Chulorviosis" is a spiritual contagion. The Changing Breeds in particular (although even they are hardly well-informed as a whole) consider the whole process to be similar to the Bane-possession that creates fomori. Some suspect it to be a form of spiritual virus encoded by unknown forces from before the birth of the sun, designed to reconfigure its hosts into its "ideal." Others consider it to be a spiritual taint that opens its victims to possession by specialized breeds of Banes. Some have even theorized that the strain is a curse levied against human sorcerers of antiquity, a curse that has tied them irrevocably to the coldest and most alien of animals. None can say for certain.

One thing is certain, at least as far as the shapeshifters are concerned: The Chulorviah are tainted. Their tang of spiritual corruption is subtle but unmistakable, even to magi with high Spirit magick or vampires with appropriate levels of Auspex. The shapeshifters interpret this taint as a positive link between Qyrl and the Wyrms, a sign that the great Kraken has fallen into rot.

The peculiar thing about "Chulorviosis" is its penchant for infecting both humans and invertebrates (most particularly cephalopods) alike — and really nothing

else. No shark Chulorviah have ever been noted, nor have there been cetaceans infected with the strain. It is also a peculiarity of the strain that each of the two groups of potential victims is made "more in the image" of the other. An infected human might develop the mottled skin of a cuttlefish and tiny suckers on the insides of his forearms after a month or two; his intellect is also likely to regress ever-so-slightly, deferring to the cold instinct that drives the Chulorviah. By compare, an infected squid might attain some measure of sentience, as well as the occasional humanlike physical trait (such as green eyes, or vestigial fingernails on the tips of its tentacles). The physical changes are relatively minimal — at least at first. As the strain runs its course, the Chulorviah might, over the course of centuries, mutate into something so unrecognizable that it would be impossible to tell whether it originally walked on two legs or swam through the lightless depths.

What is it that the Chulorviah want? It's difficult to say. The most reliable thing that can be said for their activity is that it seems to be driven by the oldest of urges: to survive and prosper. However, the simple "multiply and expand" mentality common to so many sci-fi movie monsters doesn't seem to be the end-all and be-all of Chulorvian motive. Like all creatures of the spirit world, the Kraken-Born seem to be operating towards a given ideal, most likely that of a Celestine such as Qyrl. Their schemes are always alien and inscrutable; they have often sent entire war parties for no other discernible motive than to make sure that a certain ship is in a certain place at a certain time. Their touch on a given story might be nothing more than a tiny caress — but every move is carefully calculated, planned to enhance their next step. Only by watching a number of Chulorvian projects come to fruition will an observer be able to piece together a connection; with any luck, it won't be too late by then. Ultimately, the Chulorviah's plot may be nothing less than to close the Wound and drag the Unsea back into the Sea. Certainly, such a thing seems completely impossible — but not if you ask the Rokea.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

Of course, the true nature of the Chulorviah is up to the Storyteller to define; we've avoided strictly defining these creatures in "official" terms. Certainly they have some sort of spiritual connection, whether this is because they're Umbrood made flesh, fomori, a degenerate race of magick-workers or even the spawn of the Malfians. Ultimately, the "truth" behind the Chulorviah, their powers and origins should suit the needs of the chronicle. Anything more specific is unnecessary for us to provide.

The Chulorviah come in many forms: giant war-squid, strange anemonelike entities, penny-sized octopi and even severed tentacles that have attained a life of their own. For the most part, these creatures are individuals; when creating such beasts, the Storyteller should feel free to adapt and modify any of the statistics given here, or devise his own, to simulate the miscellany of Chulorvian shock troops and underlings. However, there is something of a pattern to Chulorvian infection, and two distinct substrains have emerged. The two major "castes" of Chulorviah are the infected humans known as the Enfolded, and the cephalopod puppeteers called the Petyrani. Each group has its own role in the murky schemes of their "race," roles to which they are admirably adapted.

THE ENFOLDED

Description: The lowest of Chulorviah, the Enfolded serve as the rank and file. These infected humans often act as laborers or shock troops for their superiors, leading some to believe that they are somehow "undesirable" to the Chulorviah. Whether this is true or not, the Enfolded are certainly expendable. Although not particularly terrifying in their own right, the Enfolded carry a certain dread horror with them wherever they go — it's all too easy to discern that these wretched creatures are a blueprint for what humanity will become if the Kraken has its way.

Image: People infected with the Chulorviah spirit-virus remain mostly human in appearance; the first few changes are usually nothing more significant than a colorful mottling of the skin in certain places. However, eventually the changes become more pronounced. Teeth may fuse together into a chitinous beak; a small cluster of anemonelike tendrils may sprout from the belly. However, once an Enfolded has changed enough so that he can no longer pass for human, he returns to the depths — his usefulness has ended. Once back in the lightless realm of his masters, it's anyone's guess what happens next.

Roleplaying Notes: You know your role, and don't try to step outside it. The change that came over you made you feel sick at first, but the way you feel now makes you wonder if you weren't sick from the day you were born, and only cured just now. Your loyalty to the Chulorviah is unswerving, and the lure of the cold depths pulses in your veins. You do your job gladly, but can barely wait until the call comes for you to return to the dark, icy, lightless depths you call home.

Attributes: Strength 3+, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3+, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1+, Perception 3+, Intelligence 2, Wits 2+

Abilities: As appropriate for the pre-infection victim's life; most subsequently gain Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3 and Occult 2, if they didn't have such traits already.

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: The Enfolded typically respond to threats as they would have as normal humans; a martial artist will use his art form, while a bookworm will probably flee. Those that have manifested some minor physical changes can sometimes bite for Strength +1 damage, but they prefer to keep their actions as "human" as possible.

Powers: Amphibious, High-Pressure Endurance, Immunity to the Delirium

PETYRANOS

Description: The "puppeteer" caste of the Chulorviah, the Petyrani are infected cephalopods that have developed a malign sentience and a terrible talent for mind control. Their role in the Chulorvian grand design is clear: attach themselves to humans, take over their hosts' thoughts, and use the humans' resources in the service of the Chulorvian agenda. However, the Petyrani are hardly limited to human hosts. In times of war they can be seen attached to the cartilaginous skulls of great sharks or other beasts — and they are especially eager to take over the truly powerful forms of vampires or shapeshifters.

Image: The Petyrani take the form of smallish cephalopods, most commonly nautili, octopi and cuttlefish. They possess a few more tentacles than their mundane cousins; these extras are long and slender, perfect for burrowing through a victim's skull and coiling around his brainstem. Petyrani are almost never larger than a child's head, all told. A Petyranos can change its color at will, and uses this talent to conceal itself both on and off its host bodies. Their eyes are as alien as any cephalopod's, but are one of the few giveaways to the Petyrani's true nature — they instinctively watch any potential threats in their surroundings, even threats that a normal mollusk wouldn't recognize.

Roleplaying Notes: You are a malevolent intelligence, one without feeling or warmth. You take pleasure in manipulating your host bodies, although it is more of a narcissistic pride than actual sadism. The thought of inflicting suffering has no particular lure for you; the emotional or psychological state of lesser beings, particularly the sun-walkers, is of no impact. If you have a fear, it is of being butchered on land without a host body to protect you; you will take whatever steps necessary to avoid such a fate.

Attributes: Strength 3-5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Manipulation 7, Perception 4, Intelligence 6, Wits 4. They use the Charisma and Appearance Traits of their host, unless discovered — in which case they have no particular Charisma or Appearance worth discussing.



Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Empathy 3, Swimming 5, Stealth 5, Enigmas 2, Occult 4. They may also draw on the Abilities of their host body, although all such tasks are at +1 difficulty, owing to the trouble of using such talents second-hand.

Willpower: 7

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: As host body; in a pinch, can constrict for Strength damage or bite a grasped opponent for Strength +1 aggravated damage

Powers: Amphibious, Armor (2 soak dice), Brain-Burrow*, Cuttlefish Skin, High-Pressure Endurance

* **Brain-Burrow** — By extruding a tendril into its victim's head, the Petyranos can thereby control the victim as if it were a puppet. Ordinarily, the creature must surgically chew a hole in the victim's skull to gain access (as an attack, although the Chulorviah never causes more than one Health Level of damage in this fashion). Once one of its neural-manipulator tentacles have rooted around the brainstem, the Petyranos gains complete control over the victim and any Abilities she possesses (although they have yet to learn how to make a victim activate any but the most instinctive supernatural powers, such as a werecreature's shapeshifting or vampiric Potence). Victims with 5 Willpower or more may resist the Petyranos' commands by making a Willpower roll, difficulty 7; each success grants a turn of free action. Brain-burrowing is a violation of the worst sort, and the Petyranos must often exercise constant control over its host to prevent him from killing himself to end the suffering.

The Petyranos must remain attached to the victim to maintain control; it may leave its host voluntarily without killing her, and exacting surgery (or magical healing) can remove a Petyranos' tentacles without causing any lasting brain damage. However, simply tearing the creature free is a bad idea. To do so, the Petyranos and the person removing it make contested Strength rolls. If the Petyranos wins, the victim takes one Health Level of damage for every success on the would-be liberator's Strength roll. If the attacker wins, the victim takes a number of unsoakable Health Levels of damage equal to the *total* of both Petyranos and liberator's successes. Needless to say, a Petyranos which is torn free usually comes away from the skull with chunks of brainstem and lobes still clutched in its tentacles....

CHULORVIAN ELDER

Description: Even the redoubtable Mr. Klieg is only a young thing, after all. The children of Kraken are outside time as we know it, and the passage of years touches them only a little in their lightless trenches. Those who endure for centuries become massive, bloated things very unlike their

original human forms. Eerily enough, only once-human Chulorviah can gradually swell into elders; the Petyrani may rule over the Enfolded, but must ironically bow to the wishes of the once-human elders. Even a Petyranos' host body, its very slave, may bloat into an elder form if it survives long enough. It is a slow transformation, and none can say exactly when it begins or ends — but the elders speak from their trenches as the voice of the Kraken itself. They seem to have memories even of things that could not have occurred in their lifetimes; an elder may well know tales from the time before ships, before humanity itself. The method by which they gain this blasphemous wisdom remains secret to this day.

Only a very few have seen a Chulorvian elder and lived to tell the tale; almost all of these were Rokea elders who soon afterwards swam into the Umbral trenches forever. They have never been spotted above the surface of the ocean — although this can't be taken as proof that they cannot leave their lightless depths. Perhaps they have come to the surface now and again, and simply been meticulous about ensuring that no witnesses survive.

Image: There is no uniformity among the elders of the Chulorviah. Each one is an individual nightmare of snarled tentacle and chitinous beak, of mottled skin and staring eye, of blue-veined membrane and fleshy ruffle. A few pulsate with a sickly green luminescence, like the spiritual radiation known as Balefire. Almost all retain, as if a keepsake, some tiny vestige of their human form; one elder might have the blue eyes of a woman set in a pulsating tangle of flesh and chitin, while another might have five tiny pink-skinned fingers at the tip of an undulating blackish tentacle. Their speech is heard directly in the brains of those they address, and resonates with a cold, hollow, alien tone.

Roleplaying Notes: You are as old as the oceans themselves; the human skin you once wore is a delusion now discarded for the truth of Great Kraken. You possess wisdom sifted from the silt at the bottom of the Umbral seas, and layered into your very being over the ages.

You are cruel and alien and cold, a prophet of a time when black waters will cover all the lands and extinguish all fires forever. And you are patient, for your time will come soon enough.

Attributes: Strength 9+, Dexterity 5+, Stamina 9+, Charisma 6, Manipulation 7, Appearance 0, Perception 5+, Intelligence 6+, Wits 4

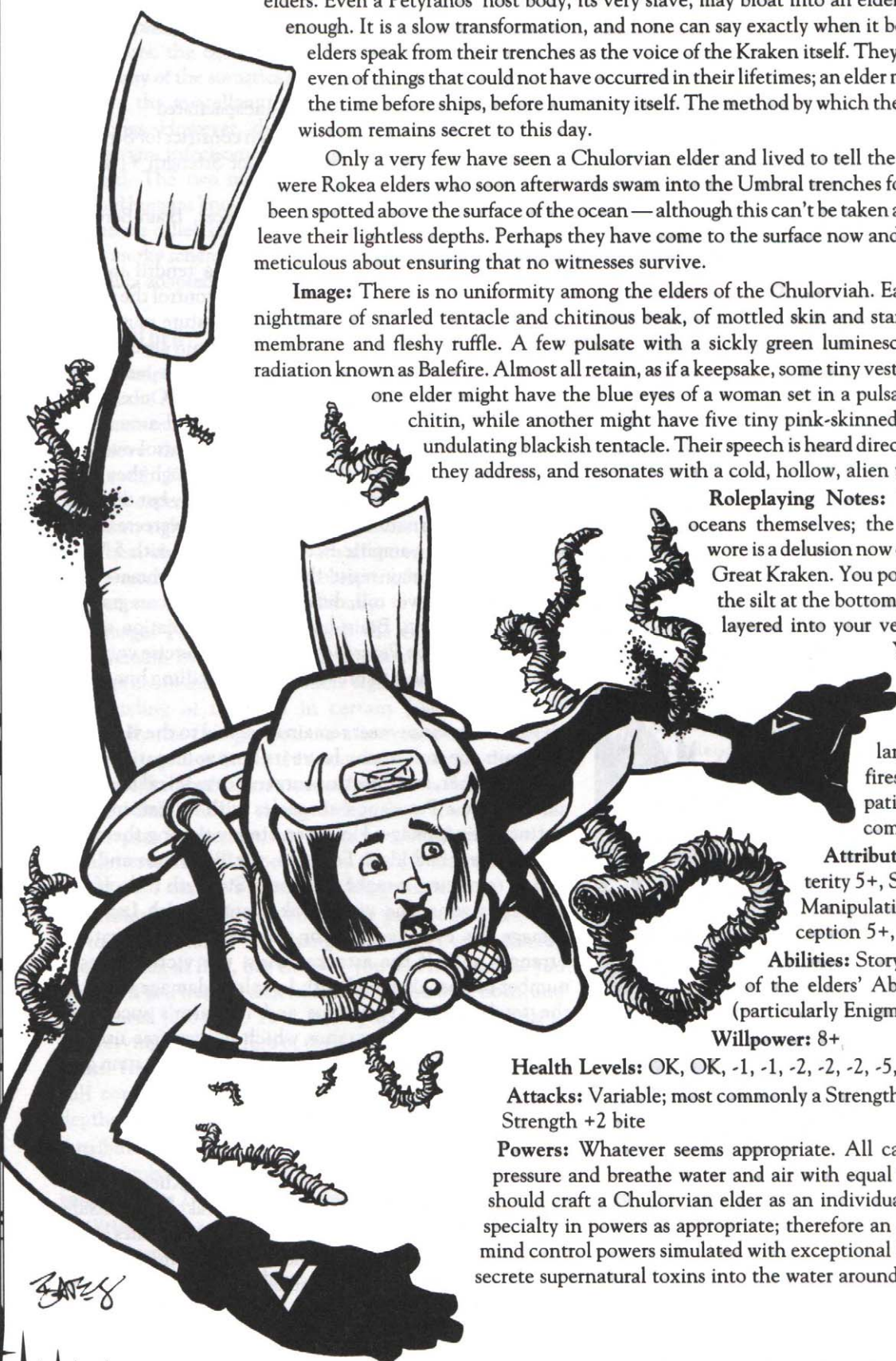
Abilities: Storyteller's discretion; some of the elders' Abilities can rise above 5 (particularly Enigmas or Occult)

