

THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. II

THE WYLD™



A SETTING
BOOK FOR



THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. II

THE WYLD™

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE: CREATION'S RIM	7
CHAPTER TWO: LIFE IN CHAOS	34
CHAPTER THREE: THE NORTHERN WYLD	67
CHAPTER FOUR: THE WESTERN WYLD	85
CHAPTER FIVE: THE SOUTHERN WYLD	102
CHAPTER SIX: THE EASTERN WYLD	120
CHAPTER SEVEN: WYLD PRODIGIES	138



LOOK, I TOLD YOU I HEARD SOMETHING!

I DON'T LIKE THIS...

WAA-AH!



DON'T! IT'S DANGEROUS!

WHAT? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?

THAT THING MUST HAVE COME FROM UPSTREAM. YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE UP THERE!

WAA-AH!

BUT IT'S A BABY! WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE IT!



HEY, MY HANDS ARE STUCK...



GAH?

HELP ME! I CAN'T LET GO!



AAAAIEEEEE!!!



BURP!



INTRODUCTION

For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible.

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II—The Wyld is a setting book for the **Exalted** roleplaying game. This book contains detailed information about the Wyld, the catch-all term for the regions beyond Creation where reality becomes more fluid than solid. Weaker Wyld zones have a few quirks, such as flammable granite or squirrels with sharp horns—small twists in the natural way of things. Where the Wyld is stronger, the surroundings become stranger: trees grow their roots into the sky instead of the ground, and crystal toadstools emit spun-sugar spores. More natural laws bend, or even shatter, allowing life to blossom within solid stone or causing water to boil when it's cold and freeze when it's hot.

The Wyld waits beyond the farthest East, South, West and North, a threat that picks at the stitches of the world

simply by its very nature. People who encounter the Wyld come away changed, sometimes for the better, often for the worse and always away from human. Some victims change physically: they grow larger or smaller, spit acid, unsheathe claws or grow a second head. Other victims return from the Wyld driven mad by their experiences.

Among the threats that the Wyld presents to Creation, the Fair Folk are one of the greatest. They call themselves *raksha* and the Wyld *Rakshastan*. Though there are exceptions, most *raksha* wish to undermine the constancy of Creation and reduce it to the same primal chaos that birthed them. **A Manual of Exalted Power** will explore the Fair Folk in more depth, but this volume reveals many of their activities and households.

Wyld mutants live in tribes and sometimes cities, usually in the regions nearest Creation or just inside



the borders of the Wyld. Their customs and habits are incredibly varied. Some Fair Folk present obvious dangers because they practice cannibalism or human sacrifice. A few of these strange tribes could potentially become allies to Creation. However, most Wyld cultures are too improbable to live within Creation; they can only survive in realms of dream and madness. The magical reality of Creation allows a great deal, but draws the line at people with jack-o'-lantern heads or who can speak only in rhyme.

Lunar Exalted also frequent the Wyld. They use the Wyld as a tool and a haven, since their moonsilver tattoos protect them absolutely from the chaos' body-warping effects. From their territories at the rim of the world, they fight off dangers from beyond.

But the Wyld is more than just a mindless threat. It is an adventure opportunity for any **Exalted** character. The Wyld abounds in lost ruins, treasures and strange peoples just waiting to be discovered. The Lawgivers of old made treaties with the Fair Folk that accomplished sweeping changes in their relationships. Mutant societies wait to be stopped from their hideous misdeeds or converted to a character's cause. The Lunar Exalted (who become fully fleshed characters of their own in **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars**) can fight threats to Creation on their own, or they can become potential allies for returning Solars or outcaste Dragon-Blooded.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is of limited use without the core **Exalted** game book. Admittedly, you can find a lot of neat ideas herein that have nothing to do with the **Exalted** rules and everything to do with bizarre, fantasy-chaos realms where weird things happen. They are tied into the **Exalted** cosmology, but you can work around that. The Wyld breaks boundaries, even of game systems!

You can use **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II** in a core game focusing on the Solar Exalted without difficulty, and this book vastly expands the information about the Wyld presented in Chapters One and Seven of **Exalted**. If the Wyld is already in your game, this supplement will be a great help.

Other supplements will draw extensively on this one. Just as **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. I—The Blessed Isle** is incredibly useful for playing Dynasts of the Realm, this book can add a lot of information and depth to the Lunar Exalted or the Fair Folk.

Chapter One: Creation's Rim

This chapter describes the nature of the Wyld, including how it deepens from Creation into Pure Chaos. Also included is a brief history of the Wyld, focusing on the assault on Creation during the Great Contagion.

Chapter Two: Life in Chaos

Many different entities live within the Wyld: the Fair Folk, societies of mutants, Lunar Exalted and even stranger things. This section deals with how they survive and what they do out there.

Chapters Three Through Six: The Wyld Directions

Each cardinal direction (except the center direction) receives its own treatment in these four chapters. Because the elemental poles influence the nature of the Wyld, each chapter describes the unique environments that arise when each element mixes with chaos. This information is as up-to-date and thorough as it can be for lands whose only constant is change.

Chapter Seven: Wyld Prodigies

The Wyld doesn't just affect the land; it also affects people and animals. This chapter describes how Wyld societies seek power or wisdom in chaos, and provides more Wyld-induced mutations and mental derangements. The chapter concludes with a selection of creatures, sample beastmen and rules for playing beastman and Wyld mutant characters.

ONCE UPON A TIME, A GANG OF DESPERATE REBELS FLED THE HEART OF CREATION.

THEY RAN TO ITS FRAYING EDGE—TOO FAR FROM THEIR HOMES; TOO CLOSE TO OURS.



PATRIOTIC FOOLS GAVE THEM CHASE ACROSS THE BORDERMARCHES, HARRYING THEM LIKE WOLVES.

THEIR PRIDE WOULDN'T COUNTENANCE THE SHAME OF THE REBELS' DISSENT.



WHEN THE REBELS COULD RUN NO MORE, THEY GATHERED THEIR COURAGE TO FACE THEIR PURSUERS AT LAST.



BATTLE WAS JOINED.

BUT AT THE HEIGHT OF THEIR BLOODSHED, THEY FORGOT WHERE THEY WERE.

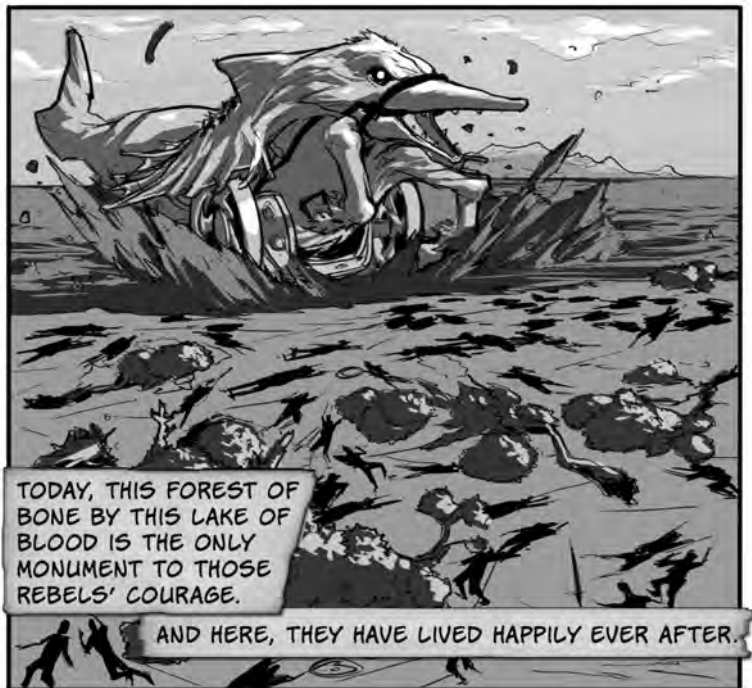
A WYLD STORM BLEW IN FROM THE MIDDLEMARCHES, CATCHING EVERYONE UNAWARES.



CHAOS REIGNED.



NEITHER SIDE ESCAPED ITS FURY.



TODAY, THIS FOREST OF BONE BY THIS LAKE OF BLOOD IS THE ONLY MONUMENT TO THOSE REBELS' COURAGE.

AND HERE, THEY HAVE LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER.



CHAPTER ONE CREATION'S RIM

The Wyld consists of the unstable realm between Creation and Chaos. Creation operates by natural and supernatural rules: animals grow and rocks don't; water freezes when it's cold and boils when it's hot. Chaos operates by no rules at all. Nothing about Chaos is definable in any way humans could understand. In the Wyld, these two realities mix.

The entities of Creation are defined by their qualities: their size, shape, substance, color and so on. The taint of Chaos breaks apart these qualities and recombines them. In the Wyld, the boulders can be made of flesh and the animals of stone. The rain falls up, or fire is cold. Humans become beasts. Beasts become humans. Grass grows the size of trees, while trees grow the size of grass—for a while, until they all become something else. Nothing is sane. Nothing is *safe*.

Anything brought into the Wyld becomes part of it—quickly or slowly, but inevitably, unless some power-

ful force prevents it. In particular, *people* change. Some people find their bodies changing in strange and often horrible ways. Others remain human in form, but the Wyld warps their spirits into perverse insanities. People who spend too much time in the Wyld suffer both sorts of change and become bizarre, savage monsters.

For all of this endless and chaotic change, however, the Wyld lacks true creativity. Even the most exotic beast of the Wyld is merely a variation of some beast in Creation, or jumbles together the forms of different creatures. They may combine two or more animals (such as the finned, serpentine ice wyrms of the North), animals and plants (such as the creatures of the East that grow on trees) or even animals and natural features (such as the vast living islands of the far Western sea). The landscape is much the same: portions of the Wyld sometimes spontaneously transform themselves to look like regions in Creation from the present, the past or maybe yet to come. Every



Wyld

hut and every insect in the Wyld duplicates something in Creation, combines several existing creatures or objects and maybe warps the result as in a funhouse mirror.

The Wyld's changes look random. Behind the chaos, however, lurks a secret order. The Wyld follows laws of meaning and story. The conscious desires of the enigmatic Fair Folk cause many of the land's changes and shifts, but the Wyld responds to any visitor. People who visit the Wyld find it echoing their hopes and desires... or their nightmare fears. The Wyld tries to make them characters in stories—but it shatters the plots into madness.

And yet, people *do* go into the Wyld. Its ceaseless change offers treasures beyond description. The Wyld can give you anything you want. Gold and jewels, fruits unlike any tasted before, strange flowers, drugs that produce miraculous effects, birds and animals that would fetch fortunes from collectors, slaves, followers, unconquered lands to rule... the imagination has no limits.

The looser reality of the Wyld also enables strong-willed people to see distant places, other times or the secrets hidden in the human heart. A very lucky person might emerge from the Wyld with powers denied to mere humans—perhaps even the power to wield Essence. The greatest temptation of the Wyld, however, is the chance to

live your dreams. Some visitors become parodies of their former selves, archetypes of heroes or villains, warriors or lovers—perfect, the way only a character in a story can be perfect, but no longer human.

The Wyld is different things to different people. To the sheltered peasants who live in the Realm, the Wyld is everything outside their protected heartland of Creation: the barbarian marauders, the soul-stealing Fair Folk, the abhorrent lands of Chaos where nothing has fixed shape or form, and insanity reigns. It is the anarchy beyond civilization, not ruled by the appointed Princes of the Earth.

To the educated Terrestrial Exalted, or to savants who live in kingdoms nearer the edges of the world, the Wyld is a boundary between actual existence and unformed potential. They classify the Wyld into degrees of danger they can name, understand—and, often, underestimate. People who think that they control the Wyld because they can describe a few aspects of its nature are often proved painfully wrong.

To some creatures, however, the Wyld is home.

Barbarian tribes that roam the fringes of Creation often step beyond its borders. They might not want to—but sometimes they don't have a choice. They live in the teeth



of the Wyld, casting defiance at it or incorporating it into their customs and mythologies. Some barbarians are still fully human, in body and mind; others are twisted in body, or mind or both. Groups of beastmen grow and prosper at the Wyld's edge, bred from mingled human and Lunar stock, created by sorcery or warped from humanity by the taint of chaos.

The mythic Lunars walk through the world's rim like gods. In the Wyld, the shapeshifting Lunars can become war-leaders, advisors, rulers and even deities. They were human once, but Luna chose them to work her will in the world and gave them power like unto gods. In the First Age, they were the Exalted partners of the Solars. The Lunars fled to the boundaries of the world to escape the Usurpation and the hosts of the Dragon-Blooded. Now some Lunars preserve the ancient ways, while others plot to regain their old dominions; some protect and educate mortals, while others use, hunt and discard them. If the Lunars move to the designs of their changeable patron goddess, then those plans are unknown to both the hidden Sidereals and the deities who watch from Earth and Heaven.

Then there are the Fair Folk—the beautiful, soul-eating monsters that come in from outside Creation to devour, pervert or simply enjoy the structured world. Few beings can see the Fair Folk's true form, and fewer would want to. They are collections of feeding maws and Essence repositories, united in whorls of chaos. Fair Folk in Creation must use Charms to create physical existences for themselves, or they sublimate into nothingness from the sheer pressure of shaped reality.

Like much about them, the term "Fair Folk" is a human invention appropriated by the raksha (their own name for themselves). The raksha lack creativity, so they copy. They lack innovation, so they steal. They lack structure, so they imitate. And they lack souls, so they devour them. They attempt to live inside epic stories where they are hero, villain, protagonist, antagonist, lover, betrayer or some other vital part of a self-created legend. They call the Wyld Rakshastan, a mad playing-field for their mad games.

Other creatures dwell in the Wyld, too. Gods, ghosts and demons may find themselves trapped in the Wyld, or flee there to avoid some worse fate. The Wyld itself generates strange beasts and monsters without number; some are intelligent and could almost be called people. Just as the Fair Folk, however, most of the Wyld's natives are too improbable to live in Creation. They can only survive in a land of dreams... a land that became much wider almost eight centuries ago.

THE HISTORY OF THE WYLD

The sages of Heaven say the Pure Chaos of the Wyld always existed. It held the potential for everything, the actuality of nothing. Chaos had no beginning or bounds; time and space were unknown, for no distinctions existed to define "here" from "there" or "now" from "then." But it held intelligences that gods and mortals cannot hope to understand. Men call these entities the Fair Folk when they enter Creation.

For reasons unknown even to the gods, mighty beings arose in Chaos. A few divine philosophers speculate that these Primordials consisted of vast conglomerations of Fair Folk who welded their souls together into a few dozen entities of unimaginable power. Other scholars speculate that the Wyld itself evoked the Primordials by mere chance. Regardless of their origin, the Primordials were vastly more powerful than the grandest of the current princes and queens of Chaos. By their will, the Primordials shaped a realm of solid reality and forged unchanging laws that eternally bound its form. Here, time always flowed in a single direction. Dropped objects fell downward. Plants grew in the ground, and animals fed upon both them and each other. Souls passed from life to death and back to life again. Gods and elementals gave consciousness to the flows of Essence that permeated Creation, so that Chaos could not reclaim the Primordials' handiwork.

The denizens of Chaos hated the newly formed solidity of Creation. No longer did they dwell in timeless, formless perfection. Creation's rule-bound existence horrified beings who had never known division into Self and Other, or Real and Not-Real. In shaping Creation, the Primordials also gave definition to its opposite. The Courts of Madness sought to destroy Creation, but the Primordials rebuffed their most fearsome attacks.

After the gods and Exalted overthrew the Primordials, the Ones Beyond hoped once more to end the blasphemy of Creation and restore the perfection of formlessness. They found, however, that while each Exalt was individually less mighty than the Primordials, the Exalted were many. Their Charms, spells and weapons destroyed the invading Fair Folk by the thousands.

During the first centuries of the Old Realm, all the various Exalted worked together to construct thousands of magical jade obelisks. They placed these obelisks a few miles from Creation's edge as a mystic barrier against attacks from the Wyld. The completed ring protected all of Creation.

As the Celestial Exalted grew in power, they turned their sights upon the Wyld and wrought the edges of the Wyld into new portions of Creation. As they pushed



back the borders of the Wyld, the Exalted built new obelisks to stabilize these newly formed lands. Meanwhile, the older obelisks remained in their original position. Some ended up more than a thousand miles from the edge of the Wyld.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE ANCIENT WYLD

During the Old Realm and the Shogunate, the Wyld did not exist in its present form. Creation and Chaos were far more distinct than they are now. There were no tainted lands, because the Wyld did not ebb and flow over the edges of Creation. A thin shell of Deep Wyld began just outside the outer ring of jade obelisks. Beyond that lay the eternal flux of Pure Chaos. A hero could travel from Creation's bounds to the Courts of Madness in a single day.

Out in the Deep Wyld, the Exalted fought their battles against the Fair Folk. Much less often, the Exalted met ambassadors to negotiate treaties between the rulers of Creation and the Courts of Madness. The Fair Folk occasionally won a battle during the long millennia of the First Age. Greater losses always followed these victories, as the ever-more-powerful Celestial Exalted, aided by their Dragon-Blooded armies and increasingly powerful artifacts, gradually pushed back the frontiers of the Wyld. The victories of the Solar Deliberative significantly expanded the boundaries of Creation, but also redoubled the resolve of the Fair Folk. Some of the Ones Beyond began to fear that Creation would consume their home entirely.

These epic battles became the subject of detailed military histories and fantastic tales—and modern scholars cannot tell which is which. However, the process of expanding Creation always stayed much the same. First, the Exalted slew the Fair Folk or drove them out of the portions of the Wyld the Exalted wished to make part of Creation. Then, the Solar Exalted used powerful Charms to transform the Wyld into Creation.

The Copper Spiders built powerful mechanisms known as reality engines to aid these efforts. These devices temporarily extended the stability of Creation around the attackers, allowing them to venture deep into the Wyld. Once the Exalted won the battle, they combined the power of their reality engines with the might of their Wyld-altering Charms, reinforcing these Charms' effects and extending their range. The Fair Folk sometimes launched suicidal attacks into newly formed regions of

Creation, so the Celestial Exalted often left reality engines in place to protect border settlements. Finally, a new jade obelisk was placed in a geomantically favorable portion of the new territory. This obelisk removed the need to guard the region or protect it with a reality engine. Later, ties of commerce and Essence would subtly bind the new territory to the rest of Creation.

When the Dragon-Blooded overthrew the power-mad Anathema and formed the Shogunate, they lacked the means to expand the boundaries of Creation. At this time, the Fair Folk began to plan and hope that they might reclaim the regions they had lost and end the blasphemies of form and limitation. However, the armies and magics of the Shogunate still proved too powerful. While the Fair Folk won a few minor victories, the Dragon-Blooded usually held their own against even the massed hordes of the Fair Folk. The Lunar Exalted, exiled to the edge of the world after the Usurpation, likewise defeated many invasions the Dragon-Blooded never suspected. The network of jade obelisks also continued to destroy any Fair Folk who came more than a few miles inside Creation, if the invaders could not topple them quickly enough.

Although the Dragon-Blooded of the Shogunate lacked Charms to forge the raw Wyld into Creation and could not manufacture their own protective jade obelisks, they could use existing reality engines. Occasionally, they could even repair damaged ones. So, they could safely launch attacks far into the Wyld and swiftly counter any attempt by the Fair Folk to mass an offensive on the borders of Creation.

The Contagion changed all that. With almost nine out of 10 people dead, the Shogunate in ruins and the sudden appearance of shadowlands weakening the very fabric of Creation, the Fair Folk saw an unprecedented opportunity. They gathered a vast army and launched an attack around the entire border of Creation. Some Fair Folk took forms similar to the ones they saw in Creation, the better to withstand its deadly force of order: some of men, and some of mad fusions of whatever creatures caught their notice. They shaped more warriors—immense behemoths, hordes of hobgoblins—from the raw potential of the Wyld. Other Fair Folk remained unshaped so they could wield their full, awful power. Even weakened by the newly formed shadowlands, the network of jade obelisks slew the entire first wave of the attack, but this mass of hobgoblins and Fair Folk managed to destroy many of the jade obelisks even as their own substance was rent asunder. Although thousands of Fair Folk died, they wrecked the network of obelisks in less than a day. Creation lay open to the armies of Chaos.





Madness swept in from the borders of the world. In the vanguard came the Fair Folk who had accepted form to destroy form. Behind them came the unshaped raksha, each one dissolving dozens of miles of Creation as it passed. The surviving Dragon-Blooded massed in their legions. The Lunar Exalted emerged from their hidden redoubts at the world's edge to pursue the Fair Folk from the rear. The Sidereals descended from Heaven to pit their matchless martial arts against the invaders from beyond. They all fought bravely, and died, and the hordes of Chaos moved inward toward the Blessed Isle.

At last, a Dragon-Blooded officer activated the long-quiescent defense grid of the Imperial manse. The awesome power of this artifact swiftly laid waste to the Fair Folk host and drove the survivors out of Creation.

Although the Fair Folk were defeated, their attack forever changed the structure of Creation. No longer was it a vast region surrounded by a thin bubble of Deep Wyld and floating in Pure Chaos. Instead, this attack eroded enormous swathes of territory and transformed these lands into regions with varying admixtures of Chaos and Creation. This broad intermediate zone is what people of the Age of Sorrows now know as the Wyld. The Fair Folk attack also tore holes in Creation to create pockets of the Wyld throughout the Threshold. Bound to both Creation and the surrounding Pure Chaos, these Wyld pockets and newly created Bordermarches and Middlemarches became home to the exiled Lunar Exalted, the Fair Folk who had taken form during the course of the attack and a multitude of Wyld mutants and beastmen.

Today, the Wyld continually ebbs and flows around the edges of Creation. The Wyld is the most active and the most dangerous in the West, with boundaries just a little more stable in the harsh North. The Wyld is least active in the East, and moderately so in the South. The reason for these differences in stability is quite simple: the West is the least populous portion of the Threshold, while the East is the most. The prayers and dreams of each and every mortal provide a tiny bulwark against the eternal chaos that seeks to destroy Creation. This is one of the major reasons why the Great Contagion made Creation so much more vulnerable to attack by the Fair Folk.

In some regions, the Wyld slowly retreats and Creation reasserts itself. Most of the Wyld, however, defies all the power of mortals, Exalted and gods. North and South, East and West, chaos still erupts from the Wyld, in the form of Fair Folk, mad barbarians and monsters out of dream and nightmare. The Empress herself could not force back the Wyld—only stop its advance. Now

the Empress is gone. The princes and queens of Chaos look upon the Creation they hate, and once more plan its ending.

GEOGRAPHY OF MADNESS

Creation is a huge continent in a vast, endless sea of Pure Chaos. The Wyld is effectively the coastal marshes, skerries and the continental shelf of Creation: neither the static reality of Creation nor the uncontrolled lunacy of Pure Chaos, but a mixture of both.

The Wyld falls into three rough categories: the Bordermarches, the Middlemarches and the Deep Wyld. Beyond that lies Chaos, where the unshaped Fair Folk dwell, and the elemental poles, pure expressions of Fire, Air, Water and Wood. The Wyld has also flooded over part of Creation and receded, leaving it changed: these “tainted lands” are not truly part of the Wyld itself, though they warn of its power. They are regular in their instability, fixed and bordered.

The Bordermarches are the periphery of the Wyld, where the shallow waters of Chaos ebb and break on the shores of reality. The forces and forms of Creation still dominate the Bordermarches; they are warped rather than entirely changed. Barbarian and beastmen tribes dwell here, as do those raksha who like the taste of Creation without fully being a part of it.

Beyond and around the Bordermarches lie the Middlemarches, where the Wyld has made the landscape malleable and reality is like wax, soft and easily sculpted. Here dwell the majority of the raksha and other creatures strange and potent enough to survive the shifting world around them.

Further out yet lies the Deep Wyld, where even the raksha, creatures of Chaos as they are, find themselves endangered. Here the unshaped roam, and bedlam rules. One's surroundings change with every passing second, and outside the sanctuaries ruled by the lords of this realm—who are, of course, as insane as the place itself—or the occasional fragment of solidity, the world is a sea of rolling change and madness.

Beyond the Deep Wyld lies pure Chaos, the utter antithesis of reality. Here dwell things that are as alien to the raksha as the raksha are to mortals. The gods themselves dare not travel here.

CENTRAL TRAITS

Any location in the Wyld has a few distinct themes or images that you can describe in a few paragraphs. These are the *central traits* of the place. Regardless of how the place shifts and alters itself, these traits do not change;

TIDE OF MADNESS

Remember that the Wyld shifts according to the phases of the moon. During the full moon, the Wyld rises, submerging the Bordermarches till they are as fluid as the Middlemarches, and the Middlemarches till they are as changeable as the Deep Wyld; during the new moon, the Wyld ebbs in turn. For those who must travel the Wyld, the new moon is the safest time of the month to do so.

they represent the essential nature of that location. This book's descriptions of specific Wyld locations give their central traits. A location's central traits can only change if a Celestial Exalted or one of the Fair Folk deliberately transforms it.

The natural changes that regularly occur in all portions of the Wyld do not affect these traits. However, anything that is not directly related to a location's central traits can and does change on its own. In the Bordermarches, these changes happen gradually and are relatively superficial. In the Middlemarches, the changes can include everything not set by the statement of central traits. Even the cities and towns within Fair Folk domains change—their streets wind in different paths, architectural details of buildings change and in the Middlemarches, even the locations of buildings relative to each other can shift dramatically. Nothing stays the same unless some powerful entity compels this.

The Deep Wyld is different. It contains no stable locations that are not artificially maintained. No single place within the Deep Wyld has any central traits except for its elemental direction. Even this much consistency surpasses the Pure Chaos beyond Creation, which has no central traits at all.

WAYPOINTS

Where reality frays, the relationship between places becomes fluid. The Wyld doesn't so much have geography as it does loosely related locations of significance. Distance in the Wyld is measured not in miles, but in experience—the layers of myth, chaos and change that one must pass to reach one's destination. The raksha measure distances in periods of *journey* and in *waypoints*, and other creatures follow their example: in the lands of madness, sometimes the mad are the best guides. Where distances change, and locations flux, and no map is the same from one day to another, you cannot speak of places as so many miles apart; you can only speak of the landmarks and scenes of importance you

must encounter between your starting point and your destination. In the Wyld, a traveler can study a rock and force it through observation or memory to take on color and quality—but, by default, the rock has none. Those present at a waypoint can interact with the world and have more detailed interactions with one another.

Journeys carry travelers in the Wyld through regions thin in shape and form, where very little happens or can happen. They are just travel. *Waypoints* are the important locations where things happen. At the waypoint in a journey, two enemies meet, a hero encounters the old woman who can give him a vital clue to his quest or a heroine reaches an uncrossable chasm that she must nevertheless somehow cross. These temporary grains of stability, such as the speck of sand at the heart of a pearl, coalesce meaning around them and force the Wyld to conform to the needs of wanderers, forming into the structured patterns of stories, of desire and destiny.

As a rule of thumb, each period of Storyteller-narrated travel is a journey, and the Storyteller's narration represents almost the entire experience. In the reaches of the Wyld, "You travel for a few days through a land of rock and low brush carved out of singing crystal," is a complete experience. If the traveler has the Charms or the powers to survive the journey itself, then days (or minutes or hours) of passage can be summarized in a single descriptive sentence. This may be a description of easy travel, such as, "You ride for hours across the plains, seeing only the tumbleweeds and hearing only the wind," or a more difficult passage such as, "You scale the mountain, clambering up amid the howling storm, until you reach the plateau." It may even be utterly appropriate to the Wyld: "You run across the sword-edge that bridges the abyss, and on the other side your sworn enemy meets you." The journey itself doesn't matter; only its beginning and its end.

SCOPE OF THE WYLD

Rakshastan is a kingdom of madness and illusion, but the eroding substrate of Creation gives the Wyld a measurable, if rather flexible, size. The Bordermarches of Rakshastan are about 20 waypoints wide, and the Middlemarches form a belt some 60 waypoints thick beyond that. At the far edge of the Middlemarches, the Deep Wyld is about 20 waypoints wide. Beyond that lie the infinite wastes of Pure Chaos, where waypoints no longer exist. Fair Folk culture, such as it is, lies in these concentric rings of half-shaped, half-warped lands; there is never a moment when some tribe, household or court is not struggling to maintain its hold on its territory, or plotting to seize lands from another group.



WYLD ZONE GENERATOR

Storytellers can use the following ideas to generate Wyld areas on short notice, from tainted lands to the Deep Wyld. When using these conditions described below to create tainted lands, assume that these conditions once held sway over this section of Creation and that only a few small remnants remain. The further out into the Wyld the region being created is, the more the listed traits will dominate the appearance and nature of the region.

BASIC GEOGRAPHY

The physical structure of the Wyld zone takes one of the following forms:

Color. Some feature of the area is a non-standard color, such as purple sand or scarlet trees. Maybe *everything* is the same color, or in shades of gray.

Geometric Forms. Instead of natural, irregular forms, some aspect of the Wyld zone assumes an unnatural regularity as straight, curved or jointed rods, disks, polygons, flat planes, spheres, cones, cylinders, torus, helix, crescents, Möbius strips or even stranger shapes.

Land Forms. The Wyld zone is based on some particular natural form such as ocean, river, swamp, tundra, forest, hills, mountains, desert, badlands, boulders, islands, canyons, caverns or craters.

Man-Made Forms. Something in the Wyld zone imitates a modern or First Age metropolis (ruined or intact), or takes some other artificial form such as pagodas, temples, castles, tombstones, clockwork, a First Age factory-cathedral, furniture or kitchen tools.

Mythic. The entire region is specifically designed as the setting of a particularly fantastic myth or story.

Organic Forms. Something, or everything, in the Wyld zone mimics the shape of a human, some kind of animal, bird or fish, insects or other lower creatures, plants or body parts such as eyes, hands, mouths, tentacles, heads, viscera or bones.

Reified Desire. The landscape expresses a single emotion or desire, such as rage, hunger or lust. Everything there represents this theme in some vividly direct manner, for example, a forest of carnivorous plants that attempt to devour anything that comes near them or a town filled with animate food that walks up and begs newcomers to eat it.

Scale. Some aspects of the landscape are much larger or much smaller than normal. Perhaps the landscape is alive and made of one or more vast animals or plants. One dimension might be stretched or compressed: for instance, trees grow impossibly tall or no taller than waist-high—but completely normal in every other dimension.

Strange Materials. The landscape, plants or animals are made of some unusual material: sand dunes made of sawdust, plains of living, hairy flesh and so on. Consider stone, metal, glass, soil, gelatin or slime, water or other liquids, fire, clouds, living flesh, bone or foodstuffs.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The plants and animals in a Wyld zone might follow a theme as well.

Collective Organisms. Creatures can separate into smaller creatures, such as animals that disperse into small, flying ants when threatened.

Hybrids. Plants contain elements of different plant species, animals are made of parts of different animals from Creation (such as gryphons or beastmen). Perhaps there is no distinction between plants and animals: trees, shrubs and herbs move around, or animals have leaves. The plants and animals may all possess various elemental traits, such as wings of flame, shells made of stone or metal or feathers of ice.

Speech. Animals or plants can speak, and some or all may be intelligent.

Unifying Trait. The flora or fauna appear relatively normal, but they are all the same color, they all have snake scales or they all have three eyes.

Warped. The flora and fauna appear in some way twisted or distorted, often in a truly hideous fashion, such as a land where animals appear to lack skins and all of their muscles and organs are clearly visible.

THE MECHANICS OF TRAVEL

When beings of Creation use Charms to speed travel through the Wyld, they force it into a shape much like their own native milieu. In such circumstances, each journey between waypoints corresponds to 30 miles. In the Wyld, without influence from Creation or the Creation-born, a journey can occupy anywhere from minutes to days.

Fair Folk characters can survey the local Wyld by having their players roll (Perception + Awareness). Success lets them identify major features—raksha, unshaped, freeholds, wandering behemoths, Lunar Exalted and so forth—as far away as the Storyteller permits. With one success, they can identify known raksha and freeholds and roughly assess others' movements and condition. Three or more successes give data equivalent to a close but quick visual examination. Players of Exalted characters can oppose this with a (Conviction + Stealth) roll.

However, the biggest trick that the Fair Folk have (and that others can master) is not so much to travel between waypoints as to adjust where a waypoint is. In Bordermarch waypoints adjacent to Creation, a raksha can slide the waypoint along the interface between the Wyld and Creation. To travel in this manner, the raksha must spend a point of Willpower, and the player must roll (Intelligence + Craft [Glamour]) at difficulty 3. For every success the player rolls, the raksha may slide her location 100 miles along the edge of Creation while staying in the same waypoint, up to a maximum of 1,000 miles. Fae-Blooded mortals can also perform similar feats of mobility.

Naturally, waypoints in the Bordermarches are more stable than ones in the Middlemarches, and waypoints in the Deep Wyld form and dissolve in a single scene. Just because the landscape temporarily remains solid enough for an encounter doesn't mean that it's going to make life easy for the raksha—or anyone else—who passes through. Perhaps a conversation is best carried out on the edge of an ocean, or halfway up a cliff. An encounter with an enemy might take place atop a range of bending bamboo spikes, while a horde of raving white monkeys charges from the North. Maybe the wooden walls of the house where the characters take shelter from the storm are in fact the stomach lining of a large and well-camouflaged behemoth, and they have kindled their fire directly above its liver.

LOCATING WAYPOINTS

In the Wyld, distance consists of waypoints passed. This means that raksha, and others who travel in the Wyld, do not so much go to a particular *place* as travel for a particular *purpose*. They don't go out into the wilderness just to travel 10 miles out and then back again; they go out to hunt, to meet an ally or enemy, to prospect for treasure or some other reason.

If two people meet in the Wyld, and neither had any definite plans about where they should meet, then the waypoint reflects their mental states and desires, and by the nearest elemental pole. Two lovers who yearn to meet for a passionate rendezvous in the West may find each other on a convenient island with happy, flower-clad islanders, blossoming groves and bowers decked with singing birds. (Of course, this does assume that the traveler has some way of traversing the environment in the first place.) A pair of bitter enemies seeking each other in the North may come face-to-face across a field of splintered ice, crisscrossed with thin bridges. A hero seeking guidance in the South may find it at a lost oasis, where an old woman sits and weaves a tapestry of serpents beside a dry well. A wanderer looking for adventure in the East finds it above the treetops, in a wide clearing bounded by huge leaves, where jungle cats prowl in the shadows and a questing cataphract demands her name and allegiance.

Waypoints are parts of stories. They do not necessarily have to make sense in terms of plausible geography (as in, could there be a village here, or how can there be a field of blades there); but they must be appropriate to the story. When characters move around in the Wyld with direction and intention, they unconsciously draw to themselves whatever would give meaning and drama to their actions. A waypoint *will* be thematically appropriate to a scene, whether the participants consciously desire it or not.

If someone in the Wyld states an intention to meet another person at a specified location, such as "near the village of flesh-potters," "in the poison forest" or "on the lip of the volcano," and if the area of the Wyld is stable enough for such a place to continue to exist, then the place where they meet becomes a waypoint that happens to have those characteristics. However, this can only happen in the Bordermarches, or in more stable parts of the Middlemarches; further out, the Wyld becomes too unstable for travelers to find any waypoint twice.

Deeper into the Middlemarches, or even the Deep Wyld, waypoints become more impressionist and less plausible in how they imitate Creation. A precipice is impossibly high and looks down on impossibly sharp rocks, or over a sea of living blood. A forest may be nothing

but background, vague trees in green and brown without clear definition or identifiable as a precise species—just the idea of a forest—or it may be impossibly detailed and vivid, with every leaf a different shape and forcing you to notice its uniqueness. A lake is the very lake the traveler remembers from her childhood, and the lotuses blossom just as they did when she first left home. The bamboo trees overhead are sculpted from silver and emerald, and each leaf has a different proverb carved on it.

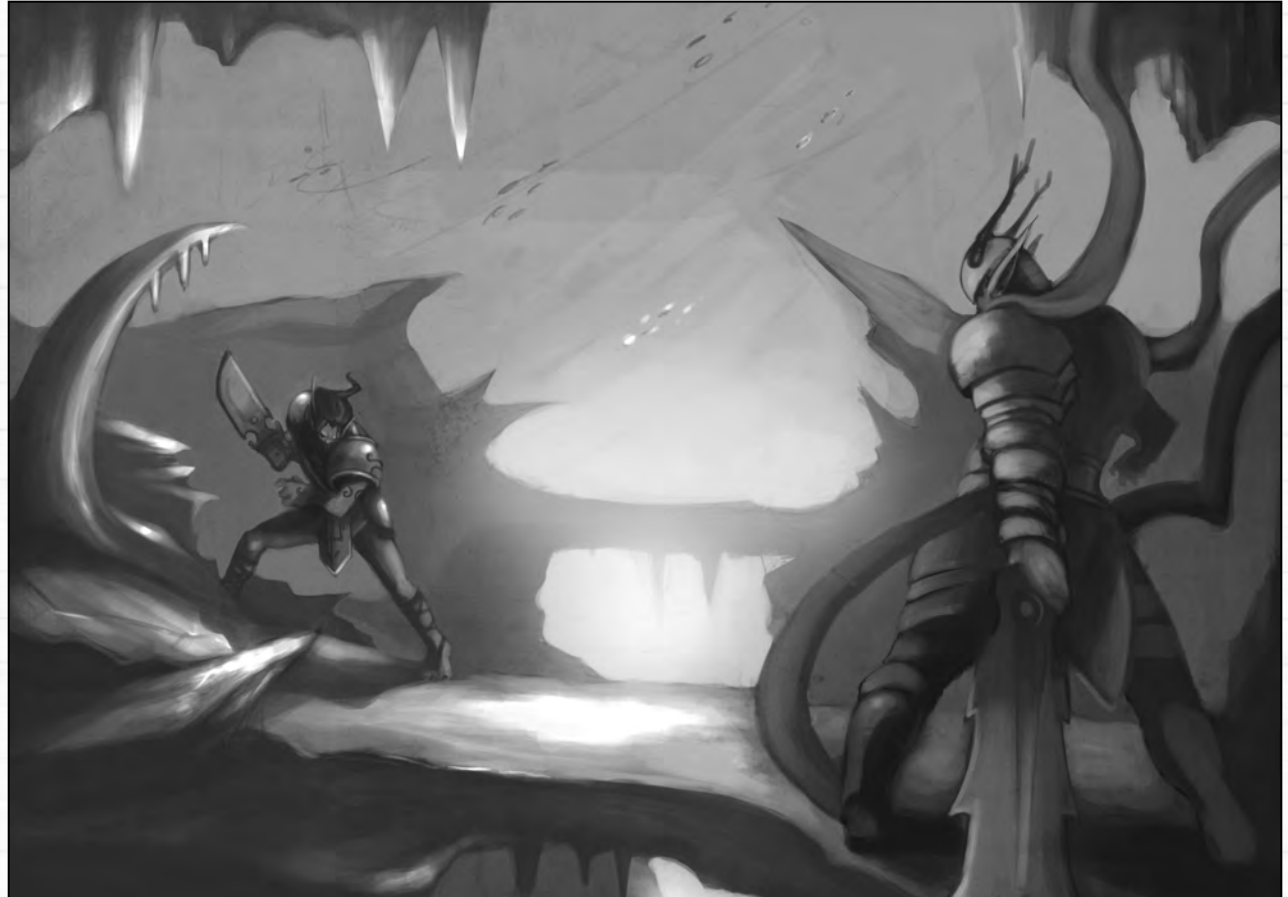
In the Bordermarches, and even in the Middlemarches, some waypoints correspond roughly to geographical locations, in that they have a particular description and tend to be generally the same whenever they are visited. They also have stable connections to other waypoints. These are usually associated with a particular Fair Folk domain. Other inhabitants can also stabilize a waypoint through their attention and expectation that their home shall remain the same. Frequent visitors from Creation may also stabilize a waypoint. Such waypoints tend to slide inwards toward Creation itself, dragging the surrounding environment with them.

One final problem with such waypoints is that the raksha's ability to slide them along the edge of Creation can result in temporarily stable areas of the Wyld being

interchanged, and known waypoints close to the borders of Creation moving from where they have previously been used for meetings or trade. The Guild cannot rely upon known waypoints for their expeditions into the Wyld to trade slaves with the raksha, or to secure exotic goods; they can only travel and hope.

TAINTED LANDS

Throughout most of Creation, the border between the Wyld and Creation is unstable. Every month, the border can shift by as much as a dozen miles, changing with the phases of the moon. The occasional Wyld storm can blow hundreds of miles into Creation. In the West, the borders of the Wyld are even more unstable and can shift several miles with the daily tides. In addition to these short-term variations, conflicts with the Fair Folk or powerful magical forces can send the Wyld sweeping over part of Creation for a time, or force the Wyld to withdraw for months, decades or, on rare occasions, permanently. Regions that the Wyld has touched but gave back to Creation are known as "tainted lands." They remain strange places long after they have fully stabilized. Although tainted lands no longer partake of the Wyld's eternal change, they bear its marks forever after.





POSSIBLE MINOR WAYPOINTS

- A ruined temple to one of the characters, overgrown with vines
- A chasm with a rickety rope bridge over a river of blood
- An obsidian island floating at the heart of a volcano
- A peach grove similar to those in Yu-Shan
- A cloud platform amid a storm
- An amphitheater exactly like the Chamber of the Deliberative, only made of cheese
- A field strewn with needles and one strand of hay
- A teahouse or inn filled with mannequins wearing masks
- An oasis in the middle of the desert
- A clearing in a forest of trees whose leaves whisper secrets
- A cave in the side of a snowy mountain
- The mouth of a huge skeleton
- The back of a vast leviathan lumbering across the countryside

The geography of the tainted lands is often subtly askew. Perhaps sand dunes are steeper, or spires of rock are thinner and more attenuated than could happen in the rest of Creation. Everything slants in one direction, as if gravity didn't pull straight down, or the rocks, hills, streams and trees show a geometrical regularity no natural thing should attain.

In other cases, the land shows obvious strangeness: The region became a Middlemarch before freezing back into Creation. Rock formations can look like undersea reefs, the walls and buildings of modern or ancient cities or even plants and animals. One tainted land might consist of a petrified forest where both the trees and animals are now solid stone. Another land might feature exotic friezes and titanic inscriptions in lost tongues that spontaneously appeared on preternaturally smooth rock faces. Impossible features might remain, such as a huge rock balanced on a spire of stone that's simply too thin to support it, but lingering energies of the Wyld hold the rock and the spire in place.

Plants and animals are occasionally born with minor mutations or mutate as they grow older. Horned animals such as goats or bison are sometimes born with three or more horns, which are occasionally mobile, metal or poisoned, trees may grow several kinds of fruit, snakes and lizards are sometimes born with fur instead of scales and

similar strange events are moderately common. Humans are not exempt, either.

On the other hand, plants and animals from the Wyld can survive in such tainted lands far more easily than in the rest of Creation. A creature that is simply an exotic but physically functional mixture of two animals, for example, an antelope with large feathered wings, can leave the Wyld and live anywhere within Creation. However, trees that grow skulls filled with blood and brains are simply too strange to survive in Creation—but they might live in a tainted land. Hives of thumb-sized ants that fashion miniature pikes and shields from fragments of wood or bone and field organized phalanxes against various tiny opponents could thrive in tainted lands.

While materials in a tainted land must be (relatively) natural, they need not be at all common or normal. Boulders can be made of cobalt blue glass or well-aged cheese, or a Wyld storm might leave filigrees of pure gold on a rock face. Of course, this inlay could just as easily consist of human bone or the dried venom of scorpions. Any form and any mundane material are equally possible, including exotic materials normally found nearer the elemental poles. Tainted lands sometimes hold the unmelting ice found in the farthest North or the coals of the far South that burn forever without growing smaller. The distinction between living and non-living materials is irrelevant deep in the Wyld, and so both can be found in unusual places in tainted lands: veins of dried blood can be found inside solid rock as easily as veins of metal, while animals found dead after the Wyld retreats may have bones made of ice or steel.

Although few mortals live willingly on the borders of the Wyld, storms can bring the Wyld to the people and create tainted lands far from Creation's rim. All of these places hold plants and animals that can be found nowhere else in Creation, but that do not require braving the dangers of the Wyld to acquire. Traders and barbarian tribes who are loathe to visit even the Bordermarches can gather exotic natural wonders without venturing there.

The risk inherent in living in lands that both contain the remnants of the Wyld's energies and that the Wyld may one day reclaim makes the tainted lands the perfect refuge for anyone sufficiently desperate. Mortal bandits, outlaws, Anathema cultists and similar outcasts often flee into the tainted lands in the hope that the exotic terrain will frighten their pursuers into withdrawing. These measures often work, but the freedom from persecution offered by the tainted lands is often the first step in the refugees becoming Wyld mutants. Even if they never venture into the Wyld, a few of their children may develop a pox or





debility... the promise of miracles waits just a few miles away... or the Wyld returns to sweep them into itself.

Over time, however, the impossible fades to the improbable and finally to the merely unusual. The trees that grew skulls grow skull-like walnuts instead. The bizarre rock formations erode, or vegetation shrouds them until one can only guess what they might have been. Fewer people or animals are born with mutations, and these sports are less severe. Onetime Wyld mutants might even stabilize as a funny-looking but natural race to join the human panoply.

DESIGNING TAINTED LANDS

For the Storyteller, creating a tainted land is a lot like designing a Bordermarch or Middlemarch—only it doesn't change. The degree of deviation from Creation's norms depends on the severity and duration of the Wyld exposure, and the length of time since the Wyld retreated. A region that briefly became a Bordermarch 100 years ago might look almost normal, with only a few oddities to show the Wyld's passage. A region just blasted by a powerful storm from the Deep Wyld might look utterly fanciful, with the forms and substances of things scrambled to madness.

While they last, the changes of the Wyld usually have the logic of story and myth, so consider a tainted land's past. An ancient battlefield might become a land where dead trees made of bone stand with the rusting and decayed shields of the fallen warriors dangle from their branches like fruit. Similarly, a small grove of trees where lovers tryst might become perfumed rose quarts, or all of the walls in an ancient city's ruin might become slabs of marble engraved with the name of its long-dead inhabitants, written in a language last spoken when the Primordials ruled Creation.

Tainted lands are often more closely and obviously associated with an elemental direction than the surrounding terrain in Creation. Southern tainted lands usually show the touch of heat and fire, just as tainted lands in the East are more verdant and overgrown than nearby non-tainted regions. On the other hand, sometimes a tainted land shows a strong influence from a *different* elemental pole: an aquatic forest growing in Western coastal shallows, for instance, or a patch of the South's volcanic heat and combustible substances in the North.

THE BORDERMARCHES

The border between Creation and the Bordermarches is often very subtle. Instead of any obvious shift, oddities and changes become more numerous and severe the deeper you go into the Wyld. The edge of the Border-

DESIGN QUESTIONS

- What are the region's chief anomalies? Consider the landscape, the plants, the animals and the people (if any). How severe are the changes from Creation?
- Do any particular locations stand out as especially strange or significant?
- Does the tainted land contain anything useful or valuable?
- Does the tainted land contain anything dangerous? (Beyond the lingering Wyld-taint itself.)
- Does anyone visit, or even live in the tainted land? Why?

marches is normally several miles wide. Unsuspecting mortals and Exalted sometimes wander into the Wyld for hours before the violet-colored rivers or trees bearing crystalline fruit prove they have left Creation's tainted rim for the Bordermarches.

Just as the tainted lands are the portions of Creation most like the Wyld, the Bordermarches are the portion of the Wyld most like Creation. The overall landscape usually stays the same, or at least takes years to change, but the details shift and change. Over the course of a week, a huge and ancient tree along the side of a path may change from a spreading oak to a chestnut... or a strange conifer with purple, prehensile needles or even a vaguely tree-shaped pillar of living greenstone. Just as likely, the same tree can be on one side of the path today and the other side tomorrow.

Few mortals other than Exalted and Wyld barbarians travel further than the Bordermarches voluntarily. Any sensible person who finds he's wandered further into the Wyld is quick to retrace his steps toward a more stable reality. A few ordinary barbarian tribes conduct important rituals in the Wyld. Their mystics and shamans enter the Bordermarches to pursue visions and power. Desperate and hardened bandits, criminals facing execution or individuals fleeing blood feuds and other deadly and immediate threats to their lives may enter the Bordermarches as a refuge they *hope* will be temporary. Only beastmen and Wyld barbarians who embrace chaos, body and soul, knowingly spend their entire lives in the Bordermarches. Life in the Bordermarches is harsh: fearsome mutant beasts roam the Wyld in search of prey, while Fair Folk and their hobgoblins invade from the Middlemarches in search of mortal souls.

The Bordermarches' change is slow and relatively minor ways, but mortals who spend too much time in this area eventually mutate and become Wyld barbarians. Although some especially hardy individuals may remain



free from mutations, children conceived or born in the Bordermarches always carry at least one pox, and most of these mutations can pass on to their descendents.

Despite the dangers, though, people can live in the Bordermarches in ways the Creation-born can understand. Time and distance do not shift too much. Although the effects of the Wyld may play scramble the forms and substances of things, the underlying reality remains much like Creation.

A Bordermarch can have trees with leaves of steel, while huge flowers snap at passing animals. Sea creatures grow shells of gold or obsidian, or gophers speak in the tongue of the Old Realm. There are places where streams of the finest plum wine flow into caverns of crystal—and dank fens where even the moss on the trees drips with venom. You can recognize the trees as trees, though, and the seashells as seashells. In a Bordermarch, the trees don't bounce around like pogo sticks, and the seashells don't change in your hand to become miniature copies of the Imperial manse.

People who live in a Bordermarch, or who visit one professionally, do not let the occasional wonders blind them to its dangers. Tigers and jungle vipers are pretty, too. Anyone who wants to make his fortune in the Bordermarches—or even live long enough to worry about mutation—must take nothing for granted. Wyld barbarians and beastmen know the dangers of their homeland; visiting outsiders had best find some way to learn from them.

DESIGNING BORDERMARCHES

The Bordermarches are essentially transitional zones that still look much like the nearby parts of Creation—just turned a little weird. Amplify or re-shuffle the natural features and make the area and its inhabitants both slightly mutable and somewhat deadlier. Bordermarches far in the North, South, East or West show the influence of the nearby elemental pole, but no more so than Creation itself.

Bordermarch beasts keep a spurious plausibility. This is not a place for lions made of living flame or other flat-out impossible creatures. Instead, a visitor might find a yeddim-sized lion with a scorpion's tail that feeds upon ox-sized beetles with shells of living wood. Nothing about Creation says a lion *couldn't* be the size of a yeddim; only the combination is unnatural.

In addition, the Bordermarches are the only portion of the Wyld that can connect to other realms of reality. A few shadowlands have formed inside the Bordermarches. Gateways can also open to the heavenly city of Yu-Shan or the dread realm of Malfestas. Such triple junctions of Creation, Chaos and another realm are extremely rare—but they can happen.

THE MIDDLEMARCHES

Out past the Bordermarches lie the Middlemarches. Here, the laws of reality become mere suggestions, though they retain a little influence. Although fish may swim easily through the sky and breathe air, they might still be fish. A dropped rock may fall sideways, and fires may freeze and snow burn, but the concepts of gravity, heat and cold are still valid, at least some of the time. These changes also stay consistent within a particular district of the Wyld, although they may change over time.

The Middlemarches scramble the qualities of Creation every-which-way. Here, water flows uphill as often as down, and rocks hold conversations with clouds that walk like men. There are glens where lions made of fire hunt stags made of living ice, and caverns hold lakes that reshape themselves into living versions of a visitor's greatest fears. The kaleidoscopic changes can sometimes make a Middlemarch resemble an ordinary part of Creation—but never for long.

The border between the Bordermarches and the Middlemarches is normally far less subtle than the transition between the Bordermarches and Creation. Here, the very nature of the Wyld can dramatically change in the space of a few hundred yards. The vast, bottomless cliffs that separate the Northern Bordermarches from the Middlemarches offer the most blatant example, but a few other borders are almost as dramatic.

The other obvious difference from the Bordermarches is the rate of change. In the Bordermarches, the landscape changes slowly and gradually. The location of a tree, the shape of a rock or the pattern of curves and ox-bows in a stream may shift every few hours, but such changes rarely occur more than a few times a day, never when anybody watches, and only a few elements of the landscape change at once.

In the Middlemarches, these changes become far more extensive. Everything in the Middlemarches changes frequently, rapidly and extensively. In the deepest portions, a forest may always remain a forest—but the types of trees, the density of the forest and the paths through it can all change everytime a traveler looks over her shoulder or stops to rest. You couldn't map a Middlemarch before it became someplace else. At most, you could record a Middlemarch's theme—its most obvious qualities, and their most usual combinations.

At least a region's largest features take some time to change. An entire mountain range may transform into a series of low atolls in the middle of an ocean, but this change occurs over the course of days or weeks: the mountains gradually sink, and the land around them





slowly fills with water. However, you probably won't find yourself walking one minute and swimming the next.

Probably. Time and distance can vary in a Middlemarch, though not to the mad extent found further from Creation. Days can seem to pass in hours, while seconds crawl like minutes in other places. In some locations, a single step can carry you across a meadow; in other places, moving inches may take minutes of running. Wyld mutations can manifest after only a few days in the Middlemarches. In some cases, mutations can occur within a few hours.

The unshaped Fair Folk keep outposts in the Middlemarches, but never visit for long. Fluid as the Middlemarches seem to people from Creation, the lords of Chaos still find these places difficult to manage and control. Most Fair Folk who have taken form choose to dwell within the Middlemarches, where they may enjoy the sweet freedom of the Wyld, while not overly risking contact with the courts of the unformed Fair Folk that they have left behind.

DESIGNING MIDDLEMARCHES

The Middlemarches are always a transitional zone. Some of Creation's norms still apply, but others do not. In the Northern driftlands, dropped objects need not fall

down and in the South, fire is a physical substance that can resemble water or stone as much as the ephemeral fire of Creation.

A Middlemarch often shows a strong elemental character that gives a method to the madness. Water, fire, lava, ice, wind or trees act in physically impossible ways, but stay in keeping with metaphor and dream logic: Lava flows like water—so it can nourish incandescently hot vegetation. People speak of trees having limbs, so trees in the Wyld have arms and legs, and can walk. Harsh winds can literally take solid form to buffet a visitor.

In other portions of the Middlemarches, especially in intermediate regions such as the jungles of the Southeast, these elemental associations may take second place to some bizarre magnification of existing natural features or local legends. In all cases, the Middlemarches are organized around one principle, or at most a handful of central principles, that defines both their physical structure and the physical laws of this particular region.

For example, Creation's far Northeast holds many dense forests cut by huge, glacier-fed rivers. In the Northeast Middlemarches, therefore, one often finds exotic forests filled with trees many miles high that grow out of a huge, swiftly flowing river whose many branches and divisions seem almost like a vast tree made of flow-





ing water. The river may flow with fresh water—or with torrents of seawater, mercury, steaming blood or even vast numbers of tiny leaves. Similarly, the Southeast jungles are notorious for their profusion of snakes. In a Southeastern Middlemarch, the trees and vines might be *made* of huge serpents that slowly crawl over each other. Some of these snakes are 100 yards long, and many of them are multi-headed, as their bodies split like the branches of a tree. Every few years they mate, and the entire serpent-forest dissolves into a frenzy of titanic movement.

Regardless of how exotic a Middlemarch becomes, the Middlemarches always have solid ground of some sort, and the creatures dwelling within them keep some relatively stable physical form. However, these creatures can be made from living fire, solidified water or other impossible materials. The distinctions between plants and animals are often completely arbitrary. When designing a section of the Middlemarches, consider a region's central traits and then assume that everything else can change radically over the course of a few days.

DEEP WYLD

Consider once more the model of the Wyld as a sea breaking on the shores of Creation: in the Deep Wyld, the sea floor exercises little influence on the stormy and dangerous waters that swirl above it. Only a few outcrops of stable land remain above the waves of constant change. Trees shed leaves that become birds, the flowers sing or clouds become solid to crawl across the land. The currents also churn the deeper structure of the landscape: canyons open in mountains, expand into valleys, sink into seas, rise again in forests or cities. Or become a chorus of singing pigs.

All the influences of Creation flood into the Deep Wyld to help shape possibility, and jumble together with no regard for the laws of reason, logic, scale or gravity. Replicas of the greatest architecture of Creation, present or past, stand side by side with impossible freaks of nature. Replicas of the ancient Dragon Kings roam the land, while tyrant lizards and mice battle each other in fields of flame or snow.

Everything in the Deep Wyld is formed from the materials appropriate to that elemental quarter, but can take any shape at all, barring intervention by an unshaped raksha. The creatures that roam each quarter of the Deep Wyld, which may be considered “natural” to that area, are similarly formed from the substances of that area. In the East, the creatures that stalk the Deep Wyld are composed of wood, leaves and flowers; in the South, they

are made of fire, smoke and ash. Creatures in the West are sculpted out of water; while the North holds beings made of ice and snow, wind, clouds and lightning.

Living within the Deep Wyld requires either the total ability to ignore or adapt to its changes or bunkering down in a zone of stability and only emerging when necessary. Some creatures shift from form to form in order to survive in whatever environment surrounds them. In the windy North, for instance, growing wings at a moment's notice is useful.

The unshaped raksha ignore the chaos of the region, matching its fluidity with their own. What humans see as their bodies are merely images that represent the focus of the raksha's self-awareness. The complete entity spreads through miles of Deep Wyld, shifting and reshaping themselves with every alteration of landscape and climate. They can enter the Deep Wyld from the realm of Pure Chaos without suffering too much from the faint traces of Creation. The Ones Beyond enter Creation's furthest rim in order to explore, to ravage and to destroy.

The Deep Wyld also holds creatures that were created or that crossed the borders during the Fair Folk invasion. They are no longer fluid enough to survive in Pure Chaos, but are too strange to endure long under the strictures of Creation. Sometimes they wander into Creation and mortals call them behemoths, after the strange monsters wrought by the Primordials at the dawn of time, but these beings are truly creatures of their own sort. Whatever name they receive, they tend to cause immense destruction before Creation slays them.