Willpower: 8+

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: Variable; most commonly a Strength +1 tentacle crush and a Strength +2 bite

Powers: Whatever seems appropriate. All can survive at any water pressure and breathe water and air with equal facility. The Storyteller should craft a Chulorvian elder as an individual, assigning a particular specialty in powers as appropriate; therefore an elder might have strong mind control powers simulated with exceptional Dominate, or constantly secrete supernatural toxins into the water around it. Be creative.



INFECTION!

So, what are the effects of Chulorviosis on the players' characters? Can the strange disease survive in a vampire's undead body? Have the Rokea ever lost some of their number to the tainted strain? What about the merfolk? Well, the answer should logically depend on how the Storyteller decides to define Chulorviosis. However, the following guidelines should be of some help.

First of all, the Storyteller should decide the exact nature of infection. Obviously, Chulorviosis isn't passed through air or water as an effective medium, or else it would be much more widely known. Certain elders among the Kraken-Born certainly have the ability to pass on the strain; similarly, it might be possible for certain Enfolded or war-beasts to inject a toxin into the bloodstream that bears the taint. The method should be whatever seems most sinister and appropriate for the chronicle. The taint isn't necessarily automatic; the Storyteller might want to let creatures with innate spiritual defenses such as Gnosis make an appropriate "soak roll" to avoid infection. However, defenses such as Spirit magick, which are learned rather than innate, should be effective only if the victim is aware of the strain's presence.

Despite the constant rumors of Vicissitude being "a strange disease" rather than a Discipline, Chulorviosis doesn't work its full effect on vampiric hosts. Nonetheless, the strain does seem to prosper in vitae, with several unfortunate side effects. First and foremost, anyone the vampire ghouls has a distinct, virtually unavoidable chance of becoming infected; a Kindred carrier runs the risk of losing his entire retinue to the deeps. For another, the taint can induce some changes in the vampire's physical form, although not permanently. An infected vampire gains a molluscid feature each time he frenzies, as if he were a Gangrel (infected Gangrel in fact gain a Chulorvian feature in addition to the animal feature already bestowed by frenzy). This feature disappears over the course of the day's rest, as the vampire's body returns to its original state; it can also be fleshcrafted away. Finally, the presence of Chulorviosis makes the vampire's spiritual "taint" more perceptible, making it more likely that Lupines will be able to spy the vampire out as their enemy. (In game terms, the difficulty to detect an infected Leech with Sense Wyrms drops by one, and even vampires with high Humanity can be detected at difficulty 9). The host can drive the Chulorvian taint from her body by expending all her Blood Points; naturally, this process is sure to have its own difficulties.

Shapeshifters are similarly resistant to the strain. Their high regenerative capabilities coupled with their Rage allows them to fight off the infection as though it were a disease. Of course, this isn't an easy fight; an infected shapeshifter must spend one Gnosis a day to stave off the infection until it can be removed (with a Rite of Cleansing or similar measure). Rokea themselves are completely immune to being involuntarily infected with Chulorviosis. However, the weresharks also believe that certain of their number who have gone over to the service of Kraken have "accepted" the strain within them, and have been changed by it in full.

Wraiths are themselves free of the taint (unless the Storyteller wishes to deem otherwise; having Chulorviosis stem from the Malfeans themselves is certainly not inappropriate).

Mages, alas, are as vulnerable as any other human. However, a mage can maintain control of his actions by making a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) every day. Failure drains him of a permanent Willpower point. Once all of these are gone, he becomes an Enfolded, and loses his magickal powers. His only hope is to be healed before he gives in. Certain Effects can purge the mage of the strain before it runs its course; these almost certainly require high Life and Spirit, as well as a goodly amount of successes.

Changelings use the same system as mages to resist, but may substitute Glamour for Willpower rolls if they like. An Enfolded changeling loses her fae soul — the spiritual corruption of Chulorviosis is as damning as any amount of Banality. Methods of healing an infected changeling vary, but most involve powerful Treasures or trips into the Dreaming itself — the stuff of high quests.



APPENDIX

The following section gives optional rules for underwater movement, combat, and other activities. Storytellers are free to use or disregard everything in this section. These rules are not required (White Wolf doesn't have Game Police like FASA® does), and are simply suggestions that may be taken to add an extra degree of realism (or complexity) to your chronicles.

UNDERWATER MOVEMENT

SWIMMING

Any character with at least one dot in Athletics is able to swim. A character's ability to function while in the water is limited by his ability to maneuver. All physical actions are resolved with the appropriate Ability or Athletics, whichever gives a smaller Dice Pool. If Jaeger has Melee 2, Athletics 3, and Dodge 4, his player would roll his full Melee rating for underwater combat but would only be able to use 3 of Jaeger's 4 dots in Dodge.

A character's base swimming speed is determined by her Athletics score and, to a lesser extent, her Strength. Swimming speed is primarily a function of training rather than agility, and the ability to force one's body through a dense liquid medium is likewise more dependent on strength than speed. All "extra" movement derived from multiple actions (Celerity, Rage, etc.) has its value halved because of this added resistance.

Athletics	Base Speed	Sprint Speed
0	1 meter/turn	1 meter/turn
1	1 meter/turn	(Strength + 2) meters/turn
2	1 meter/turn	(Strength + 4) meters/turn
3	(Strength/2) meters/turn	(Strength + 6) meters/turn
4	(Strength/2) meters/turn	(Strength + 9) meters/turn
5+	(Strength) meters/turn	(Strength + 12) meters/turn

SECONDARY ABILITIES

Several players guides refer to Swimming as a Secondary Ability rather than an Athletics specialty. If a character has Swimming, the player has the option to substitute Swimming for Athletics in all appropriate rolls. Rolls made with Swimming are made at a -1 difficulty and speed is calculated by the above chart as if the character's Strength were two dots higher. Likewise, a player whose character possesses the Secondary Skill: Scuba may use the same rule for appropriate rolls when the character is diving, substituting Scuba for Athletics (or Repair/Technology when dealing with the equipment) at a -1 difficulty.

"Base speed" refers to the speed that the character can sustain while performing other actions (such as combat). "Sprint speed" is the distance moved per turn if the character is taking no action other than swimming as fast as she can. These values assume the swimmer is relatively unencumbered (light clothes). For every two pounds of dead weight the swimmer is wearing or carrying (including clothes, body armor, and weapons), reduce her Strength by 1 for purposes of determining swimming speed.

The above values also assume that the swimmer is of normal humanoid body shape and mass. For a character significantly larger than human-sized, such as a werewolf in Crinos, halve swimming speed due to all the extra dead weight he's dragging around (not to mention fifty square feet of wet shag carpet). However, for a character who has some means of swim aid such as flippers, double the above values. A character who goes even farther and assumes a streamlined aquatic form swims at *four times* the listed speed. These modifiers are general guidelines; if a specific supernatural being's write-up calls for a certain speed, use that instead.

DIVING

Most characters require a supply of oxygen to survive. Divers must carry their own air supplies with them, most commonly in the form of scuba (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) tanks. "Divers" who do not intend to go more than a half-meter below the surface of the water can make do with snorkels, inch-

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Most of these rules assume that the activities in question are taking place in relatively calm, light seas. However, the oceans of the World of Darkness are prone to throwing up storms at the most inconvenient times. The following difficulty modifiers should be applied to most (Storyteller's discretion) activities attempted in heavy weather. This includes combat — the pitching deck of a ship is not the most stable footing from which to fight. Supernatural powers or Merits that deal with balance may reduce these penalties at the Storyteller's discretion.

Swimming pool or calm (glass-smooth) lake	-1 difficulty
Normal current or light waves	standard difficulty
Rough, choppy waves	+1 difficulty
Storm or high winds, pronounced waves	+2 difficulty
Heavy thunderstorm	+3 difficulty
Hurricane	+4 difficulty

Generally, weather conditions do not penetrate much below the surface of the sea. For every five meters of depth, weather difficulty penalties are reduced by one. Yes, this means that a scuba-diving mage who's 20 meters down can ignore the hurricane raging above his head. However, he may encounter some unpleasant surprises when he tries to return to the surface....

wide breathing tubes, and those who must go deeper than 300 meters or so usually wear diving exoskeletons, rigid pressurized suits of armor.

Scuba systems consist of a metal tank of pressurized air, a valve system called a *regulator* that dispenses this air at a measured rate, and a rubber hose and mouthpiece to deliver this air to the swimmer's mouth. A weight belt and buoyancy compensator (an inflatable vest connected to the diver's air tank), flippers, a mask, and a watch or dive computer are also standard equipment for most scuba divers.

Maximum dive depth and length of dive are both highly important. Any trained scuba diver calculates the amount of time he will stay underwater and the maximum depth to which he intends to descend before

Maximum Depth	Dive Duration	Maximum Dive Duration
0-10 meters	4 hours, plus 30 minutes per success	8 hours
11-30 meters	30 minutes, plus 15 minutes per success	3 hours
31-50 meters	10 minutes, plus 10 minutes per success	90 minutes
51-150 meters	10 minutes per success	60 minutes
151-300 meters	5 minutes per success	30 minutes

he goes over the side of the dive boat. Scuba gear is capable of taking divers down to 300 meters' depth, though most recreational dives do not go below 30 meters for safety reasons.

The deeper the dive goes, the less time can be spent at the intended depth, as air supplies are consumed faster at lower depths. When a character begins a dive, the player rolls Stamina + Athletics (difficulty 7). The number of successes indicate the amount of time the character may spend in the dive, as determined by the following table:

A character who passes his dive time limit must begin an immediate ascent or risk running out of air. Every minute that a character spends past his dive duration, the Storyteller rolls one die. On a result of 8 or higher, the character's air runs out and drowning rules begin to apply. A failed roll indicates that the character has broken his equipment and must repair it before he can dive safely. A botch indicates that the character has not found a potentially fatal equipment malfunction and may discover it at a most inopportune time, most likely through oxygen toxicity or nitrogen narcosis (see below).

Vampires, obviously, do not breathe and thus do not need to observe these time limits (although being seen 200 meters down with no air tank may be considered a breach of the Masquerade). However, they are susceptible to certain high-pressure-induced ailments (see below).

FLOATING AND TREADING WATER

For those characters who wish to do nothing more active than stay above water, there are two additional options: floating and treading water.

Most characters have natural positive buoyancy, meaning that they are capable of floating without too much effort. Under normal circumstances, floating requires the player to make a Stamina + Athletics roll (difficulty 4). Each success is one minute that the character floats successfully before the next roll is required. Failure means that the character begins sinking and must attempt to tread water to regain her equilibrium. A botch indicates that the character begins drowning.

Vampires' bodies are slightly denser than those of living beings and lack the normal layer of subcutaneous fat that all but the scrawniest mortals possess. Shapeshifters who have assumed Crinos form or the equivalent are likewise denser than humans (save Corax, whose hollow bones help them float). In both instances, the characters in question have neutral buoyancy, meaning that they neither sink nor float naturally. Vampires and Crinos-form shifters may not attempt to float, and must tread water to keep from sinking.

ROKEA IN CRINOS

Several rules given in this section refer to shapeshifters' Crinos forms as ungainly and awkward in the water. This does not apply to the Rokea, who are quite adept at maneuvering underwater in all four (or five) of their forms. Weresharks in Crinos ignore all rules given in this appendix that penalize Crinos forms. At the Storyteller's discretion, Nagah and Mokolé with aquatic-adapted Crinos forms may be likewise unimpeded.

Treading water requires a Stamina + Athletics roll (difficulty 5). Each success is one minute during which the character stays above water and may take other actions, within reason (talking, trying to work a survival radio, fixing a scuba tank's regulator). A character who fails to tread water begins sinking and must roll Strength + Athletics (difficulty 8) or begin to drown on the next turn. A botch on an attempt to tread water indicates that drowning begins immediately. Glub glub.

FATIGUE

Swimming is an incredibly taxing activity. A character who has to maneuver in the water for any length of time is going to tire quickly. For every five minutes that a character spends swimming — or after any combat is resolved, even if it only lasts one round — the player must roll Stamina + Athletics (difficulty 7). Failure on this roll means that the character is down one die on all rolls. This penalty is cumulative — a character who fails three such rolls and does not rest is down 3 dice on all subsequent rolls. Resting (floating, at the least) removes one die's worth of penalty for every five minutes of rest. Botching a fatigue roll means that the character founders and begins sinking (and drowning).

A character who is constantly treading water is likewise susceptible to fatigue. However, treading water is much less exhausting, and players whose characters who are performing this action only need to roll every 30 minutes.

The combat system in **Vampire: The Masquerade, Third Edition** differentiates between two types of non-aggravated damage. The sources of damage listed in this chapter are annotated as (Bashing) or (Lethal). If you are not using this system, please disregard the parenthetical designations and apply the damage ratings normally.

DROWNING AND OTHER HAZARDS

BASIC UNPLEASANTNESS

A character who has no other oxygen supply can hold her breath for an amount of time determined by her Stamina (ghouls with Fortitude may add it to their Stamina) before she begins to die:

Stamina	Holding Breath	Holding Breath in Combat
1	30 seconds	2 rounds
2	one minute	5 rounds
3	two minutes	8 rounds
4	four minutes	12 rounds
5	eight minutes	18 rounds
6	15 minutes	entirety of combat
7	20 minutes	entirety of combat
8	30 minutes	entirety of combat
9	45 minutes	entirety of combat

A character who runs out of time may expend Willpower to hold her breath longer: one point grants one minute out of combat or one turn in combat. Note that a separate time limit is given for characters who are involved in a fight. This is because intense, strenuous, adrenaline-charged activity (e.g. fighting for one's life) uses up a lungful of air much more quickly than does swimming or diving.

Once a character can no longer hold her breath, she begins to drown. Drowning inflicts one Health Level of (Lethal) damage per turn. This damage is not aggravated, but may not be healed until the character is able to breathe again. A character who reaches Incapacitated from drowning suffers no further damage, but dies in a number of minutes equal to her Stamina. If she is recovered and resuscitated between going to Incapacitated and dying (Intelligence + Medicine roll [difficulty 5] to apply rescue breathing and/or CPR), she will need to be hospitalized. If less than three successes are scored on the resuscitation roll, the drowning victim loses a permanent point from her highest Mental Attribute — oxygen deprivation does cause brain damage.