Powerful deities and Exalted can protect themselves through mighty Charms... for a while. Beings from Creation cannot survive for long in the Deep Wyld: their substance is too mixed, too solid; the turbulent elemental currents of the Deep Wyld quickly mutate or dissolve them. Only the Lunar Exalted, protected by moonsilver and their own protean nature, can resist the Deep Wyld indefinitely. Even they, however, must fear the unshaped raksha and other strange creatures spawned from Chaos.

Thinking too much about the Deep Wyld's logic leads to attempts to understand it, which can lead only to madness. The Wyld does not have logic and cannot be understood. It is the domain of unreason, and here, on the edge of total Chaos, only a few fragments of recognizable form remain, teasing the mind to try seeing some sort of pattern in how they are put together. This has been the downfall of many savants, who have thrown themselves into efforts to find sense and meaning in the Wyld, and have destroyed their own minds in the process.





DESIGNING THE DEEP WYLD

The Deep Wyld is too chaotic to contain distinct locations. A waypoint changes into something else within the span of a single scene. At least there is usually some continuity between what came before the change and what exists afterwards: a forest falls before a plain exists, and a mountain takes several minutes to rise rather than simply not existing one moment and being there the next. The principle of change remains constant; however, nothing remains the same, and the changes do not have to follow any theme. After the mountain rises, it could sink again—or become a molehill inhabited by mile-sized moles—or shrink to become an ice cream sundae—or any crazed transformation you can imagine. Only the dominant element provides any hint of continuity.

THE ELEMENTAL POLES

At the furthest edge of Creation's influence lie the Elemental Poles of Fire, Air, Wood and Water. They are in the Wyld, but not of it. The Wyld itself slithers around them, but the poles themselves mark the boundaries of Creation.

The elemental poles have no fixed location. They are the Furthest Point. As Creation expanded in the First Age, the poles stretched further apart. As the Wyld swept in to wash Creation's borders away, the poles moved inward toward their center, the Elemental Pole of Earth.

To reach one of the other elemental poles, journey outward from Creation and concentrate on the most "elementally pure" parts of the landscape. While the traveler runs the risk of straying into Chaos, if he keeps heading toward the structured principle of the element that he seeks, eventually he finds his way to the pole. Once he arrives, there is no path into Chaos. To go from an elemental pole into Pure Chaos, a traveler would have to go back toward Creation, and thus re-enter the Deep Wyld, and choose a different path from there.

Around each pole lies total confusion and dizzying change. A mountain range rises up in seconds, and then reduced to plains, and then becomes a forest or a riverbed. A great chasm opens before a traveler's feet, and then fills up again. The only real stability (and scarcely even that) lies in the area directly around a traveler, briefly firm due to the traveler's own perceptions and to any Charms or sorcery the traveler may use.

As the forms become more chaotic, however, the substance of the Wyld becomes purer near an elemental pole. In the West, the sea reaches to the horizon; forests rise from the surface of the water in high fountains that bear leaves of fluid, mountains of water arise and hold their shape until they are cast down again, and one may sail

down and up a vast ravine that holds its form as though carved. In the South, springing trees and grasses of fire burn without being consumed, while deer and birds of flames pass by. In the East, the ground is made of wood and leaves, while the people seen in the distances are living dolls of grass and wood that speak with human voices. In the North, the ceaseless wind blows the endless wastes of snow and ice into a thousand fleeting shapes. Solid floes of pallid, opaque air go rushing through the sky like birds, and bolts of lightning become towers, trees or tumbleweeds.

However, the elemental poles themselves do not show the same *kind* of chaos as the Wyld around them. They keep to the rules of Creation, without mad re-combinations or distortions of scale. The birds at the Pole of Wood may be made of wood and leaves, but they are true birds and not lizard-fishes that swim through the air. The rivers at the Pole of Fire may consist of liquid flame and lava and flow through banks of burning coal, but they do not run uphill or sing opera. While the scenery and terrain at the poles change constantly so that fields of flowers blossom and die within a minute, and cliffs rise and fall within an hour, they are elemental copies of the things from within Creation, not impossibilities from outside it. A few savants believe the poles offer the *originals* of Creation's forms, which the Pole of Earth's influence solidifies within Creation.

Few dwellers in Creation could survive a journey to the elemental poles, but those few have much to gain. Savants and craftsmen can gather samples of the pure element in untainted, undiluted form, to build great works of craft and sorcery. Just as the jade of the Imperial Mountain is the purest and most potent, no mortal flame can match the heat of the Pole of Fire, and no mortal herb can match the medical potency of one culled from the Pole of Wood. Diplomats can negotiate with mighty elementals, or maybe even the Elemental Dragons themselves. Warriors and leaders can seek ancient lost weapons, or conquer spirit courts and strike down gods.

The Fair Folk shun the elemental poles. These are the domains of spirit courts controlled by powerful elementals. Here, a traveler can hope to find a moment's shelter from the constantly changing environment. The spirits themselves prefer their dwellings as elementally pure as the rest of the pole, but they do not like their palaces dissolving into the elemental vortex. The spirits may even provide special accommodations for guests who cannot endure the full fury of their element. The elementals of the poles tend to be arrogant and care little for humanity, since these elementals usually lack



specific responsibilities elsewhere in Creation, or choose to disregard them. Visitors may need to prove their worth and force the elementals to remember what courtesy and consideration are due the Princes of the Earth.

PURE CHAOS

Here there are no rules, no boundaries, no limits and no restrictions. Anything is possible, can happen and is happening, *all at once*. Mortals who enter a pocket of utter Wyld suffer a strange sensory overload: they cannot process the infinite change happening around them, and so their minds shut down, trying to cope. Creatures who lack some sort of protection against the power of the Wyld, such as a Fair Folk guardian, quickly find their minds shattered and their bodies mutated beyond any hope of recovery or even identification.

Pure Chaos doesn't just flout the laws of nature, it flouts them *insanely*. This is part of what drives onlookers mad: nothing can be relied upon, nothing follows logically. A human mind can barely accept a flock of birds made of fire swooping through the air, but when the birds turn into fish a second later, and then dive into the ground after that while making little grunting noises, and spring up again as turnips that blossom pinkly, even the sanest person cannot predict what will happen next. But even these flickering forms are merely contagion from Creation—images and shapes that Chaos reflects from a visitor's own mind. Pure Chaos itself offers images that no human mind can encompass, relationships that break all sane patterns of thought even to consider them....

In Pure Chaos, parallel lines touch at a point that is too far to be visible, and yet is perfectly clear when you look at it. Colors unknown in Creation bleed into each other to make shades you can taste. Objects feel horribly soft and mushy, but also as hard and angled as diamonds. Purple lights flow into six-dimensional labyrinths that smell of something rotten. Worst of all, it almost, *almost* makes sense, and the viewer is left feeling that a moment longer would allow her to understand. That understanding, of course, is the first sign you are going mad.

This is the home of the unshaped Fair Folk, and they rule over it utterly. At their behest, all things are possible, and none may gainsay their desires. Time and space are at their command in Pure Chaos, and they may do as they will. Only the most foolhardy, powerful or courageous dare to invade the Fair Folk's realm. Or the most crazy, of course. While many of the Fair Folk endure within Creation to plague its inhabitants, countless more remain, unformed, pondering how to exploit the world of fixed form to their purposes, or whether

they should simply rip it apart and reduce everything to Chaos once again.

Pure Chaos has no outer limits. While Creation has boundaries, Chaos by its definition has none. It has no outer edges, no ultimate ruler, no defined social order or geography—nothing but vortices of force and possibility that sometimes, by chance, assume a kind of coherence and become entities, or locations or tools. Any forms in Chaos are mimicries of what the Ones Beyond have observed inside Creation, rather than being the fruit of any coherent thought. Even the emotions and thoughts of the unshaped raksha are copied from Creation: they could not think or feel without the example of thinking, feeling creatures before them. Naturally, the raksha resent this imposition, while simultaneously thieving concepts and images to comprehend their own resentment.

Introducing someone from Creation into the swirling patterns of Chaos has an even more pronounced effect than simply having him show up at a waypoint. It's like throwing a stone into a pool, or forcing crystallization: the solid, *real* person becomes a focus for events and structure. Entities in the area are drawn toward him, feeling the ripples that he creates in the utter randomness that they are used to. He is *noticed*. He *becomes* a waypoint, and the formless chaos may coalesce into a location around him—a mad, deadly location shaped by his own mind and the hatred of the Ones Beyond. Even the raksha who have taken forms inside Creation cannot safely return to Pure Chaos. The environment notices them, reacts to them, re-forms itself in response to their nature and actions and ultimately attempts to dissolve them into chaotic elements as well.

ANOMALOUS LOCATIONS

The Wyld breaks boundaries, including the boundary between itself and Creation. In addition to tainted lands where the Wyld left its mark on Creation, specks of stable Creation sometimes endure in the Wyld, while pockets of the Wyld infect Creation.

POCKETS OF THE WYLD

The Wyld is not confined to the edges of Creation. In some locations, pockets of the Wyld also exist within Creation. The most infamous of these localized aberrations lies in the heart of Nexus's Firewinder district. Similar to many such Wyld areas, it dates from the end of the First Age, when the attacking Fair Folk destroyed Essence-powered weapons designed to defend the city. Scavenger lords create more Wyld pockets when they tinker—disastrously—with powerful First Age devices beyond





STORIES IN CHAOS

For the Storyteller, designing Pure Chaos is difficult. There is little actual story or logic to players stumbling through one random obstacle after another, though a couple of dramatic scenery changes help underline the nature of the environment. Since the main rule of Pure Chaos is that there are no rules, the Storyteller should go for thematic aspects of description rather than specific geographical ones.

It is not advisable to run more than a single scene or two at a time in Pure Chaos. Not only is it hard to sustain the atmosphere, but too much exposure detracts from Chaos's nature as the land of true madness, where no sane person or thing can exist for long. Even the noblest and mightiest of Exalted should fear Pure Chaos and be grateful for their escape. A journey beyond Creation's furthest rim is the climax of an epic adventure.

The Storyteller may wish to bear these points in mind.

Why are the characters there? If they seek a particular entity or location, then the nature of Chaos draws those things to the characters within a short period—along with suitable dangers. If the characters have stumbled into Pure Chaos by accident, or been brought there against their will, then they want to escape. The Storyteller may throw some environmental obstacles in their way, or allow them to encounter (or flee) one of the unshaped raksha, but the scene's focus lies in leaving the area and returning to a zone of relative stability. In either case, the progress of the scene should be either toward the encounter or toward the escape, not just stumbling round in circles.

How do the characters react? The players may actually wish to explore their characters' reactions to this insanity, by deepening the bonds that tie their group together and holding each other back from the edge of lunacy, or by suffering a Limit Break, or simply just roleplaying reaction to an environment so unlike anything they have known in Creation.

What are their current emotions and wishes? A mournful, gloomy character affects the "landscape" around her unconsciously. White lilies bloom like fungus on the trees before their blossoms swim away into the wastelands of dark reeds and singing wolves. An optimistic, merry character (should such a thing be possible under the circumstances) finds that happy little ponies prance around him before chewing each other to pieces, and that the colored winds braid themselves like ribbons and make temporary pathways over precipices, while the stars descend to light his path and fireflowers bloom on the corpses around him. Similarly, if the characters think about particular people or locations from Creation, the flux around them takes those images—to a degree. The characters may find themselves walking through a distorted parody of Great Forks, where the buildings around them are made from rotted meat, or travel through a field of flowers where every blossom has Mnemon's face.

What unshaped are in the neighborhood? The Storyteller should design one or more unshaped raksha to provide a (somewhat) coherent encounter for the characters. An unshaped raksha has particular habits of behavior and something approximating structured thought, but also shows illogical limitations, preconceptions and desires. At least a few of the Ones Beyond probably want to interact with the characters, though this may involve anything from discussion to unmaking them or devouring them. The Ones Beyond do not consider such options mutually exclusive.

How do they get out? This is particularly important if the unshaped raksha hunt the characters. The Storyteller should prepare some particularly vibrant images beforehand, so as not to detract from the urgency of a chase scene. The environment takes shape to hold the characters back: chasms gape at their feet, plants entangle them, fish bite at their shoulders and legs, flowers grow to giant size and bar their way, hurricanes drop mountains of pudding on them.... Chaos becomes even more nightmarish than it was already (though more comprehensible). Only fixed purpose, Charms and desperation can drag the characters back over the borders into Creation.



their comprehension. The largest and most dangerous of these Wyld areas result from detonation of the reality engines that once helped protect Creation. Imprudent experiments in the First Age created a few Wyld zones that seem likely to last for millennia.

The great Fair Folk invasion left other Wyld pockets where the Exalted or the Realm Defense Grid slew the mighty unshaped raksha. Just as mortal deaths erode the barriers between Creation and the Underworld, the violent dissolution of the greatest Fair Folk sometimes left weak spots where the Wyld leaks through. On the other hand, a few Wyld pockets are still-living unshaped raksha, trapped within Creation and sustained by demesnes or flukes of local geomancy. They have lost their minds but retain their rage and hatred for Creation, producing some of the deadliest Wyld pockets of all.

Still other Wyld pockets form when storms of Chaos blow into Creation. The local geomancy sometimes traps an eddy of the storm. These Wyld pockets seldom last more than a few years, however, and most subside within months, leaving a small patch of tainted land.

Only the Blessed Isle is free from Wyld pockets. The Fair Folk invasion never breached its shores. The Realm's proximity to the stabilizing Elemental Pole of Earth offers much protection from the Wyld, which the vast geomantic engines and weapons of the Imperial Manse strengthens to protect the entire Blessed Isle. As a result, manifestations of the Wyld cannot exist on the Blessed Isle.

Wyld zones are uncommon in the Threshold, but most large nations contain at least a handful; they become more frequent the further one travels from the Blessed Isle. Fortunately, Wyld pockets seldom cover more than a few dozen square miles, and many encompass just a few acres. Larger Wyld zones do tend to be less intense. Most large Wyld pockets within Creation are equivalent to the Bordermarches: reality shifts and changes slowly and in relatively subtle ways. The East and West hold the largest Wyld pockets. In the East, several Wyld zones contain entire forests. In the West, isolated pockets of the Wyld surround a number of atolls and other small islands.

Local people know the boundaries of Wyld pockets and usually mark them; whether outsiders notice the marks is another matter. While some communities build fences or erect stone pillars with warning inscriptions, isolated farmers or barbarians may settle for marks carved on tree trunks or small piles of rocks. Fortunately, the boundaries of Wyld pockets rarely fluctuate by more than a dozen yards—unlike the actual borders of the Wyld.

Most Wyld pockets gradually decay in size and power. The inherent solidity of Creation is a powerful and enduring force, and any region surrounded by Creation on

all sides must feel its continuing pressure. Early records state that the Wyld zone in the Firewinder district was once the equivalent of Pure Chaos; now the district's heart merely equals the Middlemarches, and the size of this Wyld pocket has decreased by a third since the end of the First Age.

When a Wyld pocket seems to last forever without a trace of weakening, some mystical force must artificially maintained it. For instance, the Fair Folk can tap and twist the power of a demesne to create a freehold within Creation—a Wyld pocket under their control. Comatose, unshaped raksha are a variation on this idea. Malfunctioning sorcery or magitech are the other chief sustainers of Wyld pockets—including, ironically, the devices once meant to protect Creation from the Wyld.

CREATING POCKETS OF THE WYLD

Hundreds of Wyld pockets are scattered throughout the Threshold, and each one is unique. Wyld zones created by the Fair Folk have a specific theme and feel set by their master. Accidental Wyld pockets often exaggerate the characteristics of the surrounding terrain, or are zones of exotic randomness where reality constantly shifts and can re-form into almost any new shape.

In any case, a Wyld zone's power is most important information for both the Storyteller designing a Wyld pocket and the characters who explore it. A Wyld pocket that is equivalent to the Bordermarches is a very different place from one that is equivalent to the Deep Wyld. Wyld zones are never equivalent to Pure Chaos; such utter negation of order cannot exist in an area surrounded by Creation. However, Wyld pockets equivalent to the Deep Wyld happen now and then. They are one of the most common results of a large reality engine exploding (the other common result is to for everything in a similar-sized area to be turned into stone).

Unlike the Deep Wyld at the edge of Creation, pockets of the Deep Wyld need not show any strong elemental associations. Every Wyld pocket, however, contains *some* central trait that provides a degree of consistency. Utter randomness without pattern or sense only happens in Pure Chaos. Although physical laws may change, the laws of theme and story remain as true in small pockets of the Wyld as they are in the larger expanses surrounding Creation.

Each Wyld pocket has a specific theme. A Wyld pocket shaped by the Fair Folk has a theme set by their mad whims. An accidental Wyld zone's theme might result from the circumstances of its genesis. Some Wyld pockets merely exaggerate aspects of their surroundings... but anything's possible, from birds to music to hunger. Take hunger as an example. In a pocket of Deep Wyld, fantastic predators





might be spontaneously generated from the earth and devour one another in an endless spectacle of eating. A subtler, Bordermarch pocket might look like a peaceful orchard of trees loaded with ripe, luscious fruit... but the more you eat this fruit, the hungrier you get. If you don't stop, you could starve to death in an afternoon.

ARTIFICIAL WYLD POCKETS

(ARTIFACT •• OR •••)

A sufficiently wealthy and determined person can import material from the Wyld to create a small pocket of partial unreality. A very rich person might do this to keep Wyld creatures in a zoo, as a medical resource (such as the arm-beasts from the Forest of Arms; see p. 132), or for a Wyld cult. Creating such an artificial Wyld zone involves transporting material from the Middlemarches, then containing it within thaumaturgical boundaries. The result is effectively an Artifact, and follows the rules and costs for creating Artifacts. An artificial tainted land is Artifact ••; an artificial Bordermarch is Artifact •••. Such a Wyld pocket requires fresh, monthly infusions of soil, stones, vegetation or other Wyld materials to maintain their potency; the monthly Resource cost is one greater than the pocket's Artifact rating, or two greater on the Blessed Isle.

POCKETS OF CREATION

Just as small regions of the Wyld exist within the boundaries of Creation, small pockets of stable Creation exist within the Wyld. None of these lands exist within Pure Chaos, but they can be found in the other, more stable, regions of the Wyld. None are larger than a dozen miles across, and some are no larger than a small hill or a few city blocks.

What sort of place can endure in the Wyld and remain stable? Only a place established with great power, and possibly still drawing on that power. Unfortunately, any power that can resist the Wyld for centuries may present hazards of their own.

The most common reasons for pockets of Creation are functional reality engines or intact jade obelisks that survived the Fair Folk invasion. Other sorcery or devices from the Old Realm may impose stability on the Wyld as well: for instance, legends speak of an artifact called the Eye of Autochthon that could quell the Wyld. The Exalted of the Old Realm built cities, palaces, sorcery-laboratories or factory-cathedrals on the world's rim to exploit the Wyld or expand the frontiers of Creation.

Such places offer huge advantages to any Exalt or hero who can exploit them. On the other hand, they probably survived so long because of First Age defenses. Powerful sorcery, weapons or supernatural guardians may repel Exalted just as well as they do hazards of the Wyld.

Gods or demons of sufficient power, stranded in or exiled to the Wyld, might create personal zones of stability. A few other potent creatures can also hold the Wyld at bay. Even these potent entities risk losing themselves to chaos, however. Any deity (except perhaps the Incarnae) who sustains a pocket of Creation must commit a great deal of its power to do so, and would require some compelling reason to maintain it.

Several islands of Creation are embassies of Heaven to important courts of the Fair Folk. Such embassies are normal portions of Creation that do not even count as tainted lands. The gods of these sanctuaries serve in these hardship posts by command, and usually wish to leave as soon as possible.

On the other hand, a few gods and goddesses have gone to the other extreme. They walled themselves away in the Wyld, and rule a petty domain as absolute lord and master—but they grow ever more insane in their isolation. Some of these gods are celestial criminals who fled Yu-Shan for fear of audits or other punishment, while other gods lost their position through their rivals' power plays. A few pitiful deities wished to protect worshippers or territory from the incoming Wyld, and trapped themselves in a self-chosen prison that they cannot leave, for fear of losing everything that defines their existence.

In a darker vein, shadowlands gain a degree of stability from their connection to the Underworld. The Wyld may affect them to some degree, but they also maintain their integrity and boundaries. This can make them unexpected refuges for the living in an emergency. Of course, they have their own hazards, such as ghosts, the walking dead, perhaps a deathknight who already uses it as a base in the Wyld, and direct links to the Underworld. When 100 raksha on nightmare-swift steeds decide to hunt you, however, even these dangers can seem like a positive advantage.

Many sanctuaries lack inhabitants, but several of the largest contain First Age towns inhabited by mortals and Dragon-Blooded who have had no contact with Creation since the days of the Shogunate. Others include lands inhabited by tree folk, beastmen or Dragon Kings. The Lunar Exalted know about most of these sanctuaries and use them as refuges, resources and, occasionally, fiefdoms or experiments in shaping societies.

The Fair Folk overran many pockets of Creation centuries ago, and killed or enslaved the mortal and Exalted inhabitants. Few of the remaining regions could survive a

concerted assault by the Fair Folk, so the inhabitants must reach some accommodation with the local raksha. The people might offer tribute or otherwise persuade the Fair Folk that coexistence makes an amusing game. In other cases, the people have some threat fearsome enough—First Age weapons, perhaps, or a Lunar's protection—that the Fair Folk are willing to leave them alone.

JADE OBELISKS

The ancient rulers of the Solar Deliberative did not remove the older obelisks when they extended the boundaries of Creation. This left some obelisks hundreds of miles from Creation's new borders. The Fair Folk invasion destroyed most of the obelisks at Creation's rim, but hundreds of the older monuments survived. The broken and inactive ruins of many more can be found in or near the Wyld.

Intact obelisks are almost identical. They are made from white jade and stand seven yards high, three yards wide and two yards thick. Thumb-thick bands of orichalcum line their edges, and the four vertical faces of the obelisk bear moon-silver inscriptions. On the two widest faces, complex magic sigils lace around the great seals of Gaia and Autochthon. The writing on the two

narrow faces recount the events that lead to the obelisk's placement, including records of ancient battles and the names of the Celestial Exalted involved.

Although these obelisks no longer protect the entire border of Creation from Chaos, each obelisk still carries potent stabilizing enchantments. Land within seven miles of an obelisk cannot permanently become part of the Wyld. Storms of Chaos can sweep over protected areas and the lesser ebb and flow of the Wyld can still cover this land during the nights of the full moon, but the Wyld cannot cover land protected by one of these obelisks for more than one week every month. In addition, both the land itself and all permanent structures within this area cannot be altered by temporary incursions of the Wyld.

This protection no longer extends to plants, animals, mortals or temporary structures such as tents. However, the landscape does not change: hills and riverbeds all retain their shape despite the worst Wyld storms, and Western islands that bear an obelisk cannot be washed away by the Wyld's destructive tides. In addition, the effect of the Wyld on living things and similar objects is reduced by one level within a mile of the obelisk, and nothing short of Pure Chaos can affect anything within 100 yards of an obelisk.





Today, these surviving obelisks give the borders of Creation a scalloped appearance in some regions, as the Wyld extends inward between them. Other obelisks preserve tiny islands of Creation in the Bordermarches and Middlemarches, with bands of tainted land around them.

A ring of obelisks might protect a much wider area—after all, the great circle of obelisks once shielded all of Creation. Unfortunately, a jade obelisk weighs more than 100 tons. Most proposals to create new jade obelisks, or make better use of the existing supply, run aground on the problem of transporting such colossal weights.

Naturally, surviving obelisks are known to every mortal or Exalt living near them, and held as treasures beyond price. Local people often incorporate the obelisks into their religion. Any small gods of the region don't object, because they need the obelisks, too. When mortal astrology or warning talismans predict a fluctuation of the Wyld, everyone who lives nearby seeks shelter at the sacred monument.

In some cases, a single tribe or community owns the obelisk and defends it against all comers. The people do not permit outsiders to take shelter, or the community demands a high price. Other pillars become neutral ground where everyone can find refuge. (In the South, jade obelisks also tend to occupy lush oases, adding to their value. They are held as common ground because anyone who tried to claim sole ownership would provoke a genocidal alliance against them.) During Wyld storms, beastmen, barbarians and Wyld barbarians all huddle within the protection of the obelisk, while also carefully watching one another. Their comrades slay anyone who violates this peace, lest their act bring down the wrath of all neighboring tribes—not to mention the gods who also flock to the obelisk's protection. The gathered mortals pray, of course, so a Wyld storm also makes a good opportunity for gods to solicit worship and for barbarians to present petitions.

CREATING SANCTUARIES

A pocket of Creation usually has terrain, climate and other features appropriate to their elemental direction. Southern pockets of Creation tend to be deserts or volcanoes, Eastern sanctuaries are wooded and so on. However, areas created by Old Realm sorcery and technology may feature incongruous or unusual buildings, or have been transformed so completely that they look like nothing else in Creation. In such extreme cases, infiltration by normal aspects of that direction (cold winds and ice in the North, or lakes and seas in the West) show that the sanctuary's boundaries have weakened, and the Wyld is breaking in.

DESIGN QUESTIONS

When creating a pocket of Creation amid the Wyld, the Storyteller should consider several factors.

- What is the history of this sanctuary? Who or what created it, and why?
- Is it currently being maintained by some power source, or not?
- Are there any current allies nearby who support it?
- Are there any enemies nearby who want to seize control of it?
- Are there any enemies nearby who want to destroy it?
- What is the current psychological state of its inhabitants, trapped in the middle of the Wyld? Can they leave? If so, why do they stay?
- Is it in the process of eroding, and will the arrival of outsiders accelerate this?
- What are its defenses, if any?

REALITY ENGINES

During the height of the First Age, the mighty Solar Exalted used powerful Charms to expand the frontiers of Creation. To protect advance bases in the Wyld and to ensure that new areas would remain safe and stable before a jade obelisk was placed nearby, the Copper Spiders built powerful artifacts called reality engines. These devices protect an area from the ravages of the Wyld. A small engine might shield a single building complex; the largest reality engines protected entire townships or mighty metropolises covering dozens of square miles.

The Solars built these devices to run with little or no maintenance. A few reality engines still work long after the Wyld swallowed the territory surrounding them. As a result, more than a dozen First Age cities, and two entire factory cathedrals, exist as islands of Creation within the Bordermarches and Middlemarches of the Wyld. Some of these islands are still inhabited by mortals and Terrestrial Exalted who have not seen Creation since the end of the Shogunate.

Even though reality engines all have the same function, they come in a wide variety of forms. They range in size from one to 10 yards across. The larger the reality engine, the greater the area it can affect. The size and shape of the protected area depends both on the innate power of the reality engine and how it is tuned.

The most powerful reality engines were made during the height of the First Age. These are smooth and elegant geometric forms of clear, faintly glowing crystal, inlaid and shot through with filigree of moonsilver and



orichalcum, and set with nuggets of jade. A typical Old Realm engine might consist of an icosahedron twice the height of a man, balancing on one point and orbited by a dozen melon-sized tetrahedra, cubes and spheres. Reality engines made earlier in the First Age appear considerably more complex and often resemble the intricate magitech of the Shogunate. Such a reality engine might be a squat jade cylinder three yards across and two yards tall, with levers, dials and switches made from the other magical materials and holding intricate clockwork of the same substances. Reality engines made during the last days of the First Age were the most exotic. They often take the form of portrait busts or even statues of their creators or other then-famous Solar or Lunar Exalted, with concealed panels that open to reveal miniature versions of the clockworks and crystals found in the earlier models.

Reality engines were all build during the First Age, and they do not wear out and break down. Unfortunately, they can be damaged. Reality engines that were damaged but not destroyed may create large, self-sustaining Wyld pockets: the damaged device reverses its normal function by forcibly and continuously transforming an area from Creation into the Wyld. If someone can brave the dangers of this Wyld pocket to shut down the reality engine, the area shrinks or becomes less chaotic. Repairing the device often quickly restores the area to the stability of Creation.

Because of the power inherent in all reality engines, the center (and sometimes the entirety) of such a Wyld pocket is equivalent to the Middlemarches or occasionally the Deep Wyld. A damaged reality engine cannot generate Pure Chaos, but the area around the reality engine may offer physical dangers as well as Wyld mutation. Blasts of fire, animate toxic vines, tornado winds or razor-edges shafts of stone may erupt at random, or the disrupted elements of Creation may generate even stranger perils.

Nevertheless, the lure of such a powerful and useful device draws Scavenger Lords, Dynasts from the Realm and occasionally Celestial Exalted into these Wyld pockets in hopes they can repair or turn off the reality engine inside. In the first centuries after the Shogunate's fall, several Wyld zones were restored to Creation when Dragon-Blooded managed to turn off the damaged reality engine inside.

Of course, a person who doesn't know how reality engines work might destroy the occult machine instead. The Dragon-Blooded also (reluctantly) destroyed a few reality engines they could not hope to repair. This is profoundly dangerous. The Wyld pocket may stabilize as something both strange and deadly, such as a boiling lava pit or a grove of exceptionally poisonous trees found nowhere else in Creation.

SERVICING AND REPAIR

Only Solar Exalted can create reality engines, and only Celestial Exalted can repair badly damaged ones. However, sufficiently trained Dragon-Blooded can perform minor repairs and perform routine maintenance on models that require such servicing. The return of the Solar Exalted has brought forth rumors that at least one small Wyld zone has been eliminated and that the reality engine inside it was repaired and moved elsewhere.

Repairing a moderately damaged reality engine requires the efforts of a technician with Occult •••••, Lore ••••• and Craft (First Age Devices) •••••. These repairs require one day of work, materials costing Resources •••, and an (Intelligence + Craft [First Age Devices]) roll at difficulty 4. Severe damage adds one dot to each required trait and increases the difficulty of the roll to 5.

Retuning a reality engine to alter the size or shape of the protected area is somewhat easier. The technician merely requires Occult •••••, Craft (First Age Devices) ••••• and Lore •••••. The technician's player rolls (Intelligence + Lore) at difficulty 3.

FREEHOLDS

The Fair Folk are creatures of the Wyld, but even they don't want chaos around them all the time. Powerful raksha can transform demesnes into freeholds—havens that obey their lord's will. A freehold is *both* a zone of the Wyld and an island of stability. Which aspect a visitor notices first depends on the freehold's surroundings and the taste of the raksha noble who controls it. A freehold could look like anything from a near-copy of Creation to a fantasia as mad as anything found in the Deep Wyld. Whatever the freehold's appearance, however, a freehold remains an expression of the Fair Folk's power... and nothing about the Fair Folk can be considered even remotely safe.

A CAREFUL AMBIGUITY

A freehold combines aspects of Creation and the Wyld. The environment shifts as easily and rapidly as in a Middlemarch, making it comfortably fluid for the raksha. The freehold's lord can lock certain aspects of its appearance in place, though. The ruling raksha usually fixes the freehold's décor but allows the placement of trees, fountains, buildings or rooms within buildings to change freely.

The freehold also grants a Middlemarch's concealment against astrology. On the other hand, Wyld mutation

does not occur unless the bonefire's master deliberately withdraws protection from a person or creature.

APPEARANCE

A freehold's location greatly influences its character. Fair Folk of the East usually build their freehold dwellings out of wood; in the Far East, the raksha prefer to shape vast living trees so that their trunks, branches and leaves form the structure and furnishings of the freehold's fortress. Similarly, Northern raksha often carve their freeholds from mountains or build them from unmelting ice. Western raksha build their freeholds underwater or on lonely islands, and may build their dwellings from shells, coral, living seaweed or sheets of solid water. Southern raksha conjure whirlwinds of sand, obsidian desert strongholds or citadels shaped from heatless flame. Beyond that... anything goes! The sun and moon can look like lamps hung from the stone vault of the sky, or the flowers may sing lullabies.

Freeholds often feature castles, manor houses or temples designed for defense as well as for beauty and caprice. The citadel has room for many lesser raksha servants as well as whatever close allies the ruler may possess, rather than requiring them to dwell in the surrounding domain. After these practical considerations, though, fantasy reigns. A castle may spin like a top. A manor is raised on a mile-high pillar. A temple forms the center of a gigantic flower whose petals close in the evening.

THE BONEFIRE

The wellsprings of Essence known as demesnes exist through all of Rakshastan, even in the Deep Wyld.

Just as gods and Exalts, the raksha make use of these sites, but they cannot create manses due to their innate incomprehension of Creation's laws. Instead of capping demesnes and using the resultant hearthstones, the raksha nobles build their castles and fortresses on these sites, and bend their Essence to their will through a combination of raksha sorcery and complex Glamour crafting.

At the exact center of a freehold lies its heart, a pillar of heatless, silver flame called a bonefire. The typical bonefire ranges from one to two yards in diameter and is several yards tall. Larger freeholds have bigger, brighter bonefires, so any knowledgeable person can guess the power of a freehold by looking at its bonefire. (This requires a [Perception + Occult] roll at difficulty 1.)

Extinguishing the bonefire disperses the freehold, so the Fair Folk give thought to their defense. The bonefire usually occupies a wide, flat, empty space such as a plaza, great hall or temple, so the raksha have plenty of room to fight intruders. A small dais or pit defines the bonefire's specific location. Any further details depend on the taste of the raksha noble. Prudent nobles might lock the bonefire within a small building decorated with friezes, paintings or sculptures of deeds of glory or infamy performed by the domain's ruler. Options that are more extravagant include setting the bonefire on the palm of a huge statue (far above molestation, the noble hopes), surrounding an image of some sort or atop a mountain. One freehold's ruler chained a defeated enemy within the bonefire to burn forever, as both punishment and a warning to anyone else who might threaten him.

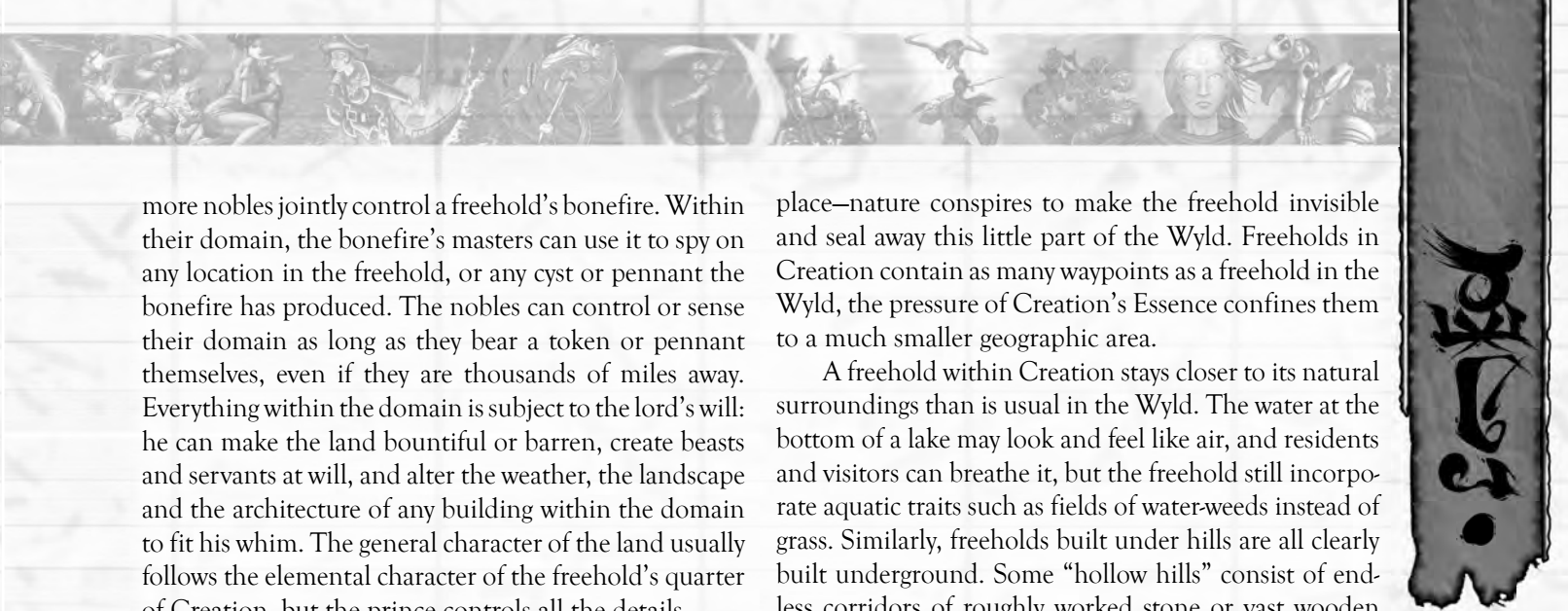
In most cases, a single noble controls the bonefire and, through it, the freehold. Now and then, however, two or

THE EXTENT OF FREEHOLDS AND DOMAINS

When the Fair Folk convert a demesne to a freehold, the demesne's power sets the maximum size of the freehold. Obviously, notions of size are very rough in the Wyld, so a freehold's size may be better measured in waypoints. In general, a freehold controls a number of waypoints equal to its freehold rating +5, including the waypoint the freehold rests upon. The waypoints may form a line, a cluster or whatever arrangement suits the freehold's master.

Freeholds within Creation are much smaller than those in the Wyld. Freeholds within Creation contain just as many waypoints; however, the waypoints are simply more compact, and closer together. In a Wyld freehold, for instance, a series of three waypoints might take the form of three bridges where raksha knights challenge intruders to battle. For a freehold in Creation, the waypoints might appear as a series of three gates in concentric castle walls, where visitors must solve a riddle to pass.

Level	Waypoints	Size in the Wyld	Size in Creation
•	6	60 miles across	100 yards across
••	7	90 miles across	200 yards across
•••	8	120 miles across	400 yards across
••••	9	150 miles across	1/2 mile across
•••••	10	200 miles across	One mile across



more nobles jointly control a freehold's bonefire. Within their domain, the bonefire's masters can use it to spy on any location in the freehold, or any cyst or pennant the bonefire has produced. The nobles can control or sense their domain as long as they bear a token or pennant themselves, even if they are thousands of miles away. Everything within the domain is subject to the lord's will: he can make the land bountiful or barren, create beasts and servants at will, and alter the weather, the landscape and the architecture of any building within the domain to fit his whim. The general character of the land usually follows the elemental character of the freehold's quarter of Creation, but the prince controls all the details.

CYSTS AND PENNANTS

From the bonefire of a freehold spring cysts and pennants. Cysts are wellsprings of Essence akin to hearthstones. Pennants are mere wisps of power—not sufficient to allow raksha to regain Essence, but strong enough to stave off the wasting away that raksha suffer when in Creation. Fair Folk who dwell within Creation typically reshape their freehold's demesne to provide the maximum number of pennants, and thus allow a large number of raksha to survive outside the freehold. A freehold can produce up to three pennants per point of the freehold's rating.

The prince of a freehold can see and hear everything occurring at the location of every pennant as though he were standing there. This requires no expenditure of Essence or willpower, but the raksha can only focus on one pennant at a time, and he must perform this feat at the bonefire. A raksha noble can thus be very well-informed of goings-on outside his freehold, as long as he has minions and spies willing to travel beyond its boundaries.

FREEHOLDS IN CREATION

Raksha can also form a freehold inside Creation. They only need a demesne—preferably uncapped, but they can destroy a manse to uncap its demesne. The resultant freehold is much smaller than a freehold in the true Wyld. These little seeds of Wyld pollution can be found in the tainted lands, or even deeper in Creation itself.

Geomantic considerations demand that these freeholds should be physically isolated from the rest of Creation: under hills, at the bottom of lakes, in inaccessible valleys and so on. These locations also help to protect the residents from interference by the denizens of Creation. Clouds obscure the area, rippling water blocks vision, shadows from the mountains conceal the

place—nature conspires to make the freehold invisible and seal away this little part of the Wyld. Freeholds in Creation contain as many waypoints as a freehold in the Wyld, the pressure of Creation's Essence confines them to a much smaller geographic area.

A freehold within Creation stays closer to its natural surroundings than is usual in the Wyld. The water at the bottom of a lake may look and feel like air, and residents and visitors can breathe it, but the freehold still incorporate aquatic traits such as fields of water-weeds instead of grass. Similarly, freeholds built under hills are all clearly built underground. Some “hollow hills” consist of endless corridors of roughly worked stone or vast wooden longhouses, while others feature elaborately carved and decorated passageways, such as the tombs of Sijan or the hallways of Gethamane. The most ornate of these freeholds are buried castles, or fortresses carved from enormous tree roots or embedded in great caverns ornamented with stalactites, crystals and draperies of stone.

Freeholds are often larger on the inside than the lake, hill or valley that contains them. However, they are still limited in extent. Raksha nobles who live in such freeholds may attempt to disguise the limited scope of their domain with twisting and branching passages, labyrinths of nooks and chambers or other tricks to block long-range views—made even more complex by the noble's ability to alter its structure at will. However, none of these tricks can completely disguise that the freehold is a very small pocket of safety amidst the huge and hostile world of Creation.

On the one hand, these miniature realms of chaos are the ultimate safety from other raksha. Their inhabitants know that their enemies must journey all the way through perilous Creation itself before they can attack the freehold. On the other hand, nobles with a freehold in Creation have built their stronghold in enemy territory, and they risk attacks from mortals, gods and Exalted, all of whom often view these freeholds as threats to Creation itself.

No one can enter, leave or even see in or out of the freehold except at special doorways created by its master. These must look like gateways or natural arches of some sort. Even freeholds located at the bottom of lakes, or atop airy mountains, can only be entered by such gateways. Naturally, all but the most desperate or impoverished raksha nobles post many well-armed guards at these entrances to fend off intruders. The freehold's master can conceal its entrances from mortal eyes... though not perfectly.

FREEHOLDS IN THE WYLD

Freeholds in the Bordermarches are physically isolated just as those in Creation, but not as severely. In the



FORCING ENTRANCE

Perceiving a concealed entrance to a freehold requires a successful (Perception + Awareness) roll. The difficulty is the sum of the freehold's power level and the permanent Essence of its raksha master. However, the natural distortions in Essence caused by the freehold's presence allow Exalted and other Essence-users to halve the difficulty (round up) if they activate any Charm that increases Perception or Awareness. A character who uses Charms to sense the flows of Essence directly can automatically detect such openings.

The border between Creation and the freehold's interior is very strong. Nothing short of the most powerful Celestial Charms (such as Wyld-Shaping Technique or Ritual of Lunar Stability) can open other entrances into these freeholds. The difficulty of the roll to create new entrances equals the permanent Essence of the freehold's lord.

Solar Exalted can also attempt to use Wyld-Shaping Technique to destroy or reshape a freehold, but the difficulty of this roll is the permanent Essence of the raksha controlling the freehold + the rating of the demesne from which it is built. The Solar's player must succeed on a single roll to accomplish this feat. The raksha who controls the freehold actively resists this attempt and can strike back. A Solar whose player fails the roll suffers one level of unsoakable lethal damage for each difficulty level she failed the roll by. A Solar whose player *botches* the roll suffers a number of automatic levels of unsoakable aggravated damage equal to the permanent Essence of the raksha overlord + the rating of the freehold.

Bordermarches, freeholds may be found on small islands amid lakes or oceans, or on mesas or in the depths of vast forests. While these freeholds are isolated and bounded, they need not be completely separate from their surroundings. The looser reality around them also means that they are not as well hidden. The freehold's master cannot conceal its entrances, though they are as well defended as those of any freehold in Creation. Freeholds in the Middlemarches or Deep Wyld can sprawl as wide as their masters choose. A Wyld freehold's master may still limit access by ordaining that no one may pass its outer waypoints unless they follow a special route, perform certain deeds or meet special conditions, but Wyld-shaping Charms easily bypass these requirements.



Fair Folk who inhabit freeholds in the Deep Wyld often maintain lines of trade and diplomacy with the Middlemarches and even the Bordermarches. The raksha closer to Creation can supply mortal slaves for food and amusement, interesting works of art and songs produced by mortals and by Exalted and other genuine original pieces of work that the parasitic raksha themselves could never produce. Those in the Deep Wyld respond with creations of glamour, powerful allies, items torn from the edge of the Wyld or even from Chaos itself, and relics that were lost from the fringes of Creation during the Balorian Crusade.

The raksha of the Deep Wyld enjoy near-complete safety from Creation's dangers. Few beings would come so far from Creation to assail the raksha here, and the raksha who dwell in the Deep Wyld are more amused than threatened by visitors who make the journey. These raksha do not remember the days of the Old Realm, when the Solars would shatter raksha fortresses and scourge them back into Chaos. While the Deep Wyld's raksha find the modern Solars intriguing and exciting, these raksha do not yet view these Solars as a genuine menace—which may, in the years to come, become a grave mistake.

ETERNAL VIGILANCE

Given the need for shelter, freeholds are highly prized and desperately guarded. At any given time, a known freehold is likely to face siege from wandering Fair Folk who seek to claim it as their own, or other nearby freeholds who wish to expand their territory. However large a freehold may seem inside, it is never big enough for all the ambitious raksha who shelter within it. Enemies within one freehold may team up to conquer another, just so they can be comfortably separate once they own it, and feud with each other at a distance. Raksha may also face threats from persons who wish to loot the raksha of their treasures, or enemies who hate the raksha bitterly enough to pursue them through Creation and the Wyld alike.

But raksha are not the only ones to hide within freeholds. Whether in Creation or the Wyld, a freehold's existence outside of Fate makes it a rare protection from the astrological curses of the Sidereal Exalted. Ancient Lunars have wrested freeholds from the Fair Folk in order to dwell therein with their mortal followers. There are even mad gods and broken spirits who shelter in cringing terror, seeking to preserve themselves against the transforming influence of the Wyld, aware that they could not hope to reach the boundaries of Creation again.

SAMPLE FREEHOLDS

The following are typical examples of raksha freeholds and Domains:

Dark Fountain is located in one of the mountains to the northwest of the Lap. The central buildings of the freehold lie within a great cavern more than 500 yards across and 100 yards high. Gothic and baroque buildings made from black and charcoal-gray stone occupy almost half of this immense cave. They have elaborate flying buttresses, and are adorned with fantastic gargoyles. The gargoyles are all servants of the ruling nobles, and can be animated or transformed back into stone at the controlling noble's whim. Only half of this palace is built in the cave; the rest is carved deep into the surrounding rock, and consists of a series of ornately decorated but completely windowless passages. The cave itself is the other half of this freehold, and is dimly lit by the large patches of luminescent fungi that adorn the cavern walls, and ornamented with stalactites, stalagmites, and deep streams. The cave is heated by deep volcanic fires, and thus is perpetually as warm as a fine spring day. A multitude of tentacled bats, large blind predatory lizards and pallid, dog-sized slugs dwell in the cavern, while bone-white fanged fish swim in its streams.

Dreaming Pool is an oasis set amid the Southern deserts, northeast of Gem. Shimmering heat waves surround the oasis, hiding it from view. The oasis itself is barely 400 yards across, centered on the pool in the middle; the bonfire burns inside the water, constantly heating it to a boil. The local raksha dwell in tents made of silk and sunlight, and the chief of the tribe has a particularly beautiful tent draped with cloth of gold. The palm trees that surround the area have leaves of gold and silver and emerald, and the birds that perch in them have feathers made of tiny gems. Snakes of living obsidian hide in the shadows of dunes and bask in the edges of the boiling spring. Hobgoblins in the form of veiled men and women serve the raksha of this place, faceless and smooth-skinned beneath their veils.

Shining Mist, a small freehold located at the bottom of a lake a few hundred miles northeast of Laryn. The lake bottom of Shining Mist is a strange mixture of bucolic meadow and sea floor; there is both grass and coral, and trees grow from the lake bottom intermingled with great shells. The lake is filled with water, but everyone within this freehold can breathe it normally and can either walk as if on land, or swim, at their choice. All the animals are mixtures of beasts that live in ordinary meadows and sea life. Creatures that resemble crosses between small, brightly-colored tropical fish and songbirds fly overhead, while crab-shelled horses (treat as ordinary horses that can breathe both air and water and that have a soak of 7L/9B) and octopus-tentacled sheep graze the lake bottom. The shops and houses are well-made buildings similar to those found in the Realm, or any prosperous client state. They are all painted in sea colors, with windows and trim shaped like seashells and fish. Shingles resemble huge fish scales, and all of the stonework looks heavily water-worn. The Duke's castle, at the center of the freehold, is a work of art in mother-of-pearl and turquoise, with the battlements scalloped like clamshells, and the cataphracts all in scaled, finned armor.



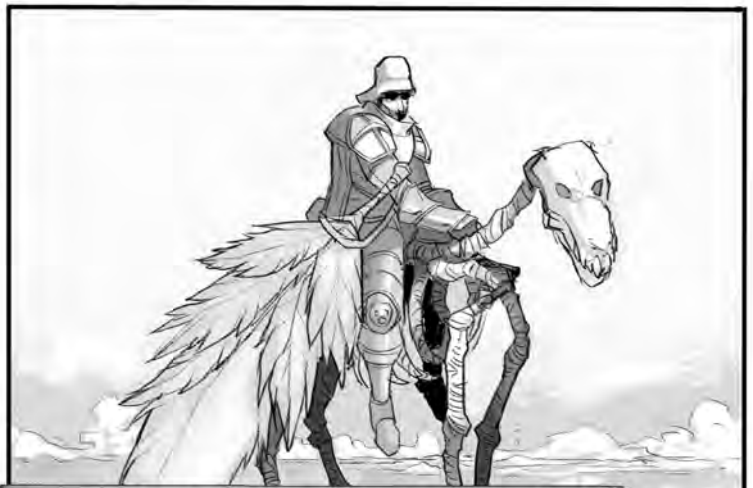


HOW MUCH FARTHER UNTIL WE MEET LAN-SHOKI HAHNA, MASTER CARAVEL?

NOT LONG. WE'VE FINALLY REACHED THE BORDERMARCH.

TELL ME ABOUT HIM AGAIN, PLEASE.

VERY WELL...



I FIRST SAW LAN-SHOKI HAHNA ON THIS VERY ROAD, ASTRIDE HIS WONDROUS MOUNT, RALL'SIN'TANTES.

HE INTRODUCED HIMSELF AS A KNIGHT-ERRANT AND CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED.



TO PROVE HIS MIGHT, HE SHOWED US TOKENS FROM FELLOW "KNIGHTS" HE'D VANQUISHED.

THE FIREFLY ABACUS, THE WHISPERING COMB, THE HANDSOME PHYLACTERY...

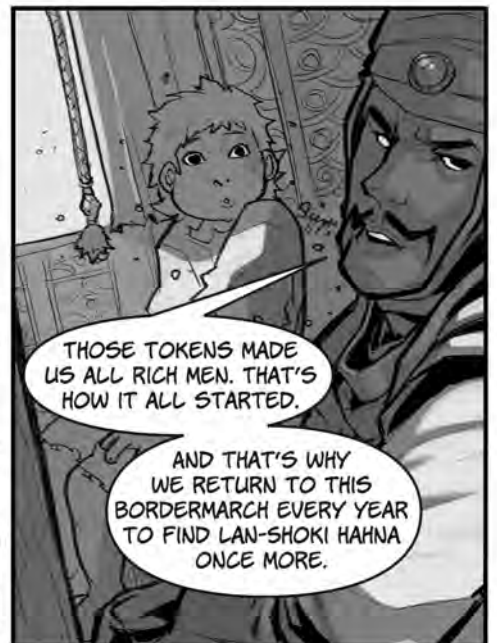
SUCH STORIED WONDERS HE PRODUCED.



TO OUR AMAZEMENT, HE OFFERED THESE AND MORE AS RANSOM FOR OUR "CAPTIVES."

BY "CAPTIVES," HE MEANT THE SLAVES WE'D BOUGHT AT AUCTION THAT VERY DAY.

WE ACCEPTED HIS TERMS AND RELEASED THE ENTIRE COFFLE INTO HIS CARE.



THOSE TOKENS MADE US ALL RICH MEN. THAT'S HOW IT ALL STARTED.

AND THAT'S WHY WE RETURN TO THIS BORDERMARCH EVERY YEAR TO FIND LAN-SHOKI HAHNA ONCE MORE.



BUT IF THAT'S TRUE, WHY AREN'T WE BRINGING ANY SLAVES WITH US THIS TIME?

BECAUSE APPARENTLY OUR KNIGHT TIRES OF FREEING CAPTIVES. HE ASKED FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT THIS TIME.

WHAT'S THAT?



A SQUIRE, SAN-XIAO. A SQUIRE.



CHAPTER TWO LIFE IN CHAOS

Not everyone finds the Wyld as hospitable as the raksha, but they live there anyway. For many, the Wyld represents endless potential, freedom from oppression (or just reality), a source of wealth or hope. Many are disappointed, but by then, it's too late to leave.

Almost every creature imaginable lives someplace in the Wyld. Most of these migrated there from their place of origin, be that Creation, the Underworld or Heaven, and the few others the Wyld spawns. Chaos has the unique property of being able to achieve nearly any effect, given time and luck, and can even duplicate the Essence patterns of ghosts and gods. The Wyld's imitations are rarely perfect, so explorers must be alert for telltale differences if they wish to tell fakes from the real thing.

MORTALS

Few ordinary mortals are foolhardy enough to live in the Wyld. However, hundreds of barbarian tribes live

near the Wyld's border. Since the edge of the Wyld ebbs and flows with the phases of the moon, some barbarians occasionally end up in the Wyld. What's more, many barbarians regularly spend time in the tainted lands. Any mortals who are sufficiently brave or desperate to dwell in the Wyld itself soon become Wyld mutants if they are not already.

Four distinct groups of mortals live in and near the Wyld: the most remote tribes of mortal barbarians, Wyld barbarians, beastmen and strange, created races from the First Age. Despite their differences and the enmity these groups often feel for each other, they live in or near the Wyld for much the same reasons.

Some people live at the edge of Creation to avoid attention and possible attack by civilized people. Civilized people and non-mutated barbarians alike feel deep suspicion for Wyld barbarians, beastmen and the descendents of beings created in the First Age—or even

outright hatred. While mortal barbarians do not face these same threats, aggressive rivals can drive the least successful or most primitive tribes to the very edges of Creation. Severe weather or famine can also force tribes to take their chances with the Wyld's fringe. Some tribes die out or become Wyld barbarians. Other barbarians struggle both to survive and maintain their humanity in the face of harsh environments, the nearby chaos of the Wyld and the other inhabitants of such regions.

BARBARIANS

Few barbarians want to live near the Wyld. Civilized people often see little difference between ordinary barbarians and Wyld barbarians, but the two groups see themselves as nothing alike. Their separation begins with their attitude to the Wyld itself. By definition, Wyld barbarians accept the influence of the Wyld upon themselves. In sharp contrast, almost all ordinary barbarians hate the Wyld; most of them also refuse to have any dealings with the Fair Folk. This does not prevent barbarians from worshipping the Wyld, but they worship it in fear, seeking to protect themselves from its fathomless menace.

Barbarians hold similar feelings about Wyld mutants. These tribes expose or kill children born with obvious mutations, and if their parents do not wish to be exiled from

the tribe, they must submit either to gelding or drinking sufficient quantities of maiden tea to render them sterile. Adults who gain Wyld mutations are killed or driven from the tribe and forbidden from returning. Many tribes, including the icewalkers of the North, believe that living as a mutant torments that individual's soul. They also see mutants as an affront to the tribe's ancestors and patron spirits. When icewalker shamans kill a mutant, they declare they have freed the person's spirit from the taint of the Wyld; now the person can be reborn within the tribe.

Some barbarian tribes accept Wyld mutants as shamans and expect them to use their mutations to help deal with gods, Fair Folk and various other dangers. Barbarians fear these shamans as much as they value them. They are both sacred and accursed. Mutant shamans typically dwell apart from the rest of the tribe. A tribe may see the usefulness of a shaman who can walk unscathed through the burning winds of the uttermost south, or spend an hour underwater gathering medicinal seaweed. A shaman whose essence the Wyld has awakened is even better. Even this concession to the Wyld carries danger, though. After all, the shaman who owes his power to the Wyld might decide to serve it instead of the tribe. The only reliable way for a community to retain its humanity is to reject all mutation among its members.





Because of the press of civilization, however, some barbarian tribes have no choice about living near the Wyld, often within the tainted lands. No two barbarian tribes possess the same customs, but most of them develop similar ways of dealing with the presence of the Wyld and the dangers of the Fair Folk. Most tribes do their best to avoid the Wyld and slay any creatures that stray out of it. Even their bravest warriors and hunters stay at least a day's journey from the Bordermarches; if they must venture any closer, they carry a talisman to warn them if the Wyld's border shifts. Other tribes, especially in the Wyld-torn lands of the West and the North, must make accommodations for it. Some Western tribes make offerings to nearby Fair Folk courts by sending out uncrewed boats laden with offerings, and with sails set to take them into the Wyld.

On the other hand, barbarians know the Wyld offers wonders they cannot easily ignore. Tainted lands sometimes offer great boons to barbarian tribes. Most importantly—from the barbarians' point of view—tainted lands sometimes generate useful plants that live nowhere else. For example, age-staving cordial, seven bounties paste and sweet cordial all include at least one ingredient from Creation's rim. Animals, insects and minerals from tainted lands may also possess medical or occult value. The learned doctors of the Realm rely on herbs, roots, glands and venoms that a barbarian collected months before and sold to a traveling merchant. Thaumaturgists also support a small but lucrative trade in materials from tainted lands.

The barbarians aren't stupid, of course. Whenever possible, they foist the job of collecting Wyld-empowered treasures onto their shamans, who should know how to protect themselves, or onto slaves, who are expendable. Some barbarian tribes live near the Wyld because they fall into the latter, unhappy category: some stronger tribe forces the weaker ones to pay tribute in commodities gleaned from a tainted land, with extermination as the alternative. Whatever the method, the barbarians keep their visits brief and use protective talismans whenever possible.

Barbarian tribes are also forced into the tainted lands by the armies of civilization, the walking dead or famine. Once here, the tribe's future becomes uncertain. The Wyld's residual energies eventually induce mild mutations in a few children conceived and born in the tainted land. If the Wyld surges over this land once more, adults may also mutate.

The tribe's future depends on how it responds to such events. If the tribe culls or casts out its mutants and soon finds a way to move further back into Creation,

the members remain ordinary mortals. If they decide that greater prosperity, or perhaps simple survival, matters more than their humanity, then they soon become Wyld barbarians.