SEASICKNESS

Seasickness, or motion sickness, occurs when a character is in the water or on a surface vessel and cannot adjust to the constant rocking motion of her inner ear. In game terms, any character who fails a Stamina roll (difficulty 5, modified by weather conditions [above]) is afflicted by nausea and dizziness for the next 12 hours. This Stamina roll is made whenever the character first boards the vessel or enters the water and every 12 hours

thereafter. Seasick characters are down one die on all Dexterity, Perception, and Social Attribute-based rolls and two dice on all Intelligence and Wits-based rolls due to extreme discomfort. Seasickness does not affect characters who are naturally adapted to the sea, such as Rokea or merfolk, nor does it affect the undead. In addition, the Storyteller may wish to exempt characters who successfully stave off seasickness for three days or so (assuming that they've finally gotten their "sea legs.")

HYPOTHERMIA

The normal human body temperature is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. A prolonged immersion in waters as warm as 70 degrees can gradually leech away body heat, and hypothermia can incapacitate or kill an individual over a prolonged period of time. Hypothermia's symptoms include numbness, loss of voluntary muscle control, impaired senses and thought processes, and slurred speech.

In game terms, hypothermia begins to set in after a character has been immersed in water for twice her Stamina in hours. Every hour after this limit has been passed, the player rolls Stamina (difficulty 7). Every time this roll fails, the character gains a cumulative -1 die to all rolls; this penalty lasts until the character is treated for hypothermia. Hypothermic characters in the ocean usually drown because their muscles stiffen and they lose the ability to tread water or even float. Hypothermia must be treated by warming the character, both internally and externally. Hot liquids, dry, heated blankets, and (if no other heat source is available) the body warmth of an unaffected individual are the recommended treatments.

Hypothermia sets on much faster in cold water. The above rules assume a water temperature of 65+ degrees. In water between 55 and 65 degrees, hypothermia develops in half the time (the character's Stamina in hours). Between 45 and 55 degrees, hypothermia may begin after a number of minutes equal to three times the character's Stamina, and Stamina rolls are made every 15 minutes. Below 45 degrees, hypothermia hits within a number of minutes equal to half the character's Stamina and Stamina rolls must be made every minute.

Vampires are not affected by hypothermia (although they can slowly freeze solid in temperatures below 20 degrees Fahrenheit). Characters with natural insulation, such as shapeshifters who have assumed furry forms, add two dice to their Stamina when rolling to stave off hypothermia. Characters who are naturally suited to cold-water existence, such as Gurahl of polar bear descent, treat the water they are in as if it were two "stages" warmer.

NITROGEN NARCOSIS (RAPTURE OF THE DEEP)

The most common ailment afflicting divers is nitrogen narcosis, colloquially known as “rapture of the deep.” This occurs when a diver is breathing highly compressed nitrogen gas, usually at depths of 30 meters or more. The amount of nitrogen in the character’s lungs limits how much oxygen can be absorbed into his bloodstream to reach the brain. Nitrogen narcosis comes on slowly (over 15 to 60 minutes) and mimics alcohol intoxication: the character becomes disoriented, giddy, and uninhibited. In game terms, a character suffering from nitrogen narcosis is down three dice on all Will-power rolls and two dice on all Dexterity and Mental Attribute rolls. His judgement is impaired, and a character who is susceptible to Frenzy is at +1 difficulty to resist or -1 difficulty to enter.

Nitrogen narcosis may be overcome by ascending 15 meters or more. This lowers the pressure of nitrogen within the character’s lungs and allows the body to rebalance itself over the course of 5 to 10 minutes. A player whose character who is being overcome by nitrogen narcosis must succeed in a Perception + Medicine roll (difficulty 6, but don’t forget the two-dice penalty) for the character recognize the danger and ascend safely. Other characters in the area may recognize this problem

with the same roll (difficulty 8), but an irrational character may be difficult to persuade to ascend.

Nitrogen narcosis does not affect vampires or other characters who are not breathing gases underwater.

DECOMPRESSION SICKNESS (THE BENDS) AND AIR EMBOLISM

The opposite of nitrogen narcosis is much less pleasant and much more likely to be fatal. Decompression sickness, commonly referred to as “the bends,” is caused by a rapid ascent and depressurization after a diver has been breathing compressed air containing nitrogen (this is usually avoided by the use of a gas mix with high oxygen concentrations, which causes oxygen toxicity if used at shallow depths — see below). The sudden reduction in pressure on the diver’s body causes the nitrogen in his bloodstream to “boil” out of solution and form bubbles. These bubbles accumulate at the character’s joints and within muscles, causing incredible and prolonged pain. Other symptoms include mood swings due to fluctuating oxygen levels within the brain, seizures and convulsions, and skin irritation or numbness. A character suffering from the bends receives one Health Level of unsoakable aggravated damage each hour until he dies or is placed in a decompression chamber (present on board most commercial salvage vessels and dive platforms and standard



at many coastal-area hospitals). Furthermore, the player must succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) for the character to take any action past writhing and whimpering. This roll must be made for each and every action the character attempts — this is some of the most excruciating pain that most individuals will ever experience. Damage from the bends may be healed before the character has been decompressed, but the bends (and the pain penalty) continue for 24 hours. Normal humans don't survive this long without treatment.

Decompression sickness doesn't appear until the character has reached the surface of the water. Symptoms appear within one hour of surfacing. As noted above, this ailment continues until the character has been decompressed or is dead. Decompression sickness occurs when a character ascends too quickly. "Too quickly" is a function of the maximum time which the character spent underwater. A safe ascent takes a quarter of the time that was spent in the dive (this time is factored into the dive time table, above). If need be, a character may make a rapid ascent to a depth of approximately 3 meters and spend the rest of his ascent time waiting at that depth.

When a character makes a very rapid ascent from a deep dive (faster than 5 meters per turn from a depth of 50 meters or more), the player must roll Stamina (difficulty 7). Failure indicates that the character has an extremely bad headache from the rapid pressure change (+1 difficulty to all Willpower and Mental Attribute-based rolls for the next hour). A botch indicates that, in addition to developing the bends upon surfacing, the character must contend with a more immediate problem: an air embolism. This occurs when a large bubble of nitrogen forms in the bloodstream and blocks the blood flow to the brain. A character with an air embolism receives five dice of (Lethal) damage every hour (in addition to the damage from the bends) until he is placed in a decompression chamber. If he reaches Incapacitated but survives this damage, he loses a permanent point from his highest Mental Attribute.

A vampire cannot develop an air embolism, but can suffer the bends due to the large amounts of unmoving blood in his system. He may soak each Health Level of damage from the bends by rolling Fortitude (difficulty 6, and only Kindred may soak this damage — ghouls with Fortitude may not). If a vampire knows what is wrong with him (Intelligence + Medicine roll [difficulty 5] or prior experience with the bends), he may try to purge his bloodstream of accumulated nitrogen. This requires the player to spend three Blood Points and succeed in a Stamina + Self-Control roll (difficulty 8). Players of *Gangrel aquarii* do not have to roll but must still expend the three Blood Points.

Water-breathing characters are not affected by the bends or air embolisms.

OXYGEN TOXICITY

The deeper a diver goes, the higher the concentration of oxygen he needs in the air he breathes in order for his lungs to function properly while under external pressure. Oxygen toxicity occurs when a diver breathes too high of a concentration of oxygen for the depth at which he is operating. The diver's system becomes supersaturated with gaseous oxygen, which begins accumulating at various points within the body.

The first stage of oxygen toxicity involves little more than discomfort, and appears within fifteen to thirty minutes of the point at which the character begins breathing too much oxygen. The character experiences difficulty breathing (the lungs are working overtime to process the elevated levels of oxygen that are available to them), abdominal discomfort (gas bubbles in the digestive tract), and chest pains. At this point, all rolls involving mental effort or endurance are made at +1 difficulty due to distraction.

Fifteen to thirty minutes after the onset of the first stage, the second stage of oxygen toxicity sets in. This involves decreased lung capacity and fluid pooling in the lungs as the body attempts to buffer out the excess oxygen. At this stage, a character is in extreme pain (-2 dice to all rolls, cumulative with wound penalties) and has vastly reduced endurance (+2 difficulty to all endurance/fatigue rolls, cumulative with the dice pool penalty for agony).

If the character continues to breathe high oxygen concentrations, the third stage of oxygen toxicity sets in after another thirty to sixty minutes. This involves permanent loss of lung capacity as alveoli rupture and the more immediate threat of pulmonary hemorrhaging. In layman's terms, a character in the third stage of oxygen toxicity literally drowns in his own blood as his lungs rupture from the inside. Third-stage oxygen toxicity inflicts one Health Level of unsoakable aggravated damage every X turns, where X is the character's Stamina rating. This damage cannot be healed by supernatural means until the character is breathing a normal atmosphere.

First- and second-stage oxygen toxicity reverse themselves after three hours of breathing normal atmosphere. However, oxygen toxicity is nearly impossible to treat or reverse at late stages because successful treatment requires the removal of excess oxygen from the patient's bloodstream. Dialysis has been of limited success in some cases, but even this is chancy. Any attempt to treat a character with third-stage oxygen toxicity requires an Intelligence +

Medicine roll (difficulty 9) and access to a fully-equipped emergency room. A character who survives third-stage oxygen toxicity loses one permanent point of Stamina and is permanently down an additional die on all rolls involving endurance.

A vampire is not affected by oxygen toxicity unless he is deliberately using scuba gear to fool mortals. In this case, first- and second-stage oxygen toxicity affect him the same as they would a mortal, and third-stage oxygen toxicity causes Blood Point loss instead of aggravated damage. Obviously, water-breathing characters are not susceptible to oxygen toxicity.

PRESSURE-INDUCED VITAE DISSOCIATION (DEPTH SWEAT)

Although vampires do not need to breathe, they are still susceptible to certain problems that high pressure causes, such as decompression sickness (above). In addition, Kindred who descend past 300 meters' depth experience a gradual dissolution of the blood as water pressure forces the stagnant vitae in their undead bodies out of their systems. For every 10 minutes that a vampire spends below 300 meters' depth, she loses one Blood Point. This loss is faintly visible (if a light source is available) — the vampire appears to be sweating blood which rapidly diffuses into the surrounding water.

Fortitude does serve to shield the vampire against this blood loss, which Lasombra scholars have named PIVD (Pressure-Induced Vitae Dissociation) and Gangrel *aquarii* refer to as "depth sweat." Every point of Fortitude that the vampire possesses increases the critical depth by 50 meters, so a character with Fortitude 4 may descend to 500 meters before experiencing any ill effects. Gangrel *aquarii* are innately adapted to high water pressure; their safe depth is triple the normal value.

A vampire whose Blood Pool is emptied by depth sweat enters torpor and sinks to the sea floor. The Gangrel *aquarii* admit to having found several torporous elders on the bottom of the ocean, usually in the remains of shipwrecks, and have even gone so far as to positively identify some formerly well-known individuals who were lost at sea during the World Wars. However, the Mariners have never rescued a victim of depth sweat from torpor and returned him to the surface. The Camarilla believes this to be proof that the Mariners practice Diablerie as a matter of course, but all inquiries have met with puzzled looks and a lack of comprehension of the Diablerie process.

PIVD only affects vampires. It does not drain blood from ghouls or werespiders, both of whom have pulses which circulate their blood (and who have enough



problems of their own by the time they reach PIVD depths).

UNDERWATER COMBAT

VISIBILITY

Water has different refractive properties than air. Objects viewed underwater appear larger and closer than they would on the surface. In addition, water gradually deadens colors, starting with reds and gradually phasing out blues and purples. The net game effect of these two phenomena is to impair vision-based Perception rolls (+1 difficulty for every 5 meters of distance from the viewer, to a maximum penalty of +3 difficulty) and accuracy in ranged combat (see below). Characters who are adapted for aquatic or amphibious existence, such as Gangrel *aquarii* or merrow, do not suffer these penalties.

Water also absorbs light. During daytime, depths between 5 and 15 meters are lighted as if they were overcast, 15 to 25 meters are considered cloudy, and depths below 25 meters are dark. Yes, this means a vampire who is 25 meters below the surface of the sea takes no damage from sunlight during the daytime. These ranges are halved for particularly silty or polluted water (e.g. Boston Harbor) and doubled for extremely clear and pure water (the Bahamas).

CLOSE COMBAT

Water reduces the force of all attacks that use kinetic energy, which is the vast majority of means used to inflict harm in most fights. All brawling attacks halve the attacker's Strength (and Potence) for the purpose of determining damage dice. Exceptions to this rule are claw and bite attacks and those that rely on gripping rather than striking (such as strangleholds). In addition, the added resistance of water slows strikes enough that all Dodge rolls made against brawling attacks are made at -1 difficulty.

Melee attacks are likewise impaired. All attacks with blunt melee weapons have their damage dice pools reduced by three dice, slashing melee weapons lose two dice, and stabbing weapons lose one die. Flexible weapons (whips and chains) are impossible to use underwater, as are thrown weapons (though spears and harpoons can be thrown into the water from above with the loss of one die of damage).

RANGED COMBAT

Ranged underwater combat is a chancy proposition at best. Any firearm attack made from above the water against

a target that is underwater is made at +2 difficulty due to the image displacement caused by the air/water visual distortion. In addition, a bullet loses 1 die of damage for every meter of water through which it passes. It is quite easy for a scuba diver to catch a bullet in her hand if she is a few meters underwater (Dexterity + Athletics roll against a difficulty of the bullet's base damage rating + 3, although failures and botches are messy).

Most modern firearms use sealed cartridges that are effectively waterproof, at least for the short term. However, actually firing a gun underwater is a chancy proposition. Semi-automatic weapons cycle the next round into the firing chamber by using either the gas released by the previous bullet firing or the recoil generated by the same source. In both cases, water absorbs part of the force that the gun needs to operate, which raises the likelihood of the weapon jamming. Whenever a character is foolish or desperate enough to pull the trigger, the Storyteller rolls one die. Any semi-automatic weapon (automatic pistols, submachine guns, assault rifles) jams on a result of 1 through 3. An underwater jam requires a successful Wits + Firearms roll (difficulty 6) and three actions to clear. If a character fires a burst or uses full automatic fire, the Storyteller rolls one die for *each bullet fired*.

Underwater combat is actually kinder to firearms that operate on simpler principles. Pump-action shotguns, bolt-action or lever-action rifles, and revolvers all cycle rounds into their firing chambers by simple mechanical means. They are much less likely to malfunction underwater and only jam if the Storyteller rolls a 1.