WYLD BARBARIANS

The Wyld barbarians are the most diverse, numerous and infamous class of dwellers on Creation's fringe. Many Wyld barbarian tribes form spontaneously from ordinary barbarians who fled or were expelled from their tribes because of their mutations. Wyld tribes often last only a generation or two before the members either die off or succumb to other and stranger fates—but a few tribes retain most of their humanity for centuries. Similar to the difference between ordinary barbarians and Wyld barbarians, a great deal depends on the tribes' attitude to the force of Chaos around them.

Tribes that accept Wyld addiction among its members and who regularly embrace the transformations of the Wyld face either destruction or radical transformation. Within years or at most a decade or two, the members mutate to the point that they can no longer leave the Wyld. Soon after, they end up as slaves of the Fair Folk, transform into savage man-beasts (such as the notorious buck-ogres) or become inhuman, living archetypes utterly subsumed into a location of the Wyld.

Civilized peoples and mortal barbarians both tell stories about brutal tribes whose members are all barely human monsters with each member more bizarre than the last. However, these Wyld-twisted monsters are actually quite rare. They just don't last long before they pass beyond the Middlemarches into the Deep Wyld, and dissolve into the ever-changing Chaos. Unfortunately, such tribes are also the most violent and dangerous and so are the most likely to stage raids on non-mutants.

Tribes of mutants who wish to retain some semblance of humanity limit their exposure to the Wyld. Hundreds of tribes of Wyld barbarians actually live in the Wyld, but most live only in the Bordermarches and avoid straying deeper into the Wyld. Also, many Wyld barbarians live in the tainted lands and only venture into the Wyld for specific purposes.

In these careful tribes, only a few shamans and other specialists travel frequently into the Wyld to seek visions, collect valuable commodities, negotiate with the Fair Folk and other powerful entities or deal with other dangers. These specialists may possess a variety of extreme mutations. Most tribal folk appear far more human. Their ancestors gained a variety of mutations that now breed true, more or less. Such packages of inherited



mutations rarely exceed one or two poxes and maybe a single affliction or blight.

Because of their proximity to the Wyld, individual barbarians may also possess one or two additional poxes or a single deficiency. However, more extreme mutations are quite rare since few Wyld barbarians travel further than the Bordermarches of the Wyld. Only their shamans and heroes enter the Middlemarches. The Deep Wyld is avoided by all but the foolhardy, the desperate and the suicidal. Barbarians who acquire debilities and deformities may be gelded or otherwise prevented from breeding, lest their infirmities spread through the tribe. Even more than ordinary barbarians, Wyld barbarians simply cannot afford any weakness in their members.

The inherent diversity of the Wyld ensures that different tribes or tribal confederations display different hereditary mutations. Those few daring scholars who seek to understand mutated savages can tell a group of mutants' tribal affiliation simply by looking at them. For example, in the East, different tribes of the mutated forest people are distinguished by whether they possess hair or leaves (and each tribe has its own distinctive foliage), whether they have bark for skin and whether they possess tails or extra arms to aid their climbing.

While generalizations are impossible, many Wyld mutants show the influence of the nearest elemental pole. The pox of *Elemental Adaptation* (see Chapter Seven) is quite common. Western mutants are often amphibious; Northern mutants often sport thick, white fur. Members of many tribes distrust anyone who gains too many mutations, knowing that madness, Wyld addiction and eventually both inhuman minds and the inability to survive outside the Wyld awaits anyone who succumbs too easily to the transformative powers of chaos.

WYLD ADDICTION

All Wyld mutants face the danger of addiction. Few mutant tribes have a place for the weak or foolish: anyone who cannot resist the temptations of the Wyld must rely upon the help of their close comrades to help them recover, or at least to remain with the tribe until the shaman performs a blessing against the Wyld (see below). If no one aids them, Wyld addicts wander into the chaos, never to return.

The danger of Wyld addiction prevents most tribes from venturing beyond the Bordermarches, and even they use various magical protections against the Wyld and carefully track its boundaries. Any tribe that remains even remotely sane retreats to safety if a Wyld storm blows toward them or the edges of the Middlemarches move nearer to them. Most Wyld barbarians can withstand

prolonged exposure to the Bordermarches without becoming addicted; they're used to it. However, exposure to the Middlemarches or the Deep Marches carries greater risks.

As a companion worry, Wyld tribes also know that any barbarian who gains too many mutations becomes unable to leave the Wyld. In fact, repeated mutation can force a person to live in the Middlemarches—cutting her off from her tribe forever.

WYLD MUTANTS AND OUTSIDERS

Ordinary humans who become mutants experience two horrors at once. They find their bodies changed in unexpected, and often terrible, ways. At the same time, they become outcasts, feared or hated by their former friends, relatives and communities. In cities, people who cannot hide their mutations usually sink to the lowest levels of society as beggars or petty criminals, or join carnivals as part of a freak show. (Such are the most common fates of scavengers in Nexus whose bodies warp because they explored the Firewander district too eagerly.) In small farming villages and among nomads or other barbarians, however, newly changed mutants can expect death or exile.

In these tight-knit communities, nobody can expect to hide a physical mutation for long. Their mutants must flee sooner or later, and they have few choices where they can go. Some mutants find their way to Nexus, Chiaroscuro and other great cities, but they usually know they can expect a wretched, impoverished life. Instead, they turn to the tainted lands as the best of a series of bad options: where should the Wyld-tainted go, but toward the Wyld? Tribes of mutants who live in the tainted lands regularly encounter newly changed mutants who seek a home among people who—they hope—will tolerate their differences.

This strategy works less often than new arrivals might hope. Life on the edges of Creation is harsh and unforgiving, and no Wyld tribe has space for the lazy or the helpless. A mutant who wants to join a tribe must prove he can farm, hunt, herd, fish, gather, weave baskets or otherwise help the tribe survive. Accepting new members also carries risk. A Wyld mutant might be dangerously insane or carry a disease. Occasionally, these mutants actually work for gangs of mutant hunters as stalking horses and judas goats.

Because of these costs and dangers, Wyld tribes vary in their attitudes toward outsiders. The most extreme tribes either kill any unfamiliar mutants or drive them away with the promise of a swift death if they return. Most tribes accept outsiders, but only once the tribe's



shaman examines the outsiders for signs of madness, disease or deception. Any hint of these results in death for the mutant, possibly after torture to find the number and location of any mutant-hunting allies.

Before accepting an outsider, a Wyld tribe may also demand some deed of valor or martial prowess, such as defeating a champion or hunting a dangerous beast. Mutants who fail are ordered to leave on pain of death. Mutants who instead demonstrate valuable knowledge such as medicine, thaumaturgy or significant skill at one or more crafts are usually accepted because such skills are in high demand.

WYLD CULTS

Just as they do with any other source of potential power, some humans revere the Wyld or try to exploit it. They may worship the Fair Folk or other powerful entities, but some people seek power directly from the raw and untamed powers of Chaos. These groups may start by attempting vision-quests and power-quests, but they usually end up addicted to the Wyld's sense of limitless possibility. The leaders soon sport visible mutations, and the entire cult may follow. Of necessity, these cults congregate near Wyld pockets or the borders of Creation, so they can be found anywhere in Creation except the Realm. Wyld cults usually last only a few years before they are uncovered or destroy themselves.

One exceptional Wyld cult called the Children of Transformation has grown up around the Firewander district of Nexus. Remarkably, this cult has existed for almost a century, concealed by the anonymity provided by Nexus's poorer districts. The cult members seek personal power through careful exposure to the Wyld. The cult's founders learned the secrets of vision-questing and power-questing from ancient, forbidden books. Members use the power of the Firewander Wyld pocket to awaken their Essence and give themselves several discreet but useful poxes.

Unlike many such cults, the Children of Transformation have no interest in proselytizing. However, any person who uncovers their activities receives the choice of joining them or dying. People who join are taken into the Firewander district and forcibly transformed by a skilled power-quester. The new recruit is given at least one obvious but concealable mutation to ensure that he faces the same fate as the rest of the cult if he betrays it.

All civilized lands forbid the activities of Wyld cults. So do most barbarians. Cults face death or expulsion once their mutations or their activities become known. Survivors must flee for their lives, and most eventually find themselves at the borders of Creation, in the tainted

lands or the Wyld. The remnants of these cults often form the basis of deadly but short-lived tribes driven mad by the Wyld.

WYLD CRAZED TRIBES

The least enduring but most dangerous tribes of barbarians embrace the Wyld and actively seek mutation. These tribes usually begin with Wyld cultists. Unlike most tribes, these barbarians eagerly accept ordinary mortals who accidentally gained one or more mutations. As the cult-tribe becomes more fanatical, it captures people and forces them deep into the Wyld until they mutate so much that joining the tribe becomes their only alternative to suicide. Their love of the Wyld does not prevent them from making regular forays into Creation: they see Creation as both a source of recruits and other supplies as well as their abandoned, and often hated, home.

One of the most infamous Wyld-crazed tribe calls itself the Devourers. They live on the plains of the Southeast, far south of the kingdom of Harborhead. The tribe's members all have many mutations—most display oversized mouths and three or more clawed arms. More than half of them sport extra heads. A few captives who escaped their clutches report savage and terrible rites, in which the Devourers eat the living organs and limbs of their captives in the belief that the Devourers can thus incorporate the best features of their victims into themselves. By the time the prisoners escaped, a few Devourers seemed to have body-parts that resembled those of less fortunate captives, so there may be some horrid truth in these practices.

In a few years, or at most a few decades, the members of most of these tribes become incapable of leaving the Wyld for long. If they do not assimilate fully into the Wyld, they may become the retinue of one of the Fair Folk. Other members dissolve into the Wyld's eternal chaos. Before any of these fates, however, the tribe's members become truly horrific mutants. Either they hate all non-mutated mortals or wish to spread the terrifying glory of their mutations on the rest of humanity. These savage, monstrous beings typically live in Bordermarches. From here, they launch terrible, bloody raids into Creation—perhaps for mindless slaughter, perhaps to capture and sell victims to the Fair Folk or perhaps to drag captives far into the Wyld until they are irreversibly changed.

It is debatable whether the inhabitants of Creation are more likely to see these murderous, insane mutants than the Wyld barbarians who strike a cautious *détente* with chaos. However, Creation's dwellers are *much* more likely to tell chilling tales of their horrific deeds and grotesque appearance. Stories about three-armed cannibals spread



in a way that cattle raids by bandits who simply happen to have fur, claws or even prehensile tails do not.

By civilized or even barbarian standards, all Wyld mutants are dangerous and often unstable beings—but the short-lived, often *ad hoc* tribes of Wyld-embracing mutants are the source of much of the horror with which other people regard the Wyld. Even the stable tribes of Wyld barbarians avoid these lunatic tribes, fearful of their excesses, but also certain that the tribe will not last very long. If the cult-tribe does not vanish deeper into the Wyld by its own choice, mutant-hunters and warriors from Creation eventually gather in sufficient numbers to destroy the cult or force the cult members away. Other Wyld tribes may even attack the crazed mutants in hope of driving them deeper into chaos, and eventual destruction.

ADAPTING TO THE WYLD

The Wyld echoes the stories of Creation as much as reflecting its physical forms. Visitors to the Wyld carry wisps of story—goals, fears, expectations, conscious or unconscious—that the Wyld absorbs, magnifies and scrambles together with great, archetypal tales and tropes. At best, outsiders can shape their own brief tales of power

or knowledge in the Wyld and then depart from it. The longer people spend in the Wyld, however, the more it tries to fit them into one, simple story instead of the complex muddle of plots that characterize real people.

A few of these stories are hero tales, such as those of Eos and Ossissa, in which this daring pair have become uncatchable scourges of the Realm. Other tales are horror stories. Mutants hunted from Creation often accept a very simple story: they become horrific monsters that bring terror, death and destruction to the folk of Creation, just as the stories *they* heard say they should.

However, Wyld barbarians often find less terrible stories. Some, like the forest people of the far East, have been adapted to their forests and are now a much a part of it as the lianas that grow on the trees and the monkeys that swing among them. The forest people exist to serve their forests and can no longer survive elsewhere. Similarly, in the far North, the white-furred, eight-foot-tall Wyld barbarians that plague both the Haslanti and the icewalkers live a story where the barbarians are brave savages who can endure any hardship and feel utter contempt for weakness or cowardice.

The transformation from ordinary mortal to part of a story strips away at least some of the individual's hu-



manity by transforming him into a living archetype. The mortal warriors of a tribe known for honor and bravery may feel that cowardice or deceit are terrible personal failures, but they can still act in these ways. If the Wyld transforms this tribe into living characters in a story about bravery and honor, they may seem much the same... at first glance. Now, however, they are literally incapable of fear or deceit. They cannot even *think* of acting these ways. Creation-born folk who spend time talking to such beings soon realize that there is something subtly inhuman about them. Their thoughts run in channels: the *same* channels, or at most a limited repertoire of scenes and social roles. The brave, honest warriors are all the *same* brave, honest warrior. Wise elders are all the same, stereotypical Wise Elder—or the same Superstitious Elder, Hostile Elder or whatever.

People assimilated to the Wyld are no longer subject to random mutations. The Charms of the Fair Folk or Celestial Exalted can change their bodies, but the ever-changing tides of Chaos do not affect them. Their existence as part of the Wyld incidentally renders such people immune to direct manifestations of the Wyld's power such as the waters of Chaos (see p. 87) or frozen fog (see pp. 69–70). The thought-patterns and physical mutations that define their story pass on to their descendents who are born in the Wyld. However, while their physical mutations remain part of their heredity even in Creation, children of these mutants who are born and grow up in Creation automatically lose these mental limitations and develop the minds of mortals—by Creation, by its very nature, resists the incorporation of mortals into the Wyld's eternal stories. Also, even these Wyld mutants can be touched by the glories of Exaltation, and all forms of Exaltation free the Exalt's mind from these Wyld-forged constraints.

WYLD SHAMANS

A skilled shaman is a vital part of any Wyld barbarian tribe. Because shamans regularly go power-questing deep in the Wyld, they have many mutations—often including an awakened Essence. In addition to performing the duties of any barbarian shaman, such as laying ghosts and curing ills, Wyld shamans are expected to study the Fair Folk and either act as emissaries to them or to advise the tribe's leaders how to avoid them. Wyld shamans also deal with gods, elementals and demons even more than ordinary, mortal shamans. With access to both the Wyld's valuable and unnatural wonders and their own powerful mutations, Wyld shamans can both bargain with and intimidate minor spirits and demons quite effectively. These shamans also regularly use vision-questing to learn all manner of valuable secrets.

Even highly mutated Wyld barbarians often think their shamans are strange and disturbing. In addition to their physical mutations, most Wyld shamans have adapted to the Wyld and become living archetypes. Such shamans are exceptionally skilled, but have lost everything that is not part of their defined role as The Tribe's Shaman—they never for a moment think of being anything else.

BEASTMEN

People within Creation often see no difference between Wyld barbarians and beastmen, but the two groups themselves see nothing in common between them. Wyld barbarians sometimes show animalistic traits, but they are not true fusions of human and animal. Beastmen are. They owe their genesis to the intersection of two powerful, supernatural forces: the shapeshifting Lunar Exalted and the boundary-breaking power of the Wyld.

All beastmen were originally the offspring of Lunar Exalted, but many tribes have been breeding true for hundreds of years. A few tribes date back to the Shogunate. Any powerful Lunar can create beastmen, and many Lunars maintain small cadres of loyal beastmen followers. In the Age of Sorrows, however, most beastmen live without direct control from any Lunar. The Chosen of Luna observe these beastmen tribes, and often accept their worship, but rarely interfere with their lives or activities. The beastmen are the Lunars' children, after all—or more remote descendants—and just as all good parents, the Lunars let their children learn and grow on their own.

Beastmen live on the fringes of Creation for several reasons. Their Lunar forebears had to mate with a human (while in animal form) or an animal (while in human form) to breed a beastman, and their descendants live near the places where they began. Civilized folk also prevent beastmen from moving away from Creation's rim. Imperial armies generally slaughter any beastmen they capture, because they think beastmen are savage, untamable creatures tainted by the touch of the Anathema. The Immaculate Philosophy clearly states that like any creatures derived from or related to the Anathema, beastmen are soulless monstrosities who deserve slavery or death. After centuries of such murderous hatred, beastmen have learned to hate civilized folk in return.

Opinions about beastmen rarely improve in civilized nations that do not follow the Immaculate Philosophy: beastmen are frightening and inhuman, but because they are far less deadly than gods or Exalted, human fears more readily turn to hatred or scorn. Some countries attack beastmen as zealously as the Realm.

INTERACTION WITH THE ASSIMILATED

Most people have never heard of Wyld assimilation. The Wyld's grotesque, blatant changes to minds and bodies overshadow this subtle deformity of the soul. Careful conversation, however, can reveal Wyld assimilation and identify the limitations on the thoughts and behaviors of a Wyld assimilated person or culture—in effect, their Motivation or the group's Policy.

Players must succeed at (Perception + Socialize) rolls to gain such information. Five to 10 minutes of conversation, and a simple success, reveals that a person thinks in an obsessive, rigid way—but some people *do* think in narrow channels, so that isn't enough to prove Wyld assimilation. A character must spend a full scene talking with a person (and her player roll three successes) to spot that the person thinks in no sane, human way. The character recognizes Wyld assimilation if he thinks to look for it. Figuring out the approximate limitations on the thoughts and behaviors of a Wyld-assimilated person or group—in effect, the assimilated group's Policy—requires five to 10 successes on an extended roll, with each roll representing a full scene of probing conversation. Charms may grant more extensive and detailed knowledge.

Personal and cultural factors can make it harder to spot Wyld assimilation. A person may have been obsessive before the Wyld turned him into a story. Some people also perceive monomania as commendable zeal. Dozens of Immaculate monks, for instance, have become living archetypes of relentless pursuit, after a few too many trips into the Wyld after Anathema. Far from realizing these fanatical hunters have gone insane, the Order holds them up as laudable examples—no matter how many other hunters these fanatics get killed.

Assimilation to the Wyld has a powerful effect on social combat, whether mundane or enhanced by Charms. Assimilated people have no Intimacies, only a Motivation—the role they play with utter fidelity. Social groups likewise adhere to their Policy with total dedication. If a social attack aligns closely with a Motivation or Policy, the attacking character's player receives a +3 dice bonus to his roll (if the Storyteller thinks a roll is necessary at all). Any course of action that deviates significantly from the Motivation or Policy imposes a -3 dice penalty to the roll. A social attack that directly opposes a Motivation or Policy fails outright—no need to roll at all.

Example: The Falling Tears Poet, a Moonshadow Caste deathknight, tries recruiting the Devourers for an attack on a town. He must persuade the demented cannibals of two things at once: to raid beyond their usual territory and not to eat him. The former objective is in line with the Devourers' Policy, so the deathknight's player has a +3 dice bonus to the social attack. The latter objective would directly challenge the Devourers' Policy of eating everyone who isn't one of them—but the Abyssal argues that letting him live will enable the Devourers to kill and capture many more people than they could without him, which plays on another part of their Policy. The roll for this social attack, therefore, takes a -3 external penalty.

Finally, the Falling Tears Poet must make these attacks as a flurry, since the mutant maniacs won't care about letting him live unless they are also convinced to make the attack, and the deathknight won't persuade them to attack the town unless they refrain from trying to eat him. One Presence Excellency later, the Abyssal has his allies... deeply unreliable allies who will need careful handling to prevent them from turning on him.

As long as assimilated people or groups stay in the Wyld, mundane social combat cannot break their Motivations or change their Policies. Only unnatural mental influence or social influence Charms can challenge a Motivation or Policy directly, and then suffer a -5 external penalty. Even magical social combat cannot work an enduring change in a Motivation or Policy: that requires Shaping magic to change the fundamental nature of a Wyld-assimilated person or group.

Pulling a Wyld-assimilated person into Creation extends the possibilities for social combat. Without the Wyld constantly reinforcing the person's role, her assimilation can be broken. This requires creating an Intimacy—any Intimacy, so long as it deviates from the person's Motivation in some way. For instance, a social combatant might try to give an honorable warrior a personal loyalty that doesn't follow his usual script, or give a cannibal savage a personal enmity beyond his general desire to kill and eat the unmutated. The social attacks to establish the Intimacy suffer a -3 dice penalty because they challenge the person's Motivation to follow his scripted role.

A single, independent Intimacy, however, gives the person *two* roles or stories instead of one. That suffices to make her a real person again, prying her loose from the Wyld. Her Motivation hasn't changed—a cannibal maniac, for instance, is still a cannibal maniac—but it becomes a *human* Motivation (however strange or unpleasant), and subject to change. The person is also most likely addicted to the Wyld, and might not be able to live in Creation anyway. Nevertheless, the person becomes subject to normal social combat.



Beastmen sometimes gain marginal acceptance in the Threshold's most open and cosmopolitan cities, such as Nexus and Chiaroscuro, but they still risk enslavement. The few free beastmen find employment as gladiators, bodyguards to wealthy eccentrics or in the criminal underworld. They remain second-class citizens, however, if they receive citizenship at all. The law seldom punishes humans who cheat, rob, assault or kill a beastman; people usually smirk and say, "The freak had it coming." And of course, everyone "knows" that male beastmen lust for human women.

The forest-dwelling folk of the Haltan Republic form the chief exception to this prejudice. In Halta, beastmen form a small, distinct class within civilized society. Snakemen and hawkmen often work as priests, thaumaturges or doctors. Haltan humans, however, feel more friendship for the country's sentient animals than for the half-human beastmen. Halta treats its beastmen with careful formality, and they do not mingle casually. For instance, if a beastman enters a Haltan tavern, the human patrons immediately leave to give him privacy.

A few other societies also accept beastmen, but none are as large as Halta. All such lands lie far from the Realm's control. A few beastman tribes also grow into small countries of their own, which may in time develop into curious little civilizations. For all the fear leveled at real, present beastmen, however, people in Creation's interior like to hear stories about "civilized beastmen" who live safely far away. Such tales usually emphasize the weird, animalistic customs of the beastmen, or use the beastmen to satirize human foibles.

Despite all the prejudice beastmen face, they do not inspire quite the same reflexive disgust and horror as the twisted humanity of Wyld mutants. In Creation's interior, the hatred, fear or scorn become ideological rather than visceral. At least a few people can learn to see beastmen as fellow humans if they get to know one. Barbarian tribes feel a simpler hatred: they see beastmen as inhuman competitors for land and food, and possible harbingers of Lunar domination. The rapacious nature of predatory beastmen, similar to the dreaded wolfmen, does little to help these conflicts—but even herbivorous gazelle-men claim land that nomadic herders might want for their own flocks. Unlike ordinary barbarians, though, beastmen seldom fear to live in the tainted lands on the edges of the Wyld. Other beastman tribes give up on Creation entirely and dwell in the Bordermarches.

Even beastmen tribes that owe Lunars neither worship nor obedience often know the techniques to resist the Wyld. Their Lunar ancestor taught them, or some

other Lunar took on this duty. On top of their innate resistance to the Wyld (see Chapter Seven), beastmen excel at all of the various magical protections against the Wyld. As a result, beastmen tribes that live within the Bordermarches resist mutation much better than ordinary humans. Safe from pursuit by all but the most brave or foolhardy mortals, Bordermarch beast-tribes regularly venture forth into Creation for the same mixture of raiding, thievery and occasional trade as Wyld barbarians. Instead of mutating, beastmen tend to assimilate to the Wyld as living icons of fierce strength and courage, spurning or preying upon the weak humans who hate and fear the beastmen. Tribes of carnivorous beastmen might eat humans who fall into their claws—but as they might reasonably point out, is this cannibalism? Humans often say that beastmen are just animals; the beastmen sometimes agree, and just as any tiger or wolf, they view humans as just so much meat.

RELICS OF THE PAST

Beastmen and Wyld mutants are not the only offshoots of humanity to find refuge at Creation's rim. The Solar Exalted of the Old Realm created several new versions of humanity. The people of the air and people of the sea were designed to glorify the Solar Deliberative and expand its reach into the skies and under the waves. The tree folk and the dune people were created as servants and slaves. Unlike many lesser creations, the Copper Spiders made certain that all four races would breed true, and so their descendants survive into the Age of Sorrows.

Few members of these offshoot races remain. When the Dragon-Blooded overthrew the Solar Deliberative, the Dragon-Blooded massacred all the Solar creations they could find because they assumed these beings would remain forever loyal to their now-dead masters. They were also eliminated to help purify the world of the Anathema's taint—erasing the record of the Solars' power and excesses. Only the most isolated settlements of the air-folk and sea-folk escaped these terrible purges. They survived the Shogunate by remaining hidden. The tree folk remained safe through sheer remoteness in the furthest East, while a pair of Lunar Exalted saved the dune people.

The Contagion and the invasion of the Fair Folk ended the Shogunate, but this did nothing to help these living relics. All four races escaped the worst ravages of the Contagion because of their isolation, but the Fair Folk slew them as readily as the Shogunate had. Just as these races' ancestors fled to Creation's edge, small numbers



of these living relics survived by fleeing inward before the tsunami of the Wyld. When the Scarlet Empress restored order, these beings again had to contend with an Immaculate Philosophy that called them unclean monsters, while residents of many Threshold kingdoms considered them either evil mutants or, at best, potentially valuable slaves. The four races continue to live on the very edges of Creation.

THE PEOPLE OF THE AIR

The people of the air look like attractive humans who have huge and graceful white-feathered wings growing from their shoulders. To demonstrate their power, their creators endowed them with the wings and eyes of raptors and unusually long lifespans. Today, fewer than 25,000 people of the air survive in all of Creation. Their largest settlement is the eyrie of about 7,000 who live in the half-ruined First Age city of Sezakan, located high in the mountains of the Northwest. (See Chapter Four.) Smaller, less civilized holdings that range from a few dozen to a thousand or more air-folk can be found in both the far North and the Northeastern forests. Almost 1,000 of the people of the air live in the civilized nations of the Threshold, but they are mostly slaves kept because of their exotic beauty and magnificent wings. Some air-folk

find a place on the fringes of civilization as scouts and messengers. Only in the far Threshold, however, does the value of a flying ally or employee regularly outweigh the stigma of being considered either a mutant or a creation of the Anathema.

THE PEOPLE OF THE SEA

The people of the sea look like nothing more than attractive Westerners, with the blue or green hair and pale, blue-tinged skin sometimes found in the West. Their most obvious differences are the large but elegant gill slits on their neck and extending a palm's breadth down their back. In the air, the slits close and resemble unusually symmetrical scars. The only other marks of their true nature are their unusually long lives and the tough but delicate webbing between the first joint of their fingers and the entirety of their slightly over-long toes.

Unfortunately, the warm climate and casual attitude toward nudity found in much of the West means that people of the sea often have trouble concealing their webs and gills. Sea-folk are loathed and feared throughout much of the West, because they are often mistaken for Wyld mutants or the aquatic and inhuman Lintha pirates. As a result, sea-folk who live in the civilized nations of the West must accept a lowly station in life. Most of them





avoid civilization and dwell near the edges of Creation. The two largest communities are the ruined city of Jalarin, located in the Western Bordermarches, and the island of Seahome, in the West's tainted lands.

Seahome is an island to the West of the Neck that covers 90 square miles. More than 4,000 people of the sea live on it or, more often, just offshore. Although the island lies within the tainted lands and waters of the West, a jade obelisk protects Seahome and its inhabitants. The folk of Seahome have skilled astrologers who can usually predict Wyld storms and call their people to the obelisk with conch-shell horns.

THE TREE FOLK

The tree folk have bright green hair and skin. Their prehensile toes make them as much at home in the treetops as on the ground, and they possess a natural immunity to all plant toxins. Their green skins allow them to gain much of their nourishment from sunlight and water and so they require half as much food as other mortals; on the other hand, tree folk require lots of time in the sun. While the Solar Exalted shaped the people of the air and the people of the sea for the sheer joy of it, the tree people had a far less glorious purpose.

The tree folk were not made to glorify their creators. They were made to work the vast forests of the far East where the trees grow many miles high. Here, far from any other mortals, they collected rare flowers, seeds, vines and fungi. Automated skyships delivered the harvest from processing stations to the cities of the Solar Deliberative. The skyships gave the tree folk tools for their work; anything else, they had to make by themselves. During the Old Realm, the tree folk's entire contact with the outside world consisted of short visits every decade or two by one of the mighty Solar Exalted. These Exalted spoke to the tree folk and made certain that their loyalty to the Deliberative remained absolute.

The tree folk's centuries of slavery ended with the Usurpation. The Dragon-Blooded might have tried to exterminate the tree folk, but could seldom find them. The Great Contagion spared them because they had so little contact with the outside world. However, they became early targets for the invading Fair Folk. The tree people who remained free found much of their home now part of the Wyld. Some settled in the Bordermarches and gradually became Wyld mutants, while most remained within Creation and retained their humanity.

Today, the mutant and non-mutant tree folk avoid one another, which is exceedingly easy given the huge expanse of the Eastern forests. Both groups share one important common attitude: they feel an abiding distrust

for the Exalted. The Chosen of Luna generally leave the tree folk alone, being more interested in seeing how their unique barbarian culture evolves.

Many tribes of tree folk also share a mixture of disdain and fear of other mortals and avoid them. Because the tree folk are so often taken for Wyld mutants, this fear is largely justified. Only traders from Halta enjoy regular contact with a few of their tribes. Because the tree folk know forest secrets unknown to any outsiders, anyone who trades with them can return with mysterious bounties of the forest impossible to find by other means.

THE DUNE PEOPLE

Surviving creations of the First Age also dwell in the South, and their history is one of the most horrific in Creation. Late in the Old Realm, the Solar Exalted bred the dune people as a slave race. They labored in a city of pleasures that once stood in the middle of the desert. Their creators made them albinos so that any escape into the desert would swiftly kill them. Thus, they worked only at night or underground.

During the Usurpation, the Dragon-Blooded would have killed the albino slaves along with their Solar masters. A pair of heroic Lunar Exalted took pity on the dune people and led them into the desert in the dead of night. There they taught the arts of survival and commanded them never to live in slavery again. Over time, however, the dune people became as harsh as their desert home. They do not merely see civilized folk as potential oppressors; the dune people see civilized folk as foes who must be slaughtered whenever possible... and as food.

The dune people are true albinos who must forever avoid the searing rays of the sun, which would kill them in minutes. Despite their lack of pigmentation, they have taken no deformities from the Wyld. They are barbarians, not mutants. Similar to most barbarians, the dune people are concerned with honor, pride, tribal lore and reverence for the natural spirits and their ancestors—but survival most of all. They hunt and kill humans, beast-men and Wyld mutants as part of an eternal feud with the rest of the world.

During the day, dune people lie beneath the desert sands and breathe through the hollowed thighbones of their enemies. They come out only at night. Experienced travelers know the dune people hunt for human meat at night and during sandstorms. The one advantage travelers have when dealing with the dune people is, just as other mortal barbarians, they avoid the Wyld whenever they can. Caravans that journey into the Bordermarches leave the dangers of the dune people behind. The dune people happily kill Wyld mutants and use their bones



and skin for tools. The dune people refuse to eat the Wyld mutants' meat, however, and swiftly hunt and kill any of their own who suffer Wyld mutation.

CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG?

The reflexive hatred that most of Creation's folk feel for Wyld barbarians, beastmen and relics of the past may seem discouraging, especially to an Exalt who regards a tribe as her people, and wants them to find prosperity, security and acceptance within Creation. It may also seem strange that so many people lump together the handsome and civilized people of the air with grotesque monsters such as the Devourers.

Remember that most people *don't know* the different origins of humanity's offshoots. For all the average citizen of Whitewall or the Haslanti League knows, a person with wings was transformed by the Wyld as surely as any furred, fanged savage. The average person knows a jumble of stories about Wyld mutation, bestial miscegenation and vile Anathema sorcery.

Appearance is no help, either. Some Wyld barbarians look human—or at least as human as any beastman or relic race—but the Wyld has made them monsters on the inside. Maybe the gorgeous woman with the white wings, or the handsome fellow with gills, really *does* enjoy torturing people to death or feeding on the brains of children.

Centuries of propaganda make things worse. The Immaculate Order—arguably the most powerful cultural institution in Creation—says that evil forces taint relic races, beastmen and Wyld mutants alike. The Scarlet Empire, Creation's greatest military power, backs up that position. Repeat a message long enough and even people who hate you can start believing it.

Not that the people of Creation's rim are innocent. Whether human, once-human or part-human, they meet attack with counterattack, slave-raid with slave-raid, hatred with hatred. Not many of them feel they should show more forbearance than their enemies.

So any Exalt who wants to make peace and friendship between a Wyld tribe and anyone in Creation is in for a challenge. The people of the air and people of the sea would be easiest, since they look the most human and occasionally find limited acceptance on their own. Tree folk and some beastman tribes would present greater difficulties because they look obviously nonhuman. They have a rightness to them that most Wyld barbarians lack, though. The tree folk and beastmen's animalistic features are at least consistent. Wyld barbarians—especially those whose mutations are not all inherited—are visibly *warped*

humans, and that suggestion of violated flesh (and violated identity) inspires an instinctive fear that even the most rational person must work to overcome.

In places where people have little direct experience with part-humans or once-humans, the prejudice might be shallower. At least a Lunar or Lawgiver doesn't have to work against personal grievances about who killed whose sibling, spouse or parent. Mere laws might keep a Wyld-touched population from death or slavery. Prejudice, however, does not die quickly. Just because the people of the sea helped your country defeat the Lintha pirates doesn't mean you want your daughter to marry one. Attitudes like that take decades or centuries to change... or powerful Charms, such as the Lawgivers once used to rule Creation. Whether it's ethical to use mind control on entire populations is a question characters must answer for themselves.

FAIR FOLK

The Fair Folk borrow or steal the words and skills of others to describe—and, ultimately, to define—themselves. They are nightmares and heroes, lovers and warriors, murderers and torturers, larger-than-life figures out of stories. They have to be. They do not know how to be, and they *cannot* be, simply human. Their histories are full of archetypes moving through predestined roles, betraying and loving and warring and despairing, but never ultimately changing in nature. And the Fair Folk cling to this, throwing themselves into each successive part and living it to the hilt, desperate to fan passion—any passion—to a flame inside their inhuman hearts.

The fundamental Wyld at the core of raksha nature causes shaped Fair Folk to need the stability of settled past and established deeds as part of their carefully structured identities. They define themselves by the deeds that they have performed, the passion and hatred they have garnered from others, and the skills they have mastered. All Fair Folk hunger for powerful allies or adversaries, to draw an emotion from them—any emotion—and to *exist* to that person. The Fair Folk play a part, and they make themselves that part. They are like actors who do not exist without their costumes and lines, utterly swallowed up in the stories that they enact. They are masks without faces behind them. They crave interaction, drama and passion, whatever the drama and passions may be.

They also devour souls. Raksha feed on human souls, ravaging them through their emotions; some prefer the taste of love or affection, while others prefer pain, aggression, pride, humiliation... They can control their feeding so as not to harm the victim—more than the victim permits, anyway.

UNSHAPED RAKSHA

Unshaped raksha have not taken on a stable form. They dwell in the utter Chaos that storms beyond Creation, and some of them prowl in the Deep Wyld. They dislike the comparative fixity of the Middlemarches and cannot survive long in the Bordermarches or Creation, as matter there becomes too fixed and structured for them. Thousands of them entered Creation during the great Fair Folk invasion, but legions of shaped raksha helped them draw the Wyld inward to sustain them, and they expected to unmake Creation before it could unmake them.

These entities have no actual, solid form. They can permeate an entire waypoint... or more accurately, they *are* sentient waypoints traveling through the outer Wyld. They have no genuine names of their own, only a collection of words or syllables that somehow describe an aspect of their being.

Protean as they are, however, the unshaped do need to adopt a few defined traits when they leave Pure Chaos. These are not so much a fixed nature as an arbitrary set of traits similar to the central traits of a waypoint. These traits might include a visible, tangible focus for the raksha's self-awareness and interaction with other beings... or it might not. For example, the unshaped raksha Kroange, Tooth in the Cliff, usually creeps through the world as a cave lined with teeth in the bowels of a mountain. When Kroange feels restless, it takes the form of a rock and rolls through the valleys and fields, never casting a shadow. Kroange sometimes hides among other rocks; the rocks then become impossible to count. Each of Kroange's teeth has a separate nature. Long ago one of them, Subak, was stolen from him by Princess Kyema of the Jet Court, and he would reward anyone who could return it. Subak now takes the form of a dagger, which the Princess wears at her side; it can cut through any flesh once it has tasted that person's blood, despite any armor or Charms.

Unshaped raksha do not and cannot react on a human level, or comprehend human preoccupations. They are insane, without even the appearance of humanity to conceal this.



Unshaped



The Fair Folk who live openly within Creation's major cities subsist on harmless emotions such as joy or pleasure, and refrain from doing permanent damage. A raksha might even pay people to argue, so it can feed on their anger and exist through their opposition. The raksha who dwell in the Wyld rarely see any need to confine their desires, however, and feed until they leave the human as an empty, soulless shell. These victims are often sold to the Guild—who frequently sold the raksha the slaves in the first place—for use as menial labor.

INVADERS FROM BEYOND

Every scholar in Creation knows how the Fair Folk invaded from beyond the world's rim. The raksha remember this story, too—but of course, they tell it from the other side.

Once upon a time, the Fair Folk had neither shape nor identity. When the Primordials formed Creation, the Ones Beyond raged against it. The powerful among the raksha took shapes borrowed from Creation so they could have voices to speak, and gathered thoughts so they could formulate what they desired to say. They sought emotions that would express their desires, and they found them: Valor, Compassion, Temperance, Conviction and Will.

The newly arisen leaders strove for dominance (another concept they imitated), as each raksha desired to make the assault on Creation an expression of its chosen Virtue. At last, a single raksha came forward. With cunning speech, it showed the other raksha that all things ultimately served their desires, whether to enslave, destroy or cherish Creation's mortal inhabitants. It swore that nothing should ever prevent the raksha from doing as they wished. They named this raksha Thief of Words, and it still roams Creation to the present day, an object of awe and terror among the Fair Folk—the definer of their race.

THE FAIR FOLK TAKE FORM

Prince Balor of the Terrible Gaze then raised his standard and named his will: that Creation should be taken, for the raksha to ravage, shape or destroy at their whim. He led the assembled forces into Creation. The Dragon-Blooded, greatly wearied by their own efforts in the Usurpation and by the scourge of the Great Contagion, could not stand against the raksha.

Right when the world seemed about to fall into their hands, and the raksha began to celebrate their victory, the leaders turned on each other and slew each other with the mightiest of their weapons. And then it was that the Scarlet Empress roused the Imperial Manse and

THIEF OF WORDS

Thief of Words has become a legend among the raksha. While the Fair Folk frequently profess to honor sages or respect cunning counselors, Thief of Words is one of the very few elder raksha whom everyone really listens to and obeys. The raksha themselves do not know the limits of its powers and fear to test its strength. Rumor variously says that Thief of Words has been the lover of the Scarlet Empress (whom the raksha hate and fear above all humans, and therefore love for giving their existence meaning), that it lives in Yu-Shan, that it journeys in disguise between the courts to keep them in opposition and that it organizes the next crusade to destroy Creation. Since Thief of Words is said to take any shape it pleases, nobody can say what it looks like. Sometimes the arch-raksha is an excuse for new movements and fashions among the Fair Folk; at other times, Thief of Words (or someone claiming its identity) has halted a war in the making, forced a treaty or even intervened on behalf of normal humans. Anyone who can reasonably claim to have met Thief of Words becomes an instant subject of interest to any raksha.

reestablished the boundaries of the world. The surviving Fair Folk leaders fled, and so did their forces with them. Balor's Crusade had failed.

The Dragon-Blooded thought the main threat broken. They set up garrisons on the borders of Creation, and led hunts to dispose of small freeholds where they could find them, but the Scarlet Empress found she had more than the Fair Folk to deal with: the Dragon-Blooded did not harry the raksha all the way back to Chaos. The Lunars who remained knew the Wyld better, and remained on guard. Meanwhile, the Fair Folk themselves became more fixed in form and nature as they remained within Creation. But those raksha beyond the boundaries, still unshaped and unformed, cursed their fellows and saw them now as pitiful freaks and traitors little better than humans and deserving to be destroyed with them.

When the Fair Folk began to meet with each other again, they had all changed. They now bore aspects and forms taken from mortal dreams and nightmares. For a while there was confusion, with some giving offence where it was not intended, and others not giving offence despite their greatest efforts to do so. However, after discussion, the Fair Folk discovered that they all still shared the concepts of Valor, Temperance, Conviction, Compassion and Willpower. Five courts based on these concepts



arose, and many lesser households. Many raksha chose to affiliate themselves with one or more of these groupings, the better to befriend or feud with their kin.

As the years went by, more than one court fell to become a mere household, and more than one household rose to become a court. Some courts or households set up their own treaties with gods, mortals or Exalted; however, these treaties only bound the particular Fair Folk who belonged to that court or household... or perhaps only an individual raksha. Although the Fair Folk must keep their given word to the letter, they do their best to interpret it to suit themselves.

The Guild taught the Fair Folk about commerce. The raksha offered glamours, sorcery and rare items from the Wyld; the Guild offered human slaves. Unlike the Guild's other clients, the Fair Folk did not object to truculent and awkward slaves; the raksha enjoy willful victims. Once the raksha savored the last morsel of a victim's mind and soul, they often sold the slaves back to the Guild, for use as menial beasts of burden. While civilized society looks down on the trade, and strategists condemn it as merely strengthening the raksha, it brings in so great a profit that the Guild certainly does not intend to stop it. A traveler who wanted to reach a particular raksha freehold could do worse than journeying with a

Guild caravan going there as well; he is likely to reach the freehold sane and in one piece. What may happen after that is a different matter.

A few raksha also affect to scorn the trade as weak and decadent. What glory do the raksha gain by lounging in their freeholds, waiting for their dinners? They should stalk through Creation as its predatory lords, filling it with their wonder and terror. The schism between the traders and the hunters leads to many entertaining rivalries and vendettas.

THE COURTS AND HOUSEHOLDS

As of RY 768, the Five Courts are Opal, Ruby, Jet, Lapis and Pearl. Previous courts include the Emerald Court—now a mere household, due to the carelessness of its twin rulers, though still devoted to Valor—and the Diamond Court, which was destroyed.

The **Opal Court** champions Valor. Its ruler Prince Japhthia traces his lineage back to Balor himself. The court currently resides in the distant East, from where the warriors ride forth to cast defiance at the local petty gods.

The **Lapis Court** offers shelter for those who practice what the Fair Folk term Compassion. Here rules Neshi of the Double Whips, who goes perpetually veiled and who sleeps surrounded by human children. The mood of

THE CHURCH OF BALOR

The raksha would never sincerely worship any god. However, the *drama* of divinity and worship appeals to the Fair Folk. They can adopt formalized postures of veneration, homage, penance and prayer. They particularly appreciate the idea of gods who influence the entire world—who are *known* by everyone, in fear and reverence. And when were the raksha more godlike, more known, than when they almost destroyed the world? And, they take up the tragically slain Prince Balor (never mind that other raksha killed him) as a lost but noble cause, and swear undying loyalty to his crusade. The Church of Balor was sculpted by a thousand terrified human dreams of destruction, a thousand wanton human lusts for conquest and a thousand dying human souls screaming in pain.

The Church is what Fair Folk think religion ought to be. Worshipers kneel and pray, priests incant strange chants of praise, warriors in shining armor ride forth on quests, horrible sacrifices take place in exquisite or excruciating detail, zealots duel over points of doctrine, and so on. Many Fair Folk join or leave the Church as a whim, as they find it a convenient excuse for some role they wish to play, or as justification for some feud or friendship.

While the Church officially seeks to bring the Final Crusade that sweeps Creation back into Chaos, the Church's devotees share no consensus on how this should take place. Some adherents favor inviting the unshaped raksha from the Deep Wyld or from Chaos to lead the armies. Others suggest murdering the Scarlet Empress and her most faithful servants first, while still others simply want to ride out in nightmare, blood and fire, and destroy everything in their path. The passive remainder simply enjoys the feuds and disputes, but is unlikely to launch any Crusade in the immediate future.

With the Empress vanished and the Great Houses in strife, some raksha say this is the perfect moment for a new Crusade. Some of them even suggest offering cataphracts and hobgoblin legions to certain Houses or rebel kingdoms and satrapies, helping them break free from the Realm and then turning on both sides when they are weakened. This proposal interests many raksha, and particularly the Five Courts, but would require careful choice of victims and wording of bargains.

Raksha



this court ebbs and flows with the years, and it is given to passing fashions. It recently traveled to the far South, and lion warriors guard the silken tents of its nobles.

The **Pearl Court** is filled with raksha who idolize Will-power. Its nobles duel by night and day, and the ocean around it is doubly salted with raksha blood. The court rides on the back of one of the last remaining behemoths, which swims the seas of the Western Middlemarches. Judge Nehemeth sits on a throne carved from a single pearl and only moves from it when a would-be usurper challenges her rule.

The **Jet Court** is the refuge of those who have a high (yet moderate) regard for Temperance. Many of these raksha strive to demonstrate this virtue at the expense of their fellows. They take pleasure in demonstrating how moderate and well judged they are in their pleasures and hatreds, leading to a number of duels second only to the Pearl Court. Princess Kyema rules the Jet Court mildly and seductively, aided by her personal rumormongers and spies; it currently lies in the Northern Wyld, but rarely stays put for long, as that would show excessive attachment to one place.

The **Ruby Court** prizes Conviction. These raksha do not care what anyone does, so long as they do it with uttermost passion and certainty. The nobles of this court weep tears of blood, take human lovers, slay them in fits of jealousy and then feud with each other about it. Duke Aral is a weak ruler who spends much of his time before his mirror. The nobles of his court politick and command in his absence. The court resides in the far Southeast, and trades heavily with the Guild.

The **Lesser Households** may take the name of gems such as the Garnet, the Beryl, the Amethyst and the Citrine, to name but a few, or they name themselves after flowers, musical instruments or whatever else their master pleases. They move and travel as they wish, if they cannot obtain a freehold. While a household often follows its master's wish and allies to a single court, just as many households include members scattered across the courts. Likewise, some households live within a court's bounds while others live apart if the Wyld or in Creation. A household lacks the authority or power of a court, but a sufficiently strong household can gather allies and maybe in time become a court itself. The Ruby Court was once a simple household itself, and still has many allies among the Lesser Households.

COMMON RAKSHA OF THE FOUR DIRECTIONS

Travelers through the quarters of Creation report that the raksha who live in the different directions each have their own customs, habits, hungers and passions.

CHILDREN OF THE DIAMOND COURT

The Diamond Court is one of the great raksha cautionary tales. Centuries ago, the Diamond Court celebrated Conviction. The court set itself against all four of the other courts, arguing that Conviction made all other virtues possible. Warriors of the Diamond Court also raided human villages and left false traces that cast blame on the other courts or nearby freeholds, in an attempt to draw the other raksha into an alliance against the humans. The nobles of the court and its ruler, Queen Kanatharitha, argued that true Conviction made all means not merely possible, but necessary.

The Diamond Court was taken by surprise by the Tepet legions, which penetrated deep into the Wyld with the help of Guild experts, thaumaturgy and powerful Charms. (If they had assistance from Sidereals, Lunars or other raksha nobles, this was kept well secret.) The legions destroyed the Diamond Court, burned its palace, slew the Queen and left the remains to the Wyld. Some raksha claim that the younger members of the court, including the Queen's twin babes, were taken to be sold as slaves by the Guild—a most exquisite irony, the tellers all agree—but if this is so then no trace of them has been found for centuries. The Ruby Household rose to become a court in the power vacuum that was left.

The whole affair of the Diamond Court taught the raksha to keep their depredations below the level that would provoke the Realm's retaliation. With the Empress gone and the Realm in disarray, that caution is nearly gone. Furthermore, finding the "lost heirs" could easily spark a restorationist civil war among the courts that would entertain all raksha involved.

However, strong similarities appear among raksha in a particular elemental direction, far more so than among humans who might live in the same area. Along with being infinitely variable, raksha are infinitely impressionable. Without strong, personal inspirations, the average raksha takes impressions from his surroundings like a drop of hot wax. Fair Folk want exotic personal habits, rites, oaths, feuds and all the other things that give them the semblance of a human personality. They are easily swayed by the hunger of the sea, the drama of the climate and the local human customs. The Fair Folk gather them in as magpies gather gaudy toys, and assemble them into intricate and vivid lifestyles. See Chapters Three through



Six for the appearances and attitudes frequently adopted by the raksha of the Wyld's four quarters.

The Five Courts, by comparison, define themselves far more by their chosen virtues than by the general customs or nature of their environment. The raksha within a court often reflect the local elemental temperament, but they filter it through their own attitudes, with the ruler's personality as a further influence.

Finally, in some freeholds the ruler makes such an impression upon his subjects and the environment that local customs reflect nothing but his own temperament. This can lead to small enclaves inside Rakshastan that look and act nothing like the dominant Fair Folk culture for that region.

TRADE WITH THE GUILD

Trade between the Guild and the Fair Folk began in approximately RY 130, between particularly daring Guild factors and Fae-blooded ravagers who saw this as an easy way to procure the human slaves their raksha masters demanded. Within barely a dozen years, trade had blossomed into a full-grown industry, and the ravagers had been cut out in favor of direct bargaining between high-ranking Guild merchants and the Fair Folk themselves. Those first merchants left behind detailed instructions as to the proper protocols to use when trading with the raksha, and these are still regarded as the most reliable way to do so. While merchants (Guild and otherwise) are free to make their own deals anywhere in Rakshastan, and often do, five fortified markets offer some degree of associated safety through their established customs.

These five Goblin Bazaars—one in each quarter of Creation, and one that wanders with the Wyld itself—serve as convenient points for Guild caravans to trade with the Fair Folk. When a caravan comes close enough to a bazaar, one of the common Fair Folk guides the caravan in. The guide may arrive alone, or with an honor guard of gossamer-glass ships, firebirds or other wonders out of the Wyld. By the rules of these bazaars, the caravan master must formally ask permission to enter, and then every member of the caravan must go in; nobody can stay outside. The Guild officials must refrain from sampling the refreshments they are offered while bargaining with the raksha lord of the fortress. By the laws of the exchange, anyone who partakes of the hospitality must remain as a slave. After the bargaining ends (and still without any food or drink) the Guildsmen may leave, and will find the price of the newly sold slaves packed in their caravan cargo, together with any dream-eaten slaves chained together in a coffle.

The Goblin Bazaars have been the same for the last few centuries, but their lords and ladies change frequently. They are as follows:

The **Wreath of Lashes** is found off the Ash Road deep in the Southern Desert, where lions and fire-blackened scorpion-children guide the caravans to this bronze tower. The slowly writhing walls are chill to the touch, and move with shifting bas-reliefs of long-devoured slaves, revisiting their past torments in slow motion. A maze of curtains made from whip-braids and chains leads the way to the reception hall. Visitors are offered chilled wine and raw, spiced meat. Merchant princes often leave with gossamer blades, carved jewels, ever-burning lamps and unguents that make one beautiful as the dawn for one hour.

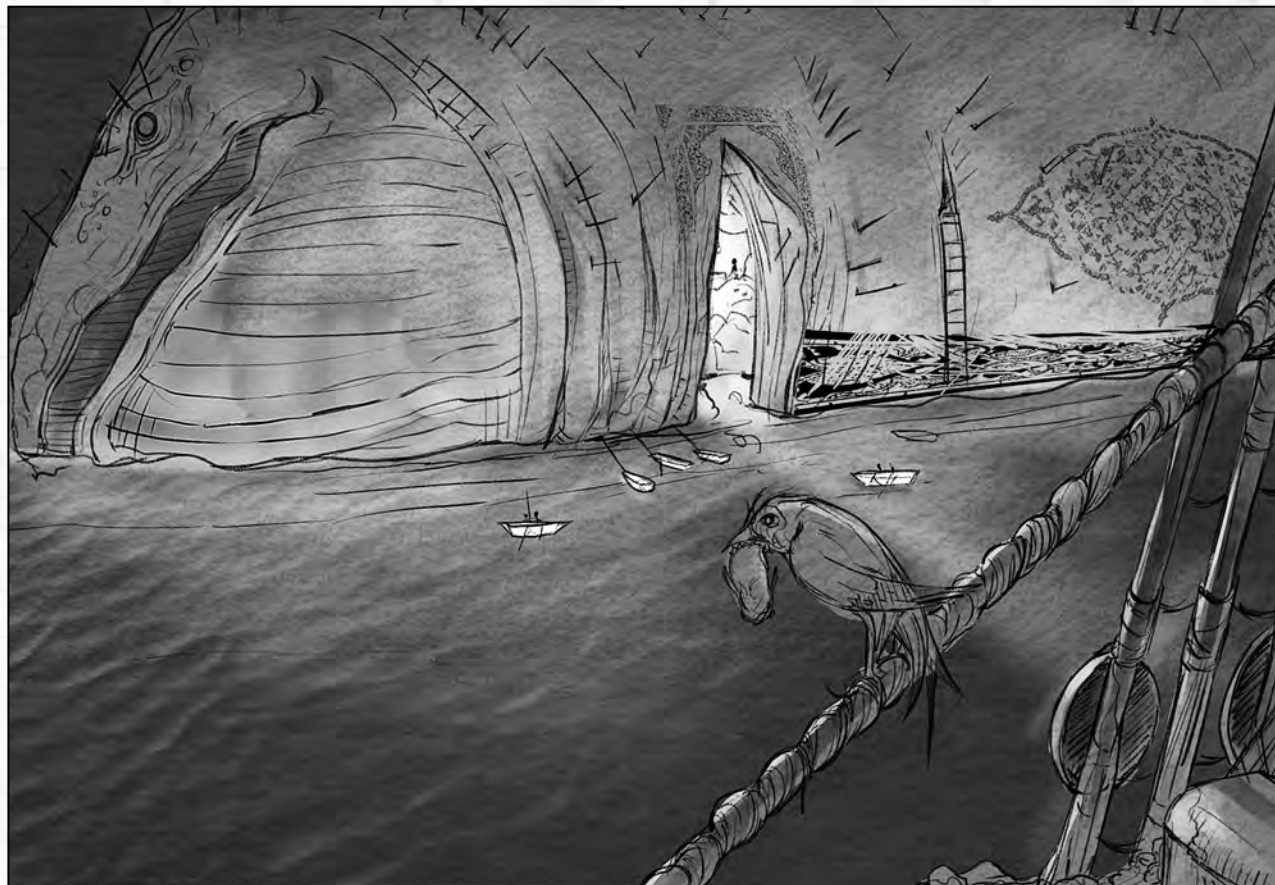
The **Embrace of Ash and Yew** is deep in the Eastern Forest. Carnivorous gray stags lead caravans on a twisting path toward the rising sun and a huge ash tree twisted together with an equally huge yew tree. Interlocking chambers lie within the living wood, decorated with spiderweb tapestries that give soft music from the plucking of fist-sized spiders. Hanging fruits, candied insects and nectar are served here. Guild representatives leave with gossamer cloth, rare spices and dyes, recipes for medicines and poisons, dream-inducing wines and birds that sing the most complex arias after hearing them once.

The **Mouth of White Sleep** lies in the distant North, and a chill white fog shrouds the gates of this ice palace. The hospitality here is the offer of fur cloaks and heated rooms; the reward is blocks of never-melting ice, bottled winds, soap that washes away a guilty conscience and tapestries woven from the dreams of gifted artisans.

The **Surgeon's Deep** is cut from the body of a slowly writhing whale-behemoth. Glass boats and Fair Folk in the shape of gulls guide travelers to the bazaar. Great spears puncture the behemoth's nerve-points and closed the flow of living Essence to its vital organs until those chambers have hardened into jade. Slaves are exchanged for gossamer armor, Wyld pearls, thought-reflecting mirrors, immense corals, shells and other Western treasures. Merchant princes must avoid the skewered, living sea-creatures and heady rum offered to them.

The **Fragrant Hill** wanders through the Wyld places of the world. Caravans take a widdershins route around the source of the Gray River until the hill appears, cloaked in mist and smelling of the rare incense of the greatest Immaculate temples. Visitors must refuse the shining gems they are offered to navigate the darkness within, and use only their own lanterns, or grope in the dark. They must also refuse the savory roots and legumes





heaped on platters for them. Here can be obtained scrolls depicting First Age devices, gryphon feathers, cakes of diamond-dust and mechanical toys of inhumanly cunning manufacture.

Of course, other domains and freeholds buy slaves, too, or trade away their dream-eaten husks to the Guild or any other merchants. However, any deals the humans broker outside the Goblin Bazaars are individual ones, and subject to raksha interpretation and raksha humor. Let the vendor beware.

RAVAGERS

The Guild sells mortal souls to the Fair Folk, but some people work for the raksha directly. Ravagers are humans whose wills the raksha have broken or suborned, and who now serve them with slavish devotion. Some ravagers abduct other mortals for their masters. Other ravagers serve as messengers, warriors and front-men. They are often physically attractive, either because they were so originally or because their raksha masters disguise them with glamour.

A few ravagers are Fae-blooded—people of mingled raksha and human descent—reared as coddled and abused pets inside some freehold or finding their way to raksha

service after painful lives in Creation. Other ravagers began as slaves but took their masters' fancy. The raksha may cultivate other potential ravagers from childhood, occasionally visiting their villages or cities to observe them from a distance. The Fair Folk look for cold-blooded amorality: not just the obviously vicious bullies but the little princesses and drama queens, the village Lotharios and neighborhood tattletales—anyone who hides behind an image and doesn't care whom he hurts in the process, or who would rather live an imaginary life than a real one. In short, people like the raksha themselves.

A ravager in training briefly becomes a petted toy, perhaps the favored lover of one or several raksha, while simultaneously witnessing the degradation and collapse of other humans around him. The Fair Folk also promise the mortal that if he serves faithfully, he will be rewarded with immortal beauty and power as the raksha themselves. This combination of stick and carrot seduces the wills of most ravagers. Stronger-willed mortals, or half-bloods who understand what happens to *all* mortals eventually in a Fair Folk domain, become the leaders of such groups and receive gossamer weapons and armor. Their masters promise to spare them so long as they obey perfectly and bring back more victims.



Ambitious ravagers sometimes realize the thrall that the Fair Folk have over them and try to break free. These ravagers may discard their raksha belongings and hide in a village or city far from raksha dwellings, while trying to forget the unimaginable pleasures and pains that they once enjoyed. Former ravagers have even become regarded as local holy men, due to their stern denial of physical pleasures. (Of course, for a ravager, nothing compares to what he once knew at the hands of the Fair Folk.) A few even manage to live out a normal mortal lifespan, and die respected by a community that never knew of their previous tasks. More often, onetime ravagers vanish in the dead of night, carried away by raksha who finally tracked them down, or they cannot resist the memory of the Fair Folk any longer and go stumbling back to the Wyld, to have their dreams devoured and their souls emptied away.

Not many ravagers survive more than a few years. Either they die while carrying out the raksha's bidding, or they no longer possess the physical charms and grace that made them suitable servants. After all, the Fair Folk would never tolerate a minion who was less than beautiful or pleasing. However much a favorite they once were, most ravagers end up suffering and dying with the other victims, or shuffling in some Guild merchant's slave-coffle. Half-bloods have a better chance of surviving and prospering, since their innate abilities and longer lifespans give them the option of finding a niche within the freehold and somehow establishing their own value.

BARBARIAN RAVAGERS

The Fair Folk employ seductive ravagers when they wish to gain victims by stealth and cunning. Some raksha, however, prefer a more brutal style of predation by proxy. They bully, bribe or bamboozle a local tribe into attacking some other tribe, or the civilized folk of Creation, with the aim of capturing victims. The shock, fear and grief of the captives give extra savor to their souls. Some barbarians do this of their own volition: they realize the Fair Folk want slaves, so the barbarians offer captives as tribute if the raksha will leave them alone.

This racket works best with ordinary barbarians and Wyld barbarians. A tribe that assimilates to the Wyld might even make service to the Fair Folk part of its scripted identity. Beastman tribes, however, sometimes have Lunar sponsors who object forcefully to raksha domination—but that can be a desirable outcome, too.

POLITICS OF THE FAIR FOLK

Among the raksha, politics deals not so much with territory or power as with personal feuds, long-term enmities, current fashions in the use of captive humans and general style. The actual reason for the long enmity between the Pearl and Lapis Courts matters little when compared to the opportunities their adherents find to fight duels, plot against each other, insult each other in public places, steal each others' treasures or pet mortals or enjoy passionate, forbidden affairs with each other before the tragic betrayal and inevitable temporary mutual destruction. Although genuine discussions about territory and tribute do go on behind the scenes, the average raksha understands "politics" as "a chance for me to indulge myself and develop some new enemies."

This is affected by the fact that the popular, powerful Fair Folk are the *interesting* ones who can hold the attention and respect of other raksha. They have Exalted (and preferably Solars or Lunars) as allies or enemies. Their weapons are known to freeholds across Creation. Their powers and skills become the subject of tales among both raksha and humans, and their stories grow more and more epic. Such raksha gain assistance and obedience from other Fair Folk who hope to become part of their story or find new roles for themselves. Lesser Fair Folk—or worse still, boring, nondescript Fair Folk—must scramble for crumbs in the corners, unimportant and unwanted, and lack the attention and interaction sufficient to fully define themselves and become strong.

Policies among the Fair Folk divide into two loose categories: genuine and serious policies that deal with real events affecting the stability of the court, household, freehold or individual and policies developed purely for emotional and narrative indulgence. Fair Folk often manage to combine the two, but not always. Powerful Fair Folk are most likely to be behind genuine politics, since they don't have the driving need for attention that forces lesser Fair Folk to choose the most dramatic, *interesting* course of action.

Fair Folk are always delighted to involve other beings in their politics. Exalted in particular make marvelous tools, agents or adversaries. It is not considered a sign of weakness to employ one of the Exalted to perform a task, but rather a sign of skill and control that the raksha could persuade or force the Exalt to comply.

Raksha political activities include the following:

Send official ambassadors. These Fair Folk should be powerful, elegant, interesting and in every way good representatives of the group they represent. They are expected to deliver dramatic threats or sweet flattery



while presenting their ruler's demands or requests, and to emphasize the importance and interest of the faction they represent. It is considered good manners for visiting ambassadors to involve themselves in local court or freehold life, via seductions, duels, betrayals and other normal interactions.

While it might be more useful sometimes to send weak or unimportant ambassadors so your enemies will underestimate you, no raksha could bring herself to do this. It'd be so dull, and it'd damage her reputation. Sending someone so hideously ugly or gruesome that his very ugliness makes a statement in itself has possibilities, though. Persuading a Celestial Exalt to serve as an ambassador is a major diplomatic coup. A Terrestrial Exalt is worth a round of applause, but doesn't have quite the same shock value.

Send unofficial ambassadors. Raksha groups do this either when they don't want to admit in public that they negotiate with each other, or when the official ambassadors *in situ* can't be trusted to handle the important business. Unofficial ambassadors genuinely represent their particular group (after all, where's the point otherwise?) but don't admit to having any particular authority. They merely display themselves attractively, get involved with the group they visit and have quiet words behind the scenes. Such negotiations may concern important issues that affect both groups, and the secrecy is an important factor. Discovering or revealing these negotiations can cause genuine attempts to kill a raksha, rather than simply artistic ones. While an Exalt can be sent on this sort of mission, it might involve revealing too much about a raksha group's secret goals or weaknesses.

Stage daring raids. This can range from simple border attacks and duels to full-scale kidnappings and thefts from the ruling raksha's throne room. This sort of action demonstrates the raiding Fair Folk's power, competence and style: stealing a raksha lady's ring while she holds court, for instance, would definitely impress the other Fair Folk. A raid can be done as the equivalent of a polite introduction, or as a demonstration of strength between two raksha groups who are currently neutral or feuding mildly. The raksha consider it gauche for too many pursuers to hunt down a raider or thief. The offended party should merely send a few high-quality hunters to bring back the item, the thief's head, the thief himself or some other item of value.

Meet at a neutral location. Minor freeholds compete to host this sort of event. While powerful visitors may overshadow the local lord, diplomatic meetings offer unparalleled opportunities for local raksha to entangle

themselves in the visitors' stories, acquire important allies and generally make new friends and enemies. Meetings at neutral ground usually occur when two major groups of raksha wish to interact, but without the commitment of sending ambassadors (official or unofficial). This sort of meeting generally involves some degree of competition, such as a shared hunt, an exhibition of crafts, a demonstration of pet slaves, a contest of magic or other opportunities to show off.

Lure away important members. Seducing a member of an opposing Fair Folk group into joining your own demonstrates your social prowess and personal power among the raksha. If you can bring along her entourage, lovers, enemies and other associates, so much the better. The drama of an important member of a group publicly renouncing her old allegiance provokes immediate response from everyone concerned or merely watching. Raksha etiquette suggests that you either seduce someone from the other group into your company, or fetch back the defector by whatever means you can—a double defection for twice the drama! Some Fair Folk would entice the defector with romance, treachery or the promise of a mutual enemy, while others prefer the classical approach of dragging her back in chains for immediate and painful punishment.

WAR

Mortals seem to enjoy war since they spend so much time on it, and the raksha agree: war is one of the grandest entertainments ever devised. Of course, a war should be done with proper concern for the feelings of both sides—that is, with a dramatic entrance, the presentation of insult, either the merciful sparing or the painful execution of the messengers, the challenges to duels from both sides, ultimatums, last-minute attempts at peace and of course the war itself. Human minions make wonderful audiences for speeches and die so beautifully on the battlefield. War really has to be one of the most popular modes of Fair Folk politics; it offers all the raksha a chance to show themselves at their best and build new relationships. Besides, when the war ends one side can sue for peace, the other side can gracefully accept it, and they can begin a cycle of feasts, prisoner exchanges, betrayals, hopeless avowals of shame, demands for restitution and other enticing pastimes until war is declared again.

Best of all, war allows the Fair Folk to involve other people in their sport, from barbarian tribes to entire nations, if the raksha can trick or enthrall the mortal leaders. The Fair Folk can devote years to seducing, blackmailing or otherwise manipulating chiefs, kings, priests, magnates



or whoever else they need to arrange a big, entertaining war. The raksha might not even bother to fight themselves, but let their dispute hang on the mortals' outcome, with lesser wagers on the side. They might even draw in a few of the Exalted. In particular, many of Luna's Chosen have traced attacks on their favored tribes or other turmoil at the Wyld's fringe to raksha "games"... and found that it was all planned to bring the Lunar to a final, epic conflict with the raksha themselves.

LUNAR EXALTED

The Chosen of Luna prefer not to live *inside* the Wyld. Many of them try to live as near the edge of their local Bordermarches as possible. They use the Wyld as a resource, a challenge, a refuge and a tactical advantage; many also see it as a responsibility that other Exalted have long since forsaken. As the Wyld such a central part of their lives and continued survival, the Lunar Exalted have every reason in the world to make their homes near the Wyld.

USES FOR CHAOS

From territories around the Wyld, Lunars control vast swathes of land and all that entails. Many untapped sources of valuable minerals belong to nobody so much as the Lunar Exalted, resting in the mountains or under the ground until the Lunar decides she needs them. Pristine forests lie on the edge of the Bordermarches, often a little bit strange, but all a hero needs to build an army's stock of spears or to hunt and salt enough wild pork to keep a legion marching for months.

On the other side of the border, the resources become harder to claim, but commensurately more valuable. Lunar artificers cannot craft impossible substances from Chaos as the Solars of yore did, but the Lunars can still obtain miraculous ingredients for their artifacts and experiments. Some Lunars just keep looking until they find what they want. Others bargain with the Fair Folk and unformed raksha (whose bargains are often so unfathomable that they *must* be ill-intended—perhaps) to behemoths, homeless demons or unclassifiable things.

The territories of Luna's Chosen are large enough to include many small, mortal societies. Despite the distance from the "civilized" way of life that radiates outward from the Realm, nearly every type of culture has representation on Creation's rim. Nomadic tribesmen wander the plains and dunes, harvesting edible plants and hunting the local animals; while villages of subsistence farmers scratch out a living. Even minor city-states form, far from the influence of the Realm or the Guild, developing their

own rivalries and intentions. Any or all of these cultures may fall inside a single Lunar's territory, and they are the perfect seeds for the Lunars to cultivate into instant armies or into potential rivals for the Realm. As Halta and the Haslanti League prove, yesterday's city-state can grow into tomorrow's fledgling empire.

In the Wyld, the Lunar Exalted find less *predictable* human cultures. Adding Wyld mutations and assimilation into the mix creates the possibility of cultures in which kingship depends on ritually sucking blood through a mosquito proboscis, where self-worth is judged on the quality of one's gills or in which people operate as a hive mind. Lunars treat the Wyld societies they discover (and seed, and found) as experiments for what might be done in Creation. Few Lunar Exalted believe that Wyld cultures are viable for transplant into Creation, but there are always exceptions. On the other hand, many Wyld cultures could provide quality shock troops in the event of a war, so Luna's Children keep an eye on them, either personally or through agents.

In the end, Luna's Children actually control *at least* as much ground as the Scarlet Empress did in her heyday, but their power is more diffuse. They cannot send a magistrate to a small town and make everyone turn out its pockets—a Lunar must go himself, unless he already established a great deal of influence over the region. Many Lunars prefer the personal nature of this arrangement, but some still try to reign as distant lieges instead of intimate warlords.

Humans (and their derivatives) are not the only creatures Lunars find useful. Many beasts of the Wyld, such as the sea horse of the West and the ice hollows of the North, prove useful to the Children of Luna. As examples, the former serve as excellent steeds and the latter can make excellent guardians (if trained) or traps for enemies (if wild). The remarkable simhata are descendants of creatures removed from the Wyld early in the First Age.

Most Lunars who keep territories around or in the Wyld also respect that the land they claim was once thousands of miles from Creation's edge. They tread now upon parts of the Old Realm they once guarded, making their homes a treasure trove of ancient history. Some territories are so connected to the old protectorates they once were that Lunars who loved those lands have handed their names down from the First Age, perhaps hoping to reestablish them someday. Every day, however, the Wyld erodes more history that the Lunars have not yet recovered and recorded... and anything consumed by the Wyld is lost forever. To prevent this, some Lunars





(or their proxies) scour the Wyld for lost knowledge and remains of the Old Realm, believing this the highest ideal they could serve in this dark Age.

Not all sources of ancient history and knowledge are susceptible to the Wyld. Tombs of Celestial Exalted, from the first casualties of the Primordial War to the last deaths of the Usurpation, exist in significant number on the edge of Creation. Their locations often seem random until one remembers that any place might have been a favored sanctuary two millennia ago. Entire cities exist on the borders or within the Wyld, and even their obvious geomancy might hint at forgotten techniques. Fortresses, highly shielded against all dangers but slowly eroding, once projected power across Creation and protected the Old Realm's tributaries; some may still contain First Age weapons or defenses, undiscovered and ready to be looted. Lunars follow up credible leads to salvage what was lost.

Even the emptyspace is a resource. Within their great territories, Lunars have all the authority and flexibility they need to experiment with new Charms, sorceries, thaumaturgic arts and even the most massive artifacts. With such wide open spaces, few people care if a new spell accidentally dissolves an area 20 miles wide to pine sap. With such a wide range of cultures available to them, Lunars can test their techniques on all manner of people and usually find a place for their new magic to be appropriate.

The Wyld also provides immediate access to a variable testing ground. Some environments may cause some techniques to function differently, and any true researcher likes to know that before using a spell or Charm in the field. There are even fewer to complain when a weapon that seemed stable collapses an entire Wyld region into nothingness—and entities that *do* complain generally aren't held in high regard by the Lunar Exalted. They also use the Wyld as a source of inspiration, sometimes wandering it for weeks or months at a time just to see if the ever-changing land offers anything interesting to learn.

CHALLENGES AND THREATS

No reasonable Lunar ever forgets that their moonsilver tattoos do not protect them from every danger in the Wyld. Creatures wander into Bordermarches or, worse, the Middlemarches and come out mutants. Sometimes they are harmless, but just as frequently they come out aggressive, sturdier, stronger or even just inherently dangerous to anything around them. A horse that fires spines from its body every few minutes just can't stay in its old stable.

The Wyld's people can be even more dangerous than mutated beasts. Whatever people may have hoped when they entered the Wyld, frequent danger and derangement by the Wyld tends to make them... aggressive. Tribes of ferocious Wyld mutants can be a premier danger to the Lunar Exalted. Even though the Children of Luna have a reputation for conquering and taming barbarians, this sometimes requires long trials of worth or a wearying series of ritual combats—assuming the mutants are not part of a story that requires they fight to the death.

Luna's Chosen also face threats from the Fair Folk, who believe themselves the true masters of the Wyld. The Lunar Exalted are heroes, however, and rarely the sorts to back down before the odd raksha. The Fair Folk treat life as a story; the Lunars are prepared to teach the raksha exactly who are the protagonists and who are the recurring villains.

The Lunars also know that most raksha would like to march into Creation with their hobgoblin hordes and unravel the world from the edges in, until nothing was left. This makes the raksha the Lunars' indisputable enemies, who must be stopped. Even those raksha who occasionally seem harmless, or even helpful, are in some way inimical to Creation's continued existence.

The Wyld holds many other potent and dangerous creatures. Some of these are behemoths, created by the Primordials before they were dethroned, or born later from Chaos itself. Other things bear no title or category. These unique and powerful creatures range from monsters that could trample cities, to the songbird-maiden Callibia whose voice enslaves all who hear it. Some of these entities can become acquaintances or resources, but they are too dangerous to become allies—at least, not for long.

Lunar Exalted know all of the above dangers very well. Mentors among the Silver Pact have collected lore of the Wyld and passed it on for nearly 15 centuries, and the threats to Luna's Children and to Creation as a whole are foremost of the things remembered. For this reason, some Lunars give thanks for their exile to the world's rim. Living here makes them strong, unlike their thinly remembered lives in the Old Realm.

The flexibility of the Wyld's landscape actually presents opportunities with the threats. Through a combination of their own Charms and temporary treaties with their local raksha, some Lunar Exalted take the time to create and overcome various challenges. Within the malleable Wyld, a Lunar can fight ersatz Deathlords marching out of shadowlands or Dragon-Blooded on the shore of the Blessed Isle itself. Realities of these situations are often



Wyld

beyond the Lunars—or too suicidally dangerous to attempt for real—but Fair Folk shapings can take into account information that the raksha themselves don't know.

Through this method, the Lunars have managed to accrue incredible amounts of experience without ranging far from their territories. When Luna's Chosen must fight these adversaries for real, (and they know such days must come, and soon), they already have a body of effective tactics and training. This doesn't mean the Lunars aren't in danger from their war games—raksha shapings can kill, and some raksha are playful or malicious enough to let an undefeated horde of walking dead march on through the Wyld until they met their fates. In some respects, facing an adventure constructed by an elder or by oneself can be every bit as harrowing as doing the real thing.

SAFE REDOUBTS

Living on the edge of the Wyld exposes the Lunars to some enemies but protects them from others. Their moonsilver tattoos give them a perfect defense against the mutations and shaping effects that are the Wyld's primary danger. Though the maddening scenes and visions can still warp a Lunar's mind, they are practiced

at maintaining their sanities. Thus protected from the distortions of the Wyld, the Lunar Exalted enjoy relative freedom in the chaos outside Creation.

So, when powerful forces such as a Wyld Hunt or Realm legion threaten a Lunar on his own territory, the Child of Luna can fall back into the Bordermarches. For many Lunars, running an opponent through the Wyld is like leading the authorities through the back alleys where he grew up. Because the Lunar knows the dangers, he is safe; his foes lose their way, stumble into danger, become frightened and otherwise operate at a disadvantage. A pursuer must choose between facing unknowable threats or losing the quarry altogether.

The most dedicated enemies, from fanatical Immaculate monks to unswerving assassins from Malfeas, pursue Lunars even into the Deep Bordermarches. Against these enemies, the Lunars may lead the hunt into the Middlemarches, or even the Deep Wyld. Neither offers as much safety for the Lunar Exalted as the Bordermarches do, but the Lunars' pursuers still face immeasurably more risk than their Lunar prey.

On the other hand, the Fair Folk and other enemies originate from the Wyld itself; they don't fear its dangers,



they *are* the dangers. Against such enemies, the Lunar uses the opposite tactic. Luring the raksha out into the Bordermarches (where Fair Folk are weaker) or even into Creation proper (where Fair Folk are most constrained) allows the Lunars to make the most of their Charms and powers while denying the raksha their unique talents. The same tactics expose heavily mutated creatures to a dearth of the Wyld energies they need to live; prolonging the hunt weakens such beasts and may eventually kill them.

Some enemies can match the Lunars step for step wherever they go. Solar Exalted can learn Charms to become proof enough against the chaotic energies, and other Lunar Exalted—unsurprisingly—are just as dangerous in the Wyld as in Creation. Faced with such pursuers, a Lunar must turn and fight or press on and use his familiarity with his territory and the nearby Wyld to his greatest advantage. Just because neither the Lunar nor his enemies can be shaped directly by the Wyld doesn't mean that a scratch in the Poison Woods is not still deadly. A Lunar who knows his turf can lead any foe into serious danger.

Sometimes, a Lunar with contacts in the Wyld can arrange for shelter from outside forces. Most raksha could easily construct locations that are safe from other Creation-born entities but are designed to accept the Lunar. For instance, a Lunar might obtain an enormous, sword-laden willow that cuts to ribbons anyone who approaches except the Lunar herself. Of course, treating with such creatures is very risky, for who knows when the refuge might turn on the Lunar? Some Lunars develop the ability to create such places on their own. Lunar-shaped sanctuaries are more dependable than any bargained from the Fair Folk, but they are more easily torn to shreds by the shaping powers of raksha in the Wyld.

THE ADVANTAGE OF CONTROL

A further advantage of operating between Creation and the Wyld is the power to limit access between them. The Lunars cannot control the borders completely—the border is simply too large to patrol it all. But they watch the parts within their territories and use manipulable societies to guard when and where they cannot. By fomenting suspicion or peculiar taboos in cultures along Creation's rim, a Lunar can ensure that most adventurers from Creation leave a commotion in their wake.

Not every Lunar attempts such a massive and time-consuming program of border control. Elders of the Silver Pact are among the most likely to try sealing off their sections of the Wyld. Their personal power and centuries of accumulated resources also make them the most likely

to pull it off. The Sidereal Exalted often influence their calculations: Lunar elders know that if the Sidereals could find the prizes buried in the Wyld's chaos, they would use them against the Pact or its goals. Histories and artifacts thought lost could allow a Sidereal's schemes to bear fruit instead of a Lunar's, and for that reason some of Luna's Chosen guard the border well.

Some Lunars also remember the value of impossible reagents from the Wyld. The loss of the Solar Exalted makes it much harder to obtain a cocoon's betrothal or moonsilver dreams, but there are ways. Even a Dragon-Blood could obtain such treasures, if he could somehow convince the Fair Folk to make them for him. Lunars stand against this for several reasons. They hate the idea of the usurpers and betrayers striving for what they destroyed. Some Lunars do not believe that the cultures of Creation are ready to reclaim such power. Other Lunars want to keep the Realm as weak as possible before their impending invasion. They can't prevent the Dragon-Blooded from obtaining Wyld-treasures and occult reagents so long as the Guild maintains its trade with barbarians and the Fair Folk, but at least they can reduce the commerce.

Restricting access to the Wyld's resources also presents opportunities for payment or bribery. More than a few Lunars across the Age have empowered their client societies with choice reagents. Some even go so far as to barter these valuable ingredients with other Exalted for equally (or more) valuable services. Even Sidereals have suffered debts to the Silver Pact for this very reason... debts repaid with cover-ups of Lunar activities, good or bad luck for client tribes, reassignment of hostile gods and other services that would provoke audits and inquiries in the Bureau of Destiny if they became known.

PROBLEMS OF SCALE

Because the edges of Creation form a wide, ragged band around the Threshold, Lunar Exalted live far from one another. Packs may run together in single, large territories, but a Lunar often lives thousands of miles from her nearest neighbor. Such distances make it difficult to organize meetings, even when the Lunar calling it accepts that less than half the Silver Pact will show. Spells such as Infallible Messenger provide one way to call a group together. Celestial Circle sorcerers (such as Raksi) have a spell that can send messages to large groups at a single time, and other Lunars summon demons or elementals to carry the word for them. Still, not every (or even most) Lunars know sorcery.

The Wyld provides other possibilities. Raksha are strange creatures, and only their imaginations and the forces of their wills limit their powers. With proper incen-



tive, a raksha could potentially transmit a message from one Lunar to all other Lunar Exalted—though it might not reach those inside Creation. Furthermore, it takes time for the Lunars to gather for a meeting. Charms that allow a Lunar to travel quickly through the Wyld are not uncommon, potentially enabling them to reach their destinations faster by going *around* Creation than they would by going *through* it. If they lived farther from the border while still avoiding the Realm’s influence, meeting with other Lunars would become yet more difficult.

DUTY OF THE EXILES

When the Lunar Exalted originally fled to the edge of Creation, they needed to reach safety and recover their strengths. Since then, the Lunars began building a world that might displace the Shogunate—and then the Contagion hit, along with the Balorian Crusade. Even diminished and weakened as the Lunars were, they fortified the boundaries of Creation as best they could.

The Lunars don’t care that the Scarlet Empress saved the world. Most Lunars have never forgiven the Dragon-Blooded for their treachery in usurping Creation’s rule and their incompetence in letting the Fair Folk assault Creation. The Silver Pact considers itself the only group that can defend Creation against the constant Wyld threat that began during the Great Contagion. (For a much more detailed discussion on the history of the Lunar Exalted, please refer to **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars**.)

That danger still exists. The Lunar Exalted still guard against the Fair Folk. Though few raksha *prefer* to live in the boring and mundane Bordermarches (or, gasp, in Creation itself) many Fair Folk consider it a duty of their own to weaken Creation and introduce more of the Wyld. As Fair Folk move inward from the Middlemarches toward Creation, the Lunars go forth to meet them as they did during the Great Contagion.

Neither side has vast armies. In the Balorian Crusade, waves of hobgoblins met with disorganized throngs of soldiers and civilians; now single raksha steal toward the rigid lands and feed them unstable Essence, accompanied only by their personal servants and Wyld-creations. Facing them are Lunars, stepping forward alone or with their packs and barbarian followers to siphon out the destabilizing Essence and eventually destroy or rout the Fair Folk.

The conflict is not always so direct as that. Lunars use every tool at their disposal to interdict raksha interference. Easiest and most ready are the people who live in or near the Wyld. Lunars try to plant societies

in tainted lands or Bordermarches. Just having people living on the land and watching it gradually quells the Wyld. Even people who assimilate to the Wyld have this effect: the land becomes a stage on which they play out their scripted roles, and their inability to change keeps the local Wyld from altering too drastically.

Lunars also fortify cultures with customs and mind-sets that help them resist the Fair Folks’ threats and wiles. For instance, the sort of paranoia the folk of Whitewall show toward the inhuman makes it more difficult for raksha to influence the people. Callous as it may seem, some Lunars also use natural, long-term conditioning to deaden the people’s imaginations and hopes, denying the Fair Folk sustenance.

When necessary, Lunars are not above inciting mutant or natural societies to war against the raksha. Most Lunars even prefer using mutant peoples, because their mutations make them more effective troops. Lunars also appreciate when a society’s common derangements make them more pliable to the Exalted or less susceptible to the Fair Folks’ influences; some of Luna’s Chosen actually find ways to encourage these mental mutations in the populations they cultivate, and lock them in through Wyld assimilation.

Another oft-used tactic is to sow dissension among the many and varied raksha nobles. As a melodramatic people, the Fair Folk often look for opportunities to play the part of the betrayer, betrayed or the arch-nemesis. Lunars usually leave this sort of delicate manipulation to the most proficient among them; if not teased in just the right way, some raksha nobles are just as likely to choose the part of the ignorant victim over the role of the enraged victim.

Finally, the Lunar Exalted who claim territories in the Middlemarches help when they can. These Lunars (usually at least a century old) use their familiarity with the Wyld, the Fair Folk and their territory to sabotage the raksha’s efforts closer to Creation. Sometimes this is a simple matter of upsetting things “at home.” The Fair Folk have a strong need to maintain their places within their queerly fluid structures of nobility, and disrupting that structure can send a troublesome raksha hurrying back to its native court, lest it be cut from the ongoing stories or reduced to a bit-player. Other Lunars make an effort to simply destroy or sabotage the raksha’s freeholds, reducing their supply of Essence. Attacking the Guild’s slave caravans prevents the Fair Folk from easily acquiring the dreams that sustain them and that they spin into gossamer treasures—quite apart from the moral satisfaction gained.

Exalted



Other tactics grow increasingly topical. Examples include distracting one particularly aesthetic raksha with an out-of-place rosebud or disturbing another's hobgoblin eugenics program. (The latter is difficult, since they are little more than creations of their lord's imagination, but a raksha could divorce itself from the process in order to be "surprised.")

No matter how many raksha the Lunars distract, diminish or outright destroy, there are always more ready to take up the task of undermining Creation. Even when the Children of Luna raid the Wyld to reduce the population, more Fair Folk eventually spring from the deeper chaos of the Wyld. It seems almost like a losing battle, especially since the eldest Lunars remember the tools they possessed before the Contagion for this very purpose.

Suggestions that the battle is futile rarely meet with much agreement. It is the nature of heroes, survivors and protectors—all of which Lunars are, or often consider themselves—to defy the odds. Lunars who study the nature of Exaltations point out that similar to the raksha, every Lunar who falls will eventually be replaced. And some Lunars believe that despite all appearances, a final solution exists. They have labored, some for decades and some for centuries or more, to recreate the jade obelisks and reality engines of the Old Realm. A few Lunars even hope to develop a spell or artifact that prevents the Wyld from developing the sort of consciousness that becomes one of the Fair Folk. The Vacuity Blossom, as some within this small cabal call themselves, speak occasionally of "a seed," but they are careful to let nothing else of import drop, lest they forewarn the enemy.

Since news of the Scarlet Empress' apparent abdication, the Lunar Exalted have seen a redoubling of raksha insinuating themselves into the skin of the world. They know another great battle looms, and vow that this time, the Ones Beyond will not take them by surprise.

DEEPER AND DEEPER

Lunar Exalted don't always live on the edge of the Wyld. Some Lunars move inward, toward Creation and the seats of power and away from the unraveling edges; others move outward, farther from the places where reality makes sense. These tend to be elder Lunar Exalted, in part because they can better endure the Wyld for long periods. Such pioneers head outward for different reasons.

One Lunar might fear assault from the Realm and so moves his base of operations into the Middlemarches. Or a Lunar stares at the mostly normal constellations of the Bordermarches, thinks of the Sidereals and decides to move farther out to dim his star to astrologers. Another

Lunar just needs some quiet time to think, so she finds a place in the Wyld where she won't be bothered.

Lunars who venture farther from Creation often engage in the same activities as their colleagues on the edge. They make preparations, build up resources and launch their own attempts at fixing the world, all in their own ways. The risks of living deeper in the Wyld are greater than living within Creation, but some Lunars think the potential rewards are equally large.

The Bordermarches and even the Middlemarches hold some remarkably healthy and strong societies that Lunar Exalted have watched or guided for decades, if not centuries. Where the Middlemarches fade into the Deep Wyld, there are still hearts of stability that only someone who lived there for years could find. Treasures lost since the Contagion, since the Usurpation and even wonders never discovered exist in the farthest reaches of the Wyld, and dedicated Lunars mean to find them.

Admittedly, not every Child of Luna who leaves Creation for the Wyld is an explorer or a careful warrior. Some really do retreat from the demands of their heroic calling. A Lunar might seek a place of refuge in the Wyld where she could hibernate as some of her peers did from the First Age to the modern day, and another could just want to escape himself. It is the unfortunate truth that some Lunars still succumb to chimerism, even after they have been tattooed, simply by losing the mental restraint to keep unlimited shapechanging in check.

A few Lunars enter the Wyld to study their ancient enemies, the Fair Folk. Through stealthy observation or pacts and bargains made, Lunars can watch raksha craft glamours and shape the Wyld. Over the centuries, the Lunars have devised a few Wyld-shaping Charms themselves. They can also acquire artifacts with powers similar to those of the raksha themselves. Thus do Creation's stewards gain advantages the Fair Folk would rather keep for themselves. This is not always a blessing. Lunar Exalted who study raksha methods occasionally find their natures shifting, becoming less human and more alien. Perhaps the raksha know something their frequent enemies and occasional allies do not.

At least one Lunar Exalt keeps to herself in the Wyld as part of a plan for Creation. By remaining aloof and separate after becoming somewhat renowned, her reputation grows by itself. People come to remember her, or to think of her, as greater than she ever was, and she plans to soon use this to her advantage. Another Lunar has examined the Wyld for more than 100 years, and he now believes he could banish it from Creation if he had to. His plan is to open the floodgates and let the Wyld wash over the world, wiping the slate clean before his

unique techniques force the chaotic energies back to the edges. Even other Lunars consider him a madman.

SPIRITS IN THE WYLD

Though casual savants or junior Immaculates might think that spirits would welcome a place where physical matter was fluid and physical definitions broke down, this is not the case. The Wyld can mutate spirits as easily as mortals. What's more, in a place where concepts shatter, shift and recombine, spirits who define themselves through a concept within Creation find themselves warped or weakened by the changes to their basic nature. What happens to a river-spirit in an environment where rivers can flow backwards, or be made of custard? How can a bird-spirit sustain her essential self when birds can be made of leaves, or fire, or fall into dust when they are touched?

Spirits in the Wyld risk losing their identity, even more so than humans. To endure, they need human worship to remind them who they are, or they need some sort of magical protection. Otherwise, they grow steadily more insane and, if they do not leave the Wyld, break down entirely. Spirits do not gain poxes, afflictions or blights, but they do gain derangements (see pp. 148–150), and may

also suffer unconscious physical alterations that match their madness. A totally lunatic spirit will not last long in the Wyld, but will swiftly be devoured by local predators, raksha, other mad gods or stranger things.

Spirits who find steady worship by a stable mortal population might retain their original nature and integrity, reinforced by regular supplies of Essence and the belief of their faithful. However, one tribe living in the Wyld can only support a few godlings with their belief; usually there is no room for a full pantheon or a spirit court, only for a single or a few protective spirits. This can result in savage turf wars over worshippers, as newly arrived spirits who have been banished into the Wyld, or swallowed up by a sudden change in borders, desperately try to keep their worshippers or attract new ones before they lose too much of themselves.

On the other hand, a tribe's beliefs can change a spirit's aspects and identity. An ancestral stag-spirit that protected hunters may find itself becoming a vengeful half-man, half-stag warder of boundaries whose antlers drip with blood. The mistress of a river now polluted with Wyld substances might go mad, invent new rites and demand senseless new offerings after every full moon. A physician-god clad in rainbows becomes a fierce guardian





of the tribe's purity who commands them to slay anyone who doesn't look like themselves.

Fortunate spirits can hide in protected areas—freeholds, zones of stability, past Solar sanctuaries and so on. They gain some degree of shelter from the chaos outside. The protected zone may even support a group of worshippers to provide the spirit with Essence. This is the best possible solution for a spirit caught in the Wyld, but they remain cut off from the world outside, from other elementals or spirits, from their superiors in spirit courts and from Yu-Shan (if they had the power and authority to travel there). Trapped spirits often go insane from isolation, and the mortals who share their sanctuary become fodder for their whims as toys, pawns, minions or slaves.

Spirits can also cannibalize other spirits to survive. This can result in gatherings of spirits where the stronger ones devour the weaker ones, and all attempt to lure in new victims to serve as new prey. Huddled together in some sort of refuge, or subsisting on a few pitiful worshippers, these spirits become no better than Fair Folk, living from day to day and ruled by their hunger. Visiting Exalted may become new prey, or may provide a chance for some of the spirits to escape. If Exalted can escort the spirits to the borders of Creation, or stabilize their domain, then they give these spirits a chance to return to a saner existence. (Assuming that the spirits want to, by then....)

For elementals, there is no gap between Creation and the elemental poles. An elemental can journey from the edge of Creation to its elemental pole without passing through the Wyld, following the uncorrupted threads of its own substance. While elementals could lead other beings along the same path, the passengers would need to transform their own substance into dematerialized, elemental Essence—the same pure substance they would need to survive at that pole. The ways that elementals travel are not safe for humans.

SPIRITS ON THE BORDERS

Those spirits who live on the border of Creation must live with the constant fear of the Wyld and of their own unmaking. Such spirits are often terrestrial gods with very limited domains that lie beside the Bordermarches, and who cannot shift their territory or expand it into safer parts of Creation. Stronger gods who cover actual boundaries or concepts of boundaries on a large scale, may have several Charms that hold back the Wyld, while small terrestrial gods may only know one or two such Charms.

In any event, such gods and elementals take a keen interest in Exalts or other powerful beings who can force back the Wyld or dispose of local Wyld raiders. An Exalt can reasonably presume that any petty spirit dwelling on

Creation's rim will appreciate any such help. However, visitors should take care: some old spirits resent the Exalted whom the spirits think "betrayed" them, by failing to defend Creation's borders during the Fair Folk invasion. Such spirits might not attack openly, but they can tell lies to send Exalted into danger, offer protective Charms that fail or attempt other petty, vicious revenge.

OTHERS

While mortals, Fair Folk, spirits and the Lunar Exalted form the chief inhabitants of the Wyld (in power, if not in numbers), many other intelligences also enter the Wyld or call it home.

DRAGON-BLOODED

Terrestrial Exalted may have greater resistance to Wyld energies than mortals, but not by much. Therefore, Dragon-Blooded either master appropriate Charms before venturing out of Creation or succumb to mutation and derangement almost as quickly as mortals do. Even misshapen and insane Dragon-Blooded have better survival rates than their unExalted stock, though, so they have the potential to form strong, if temporary, societies in the Wyld.

Of all the Exalted, the Children of the Dragons have the fewest reasons to seek out the Wyld. They are not reviled across Creation as Anathema, for a start, and most of them could easily gain positions of power in whatever culture they chose. Even the least self-possessed Terrestrial can turn to the Realm for support, though the Dynastic Houses will not respect him. Because the Dragon-Blooded can usually fulfill their desires within Creation, their reasons for leaving it altogether are consistently more *personal*.

Personal reasons are not limited to individuals. Groups of Terrestrials who all adhere to a personal code—which may conflict strongly with the Immaculate Philosophy or even the basic practices of decency—find reasons to abdicate Creation for the Wyld. Either way, these strong beliefs provide a path of least resistance for their minds to follow while the Wyld drives them mad. Their emotions and thoughts shape the Wyld around them and help determine where they go, leading the Dragon-Blooded to locations or scenes that resonate more deeply with them and more easily drive them mad.

Dragon-Blooded societies within the Wyld are rare and, usually, short-lived. Wyld mutant tribes greatly outnumber mutant Dragon-Blooded tribes, simply because there are more mortals to mutate. Once a society forms and settles down, it is only a matter of time before they begin to breed and, after a decade or two of births, include more mortals than Exalted. A few communities retain a small



cadre of Dragon-Blooded leading a growing population of mortals, but eventually that rule falls apart. Progenitors die off, and these Terrestrial offshoot groups never manage the sort of breeding programs that the Realm and Lookshy use to keep their Exalted populations up. (If they try, inbreeding puts a stop to it within three generations.) Eventually, it becomes a tribe of funny-looking mortals.

It doesn't help that some Lunar Exalted, who frequent the same areas of the Wyld, hold a grudge against the Dragon-Blooded. The Wyld Hunt still competes with the Silver Pact to reach Exalting Lunars first, and every Lunar alive knows what the Realm does with any Lunar it catches. Elder Lunars make terrifying foes, and some of them remember the horrors of the Usurpation personally.

A few members of the Silver Pact argue that Dragon-Blooded who seek to make their own societies should be left to do so. They believe the Terrestrials may come up with something innovative and useful, or they just remember the sheer necessity of the Usurpation and feel a need to balance out the rage their brethren feel.

The Children of Luna don't always ignore Dragon-Blooded in the Wyld or lash out at them in rage. A few groups of Terrestrials do not believe the Lunars are Anathema. Some of them do not know the Immaculate Philosophy at all. With this ancient enmity out of the picture, Lunar Exalted and small families of Dragon-Blooded occasionally join each other for their mutual benefit. By virtue of their greater individual prowess, Lunars often become the most valued members of such communities, if not the straight-out leaders.

Older Lunars look upon these relationships with a taste for the irony of it all. Unusual and ironic or not, these groups are often very effective in the effort against the Wyld or other threats, reminding some Lunars (of the few who actually know) that humans were originally Exalted to fight as a team.

SIDEREAL EXALTED

The Sidereal Exalted do not like visiting the Wyld. Many of their Charms and abilities weaken or fail outside Creation, making the Sidereals less capable when they visit. The Wyld's energies also degrade the Sidereals' connection to Yu-Shan and the Loom of Fate. Although they can usually resist the Wyld's effects, trips beyond Creation's rim still make them profoundly uncomfortable.

Occasionally, however, the Chosen of the Maidens simply must enter the Wyld. Their unsurpassed supernatural martial arts still function there, making them competent (or terrifying) opponents even separated from Creation and the Loom of Fate. Sidereal Exalted who wield influence over the Realm (or other Dragon-Blooded)

usually enter the Wyld with a squad of hand-picked Terrestrial soldiers. So armed, the Sidereal may rely more on their powers than on her own diminished abilities.

Fair Folk villains may retreat into the Wyld after causing great harm in Creation (and intending such harm again); well-trained operatives go in after the enemy to surprise the raksha and deny them any opportunity to recover.

Daring Sidereal investigators also try to learn the plans of their Lunar rivals. The Sidereals know that Luna's Chosen have a millennial plan called the Thousand Streams River—apparently a plan to raise barbarian hordes and nations to encircle the Realm and, the Sidereals fear, destroy it. Every trail of evidence, however, leads into the Wyld—so if Fate's Chosen wish to learn operational details of this challenge to their power, they must venture where Fate has no sway.

ASTROLOGY IN THE WYLD

While the Sidereals do not like to mention it even among themselves, the power of their astrology weakens outside Creation. The stars and constellations are part of reality; they do not control what lies outside it.

The following penalties apply to Sidereal astrology when used against targets in the Wyld.

Target is in the Bordermarches: Increase difficulty of attempt by 1/2 again.

Target is in the Middlemarches: Increase difficulty of attempt by 3/4 again.

Target is in the Deep Wyld or Pure Chaos: Impossible to use Sidereal astrology against them.

At the end of the First Age, some of the remaining Solars and Lunars chose to flee into the Wyld in order to avoid the wrath of the Sidereals. Many of those Lunars and Solars, in turn, perished in the Wyld, but held it a better fate than the astrological curses that only the Sidereals can wield.

SOLAR EXALTED

The Solar Exalted do not have any real history with the Wyld, at least not in the Second Age. Now returning in great numbers, the Lawgivers have the opportunity to begin such a history—if they so choose.

Most Solar Exalted have significantly more interest in Creation than they do in the Bordermarches and Deeper Wyld, so Solars who visit there usually go with specific goals in mind. One might seek a lost city, another an ancient Lunar or one of the impossible reagents for which they were irreplaceable in the First Age. A Solar might seek a previous incarnation's tomb.

Exalted



The Chosen of the Sun rarely settle in the Wyld. They are less naturally equipped to handle the Wyld than they are the dangers of Creation, and the various enemies beyond Creation's rim can be harder to avoid. With all the many tasks awaiting them in Creation—especially the ongoing threat from the Realm—Solars tend to focus their efforts inward rather than outward.

Of course, the Solars might not have a choice. What might be the absolute greatest threat to Creation has waited and watched from outside since the beginning of time. Some of the Solar Exalted would be a great advantage in the Lunars' eternal fight against the Wyld. Certain Lunars might be suspicious or proud and refuse their assistance, but as long as the Solars offered their aid in earnest many Lunars would happily accept it.

GHOSTS

In the Age of Sorrows, ghosts walk the Underworld. They are restless souls, doomed to wander the land of their memories until they find peace with themselves and their station—or until something completely dissipates their Essence. In the meantime, they find careers in the Underworld's necropoli or seek out living descendants in hopes of gaining worship.

But not all dead spirits accept existence in the bleak Underworld. The few who desire more must look outside Creation—where even the richest wines taste like unremarkable memories to a ghostly tongue—toward the Wyld.

Something about the Wyld entices wayward ghosts. The dead only know sensations and emotions that they felt in life, and then only through faded memories. By searching the Wyld, a ghost can hope to find a sensation so intense that it rejuvenates her memories or overwhelms her with an entirely new experience. Normally, it is impossible for a ghost to experience something new, but the Wyld has always denied impossibility.

Ghosts may seek the Wyld because of its danger. Few ghosts want to die (again), but some of them miss the *threat* of death. Not much can actually kill ghosts and make them stay down. The Exalted, Deathlords and puissant other ghosts, demons or gods fit the bill, but they aren't everywhere. But the Wyld abounds in unpredictable and uncatalogued dangers. A certain seed might have the power to destroy a ghost forever when consumed, or the venom of a Northern winter sparrow might kill the already dead. Who knows? A genuine threat of permanent death provides a certain excitement that some ghosts crave.

The Fair Folk hold little terror for ghosts. Ghostly emotions and desires are stretched too thin, after serving

for years after death, to give the raksha any pleasure or sustenance, so the Fair Folk rarely seek them out. Only when Fair Folk desire a ghost for some special purpose—a plot within Creation or the Underworld or a new kind of plaything—do they look for spirits of the dead. A raksha's attention can be dangerous for a ghost, but rarely deadly.

But ghosts cannot prepare themselves for the scenes and events they encounter in the Wyld. The wonders and terrors of the Wyld can ensnare and addict the dead as easily as the living. The addicted ghosts want to stay within the Wyld to experience what it has to offer, no matter that their experiences are but faded memories of their past lives. Some ghosts who enter the Wyld refuse to leave again. Unless concerned companions—perhaps living descendants, ghosts of ancestors or friends made in the Underworld—come to rescue the ghosts from the enchanting terrors that exist outside of Creation, some aspect of the Wyld eventually ends them forever.

Enterprising ghosts may find ways to exist in the Wyld. Raksha patrons are ideal because of their command over the Wyld and their penchant for creating new and interesting stories. One of the Fair Folk might take on a ghost—or an entire troupe of them. The raksha remakes himself in the shape of a lord of the dead and gives the ghosts roles that he wants them to play: the ghost who left behind a lover whom she seeks to regain, another whose only purpose now is to see the honor of his office restored and so forth. The stories of the dead also offer many entertaining roles for raksha, from the oppressive Deathlord to the learned and compassionate necromancer who desires to help the ghosts. Renegade deathknight is currently a fashionable role to play among raksha “in the know.”

Some places in the Wyld offer natural abodes for ghosts. shadowlands occasionally coexist with the Wyld, especially in the North where both are prevalent. These locations represent a balance of the freedom a ghost may achieve by coming to the Wyld and the prison of humdrum afterlife in the Underworld. Being able to recover Essence is a great boon that ghosts usually lose when they flee to the Wyld.

Deathlords and other ghost-slavers occasionally make forays into these “Wyld Shadows.” They hope to harvest ghost populations that have little or no leverage in the Underworld's politics, ensuring that no one shall grow angry on the ghosts' behalf.

DEMONS

The spawn of the Yozis occasionally escape from the foulness of Malfeas into the burningly clean and bright



world of Creation and the Unconquered Sun. Sorcerers or thaumaturges summon most of these, but a few demons manage to exploit other cracks in their prison-world. Brief doorways from their calamitous realm may open through the unjoyous ring of a dropped temple bell, the vile ecstasy of a forced deflowering or other crimes against the righteous or divine. However these demons arrive, some demons try to stay in Creation. Perhaps they seed freedom, though from what is hard to know. Others simply cannot get the pleasure they want in Malfeas and remain to indulge their natures.

Once in Creation, demons go to the Wyld for different reasons. Safety is one possibility: Creation holds enough Dragon-Blooded, gods and God-Blooded to endanger even a dematerialized demon. Eventually, they seek out safer ground and think the Wyld is someplace they can rest.

A demon can also find relief from the constant irritation of Creation's nature. Demons may seek the Wyld in an effort to feel more at home, without actually returning to that terrifying place. The ever-accommodating Wyld can mimic Malfeas' interior or the desert Cecelyne with remarkable accuracy. Occasionally, demons that relax in these imitations find themselves actually back in Malfeas, once more at the whim of the Yozis and the demon princes.

Only a few Second and Third Circle demons have the proper nature to shape the Wyld to their whim, so demons need the help of the Fair Folk to construct a place of comfort for themselves. The raksha rarely work without price, however, and so the demons find themselves bound to yet another master. Demons end up fighting Lunar Exalted on the raksha's behalf, running errands across Creation, serving as ravagers or even playing out one of a million roles within the raksha's court. Demons who can't stand their servitude eventually leave and do without a comfortable refuge... and risk a worse fate than slavery.

Demons are not immune to the mutating energies of the Wyld, just as ghosts aren't. Mutations look mostly appropriate to the demon's nature, but never entirely. Erymanthoi wings might be bloody, furred and have sharp bone spurs; depending on what aspect of the Wyld endowed them upon the blood-ape, they could also display bat leather, dragon scales or bloody-furred strix feathers.

First Circle demons that suffer mutations use them, if appropriate, but rarely care as long as they can still fulfill their natures. Mutant erymanthoi still want to lap up blood and crush bones in their claws, whether their new frog tongues make it easier or not. Some mutations force

a demon to become something different. An erymanthus with the *diet* mutation can no longer consume blood—it must reverse the mutation, become something different from what it was or die. The latter two options seem very similar for creatures such as demons.

First Circle demons with changed natures would be torn apart by their brethren and spawners should they ever return to Malfeas—yet another reason why demons who flee to the Wyld rarely try to go home. Demons who remain long enough in the Wyld also inevitably develop derangements. For demons, a derangement is not a mental quirk but a direct alteration to the creature's nature: a neomah endowed with an obsession for collecting roses is no longer devoted to creating her flesh-creatures and therefore is no longer truly a neomah. Instead, she may create rose-amalgams or change in an even more fundamental way.

Any Second Circle demon has a greater ego than even the proudest First Circle demon—the least creatures of Malfeas know instinctively that they exist as less than motes in the Yozis' eyes. With greater connection both to itself and its betters, a Second Circle demon recognizes that a mutation may be useful and that it is not—generally—disposable. Many understand that the Wyld changes their natures as it changes their forms; knowing that their Third Circle demons prefer them as they are, Second Circle demons strive to avoid such alterations.

A Second Circle demon who receives a mutation (or worse, a derangement) generally seeks to reverse it through power-questing or bargaining with the raksha. Some demons do consider the change for the better and return to Malfeas without fear. Such courage is not always justified.

Something about the Fair Folk resonates with demonkind. They both have specific natures and answer calls that cannot be denied. Relationships between demons and raksha can deepen over time. Their Essences intertwine. Eventually, the Wyld and the raksha shape the demon into something else. The demon loses its connection with Malfeas and the greater demon that spawned or created it; it becomes a part of the Wyld and of the raksha that reshaped it.

Second Circle demons rarely acquire completely new natures in this fashion. They are more intimately connected with their superiors and more the equal of a raksha noble (though not in its own domain). When such assimilation or transformation *does* happen, a demon of the Third Circle—or even the progenitor Yozi—takes notice at the loss. First Circle demons are much more ignorable disappearances on the demons' parts.



BEHEMOTHS

“Behemoth” is a broad category of creature. Creatures of Primordial construction, some of which embody certain mortal concepts and others of which are simply huge and monstrous, are behemoths. Fair Folk living weapons, wrought to make an artistic statement while devastating opponents in shaping combat, are also termed behemoths—they are also huge and monstrous or thematically potent. Some behemoths spontaneously appear from the Wyld and, with similar features as those previous entities, are termed behemoths.

These powerful creatures range in intelligence from non-sentient to brilliant within their bailiwick. Their powers are equally unpredictable, as are their reactions to and interactions with humankind. Only Fair Folk weapon-behemoths are at all predictable as a class, and that is only to do as their raksha lords direct them.

Whatever their origins, the Wyld has no power over behemoths. Either it spawned them, or their Primordial creators infused them with power and selfhood sufficient to resist anything less than Pure Chaos.

NATIVES

Not every sentient creature found in the Wyld came from somewhere else. Some creatures defy any definition beyond “native to the Wyld.” The flame gryphons of the

South, the children of the wind in the North and the inhabitants of Skyport in the West are all prime examples of entities who originated nowhere but the chaos of the Wyld. Similar to behemoths, natives of the Wyld are hard to define because of their extreme diversity. Creatures of this sort seldom come nearer to Creation than the Middlemarches.

Natives are most notably different from behemoths and other unique monsters in that natives comprise societies. Even when outsiders do not perceive such groupings, natives of the Wyld usually interact with each other in ways that make them a culture instead of individual “monsters.” Flame gryphons protect themselves and their nests from exploitation, children of the wind create their tunnels for unknown reasons and the people of Skyport accept merchants at their upside-down quays.

Most native creatures have standard methods of dealing with the rare visitors from creation, usually shunning the outsiders for the natives’ own safety. Other natives are prepared to deal with visitors. Wyld societies that Creation-born explorers often seek can be the most averse to outside influence—they usually have something that the Exalted (or other daring explorers) consider valuable and go to great (and offensive) lengths to collect. Flame gryphons are one example of such a society that justifiably resists any contact with the Creation-born.

FULL MOON SHINES IN A SKY OF DIAMONDS.



FROZEN FOG SLITHERS ON BARREN EARTH.

WHAT THE FOG TOUCHES TURNS TO ICE.

ONLY THE HARDEST SOULS SURVIVE ITS CARESS.



AND WHAT SURVIVES THE FOG MUST FACE... THEM.



MINDLESS SAVAGES TWISTED BY THE WYLD.

THEY PREY ON ISOLATED VILLAGES LIKE THIS...

...AS IMMUNE TO THE FROZEN FOG AS THEY ARE TO CRIES FOR MERCY.



THIS VILLAGE WILL NOT BE THESE SAVAGES' PREY.



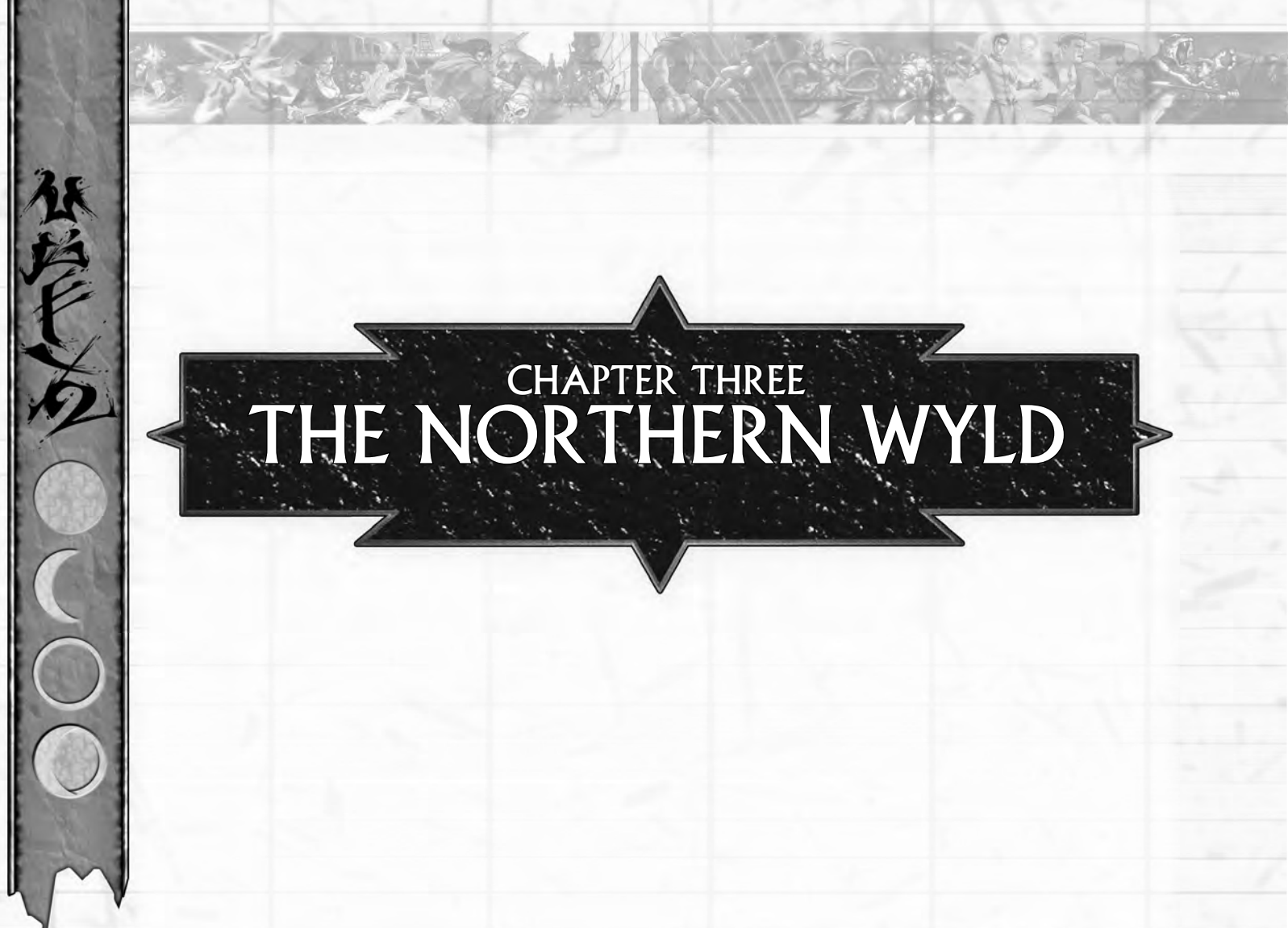
BUT THEY AREN'T CONQUERORS OR EVEN CANNIBALS. THEY JUST ENJOY THE SLAUGHTER.

BLOODLUST IS THEIR ONLY EMOTION.

THAT'S WHY I CAME WHEN I SAW THE FOG ON THE HORIZON.



INSTEAD, IT IS BAIT FOR MY TRAP.



CHAPTER THREE

THE NORTHERN WYLD

The Northern Wyld takes its form from the influences of Chaos and the Elemental Pole of Air. The predominant qualities are wind and cold and a tendency to float into the sky, from the islands that hover in midair to plants and animals made of living ice.

THE NORTHERN EDGE OF CREATION

The actual borders of Creation lie north of the White Sea. Tainted lands and Wyld pockets, however, extend at least as far south as Whitewall. Wyld storms occasionally sweep in from the icy wastes of the Bordermarches and across the White Sea. Whirlwinds of chaos from the storms can taint areas ranging from several feet to several miles across, or curdle into actual pockets of the Wyld. These Wyld storms leave behind trees and animals frozen solid or transformed into pure ice—but only

into ordinary ice; living ice can only exist in the actual Wyld. Now and then, plants or rocks are changed into one of the rare forms of permanent ice. Most of these storms occur in the depths of winter, but can happen at any time. North of the White Sea, the land contains only the most desperate tribes of icewalker barbarians, the people of the Haslanti League, beastmen and the northern Wyld barbarians.

The power of the Wyld is not just limited to living things. After a Wyld storm, travelers may find words of some ancient language, or something that looks like writing but matches no known language, engraved on mountainsides and glaciers. Each of these strange glyphs can be as much as a foot or two high. Entire mountains, cliffs or hills near the Bordermarches are resculpted on a regular basis: each storm changes some feature of the landscape, as if millennia of wind erosion happened in

a single afternoon. While these alterations can take any form, the most common leave the landscape looking strangely fragile and stretched. Narrow, almost ethereal-looking natural bridges of ice or stone stretch between plateaus. These structures retain sufficient chaotic energies that the narrowest bridges can support an entire Guild caravan at once.