It is possible to modify a semi-automatic weapon for underwater use. This requires a minimum of four dots in the Gunsmith or Professional Skill: Gunsmith Secondary Ability, 12 hours of work, and a machine shop. The player rolls Intelligence + Gunsmith (difficulty of the weapon's base Damage Trait + 4; difficulties over 10 indicate a weapon that cannot be modified in this fashion). Success reduces the weapon's chance of failure to a result of 1 only.

EXPLOSIONS

Water conducts shock much more readily than does air. Any explosion that goes off underwater has its damage Dice Pool increased by 50% (round up). Note that grenades are waterproof and can be used as rudimentary depth charges (the infamous "grenade fishing" method of foraging for rations).

If the alternate explosives and demolitions rules from *The Vampire Storytellers Companion* are in use, using a charge underwater or preparing one for underwater use requires one more point of the Demolitions Secondary Skill than is normally needed.



EQUIPMENT

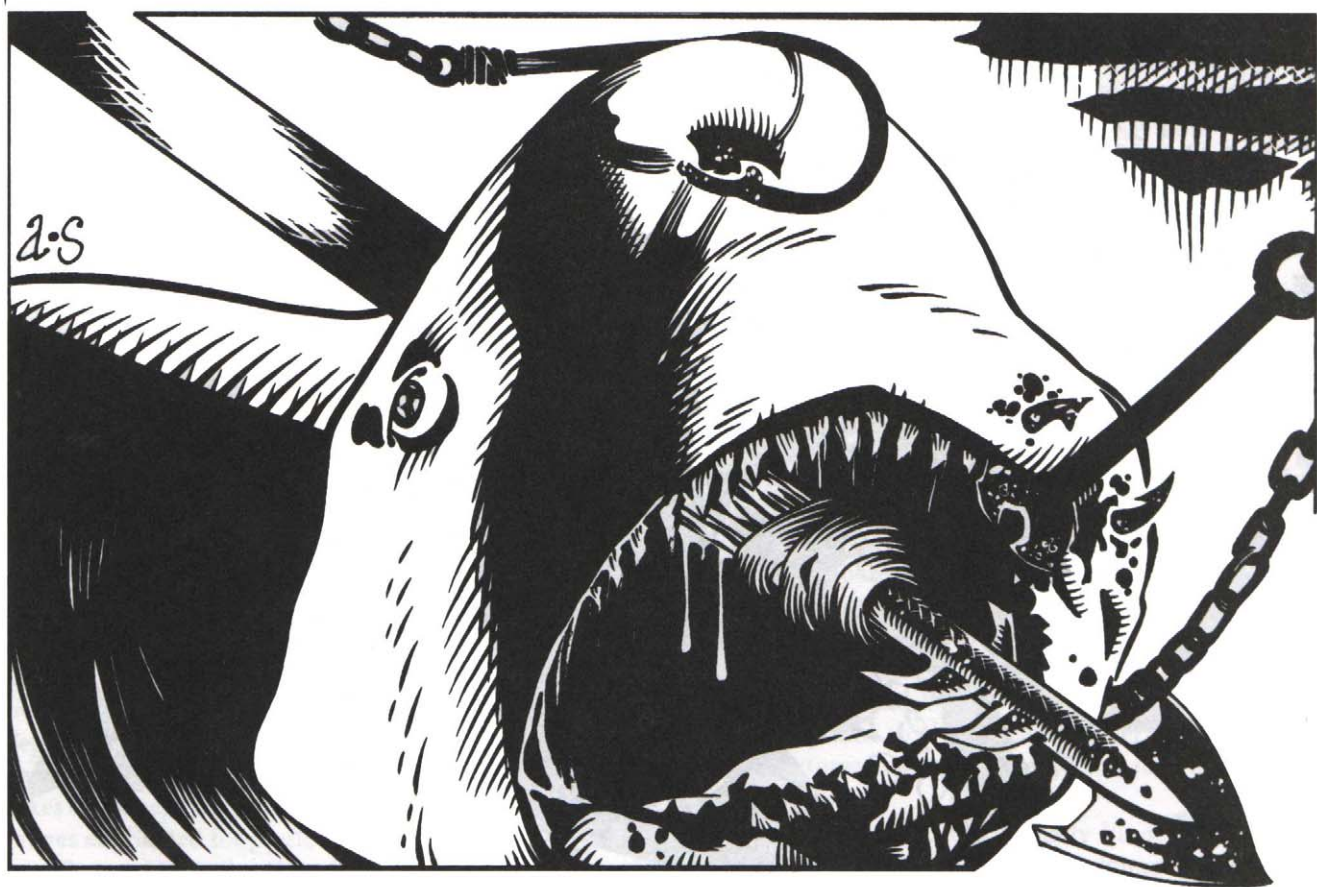
WEAPONS

- **Bang stick:** Originally devised for anti-shark use by divers, this appropriately-named one-shot weapon is little more than a 12-gauge shotgun shell (sealed to keep the powder dry) inside a two-foot collapsible metal rod. To use the bang stick, the wielder slams the muzzle end of the stick against the intended target (Dexterity + Melee roll [difficulty 6]). The rod telescopes down, slamming a firing pin into the base of the shotgun shell and setting it off. This inflicts 10 dice of (Lethal) damage on the unfortunate victim. A botch on the attack roll inflicts this same damage on the wielder, and three or more unsoaked Health Levels result in the explosive amputation of the user's hand. A bang stick can be used on land or underwater with equal effectiveness. A character with the Secondary Skill: Gunsmith at 2 or higher can make a bang stick with access to a machine shop and a shotgun shell and one hour to work. A bang stick can be concealed under a jacket.

- **Harpoon:** A harpoon is essentially an oversized spear. Harpoons were traditionally used for whale-hunt-

ing. Harpoons can be used as melee weapons, in which case an attack with one is made at difficulty 7, or can be thrown, in which case the attack is treated as an attack with any thrown weapon. In either case, a harpoon inflicts Strength + 3 (Lethal) damage and cannot be concealed. Harpoons typically have wooden shafts and can thus be used to stake vampires, although this may be a bit of overkill. Then again, maybe not...

- **Harpoon gun:** Modern whaling vessels typically use harpoon guns, oversized spearguns which fire economy-sized harpoons. Harpoon guns are bolted to a ship's deck and cannot be removed and fired by any character with a Strength of less than 7 (which pretty much limits their portable use to shapeshifters and elder vampires). They can fire normal harpoons (above), inflicting 15 dice of (Lethal) damage, or explosive-headed whaling harpoons. These highly unpleasant projectiles inflict 10 dice of (Lethal) damage when they strike. If at least three successes were scored on the attack roll and three Health Levels of damage were inflicted after the victim soaked, the harpoon stays in the victim and the explosive head detonates at the beginning of the next turn, inflicting 8 dice of aggravated damage on the victim and 3 dice of (Lethal) non-aggravated damage within a two-meter radius.



Harpoon guns are designed for attacking whales and other large targets, and these attacks are made at difficulty 6. Human-sized victims are a base difficulty 8, and Crinos/zulo forms are difficulty 7. Harpoon guns may not be used to make called shots when firing at a target smaller than a whale.

Range: 40

Rate: 1

Clip: 1, 5 actions to reload

• **Speargun:** A speargun uses a compressed air charge to fire a long metal shaft similar to an arrow. Spearguns are equally effective on land or underwater, with the exception of increased range if fired in the air (due to lessened resistance). Spearguns do not lose damage as firearms do when firing through water (see above). If using the variant armor rules from **The Vampire Storytellers Companion**, spearguns are resisted by body armor's Melee Soak rating.