UNMELTING ICE

The Wyld produces two varieties of ice that never melt. One has a greenish tinge, while the other is tinted blue and glows. Green ice never melts and, regardless of the temperature, remains as cold as the coldest winter day of the far north. Blue ice remains only slightly below freezing; it glows brightly enough that a rod of blue ice provides as much light as an ordinary torch, and an egg-sized piece of blue ice inside a lantern gives as much light as the usual oil and wick. Both forms of ice are extremely rare and much in demand in countries further south. Prospectors regularly brave the Northern tainted lands in search of these rare wonders and on rare occasion head north to the Bordermarches.

FROZEN FOG

The whirlwinds of chaos that create the tainted lands also cause one of the most unusual dangers of northern winters: frozen fog. This threat extends from Gethamane to the Pole of Air itself. The fog contains only a hint of the Wyld's chaos and so cannot induce mutations or alter the landscape, but is nonetheless deadly and greatly feared. Great, billowing masses of this frigidly cold and oddly dry fog periodically descend upon the Northlands. A thin layer of ice soon covers anything that lacks protection from the cold. A bare hand exposed to frozen fog becomes frostbitten in less than a minute. Frozen fog becomes increasingly common the further North one travels, and some explorers say that endless banks of the white haze float beyond the eternally frozen mountains.

Frozen fog is almost opaque. Inside the fog, visibility rarely exceeds 20 feet, and sometimes is less than half that. The fog can descend upon a settlement in less than an hour. Wyld barbarians sometimes use it as cover for an attack. The barbarian raiders who follow the fog are obviously twisted by the Wyld, just as some of them are immune to all forms of cold.

Thick furs and other heavy clothing can protect a person from the bitter cold, but frozen fog offers other





perils, too. People are sometimes moved vast distances by the Wyld energies lingering in the fog. Now and then, an individual caught in one bank of frozen fog stumbles out of another fog bank dozens or hundreds of miles away from his previous location. Everyone who has survived such a translocation reports hearing a distant sound of bells while he was in the fog. Although the destinations seem random, everything in a given bank of fog seems to go to the same location.

Within a few dozens miles of the border of the Wyld, the frozen fog does not carry along only travelers and animals. Storms near the Bordermarches send huge banks of frozen fog advancing from the edge of the Wyld. These massive fogs can also move entire natural features. Although large features such as mountains and cities seem immune to such vagaries, hills, small groves of tress and even small villages can be surrounded by frozen fog and find themselves transported dozens of miles when the fog clears. Such locations are never actually transported into the Wyld, nor do they move more than a dozen miles from the border of the Wyld. Because of this shifting, Northern tainted lands are regarded as even more dangerous than those in other parts of Creation.

SURVIVING FROZEN FOG

Exposure to frozen fog inflicts environmental damage of 2L/minute, Trauma 5. What's more, armor and most Charms give no protection at all: only natural soak applies, or Charms that specifically protect against temperature extremes, such as Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit. The pox *Elemental Adaptation: Air* renders a creature immune to frozen fog.

Sufficiently warm, heavy clothing also protects against frozen fog, though a person must keep moving to avoid being encased in ice. The clothing necessary to protect against this damage adds one to the maneuver penalty and fatigue value of the character due to its bulk.

BARBARIANS

The far North is a hostile and sparsely occupied region. Its inhabitants include Wyld barbarians, beastmen, a few communities of the people of the air and the most desperate icewalker tribes.

THE ICEWALKERS

The barbarian tribes called icewalkers fear the Wyld as the source of both vast Wyld storms and the frozen fog. Tribes that face starvation may camp in tainted lands

for a few days or weeks at most. Their fiercest warriors, however, regularly hunt monsters and Wyld barbarians in the tainted lands. The warriors even venture into the Bordermarches to track down and destroy the most dangerous bands of Wyld barbarians and wolfmen. Icewalkers perform these missions into Chaos with ruthless efficiency. Their shamans call on powerful totem-gods called the Animal Masters for aid in tracking their foes and for enchantments and talismans against mutation.

The icewalker way of life is now in turmoil. A great leader has arisen among them: Yurgen Kaneko, the Bull of the North, Warlord of the Sun. Ever since Kaneko destroyed the Realm legions, tribe after tribe have sworn fealty to him. The small, scattered tribes are rapidly metamorphosing into a nomad empire. This does not please either the Animal Masters (who do not want the Unconquered Sun taking their worship) or the tribes' former patrons among the Lunar Exalted. Observant tribes among the other races view the nascent barbarian horde with greater alarm—not to mention the Fair Folk who used to prey on the icewalkers, while the icewalkers' neighbors of the Haslanti League wonder if their onetime allies might become dangerous rivals.

WYLD BARBARIANS

In the North, many Wyld barbarians grow thick white fur and their hereditary mutations usually include the pox *Elemental Adaptation: Air*. In addition, the poxes Large and Claws are common. Visitors to the far North often assume that huge, white-furred Northern Wyld mutants are bear beastmen; true polar bear beastmen are very rare.

A few mutants can find a lowly place in the cosmopolitan cities on the Inner Sea, but neither beastmen nor Wyld barbarians find welcome in the harsh lands further north. The icewalkers and their Haslanti allies loathe and fear both groups. Whitewall and Gethamane are only a little more tolerant. Although beastmen and mutants may not enter Whitewall, both groups can use the sacred traveler's road. Gethamane allows beastmen and Wyld mutants to enter if they arrive peacefully, in small numbers with weapons sheathed. However, none may stay longer than a week, and very few find any welcome.

The icewalkers make no treaties with any of the Wyld barbarian tribes, whom the icewalkers consider monstrous horrors. However, all the nomads have an unspoken agreement: icewalkers never settle in and rarely visit the tainted lands, and the Wyld barbarians rarely settle further into Creation than the tainted lands. Both groups cross



the vague boundary between the tainted lands and the rest of Creation regularly for raiding, but neither spends more than a few weeks in the other's territory.

The sparse settlement in the North means that a few Wyld tribes find homes further from the Wyld, and further from the icewalkers. The Varajtul tribes, for instance, live hundreds of miles from Creation's rim, but still show the mutations and cannibal ferocity they gained in the Wyld.

THE VARAJTUL

The largest and most feared group of Wyld barbarians in Creation's Northwest are called the Varajtul. Hardly anyone else knows their true name; the Varajtul do not talk to their food. Indeed, they speak only a language of their own, meant to imitate the howling and moaning of the winds. In their own tongue, they call themselves the Dream of Infinite Light.

Varajtul average eight feet tall, with bodies covered in white, gray or light blue fur. They have narrow, yellow or blue eyes and mouths full of fangs. Their only clothing consists of cloaks woven from human hair, whose designs record the deeds and vision-quests of their ancestors; the frigid winds do not bother them. Their blood, however, is human enough.

Most of the time, Varajtul hunt, fish and gather wild foods just as other Northern tribes. In battle, the Varajtul prefer spears with heads of bone or stone, but can use any human weapon. They often lay traps such as camouflaged pits, snow-filled trenches lined with spikes or nets triggered by trip lines. They value human meat for religious reasons as well as the taste. While Varajtul readily feed on their dead foes, they prefer to butcher captive warriors or shamans and roast them for a tribal feast.

Most important of all for the Varajtul, captives can be taken to a Wyld pocket and ceremonially dissected with a blade of unmelting ice and eaten alive. This thaumaturgical procedure of their shamans calls the Wyld energies into the spilled blood to produce visions of the victim's emotions, memories and desires—and, sometimes, a complete vision-quest performed in only one day. The Varajtul do not see themselves as savages: rather, they consider themselves the most spiritual folk of Creation. Only a few have spent enough time in Wyld pockets to assimilate. Most eat human flesh out of the sincere religious conviction that other tribes and races are no better than beasts.

BEASTMEN

Unlike the Wyld barbarians, the savage wolfmen, the mystical elkmen, the nocturnal owlmen and the other Northern beastmen settle where they choose.

The icewalkers regard beastmen as yet another breed of deadly creature.

The wolfmen are the most feared and most abundant Northern beastmen. Their hunting packs threaten travelers throughout the North. Some wolfman tribes also rule communities of brutalized human slaves, who become the feral creatures' dinner if they cannot provide other food. The coastal cities controlled by the Realm pay a bounty on wolfmen skins. Despite their notoriety, however, the wolfmen are not the only beastmen in the Northern Wyld.

ELKMEN

The elkmen are the most mysterious of the Northern beastmen. They are all natural Essence-users and have a reputation as potent magicians—not just thaumaturgy but true sorcery, as well as Charms bartered from spirits and stored within talismans. Elkmen breed slowly, keeping their population low. Small communities occur throughout the North, from the chilly lands near Whitewall to the tundra near the Eternal Ice. Because of their potent magic and the fact that as herbivores they never hunt humans as prey, elkmen are perhaps the most accepted of the Northern beastmen. Of course, humans fear elkmen, as sensible people fear any sorcerer, but some human communities trade with them for the use of their powerful magics. More ominously, the elkmen's Lunar heritage permits a few to learn necromancy instead of sorcery; these elkmen are feared and revered by Northern tribes who carry ancestor-worship to unhealthy extremes. Widespread taboos include never looking an elkman in the eye, never letting one step on your shadow and never eating in their presence.

OWLMEN

Owlmen are a Northern version of hawkmen found in the taiga forests of the far Northeast. The largest tribal confederation of owlmen, known as the Nightfliers, lives in a tainted land less than a hundred miles from the Haslanti city of Crystal. They retreat into the treetops when danger threatens, but venture out of their forest to raid and trade with the Haslanti. Sometimes the owlmen fly east to the northern fringes of Haltan territory, to pursue fierce rivalries with the hawkmen that humans seldom see. The Nightfliers worship various Northern air and storm spirits, and are ruled by a hereditary council of God-Blooded warriors and shamans.

THE HUNGRY HORDE:

A NIGHTFLIER RAIDING PARTY

Description: This medium-sized raiding party consists of a band of owlmen warriors who want to raid and plunder human settlements. They carry ironwood short



swords and boomerangs and wear breastplates or buff jackets. One of the tribal confederation's God-Blooded chiefs leads this feared war-band.

In lean years, especially after a particularly harsh winter, the Hungry Horde goes raiding. In good years, however, they sell their services as caravan guards and protect human towns near the Wyld from incursions by hobgoblins, Wyld barbarians and similar dangers the humans find more uncanny than the owlmen themselves. **Commanding Officer:** Classa Hodek, God-Blooded owlman warrior

Armor Color: None, various looted armor

Motto: "For loot and glory!"

General Makeup: 70 flying light infantry with short swords and boomerangs, supported by 20 archers.

Overall Quality: Fair

Magnitude: 3

Drill: 1

Close Combat Rating: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 2

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 2

Endurance: 4 **Might:** 2

Armor: 2 **Morale:** 3

Special Characters: Classa Hodek, two low-powered God-Blooded lieutenants

Formation: The Hungry Horde fights in skirmisher formation... usually from the air, when they engage in ranged combat. They prefer to soften up foes with archery and boomerangs before closing to use their blades.

WYLD POCKETS

As one of the two directions hardest hit by the Balorian Crusade, the North contains many Wyld pockets—some of them dozens of miles wide. The Ice Forest is unfortunately rather typical of Northern Wyld pockets. The *really* dangerous Wyld pockets contain groups of predatory Fair Folk.

THE ICE FOREST

This Wyld pocket covers an oval nine miles long and six miles wide. In the short, cool summers of this region, the Ice Forest is instantly visible from far away, as the only portion of the hills perpetually locked in winter. For a good portion of the year, however, snow blankets the entire region, and the exact edge of this little Bordermarch become far less clear. The vegetation provides the surest clue. While the bushes and scrubby trees in the surrounding land are draped in snow and ice, the tall conifers of the Ice Forest have needles *made* from snow and ice.

As usual for Bordermarches, the paths between the trees and even the trees themselves shift and change. However, the Ice Forest always remains a wood of ice-needed trees, inhabited by pale blue animals with antlers, hooves, claws and teeth of arctic ice. Even the most desperate and hungry mortals have learned never to hunt these creatures. Animals and trees alike are as cold as Diamond Hearth in midwinter: even a brief touch causes severe frostbite, and their blood is colder still.

Mortals also avoid the Ice forest because it is also home to a deadly band of Wyld barbarians called the Pale Hunters. These monstrous beings all have the poxes *Elemental Adaptation: Air* (see p. 145), *Fangs, Fur* (white, like a polar bear) and *Large* (eight feet tall on average). Most have other mutations, too, which can include fangs, antlers and other horrific deformities. Their ancestors were outcast from the Varajtul in a cultural dispute the Pale Hunters no longer remember; they don't remember Varajtul mysticism or language, either.

These barbarians live in a castle built entirely of ice. They ride forth on fanged and horned blue horses to hunt humans for food and sport. The Pale Hunters are also ravagers. Once they eat their fill, they capture more people and trade them to the Fair Folk. Although no Fair Folk inhabit this forest, they built the castle as a reward for the mutants' vile services. Anyone who kills a Pale Hunter can bring the head to any town or city within 500 miles to claim a bounty.

Northern city-states have launched almost a dozen attempts to root out this pesthole of cannibals, including one led by a trio of outcaste Dragon-Blooded. These ven-

tures all ended in disaster: the cold and the massed might of several hundred Wyld barbarians make a formidable combination. In addition, the Fair Folk gave the Pale Hunters an artifact that allows them to call the frozen fog (see pp. 69–70). They do not hesitate to use it if a foe besieges their castle or they simply wish to eliminate a threat with little risk to themselves. Anyone who finds a way to destroy these monstrous beings can expect a rich reward from the Haslanti and the icewalkers, as well as the undying love of the local people.

DAMAGE FROM ICE FOREST CREATURES

Touching the animals or trees of the Ice Forest inflicts environmental damage of 1B/action, Trauma 1. Contact with their blood is as deadly as a supernatural ice storm (see **Exalted**, p. 131)—the blood continues to deal damage until characters manage to wash or wipe it off. The Pale Hunters are immune.

ICE FOREST WAR PARTY

Description: This medium-sized raiding party consists of Wyld mutant warriors riding ice blue, carnivorous mutant horses. These merciless warriors are armed with axes or chopping swords and javelins; they wear reinforced buff jackets, or better armor if they can scavenge it. Their leader, the fiercest and most mutated of their kind, calls himself Glorious Ruin. They fight with little discipline, but great ferocity. They prefer to attack by night.



Commanding Officer: Glorious Ruin

Armor Color: None

Motto: “Get ‘em!”

General Makeup: 180 heavy cavalry with axes or chopping swords and javelins

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 0

Close Combat Rating: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 4

Ranged Attack Rating: 2 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3

Endurance: 4

Might: 3

Armor: 3

Morale: 4

Special Characters: Glorious Ruin, three Fae-Blooded sub-commanders

Formation: Ice Forest raiders are too crazed and savage to fight in any formation except an unordered mob.

FAIR FOLK OF THE NORTH

The Fair Folk of the North, the Winter People, are as merciless as the region’s long winters and harsh landscapes, while their smiles are as short and false as the pitifully brief summers. The Winter People lust for warmth of all kinds: the passion of desire, the vivid burning of mortal dreams, the heat of living bodies and of blood.

In the North, raksha temperament often changes with the seasons. In the winter, they become heartless as the icy winds, but can be merry and even sometimes merciful in the summer, dancing across the land along the briefly unchained rivers. Their hunger is remorseless, but it is rarely personally sadistic; they scar the lands like winter storms. Sometimes they can be kind as well as cruel to the humans around them, depending on their mood, and a chance-met raksha might choose to lead humans safely home or entertain them as honored guests... in the summer. But winter always comes soon, and any mortals caught in the raksha domains spend their lives in charmed sleep, fed with milk and animal blood to prolong their lives as far as possible. The Fair Folk sip the mortals’ dreams and blood away, draining them together with their heat and their lives.

Some raksha model their domains after typical Northland longhouses, while others build castles of ice, bridges that lead over vast chasms to impossible, sunny forest clearings, underground catacombs walled with bones and snow, floating dwellings amid stormclouds anchored to the ground by thin silken ladders or high spires on a mountaintop flying bannerets of silk in unimaginable colors. When they desire more victims, they set forth in sleighs forged of ice or dare the stormy seas



in longships, bearing down on merchant ships as they sail against the wind through howling gales.

THE SEVEN STORMWINDS

The Fair Folk who call themselves the Seven Stormwinds hunt the icy plains of Creation's Northwest. They actually number more than 30 raksha, each with their own retinues of hobgoblins, dog-handlers, grooms, bodyguards and human slaves. The best warriors in the group are acclaimed as the Seven Stormwinds in person, and form a council that leads the tribe. This unusual sharing of authority (for raksha) results in an extremely stable tribe. While the position of a Stormwind is theoretically open to challenge at any time, in practice the Stormwinds have grown used to watching each other's backs and eliminating each other's challenges before a duel can take place. They do not feel affection for each other as humans would, but they prefer to deal with known quantities rather than with new challengers. Other raksha cite this as an example of their stagnation. Their freehold takes the form of several longhouses, lodged in a valley one can enter only by walking a certain path backwards.

The Stormwinds themselves are Frost Lily, Kinderans, Migulo Whiteblade, Snowbreath, Mellelone, Tormentil and Wolfchild. These old, experienced raksha have learned to temper their thirst for excitement with due caution. Frost Lily is the youngest, and ardently desires an encounter of some sort with deathknights. Migulo Whiteblade, the oldest, buys healthy, dream-filled slaves from the Guild in return for ice-diamonds, living amber and flowering amethysts. Kinderans is the architect responsible for sculpting their longhouses. The other four have a constant stream of love affairs and betrayals that entertain the entire domain. All use bows and axes, save for Mellelone, who insists on wearing only a leather vest and skirt, and fighting with her bare hands. Featherheart, a younger raksha in the tribe, swims naked in the rivers and whistles down gulls and white eagles; she plots to trick Celestial Exalted into bringing down one or more of the Stormwinds.

THE BORDERMARCHES

Although ice covers the northern edge of Creation, fertile land reappears in the Bordermarches. First, the ice gives way to arctic tundra and taiga... but twisted by the Wyld. Instead of the dwarf conifers and willows found in Creation's far Northlands, Bordermarch forests sometimes sport stunted versions of temperate woodlands, Southeastern jungles (complete with snow-hung lianas) or the olive groves, chaparral and cacti of the South. Then again, a Bordermarch forest might feature apple trees bearing fruit of ice, or the wind might play a

willow's twigs like a harp. Bordermarch tundra, meanwhile, is especially hard to navigate because it's so flat and featureless—sometimes *completely* featureless—or the frozen rivers and distant, icy mountains change position from day to day.

Deeper in the Bordermarches, frigid versions of lands throughout Creation appear. A traveler might find a copy of Sijan built entirely from ice, or snow drifted into dunes as in the far South. The plants and animals may be freezing cold, just as the creatures of the Ice Forest.

The pull into the sky creates landscapes that could never exist in Creation. Impossibly slender bridges of rock cross mile-wide chasms, and rivers flow uphill as easily as down. The most spectacular, however, are the hollow, funnel-shaped mountains that are widest at the top and no more than a few yards wide at their base. These often contain pocket environments that may be surprisingly temperate—the element of Air expresses itself through the upside-down mountain, rather than the usual cold of the North.

THE CITY OF SEZAKAN

The mountains on the Western coast of the northernmost lands hide the First Age city of Sezakan. High cliffs and mountains render the city's valley almost inaccessible except from the air. As a result, the valley makes an ideal home for the 7,000 people of the air who live there. The city center holds a large manse that looks like a pyramid of glowing blue ice. Sezakan's builders tapped the power of the manse so that instead of forming a hearthstone, the manse provides the city with both light and protection from the frigid weather. A dome of Essence covers the entire city to moderate the winds and keep the city warm. At night, the dome glows brighter than the full moon seen on a clear night. This manse also powers the reality engine that partially protects the city from the Wyld.

Sezakan is only 25 miles from the edge of the Bordermarches. The Wyld sometimes advances over the city on nights of the full moon, or when a Wyld storm blows into Creation. During the Old Realm and the Shogunate, the reality engine protected the entire city from even the Deep Wyld. Today, the ancient device is out of tune, and the people of the air only remember how to perform basic maintenance. Instead of providing complete protection from the Wyld, the engine merely downgrades the Wyld's effects by one category. Inside the city, the Bordermarches are treated as Creation, the Middlemarches are treated as the Bordermarches and the Deep Wyld is treated as the Middlemarches.



Most of the time, this limited protection is enough. The Bordermarches cannot affect Sezakan, and no Wyld storm has inflicted worse than the Middlemarches around the city. When the city is within the Wyld, the Essence dome shines a brilliant violet to warn the inhabitants not to leave the city. As a result, the buildings have suffered almost no damage from the Wyld, and the inhabitants are almost completely free of Wyld mutations. The very few Wyld mutants among the city's residents are expected not to breed; they are slain or driven out if they make a fuss about this.

The dome glows faintly violet if the Wyld approaches within 10 miles of the city and continues to brighten as the Wyld comes closer, warning the residents to call back hunting parties. Hunters and other people traveling to or from the city look for the glowing dome as a warning either to return rapidly or fly south, away from the ravages of the Wyld.

Thaumaturges must periodically adjust or repair the reality engine. While adjusting the device is relatively simple, repairs call for jade and other rare materials. The people of Sezakan must seek out civilized areas or ancient ruins to obtain the parts they require. The Sezakanians honor the daring scavengers and silver-tongued traders who fly across the Northlands their city needs. Because the Wyld often yields deposits of unmelting ice and feathersteel, the inhabitants of Sezakan have valuable goods to trade.

Some traders regularly deal with Gethamane and the Haslanti, but never reveal the location of their home. For large trading expeditions, successful merchants can request use of one of the city's two flying vehicles, a pair of fast courier excellent air boats (see **Wonders of the Lost Age**, p. 35). The inhabitants recently manufactured their second air boat from components in their city, aided by a pair of Haslanti technical advisors who were carried to and from Sezakan blindfolded—the only humans to visit Sezakan in the last 200 years.

Most of the other First Age devices in this city no longer function. Sezakan has the wreck of a battle carrier (see **Wonders of the Lost Age**, pp. 36-37), but lacks the knowledge and resources to repair it. A few dwellings contain functional automatic doors and windows that open or turn opaque at a touch, but most such devices failed long ago; the last of the lift-tubes inside the tall apartments failed centuries ago. Today, elderly Sezakanians sometimes take the interior stairs, but most people fly up to the balconies found on the apartments in the city's blue glass terraces and spires.

The Solar Council governs Sezakan. These elected leaders receive advice from shamans who deal with the

local gods and elementals. The inhabitants worship the Unconquered Sun. Because of Sezakan's isolation, the Shogunate never razed or conquered the city; the city contains one of Creation's few intact temples to the Unconquered Sun. This temple is a slender, golden pyramid located east of the manse, across the central plaza.

The Sezakanians include a few God-Blooded people of the air, because Sezakanians occasionally take air elementals and local gods as lovers or spouses. The inhabitants seldom mate with gods or elementals who cannot fly due to the risk that their offspring might lack wings. The joys of flight are central to life in Sezakan: infants born with missing or atrophied wings are exposed to the elements. Adults who cannot fly due to injury or disease become objects of pity and veiled horror; they are encouraged to commit suicide. All members of the Solar Council must demonstrate their flying prowess every year on the high holy day of the Unconquered Sun.

During the Usurpation, several dozen Dragon-Blooded loyalists took refuge in Sezakan. As a result, the city's population always includes about a dozen Azure or Crimson Dragons. Both the God-Blooded and the Dragon-Blooded people of the air are honored here and are expected to help keep the city in good repair. They often become members of the Solar Council.

So far, no Sezakanian has become a Celestial Exalt. Recent prophecies, however, foretell that at least one inhabitant shall soon take the Second Breath as a mighty

Sezakan, a Magnitude 3 Dominion

Military: 1 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 3

Abilities: Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 1, Craft 3, Integrity 4, Investigation 1, Occult 1 (Savant Academy +3), Performance 2, Presence 2, Stealth 2, War 2

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

Limit Break: Temperance **Current Limit:** 2

Willpower: 6

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 4

Notes: Almost half of the ruling Solar Council are God-Blooded or Dragon-Blooded, several of whom are sorcerers with Legitimacy. Several other skilled sorcerers live in Sezakan. The dominion's external bonus points come from trading contacts with Gethamane and the Haslanti League, which are invested in one dot of the Craft Specialty and the War Specialty (through trade in artifacts and weapons). The city's Virtue Flaw causes Sezakan to attempt to break all contact with the outside world and eliminate all outside influences.

Celestial Exalt. This event could suddenly put this isolated land back in contact with the rest of Creation and possibly the Fair Folk.

Aside from gods and elementals, hardly anyone has visited Sezakan. Visitors are expected to keep the city's existence and location secret: anyone who seems unlikely to do so is held captive, or, in extreme cases, killed. Visitors who can fly, using wings, artifacts or Charms would receive greater favor; outsiders who cannot fly can expect a mixture of pity and disdain. They will also have trouble gaining access to much of the city, since it is very much designed for fliers.

TURRETS OF THE ICE BLOSSOM

The castle called the Turrets of the Ice Blossom rules the greatest raksha domain of the northeastern Bordermarches. This freehold sprouts from the top of an impossibly slender peak like a giant rose carved of ice, with its shining spires rising from the center—but some savants of the North say the name refers to its queen. Ellith, the mistress of this domain, seems proud and glorious at first glance, but she has slowly sunk into weariness and decrepitude. She sustains herself on the blood of children, keeping them in separate towers of her castle in rooms full of toys. Her subjects fear Ellith for her power and love her for the bright, innocence-fed dreams that fill the castle: while the living children weaken and die in the upper chambers, glammers and dreams laugh sweetly and play in the frost-draped corridors.

In the cellars of the castle lurks Ithelle, Ellith's daughter. Even if she was not born of Ellith's body, both claim the relationship. Her aging mother stripped Ithelle of all beauty to maintain her own charms. An army of ugly hobgoblins and a few withered warriors serve Ithelle as she plots against the raksha in the turrets above and attempt to assassinate or usurp them. If Ithelle can reach Ellith and tear out her heart, replacing it with Ithelle's own, she can regain the beauty that was once hers, while Ellith becomes a crone and flees to the cellars, there to plot to usurp the throne. Both sides endeavor to draw visitors into their constant struggle, using them as tools, lovers or victims.

The only true neutral in the domain is Kerris, the Master at Arms. He commands the cataphracts and hunters, but would never dream of interfering between the Queen and her daughter; he seeks only to keep the borders secure and the trade with the Guild constant. Children are expensive slaves to transport, and die so quickly. He pays the Guild in flowers that never die plucked from fields of snow, silver filigree, never-melting

ice and chains of adamant. Kerris rides out daily with his warriors on white horses with silver hooves. But ghosts crawl through the beautiful ice palace, amid the gaudy raksha indulgence, and some day it runs the risk of becoming a shadowland chained to the Underworld.

ICE BLOSSOM HUNTERS

Description: A unit of hunters from the Turrets of the Ice Blossom, under the authority of the Master at Arms. These riders are armed with both swords and bows, and emphasize speed and mobility over strength.

Commanding Officer: Captain Djavan

Armor Color: Silver chain mail with black trim

Motto: "For the Queen!"

General Makeup: 50 riders, each carrying sword and shortbow of steel-hard ice

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 2

Drill: 3

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 2

Endurance: 6

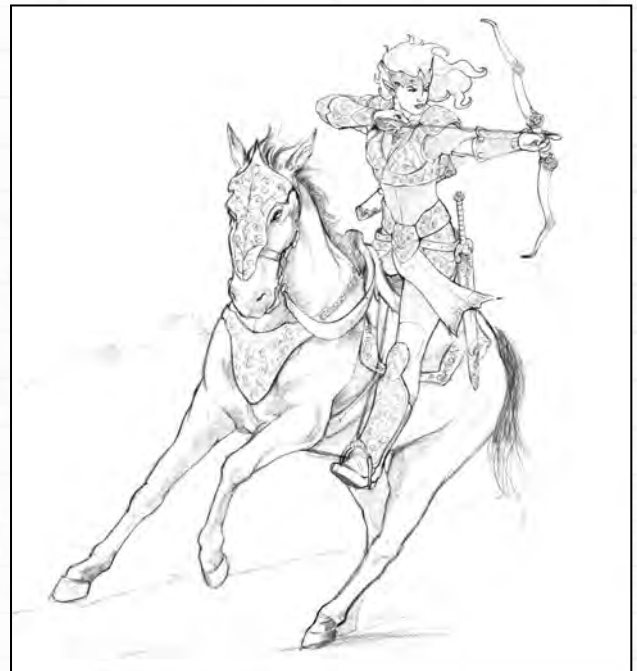
Might: 4

Armor: 3

Morale: 2

Special Characters: None

Formation: Relaxed



THE BRIDGE OF TEARS

The most impressive of all of the North's natural bridges is the fabled Bridge of Tears. It exists on the furthest reaches of the Northern Bordermarches and bridges the path into the Middlemarches. This vast



natural structure is actually a single huge peninsula that has gradually pulled free of the ground since the Fair Folk invasion. Today, it is an arch of land 30 miles long and half a mile wide. The southernmost portion of this bridge joins the ground in a gradual slope that is easy for even ordinary mortals to walk up. After the first mile, the bridge is completely separated from the ground. The bottom of the bridge rises as high as a mile above the ground and extends 12 miles out beyond the vast cliff that marks the end of the Bordermarches and the beginning of the Middlemarches for this area of the Northern Wyld.

The end of the Bridge of Tears forms a wide, aerial plateau roughly a mile in diameter. Most of the Fair Folk consider it neutral territory. This plateau has the unique property that it attracts the driftlands in from the Middlemarches. Every week or two, a driftland moves toward the end of the Bridge of Tears and then stops just as it touches it. Anyone on either the bridge or the driftland can then walk from one to the other safely and easily. The driftland remains in contact with the bridge for one to three days, and then floats away. No driftland has ever been known to touch the bridge more than once a decade, unless directed to do so by one of the more powerful raksha. The bridge obtained its rather sorrowful name because of the mist and gentle rain that covers it at least once a day.

MIDDLEMARCHES

In the Northern Middlemarches, the element of Air clearly supersedes all other influences from Creation—but all the forms and qualities of Creation manifest and recombine freely. Here, lightning bolts stick in the ground and sprout branches like trees. Pork chops fall like snow, and children made of sherbet eat scoops from each other's bodies. The Wyld barbarians might be furred, as in the Bordermarches—but they are just as likely to have bodies made of ice, crystal or clouds—or ordinary-looking flesh. The logic that says people *ought* to need protection from the cold no longer applies.

DRIFTLANDS

The most noteworthy feature of the Northern Wyld, however, is how much of the geography is aerial. Portions of the land detach from the ground and float lazily through the air. Aerial islands of the Bordermarches range from small, rock-lined pools a dozen yards across to flying mountains. These “driftlands” settle toward the ground as they near Creation. The Middlemarches hold larger driftlands—a few are hundreds of miles across.

Gravity remains constant on a driftland: without using Charms, characters can only walk or stand on the tops of these islands. A few driftlands are stationary, but most wander at random. Except when a new driftland rips itself from the ground and rises gradually upwards, none ever drops below 10 yards from the ground. They rarely collide, but when such collisions occur, they can be exceedingly spectacular. A few stationary driftlands are connected to the ground by slender bridges of ice or stone. Breaking the bridges frees the driftland to move through the skies as the others. Larger driftlands sometimes contain rivers that run off their edges. Some of these rivers plunge down to the ground as mobile waterfalls. Others flow through the air from one driftland to another, twisting in complex ribbon-like paths as the two driftlands move in relation to one another.

Ice covers some driftlands or they are actual floating glaciers, but in other cases, they can support vegetation, life and a temperate climate. (Why shouldn't they be warmer? They float closer to the sun....) The largest driftlands generally stay remote from each other, but the smaller ones float in vast clouds, allowing the inhabitants and animals to easily travel from one to another.

Driftland swarms sometimes show a strange but consistent geography and ecology. Waterfalls cascade from one driftland to another, the two driftlands maintaining constant distance and speed from each other. Vines or trees that have grown together over the centuries may link particularly close driftlands. The air of the driftlands is full of predators, and some Wyld creatures sleep on the wing, never landing or coming to a halt. White hares spread flaps of skin like the flying squirrels of Halta to glide from driftland to driftland, forming packs to hunt the giant toads that hide in driftland caves.

The largest driftlands or swarms often have no ground beneath them. In these regions of the Middlemarches, the influences of the Wyld and the Pole of Air break Creation into floating fragments. In these cases, up or down become arbitrary concepts, meaningful only for a single driftland—or each driftland maintains a uniform “downward” pull over its entire surface, which folk from Creation find as strange as the driftlands themselves.

HY BANNIT

This enormous driftland is shaped like a coin almost 300 miles in diameter and 10 miles thick, with no ground underneath it. One side consists of wide fertile valleys located between gentle mountains, while the other side features rough scrub, rugged terrain and harsh mountains; the sides are all of ice. Two driftlands smashed together long ago, and the icy sides mated to produce a strange interior.





Raksha and other creatures live on both sides. Hy Bannit is composed of some 50 waypoints (20 to a side and 10 in the interior) and several small freeholds.

Immense caves of ice pierce the driftland's interior. The gravity of each side cancels out, leaving the interior weightless. The caves in turn host a weird ecology. Vast snow wyrms dwell and feed on the lesser predators and prey. Half-deer roam there, creatures with one head and two bodies that can split apart so one half feeds while the other half watches for predators. Carnivorous moss infiltrates the ice and moves along it in creeping patches, leaving a rough, scarred surface behind it. The flesh-eating grubs lay eggs that look like small opals; they do not hatch unless they are in close proximity to something warm for at least a day, to make sure they have sufficient nourishment during their early hours. The raksha do not know how the rumor began that an abandoned ice castle inside Hy Bannit holds a huge treasure trove hidden during Balor's attack on Creation. The caves are deadly enough that few visitors survive their explorations, and the raksha themselves have given up.

THE SHATTERED LAND

A raksha legend says that these thousands of driftlands once formed a great land that almost rivaled the Blessed Isle in size, before mighty Balor shattered it with his spear. The driftlands float in an oval cloud about 2,000 miles long and 1,600 miles wide and deep; most of these driftlands are spheres and ovoids between a quarter of a mile and 10 miles wide. Their slow, ever-changing orbits rarely move the driftlands more than three miles from one another, and some driftlands float considerably closer.

An alliance of raksha nobles control a good portion of the Shattered Land, but most of it remains wild and untamed. Trade and commerce abound. Hobgoblins work the open mines found on many of the driftlands, while raksha wind yachts ply the air between them. These raksha have little concern for Creation; their aerial continent keeps them busy enough.

PROPERTIES, PEOPLE, PLACES

THE AIRLESS QUARTER

One cubic mile of space in the Northern Middlemarches has no air whatsoever. Tribes of mutants mark it with obscure warnings so their warriors may avoid it, and the locals' favored tactic is to force their enemies into the quarter. Animals never stray into it, perhaps sensing its completely dead nature. Some Lunar Exalted have mastered a Charm to enter it safely; they are rare enough that they find the Airless Quarter a safe repository for concealing valuables.

Back in the Old Realm, a Sidereal's experiment-gone-wrong created the Airless Quarter. An attempt to condense tons of air into a single, manageable point went haywire. It channeled all the air in a strictly defined area into a single point, but continued to do so and could not be stopped. In a region that was, at the time, within Creation, authorities bound the Airless Quarter away from mortals for their safety.

If some enterprising individual could figure out how to steal away the single point in the center (half a mile above the ground), she would possess a source of near-infinite air with a multitude of uses.

BREATH TUNNELS

Breath tunnels are a natural form of rapid transport in the Northern Middlemarches. Small ice caverns pierce the frozen ground in numerous places across the Wyld. They look unremarkable in most respects. Inside is only a small ledge, barely shielded from the fierce elements outside, that looks down upon a tunnel through which a vicious wind blows. Jumping down into this tunnel whips a person along the channel at incredible speeds. By mortal reckoning, breath tunnels move travelers at anywhere from 50 to 200 miles per hour. According to Fair Folk and other travelers familiar with them, breath tunnels can take a person anywhere from four to 20 waypoints in a single scene.

Most breath tunnels convey a person swiftly from one terminus to another. Because the winds flow in only one direction, there is no immediate return trip. It is often easier to find one's way back overland than to find a corresponding, reverse breath tunnel. Some termini have multiple landings over multiple breath tunnels that go to a variety of places, in either direction. The breath tunnel network is random, but extensive.

A person who mastered the network of breath tunnels could appear almost anywhere in the Northern Wyld in very short order. Such mobility would provide great advantage in Creation, even with the distance from the Middlemarches. Even so, a measure of luck always

BRANCHING BREATH TUNNELS

Occasionally, a single tunnel branches in the middle and has two destinations. One is always the stronger destination, the default. The player of any character who wants to take the other must make a ([Dexterity or Wits] + Athletics) roll at a difficulty of 2 to 4, depending on the wind's speed. Botching this roll inflicts 10 dice of bashing damage on the character.



Wyld

plays into tunnel travel: in the Wyld as they are, breath tunnel termini shift over time and are not dependable unless a person's records are very up-to-date. Luckily for travelers from Creation, the tunnels are always close to 12 feet in diameter, making many Wyld monsters too large to fit.

THE CHILDREN OF THE WIND

The children of the wind consider the breath tunnels their responsibility to maintain. Though they are usually immaterial, the children appear as child-sized old men

swathed in very light blue silk. Children of the wind can deaden all airflow around them. They use this to stop the winds of the breath tunnels while they smooth out the roofs and walls with their hands and grow new breath tunnels between new locations. Read about a sample child of the wind on p. 153.

Children also silently and invisibly watch the all the breath tunnel termini. While they have a strict policy not to interfere with regular uses of the tunnels, children of the wind can shut down a tunnel when people abuse them. The most explicit abuse of the tunnels is to move large numbers of troops, but others exist.

AIR SEEDS (ARTIFACT ••)

New breath tunnels grow from air seeds, yellowed things that look like small pine cones. The children seem to be able to generate them at will. To plant an air seed, push it against any solid region of ice, earth or stone, and germinate it with five motes. The air seed sinks into the ground and opens a shaft of air through it, up to 100 feet long at the rate of one foot a day. Smaller channels branch off it, which children of the wind fill in and seal up in their tunnels. Air seeds qualify as two-dot artifacts.

SKYWATER SPRINGS

Skywater springs occur naturally across the Middlemarches. At first, they look like natural sources of fresh water, bubbling from the ground or off a driftland, misting in the cold air. On closer inspection, an explorer discovers that they are flowing springs of liquid air, which quickly sublimate into the atmosphere. Skywater is more transparent than even the purest water, and runs over a creekbed of snow and ice without disturbing them.

Travelers Creation-wide, especially in the West and East, prize bottled skywater. Westerners know the danger of drowning, and the Eastern scavengers fear suffocating



in cave-ins and self-shutting tombs. They use skywater as an alternative or emergency source of air. Drinking a bottle provides a character with enough liquid air to ensure that she doesn't need to breathe for the next eight hours. One can also let it slowly seep out of its bottle to keep enclosed air from growing stagnant for 12 hours.

A bottle of skywater goes for Resources •••• in most regions, occasionally ••• in the North.

THE UNSURMOUNTABLE SUMMIT

This spot is the single highest place in the Northern Middlemarches. In this place, the nature of air to be *above* things most strongly expresses itself. The Summit itself is circular platform 15 feet in diameter that has one small, treacherous path downward and otherwise looks out over open air. From here, a person can see all the driftlands and the rest of the Northern Wyld, all the way to the Elemental Pole of Air and the northern edge of Creation. The sharpest, Charm-enhanced sight can just make out the Imperial Mountain far, far southward.

Explorers do not actually reach the Unsurmountable Summit by climbing a great mountain. Instead, it looks like a nondescript patch of ground, marked by nothing. Stepping upon it, however, a traveler suddenly sees the most fantastic of views and a very surprising cliff. The path one trod into the rough circle becomes the way back out, and stepping there takes one directly back to the flat, unremarkable ground of before. People who seek the Summit may spend mortal lifetimes trying without success.

One special quality of the Summit has never been discovered. Northern Lunar Exalted have used it as a lookout point without peer, but even they do not know that it serves as an unknown and unguarded portal to Yu-Shan. By exemplifying the quality of the "highest point," the Unsurmountable Summit floats above Heaven itself. By jumping off the small Summit's cliff, a character hurtles not to doom miles below but into the Jade Pleasure Dome where the Incarnae play the Games of Divinity. The lack of any immediate path back can only mean trouble for the unprepared visitor.

WEAPON STORMS

Storms of flying blades meander across the North, cutting down the unfortunate creatures in their paths. Chakrams are the most common. The only time a chakram storm truly dies is when it wanders into Northern Creation. Then, the storm weakens as it goes farther from the Wyld until it exhausting itself.

Each chakram in a storm is unique as a snowflake. Chakrams are also entirely real, no matter that they fall

from steely-looking clouds and come from the Wyld. When the storm passes, the chakrams remain. When a chakram storm dies in the North, scavengers retrieve the weapons, and chakrams glut the market. For a time, they can be cheaper than food in Diamond Hearth and Crystal. Some chakrams command higher cost for exceptional artistry.

The Northern Middlemarches also spawn javelin storms, dagger storms and storms of other weapons. These occasionally meet, grow in strength and form temporary murder storms. Individuals who live or spend a lot of time in the Northern Wylds are inevitably familiar with chakram storms; such explorers sometimes rid themselves of less savvy enemies by luring their foes into these storms while having ready shelter for themselves.

WEAPON STORM DAMAGE

A weapon storm is an environmental danger with a damage rating equal to the weapon's damage per minute and a Trauma of 2. Storms that are more dangerous may have higher Trauma ratings. A murder storm has a damage equal to the summed damage ratings of all involved weapons. Occasionally, there are jade chakram storms. These have damage ratings of 3L. They are very rare, and when they enter Creation, many people get very rich.

THE JET COURT

Toward the Deep North lies the Jet Court, one of the five great centers of raksha power. The raksha of this court consider Temperance the greatest virtue, and go to great lengths to show how temperate they are by spying on each other, betraying each other and brutally killing each other over who is most moderate. The court lies in a set of ice caverns connected by twisting corridors, set with arrases and convenient bedrooms and courtrooms, perfectly arranged for plotting, rendezvous and affairs. No other group of raksha nearby is foolish enough to defy the court and give them cause for dramatic feuds and open warfare; the Winter People journey from Creation and the Bordermarches to exchange regular gifts and visits.

The court's ruler Princess Kyema is as artistically perfect in her beauty as she is perfectly cutting in her wit. Her constant, mild smile soon seems more threatening than any scowl. She has ruled the Jet Court for centuries. Kyema enjoys leaving glamour-created copies of herself around the court while she spies on her nobles. She blackmails her agents into desperation.

Three special minions assist Kyema's schemes. The Lady Ennaya, a maker of poisons and aphrodisiacs, leads

the Amethyst Household. The fearsome warrior Count Okudo decides his actions purely at the fall of dice. Lord Kazour, a diplomat and courtier, conceals his hopeless love for the Princess. He walks amid the falling snow in thin silks and bare feet.

The major entertainments of the court are spying, betraying, blackmailing, indulging or torturing pet mortals and disturbing other Fair Folk. The court is a very random faction, since they can justify almost any course in the name of “temperance”—and delight in doing so. Indeed, to *plan* anything would show a disturbing lack of indifference. The court has no set hours for rising or sleeping, and courtiers and sycophants constantly wander the long, icy hallways. The hobgoblins who serve the Jet Court are usually beautiful metal statues or dreamlike, mist-shrouded ice sculptures swathed in scarves of jet that has been woven like silk.

The Jet Court does good business with the Guild, directly and through the Mouth of White Sleep, throwing gold and gems at the merchants’ feet before luring the unchained slaves that they have purchased out into the snow. The court is also prompt in returning mind-broken slaves, and while these slaves often have artistic mutilations that render them less than ornamental, they are nevertheless adequate for hard labor. The Jet Court doesn’t usually try to lure the Guildsmen into the snow. In fact, a recent apparent kidnapping turned out to be a

murder attempt by a rival merchant group, who hoped to anger both sides and usurp the Guild’s slave trade in the region. The rival group in question now enjoys the Jet Court’s hospitality.

The Bull of the North and several Lunars have recently caused the Jet Court some problems, forcing it to restrict its raiding and curtailing the Guild’s visits. Princess Kyema ponders a huge raid that would take an entire encampment of warriors as slaves, or breaking into one of the Northern cities and stealing a choice selection of mortals from it. While this would remove the need for new mortal slaves for a while, it could also provoke a major alliance against the Jet Court. This could be extremely risky; she fears the possibility of a Lunar-Haslanti-icewalker triple alliance, and the potential of a Haslanti air fleet backed by Lunar magic.

JET COURT SKIRMISHERS

Description: A group of three hundred Fair Folk cataphract raiders. They are of Excellent quality, half male, half female. They wear gossamer armor and carry gossamer weapons.

Commanding Officer: Count Okudo

Armor Color: Black glass with violet and silver trim

Motto: None. They charge in dead silence, casually looking around as if they just happened to be passing through.

General Makeup: Lancers

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 5

The Jet Court, a Magnitude 3 Dominion

Military: 2/2 **Government:** 3/3 **Culture:** 3/3

Abilities: Awareness 2 (Superior Diplomats 3), Craft 2, Integrity 3, Occult 3 (Supernatural Etiquette 3), Performance 3, Presence 3, Stealth 2 (Calculated Assassination 3), War 2

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 2

Limit Break: Temperance **Current Limit:** 2

Willpower: 7

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 9

Notes: The Jet Court is a Supernatural dominion. Princess Kyema, Lady Ennaya and Lord Kazour are all sorcerers, and Princess Kyema has Legitimacy. The Jet Court does not hold any savants, as any powerful members of the court are far from secretive. In the event of a Limit Break, the Jet Court turns in on itself and engages in self-critiquing and demonstrations of personal non-involvement. The court will refuse to get involved in outside affairs or take any action that could be construed as personal interest in events.



Close Combat Attack: 4 Close Combat Damage: 3
Endurance: 7 Might: 4
Armor: 4 Morale: 2
Formation: Close

THE SCARLET CRYSTAL ARTISAN

The Lunar called the Scarlet Crystal Artisan claims her territory around the Unsurmountable Summit and uses it regularly. This elder of the Silver Pact leads her thousands of mutant followers on grueling trips several times a year to thin their ranks and strengthen the survivors.

The Lunar uses her observations from the Summit to direct her military efforts in the Northern Middlemarches. The Scarlet Crystal Artisan leverages the fanatical devotion of her mutants into a powerful (if unfocused) war machine for fighting the Fair Folk, the Realm and, recently, the Bull of the North. She dreams of turning the far North into a paradise using powerful spells and the work of her people.

The Scarlet Crystal Artisan's followers fight for her. She forms them into First Age battle units for efficacy. They are a diverse lot of Wyld mutants, still recognizable as of human stock but otherwise with little in common.

WYLD HORDE TALON

Description: Warriors in a typical war party have many mutations, but none consistent enough to form into effective different battle ranks or units.

Commanding Officer: Varies



Armor Color: The armor is as diverse as the soldiers, but is usually splashed with dried blood.

Motto: "Marching to Paradise!"

General Makeup: 125 warriors, effectively heavy infantry, armored with layers of Wyld creature hides. Their patron usually equips them with short spears and javelins for both close-up and ranged fighting.

Overall Quality: Fair

Magnitude: 3

Drill: 1

Close Combat Attack: 3 Close Combat Damage: 3

Ranged Attack: 3 Ranged Damage: 2

Endurance: 4 Might: 1

Armor: 1 (-1 mobility penalty) Valor: 4

Formation: These units swarm over the Scarlet Crystal Artisan's targets of opportunity.

CRAZED MARAUDER SCALE

Description: Shock troops, eager and able to destabilize enemy units.

Commanding Officer: Varies



Armor Color: Same as above

Motto: "Hawoogawoogawooga!"

General Makeup: 25 warriors armored the same as most others. These fight with big axes to frighten their opponents, howl nonsense for further intimidation and use thaumaturgic potions to ignore pain.

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 2

Drill: 2

Close Combat Attack: 4 Close Combat Damage: 3

Ranged Attack: — Ranged Damage: —

Endurance: 5 Might: 2

Armor: 1 (-1 mobility penalty) **Valor:** 4

Formation: The Scarlet Crystal Artisan holds these units in reserve to attack from unexpected quarters or when the enemy is weak.

THE DEEP WYLD

The land in the Deep Wyld is all made of snow and ice, and although as durable as ordinary rock or soil, it is no thicker than a child's hand, with only air underneath, and ripples like a flag in the wind. While gravity always remains oriented toward the surface a character stands upon, vast arcs of land twist and fold in the sky, and valleys can lead down to other, seemingly endless ribbons of land. Storms chase each other across the landscape, pursued by bright clear skies and perfect sunsets or glorious stars and moons. No shelter lasts for long; ice-forests of pine trees rise and then crumble again, cliffs fall to snow and caves lead down through long tunnels out onto mountain peaks high above the horizon.

Sometimes the whole landscape breaks apart into driftlands, which become clouds firm enough to walk upon. Snowflakes chiseled from crystal and black onyx fall from the sky, slicing at those caught below. The mists take on the form of white animals, their eyes and mouths a red so deep it's black and then stalk anyone who disturbs their quiet coiling. The ice beneath a traveler's feet forms itself into tiles, and strange gamepieces mimic the traveler's paces as if he were a part in a gigantic game of Gateway. Mirrors in the sky reflect whatever happens below, but also show strange tracks in the snow and ice, and odd shadows that don't belong to any visible creature.

As with any quarter of the Deep Wyld, a few sanctuaries have been nailed into the chaos. Homes built by Celestial Exalted in the distant past still stand. Thin cords of fate tie observatories to Yu-Shan. shadowlands where cities died in the Fair Folk invasion resist dissolution through their link to the Underworld. Dreams of the Yozis bob like stinking bubbles of perversion amid the windstorms of insanity. But these tiny points of reality are nearly lost in the measureless sea of chaos.

UNSHAPED RAKSHA

The unshaped raksha that wander through the North tend to ignore such sanctuaries as not worth their notice; the hateful stability of Creation interests them more. Foremost among them is Ramis-Adke, Feather on the Wing, who floods across the landscape in a great blanket of feathers that have nothing solid beneath them. Ramis-Adke flies through both air and earth without pausing,

sweeping through mountains and cliff faces with as much ease as it flies through windstorms and hurricanes. It smothers and devours those in its path, stripping them down into broken gems and charcoal in the heat of its interior furnaces. When Ramis-Adke rests, its feathers form a set of concentric circles in the ground, and the magical materials bubble out of nowhere to congeal at the center, so great is Ramis-Adke's natural prohibition against stillness. Several lesser unshaped raksha follow Ramis-Adke, no more comprehensible than it is.

Another prominent unshaped raksha is Isingwethe, Unborn from Blood. Isingwethe hates all things that have life and death. She resolves to break into Creation so she can tear her way down into the Underworld and crack it like an eggshell. Following this, she intends to rip Yu-Shan apart and dine on the corpses of the gods. She was a close ally of Balor's, and would have joined his Crusade had not a duel with him left her close to death. Isingwethe manifests as a woman with scarlet skin and white hair, or as a creeping stain across the landscape that leaves it corroded and fractured. She has many servants, dolls of icy moss and frozen sticks bound into mimicries of human or animal forms, all of whom constantly bleed from various wounds.

The Northern Deep Wyld offers no fixed locations for the great unshaped to meet for their incomprehensible debates. When they wish to gather, they form a floating island out of the swirling ice and wind. This sudden surge of temporary stability causes ripples all the way to the Bordermarches, evoking a responding wave of chaos that sweeps through the Wyld and makes the lesser raksha tremble in fear.

THE ELEMENTAL POLE OF AIR

The Pole of Air is the furthest North you can go. Here, everything flies on eternal, hurricane-strength winds. Any solid land is just a driftland pulled in from the Wyld, or coalesced from the driving snow before being sent into Creation. Up or down only have meaning with regard to such temporary islands of solidity—the winds are much stronger than gravity, if the Pole of Air feels that pull from Creation at all. A man may be picked off a driftland's surface, tossed hundreds of feet into the air, and smashed back to the ground by a passing gust of wind ... if he ever came down at all. From time to time, the winds freeze in their tracks and form solid paths through the air, leading skywards like ribbons of silver, creating an interlacing maze high above the ground. When they shatter, glittering shards of ice sharp as chakram storms cut through the tattered veils of snow and frozen fog with





the force of a Solar's swordblade. The never-melting snow grinds away whatever's left. The sheer cold can freeze blood and flesh in seconds. The sun barely peeps through the eternal storms: more light comes from the lightning that flashes through the snow-clouds, illuminating them poisonously green and purple.

This is no land for mortal flesh. Only elementals and spirits may call it home. The razor-winds, the deadly cold and the lightning defeat any mundane protection. The Pole of Air can challenge even the Charms of the Exalted: a character needs separate Charms to resist the force of the winds, the killing cold and lightning, and the razor-edged storms of ice. A Solar, for instance, would need Element-Resisting Prana to survive the cold, Iron Kettle Body (or excellent armor) to resist the ice-storms and perhaps an Athletics Charm such as Spider-Foot Style to stay on a tumbling driftland.

While one might expect to find the Elemental Dragon of Air at the pole, she seldom finds time to visit. The climate and location are greatly to her taste, but her responsibilities keep her far too busy in Creation. When Mela arrives at the pole, a great, shining palace of ice crystallizes from the snow to ride the winds; the clouds gather, tornadoes dance around her palace and lightning rings across the sky in celebration of her coming. Lesser dragons of Air and other elementals gather to bid her welcome, bringing gifts and songs of praise. When she departs, she takes any gifts with her, and the

floating palace dissolves back into snow, which falls to the ground beneath.

Other beings can petition her at these times, if they have appropriate rank and power (such as Celestial Exalted, or old and powerful Dragon-Blooded), or if they bring worthy gifts. Mela's moods are changeable as her element, however, and proven enemies of the Dragon-Blooded are unlikely to find favor with the Dragon herself. She never receives Fair Folk, and takes great pleasure in rending them limb from limb and scattering their blood into the howling winds. Despite the Realm's centuries of hunting the Lunar Exalted, however, the Dragon of Air hears them out.

In Mela's absence, her Seneschal Colis-Jahmen guards against incursions from the Wyld. Colis-Jahmen is a lesser elemental dragon of Air, proud, young and jealous of his rank and prerogatives. His predecessor in the post died barely 50 years ago, under dubious circumstances that may or may not have involved the visiting Sidereal Iron Siaka and an oath carelessly sworn to an unshaped raksha. Colis-Jahmen is served by lesser elementals and gods of air that prefer the purity of the absolute North to human worship or Celestial duties. While Colis-Jahmen's sycophants view anything that is not a creature of the Air as a lesser being, they treat visitors with haughty politeness, permitting them to explain their presence and possibly even deigning to assist them in small ways. Various other spirit courts also dwell at the Pole of Air.

THE WYLD TIDES ARE HIGH TODAY.

THE SEA HAS TAKEN ON THE CONTOURS OF THE OCEAN FLOOR FOR MILES IN EVERY DIRECTION.

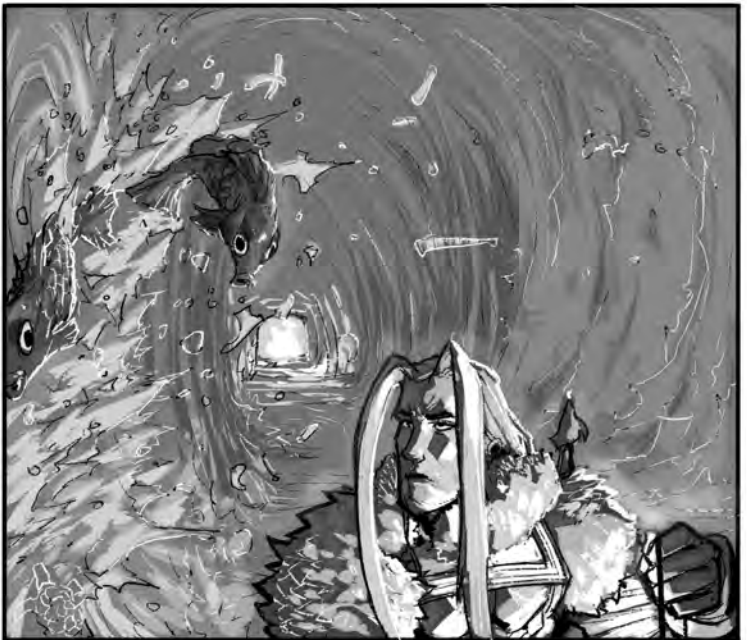


I'M TOO FAR FROM HOME. I'M NOT SAFE HERE.

STILL, A MONTH OF PROPHETIC DREAMS HAS DRAWN ME TO THIS PLACE.



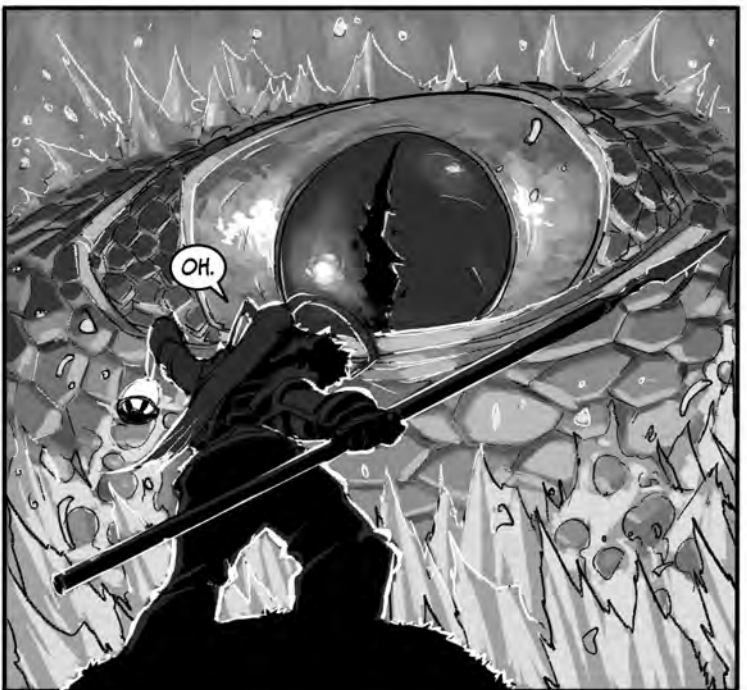
I MUST FIND OUT WHY.



HM... END OF THE LINE, IT SEEMS.
SO WHY, THEN, AM I HERE?



OH.





CHAPTER FOUR

THE WESTERN WYLD

Ships sail on stranger tides than usual when they enter the far West. For one thing, the Western Wyld responds most readily to a visitor's thoughts: water's nature is to accept the forms given to it, and in the Wyld that includes forms given by thought. Unlike the North or South, the Western Wyld does not openly attack intruders with environments in which normal life cannot survive. It receives visitors, lures them in with illusions and the horizon's promise, and then swallows them up.

THE WESTERN EDGE OF CREATION

The West is the quarter of Creation most vulnerable to the Wyld. Wyld storms usually manifest as fierce monsoons that rain blood, exotic sea-life or a multitude of other substances across the islands and the seas near the borders of Creation. The extensive "tainted" portions of the West reach 100 or 200 miles from the

Bordermarches—often within 100 miles of the main archipelagoes. These areas endure Wyld monsoons several times a year. Only beastmen, the truly desperate and Wyld mutants live in the Western tainted lands. Mortal sailors pray their ships will not be blown too far West. As a result, the inhabitants of this region have only the dangers of the Wyld and each other to fear.

However, these dangers can be quite severe. Wyld-tainted water regularly flows out of the Bordermarches. When currents from the Wyld run especially strong, tides can move in reverse or run much higher or lower than normal. The water itself can have strange properties.

The two most common aberrations are called *strong* and *weak* water. Strong water is unusually thick, almost gelatinous. It looks like normal seawater, but pushing a hull or an oar through it requires five times the normal effort. However, humans float so easily in strong water it's nearly impossible to drown.



Weak water has no buoyancy: ships and swimmers instantly sink to the bottom when they encounter weak water. It looks just like ordinary water (though abilities to sense Essence or the Wyld reveal its presence). Fortunately, the transition from ordinary water to weak water is never instantaneous: an alert captain can spot the prow's dip as it moves into weaker water, giving a brief opportunity to move away from the deadly current. Many ships sailing near the Wyld place small floats on long poles in front of the ship, to give early warning of weak water.

Sometimes the waters of the Wyld become so filled with the powers of chaos that they dissolve everything solid in their path. This unnatural extension of water's natural power is normally confined to the Middlemarches and the Deep Wyld, but occasionally these destructive currents sweep into the Bordermarches and even into Creation.

The Lunar Exalted, the native inhabitants of the Wyld and anything made from gossamer or the magical materials are immune to these "waters of chaos," but these currents can quickly dissolve a boat, a mortal or a Wyld mutant in a few minutes, and an islet or atoll in a scene. The waters of chaos seldom last more than a minute in Creation or the Bordermarches; in the Middlemarches, they normally confine themselves to special currents.

Life on islands near the Wyld is often no safer. Although most Wyld storms are sufficiently brief that thaumaturgical protections normally suffice to shield people from mutation, the islands they live upon lack such protection. Wyld storms can reshape islands. On rare occasions, currents or rains of the waters of chaos erode an entire island to nothing, while simultaneously dissolving the inhabitants as well as any boats they may use to try to escape.

Many of the people who live on the edges of the West are aquatic, and some are more at home in the water than on land. Having the freedom to retreat into the sea and the ability to survive for days or weeks without walking on land allows the Wyld mutants, beastmen and other inhabitants of the Western edges of Creation to survive in this harsh Wyld-torn region.

BARBARIANS

The human barbarians of the West have much in common with their civilized kin, such as feather ornaments, tattoos meant to protect against bad fortune or the Fair Folk, and the custom of Tya, or women living as men. They are most numerous in the Southwest, where they live on hundreds of little volcanic islands beyond the Wavecrest Archipelago. Their outrigger canoes easily take them from island to island, and on raids into Wavecrest.

WYLD WATERS

In game terms, the various Wyld-tainted waters have these effects:

Strong water reduces ship movement or swimming speed to one-fifth normal. However, players do not need to roll for their characters to stay afloat.

No one can swim or sail in weak water. A (Wits + Sail) roll, difficulty 3, enables a captain to notice and steer out of weakening water; a swimmer can escape with a successful (Wits + Athletics) roll, difficulty 2.

Spotting a current of the waters of chaos requires a (Perception + Lore) roll at difficulty 3. The water deals environmental damage of 2A/minute, Trauma 2 (see *Exalted*, p. 244)—and only Essence-channelers can resist these effects. Charms that protect the user against the Wyld or environmental damage completely protect the user from the waters of chaos. Talismans against the Wyld allow bearers to roll to resist the effects of these waters—but the supernatural water still inflicts lethal damage.

Between storms, Wyld tides and volcanic eruptions, the Southwest tribes live in one of Creation's least predictable areas. They respond by observing hundreds of taboos meant to placate the local godlings and gain their protection. Some of these taboos actually do please one god or another; most are pure superstition, born when people try to repeat whatever they did before a stroke of good luck or avoid doing whatever they did before a calamity. These barbarians have more shamans than any other culture in Creation... but no higher proportion of effective shamans than anyone else.

The barbarians spend prodigious effort on statues, temples and pyre-offerings to every god they can find. They spend rather less effort cultivating their island homes. Indeed, they tend to strip an island of vegetation and animal life within a few generations, and then move on to another island. After several centuries of this, they are running out of islands, leading to fiercer and more frequent tribal wars. Some people give up and move to Wavecrest... and other tribes move further west, into the tainted lands where the gods and elementals make stranger demands than ever and the power of chaos grows even stronger.

WYLD BARBARIANS

In the West, the pox *Elemental Adaptation: Water* is especially common, as is the blight *Gills*. Many mutants





also have fish scales, large fish-like eyes and skin or hair of blue, green, silver or fish-belly white. Ignorant outsiders often confuse the less mutated barbarians with the people of the sea.

Wylid mutants face many dangers in the West. Roving packs of sharkmen present as much threat to mutants as anyone else. The West has no cities large or sophisticated enough for mutants to find even minimal acceptance. Instead, Wylid barbarians must risk their lives defending their chosen territory in the Bordermarches or the tainted lands from attack. The sharkman threat makes these tribes of Wylid mutants even more tightly knit than those of other lands; in turn, they are also more inclined to view all outsiders as enemies.

Mutants who can breathe water have no trouble living off the sea's vast bounty. Tools, medicines, worked metal, pottery and other manufactured items are difficult to acquire in the far West, however. More than other Wylid mutants, perhaps, tribes in the West resort to raiding civilized folk—as if the West didn't have enough pirates already. Some mutants simply swim to their targets or hitch rides upon the backs of tamed sea-beasts. Others construct, or more often steal, ships. They obtain their wealth and useful goods by raiding ships or attacking

human villages on remote islands. Wylid pirates stay far from any island with a Realm garrison, and shun the Skullstone Archipelago: the Water Aspects of the Realm can fight as powerfully underwater as on dry land, while the undead armies of Skullstone fight underwater with frightening efficiency.

The Sea Lord of Coral Archipelago grants letters of marque to several companies of Wylid pirates. In return for sparing Coral's own shipping, the barbarians can dock at a few specific ports for repairs and to purchase supplies with their booty. However, they may not leave their ships and may only trade with specially licensed merchants, who always keep well-armed guards with them. Any mutants who violate these rules are killed, and their twisted bodies set out on floating buoys at the edge of Coral's ports, as a warning to any mutants or other pirates who would defy the edicts of the Sea Lord.

The murderous Lintha pirates also offer Wylid barbarians a haven. The inhuman-looking, pure-blood members of the Lintha "family" show no prejudice at all to even the most grotesque mutants. Wylid mutants make up almost a third of this large and deadly criminal band. A few mutant barbarians advance to the upper ranks of the Lintha and dwell in Bluehaven's lavish



and barbaric splendor. More often, they just work for the Lintha, bringing their stolen wealth back to their small and isolated island homes. Mutants who join the Lintha usually dwell on the edges of the Wyld and not within the Bordermarches—even more than in the Bordermarches of the rest of Creation, the storms and tides of chaos of the West twist barbarians living within the Wyld in ways that leave them unwilling or even unable to leave the Wyld.

THE PELAGOTHROPES

The most mutated of Wyld barbarians are called pelagothropes. Especially in the Northwest, they often have a layer of fat and oily fur, like a seal's—but this can be blue or green. Long, webbed feet that are almost flippers, scaled skin and nictitating membranes on the eyes are also common mutations. Some pelagothropes might be sealmen further transformed by the Wyld.

Pelagothropes who must still breathe air find themselves forced west toward the Wyld. Gilled tribes, however, sometimes dare to live in the main archipelagos of the West. If pressed by humans, the pelagothropes just move a little deeper. Favored homes include coral reefs, villages woven from living kelp and seaweed or caves hollowed from the underside of icebergs. The gilled pelagothropes still need small areas of land to bear and rear their young, however, since they take time to learn how to use their gills. They use the most remote islets and sandbars for this purpose.

The sea provides almost everything the pelagothropes need, from food to coral or stone for weapons. Ordinary humans know almost nothing of the pelagothrope culture; most tribes even remain aloof from the Lintha pirates. A few Guild factors, however, manage to trade beads and baubles for coral sculptures, which fetch high prices among connoisseurs of the unusual.

Pelagothrope religion focuses on the ocean depths. Their priests and shamans descend to the lightless depths to commune with storm mothers, sirens and sea-spirits almost unknown to surface-dwellers. Pelagothropes also quest for visions in Wyld pockets far under the waves, or journey west to the Bordermarches. Their rites are a mystery even to the other marine races.

BEASTMEN

The sharkmen are the most feared and numerous beastmen in the West. One legend says their savagery so impressed the Fair Folk that the raksha created the horrid siaka-men as a hobgoblin version of these arch-predators. Sharkmen are fully amphibious: they can breed and raise

their young underwater, but also swarm over the side of a ship or onto a beach to hack down any humans who get in their way. Similar to ordinary sharks, sharkmen subsist on raw meat and are always hungry. Most sharkmen have a taste for human flesh.

No beastman breed is more hated than sharkmen. A few dozen sharkmen survive in the West and the Realm as gladiator slaves. The Lintha and a few other exceptionally brutal pirate groups use a few hundred more as shock troops. The Lintha keep these creatures both well-fed and in carefully locked cages, when not setting them to devour the Lintha's enemies. Otherwise, sharkmen are killed on sight. The people of Wavecrest, the Neck, Coral and even Skullstone all consider sharkman-hunting both a deed of valor and a public service. A mounted sharkman head is a point of pride.

Unfortunately, sharkmen breed rapidly and can easily slip away into the water when threatened. Most sharkmen live on the furthest outskirts of Creation. Because they are too bestial to fear the dangers of uncontrolled mutation, many sharkmen live deep within the Bordermarches and only enter Creation when mortal ships come near. Ships that stray too near a pack of sharkmen can often face attack by foes that possess half a dozen or more additional mutations. In other cases, near-constant exposure to the Wyld turns sharkmen into living stories of rapacious, cannibalistic predators. These sharkmen have no culture beyond their eternal hunger and contempt for every other form of life; but the sharkmen who still belong to Creation worship the shark-bodied war god of the West.

The whalemens and dolphinmen are the only other beastmen common in the West. They wage a vicious war for survival against the sharkmen. Although the whalemens and dolphinmen are more intelligent and capable of civilized behavior, these creatures cannot breed as rapidly as sharkmen and lack their sheer ferocity. To survive the ravages of their enemies, the whalemens and dolphinmen follow a strict code of honor, truth and mutual aid. These beastmen avoid humans, whom they regard as cowardly and deceitful.

Most whalemens and dolphinmen live on isolated islands in the tainted lands of the West. Because they breathe air and must spend time on land to give birth and forge metal weapons, dolphinmen are highly territorial and guard the location of their islands with their lives. Dolphinmen treat any trespass into their territories as an attack. While they might spare the lives of intruders who do not threaten or attack them, they strip intruders of any items useful to the dolphinmen pod, and often





beat them to discourage return visits. The prevalence of sharkmen in the Bordermarches prevents dolphinmen and whalemen from venturing into the Bordermarches except to hunt these monsters.

THE PEOPLE OF THE SEA

The people of the sea find little welcome in the main archipelagoes of the West. Fishing nets, mortal thaumaturgy and persistent hatred from land-dwellers encourage the people of the sea to live on the edges of the Wyld, or sometimes even within it. This results in a number of different communities scattered through the West; the largest are the island of Seahome and the Wyld-lost ruined city of Jalarin (see pp. 93–94).

SEAHOME

More than 6,000 people of the sea live on the small island of Seahome, located due west of Abalone. Although Seahome is located within the tainted lands, a jade obelisk protects the island and its inhabitants from the Wyld. The Seahomers would like to push back the Wyld as a matter of self-interest. They also have a number of damaged First Age artifacts salvaged from the sea. Centuries of fighting the Wyld and striving to restore their heritage from the Old Realm have resulted in a respect for scholarship and the study of magic: a council of sages governs the island.

The Seahomers have also bred with outcaste Dragon-Blooded and water elementals for centuries. Some of this

is mere propinquity, but many Seahomers also believe this increases their ability to master the lost Wyld-working technologies of the First Age. Today, Seahome includes a few hundred God-Blooded and more than a dozen Dragon-Blooded people of the sea. They also have a few citizens who are merely Dragon-Blooded: Seahome offers refuge to female “lost eggs” who find themselves stifled by the patriarchal culture of the West. As a result, stories about Seahome often portray it as an island of water-breathing women with loose morals and magic powers, when actually it just has simple gender equality. Perhaps fortunately, few human mariners know Seahome’s location, or would dare sail that close to the Wyld anyway.

The people of Seahome have close, but secret, ties to the Emissaries of Perfect Water (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Dragon-Blooded** pp. 84-85), who share the Seahomers’ interest in pushing back the Wyld. Four members of this organization are people of the sea from Seahome, including one Sable Dragon sorcerer.

WYLD POCKETS

In the West, Wyld pockets occur both on land and in the sea. Pelagic Wyld pockets often include huge, never-ending whirlpools or patches of sargasso weed that may be both animate and home to other dangerous creatures. On land, Wyld pockets may cover part or all of an island. Because some islands actually change location, especially in the aftermath of a Wyld storm, they can become deadly traps for sailors seeking land to resupply their ship.

THE HAMOJI VOLCANO

Mount Hamoji, the largest volcano on the Wavecrest Archipelago, rises near the center of Abalone, the archipelago’s largest island and capital. Several square miles around this volcano belong to the Bordermarches, and the volcano’s caldera is a Middlemarch. As a result, this mountain changes its shape, sometimes daily. The volcano also occasionally spews jets of glowing violet lava, clouds of blood or poisonous flowers and other such oddities. Smaller Wyld zones surround several of the archipelago’s other large volcanoes and a few tiny, nearby volcanic islands as well. These volcanoes often erupt at the same time as Hamoji, but all of these Wyld zones are considerably smaller and are all Bordermarches.

Volcanoes hold a special place in the beliefs of the Wavecrest islanders. When these volcanoes are particularly active, special priestesses carry living convicts deep into the Hamoji Wyld pocket and hurl them into the volcano. No one knows if the volcano-spirit devours these offerings, if the Wyld swallows them or if they just die, but the victims

Seahome, a Magnitude 2 Domain

Military: 1 **Culture:** 2 **Government:** 2

Abilities: Awareness 0 (Superior Diplomats +2), Bureaucracy 1, Craft 2, Integrity 2, Investigation 1, Occult 2 (Savant Academy +3), Performance 1, Presence 1, Stealth 1, War 1

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

Limit Break: Conviction **Current Limit:** 5

Willpower: 6

Bonus Points: 10 **External Bonus Points:** 3

Notes: Seahome is ruled by a council of scholar-magicians with Legitimacy. Despite being relatively small, Seahome boasts more than a dozen sorcerers. It has close ties to the Emissaries of Perfect Water, who provide its external bonus points. These points are used in the city’s Occult Specialty. When in Limit Break, Seahome tries to continue pursuing its current goal, regardless of how costly or difficult it becomes.



are never seen alive again. After the sacrifice, it sometimes rains brains or fresh bone-fragments. Although no one understands the reasons, the volcano stops erupting after a sufficiently large sacrifice. Unfortunately, on rare occasions the only sacrifice that will satisfy the Hamoji Wyld area is the Feathered One, Wavecrest's ruler, or the sacrifice of a person of unmatched beauty. Naturally, when eruptions become especially severe, the Feathered One has his servants search for such individuals.

FAIR FOLK OF THE WEST

Mortal settlements in the West try to ward themselves against the Fair Folk. The islands of prey attract the raksha just as blood in the water attracts sharks. The Western Fair Folk actually hunt mortals *less* than in more settled areas, however, because they have many more Wyld havens to live in. On fantastical islands or enchanted reefs and grottoes, the Fair Folk can play their endless games without need for mortal dreams. The raksha who devour souls for sustenance or just to play the predator, however, are as vicious as any in Creation—and these are the raksha whom mortals meet.

The Fair Folk predators of the Southwest know neither fear nor remorse. They feed on the pain and desperation of their victims. Southwestern raksha ape the customs of the region's mortals by dwelling on islands in tribal groups, each with its own set of initiatory ceremonies, superstitious prohibitions (faithfully observed though never believed) and tattoos. These Fair Folk particularly delight in carved wooden masks, which each raksha carves and paints for himself. They wear no armor, and they carry light weapons such as slings made from tanned human skin, daggers and javelins.

The ruling Fair Folk control the tribe's tame siaka, giant squid and other monsters of the deep. They direct raids against fleets or single boats rather than against islands and archipelagoes; these raksha do not want to "overfish" a single area and drive out or kill all the humans. Few great dreams fill their empty spirits; for the most part, these raksha are content to live an endless cycle of war, hunger and war again.

In the Deep West and Northwest, the raksha build palaces of coral and pearl, far below the range of human divers. The raksha decorate their secret dwellings with jewels and figureheads taken from sunken ships. Raksha carry humans down from ships in cocoons of air, and then torment them in their dreams until they wake screaming, slowly to suffocate as the air in their cocoons grows foul. The male raksha of these regions take great pride in their weapons—nets, tridents and spears—and

sometimes even go disguised on land to seek inspiration from master weaponsmiths. Female raksha usually hunt alone. They lure isolated mortals with songs and promises of love, joy and delight until they join them in the waves and swim down with them to their deaths. These lazy, beautiful and crafty raksha have no regard for humans, but have learned to love their own existences. They are artists, creators and dangerous hunters, feeding at the sea's breast like idle children, and could dream the centuries away nibbling at the edges of Creation.

THE NACRE WHIRLPOOL

A few hundred miles east of the Coral Archipelago, on the trade route to the northern Inland Sea, a perpetual whirlwind boils. The whirlpool guards this freehold's mother-of-pearl palace. All who would visit must sail directly into the rainbow in the maelstrom's spray, as if it were an arched doorway. The ship rides the whirlpool down into the depths, tossed like a toy by the churning sea, until it reaches the calm zone at the bottom. Any other course results in a ship's destruction. Sailors who must pass nearby know the whirlpool's dangers, but they also know that the payment of a living victim grants them safe passage—usually.

The raksha of this freehold have become lazy and self-indulgent. They do not bother to organize trade with the Guild when passing ships offer them mortal souls. In lean times, the Fair Folk sometimes stir themselves to drag victims from ships or raid Coral for victims.

The Fair Folk take their cue from Baron Temmeno. This raksha noble is languid and lecherous as an octopus, drinking the finest wines and sharing his couch with raksha and mortal beauties. His laxness inspires a similar laziness in his followers; they know their human slaves cannot escape from deep beneath the waves, so these raksha permit more freedom than most raksha would. They have some communication with the Winding Stairs and the Seven Stormwinds in the Northern Wyld (see p. 74), exchanging ambassadors with both out of sheer boredom or to arrange the shipping of exotic foodstuffs and luxuries.

No one at the Nacre Whirlpool knows that local Guild representatives are organizing a mercenary strike to destroy or cripple the raksha's freehold. The Guild objects to paying souls and getting nothing in return. Its local factors now seek Exalted, God-Bloods or thaumaturges to supply supernatural aid in the assault.

THE BORDERMARCHES

The Western Bordermarches actually consist of two realms: one on the islands and the surface of the





sea, the other underwater, especially on the sea bottom. This undersea realm is by far the more populous. The vast majority of Wyld-dwelling life dwells in these exotic landscapes where herds of panicked seahorses flee from ravenous bands of siaka-men.

The seas of the Western Bordermarches are unusually animate and active. Waves often move regardless of any wind or currents. Sometimes the waves form tendrils that reach out and try to touch or grab anyone or anything that comes near. Looking into the sea for any length of time can result in faces, heads and even roughly formed bodies rising from the surface of the water. Reaching down to touch the water often results in a watery hand reaching up to touch the character. While such hands sometimes weakly grasp at the character, in most cases they touch and then vanish back into the water. Also, while the waters of chaos are still rare, strong and weak water often occur, as do currents of radically different temperatures or speeds.

The Fair Folk and their hobgoblin servants range freely over much of the sea bottom Bordermarches. In addition, aquatic versions of many land animals roam the sea floor. Tigers covered with blue and black fish scales and elk with the skin of dolphins hunt and graze the strange land underneath the sea. Most of these creatures cannot swim and instead walk and run along the sea bottom as easily and swiftly as their counterparts run along the plains and savannahs of Creation.

DRUMMERS OF THE ENDLESS WAVE

Southwest of Wavecrest, in a Bordermarch of horizon-less ocean broken by dead volcanoes and tidal waves, dwell the Drummers of the Endless Wave. A mated pair of Fair Folk called No-mind and No-desire, who lost their original names to the ocean, leads this raksha tribe. No-mind, the planner of the pair, schemes to increase the tribe's influence and watches constantly for attempts to usurp him. He lost one of his eyes together with his name, but he replaced it with a faceted emerald. No-desire swims naked with the siaka, his long blood-scarlet hair floating behind him, and his mask is set with ruby scars. The two hold an iron domination over their tribe, but fear any discovery of their names.

Their tribe does not know that, three centuries ago, their leaders' names were stolen by one of the great unshaped raksha, the Sucking Tide, who still holds them in order to use the Drummers as tools and minions. For the moment, the Sucking Tide directs the Drummers to cause random havoc, but intends to use them to support a wider invasion when it sees a good opportunity.

AQUATIC SURVIVAL

Western Fair Folk can use their Charms to breathe water, and most Western hobgoblins are naturally aquatic. Mortals, Exalted and Fair Folk from other portions of the Wyld often have more trouble surviving underwater. Characters who do not possess the appropriate Charms, spells or artifacts can instead search for one of the rare plants and animals that can be eaten, held or worn to allow the characters to survive underwater. While none of these Wyld-spawned wonders allow characters the same mobility as that granted to Sable Dragons, they at least permit characters to breathe underwater. Some also let characters move and fight as if they were on land. However, these quasi-natural wonders do not let characters use missile weapons underwater. Their blessings extend only to the character herself.

Finding such plants requires a successful (Perception + [Lore or Survival]) roll of difficulty 3 in the Bordermarches or 2 in the Middlemarches and Deep Wyld. Only natives of the Western Wyld with Lore 2+ or residents of Creation with Lore 2 and a specialty in the Wyld know enough to find these plants or animals, however. Each success above the required difficulty allows the character to find two additional "doses" of the plant. Each "dose" typically lasts either one scene or one full day—but they drugs that are more potent may also force an immediate roll to resist permanent mutation.

The Drummers themselves have no idea how they are used. They live a happy, carefree, bloodthirsty life on the ocean wave, with their pet siaka and their human slaves. Tidal rollers constantly sweep across their island, raising their tethered glass dwellings high above the surface as they pass by; their bamboo rafts float in shifting patterns, forming loose bridges and strange writing on the surface of the water. Human slaves don't last long before being fed to the siaka. The Drummers have little to do with other local raksha, since the Sucking Tide does not want its mastery over the two leaders discovered.

DRUMMERS OF THE ENDLESS WAVE PATROL

Description: A patrol group from the Drummers of the Endless Wave. They carry barbed spears and wear loincloths, and either ride in canoes that row themselves or swim alongside them.

Commanding Officer: Esotai Wavebane



Armor Color: Decorated loincloths and ornamental tattoos

Motto: The sound of canoes being tapped and thumped like drums

General Makeup: 30 Fair Folk, all capable of either fighting or sailing; all can either throw their spears or use them as stabbing weapons. They carry spares.

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 2

Drill: 3

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3

Endurance: 5 **Might:** 3

Armor: 1 **Morale:** 3

Special Characters: None

Formation: Unordered

THE PIRATES OF JALARIN

Jalarin, located several hundred miles west of the Coral Archipelago, was a jewel of the First Age: a city beneath the sea. The city's highest towers extended a dozen stories above the waves. They provided luxurious accommodations for visiting Exalted, as well as mooring masts where skyships docked. Visitors then could descend to air-filled crystal domes, where they could look out upon

both the wonders of the deep ocean and the activities of Jalarin's tens of thousands of aquatic inhabitants.

During the Usurpation, a battle destroyed almost half of the city. The inhabitants fled into the ocean depths. Sable Dragons looted the ruins of any portable artifacts, and then abandoned the city. Years later, some sea-folk returned to reclaim their home, far from the persecutions of the Dragon-Blooded.

The Contagion and the Fair Folk invasion completed the city's ruin. Two-thirds of the inhabitants died. The return of the Wyld shifted the local Essence flows away from the city's manse, leaving the city firmly within the Western Bordermarches. The assault on Creation incidentally produced temblors that tumbled most of the city's remaining towers and shattered all but one of the surviving crystal domes.

The survivors lost all knowledge of First Age wonders. The powerless manse, the city's temples and the bottom halves of several towers remain largely intact, as do many of the low building that nestle amidst these vast edifices. They now serve as home to more than a thousand aquatic barbarians who live as fish-herders and raiders amid the ravaged splendors of the past.

The people of Jalarin adapted to life in the Wyld by becoming living tales of proud, fearless, honorable but utterly merciless pirates. Although they always keep their word, getting a promise of safe passage or even an acceptance of surrender requires their foes to impress the Jalarinites with their bravery. All lesser foes are either killed or sold to the Fair Folk without a second thought. The Jalarinites' assimilation to the Wyld leaves the inhabitants of Jalarin largely free from mutations: they look like perfectly formed people of the sea. Jalarinites typically wear kilts and vests of sealskin or still-scaled fishskin, ornamented with beads, mother-of-pearl badges and jewelry taken from their victims, in a display of barbaric splendor. They go heavily armed even in Jalarin itself.

Raiders from Jalarin regularly attack ships around Coral, Skullstone and the Neck. Their ships can sink down into the water until their decks are awash, which makes them singularly difficult for Western navies to capture. These pirates gain valuable wares; what they can't use, they keep as trophies. The Jalarinites also take captives and keep them alive in the city's one remaining crystal dome: fast-growing seaweed gives the dome a murky but breathable atmosphere. When the Jalarinites have at least a dozen captives, they feed them alchemical concoctions that allow them to temporarily breathe water and carry them to the Fair Folk. The borders of the Middlemarches are only a few dozen miles away, and the Fair Folk have

a large, underwater domain nearby. The Jalarinites pay this living tithe to buy peace with the Fair Folk and to cement a promise of mutual aid.

The treaty's wording is quite loose, but the Fair Folk understand how it fits into the Jalarinites' story, and how it enhances their own tales. The deal has lasted more than five centuries. As a result, the population of Jalarin includes several dozen Fae-blooded people of the sea, who are both the finest shamans and the city's primary emissaries to the Fair Folk.

The Jalarinites' assimilation to the Wyld and treaty with the Fair Folk enable the Jalarinites to employ sharkmen as shock troops and marines. The Jalarinites control these monstrous predators with a combination of drugs, Fair Folk artifacts and the sharkmen's own tendency to become part of a story. Typically, a fifth of the crew of any Jalarin pirate ship are sharkmen.

JALARIN PIRATE COMPANY

Description: This pirate company consists of 185 fierce sea-folk pirates wearing breastplates and armed with chopping swords and boomerangs (for cutting rigging). They are aided by 45 sharkmen shock troops wearing buff jackets and armed with great axes.

Commanding Officer: Captain Fakran, a middle-aged and exceptionally skilled and fierce pirate captain

Armor Color: Black breastplates

Motto: None



General Makeup: 140 flying marines with javelins and chopping swords, supported by 45 archers and 45 sharkmen with great axes.

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 2

Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack: 2 **Ranged Damage:** 2

Endurance: 5 **Might:** 2

Aarmor: 2 **Valor:** n/a

Special Characters: Captain Fakran and a pair of Fae-blooded sub-commanders

Formation: These pirates make up the crew of three ships, Fakran's *Golden Reaver* and the two smaller ships, the *Fearless* and the *Tiger Shark*. They spend much of their time on these vessels and when in Jalarin are always anxious to return to sea.

Notes: Pirates of Jalarin can never fail Valor rolls. Their story does not permit it.

MIDDLEMARCHES

In the Middlemarches, the distinction between ocean surface, sea floor and sky becomes uncertainty. A sinking ship might drift down to a land under the waves; or a waterspout might carry one to a lake in the sky. In some places, water mimics solid forms from elsewhere in Creation, while remaining clear. In other locales, such as islands and the undersea lands, the Wyld copies substances as well as forms in its usual jumbled fashion. The tendency for water to animate and take shapes and images from visitors becomes even stronger than in the Bordermarches: not only can people's daydreams play out in the sea's reflections, the water may itself take the forms of visitors or their imaginings, if only for a short time.

PROPERTIES, PEOPLE, PLACES

LANDS OF DESIRE

The West's propensity to mirror back a visitor's thoughts becomes strongest on certain islands that seem like paradise itself. These islands offer almost everything a person wants, from good food to dead loves returned. Want to take the place of the Unconquered Sun and rule Yu-Shan in glory? The Western Wyld provides.

But it is all illusion. Nothing on these islands is real. The treasures and artifacts vanish when taken from the island. The books of First Age lore only record your own imaginings. The friends, lovers, servants and families are only dreams. They only know what the seeker thinks they do.



Lands under the sea can also gratify desires in this manner. Whatever their form, these lands of heart's desire are the West's most seductive trap. No real force keeps a visitor from leaving; all you have to do is set aside beautiful illusion for harsh reality.

THE MIRROR MAZE

The Mirror Maze is one of the most enigmatic places in Rakshastan. Various raksha nobles have tried to place this maze within their domains, but it resists all forms of control, appears and disappears throughout the Western Middlemarches.

This place is a huge, shifting maze made of solid water. This water is as hard as a wooden wall, but stays fully transparent and is neither cold nor frozen. Wherever visitors walk is the floor in this three-dimensional maze, and terms such as walls and ceilings become meaningless. The passages are all square, and between nine and 11 feet across. They twist, turn, branch off from one another and intersect in a constantly changing network of smooth corridors.

Bubbles float within the walls of these twisting passages. Some bubbles are as small as a fist, while the largest can be three yards in diameter. Each bubble provides a miniature view of some place in Creation or Rakshastan, like a curving window. One may show the bedroom of the Perfect of Paragon, while another might look into the private hunting preserve of a raksha noble from the Western Middlemarches. Naturally, larger bubbles give views that are more detailed. These bubbles cannot be used to affect the actual locations they show. Also, a bubble breaks and vanishes if anything disturbs it. All of the bubbles move slowly through the walls, and vanish within a few hours, so there is no reason to assume that a bubble that appears one day will be there on the next.

Finding a particular bubble involves a lengthy search. This is as much an act of will as a physical search. Unfortunately, the longer a character traverses the Maze, the harder it becomes for her to find her way out. Occasionally, visitors will find lost raksha, Exalted and spirits wandering helplessly through the Maze.

THE OCEAN RIVER

Sailing westerly and always farther west, some voyagers see what looks like a rippling blue ribbon rising from the horizon. They have found the Ocean River. This strip of sea follows its own path through the Western Middlemarches, like the flow of a swift river two miles wide cutting through a landmass. The Ocean River has no beginning or end. Daring traders or explorers use

SEARCHING THE MIRROR MAZE

Finding a particular bubble requires a successful Willpower roll with difficulty equal to the highest permanent Essence rating of any person regularly involved with that location. (So for instance, the difficulty to spy on the Perfect of Paragon's bedroom would equal the permanent Essence of the Perfect.) The difficulty of this search drops by 1 (to a minimum of 2) for every additional scene the character spends walking the Mirror Maze and looking for the appropriate bubble.

Leaving the Mirror Maze requires a Willpower roll with a base difficulty of 1, but the difficulty increases by 1 for each scene the character spends searching (either for a particular bubble or for an exit), to a maximum of 7. Characters who botch either roll become hopelessly lost, and the difficulty of leaving the Mirror Maze becomes 7 immediately.

the Ocean River as an express route to other places throughout the Wyld.

When a ship embarks upon the river, it stays level with the rest of the ocean for at least 20 miles. Then the river begins to separate. Sometimes it rises from the ocean. In places, the river separates entirely from the ocean beneath it, creating a blue arch in the air. The Ocean River is deep enough that most sea creatures, including larger monsters, can still swim along its length. In other places, the Ocean River dips below the surface of the surrounding ocean. There, the waters of the ocean form an unbroken "wall" at the river's border. Occasionally, the river goes so deep that it acquires a saltwater ceiling. Monstrous creatures occasionally swim through the wall to get at ships sailing the Ocean River; sometimes they succeed, and sometimes the current sweeps them away. Whenever the Ocean River bends to the south, it becomes brackish water, then freshwater. These sections of the river have their own freshwater creatures that live nowhere else. One such creature is the swimming Ocean River oyster, which creates a pearl so iridescently beautiful that queens have killed to possess it. When Ocean River flows north, it becomes salty again. Sometimes the current is warm; other times, cold.

The Ocean River divides and recombines enough that a master of its slowly-shifting braids and meanders could travel across the Western Wyld with brilliant speed, including to the undersea lands and locations in the sky. Much of the time, the river blends in with the rest of the ocean, making the Ocean River difficult to find





and nearly impossible to accurately map. Few mariners except the Western raksha know it well.

Effectively, the Ocean River is a waypoint whose properties dictate that it is never more than three scenes away from any other waypoint. Traveling on the Ocean River is generally one scene that may encompass a great length of time. When other scenes occur on the Ocean River (say, a mutiny on a Creation-born boat), the travelers reach the point nearest their destination once that scene ends. It is simply a property of the Wyld that experiencing narrative speeds the journey.

WATERDROP OCEAN

Enormous masses of floating water often occur in the Western Middlemarches, but the Waterdrop Ocean dwarfs them all—almost a separate Creation. This huge, spherical ball of water is more than 500 miles in diameter, with a multitude of fish and other creatures. A single, massive coral reef fills the interior of this vast ocean with a lacy openwork of narrow, spreading branches. In the large, open spaces between the coral tendrils of the reef live enormous kraken, sea dragons and sea serpents.

The Fair Folk say that the center of the reef holds a cache of treasure placed there long ago by one of Balor's chief aides—but this treasure is also said to be guarded by kraken-whales and other powerful beasts that remain mindlessly loyal to the raksha who placed them there. No one who has returned from a journey to the center of the Waterdrop Ocean has ever found the treasure, much less defeated its guardians.

Wyld shifts can transfer ships to the Waterdrop Ocean without them even realizing (at first) where they are and how much their location has changed. The Waterdrop Ocean can appear anywhere in the Western Middlemarches.

THE WEeping MAIDEN

On a lone island in the far, far West rests the Weeping Maiden. She is a limestone statue of a young woman on her knees, hands cupped beneath her face. Tears drip slowly from her eyes into the bowl made by her hands. That cup overflowed long ago, and two salt-lined channels run down to the nearby shore and into the ocean.

Sailors' tales claim that the Weeping Maiden is sister to the Five Maidens of the stars. After breaking some law of Heaven, she was punished by being turned to stone for 31 years. When that time was up, her sisters forgot or neglected to release her. When she realized she had been forgotten, she began to weep. Her tears are the source of the Great Western Ocean. Some end the tale by mentioning that, were she ever released, her constel-

lations would return to the sky and long-forgotten fates would return to Creation.

Regardless of the truth of the matter, there are some benefits to finding and visiting the Weeping Maiden's small island. A taste of the very salty water that fills her cupped hands endows one with the ability to drink saltwater as if it were fresh, but freshwater becomes poisonous. Dabbing the water on the eyes stings and blurs a person's sight in the clear air, but conveys the power to see clearly through the murkiest and darkest ocean depths. Touching the water to the ears renders one deaf to human speech but capable of understanding and speaking with the animals of the sea.

Also, visitors may petition the Weeping Maiden to learn something of their fate, request a desirable fate or abjure one unpleasant. Tall tales about the Weeping Maiden describe many rituals to summon these services, and each is "the only one." The true ritual is recorded within a waterlogged but serviceable book held by the Lintha Family.

Used properly, the ritual allows a character at the Weeping Maiden to learn an aspect of her future or apply a single astrological blessing to help her reach or avoid a certain prospect, similar to Sidereal Astrology. The change is usually so subtle that neither the Five Maidens nor the Sidereal Exalted notice it unless they specifically watch for it, and then they cannot detect the change's source.

To visit the Weeping Maiden, however, one must pass her guardian. Iwau Tamotsu, Watcher with Eyes of Stone, defends the ocean around the statue's island and viciously attacks everything that comes near. Her guardian is a massive coral-reef behemoth, harder than steel, only vaguely human in shape and so large that it stands on the ocean floor while it destroys and devours intruders on the ocean's surface. What the behemoth eats reappears, drowned and broken a thousand ways, on the shore of the Blessed Isle. Few seek the Watcher's ward nowadays, otherwise the Dragon-Blooded would be more curious about how the Watcher's victims got there. (See Chapter Seven, pp. 152–153 for the Watcher with Eyes of Stone's statistics.)

THE PEARL COURT

In the Deep West lies the Pearl Court, a haven for raksha who value pure Will above other virtues. More than anything else, they wish to assert their dominance over other creatures. Members of the Pearl Court are not quite as vicious as those of some other courts, and these raksha don't maintain as high a degree of permanent feud, but they cannot refrain from testing themselves against

those around them. Even the raksha, however, cannot all rule or always win. This fundamental problem in the code of Willpower leads Pearl Court raksha toward a morose, self-loathing bitterness. A Pearl Court noble who loses a duel blames himself for a failure in Willpower, as well as his victorious opponent: the noble's loss shows he did not want victory enough.

The Pearl Court follows Judge Nehemeth, whose body is living bronze, whose eyes are rubies and whose long fingernails are carved ivory. She rigidly controls the entire court, never moving from her throne at the center except when challenged to a duel, and issues strict judgments on any who defy her laws. Her human pets and raksha pages change her robes and polish her body and copy down her pronouncements. She spends day and night creating new laws, leaving actual diplomacy to her counselors and entertainers.

Other noble raksha venture out into the Wyld to serve the court's interests, maneuver for power inside the court or simply to find something to do. The deed matters less than that one set out to achieve it, and succeeded despite opposition.

Lord Coraydo wears nacreous scale armor and styles himself the Warrior of the Pearl as he searches for new adversaries. He takes little interest in his human slaves. Coraydo leads many of the court's hunts and raids, but his declared goal is to conquer Creation all the way to the gods and beyond. The other nobles of the court admire his ambition; they would admire it more if Coraydo could propose any plan, however remote, for achieving this goal.

Dilari of the Sea Foam is one of the most skillful dancers in all Creation. She graces any court or freehold that she visits, which makes her Nehemeth's most useful spy and collaborator. She also works to keep the courts in balance and to avoid another Crusade; she organizes pacts, love affairs and betrayals as beautifully as she does the dances of the Pearl court.

Another widely traveled noble is Sweeter Than Honey, a minstrel, an equivocator and a diplomat. He received his current name from a Lunar with whom he formed a brief alliance to dispose of a deathknight, and kept it after avoiding the Lunar's subsequent attempts to kill him. Sweeter Than Honey spends much of his time traveling the Wyld with interchangeable, short-lived apprentices, and the rest of it acting as a gadfly in Nehemeth's court who finds loopholes in her laws. He also goes through human slaves at a painfully fast rate, and constantly searches for new slaves after driving the latest set raving mad.

The Pearl Court, a Magnitude 3 Dominion

Military: 2/2 **Government:** 4/4 **Culture:** 3/3

Abilities: Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3 (Red Tape 3), Integrity 3, Investigation 3 (Witch Hunt 3), Occult 3 (Supernatural Etiquette 3), Performance 2, Presence 3 (Imperious Demands 2), War 2

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 3

Limit Break: Conviction **Current Limit:** 3

Willpower: 7

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 9

Notes: The Pearl Court is a Supernatural dominion. Judge Nehemeth is a sorcerer with Legitimacy, while Dilari of the Sea Foam is a savant (her influence behind the scenes is occasionally suspected but not proven). In the event of a Limit Break, the Pearl Court becomes ruthlessly controlling and refuses to engage in any situation in which the court does not have total authority over proceedings, either ignoring them or attempting to seize power over other participants.

The Pearl Court itself consists of a single castle of shimmering mother-of-pearl that rises, spire upon spire, so high that the sun and moon must change their course to avoid crashing into it—that's what people see, anyway. Though it rises from the sea on an isolated crag of solid stones, the court moves throughout the Western Middlemarches, because Nehemeth wills it so. This makes the Pearl Court hard to find; it buys most of its slaves through the Goblin Bazaar of Surgeon's Deep.

The length of time the court has spent in the West means the court has built up many enemies. The Fair Folk have displeased nearby Lunars, angered the Silver Prince and even annoyed the Lintha—just to prove they could. The court's best local ally (not counting other raksha, who would betray it if they saw the chance) is the Guild, which values its stable market for slaves. Some raksha nobles speculate when the Pearl Court shall move elsewhere in the Wyld—and if so, where it will go.

PEARL COURT RAIDERS

Description: A group of 150 Fair Folk raiders. They are of Excellent quality, half male, half female. They wear gossamer armor and carry gossamer swords, tridents and daggers. They ride on horses of foam and starlight that gallop across the surface of the waves.

Commanding Officer: Captain Dragon Pike

Armor Color: Grey siaka hide ornamented with mother of pearl



Motto: None. They sing strangely as they ride into battle.

General Makeup: Armed riders

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 3

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 4

Armor: 4 **Morale:** 2

Formation: Skirmish

SKYPORT

When sailors hear of Skyport and its strange mariner culture, they blow it off as a tall tale. But those who sail far enough into the Northwest see the truth of it for themselves. First come the ships of Skyport's fleet. These ships do not show bow and sail but instead display a keel, sticking the wrong way up into the air. As much of the hull's bottom shows as is usually underwater, even to the point of rising up when the ship is laden.

Most sailors who spot Skyport believe at first that they've drunk too much grog, or that the chef did something stupid with the fish last night, but it's real. The sailors of Skyport sail under the water, floating their livelihoods upside down on the sky above. Barnacles of a sort latch onto their ship bottoms, bird eggs with very hard shells that sort nutrients out of the air until they hatch and fly off.

As the sailors approach Skyport itself, the waters become thicker with ships and boats, all sailing the underside of the sea. Fishing lines hang upwards into the air to catch gulls and Wyld beasts for tonight's dinner, plus a little more for the aromatic and feathery Bird Market. Some people trawl nets. Before the city becomes visible, a small, fast but armed ship—sails to the sky, for once—meets the visitors and asks them to heave to for a discussion.

The people of Skyport are black-skinned like obsidian. They look as humans might if they were creased down the middle and each half folded somewhat back. They are very thin, and the two planes of their narrow faces ensure that each bright eye looks a different direction. Their fingers are long and thin and their legs strong but apparently covered with baggy, loose skin. This is actually a series of fins that wrap around their legs when out of water.

Once the greeter meets the ship's captain, he or she explains the docking procedure. The native tongue of Skyport is Riverspeak for reasons no one knows, but some people know other languages, too. Skyport's official greeter usually also speaks Seatongue and Old Realm. She explains that, because their buildings are on the ocean's other face, the ships of Creation are dangerous to them. Much like port cities with swamps, reefs or other hidden dangers, Skyport requires native pilots if the explorers wish to go on.

Pilots are skilled at their jobs. Following their guidance, a captain can easily sail the ship within the lanes marked as safe. Small poles marked with red paint show the way but can be hard to notice, as can the piles of detritus showing through the water that the guides assiduously avoid. Before the crew knows it, they reach the foreign quarter – that is, the above-water section of Skyport.

There, buildings constructed from driftwood, seaweed, coral, bones and other flotsam rest solidly on the water. They rise and fall with the waves but never capsize. The two dozen buildings include the port authority, hostleries for visiting sailors, warehouses for trade goods, offices for merchants who deal with foreign merchants and shops for resupply.

Despite the long quays and many slipways, there never appear to be any other ships docked—not surprising, out in the Middlemarches. By the time visitors dock, even the ship that came out to meet them is gone from sight.

Visible from this area of Skyport is a pale patch of ocean that looks more sky-blue than marine blue-green. Here is where the greeter's ship has gone. Sailing into this patch of ocean, a ship loses buoyancy quickly, fast



enough to make a captain certain he's going down with his vessel. But instead of water rushing in and giving them a cold grave, the ship *flips* around to sail on the sky from underneath. Merchants in the foreign quarter sell blue-black jade pendants (Artifact •) that allow foreigners to breath the sea around Skyport.

In Skyport proper, the "ocean" below is a clear blue, stormy gray, and many colors in between. The air and sky are a deeper blue, growing green and sometimes murky in the sky. Sunlight comes from below, so many houses have skylights in their basements. Traveling the path from sky to sea (which may be taken on foot, on a floating quay) places one far from Skyport's true center. The first buildings that people see are mere shacks, hovels for Skyport's paupers. Just like above, the buildings rest firmly (if upside-down) on the ocean's surface and roll with the waves. There, the tops of the red-painted sticks are visible—two-sided buoys, marking the paths where the pilots direct the foreign, "under-air" ships.

The buoys are spread out enough for a ship to pass through, and a channel leads toward the city center. Now, the city becomes visible: many buildings, constructed of the same materials as before but somehow noble and grand, rise from the ocean's surface into the depths. All transit between buildings is done by gondola or floating

bridges. Natives look stranger underwater, as their fins unwrap and float ethereally around their legs, but they obey their upside-down gravity. They use the increased buoyancy of being underwater but do not swim in it—to them, as to any visitors who enter through the official path, it is atmosphere.

Visitors to Skyport are invited to partake of all its exotic pleasures, from alcohols and drugs never seen in Creation to elegant seaweed parks to erotic practices that could confuse a Cynis. Luckily, they accept jade as currency. Skyport also has many confusing and unintuitive laws, such as, "Do not gaze at the space between a woman's eyes in public," or, "Only touch those you own." They do not consider it necessary to tell guests about these laws until they have been broken. Skyport also has many unusual methods of punishment, including turning people into fish or water-plants for extended periods.

THE DEEP WYLD

All the forms and qualities of Creation are present in the Western Deep Wyld, but everything is made of water. The endless sea evokes shining, transparent duplicates of whales, seals, people, islands, cities or anything else found in the West of Creation—or anywhere else. Volcanoes of ice spew steaming rivers. Forests of clear water rise from the waves. Breakers crash on beaches of granulated water, where liquid children splash and play. The difference between air and water becomes largely meaningless here. Most of the time, a visitor can breathe the water; but sometimes, he can drown in air.

Influences seep in from the South and the North. Although no polluting fire or hurricane winds can part the waters, even here there is heat and cold. The far Northwest sees much ice and snow. The far Southwest has areas of boiling steam that can flense the flesh from the bones, condensing into clouds as they move northward until they become masses of water undulating through the sky.

The waters of the utter West are unnaturally reflective. The water often forms itself into large flat sheets like giant mirrors, or warped surfaces that throw back twisted images. While there is light, the sun, moon and stars are not seen: water arcs above so high that they block the celestial bodies from view, if indeed they even exist here. Though rainbows may cut through spray, the source-less light that casts them cannot be found. In deeper parts of the water, light fades until only the pallid glow of luminous fish illuminates the endless depths.

This land of mist and reflections is even more chaotic and changeable than the rest of the Deep Wyld. A stray

Skyport, a Magnitude 3 Dominion

Military: 1 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 3

Abilities: Awareness 2 (Visitors +2), Bureaucracy 3, Craft 3 (Unique Art +2), Investigation 1 (Visitors +2), Occult 2 (Water +2), Performance 3 (Strange Entertainments +3), Presence 2

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

Virtue Flaw: Temperance **Current Limit:** 2
Willpower: 6

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** None

Notes: Citizens of Skyport do not Exalt as Celestial or Terrestrial Exalted; all their savants and sorcerers are native heroic mortals. One of the Exalted who came to spend a great deal of time there could greatly shift the city's direction, if he could figure out its Policy. Skyport's bonus points are tied up in its third dot of Performance and its Specialties. Because of the city's distance from other dominions, Skyport has no external bonus points. The people of the city are remarkably intransigent when it comes to their unique laws. Its Virtue Flaw causes the city to crack down on lawbreakers, especially visitors.



thought or memory can briefly reshape a nearby bit of water into a duplicate of some familiar place, or cause an image of a friend to appear in a nearby reflection.

Freeholds and domains here on the edge of Chaos take the form of vortices, standing breakers and other aquatic manifestations of power, rather than islands, sunken palaces or smooth sargassos. Some raksha shape their dwellings as icebergs hollowed into castles of ice or twisting mazes of frozen corridors.

UNSHAPED RAKSHA

The sparse population of the West gives its unshaped raksha less of humanity to draw on for concept and form. As a result, these raksha tend to manifest in even more abstract, diffuse and impersonal ways than usual for their kind. However, some raksha have gained fearsome names and reputations.

Shatters the Horizon has little active malice, but spreads insanity merely by her presence. She breaks all horizons, whether of the world, the body or the mind. When she is near, nothing seems true; best friends may kill one another while claiming that their victim was “just a copy, an imposter, not real,” and virtuous men and women can commit horrible atrocities just to watch what happens, confident that the whole thing is a particularly realistic dream. Shaped raksha utterly dread Shatters the Horizon, for she weakens the conventions of personality they have assumed, unmasking and unshaping them. When she comes even closer—or more precisely, when she directs more of her attention on an individual—flesh flows like wax and she plays with heroes like dolls, reshaping them to her whim. From a distance, she cannot be seen, but the horizon in her direction grows cracked like brittle glass, and any water nearby loses its taste.

The Sucking Tide exercises a hidden influence over the Drummers of the Endless Wave. It manifests as water that has the consistency of flesh, and that forms a never-ending whirlpool. The Sucking Tide drinks the names of people trapped inside it, and then releases them to do its will in Creation. Anyone who sees the Sucking Tide dreams of it afterwards, and it attempts to follow them to the borders of Creation. Bodies of water in their dreams become gateways for it, and water runs from their eyes and mouths while they sleep, casting reflections of the Wyld.

Salt That Cuts manifests as a brittle sharpness on the surface of the water. In its presence, all water takes on edges and slices anything it touches. Other flat surfaces become sharp in all directions as well, no matter how

one tries to stand on them. The only way to smooth them is to coat them with fresh blood, which lasts for a few seconds before dissolving into the water. In the presence of Salt That Cuts, storms slice the sea to pieces until the water itself bleeds, and all liquids become salty. Salt That Cuts rarely speaks, but its voice resounds like an echo. Salt That Cuts cannot endure any whole thing, any perfect thing or any smooth thing, and destructively lacerates such entities if it encounters them.

THE ELEMENTAL POLE OF WATER

At the furthest West, a strange sense of order appears. Even though the place is filled by water and its illusions, even though nothing is solid, still, this is a place of pure elemental power rather than the Wyld, and water must obey certain laws inherent to its nature. Rivers cannot remain still, and tides must flow. Even if the water shapes itself into mighty castles, avenues of towering trees, or mountains and crags and valleys, it remains water. It does not have the bitter coldness of pure air, the savage heat of pure fire or the unrestrained hungry growth of pure wood. It is water, it flows, it penetrates and it takes whatever form it is given.

The Pole of Water has no surfaces, only discontinuities between different forms of water. A river of mobile water falls over a cliff of solid water through a space of breathable water into a lake of still, receptive water. The few bubbles of air are so suffused with moisture that fire cannot burn without the help of puissant Charms.

SURVIVAL AT THE POLE OF WATER

The animals and plants of Creation include much water; blood is an inner sea. Mortal creatures, therefore, survive at the Pole of Water more easily than at the Poles of Air or Fire. A visitor may drown, but he drowns in a familiar element. Any Charm or other magic that enables breathing underwater removes that danger.

The elemental pole has its own version of the water of chaos, however—destructive not because of Wyld-taint but because water’s nature is to dissolve what it touches. Any Charm that protects against the water of chaos also shields a mortal against the pole’s all-dissolving currents. For what it’s worth, a victim dissolved by the pole does not die. The water takes the form of his body, mind and soul, as it takes the form of any container, transforming him into an elemental.

No plants can survive, because the Water Pole has no impurities to nourish it or earth to take root upon; the only exceptions are the trailing weeds that sometimes grow on the bodies of water-spirits, emblematic of their nature rather than actual, physical plants. There is no earth here, for the endless depths have no bottom and no further shore; equally, the only coral here grows on the bodies of water-spirits. The pole knows only water; water solid or liquid, horizontal or vertical, in shapes imaginable and unimaginable, twisted in an endless medley of movement.

The Elemental Dragon of Water never ceases to move through the waters of Creation; she visits the elemental pole, but no more than any other place, and she is never still. The visits of Daana'd are unheralded, but cause a great commotion as all the water-spirits and elementals rush to pay homage, disrupting the tides of the region and dragging storms and waterfalls behind them. She continues to move while she accepts their obedience and hears their reports, never ceasing, and her servants must therefore follow her, though she is kind enough

to slow her pace. Her majestic dwelling consists of lakes, waterfalls and rivers that twist and bend in on themselves in impossible patterns. When Daana'd is in residence and swimming through it, it glows with a blue light that shines through the entire pole.

Two mighty lesser water dragons, Unresting and Unhasting, take command in the Elemental Dragon's absence. They were born from a single stream that was divided at its source, and seldom part from each other, twining their bodies around each other in long arcs of crystalline water and flashing scales. They now disdain the Creation that birthed them for the purity and beauty of the elemental pole. The two guard its borders against intruders from Creation or the Wyld; these Dragons consider this duty far more important than anything they could do inside Creation. Unresting and Unhasting also disdain lesser beings—which to them means anything less than a major deity. Since they are younger than the First Age, they do not remember the Solar Exalted, and know the Lunar Exalted only as wanderers of the Wyld, powerful yet often unstable.





WELCOME TO RAKSHASTAN, QUEER GUEST.

THANK YOU, GOLDEN MIRROR. YOU ARE NOT AS I IMAGINED.

YOU FLATTER ME. HAVE YOU COME TO MAKE SOME REQUEST?



YES. I CAME TO ASK ABOUT SHE WHO LIVES IN HER NAME.

THE DEMON PRINCESS?

INDEED. I KNOW SHE HIDES AN ENTRANCE TO MALFEAS NEAR THE ELEMENTAL POLE OF FIRE.

YET, I KNOW NOT WHERE. CAN YOU TELL ME?



WHY ASK ME, EXALTED ONE, WHEN YOU REEK OF CAPTURED MALFEAS?

DOES NOT THAT PRINCESS LANGUISH THERE? CAN SHE NOT TELL YOU HERSELF?

I HAD HOPED TO LEAVE HER OUT OF THIS.

AH...



WELL, IT'S NO MATTER. I WON'T HELP YOU ANYWAY.

NORMALLY, MY PRICE WOULD BE YOUR LOVELY FACE, YOU SEE, BUT YOURS IS INCOMPLETE.

THAT MAKES IT WORTHLESS TO ME.



WHAT'S MORE, YOU'RE POLLUTED WITH THE ESSENCE OF THE ABHORRENT PRIMORDIALS!

IF NOT FOR CERTAIN REGRETTABLE OATHS, I WOULD DESTROY YOU FOR COMING HERE TO INSULT ME!



NOW, GET YOU GONE!

VERY WELL, HATEFUL FAERIE, BUT I SHALL RETURN IN TIME.

AND WHEN I DO, REMEMBER THAT I GAVE YOU A CHANCE TO COOPERATE.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE SOUTHERN WYLD

The Elemental Pole of Fire spreads its influence throughout the Southern Wyld. In Creation, the growing heat dries the land to desert or calls volcanoes from the earth. In the Wyld, the deserts become harsher, hotter and stranger, while the volcanoes may spew substances other than lava. Not only do the many forms of heat and fire appear—actual flames, hot coals, lava, solar heat—so do the products of flame: ash and smoke, but also forged metal and the jewels that form from crystallizing magma.

The further reaches of the Southern Wyld often become lethally hot for mere mortals, while the Exalted need Charms to survive. In other areas, however, the heat lessens while other aspects of fire take precedence: its light, its capacity to burn out impurities, its evanescent, flickering motion or its power to liquefy, boil or transform.

THE SOUTHERN EDGE OF CREATION

The South is the portion of Creation most inherently hostile to life. Although the warm coastal lands contain many populous and highly civilized lands, the interior becomes harsh and hot, dry and desolate. The tainted lands and Bordermarches of the South usually consist of dune fields, pebbly “desert pavement,” barren lava plains, salt pans and flash-flood gullies, just as the rest of the Southlands. The few mortals who survive in this unforgiving land adapt to it physically or culturally in ways that make them profoundly dangerous to outsiders. Most tribes of beastmen, barbarians and Wyld barbarians living in the far South are cannibals who eat both their



own dead and any outsiders the inhabitants can slay or capture—meat and moisture are too rare to waste.