Damage: 6 (Lethal)

Range: 30 (underwater)/50 (in air)

Rate: 1

Clip: 1, two actions to reload

Conceal: T

SWIMMING AND DIVING EQUIPMENT

• **Buoyancy compensator:** This is a scuba diver's inflatable vest that is usually worn in conjunction with a weight belt. The vest is connected to the diver's air tank. By increasing or decreasing the amount of air the vest holds, the diver can maintain neutral buoyancy and neither sink nor float while diving. Athletics rolls attempted while scuba diving without a buoyancy compensator are made at +1 difficulty. A buoyancy compensator also provides one extra soak die against blunt attacks (such as fists or clubs).

• **Deep-Dive Armor:** This is a sealed steel exoskeleton used in deep-sea salvage work. It weighs several hundred pounds and is nigh-impossible to maneuver in the open air. Deep-dive armor is used in conjunction with a dive support ship to which the armor is tethered by a steel cable, air lines, and a telephone link. If the air line to the ship is severed, the armor has 12 hours of internal air. It is pressurized to one atmosphere, so the diver does not need to depressurize on ascent. Deep-dive armor gives the character an effective Strength of 6 and Dexterity of 1. The diver moves at a maximum rate of 3 meters per turn and cannot take multiple actions. Deep-dive armor incorporates its own searchlights and video cam-

era (whose image is relayed to the support ship). It is not armed and is incapable of complex or delicate manipulations. Deep-dive armor is safely rated to 600 meters' depth. It is not available for player characters to purchase and operate without outside assistance.

- **Dive computer:** This is a compact electronic device, roughly the size of a graphing calculator, that is worn strapped to a diver's forearm or attached to her buoyancy compensator by a strap. A dive computer is programmed before a dive with information on the air mix in the diver's tanks and the local water conditions. It includes a chronograph, a depth/pressure sensor, and an LCD display that tells the diver how much time she has before he needs to begin her ascent and the proper speed at which she should ascend. The dive computer is mainly included for storytelling purposes, but characters diving without one are much more likely to encounter one or more of the dive-related ailments described above.

- **Diving clothing:** Scuba divers typically wear specially designed clothing when diving. This clothing generally falls into three categories: dive skins, wetsuits, and drysuits. All three generally cover the diver's entire body except the head and hands, and many come with hoods and gloves.

Dive skins are stretchy fabric with little to no insulating properties. They are worn primarily to protect from jellyfish stings, coral scrapes, and abrasion from belts and harnesses, and are intended for use in water 75 degrees or warmer. They provide minimal to no environmental protection.

Wetsuits are made of neoprene rubber. They are intended to provide insulation for divers in most water (50 degrees or warmer). A character in a wetsuit does not lose an appreciable amount of body heat in water warmer than 65 degrees and gains two extra dice of Stamina to roll against hypothermia in cooler water.

Drysuits are similar to wetsuits, but are made of synthetic waterproof fabrics. They form watertight seals that keep a thin layer of air against the body for extra insulation. Drysuits are used for water down to 28 degrees (salt water freezes at lower temperatures), although temperatures below 40 degrees require special cold-proofed scuba gear. Commercial divers working in cold water for long periods of time wear undersuits beneath their drysuits that are threaded with small tubes through which heated water is pumped from a surface support vessel. Drysuits allow the player to make his character's hypothermia rolls as if the water were one "stage" warmer (see Hypothermia, above); heated drysuits allow rolls at two "stages" up the scale.



- **Life vest:** This should require no explanation. A character wearing a life vest cannot dive, but receives three extra dice when rolling to float or tread water (above). A life vest provides three extra soak dice against blunt attacks. It does not count against a character's "dead weight" total for purposes of determining swimming speed.

- **Rebreather:** A rebreather is similar in basic function and appearance to a set of scuba gear. The primary game difference between the two is that a rebreather collects the diver's exhaled air and stores it in a secondary tank rather than releasing it into the water. This means that there is no constant stream of bubbles to betray the presence of a diver who is attempting to move covertly (normal scuba gear gives off bubbles with every exhalation, thus pinpointing the presence of the diver). Rebreathers are primarily military equipment and are very difficult to acquire (five dots in Resources, military Allies or Contacts, and a benevolent Storyteller) and maintain (+2 difficulty on all Repair/Technology rolls).

- **Scuba gear:** The basic scuba system package includes a mouthpiece, a valve system called a regulator, and one to three air tanks. It is possible to rent scuba gear at most major harbors and seaside resorts. Buying a scuba set of one's own typically requires three dots in Resources; rental requires one dot. A scuba set that is properly weighted and balanced (e.g. not a rental set) does not count against a character's "dead weight" for purposes of determining swimming speed.

MERITS AND FLAWS

The following Merits and Flaws can be taken by all characters, unless otherwise indicated or forbidden by the Storyteller. In addition, the Storyteller may choose to alter the point value of some other flaws: for example, the Flaw: Severe Phobia (the ocean) might be worth more than 3 points in a chronicle set entirely in Hawai'i.

SEA LEGS (1-POINT APTITUDE MERIT)

A character with Sea Legs never needs to roll for seasickness (above). She is assumed to have such strong

constitution as to never become motion sick. A character must have a minimum Stamina of 2 to purchase this Merit.

STRONG LUNGS (1-POINT PHYSICAL MERIT)

The character has an incredible lung capacity, either through training or the grace of good genes. His maximum time to hold his breath is figured as if his Stamina were one point higher. Vampires may take this Merit, but it is of limited utility to them.

NATURAL SWIMMER (2-POINT APTITUDE MERIT)

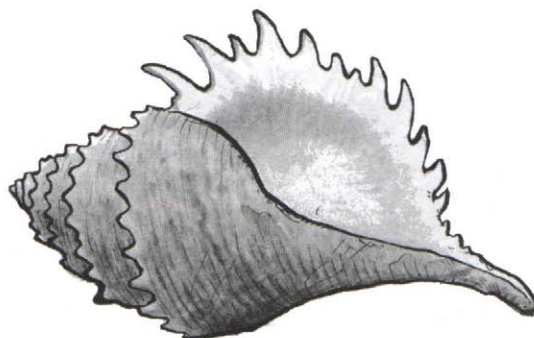
The character takes to the water as if she were born in it (perhaps she was). Her swimming speed is calculated as if her Athletics score were one dot higher, and all rolls for maneuvering underwater are made at -2 difficulty. This Merit only costs 1 point for aquatic characters such as Rokea.

MOTION SICKNESS (1-POINT APTITUDE FLAW)

A character who suffers from motion sickness is easily unbalanced by the rocking of the sea. The player makes Stamina rolls for seasickness against a base difficulty of 8. A sadistic Storyteller may also require seasickness rolls from the player of such a character in other situations, such as a long car ride...

UNABLE TO SWIM (2-POINT APTITUDE FLAW)

The character has never learned to swim, or has been taught but reverts to helpless flailing. Consider this character's Athletics rating to be zero for purposes of the above movement rules. A character cannot take this Flaw unless he has at least one dot in Athletics, and a character with the Secondary Ability: Swimming cannot take this Flaw for obvious reasons. At the Storyteller's discretion, a character who takes swimming lessons after game play begins may buy off this Flaw at the cost of six experience points after using experience to raise his Athletics score at least one dot.



BLOOD-DIMMED TIDES

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

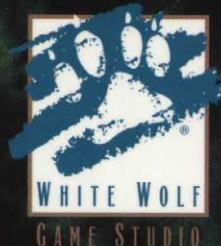
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