Civilized mortals would avoid the far South, except that the region abounds with gems and other riches, including firedust. The drive to obtain these riches sends caravans from the Guild and other merchants deep into the South, sometimes into the Borderlands themselves. Paradoxically, despite the harsh environment of the Southern edges of Creation, the riches found in the Southern Wyld make it the most frequently visited section of the Wyld.

The borders of the Wyld shift in the South, just as everywhere else. Wyld-infused substances that flow or blow into Creation, however, cause most of the region's tainted lands. Common sources of Wyld-taint include rivers of exotic lavas (on the surface or intruding through subterranean channels) and volcanic ash dunes of strange and sometimes deadly sand. Drifts of screaming sand, flows of fleshy lava and storms of animate ash all happen fairly often in some places.

EXOTIC SAND

The following types of sand occur in small patches throughout Southern tainted lands. In the Border-marches, these sands may cover large swaths of desert. In the tainted lands, all of these sands except gem sand and firedust transform into ordinary sand within a few months after leaving the Wyld.

Firedust: This common product of Southern Wyld storms finds use in firewands and other weapons. Firedust draws almost as many prospectors to Creation's rim as gemstones.

Jewel Sand: This rare and treasured sand consists of tiny fragments of emeralds, diamonds, rubies or other precious stones. In addition to being extremely beautiful, jewel sand can be used by artisans for everything from high-quality abrasives to decorations. A large bag can be sold for Resources ••• in any city in the South.

Living Sand: This strangest of sands is a collective organism, much like a colony of tiny ants. Living sand normally ignores anyone who walks over it, striking it hard can anger it and anyone who rests or sleeps upon it risks being treated as a convenient meal. Angry or hungry sand slowly crawls over its victim. It can only move at a rate of one yard per turn, and the sand ceases to attack once the person moves outside its boundary. However, this sand easily slips through any barrier that is not airtight. As a result, living sand ignores all armor (but not natural soak). It crawls up victims and deals one die of lethal damage per attack. Exalted and beings with natural soak are protected until the sand chews through their protection, which requires a number of successful damage rolls equal to the value of the armor (for beings with natural armor) or the character's Stamina (for Exalted).

Rotten Sand: The infamous "rotten sand" acts exactly like quicksand, except that rotten sand is dry. When someone steps into a patch, her player must roll (Dexterity + [Acrobatics, or Ride if mounted]). Two or more successes allow the character to avoid sinking into this innocuous-looking death trap. A single success means the character sank almost to her waist. A failed roll indicates the character sank to mid-chest, while a botch means she sinks up to her neck. Players then make the same roll every action as the character attempts to flatten out, get to the surface and crawl slowly and carefully out of this sand. Two successes on a roll allow the character to go from being in the sand up to her neck to up to her chest, then to her waist and then to flattened across the surface. Once a character is on the surface, she can slowly "swim" to the edge of the sand, at a speed of one yard per action, with no need for further rolls. Failing a roll causes the character to sink one level, such as from being buried up to her waist to being buried up to her chest. Characters who are already buried up to their necks sink under the sand and begin to suffocate. Botching this roll means the character sinks two levels.

Speaking Sand: The Wyld infuses some sands with sound that the faintest pressure can release, such as a strong breeze or someone walking upon it. Most sands contain noises from past times. Some sands carry the horrified screams of mortals facing the Fair Folk invasion or similar horrors. Others contain ordinary sounds such as howling winds or animal grunts. However, a few sands pick up and echo sounds from all across Creation. One common sound consists of brief snatches of speech about a nearby character or his loved ones, which were spoken in private and never meant to be heard by the person himself.

Unstable Sand: This exotic sand acts normally unless struck with a hard blow, such as a person or large animal running over it, falling on it or dropping something heavy on it. At this point, the entire patch of sand vanishes, leaving only a small amount of fine dust behind. Characters on the unstable sand fall into a pit that is usually between two and six yards deep... and the normal sand starts falling in on them. Escape requires an extended (Dexterity + Athletics) roll, with the total number of successes equal to the pit's depth in yards.



panagda

WYLD BARBARIANS

Many Southern Wyld mutants are completely hairless and possess a tough leathery hide, or even scales similar to those of a snake or lizard. The pox *Elemental Adaptation: Fire* is also very common. Although many tribes of Wyld mutants dwell in the South, most are small because the deserts just don't provide enough food for larger populations. The Panagda, or Scaled Folk, are the most numerous breed of Southern Wyld barbarians.

THE PANAGDA

Unlike the nocturnal dune people, these strange beings love the sunlight. They all bear the poxes *Scales* and *Elemental Adaptation: Fire*. In addition to their scaled skin, they also have the slitted golden eyes of serpents. Humans sometimes mistake the Panagda for snake beastmen, but the Scaled Folk lack fangs, poison, long snouts and other ophidian features; they owe their state to the Wyld alone, not the Lunar Exalted.

The Panagda rule the day, just as the dune people stalk the night. Because the Panagda feel cold more severely than normal humans and their night vision is poor, the Scaled Folk retreat to mountain caverns and the lava tubes of extinct volcanoes during the night. Similar to the dune

people, the Panagda are fierce cannibals who prey upon both caravans and any dune people they find.

However, some Panagda tribes have learned other ways of life. Because they all live either within the Bordermarches or the tainted lands bordering them, the Panagda have great knowledge of the riches found there. Scaled Folk have learned the skill of permanently setting gemstones in their own scales: their chiefs and shamans often glitter with complex, jeweled patterns.

After ceremonially devouring their own dead (with many reminiscences about the deceased's excellent qualities), the Panagda dry the skulls and keep them as bowls. The skulls of chiefs and shamans are coated in gold and gems. The highest honor a Panagda can offer a guest is water from the skull of his mother or father.

A few tribes trade some of their riches or act as guides to gemstone rivers and similar wonders—although they always keep the finest sources of treasure to themselves. Because of their love of ornament, Scaled Folk may trade large amounts of raw gems or lengthy service as guides for gemstones that civilized jewelers have faceted. The Panagda have raw gems in plenty—but not the tools and skills to produce such finished stones. Of course, they value food and water, too... and have learned that a



handful of stones can buy a feast for an entire tribe. If the merchants prove weak or careless, the Scaled Folk get *two* feasts and keep the stones.

As with all Wyld barbarians, however, dealing with the Panagda carries risk. The Scaled Folk have no concern for outsiders. Even tribes willing to trade with or otherwise aid well-defended caravans usually attack ill-defended caravans out of a mixture of greed and contempt. Panagda warriors also often challenge the most skilled caravan guards to duels that are supposed to be to first blood, but are actually lethal—refusing to answer such a challenge shows cowardice and often dooms an entire caravan.

THE GOLDEN SHIELD TRIBE

This Panagda tribe sells yellow sapphires mined from tainted land, where they also obtain golden obsidian for sword-clubs, tomahawks, javelin-points and daggers. The wealth of food, water and ornaments bought from the Guild has suddenly increased the tribe's power and prestige, enabling the Panagda to push around other little tribes on the Wyld's edge. Their chief, Sandswimmer Fang, now buys weapons from the Guild and plans to conquer other tribes to form a tribal kingdom.

The tribe takes its name from the shield-shaped designs of yellow jewels they fix to their scaled chests. Sandswimmer Fang, his top warriors and shamans have the most elaborate shield-designs, enchanted as talismans against the Wyld. The tribe worships the constellation of the Shield as well as their local small gods. No Exalted, Fair Folk or greater deities are manipulating the tribe—yet.

Golden Shield Tribe, a Magnitude 2 Dominion

Military: 3 **Government:** 1 **Culture:** 2

Abilities: Awareness 1, Bureaucracy 1, Craft 1, Integrity 2 (Tight-Knit Heritage +2), Occult 1 (Supernatural Etiquette +2), Performance 1 (Display of Wealth +2), Stealth 1, War 2

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

Virtue Flaw: Temperance **Current Limit:** 1

Willpower: 7

Bonus Points: 10 **External Bonus Points:** 6

Notes: The Golden Shielders trade with the Guild and use their wealth of food to buy influence with other tribes because Sandswimmer Fang tells them to. In the event of Limit Break, Sandswimmer Fang loses control: the people eat the traders and their stored food in a massive feast, and start more vendettas with neighboring tribes.

Sandswimmer Fang and his chief shaman both have Essence pools thanks to power-questing. Sandswimmer Fang spent years having adventures on Creation's rim, making him an uncommonly skilled heroic mortal. After taking over his tribe, Sandswimmer Fang pushed for greater Guild commerce and works to convince his people that outsiders can be used for more than food. As long as he brings in food and power over other tribes, his people will follow him.

BEASTMEN

Most beastmen in the South have even less material culture than their barbarian or Wyld mutant neighbors; in the warm climate, the beastmen don't need it. Hyenamen are the most common breed in the warmer areas and the tainted lands of the South, while gazellemen abound in the tainted lands of the Southeast. However, snakemen are the only beastmen capable of living in the deep desert and lava plains of the far South and in the Southern Bordermarches. They rarely need to drink, their venom allows them to slay their prey quickly and they can endure the searing rays of the sun far better than ordinary mortals.

THE BEAST CRATER

High in the volcanic mountains separating Gem from the verdant lands to the West is a vast, extinct volcano. It rises more than a mile and a half high, with a caldera 20 miles in diameter and half a mile deep. The steep walls of this crater enclose an exotic lost world. In the center of the enormous valley lies a deep freshwater lake two miles across. The altitude moderates the Southern heat and rains reach the mountain from the West, so the valley is warm, verdant and brimming with life. Inside the crater live almost 90,000 large animals and nearly 5,000 beastmen.

The Southern flank of the mountain lies within the Bordermarches, but the crater is within Creation. Winds blow strange volcanic dust in from the Wyld, and exotic beasts sometimes descend the Southern crater wall and enter the valley, but some unknown power prevents the Wyld from advancing further than the outer rim of the caldera. Even when Wyld storms draw the Bordermarches around the mountain, the entire crater always remains fully a part of Creation. The only exception is the top 100 feet of part of the Southern crater wall.

The steep walls cut the crater off from the rest of Creation. Any being that wants to enter the crater from Creation must either fly in or attempt a steep, half-mile climb down the cliffs. The Southern wall of the crater has several steep paths from the crater floor, but they

end at steep cliffs just before the top. For a few weeks of the year, however, the Bordermarches slip down the crater wall and *sometimes* etch short-lived paths from the crater to the Wyld.

The Southern two miles of the valley are tainted land. Creatures from the Bordermarches stay in this area. The occasional light dustings of volcanic ash and strangely scented winds from the Wyld provide the influxes of Chaos these creatures need to thrive and reproduce. Here grow low trees with large, shiny leaves and flowers that feel hot and glow orange-red in the dark, as well as lizards with bronze or obsidian scales and a variety of similarly exotic flora and fauna.

A mixture of plants and animals from the central South coast and the lush, tropical Southwestern shores inhabits the rest of the valley. Some creatures are smaller than normal. Packs of lions hunt gazelles, wild boar and dwarf elephants no larger than warhorses. A profusion of tropical birds sing and squawk in the trees; austrech and other large, flightless birds roam the savannahs. The beast valley also contains an abundance of flowering plants, including many found nowhere else.

Five different varieties of beastmen live here—the only place in Creation where so many different types of beastmen live next to one another. Snakemen and chiropterans dwell in the small forests dotting the valley, while the gazellemen, hyenamen and leopardmen prefer the veldt. No humans or Exalted live in this valley: the Lunar Exalted visit now and then, but only to observe this unique land.

Despite plenty of feuds and others personal conflicts, the beastmen form a rude confederation of tribes. By agreement, no beastman may hunt another as prey or eat his flesh. Such offenders are declared enemies of all beastmen, who any may raise claw or spear against the offenders without fear of retribution. These beastmen are considerably more violent and aggressive than equally primitive human communities. They make their weapons from flint, wood and bone and can use no more than Second Degree (Adept) thaumaturgy. However, they have forged a unique culture in which the members cooperate, fight duels and tell stories of love and war, wisdom, folly, tragedy and farce. They call the crater “the world.”

Several times a decade, the tribes band together to defend one another when the Wyld storms drive a horde of predatory hobgoblins and other Wyld creatures over the rim and down into the valley. The beastmen know to attack visitors from the Wyld on sight—and for all they know, human visitors from Creation are just more Wyld aberrations. They will rob, kill and possibly devour weak

or helpless visitors from Creation. Visitors who seem formidable, but not immediately aggressive, provoke the beastmen’s curiosity and have a chance to prove they are people. This usually involves a duel to first blood to determining visitors’ bravery and merit.

BEAST CRATER WAR BAND

Description: This war band consists of 100 beastmen warriors who foray after Wyld storms to defend their valley from Wyld mutants, hobgoblins or any other threat. The members of the war band wear buff jackets reinforced with strips of bone and wield spears, bows and axes. This particular band is composed of about 20 chiropterans, 20 gazellemen, 20 hyenamen, 30 leopardmen and 10 snakemen. The war band is led by Baras Goblinbane, an elemental-blooded leopardman who is one of the valley’s most renowned war leaders. Off duty, the members split up and rejoin their tribes.

Commanding Officer: Baras Goblinbane

Armor Color: Dark buff jackets with orange tiger stripes of painted bone

Motto: “Devour our enemies for the World.”

General Makeup: 70 light infantry with axes and javelins; supported by 30 archers

Overall Quality: Excellent

Magnitude: 3



Drill: 3

Close Combat Attack: 3 Close Combat Damage: 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 Ranged Attack Damage: 2

Endurance: 6 Might: 2

Armor: 2 (-2 mobility) Morale: 4

Special Characters: Baras Goblinbane, two God-Blooded chiropterans

Formation: The war band usually operates in skirmish formation, but once the warriors surround an enemy, the warriors often converge to close formation.

RELICS OF THE PAST: THE DUNE PEOPLE

The dune people inhabit much of the deep desert. Several tribes live near the fringes of the Glittering Desert, where they lie in wait for mortal scavengers and hobgoblin relic hunters; the dune people devour all who come near their lairs with equal relish. When night falls, the tribes emerge from their sandy beds and creep silently across the dunes and scree, to hunt any nearby visitors to their desiccated realm. Their keen senses allow them to spot the faintest flicker of a distant campfire or the sound made by sleeping mortals.

The dune people silently advance on any camps they find, slay the sentries and then swarm upon victims in a deadly massed attack. Disdaining clothing as a useless artifact of civilization, they wield heavy boomerangs, hammers and axes made from stone, human bone and tendon. The dune people devour their captives, drink their blood and render their bones and sinews into the tools needed for their survival.

DUNE PEOPLE HUNTING PARTY

Description: This hunting party consists of 50 hunters of the Jaresh Plains tribe, a large band of nocturnal dune people who must hunt humans and beastmen as a source of food and tools. The war party consists of a moderately small team of naked dune people wielding axes, slings and boomerangs.

Commanding Officer: Nysala, chief of the Jaresh Plains tribe

Armor Color: Ghostly white skin

Motto: None

General Makeup: 30 light infantry with axes and javelins.; supported by 20 slingers

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 2

Drill: 2

Close Combat Rating: 3 Close Combat Damage: 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 Ranged Attack Damage: 2

Endurance: 6 Might: 1

Armor: 0 Morale: 3



Special Characters: Nysala, chief of the Jaresh Plains tribe and Obok, the head shaman of this tribe

Formation: This hunting party relies almost exclusively on skirmisher formation.

POCKETS OF THE WYLD

The South holds a great diversity of Wyld pockets, from small fountains of exotic lava to entire chaos-filled mountains. The most dangerous pockets seem like inviting oases in the middle of barren deserts, but are actually small Bordermarches or Middlemarches where deadly plants, animals, Wyld barbarian raiders or stranger phenomena await tired and thirsty travelers.

THE FIREGEM FOUNTAIN

One of the smallest but most famous Southern Wyld zones occupies the corner of a large and verdant oasis. This Wyld zone is only 30 yards in diameter, but in daylight, the Wyld zone shines and glitters brightly enough to be seen from miles away. The entire area looks like different colors of candle wax ran and dripped over everything... only instead of wax, the layered dribbles and splashes are multi-hued gemstone. Technically, the Wyld pocket is no more changeable than the Bordermarches. At its center, however, lies an opening to a lava tube that leads into the Middlemarches.

Just as everything else in this glittering Wyld zone, the opening regularly changes shape, but always stays in the heart of the region; the width of the opening ranges from several inches to two feet. Between four times a day and once a week, a small fountain of burning, molten gemstone issues from this portal. This exotic lava is as thick as warm honey. If the lava touches any of the hardened gem-lava surrounding the fountain, burning lava simply cools and hardens, but if any of it falls upon anything else—from ordinary stone to wood or even living human



flesh—the liquid flows over the substance and causes it to catch fire. This fire burns exceedingly hot and deals damage as an acid bath (see **Exalted** p. 131).

Instead of turning to ash, the burned portions of the object transform into solid gemstone. A log struck by a splash of burning, liquid sapphire would catch fire, gradually burn away and leave behind a log made of solid sapphire. This transformation only occurs within the boundaries of the Wyld zone. As soon as someone removes an object outside of the Wyld zone, the molten gemstones are simply that and the fire they produce becomes ordinary fire.

Many fortune-hunters try to exploit these transformations. However, doing so is exceptionally dangerous. After leaving the Wyld, the lava itself rapidly transforms into colored glass. Only materials the lava burned and transformed remain as gemstone once they leave this Wyld pocket. As a result, characters must actually place an object into the lava splash to obtain gemstones. Unfortunately, while the lava *usually* splashes out just a few yards from the vent, it can spray outwards anywhere from one to 15 yards and can erupt at any time, even seconds after a previous eruption. Placing an object inside this Wyld pocket and safely retrieving the object after its transformation requires both exceptional patience and a great deal of luck. In the past decade, two unfortunates were completely transformed into gemstone statues. (A partner salvaged them, sold them to a Dynast and retired to villa near Chiaroscuro.) Many other gem-lava gatherers have lost fingers, hands or entire arms to this deadly but valuable lava.

FAIR FOLK OF THE SOUTH

The Fair Folk of the South are a motley group of hunters and rovers. Just as the mortal residents, the Fair Folk here often wander as bands of raiders. Many also remember when the visionary fanatic Ikerre scarred the Southern Wyld and left the Glittering Desert as a result. Though Ikerre's dream failed in the end, she left behind a scarred and vicious group of raksha who fear that it could be done again.

On the wide stretches of the savannas, the Fair Folk run in the shapes of lions to hunt their prey. They whisper outside the walls of mortal villages, luring victims to join them or convincing dupes to open the village gates. They are masters of manipulating mortal emotions, and murmur sweetly of the erotic ecstasy of the hunt, the sweet surrender of the prey, the glory and the passion of bloodstained death; they do not say who does the dying. They are terrible blights, migrating from district to

district lest they exhaust all prey in a given region. These Fair Folk are proud, seductive and lethal; they gain no satisfaction from anything less than devouring souls or slaying humans. The Fair Folk cultivate animal hungers rather than civilized tastes, and would readily join any new crusade to destroy Creation, assuming that they were well-fed on the way.

Deeper in the desert lie other tribes of Fair Folk, who ride horses swifter than arrows and catch rumors on the wind. They raid oases, tents and settled villages, sweeping down like a storm to carry away the young and the beautiful. These Fair Folk harvest their victims' dreams in elegant tents, at leisure and with style, and enjoy mordant jests and vicious humor. Fair Folk from the far South region strive to be swift, beautiful and artistic. Few of them would support a new crusade; humans are victims, created for food, exploration and wit, but destroying them all would leave the raksha short of nourishment and amusement.

ENCAMPMENT OF THE COPPER ROSE

In the **Encampment of the Copper Rose** dwells Ali of the Last Whisper with his clan of raiders. Ali chooses to refrain from attacking villages or oases that display certain charms that folktales say protect against the Fair Folk. By doing so, he makes his personal legend all the stronger; if it comes to extremities, he may break the charms and ravage at will, but he has not yet done so. Some others in his band, in particular the young noble Western exile Rimoah, disagree with Ali; however, they have not yet done so openly, as Ali is also fond of folktales that demonstrate the raksha's cruelty and ingenuity in torture.

Ali permits several other raksha groups to live in his desert freehold as well. They know they do so at his sufferance, and form part of his nascent power base. Ali works toward treaties with local petty gods and spirit courts, implying that he can call on the Lapis Court for assistance. He ponders the value of offering raksha miracles to mortal tribes and petty kings as well, as part of his plan to become a political player and power-broker.

From the outside, the Encampment's Freehold looks like a small oasis gone dry, with sand half-burying dead thorn-trees and crumbling mud-brick buildings. Anyone who passes a certain doorway in a ruined, freestanding wall enters a pleasant domain of streams, mundane greenery and rose-vines made all of copper. Silken tents surround a central lake on which floats a palace of obsidian ornamented with copper. Human slaves and obsidian statues serve the raksha. Ali deals frequently with the Guild, and is one of their main purchasers of human slaves in the area, occasionally going so far as to

Exalted



intercept some deliveries of slaves that were intended for the Lapis Court. Should the court discover his involvement, a prolonged, vicious and interesting (for the raksha) war is likely.

The Encampment of the Copper Rose,
a Magnitude 2 Dominion

Military: 2 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 3
Abilities: Awareness 2, Craft 3, Integrity 2, Occult 3
(Supernatural Etiquette +3), Performance 2, Presence 3 (Organized Crime +2), War 2
Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 2

Limit Break: Temperance **Current Limit:** 0
Willpower: 6

Bonus Points: 10 **External Bonus Points:** 6

Notes: The Encampment of the Copper Rose is a Supernatural dominion, and Ali of the Last Whisper is a sorcerer with Legitimacy. In the event of a Limit Break, all the internal factions of the Encampment turn against each other, attempting to supplant Ali and seize power, and will intrigue with outsiders in order to give themselves a winning edge.

THE BORDERMARCHES

The Southern Bordermarches usually look similar to the Southern portions of Creation. The scrubby bushes, olive groves, date palms and almond trees of the Southern coast and oases reappear beyond the mundane deserts. Just as the rest of the inland South, expanses of sandy desert or ragged lava surround these fertile waypoints. The trees are taller (or shorter) and occasionally more mobile, however, and the animals become a bit stranger.

FIRE IN THE SOUTHERN BORDERMARCHES

Fires lit in the Southern Bordermarches never naturally extinguish themselves. Such fires can be put out by water or smothering. As in Creation, fires in the Southern Bordermarches only consume flammable objects—but the fire doesn't go out when it exhausts its fuel. The fire does not grow larger or spread unless it obtains more fuel, but a campfire lit in the Southern Bordermarches could burn for 1,000 years if no one put it out. Also, every fire in the Southern Marches adds one extra die to its resisted and non-resisted environmental damage.

Moving further South, the Wyld reveals its nature in ways that are more obvious. The desert dunes might not merely look like ocean waves—they might be genuine seas of dust, with waves raised by the wind. Eyeless versions of fish, seaweed and other creatures live in these waterless seas. The Fair Folk build gossamer yachts to sail upon them... or some eerie-eyed raksha dwell beneath the dunes, rising to attack like the sand sharks they tame.

Where the Southern Bordermarches are not desert, they are often volcanic. Huge fields of lava stretch across the deep South, some hardened into weird, twisted shapes, some eternally molten and some just plain strange.

GEMSTONE RIVERS

Rivers and small lakes reappear as you move into the Southern Wyld... but they don't always contain water. Instead, they hold concentrated brine or solutions of other salts, or petroleum. A very few hold liquid glass or gemstone—even ponds of liquid glowstone that light up the landscape at night. Most life near these rivers takes on the color of the river, and the plants growing closest to the banks are almost all made of living crystal or jewels. These rivers provide no sustenance for mortals or Exalted, but cause no harm when touched or imbibed.

When these jeweled liquids dry, they leave behind exceedingly thin films of gemstone. While the liquid itself soon transforms into colored water if taken into Creation, the dried residues remain. A few brave mortals regularly travel into the Wyld to coat common goods in this liquid, so that they can sell sapphire-coated trinkets, cloth-of-emerald or glowstone-coated rods that can light a traveler's way at night. Despite the profits (a person who does this for a living can earn Resources •••), few people face the dangers of the Wyld to gather this wealth.

THE GLITTERING DESERT

Two centuries ago, the mortal prophet Ikerre used the vastly powerful Eye of Autochthon to slay enormous numbers of the Southern Fair Folk and their hobgoblin servants. Her mad crusade left a region far south of Chiaroscuro now called the Glittering Desert. A portion of desert lies within Creation, but it extends through the Bordermarches and into the Middlemarches.

The enormous magics of the Eye transformed every creature tainted by the Wyld into shining, multi-colored quartz—all the Fair Folk, every Wyld barbarian, even the plants and animals down to the tiniest insect in the thin, dry soil or the lichen on the rocks. The soil itself became glittering fragments of crystal. To this day, nothing lives in the Glittering Desert.

SIGHT AND SURVIVAL IN

THE GLITTERING DESERT

During the day, sight perception rolls are at +2 difficulty because of the brilliantly shining reflections from the unnatural sands. Indeed, the Glittering Desert can blind a visitor: this is an environmental effect of 1 dot Perception/hour, Trauma 3. If a player fails the (Stamina + Resistance) roll, the character's Perception drops by 1. At Perception 0, the character is blinded (permanently, for mortals, but Essence-users heal the lost Perception as lethal damage). The only ways to avoid these effects are to wear a visor of smoked or darkly colored glass (which inflict +1 difficulty on sight perception when the character is *not* in bright sunlight)—or to travel at night.

The sand in this desert is unusually jagged and sharp, so the damage from a severe sandstorm here equals the damage from a supernatural ice storm.

Fair Folk or hobgoblins who enter the Glittering Desert automatically take one level of unsoakable lethal damage for every hour they remain. Nothing can prevent this.

While in the Glittering Desert, however, characters do *not* risk mutation. The Glittering Desert is beyond doubt the largest sanctuary in all the Wyld.

However, the greedy and the curious occasionally visit the desert to search for valuable artifacts. Exalted and mortals are free to visit, but Fair Folk still find it baneful. The Eye of Autochthon poisoned the land against their return. As a result, they must send in mortal servants, typically either ravagers or Wyld mutants that the Fair Folk hire, to search for wonders in the lands where they once lived.

The Eye destroyed all of the demesnes in this desert and transformed the buildings in the Freeholds into solid quartz, but left magical artifacts untouched—whether they were created by the Fair Folk or trophies captured from fallen Exalted. These objects now lie buried under the shifting, shining drifts of crystal. Treasure-hunters also remember that the Eye of Autochthon itself has never been seen again, so it may still lie in this vast wasteland, too.

VOLCANOES AND UNDERWAYS

Volcanoes dot the tainted lands and Bordermarches of the South. In the Bordermarches, these fiery mountains can grow considerably taller and more jagged than

in Creation. Also, they sometimes spew anything from hallucinogenic steam to clouds of butterflies. Even within the borders of Creation, volcanoes near the Wyld occasionally produce strange and eldritch affects, because they tap veins of magma that lead back into the Middlemarches or beyond.

Wyld lava currents periodically shift, leaving empty lava tubes similar to those found around Creation's volcanoes. These tubes are typically between one and 10 yards in diameter. Some portions of the Southern Bordermarches contain vast numbers of such empty, underground tubes. In places, they intersect to form complex and deadly mazes filled with exotic beasts.

A few tubes also lead to huge caves, some of them miles across. These underground worlds range from exotic tainted lands that are still nominally part of Creation to small pockets of the Deep Wyld. Some are strange underground freeholds ruled by weird, chthonic Fair Folk, while others become home to fearsome beasts or the ancient, pre-human inhabitants of Creation that took refuge in this isolated, subterranean world long ago.

Since the "lava" often was not just melted stone, the tubes are often coated with dried blood, sticky acid or even rows of human arms, kraken tentacles or other equally mobile and potentially dangerous protuberances. (See Chapter Seven for the Traits of these clutching threats.) Occasionally, a connection with the burning lava of Creation or liquid chaos from the Deep Wyld is re-established, and the lava tubes fill again with some deadly substance.

Wyld lava tunnels can form a secure hiding place against pursuit. They may also contain various wonders carried in from the further Wyld. On extremely rare

WYLD LAVA

Hazard	Damage	Trauma
Boiling Acid	6L/action	3
Boiling Blood	4L/action	3
Boiling Venom	4L/action*	4
Hallucinogenic Steam	2L/action**	2
Lava	6L/action	4

* Once a character takes lethal damage from boiling venom, she also faces the toxic effect of the venom itself. Select whatever poison seems appropriate. (See **Exalted**, p. 131 for Arrow Frog Venom and Coral Snake Venom.)

** Hallucinogenic steam also has a Poison effect: Damage 2 (no real damage)/hour, Toxicity 4, Tolerance —/—, Penalty -3.

occasions, these tunnels and caves hold wondrous remnants of the First Age that survived untouched. Uncovering any of these artifacts and lost treasures requires treasure-hunters to brave the manifold dangers of the lava tubes—and some of them die and leave their own treasures to the Wyld.

BLACK CHIAROSCURO

One of the strangest and most enduring features of the Southern Bordermarches is Black Chiaroscuro. It has lasted far longer than duplicate sections of Creation usually manage. This waypoint consists of a lava plain bearing a life-sized, preternaturally accurate copy of the First Age city of Chiaroscuro, all made of black lava rock and jet-black obsidian. Just as everything within the Wyld, this duplicate shifts and alters over time, but always resembles Chiaroscuro at some point in its history. Sometimes, Black Chiaroscuro shows the complete city as it was during the height of the First Age. The city shifts and changes over several weeks. First it grows larger and more elaborate, with extensive walls. Then it collapses into Chiaroscuro's current state, where huge jagged shards of obsidian mark the ruins of its once-magnificent towers. New buildings appear to mark Delzahn construction. The cycle occasionally ends with Black Chiaroscuro rebuilding in a variety of exotic forms, which some scholars theorize might be possible future Chiaroscuros.

This rocky metropolis only mimics the actual structures of the buildings and roads. Black Chiaroscuro has no furnishings, and the copied lift tubes and other First Age wonders are merely empty shells of rock without any enchantment. However, the duplicate includes the tunnels that run underneath Chiaroscuro. Many of these tunnels remain unknown in modern Chiaroscuro, so information gained in Black Chiaroscuro can help anyone who seeks to infiltrate the city or discover lost tombs and treasures.

A few hundred Wyld barbarians live in the towers that never completely fall to ruin. These furtive and savage beings know the details of their city at all stages of its existence. They eagerly hunt and attempt to kill anyone who comes to explore this exotic wonder.

THE PACHARENAI

This pride of Fair Folk goes abroad in the shape of lions, and has an ongoing vendetta with some of the desert tribes in the far South of Creation. The Pacharenai's predation has become one of their defining features: they absolutely could not destroy the tribes, but the Pacharenai hunt the tribes wherever they find them. (Conversely, the barbarian, Wyld mutant and beastman tribes in question

view the Pacharenai as a particularly vengeful form of divinity that must be fought at all costs but at the same time honors them by pursuit. The prey-tribes regularly offer small sacrifices, such as a child a year.)

The Pacharenai is an unusually large pride for the South. This pride contains a full two dozen nobles, following a leader named Elegance. Elegance looks like a withered, sun-scorched woman of surprising ugliness, with a face seamed with scars and bones that stand out beneath her flesh. She parades her unusual looks as a contrast to the beauty of the other raksha nobles; Elegance enjoys dramatically posing in thin silk scarves, with her barbed spear Malice always at her side. The tribe dwells at a Bordermarch oasis hidden by sandstorms, where metallic cats wander among the palm trees and huge scorpions guard the entrances and exits. They consider their human slaves a valuable commodity—worked to their limit, but not casually destroyed.

PACHARENAI HUNTERS

Description: Two dozen raksha nobles; this is the full number of truly dangerous fighters available to the Pacharenai, though they can muster hundreds of lesser hobgoblins and minions.

Commanding Officer: Elegance



Armor Color: Lion skins

Motto: None

General Makeup: Lions; also able to take the shape of humans armed with swords and javelins, wearing shimmering silk armor that turns weapon blows

Overall Quality: Fair

Magnitude: 2

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —

Endurance: 7 **Might:** 5

Armor: 3 **Morale:** 2

Special Characters: None

Formation: Relaxed; they never engage in ranged combat.

THE MIDDLEMARCHES

Moving closer to the Pole of Fire, the element of flame pervades all other forms and qualities. Desert and lava remain, but the Middlemarches acquire seas like the West, forests like the East and winds like the North—seas of liquid fire, forests of red-hot metal and winds of smoke. Even though flames burn forever without fuel, flammable substances—coal, petroleum, tallow—often appear, or substances burn that normally resist fire. Even living creatures may be formed from flame.

PROPERTIES, PEOPLE, PLACES

FALSE SUN GROTTO

At night, light shines from a maw of stone jutting upward from lava plains. A tunnel leads to a cave several miles across. The cavern has no roof; instead, three dozen suns float in blue-white sky. White sand, bleached by the intense light, covers the cavern floor.

Nothing from Creation could live in the blazing heat of the many suns, but the center of the grotto holds a small village built of chalcedony bricks and tiles. The people hide themselves under the searing sand when strangers come. The inhabitants listen to those who walk above them, and reveal themselves only to visitors who seem trustworthy and kind.

All members of this race look identical. They are tall (for humans), they bear themselves regally, they are very manly in aspect, their skin is bronze and they have four arms. Some folk might find this a familiar image. For their part, these creatures (who appear to be neither raksha nor mutants) have no idea whom they resemble. As an isolated, once-ostracized culture, they are cautious about other people but generally trusting. They have no tools except their metal-hard hands, which are usually enough.

The people of the grotto speak Old Realm. Their traditions say that long ago, their ancestors suffered an attempt at extermination; that is why they hide from strangers. They have no name for themselves. Their tales say the grotto was once much larger.

These creatures are not the only dwellers in the False Sun Grotto. A small variety of hot-natured creatures live there, which the sentient inhabitants hunt. The bronze creatures eat what they hunt, but they often do not appear to *need* that sustenance. They refuse to discuss how they manage to reproduce, what with them all being male.

The folk of the grotto creatures cannot leave the grotto for long. They sicken and die without the light and heat of three dozen suns, as they cool and the fire of life leaves them.

CONDITIONS OF THE GROTTO

The light and heat of the False Sun Grotto inflict two environmental effects on the Creation-born:

- The searing heat inflicts Damage 2B/minute, Trauma 2.
- The intense glare can blind visitors, as in the Glittering Desert, but Damage of one dot Perception/minutes, Trauma 5 (without smoked or tinted goggles).

Conversely, the folk of the Grotto suffer one level of bashing damage for every hour they spend outside the heat of the three dozen suns. This cannot heal until they return to their home.

LIQUID FIRE

In the Wyld, fire can absorb the qualities of other states of matter, including water. Rivers, lakes and small seas of liquid fire extend throughout the Southern Middlemarches and Deep Wyld. Liquid fire comes in different colors—ordinary pale yellow, but also red, orange, green, blue, violet, silvery, golden, white, gray and even black. Even stranger, liquid fire often burns only certain classes of substance and leaves other substances alone. One fire-stream might burn only flesh, while another might everything except vegetable matter. As usual for the Wyld, one cannot predict what a fire will burn and what it will not; the raksha keep track of it all, though. Fortunately, currents of liquid fire with different properties never mix. They usually burn no hotter than a bonfire.

You can carry liquid fire in a cask or bucket, so long as it cannot burn the container. Liquid fire retains its





properties throughout the Wyld, but lasts only three days in Creation before going out.

THE ROOKERY

The Rookery is one of the most legendary locations in all the Southern Marches and consists of a lava island that moves about the largest of the fire seas. Any flame gryphon (see Chapter Seven) can find it, but no flame gryphon would tell any other being the island's location or guide anyone there unless forced by unnatural mental influences. Even raksha who become close allies with flame gryphons would never be taken there unless the Rookery already faced dire peril.

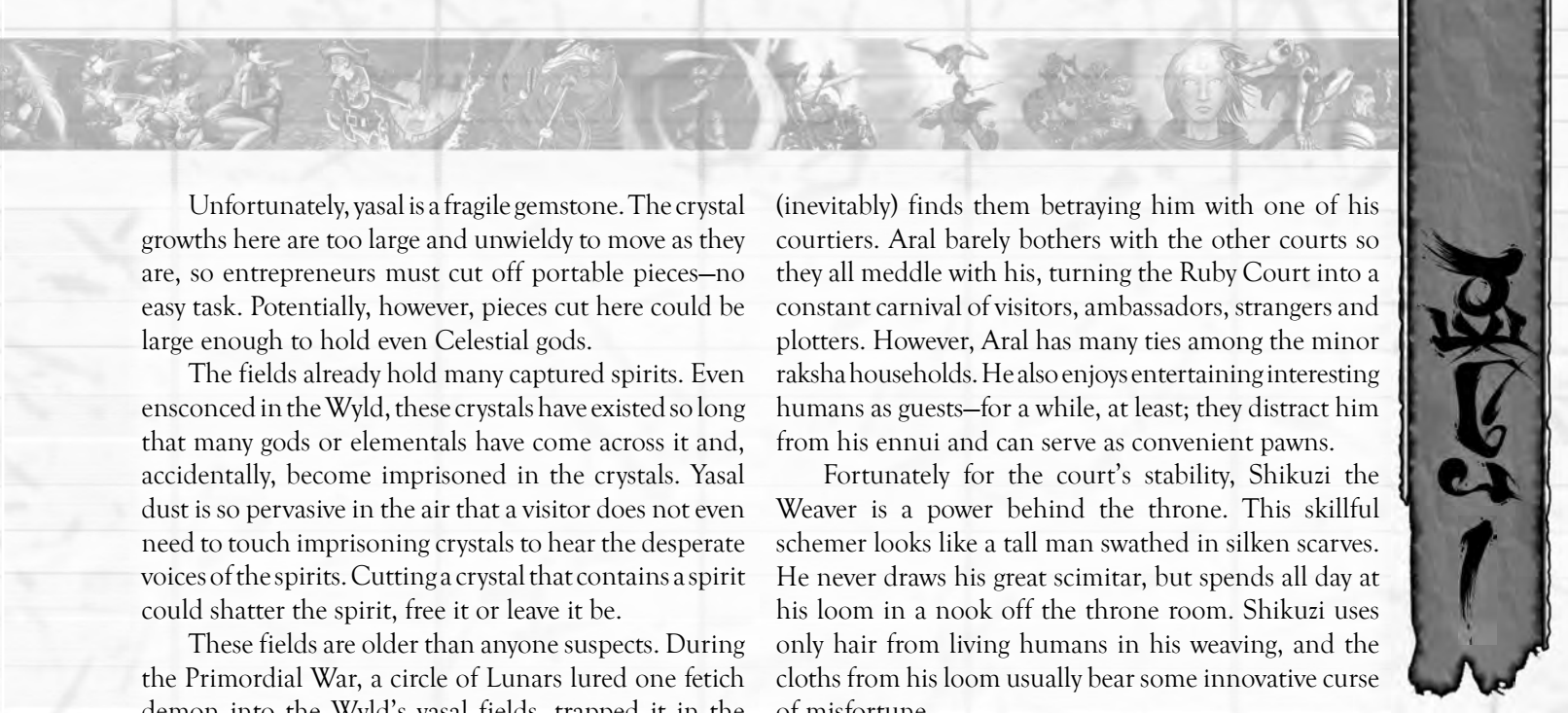
Young flame gryphons hatch at the Rookery, and old flame gryphons go there to die. A quarter of the island is a huge graveyard of golden claws and beaks and opalescent white bones. Sometimes the flame gryphons mate; sometimes they lay eggs spontaneously. But they nest and hatch their young nowhere except this floating mountain. Flame gryphon eggs take only a week to hatch, and the young flame gryphons fly and become independent in another two months. Some flame gryphons permanently live on the Rookery, but most flame gryphons visit it periodically. Between 100 and 300 flame

gryphons are in residence at any time, and they will all defend it to the death.

Although a few raksha nobles and a handful of Lunar Exalted know the Rookery's location, they keep this knowledge to themselves. Flame gryphons bring a few trusted visitors who seek young gryphons as steeds and partners—but only blindfolded. Any attempt to invade the island results in the flame gryphons fleeing to a new and unknown location, or slaughtering all the invaders and then spending the next few years killing everyone they find within three waypoints. Flame gryphons know that without this vigilance their young would all be abducted and raised in slavery. As a result, the normally solitary flame gryphons work together to protect the Rookery from discovery or exploitation. (And naturally, the Guild is extremely interested in its location.)

THE YASAL FIELD

Explorers come upon the Yasal Field without warning, cresting a dune or stepping from a lava tube to find themselves amidst a yellow expanse reflecting the sun and firelight. Because yasal normally exists only as rare caches of small shards, the field is the equivalent of an empress's ransom.



Unfortunately, yasal is a fragile gemstone. The crystal growths here are too large and unwieldy to move as they are, so entrepreneurs must cut off portable pieces—no easy task. Potentially, however, pieces cut here could be large enough to hold even Celestial gods.

The fields already hold many captured spirits. Even ensconced in the Wyld, these crystals have existed so long that many gods or elementals have come across it and, accidentally, become imprisoned in the crystals. Yasal dust is so pervasive in the air that a visitor does not even need to touch imprisoning crystals to hear the desperate voices of the spirits. Cutting a crystal that contains a spirit could shatter the spirit, free it or leave it be.

These fields are older than anyone suspects. During the Primordial War, a circle of Lunars lured one fetich demon into the Wyld's yasal fields, trapped it in the crystals and scattered them. Then, the yasal crystals did not slowly grow as they do now, so perhaps the demon is still there.

CUTTING CRYSTALS

Cutting a portable chunk of yasal without shattering and ruining it requires a successful roll of (less of [Dexterity or Perception] + Craft [Air]) at difficulty 3. If a yasal growth contains a spirit, success leaves the spirit intact. A failed roll releases the spirit, and a botch destroys the spirit.

THE RUBY COURT

In the Southeast, between Wyld-twisted jungle and savannahs full of strange beasts, lies the **Ruby Court**, ruled by Duke Aral and advised by Shikuzi the Weaver. These raksha prize conviction and dedication and never regretting their actions. The Ruby Court is a hotbed of treason, plots, counter-plots, love, betrayals and tragic funerals followed by vengeful duels.

The Ruby Court moved here a decade ago from the distant North... the same time several Tepet legions arrived, commanded by the celebrated Roseblack. Perhaps this was coincidence; or perhaps caution on Duke Aral's part. Few raksha dare suggest behind-the-scenes diplomacy between Shikuzi and the Roseblack; anyone who could prove active collusion could topple the court, or blackmail his way to extremely rapid advancement.

Duke Aral urges his subjects to indulge their every desire. He whiles away his days with an endless stream of beautiful blonde women, whom he claims to recognize as his one true love. They die on his blade when he

(inevitably) finds them betraying him with one of his courtiers. Aral barely bothers with the other courts so they all meddle with his, turning the Ruby Court into a constant carnival of visitors, ambassadors, strangers and plotters. However, Aral has many ties among the minor raksha households. He also enjoys entertaining interesting humans as guests—for a while, at least; they distract him from his ennui and can serve as convenient pawns.

Fortunately for the court's stability, Shikuzi the Weaver is a power behind the throne. This skillful schemer looks like a tall man swathed in silken scarves. He never draws his great scimitar, but spends all day at his loom in a nook off the throne room. Shikuzi uses only hair from living humans in his weaving, and the cloths from his loom usually bear some innovative curse of misfortune.

Shikuzi's closest ally is Shusai of the Immaculate Blade, who constantly seeks to test herself against monks of the Immaculate Order. Shusai's enthusiasm for bloody personal combat has done more damage to the court's forces than most of its enemies.

Another major factor in Ruby Court politics is Hakasane, who for centuries has handled the Court's dealings with the Guild. She looks like a 12-year-old girl with curly, blonde hair and blue eyes. Hakasane often carries small, harmless pets such as doves or rabbits. Her skill at negotiation equals her prowess with a bow: Hakasane's tenacity has won the court many fine slaves. She often travels outside the Ruby Court on errands of

The Ruby Court, a Magnitude 3 Dominion
Military: 3/3 **Government:** 3/3 **Culture:** 2/2
Abilities: Awareness 2 (Blackmail Official 2), Craft 3, Integrity 3, Occult 3 (Supernatural Etiquette 3), Performance 3 (Rousing Rhetoric 3), Presence 3, War 3
Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 3
Limit Break: Conviction **Current Limit:** 3
Willpower: 7

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 9
Notes: The Ruby Court is a Supernatural dominion. Duke Aral and Shikuzi the Weaver are both sorcerers with Legitimacy, while Hakasane is a savant. In the event of a Limit Break, the Ruby Court utterly refuses to reconsider or retract any of its actions or statements, pursuing them to the point of insanity, while simultaneously engaging in internal struggles as its members all support their own point of view and refuse to consider anyone else's.

trade and slave-handling, accompanied by four mute, devoted human guards.

The Ruby Court has not yet made a serious impact on the local freeholds, alliances and power plays. At the moment, Shikuzi is investigating the strength of nearby Lunars, using any convenient visitors or adventurers as his cat's-paws. For the moment, the court engages in love affairs, contests of art and frequent duels and hunts. Duke Aral indulges its guests with their preferred amusements and with generous gifts of slaves. Hunting expeditions frequently ride all the way to Creation in search of prey, slaves or interesting guests. Mortals who sufficiently amuse the court through their wit or unusual skills might leave safely, bearing miraculous raksha treasures; mortals who grow tedious or gauche are devoured.

When the Ruby Court came South, the court seized a large freehold from local raksha. Duke Aral remodeled it into a fantasia of minarets, marble courtyards and fountains of scented water, blood and wine. (The noble raksha who previously owned the freehold is now dead, and his subjects scattered or accepted lowly positions in the Ruby Court.) The court's hobgoblins take the form of marble statues or animate vortices of wind, but human slaves do most of the work.

RUBY COURT ARMY

Description: A force of 1,000 Fair Folk cataphracts, half male, half female. They comprise the main part of the Ruby Court's forces; the court would rarely field them all at the same time. The cataphracts wear gossamer armor and carry gossamer swords, lances and bows.



Commanding Officer: Lady Hishinia

Armor Color: Ruby glass plate mail; the lancers have it etched in gold, the skirmishers in copper.

Motto: "For glory and for war!"

General Makeup: Armed riders: 250 lancers, 750 skirmishers. All carry shortbows and use them from a distance before charging.

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 6

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 4

Armor: 4 **Morale:** 3

Formation: While the Ruby Court army prefers to begin a battle in relaxed or skirmishing formation, the army's favorite tactic is to surround a foe, then close ranks for a lance charge. The army feels the massed power of the charge expresses the court's chosen virtue of Conviction.

THE LAPIS COURT

The **Lapis Court** in the far South attracts raksha who claim they practice compassion towards lesser beings. The court's ruler, Neshi of the Double Whips, always goes veiled; she allows no one but her entourage of human children to see her naked face. Should any of the children disappoint Neshi by loving someone else better than her, she slays them on the spot using her paired whips of light. Neshi is a consummate politician who works toward bringing down Duke Aral and the Ruby Court. She also makes a great show of secretly supporting the Church of Balor and a new Crusade.

The court itself does not relish dueling, but has a long tradition of hunts, ambushes and torture. Raksha who adhere to the court's tenets love their human pets—love them to death, draining every scrap of their souls along the way. But the doomed mortals enjoy every minute of their demise; such is raksha compassion. Nobles of the court keep large human entourages, and are extremely protective of them; injuring another raksha's pet humans constitutes a dueling offence, and has instigated many fine feuds. The court itself occupies a large freehold, appearing as a set of tents pitched around a vast pavilion of woven silk and steel. Afternoon and evening feasts take place under the stars in the open air, with musical accompaniment and dramatic entertainment.

Notables of the court, besides Neshi herself, include Lady Ayana, a courtier from the far Northeast who keeps her chambers as freezing as the icy North. She looks like a beautiful woman with long black hair, but has the legs

and feet of a deer. Ayana likes to steal her lovers from human gatherings where she goes dancing, but flees if anyone looks down and sees her inhuman hooves.

Ayana is (just as everyone) friends with Janiera the Winter Rose. This young, innocent-seeming raksha is sincere and genuine in her compassion for humans, her affection for her friends and her willingness to agree with *anything* said to her at that moment. Janiera is utterly fickle and unpredictable, for she agrees with a new person the moment that she talks to him, but also has no equal as a dream-crafter with contacts throughout all five courts.

Nlassa of the Lion's Mane is another prominent member of the Lapis Court, and an open member of the Church of Balor. She often prowls the freehold in the form of a black-furred lion. Nlassa often raises arguments that polarize the court. She drives her pet humans to insanity with practice and speed, making her a frequent customer of the Guild.

The court itself has dwelled in the deep South for more than a century now, and the Guild has become used to trading with this court. By local custom, Neshi purchases all the court's slaves directly and then presents them to her nobles in return for suitable gifts—this irritates the Guild since it stops them raising prices, and they trade secretly with some of the more powerful members of the court. Many in the court are intrigued by the return of the Solar Exalted and the appearance of the Deathlords and Abyssal Exalted. These members of the court seek Solar lovers or enemies for passionate encounters or bitter revenges.

LAPIS COURT GARRISON

Description: The Lapis Court calls on its main troops less often than the other courts do, but they still stand ready for battle. The garrison consists of 600 Fair Folk cataphracts armed with scimitars, shortbows and javelins.

Commanding Officer: Night Cat the Prowler

Armor Color: Chased dark blue steel plate, covered by silk robes and veils in gold-spangled blue.

Motto: Changes frequently; currently "Heart's desire!"

General Makeup: Lightly armed cavalry and mounted archers

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 5

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 4

Armor: 3 **Morale:** 2



Special Characters: None

Formation: Usually in skirmishing or relaxed formation. Half will harass the foe close to while the other half maintains arrow and javelin fire, then the first half retreats while the second half covers them.

BLADE MESA

At one point in the Middlemarches, fields of lava flow sluggishly toward a central mesa. With thick boots or minor magic, explorers can walk on the cool lava and scale the mesa's plateau, where thousands of stone-skinned mutant warriors fight a constant battle. These warriors come from tribes that live on the surrounding lava plains. They live on crystal grain and magma fruit. The mutants grow to full maturity within one year. Their most able-bodied men impregnate their large female population before charging to the top of Blade Mesa to kill and die. Women of these Wyld tribes (all functionally identical but discernable by different mineral compositions of their skin) give birth to infants after only a month of pregnancy. Because the women live longer lives (about five years), matriarchs rule the tribes—but they never question the ideal of marching to certain death.

The men instinctively know how to use the thousands of bronze shields and weapons they find on the mesa. They enter the fight and soon die, to be replaced the next day by their cousins and in a year by their sons. Should one not die on the field of battle, he would succumb to old age within another year and a half.

The eternal war raises some questions. Have the bronze weapons always been there, recycled among warriors? If so, the weapon must be enchanted because they have never broken or lost their edges. Or does Blade Mesa somehow repair them or produce more? New warriors become able to enter the fray at just the proper rate so the battle never diminishes, the tribes never grow and they always remain balanced against each other. All this suggests a guiding hand behind this Wyld region... or that the Wyld has a better sense of humor than one might imagine.

BLADE MESA WARRIORS

Description: Disorganized on the Mesa, these warriors would make a skilled force in battle.

General Makeup: A horde of at least 300 men, armed with bronze swords, spears and shields. They eschew both armor and ranged weapons, preferring to meet the enemy face-to-face, kill and die.

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 5

Drill: 0

Close Combat Attack: 6 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —

Endurance: 5 **Might:** 1

Armor: 0 (-0 mobility penalty) **Valor:** 5



Formation: At any given time, at least 10 of these units can be found on each side of the constant Blade Mesa conflict. They cannot actually fail Morale checks in their eternal battle. They always fight in unordered formation.

THE COAL NOMADS

Where the Coal Nomads walk, they leave nothing behind. They collect everything they find on their eternal voyage through the Wyld.

From a distance, the Coal Nomads look much like one of the black-skinned tribes of the South on a poorly planned expedition. With a closer view, it becomes evident that the wandering tribesmen are not quite human. Their eyes are black chunks of solid coal, and the hair they wear long is chalky charcoal. Despite their human-seeming skin, they leave trails of coal dust on everything they touch.

At least one tribe of Coal Nomads numbers in the thousands. Wherever they wander, they collect everything that isn't nailed down. This gives the tribe an enormous collection of unpredictable gewgaws. They wear anything wearable, especially anything colorful, and cart the rest of their expanding collections on their backs or in wagons they construct from whatever's on hand.

Occasionally, the tribe wanders into the Bordermarches or, rarely, true Creation. They never stay for long, because the things they find aren't as interesting or attractive as the things of the Middlemarches. Meetings with the peoples of Creation often result in conflict. The Coal Nomads simply want to take *everything* they pass by and, with no real concept of *others'* possessions, see nothing wrong with doing so. People the Coal Nomads pass by usually resist, especially when the tribe tries to carry the people off, too.

The Coal Nomads never escalate conflicts to violence. They are mentally incapable of causing anyone harm. Instead, they either flee or mob their aggressor in an attempt to harmlessly bind him for their own safety. Of course, they then carry off the aggressor, back into the Middlemarches. No one knows what they do with the people they "collect."

Other and smaller tribes of Coal Nomads also wander the Wyld, but they have their own mental quirks. Some live by stealing from the main tribe and trading with other denizens of the Wyld. Others gather knickknacks and use them to lure the large tribe along a path with much food, hoping to live on the big tribe's discards. None can act to harm another creature.

THE DEEP WYLD

Past the furthest Southern Middlemarch, all things become fire and smoke, lava and ash. Whether the land-



scape currently apes the streets of Nexus or the private jewel-mines of the Despot of Gem, its substance is all the same: fire and its products. Smoke perpetually veils the air, and the heat in the landscape equals that of a bonfire (see **Exalted**, p. 131).

UNSHAPED RAKSHA

While the unshaped raksha of the South are not more than usually hostile to other entities, the substances of the waypoints they inhabit renders them life-threatening merely by their presence.

Nessaiyah, the Winding Path, is widely feared by the elementals and other creatures of this quarter. It appears as a bridge or a stairway, but smoke and distance hide its far end. It seems to lead in the direction a traveler wants to go. Once he sets foot on it, however, the Winding Path begins to feed on him. First, it eats the memory of his destination, then the memory of his origin and finally the memory of his name. Once all three of these are gone, Nessaiyah lets its victim go. One peculiarity of the Winding Path is that it never shows any footprints, even if it seems composed of ash or dust. Another is that if anyone standing on it can manage to put a foot on both its beginning and its end at the same time, then it crumbles into flames and disperses.

Orchinast, the Golden Mirror, moves in the center of a lake of fire that follows her wherever she goes. She manifests as a woman made entirely of golden fire who always looks exactly like the person or thing she encounters; if she speaks to a male, then she seems both female and male in a subtly insane way. She offers to grant anything that a person encountering her may want, in exchange for the person's face. The lake of fire in which she swims constantly teems with screaming visages among the flames. Her hunger for identity drives her closer to the Middlemarches each year, and she may eventually enter Creation and become shaped.

Levasque, the Burning Plague, does not so much set fire to the things that it encounters as it infects them with a disease that causes patches of their bodies to turn to flame and consume the rest. Levasque devours ash and smoke, exhaling them as fire, and breathes forth contagious heat each time it moves. It leaves a trail of areas of pure inferno, where nothing remains but self-devouring flame. Levasque rises in hissing tongues of flame from below to above, spreading wings like a dragon, and sings in 100

creaking, weary voices as it flies. At its heart, the Burning Plague keeps a screaming old man, whose identity no one has discovered, but who maintains his form and integrity even in the Deep Wyld and in a raksha's belly.

THE ELEMENTAL POLE OF FIRE

Here at the purest center of Elemental Fire, the rising flames consume even smoke and ash. Fire burns here brighter than the sun, purer than diamonds, richer than silk, sweeter than honey. Nothing material from Creation can endure here without powerful Charms, sorcery or elemental nature. Anything that lacks a perfect, unconditional defense against fire must melt or burn. Darkness and cold never touch the Pole of Fire, only degrees of heat and light. No substance exists except great, ever-changing landscapes of fire; forests, whirlwinds, bridges, arches, aurora that fill the sky and palaces that burn brightly against the background inferno.

The Elemental Dragon of Fire spends much of his time here, in one of the few places of Creation where he need not restrain his flames for fear of destroying everything around him. However, Hesiesh spends much of his time sleeping, husbanding his strength for those moments when he must rise to obey Gaia's commands. Jakara the Blade-Like Flame, a lesser elemental dragon who rose from a lowly position as a swordsmith's forge-spirit, serves him. Jakara is a noble warrior and a loyal follower, but a poor administrator. She patrols the area around the pole herself, often forgetting to order her elemental minions to see to petty matters.

The Pole of Fire itself rises in a great towering spire at the heart of the area, overshadowing even the tallest mountains of solid flame that surround it. At its top sleeps the Elemental Dragon of Fire himself, coiling round it in an endless spiral. Storms of fire sweep outwards from him to crackle across the shifting, unstable landscape, and lesser elementals and spirits rise to bask in their caresses, briefly tasting the purest of flames. A few solid palaces of solidified fire float amid the rippling infernos, constructed by First Age Solars or gods to provide temperate housing for their visits. Many Twilight Solars came here to obtain samples from this pole, or to smelt or anneal substances for which no lesser blaze would suffice. Some of their tools and books remain in their long-deserted dwellings, preserved and guarded by their elemental or automaton servants.





I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY WE MUST TAKE THIS BORDERMARCH ROUTE, DISCIPLE.

SURELY IT WOULD BE SAFER TO APPROACH FATAL ONYX FROM WITHIN THE UNDERWORLD.

NOT SO, MY IMPETUOUS CHARGE.



I ASSURE YOU, WE WOULD NEVER HAVE BREACHED THE CITY'S UNDERWORLD DEFENSES.

AND TRUST ME WHEN I SAY: AS A SPY, YOU WOULD RUE THE LORDS' HOSPITALITY.



SO YOU FIND IT PREFERABLE, THEN, TO BE HARRIED ACROSS CREATION'S RAGGED EDGE?



THESE HUNTERS DO PRESENT AN UNFORESEEN—

WHOOPS!



THIS PERFORMANCE LITTLE RECOMMENDS YOUR SKILL AT INFILTRATION, DISCIPLE.

A THOUSAND PARDONS, CELESTIAL RECKONER.

I WAS DISTRACTED BY DAYDREAMS OF FONDER COMPANY.



THAT REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER TOPIC I INTEND TO BROACH WITH YOU...

KINDLY SET IT BY A WHILE, IF YOU PLEASE.



CHAPTER SIX

THE EASTERN WYLD

In the furthest portions of the East, beyond the reach of any of any civilized nations, the trees grow ever taller, and the growth becomes thicker and more impenetrable. These unending forests support an abundance of living things. This superabundance of animal life continues after the point where the earth itself gives way to a cathedral of unimaginably vast trees stretching endlessly from zenith to nadir. Out here, near the Elemental Pole of Wood, the Eastern Bordermarches are especially rich and verdant.

The trees are alive with a multitude of arboreal creatures. In addition to lemurs, monkeys and apes of all sorts, there are several types of arboreal and semi-arboreal humans. Little is known of these beings other than brief glimpses through the foliage and occasional brushes—all the more rare because many such encounters leave no survivors.

THE EASTERN EDGE OF CREATION

In the East, the geography of the tainted lands looks very much like the terrain of nearby mundane regions. The changes appear in the plant and animal life. Those Wyld-warped plants and animals that can survive inside Creation thrive in the tainted lands and occasionally spread out of the Wyld completely. A few scholars believe that some of the huge, carnivorous plants of the Southeastern jungles must be examples of Wyld-mutated plants that naturalized within Creation. Although plant-animal hybrids and similar exotic beings cannot survive or breed outside the Wyld's influence, unusually animate or poisonous plants are especially common in the tainted lands.



Conflict between the various inhabitants of the Eastern tainted lands and the Bordermarches happens less often than elsewhere, because almost the entire region consists of huge forests. Movement through the forests is difficult; food and water are abundant. Few denizens of Creation's Eastern rim need to travel far, while most have great difficulty finding one another. An ordinary barbarian tribe and a band of Wyld barbarians who would gladly kill each other on sight can live for generations just 40 miles apart and never meet. Mortal barbarians are less common in these lands, however. Most people at the edges of the Eastern Wyld are Wyld barbarians, beastmen or tree folk. Traders and representative of the Haltan Republic occasionally break the tribes' isolation to barter for exotic plants and skins.

THE HALTAN CONNECTION

The Haltan Republic has no Eastern borders. The forest nation sprawls off into formally affiliated tribes, then a zone of cultural influence and trade routes that extends thousands of miles—into the tainted lands and even the nearer portions of the Bordermarches. At least eight large barbarian tribes consider themselves Haltan allies, including three tree folk tribes, two tribes of Wyld barbarians, one tribe of hawkmen and another of chiropterans. These tribes have little contact with each other and so the natural rivalries among barbarians, Wyld barbarians and beastmen almost never trouble this vast and unique region. In another century, they will consider themselves Haltans in all but law, and the Republic will extend citizenship. The Haltan Republic owes much of its growth to such assimilation. See **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars** for the deeper story behind Halta's singular expansion.

THE FOREST PEOPLE

Very few fully human barbarians live in or near the Eastern tainted lands. The tree folk filled that niche centuries before any normal humans ever had a chance. The tribes that moved into the region after the Great Contagion all turned Wyld long ago. Most tribes just don't face the same pressure to live on Creation's rim encountered in other quarters of Creation: more likely, they approach the Wyld unknowingly, and are taken unawares when a Wyld storm or a shift in the Bordermarches taints the land around them. They are descended from refugees who fled deep into the forest

in hopes of escaping the Great Contagion, or from the ancient native peoples of the East, who found the Wyld sweeping up and around them.

LANDS OF THE TREE FOLK

The tree folk live throughout the East, from the most remote portions of Creation, through the tainted lands and well into the Bordermarches. They have adapted so perfectly to life in the treetops that assimilation to the Wyld doesn't change them very much. The tree folk live a story that isn't about them: they are just part of the eternal forest, serenely accepting its bounty and its peril. Their songs go in cycles, with no beginning or end, and they see their lives the same way.

Most tribes avoid contact with outsiders. The tree folk prefer to avoid opponents when possible and vanish into the forests, leaving behind a variety of deadly traps. When the tree folk cannot avoid battle, they fight to the death with ironwood boomerangs and blowguns; their darts carry exceptionally deadly toxins.

Non-Exalted outsiders can gain the trust of the tree folk. Doing so usually requires both an introduction by another outsider who already knows the tribe well, and spending months among the tree folk learning their ways and allowing them to become comfortable. After some years of friendship, outsiders may even be invited to become honorary members of their tribe.

OTHER TRIBES

The Wyld has changed many barbarian tribes so they look very much like the tree folk, while some tree folk have mutated in ways that make them look more Wyld. In the East, the pox *Elemental Adaptation: Wood* is quite common, as are mutants with green skin, vines in place of hair, or green fur or leaves covering their body. These so-called forest people are the most common sorts of Wyld mutant found in the far East.

Other Eastern Wyld barbarians have simian bodies, with unnaturally long arms and legs, and feet similar to an ape's, with prehensile toes. Some also have tails like a monkey's. Although most of these beings are as bright as other humans, a few tribes have sunk somewhere between apes and men... and these barbarians have a taste for raw meat and human blood wholly unlike any wholesome, natural primate. Little is known about any of these creatures outside Creation's rim, except they are highly aggressive and quite proficient with blowguns, javelins or small bows. These barbarians typically use darts and arrows tipped with deadly herbal poisons, and frequently kill and rob travelers who stray too near their territories. The most notorious half-ape tribe, however, serves the

mad Lunar called Raksi, Queen of Fangs: these are actually beastmen, however, rather than mutants.

BEASTMEN

Raksi's ape-children have little contact with the other beastmen of the East. The most common Eastern breeds are the snakemen, hawkmen, catmen and the bat-like chiropterans. These creatures live throughout the tainted lands and Bordermarches of the East. In addition, some tribes—such as the hawkmen who regularly attack the hawk-riding inhabitants of Mount Metagalapa—live fully within Creation. A few individuals seek their fortunes in Nexus, where they can find employment as gladiators or members of mercenary troops. However, most Eastern beastmen prefer to avoid notice by Creation's inhabitants. These beastmen lead their inhuman lives in the deep forests and occasionally raid nearby human communities. Only in Halta do beastmen form a significant and accepted part of human society.

The catmen of the East are divided into several breeds, each forming their own tribes. They range from the lynxmen of the cool Northeast to the jaguarmen of the Southeast jungles. Their collective range is wide (and extends through the South as well), but individual breeds may live in just one small area.

The East's most distinctive beastmen, however, are the bat-like chiropterans. They live within the full range of the Eastern forests. These beastmen are built for flight with two hands on each of their wrists: a slender and dexterous four-fingered hand, plus the extra, elongated fingers that form the basis for their wings. Chiropterans are short and lightly built; their extremely bat-like heads feature large ears and short muzzles. A nap of short fur covers a chiropteran's body (but gives no protection from weapons, so does not count as the *Fur* mutation). Chiropterans operate equally well at night and during the day; most chiropterans live nocturnally since this helps them avoid contact with ordinary humans.

Their unusual appearance renders chiropterans distasteful to humans, so most avoid all contact with humanity. Some chiropteran colonies raid human settlements, however, swooping down to steal small livestock during the night and then flying off with their plunder before the sun rises.

THE BLOOD BATS

The jungles of the Southeast hold a rare chiropteran breed that drinks blood. They find human blood just as palatable as the blood of domestic or wild animals. Fortunately, these blood-drinkers almost never go outside of these jungles. The largest tribe of blood-drinking chiropterans lives in a large tainted land 300 miles northeast of the



ruined city of Rathess. Here, in a dense and occasionally animate jungle, several thousand of these beastmen rule over more than 10,000 human slaves who serve as both their laborers and their blood supply. The chiropterans avoid killing the humans they feed from, but make certain to drain unruly and rebellious subjects enough to leave them perpetually weak and anemic.

The priests of the blood bats are skilled shamans with enlightened Essence. They regularly deal with powerful elementals. Because of ancient breeding experiments by their Lunar creator, blood bats occasionally Exalt as Air-, Fire-, or Wood-aspected Terrestrial Exalted. Such Dragon-Blooded bat-folk form their ruling council. These long-lived priest-kings feel the same contempt for ordinary Dragon-Blooded as they show for all humans and regard their blood as a particularly potent and heady meal.

Based on distorted legends of the ancient Dragon Kings, these blood bats worship a debased version of the Unconquered Sun. Their legends say that if the Sun's hunger for human blood is not sated near the end of every day, the Sun might never set and its heat will burn Creation to a lifeless cinder. The blood bats force their slaves to raise huge stone pyramids as temples to the Ever-Hungry Sun. Here, every afternoon, the priests of the blood bats sacrifice one human captive and offer his blood to the Sun. Blood bat war parties regularly fly out in search of humans to capture. They sometimes hunt in Rathess, since the ruins often contain many well-nourished mortals filled with especially rich blood. If the priests fail to obtain sufficient captives for the sacrifices, the priests sacrifice one of their human slaves. To prevent this from occurring, slaves often work with blood bat hunting parties by making duplicitous appeals for aid from travelers they encounter and then leading their would-be saviors into the waiting arms of the blood bats.

BLOOD BAT WAR PARTY

Description: This band of warriors serves one of the priest-lords. The war party consists of a medium-sized team of flying blood bat warriors wearing leather breastplates (equal in protection to chain shirts), and armed with short swords, short spears and javelins. They think of ordinary humans as food and hunt them for sport.

Commanding Officer: Klast Swiftwing, an Emerald Dragon blood bat

Armor Color: Crimson leather breastplates

Motto: "Blood for the Sun!"

General Makeup: 50 flying light infantry with javelins and short spears, supported by 20 slingers and 10 archers.

Overall Quality: Excellent



Magnitude: 3

Drill: 2

Close Combat Attack: 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 2

Endurance: 5 **Might:** 2

Armor: 1 **Morale:** 3

Special Characters: Klast Swiftwing, a Dragon-Blooded blood bat who is also one of the rulers of the blood bats.

Formation: When not out raiding, the troops are quartered in the bloodstained Temple of the Ever-Hungry Sun in the blood bat's city. They fight in skirmishing formation.

WYLD POCKETS

In the East, pockets of the Wyld often consist of small groves of mutated trees or other plants that cover no more than half a mile in diameter. The East's inherent fertility tends to diffuse and overwhelm most Wyld pockets as the exuberance of life in the East overwhelms even the raw, chaotic power of the Wyld. Some Wyld pockets hold unique and strange ecosystems, or occasionally a single very unusual entity.

THE COLLECTOR WOOD

This Wyld pocket in the eastern Scavenger Lands is just a quarter mile in diameter. The entire region is a



section of the Bordermarches. The Wyld pocket looks like a small, exotic forest where large, multi-legged creatures resembling furry insects run and climb among trees whose fleshy leaves can grow a yard across. Plants and animals are all a vivid shade of reddish-purple.

Anyone who observes the area closely discovers that the animals are born from pods growing on the side of the plants, and that the creatures exist to tend the plants. Or rather, plant: each bromeliad-like tree grows from a single network of roots and rhizomes. Almost none of these creatures leave this Wyld zone. They cannot survive inside Creation for more than a week or two and find Creation deeply uncomfortable.

However, any visitor faces grave danger. The creatures attack anyone who enters the forest. They kill and devour anything that harms the plants. Individuals who are caught before they harm the plants are captured and placed inside one of the pods on the side of the plants. In two days, they emerge with vivid purple skin and proceed to tend the plants. Just as everything else within “Collector Wood,” these purple-skinned humans regularly change form and soon are indistinguishable from the other creatures. Removing someone once he has emerged from a pod causes him to die as rapidly as any other native of this Wyld pocket, unless someone assisting him has potent Shaping Charms that can remove the Wyld’s taint.

Most disturbing of all, whenever the Collector Wood acquires another servant, a new magenta-hued tree springs up outside the forest boundaries, thus increasing the forest’s area. To prevent this horror from spreading, the local people built a wall around it and keep large animals from wandering in.

Although only the foolhardy or the occasional Exalt is willing to enter this exotic trap, this Wyld pocket does offer one treasure. The pods that breed the animals and transform the Creation-born exude a dark purple sap when cut (which attracts the creatures that protect the plants). This sticky fluid is a potent restorative: each pint allows mortals and Exalted to heal any injury without a scar. In addition, drinking this liquid causes all existing scars to fade and restores function to crippled (but not missing) limbs. This healing requires between three and seven days, depending upon the severity of the person’s injuries. During this time, the individual falls into a deep slumber and cannot be awakened until her injuries have healed.

The healing sap does have side effects. If the imbiber’s player fails a (Stamina + Temperance) roll, made when the character drinks the sap, the character wakes up healed but suffers from Wyld addiction (as if from the

Bordermarches). If the drinker is anywhere near the Collector Wood, she enters it in preference to any other Wyld area. Since the nearest other section of the Wyld is several hundred miles East, the treated individual is most likely to head for Collector Wood.

FAIR FOLK OF THE EAST

The Fair Folk of the East regard appearance as the primary art. They serve it in every way they can, reinforcing natural beauty with art and craft. They perfume themselves with orchids that no human eye has ever seen, and clothe themselves in fabrics woven from dreams.

The Fair Folk of the Northeast deck themselves in somber yet striking clothing in shades of black and green and favor night over day, shadow over sunlight. These Fair Folk are creatures of control, fear and sadism. They adopt a calm, haughty demeanor with the arrogance of known superiority, but take the time to draw out a human’s agony and fear. Their human slaves are utterly broken, spirits shattered, taunted with dreams of freedom and then hunted down in the woods until their hearts give out. However, these raksha are cowards at heart. They fight their duels to first blood rather than death. While they live among trees and imitate their beauty, there are corpses buried at their roots.

The malign, beautiful and sly Fair Folk of the Southeast deck themselves with gaudy bright colors, similar to the poisonous frogs and insects of the region. They are neither cowards nor stupid, but they are lazy. Jungle raksha prefer to wait and strike from ambush, favoring the blowgun, club and spear. They luxuriate in the heat and damp, and lounge amid brilliant flowers, wrapping themselves in swathes of silk, feathers, leather and metal, or baring their skin to show off body-painting. Their victims suffer atrociously, whether slaves, captives or mere wandering fools. These raksha use glamours and jungle hallucinogens to inflict hours of screaming, nightmare torments as they extract the dreams of their prey. These raksha hunger to enjoy the last iota of the dreamer’s soul, extracted in screaming pain, and are swift to find ways to deny or betray bargains.

In between, the Fair Folk of the central East are as exuberant and energetic as the teeming forests of their realm. Fads and fashions change with the seasons. Households and freeholds search endlessly for the next fad that will have the other raksha imitating them. As befits the presence of the Valor-obsessed Opal Court, the Eastern Fair Folk make bold plans and take chances, whether they plan slave-taking raids deep into the Scavenger Lands, try to make a swineherd into a king or offer three wishes to a woodcutter, just to see what trouble they can cause.





THE ARCH OF BONES

In the far Northeast, where the forests meet the snow, rises the **Arch of Bones**. It hides deep in the woods, in a freehold entered where the branches of two trees intertwine. From the inside, the freehold looks like a clearing littered with skulls, surrounded by dark, snow-hung conifers inlaid with the bones of these raksha's victims. A constant storm lashes the trees with veils of snow. In the center of the clearing rise two towers of bone and ivory, with a bridge between them at the top, and many banners of pale silk whipping from poles along its top and sides.

The Fair Folk of this freehold are extremely secretive. While they frequently buy victims at the Goblin Bazaars, these Fair Folk take pains never to let anyone see the way to their home; their purchased mortals are blinded, and visiting Fair Folk are brought there blindfolded.

Lady Ebon rules the Arch of Bones. She eschews the usual fanciful raksha styles to wear simple drapes of black, claiming that the winter in her heart knows no end. The other Fair Folk follow her lead and similarly dress in severe black with white accents and small ornaments carved of bone.

As with most freeholds, the ruler is the source and center of the prevailing mood. Lady Ebon's paranoia comes from her birthright as one of the lost scions of the Diamond Court (see p. 50). While the Diamond Court's destruction happened centuries ago, Lady Ebon still fears attack from the courts and the true death, and expects treason. Her most trusted counselor, Naithe the Black, constantly manipulates other raksha or visitors into petty conspiracies against Lady Ebon, so that she can then expose them and feed her ruler's paranoia further.

Mortals in the Arch of Bones are tolerated pets or helpless food; no raksha in the court would ever trust a human enough to let one leave. Humans wander the bone corridors, blinded and shackled, with the marks of their raksha owner embossed upon their collars. The hobgoblins of the household are whirling vortices of pine needles, carved statues of wood and bone or wolf-skinned humanoids with ice-crusted fur.

THE BORDERMARCHES

The Eastern Bordermarches often look much like Creation, at least to someone unskilled in woodcraft. The climate stays the same as the rest of the East, ranging from cold forests in the Northeast to steamy jungles in the Southeast. The plants and animals, however, can change radically... and often intermingle, a phenomenon rarely seen in the Bordermarches of the Wyld's other quarters.

Tall reeds that end in serpents and trees whose leaves migrate with the seasons are only two examples from this unnaturally verdant realm. Even more than the rest of the Wyld, everything in the Eastern Bordermarches can breed with everything else and often does.

While ordinary trees grow in the Eastern Wyld, most trees sprout leaves and fruits belonging to other sorts of plants as well as their own. A great many animals here are born from fruit or pods. These creatures have no parents to nurture them and so they either grow rapidly or leave the fruit most of the way to adulthood.

Usually, when these pods are brought back to Creation, they cannot hatch and instead make interesting curiosities; scholars sometimes buy them and cut them open to examine the half-formed animals inside. Now and then, these pods *do* survive the transition into Creation and unexpectedly hatch. Given that a single pod can contain a deadly flying serpent, a hive of intelligent, carnivorous bees or a ravenous, flesh-eating monkey, this trade in Wyld curiosities shall never grow very large.

THE LAND OF NIGHT

The Northeast holds a small forest locked in endless night. When the sun shines over the rest of Creation, this woodland stands out because it remains cloaked in perpetual darkness. The moon and stars shine normally over this land, but the sun never shows. The trees are equally unusual: many sorts of etiolated trees with bone-colored leaves and chalk-white bark as well as the rare blood ebony trees, which rapidly die if exposed to sunlight and have jet-black wood and blood-red leaves and sap.

An abundance of fungi live among these unnatural groves. Mobile puffball mushrooms a yard wide creep slowly between mushrooms up to five yards tall. The mushroom spores do not affect the animals native to the Land of Night, that are all unusually large versions of nocturnal creatures. Strix and giant carnivorous bats feast on the fungal trees and occasionally supplement their diet with living flesh, while the deer have jet-black eyes twice the size of normal members of their kind, while their ebon hooves and antlers contrast sharply with their unnaturally pale fur. Most of the hobgoblins who live in this realm have the large-eared heads of bats: their faintly clicking sonar allows them to ignore the perpetual darkness of their homeland.

THE SHADOWLAND OF FATAL ONYX

The center of the Land of Night holds a city called Fatal Onyx. This small shadowland benefits from the perpetual darkness of its surroundings. The buildings

GIANT MUSHROOM SPOORS

Cutting down or otherwise damaging the giant mushrooms in the Land of Night may prompt them to release a cloud of spores about six yards in diameter. These spores are both mildly toxic and horrifically invasive. Breathing the spores forces the character to resist their poison effect (Damage 3L/1 Hour, Toxicity 3M, Tolerance —/—, Penalty -1). In addition, the player of anyone touched by the spores must roll (Stamina + Resistance), difficulty 3, for the character to avoid sprouting mushrooms over her body. If a mortal botches this roll, the mushrooms also grow internally, and within three days the character explodes in a cloud of spores. Fair Folk and Exalted whose players fail or botch, and mortals who simply receive a failed roll, merely sprout thumb- to fist-sized mushrooms all over their body. These mushrooms subtract 1 from Dexterity and reduce the character's Appearance to 1. Mortals require special medicine (minimum Occult 3, Lore 3 and Resources 2 to create) to cure them. Beings of greater power recover from the spore infestation as they recover from any other disease.

are all made from sculpted bones, from the pale yellow of ancient and well-polished ivory to the stark white of a sun-bleached skull. The ghosts of Fatal Onyx move to and from the Underworld as readily as any other ghosts. However, Wyld energies also taint this shadowland, and so the ghosts of Fatal Onyx are all as black as soot; they look like shadows given a three-dimensional form. Their eyes and mouths give only minor variations in their uniform darkness.

While ghosts in Fatal Onyx start out as shadowy version of the forms they take in the Underworld, over time they mutate and change as much as anything else in the Wyld. Some grow taller or wider (or both), and their limbs occasionally transform into flippers, wings or claws. Some ghosts lose all limbs and become featureless, inky blobs crawling across the landscape. These transformations gradually fade when ghosts return to the Underworld, though the recovery may take decades. Ghosts find such mutations almost as terrible as living men would. The ghosts can leave anytime they wish—but most remain and accept their progressive deformity, for the shadowland does not protect the ghosts from addiction to the Wyld.

A trio of exceedingly powerful and ancient nephwrack necromancers are the absolute monarchs of Fatal Onyx.

They call themselves the Triat. They all look the same: fluid, misshapen shadow-creatures barely recognizable as humanoid, with long, snouted heads crowned with glittering diadems of onyx. Just as all of their kind, they hate the living. The Triat also loathe the chaotic existence of the Fair Folk and their hobgoblin servants. The Triat founded Fatal Onyx as part of a crusade to cleanse and conquer the Wyld—and the Wyld caught them.

The three nephwracks use the black ghosts as packs of hunting beasts that run screeching and howling through the Land of Night. When night falls in the surrounding Bordermarches, the nephwracks lead their ghosts to hunt anything they can find, including hobgoblins, Wyld barbarians, beastmen, weaker Fair Folk and unusually careless Exalts. The three nephwracks resist further Wyld mutation because the Wyld has made them one of its stories, as the dread huntsmen who rule the Land of Night.

The nephwracks do not care what they catch. Only the hunt for living prey matters. They prefer to take mortal (or immortal) victims alive and carry them back to Fatal Onyx for a slow, agonizing death and consumption. They especially enjoy torturing hobgoblins. Captured raksha face the same fate unless they can buy their freedom with gifts and sworn promises of large favors. A far worse fate awaits mortals or Exalted captured by these monsters. In addition to using their blood to power their foul necromantic rituals, the nephwracks possess a terrible artifact that enables the user to devour dreams, emotions and souls as the Fair Folk do. The nephwracks obtained this artifact as ransom for a pair of captured raksha nobles. The Triat periodically allow their best hunting ghosts to ravish one of their captives. Even a small taste of this twisted pleasure is one of the greatest joys a ghost can obtain, and this lure attracts thousands of ghosts to Fatal Onyx and their own entrapment in the Wyld.

The Triat would prefer to hunt mortals and the occasional Exalt. However, their packs of ghosts are so addicted to the Wyld that most refuse to hunt in Creation. Therefore, the Triat must usually settle for hobgoblins. Now and then, the Triat raid the caravans of slaves taken through the nearby Bordermarches, on their way to raksha domains.

MUTANT GHOST HUNTING HOST

Description: This is Arlat Blood-Binder's personal hunting host. It consists of 120 moderately trained, but exceptionally aggressive and determined war ghosts wearing reinforced buff jackets and armed with axes or poleaxes.

Commanding Officer: Arlat Blood-Binder, one of the three nephwrack necromancers who rules Fatal Onyx.



Armor Color: Pale gray reinforced buff jackets (ectoplasmic; they evaporate in daylight)

Motto: "Blood and life, blood and life!"

General Makeup: 150 mutant war ghosts wielding axes and poleaxes, supported by 10 nemissaries who possess enemy forces, 50 zombies with poleaxes, and three spine chains

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 4

Drill: 2

Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 4

Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Attack Damage:** —

Endurance: — **Might:** 3

Armor: 2 (-2 mobility) **Morale:** 3

Special Characters: Arlat Blood-Binder, a powerful nephwrack skilled in necromancy; Tothis Vlan, leader of the nemissaries

Formation: When not in use, the zombies and spine chains are stored in the main armory of Fatal Onyx, while the war ghosts and nemissaries dwell in the city when not out hunting. Arlat Blood-Binder dwells in the city's central palace-temple.

MABANDE'S SERPENTS

This raksha band dwells in the Southeastern Border-marches. Mabande's Serpents are known for the accuracy

of their blowguns and the virulence of their poisons. They dye their tongues in shades of blue and purple to match their hair, and procure frogs and serpents from far parts of the jungles, or even the Deep Wyld, in order to distill new venoms. Mabande's Serpents have become one of the Guild's best trading partners in the region, since these raksha often need new slaves. They pay the Guild with animals and plants taken from the Wyld, and some of their drugs and poisons (though not their finest work). Some of the Mabande's Serpents philters can rot a single internal organ while leaving the rest of the body untouched, induce or prevent fertility, inflict horrible addictions or slay creatures that resist any other sort of physical damage.

The Serpents build palaces of reeds and giant water-lilies, in a marsh where the vines intertwine with snakes and poisonous frogs lurk in every pool of water. Their human minions serve with desperate eagerness, aware that even a hint of failure means that they become test subjects for new poisons.

Mabande herself maintains a careless, casual attitude, lounging in her stillroom or her throne room while lesser raksha tend to her every need. Sain the Throtter attends to household discipline. This muscular warrior prefers toxins that send his enemies into lengthy muscle spasms until they choke on their own tongues. He currently

Fatal Onyx, a Magnitude 3 Domain

Military: 2 **Culture:** 2 **Government:** 2

Abilities: Awareness 1, Bureaucracy 1, Craft 1, Integrity 2, Investigation 1, Occult 3 (Binding Agreements +3), Performance 2, Presence 1, Stealth 2, War 3

Virtues: Compassion: 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 1, Valor 4

Limit Break: Conviction **Current Limit:** 3

Willpower: 8

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 0

Notes: Fatal Onyx is a fully supernatural dominion. The Triat are sorcerers (more precisely, necromancers) with Legitimacy. Unlike most dominions, Fatal Onyx lacks any external bonus points, because it has no alliances. The ghostly inhabitants are all completely loyal to the Triat, both due to the threat of exile reinforced by the inhabitant's addiction to the Wyld, and the promise of draining mortal emotions. The dominion's Virtue Flaw causes Fatal Onyx to inflict horrible tortures and suffering on anyone the nephwracks suspect have opposed them or even questioned their authority.

schemes to depose Mabande. Sain hopes to engage in small invasions of Creation, slaying humans on all sides and spreading fear; he sees himself as a glorious conqueror similar to Balor himself, and fails to realize how human and petty his ambitions are. The Serpents do not pursue contact with other Fair Folk, but host a great many traveling raksha (or other people) who come to purchase poisons. The household's hobgoblins are humanoid but composed of water, or they are half-women, half-serpent beings with forked tongues.

THE SERPENT HOST

Description: The main force fielded by Mabande's Serpents if they need to defend their territory. These 150 raksha do not openly take the field, but attempt to strike from cover, harassing the enemy with poisonous missiles, spears and blowgun darts. All their weapons are poisoned with the equivalent of arrow frog venom (see *Exalted*, p. 131) or something stranger of the Storyteller's devising.

Commanding Officer: Sain the Throttlor

Armor Color: Loincloths and skin paint in greens, browns and bright flower shades

Motto: None

General Makeup: Foot troops

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 3

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 3

Armor: 3 (all done by magic) **Morale:** 3



Special Characters: None

Formation: Despite their superb Drill, Mabande's Serpents only fight as skirmishers. Most of the time, enemies encounter multiple smaller units.

THE SILVER CLOUDS

In the central Eastern Bordermarches lies the freehold of the Silver Clouds, mansions roofed with silver and ivory that can be seen glimmering through the woodlands from far away. The raksha of this freehold follow Duke Chanis, a warlord who knows no fear and risks anything and everything to conquer. He enjoys good relations with the Opal Court, and frequent hunts or tournaments are arranged between the two. Many of his people are infected by Chanis's spirit, and he speaks of expansion and the conquest of other raksha freeholds; he finds the Arch of Bones a particularly tempting target.

The raksha of the Silver Clouds ape divinity, claiming to their human minions and victims that they are gods descended from Yu-Shan. (This has not yet come to the attention of any divinities that would punish such an insult, but it is surely only a matter of time.) They treat their human minions comparatively well, urging them to strive valiantly for the greater glory of their gods, and ravage their souls as they battle, devouring their urges for glory and victory. Weaklings and the defeated are exiled to the cellars below the Silver Clouds, and hunted through the darkness by unseen marionettes that slowly rip and tear the victims to pieces.

Duke Chanis acts dramatically noble, heroic and even somewhat honorable; he seems to take pride in not breaking his word and in showing mercy to interesting opponents who surrender gracefully. His most fervent supporter is his lover Benne Foxjaw, a white-haired raksha of great charm and a skilled painter. The two of them betray each other frequently with Mitomin, the Champion of the freehold and the best single combatant within its walls. Mitomin fights with a bow or halberd. He seeks hopelessly to free himself from his two lovers. The emotional dynamics between these three powerful raksha affect much of the politics within Chanis' domain, especially given that Chanis favors the Balorian Crusade, while the other two do not.

MIDDLEMARCHES

Even more than in other quarters of the Wyld, the Middlemarches of the East are imbued with life. The forests absorb all the forms and qualities of Creation: trees of flame or ice; trees of living, bleeding flesh; trees of iron filigree that chime like bells; trees of braided human hair.



The rest of the vegetable kingdom follows suit, from cloth-of-gold moss to kelp-forests that send fronds waving hundreds of feet into the air. The fusion between plant and animal life also grows more pronounced, from vine wyrms that merge giant serpents with jungle lianas to the hatra trees that hatch these small but viciously swarming beasts from pods. Conversely, many plants are mobile: whole forests sometimes migrate, whether marching on the ground, floating along great rivers or drifting on the wind like giant dandelion seeds. Even the elements may absorb living qualities, resulting in rivers of sap or blood, rains of beetles or seeds or ground that twitches like the itching skin of a gigantic beast.

PROPERTIES, PEOPLE, PLACES

AGGRESSIVE SCENT ZONE

When nearing this region of the Wyld, even the weakest nose detects a change to the air. Things smell different—sharper, maybe—and almost everything has a more detectable and distinct odor. Air smells more like air, trees smell more like bark and sap, hands smell fleshy and the ground smells more *earthy*. Aromas become more noticeable and intricate the closer an explorer comes.

Then all senses other than smell diminish as visitors approach the focus of the Aggressive Scent Zone. A person's sight dims, hearing dulls and sense of touch numbs, but smell and its brother, taste, remain. This is not because a person's senses have weakened, but because things in this waypoint have no qualities of image, sound or tactile sensation—all these qualities are instead expressed through scent. Eventually, all a person can do is smell.

In the Aggressive Scent Zone, however, every scent contains all the information necessary to function. A tree smells like a tree, but also smells a certain width, texture and distance away. Local beasts smell like their analogues in creation but also smell confrontational or unconcerned, young or old, scarred from battle or still untested and scrawny or good eating. The path smells directional, and stepping from it smells a little bit lost.

Everything else has a scent of some kind, too. Up smells like up, and not a bit like down. Someone standing on her head (which her friends can't see) smells oriented upside-down. An incipient attack is preceded by the odor of the event, just as an aggressor uses his target's smell to know where to strike. Speech comes across as sharp scents that may take some practice to interpret. Anything that can or must be perceived is conveyed through aroma in the Aggressive Scent Zone.

Humans, used to sight and hearing as their primary senses, find it very difficult to accustom themselves to

functioning solely by smell. Without preparation or practice, people new to the region acts in all ways as though they were completely blind. It would be worse, losing all hearing and touch, if scent did not pick up the slack.

CAT FOREST

Cat Forest can be hard to find, because it's always on the move—even more so than most Wyld locations. Usually, an explorer can find it wandering back and forth between the Eastern and the Northeastern Middle-marches, spending time in each. Some people seek it out to acquire exotic pets, for themselves or for well-paying employers, because the forest is home to breeds never before seen in Creation. Of course, some are too large to be made captive.

In Cat Forest, cats run free everywhere, constantly underfoot. The forest floor is covered not in needles but in fur. Instead of loam, visitors smell the animal dander and other odors one might expect of a place overrun with cats. Cats are also *overfoot*, because the forest's trees are also cats.

Cat-trees come in two kinds. The first is a mass of squirming, crawling, clawing cats in the shape of a tree. These tree-cats gather in the shape of local species—towering pines and redwoods in the Northeast, branching oaks, arching willows, and so forth. The tree-cats move constantly, shifting position from the roots of the tree to the boughs and back. When on the bottom, the cats move the mass of felines above them slowly over the ground. At the top, they sway and mew softly as wind rustles them, and one occasionally falls to the ground like a ripened fruit. Except fruits don't land on their feet and run away....

The second kind of tree is a sort of giant cat. Enormous legs have a furry, bark-like texture and a tangle of leathery, cat-padded roots for feet. They reach up into the sky and connect with spreading, furry rib-branches that merge into a healthy-looking, leaf-bearing belly-canopy up in the sky. Their tails hang from behind the two rear trees, brushing along the ground in a long twist of massive, furry vines, and their heads are enormous clusters of furry needles with coloring suggestive of eyes, nose, mouth and whiskers.

Raksha occasionally ride the giant tree-cats, using lures of occult and mundane nature to point the great beasts where they want to go. Where the giant tree-cats walk, the Cat Forest follows.

An old woman, who calls herself the Magnificent Suzerainess of the Celebrated Wood, walks wherever the forest walks. When she tires, she calls to the animals that scamper about her feet, and they converge and cling to each other until they form a horse in the same way that other

cats make trees, and she rides. The Magnificent Suzariness of the Celebrated Wood steadfastly ignores anybody who has hurt a cat within the past year, to the point that she can walk completely through such people.

The Suzariness is a lost god of Creation. Only the most puissant and skilled librarian or archivist could extract the mystery of her former name and self from the Bureau of Heaven's Black Veil Annals. However, none but Ryzala, Shogun of the Department of Celestial Concerns, may peruse these records. Which she never does.

Here and now, the Magnificent Suzariness cares for Cat Forest. She allows the raksha to manipulate the forest from time to time because they do not harm it and they always leave treats behind. For a god whose office has been long empty, unnecessary or eliminated, she retains a surprising amount of power. Using nothing but her Charms and her wits, she can know everything that people around her know. In her presence, people feel closer, less alone and more empathic toward one another. Her ability to engender these feelings make some believe she was once the goddess of brotherhood or another abstract concept, but all those gods are accounted for.

When a visitor to Cat Forest truly impresses the Suzariness as a person of great virtue, as judged from her unique perspective, she may bestow upon that person a gift. Endowments may include artifacts (she once gave a daiklave made of cats), delicious and long-lasting food, enhanced senses or a cat as a companion. This last she gives only to her favorites, and it qualifies as an automatic Familiar ••• that can stack with existing familiars. The only twist is that the Suzariness can share the cat's senses at will.

FOREST OF ARMS

In this bizarre Eastern woodland, the trees consist of wildly branching arrays of arms and legs that watch visitors with functional human eyes. In addition to moving in the breeze, these limbs react to movement around them. The trees try to grab anyone who comes within range. The trees also fight back if someone attacks them. Walking hands and strange conglomerations of arms and eyes occasionally fall from the trees like ripe fruit, and run or scuttle across the ground until they find a new tree to join. If a mortal, Exalt or raksha passes by,



ARM YOURSELF

To bond with an unprotected victim, a free arm need only maintain a hold for a number of actions equal to its opponent's Stamina. After that time, the arm has successfully bonded itself to the character. The time required is doubled for gods and Exalts.

A few surgeons might pay up to Resources ••• for these animate arms and hands, as replacement limbs for maimed patients—better an arm that doesn't match than no arm at all. Limbs from the Forest of Arms retain their power to bond only in a Wyld zone, however, so unless a doctor and patient are willing to enter the Wyld the surgeon also requires an operating room artificially infused with Wyld energies.

these creatures may mistake them for attractive trees in desperate need of additional branches, and attempt to climb up them and attach themselves.

While a character protected from the effects of Rakshastan is safe from anything more than casual immobilization or squeezing, an unprotected mortal or Exalt finds the limbs bonding to him; the unfortunate person immediately gain a particularly horrific-looking version of the *Multiple Arms* mutation. Sadly, the extra limbs almost never match the victim's original arms, or each other, and they bond anywhere they can get a grip.

THE POISON WOODS

In the most dangerous forest of the Eastern Middlemarches, the trees are formed of crystallized poisons such as coral snake venom, strychnine or arsenic. Many of the trees and other plants sport glistening and deadly jewel-like thorns. A single scratch can bring a lingering and painful death to any mortal. Eating one of the trees' fruits, the pure essence of poison, would kill all but the most powerful raksha, gods or Exalted.

TOXIC WONDERS

Treat any scratch or prick from the forest as exposure to arrow frog venom (see **Exalted**, p. 131). All half-animal inhabitants have an additional 3L/3B soak from their plant-like skins, and their bites are as dangerous as coral snake venom (see **Exalted**, p. 131). A single well-trained poison raiton or hatra sells for a high price in Creation (Resources ••••+)

In addition to being deadly to the touch, the Poison Woods are inhabited by half-plant creatures that are equally dangerous. A few brave (or foolhardy) people dare to collect and train the beasts of the Poison Woods as guard animals. None of these brightly colored creatures can be bred outside the Poison Woods, however, since they all grow from pods on the toxic plants, and none of the plants will grow anywhere else—not even in other Wyld areas.

SKY FORESTS

As in the other quarters of the Wyld, the idea of “ground” becomes uncertain in the Eastern Middlemarches. Gigantic trees, miles high, can grow in the Eastern Bordermarches and even the tainted lands—but in the Middlemarches, whole forests can ascend to the sky. A single massive trunk might support a whole forest of normal-sized trees, shrubs, vines and other life, on a patch of land cupped in its mighty branches. The trees themselves might radiate outward from a clump of soil and roots, like the seeds of a dandelion, with that central mass supplying the local definition of “down.” Some of these little forest-worlds drift freely. Climbing along certain branches might take you to a sky-forest but not take you back.

THE OPAL COURT

The **Opal Court** currently lies in the depths of the Eastern Middlemarches. The court's cataphracts and courtiers practice the Virtue of Valor, inviting combats from all and sundry, and going out to find them if they don't arrive fast enough. Dueling is a common sport, although the current fashion is for challenges of will and glamour rather than actual fighting. The courtiers encourage their human servants to act as violent and short-tempered as their raksha masters and mistresses, so there is always some sort of brawling or battle going on in the background. A wide assortment of hobgoblins fill the area, many brought by masters and mistresses from distant quarters of the Wyld and then discarded here; most are warlike in some way, but the huge array of styles makes them hard to categorize.

The court itself occupies a large freehold. It looks like a set of silk pavilions spreading outwards from a central castle. The woods around it blaze with banners and standards, and clatter with the armor and weapons of defeated enemies. The court welcomes newcomers from all quarters, and especially refugees seeking sanctuary from enemies, knowing that they will bring interesting feuds and battles with them. Deities throughout the East suffer ever-increasing distress from the court's presence.

The Opal Court, a Magnitude 3 Dominion
Military: 3 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 2
Abilities: Awareness 2, Craft 2, Integrity 3, Investigation 2 (Due Diligence 2), Occult 3 (Supernatural Etiquette 3), Performance 3 (Saber-Rattling 3), Presence 3, Stealth 2 (Sabotage 2), War 3 (Forcing an Engagement 3)
Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 4
Limit Break: Valor **Current Limit:** 3
Willpower: 7
Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 9
Notes: The Opal Court is a fully Supernatural dominion. Prince Japhthia is a sorcerer with Legitimacy, while Subarto is a savant. In the event of a Limit Break, the Opal Court immediately goes to war, attacking the most convenient target, or throws all its resources into any war it is currently engaged in.

The Opal Court often sends raiding parties into Creation to challenge local spirits and petty godlings to battles. Sometimes the Fair Folk pose as mortal bandits—small numbers of mortal bandits—and torment towns and manors until the outraged people muster to fight. Then the court sends a greater force to fight this “rival kingdom.” People throughout the Eastern edge of Creation now pray for succor, and the Opal Court hopes they can find it in the form of Exalted or other heroes who can give them a *real* fight. The court’s leaders watch the turmoil in Halta and consider how best to push it towards all-out war. Of course, the Opal Court would split its army to fight on both sides.

The court’s ruler, Prince Japhthia, claims descent from Balor himself. Japhthia sees himself as a mighty strategist and leader of warriors, and declares that he is destined to lead the next crusade. To this end, Japhthia gathers information from across both the Wyld and Creation. The court’s stability, and the scope of his plans, has begun to cause a growing warp in the Loom of Fate, even if he himself as a raksha cannot affect it.

The Opal Court boasts many other notable Fair Folk. The warrior Cahlenna eats nothing but the hearts of prey that she has slain with her own hands. The idea of hunting and killing one of the Lunar Exalted obsesses her. She pays a number of Guild spies for information on the whereabouts of Luna’s Chosen. She is also the head of the Topaz Household, whose members are similarly notorious for courage and for hunting.

More outwardly pacifistic is Subarto, a minstrel from the far North who seeks diversion by playing for perilous rulers. He has gone as far as the Realm (while heavily disguised) and even played for Dragon-Blooded and for Immaculates. For Subarto, the thrill of the performance seems to consist in knowing that his listeners may slay him, and he refuses to perform unless this places him in danger. Nobody trusts him, as he is a gossip and satirist, but everyone talks to him.

There is also the Laughing Boy, a raksha with no known name who runs barefoot and leaves the ground scorched behind him. He says little, but his eyes burn with pure madness. The Laughing Boy enters Creation from time to time to destroy and ravage. Otherwise, he prefers the Deep Wyld, dancing through it but never speaking.

OPAL COURT RAIDERS

Description: A group of 250 Fair Folk cataphracts. They are of Excellent quality, half male, half female; while the Opal Court can mobilize greater forces, this unit is always ready for defense or attack. They wear gossamer armor and carry gossamer swords, lances and bows, and ride horses that can gallop through a forest as if it were an open field.

Commanding Officer: Baron Pierce



Armor Color: Iridescent black glass plate mail with red silk scarves at the neck and helm

Motto: "Eternal war, eternal glory!"

General Makeup: Armed riders. All carry shortbows and use them from a distance before charging.

Overall Quality: Elite

Magnitude: 5

Drill: 4

Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Ranged Attack Rating: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 4

Armor: 4 **Morale:** 3

Formation: The Opal Court can muster several of these units. They prefer to fight in close formation, charging and curvetting in unison to show off their excellent Drill.

ILIO STARA

This First Age city, lost to the world since the Con-tagion, has resisted being swallowed by the Wyld for 800 years. Explorers in the Eastern Wyld might come upon an open field of lush grass, about five miles across. It has no obvious Wyld mutations or nature. The only unusual feature is a bonsai tree that grows, undisturbed, in the exact center of the meadow. The place seems remarkable in its normalcy.

When an explorer comes within one mile of the bonsai, however, the strangeness reveals itself. As the explorer walks toward the tree, she can see how she passes tussocks and small boulders, but the tree seems to come no closer. Likewise, she doesn't seem to get any farther from the edge of the field.

Ilio Stara was the result of a Twilight Caste's experi-ment in space and perspective. As an explorer travels toward the tree, the distance that the traveler must cross increases rapidly. Perhaps the traveler grows smaller, or perhaps the space around her grows. Each step taken takes the explorer less far than the last, and the grasses, stones and insects around her become larger in comparison to her. Either way, crossing the final mile to the tree is equivalent to 100 miles of travel.

Because the change is so gradual, an explorer on foot may take several days to notice that the grasses are getting larger, not just higher. The bonsai itself remains the same size, which doesn't help a character trying to notice the size change. Only in the last several miles does the false perspective lift, quickly inflating the tree to many times its original size. By the time the explorer reaches the tree, it towers over her and she can see the once-fabled Staran Gate between the smaller trees that cluster around the bonsai's massive trunk.

In the First Age, the Staran Gate was the public en-trance to Ilio Stara. Stunningly crafted from iridescent, vastly magnified beetle wings, the gate's two 100-foot doors never look the same twice. From this point, a visitor can see that Ilio Stara is a city cut into a living tree smaller than a dog—but a full city nonetheless. Hallways without number link thousands of chambers hewn into the wood. These range from vast public spaces to the most private bark-side apartments.

The educated and the powerful of the First Age knew Ilio Stara for the many arcane researchers who called it home. Sperimin may have boasted the best teachers and standard savants of the Age, but Ilio Stara had the most creative and unpredictable researchers—whatever they explored, it was usually something new and previously unexamined. It seemed only natural for a city that owed its entire existence to such an experimental (and never duplicated) process.

Even purely theoretical exercises could become dangerous when they involved the Wyld, Malfeas and other volatile subjects. Needles, which could separate from the tree with little harm and would grow back in a season, became disposable workshops. Many needles were even designed to grow back with the hollow for a new workshop already formed. Over the centuries, many of the workshops have broken off and been replaced, but some still hold remnants of experimental projects, such as a (never completed) device to transfuse Lunar and Solar Essence into a single Exaltation.

The city's creator planted the tree so its roots wrapped around several small ingots of the magical materials. With the distortion and expansion of space in creating the city, those ingots—none weighing more than a pound—became large enough to supply all the moonsilver, orichalcum, starstone, soulsteel and jade the researchers could ever need. Unfortunately, anything removed from the city does not expand with the departing person.

In the Pinnacle of the White-Robed Justiciar, the city governor's office near the top of the tree, stands a wooden statue. It depicts a slender four-and-a-half-foot man whose robe hangs strangely from the odd crooks in the arms and neck. This is what remains of Tsen-Usen, god of the bonsai and city father of Ilio Stara. His devo-tion to his Solar friends made him the first target when the Usurpation came to the city. A weapon froze him in place for an unknown duration (it was yet another experi-ment), during which time his wooden Essence crept over his form until he appeared as he does now.

Tsen-Usen's altered nature slowly made the city unliv-able, and the population gradually dropped throughout

Ilio Stara, a Magnitude 3 Dominion

Military: 2 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 2

Abilities: Awareness 1, Bureaucracy 2 (Dealing with Fair Folk +1), Craft 3, Integrity 3 (Resisting Fair Folk +1), Investigation 1, Occult 2 (Cutting-Edge Research +2), Presence 1, War 2 (Endurance Tactics +1)

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

Virtue Flaw: Compassion **Current Limit:** 6

Willpower: 8

Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 2

Notes: Ilio Stara is a near-human dominion. Right now, Zhang is the only sorcerer with Legitimacy in Ilio Stara, and he is often absent. The Starans' old chieftains provide savants who could act in his stead when he isn't around. Ilio Stara's external bonus points come from trade deals and culture interaction with nearby Wyld communities and are tied up in specialties. (Its specialty with Cutting-Edge Research is largely potential at this point, and requires the city to gain a greater number of people who have the Abilities to use its remaining laboratories.)

Try as they might to be an active society, the Starans have a difficult time rousing themselves from the comfortable diminishing they experienced before Zhang's arrival. Ilio Stara's Limit Break causes its people to cease making real effort, instead allowing the citizens to simply relax and do as they like.

the Shogunate. The few who remained slowly became wooden—emotionally and physically—just as Tsen-Usen. Either its low population or cloak of spatial distortion protected Ilio Stara from the Balorian Crusade. But from then to now, the Wyld has inexorably crept inward.

Historians think Ilio Stara is just another tale about the lost wonders of the Old Realm. Nevertheless, some people still call the city home... even if they have changed since the First Age. Between the Essence of Elemental Wood that permeates the city and the Wyld energies seeping in through aged protections, the Starans have become more elemental than human.

Starans look humanoid, with two legs and two arms, but their consciousness resides within the masses of needles that grow atop their hard, knotty bodies. The city's inhabitants spend their time growing meager crops in the vast gardens between roots that used to feed tens of thousands, maintain what few conveniences they can and otherwise huddle behind the protection of the Staran Gate. Instead of dying, a Staran simply slows down and

eventually plants herself outside the city to become a tree forever. True death only comes if the Staran ends life in a place where she cannot set down permanent roots.

About 30 years ago, a young Lunar called No Trouble Zhang rediscovered Ilio Stara. In short order, Zhang acquired enough influence among the Starans to begin his own experiment in social reconstruction. Ilio Stara changed from a dwindling remnant of a city to a growing city-state with influence in its region. Under Zhang's command, the Starans taught diplomats and dispatched them to local Wyld societies and Fair Folk courts. No Trouble Zhang trained soldiers and officers himself and created military doctrine to take advantage of the people's mutations, enabling the city to defend itself against aggressors. (See p. 154 in Chapter Seven for Zhang's statistics.) Today, Ilio Stara exercises some influence in nearby waypoints of the Middlemarches.

Despite the centuries of occupation and the Starans' recent labors to rebuild their city, miles of corridors and hundreds of workshops remain unexplored. Zhang does not overestimate his ability to understand and safely examine many of the remaining experiments. On the other hand, he is not yet ready to reveal his prize to other Lunars, either. He wants to keep the glory of Ilio Stara's reconstruction for himself, instead of risking older and stronger Lunars taking over the project.

STARAN DEFENDERS

Description: These are the staunch guardians of the city, as No Trouble Zhang trained and organized them. The soldiers paint their wooden bodies with various bark-staining dyes to mark their duty and rank. Their natural toughness ensures that they don't need to wear armor.

Commanding Officer: Varies

Armor Color: Gold and silver streaks

Motto: "As the city stands!"

General Makeup: Heavy infantry. They carry spears, weapons that are easy to make in the surroundings and inflict little damage to the Starans themselves if picked up by enemies on the battlefield. Most weapons are made of wood, reverently harvested from the dead wood of the warrior's ancestors.

Overall Quality: Good

Magnitude: 3 (multiple units)

Drill: 2

Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3

Endurance: 6 **Might:** 1

Armor: 3 **Morale:** 2

Formation: Units of Staran defenders are ready at most times to march out of the Staran Gate and stand against intruders. They do not need to scout because of the great



perspective lookouts have from the high points of the bonsai. They have still not been tested, as the city has not been attacked.

THE DEEP WYLD

In the Deep Wyld of the East, the other elements of Creation fade to leave a landscape composed entirely of wood and twigs, flower petals and fungi, pollen, roots and leaves. Here visitors can find duplicates of everything from the dense jungles of the Southeast to entire streets from Juche, all composed of layers of flowers, twigs and leaves. Some trees bear miniature copies of famous manses as fruit or fir-cones, while others have maps of the streets of Whitewall or the tunnels of Gethamane etched into their bark. The Deep Wyld also holds native creatures made from wood, flower petals and leaves.

Waves of vegetation sweep through the Deep Wyld, as trees and plants expand and contract, grow and die, swell and fade. No space is certain and no track is sure, because there is no sky to navigate by and no earth beneath the feet, only the endless masses of vegetation. Two people could pass by each other and never know it, one walking on a layer of branches directly above the other. Scale and direction shift so that a traveler can never find the ground; she can climb along a branch, reach a trunk, find it is yet another branch and crawl along to discover she is apparently in a huge patch of moss where every stalk is a tiny tree.

However, there is one benefit to having a freehold in the Eastern Deep Wyld, as opposed to any other quarter of Creation: the freehold can be very well hidden. The Deep East holds Fair Folk who have hidden for centuries now, from even before the time of the Balorian Crusade, who stole across the border of reality and nestled themselves among the trees and leaves, or who retreated here to lurk in refuges crafted from deep-buried roots.

At least one group of Fair Folk have gone hungry here for the last four centuries, bereft of mortal slaves and too fearful to go out and steal more, jealously guarding weapons once used by Balor himself but afraid that other raksha will steal them away. Their leader, Entanel, sings his people to sleep every night; his voice was acclaimed as a marvel once, but now only the leaves and the blossoms hear it. Their freehold is hidden deep inside a huge tree that remains stable only because Entanel wishes it so, and few even suspect it exists. These raksha have become childlike in their simplicity, but also extremely cruel, and play with any elementals or other living things that the raksha can capture, tearing them apart and decorating the walls with their remains.

UNSHAPED RAKSHA

One of the most prominent unshaped raksha who haunts this quarter of the Deep Wyld is Loshirata, That Which Devours. She is at the same time the tree whose roots break the earth beneath her, and the darkness hidden beneath a single leaf. She walks through the forest and it parts before her, and yet when she is seen she has always been growing there. Her leaves whisper madness, and her pollen is rank insanity for all who breathe it in. The birds that nest in her branches are rooted in her wood, and sing as the wind blows through their green feathers. She is a contagious cancer in the Deep Wyld, spreading further each year. Other unshaped raksha devour her parts when they can, as she is sweet to the taste.

In the Northwest lurks Shirrduname, the Colossal Walker Among the Trees. However far up one climbs, his face and torso can never be seen, only his striding legs and his long-fingered hands—and, sometimes, a whipping tail that brings down forests in its wake, though the Deep Wyld soon grows them again. Shirrduname can be heard from far off, but it does little good to flee, because wherever he can be heard is within a single stride of his legs. He abhors noise, and tramples anything that he hears make a sound. Lizard-like creatures live in the hollows of his body and crawl up and down his legs, deathly silent, chewing on anything they find.

Another unshaped raksha is Semiramis, the Whisper in the Leaves. She is the drought-wind that steals the water



from the roots and the strength from branches, the killing hunger that makes trees turn on each other, the sound of fruits drying on the vine and crumbling to ash. Where she blows, she leaves desiccation and malice behind her, and she delights in seeing others destroy each other. All who witness her know they have feared her all their lives. Semiramis is profoundly untrusting, and will always betray; it is not in her nature to tolerate alliance with any other being, be he unshaped, shaped, human, divine or Exalt, though she always pretends that she will keep her word. Semiramis prefers the Southeast, though in high summer she sometimes drifts further westward, seeking prey.

THE ELEMENTAL POLE OF WOOD

Creation's Eastern limit is an eternal world of green thought and green shade. However far one climbs, one cannot reach the sky or the ground—nothing but trunks and branches, vines and smaller plants, going up and down forever. The very light is green, filtered down through countless leaves above.

Animals and birds of living wood and leaves move silently through the foliage and among the trees. Giant serpents woven from vines and withies slither among the branches and between the roots, rising to swallow anything nearby. Everything here is quiet, except for the rustling of leaves and the whisper of reeds. The sound of voices carries for a long distance and draws anything nearby.

This is the pole of growing things and abundant life, where nothing dies except when it is eaten or assimilated into something else. All things change their shape, alter, grow and decay, but nothing can escape the cycle of vegetable life. Moss and molds grow on the unprotected clothing and bodies of travelers, leaves and fruit sprout from human skin and flesh and sleepers may be overgrown, waking to find themselves living masses of wood and flowers, their bones threaded through with

vines. A visitor requires at least two Charms to survive: a general Charm such as Element-Resisting Prana and a Charm against Shaping effects, such as Integrity-Protecting Prana, lest the Pole of Wood consume her and make it its own.

The Elemental Dragon of Wood does not come here often, as events elsewhere in Creation keep him busy. In his absence, a lesser elemental dragon of Wood named Kotomaro the Hidden Lightning has set up dominion here, claiming that as the most spiritually evolved entity in the neighborhood she has the right (and indeed the moral duty) to take command. Her every scale is a perfectly shaped leaf carved from ironwood or ebony, her eyes shine the pure green of spring willows, and her claws have the strength of a thousand oak tree roots. Kotomaro does not mention that she had to flee Heaven on short notice due to the investigations of an auditing Sidereal team—or that she had previously accepted bribes from the minions of the Deathlord known as the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils—or that she now hides from the attention of both Heaven and the Dowager. Instead, she lords it over the lesser elementals, ruling firmly and harshly. She gives instructions that any visitors be brought to her palace of copperwood and flame trees for her inspection.

Other elementals and spirits in the area grow weary of Kotomaro's rule. None yet suspect that she is anything except haughty and sadistic—traits that are not unknown among gods and dragons. However, a couple of the lesser spirit courts now plot against her. They hope to lure a powerful Exalt to their domain, and then bribe the Exalt to dispose of her. The spirits have much to offer, since the Elemental Pole of Wood has all the potential treasures of its element. The one thing these spirits do not want is to draw the attention of Sextes Jylis, the Elemental Dragon of Wood himself: they do not wish to find themselves under a possibly more tyrannical clawed heel, or sent out into Creation.





CHAPTER SEVEN

WYLD PRODIGIES

The previous chapters have concentrated on descriptions. This chapter offers the game mechanics: the way people use the Wyld, and try to resist it; more Wyld mutations, adding to the basic list from **Exalted**; sample characters, creatures and races that live in or near the Wyld; and a guide to playing characters from half-human races, or who begin play with Wyld mutations.

USING THE WYLD

Cultures that live with the Wyld as facets of their everyday life interact with it in many ways. Some people see the Wyld as an antagonist, others consider it a god and more simply call it home. They struggle against it to survive, fighting its dangers and enjoying its rare boons. Brave or foolish people can try to steal more benefits from the Wyld at the risk of personal disfigurement or derangement. These are *vision-questing* and *power-questing*.

Of course, not everyone who enters the Wyld seeks something special. Some visitors only want to get away whole. Any traveler from Creation is in danger of gaining mutations through simple exposure to the Wyld. To escape it, a character's player must roll (Willpower + Essence) at a frequency and difficulty determined by the region. The chart below extends the table found in **Exalted**, on p. 283, to include Pure Chaos and covers the entire range of mutations. Remember that any mutation may manifest as a derangement.

VISION-QUESTING

The Wyld is a realm of unbound possibility and dangerous, warping chaos. Occasionally, a resourceful character can use the Wyld to see subtle aspects of the potential future or events far away. When the need is great and times are desperate, a character may travel out of Creation and seek meaningful visions in the swirling chaos. As the Wyld



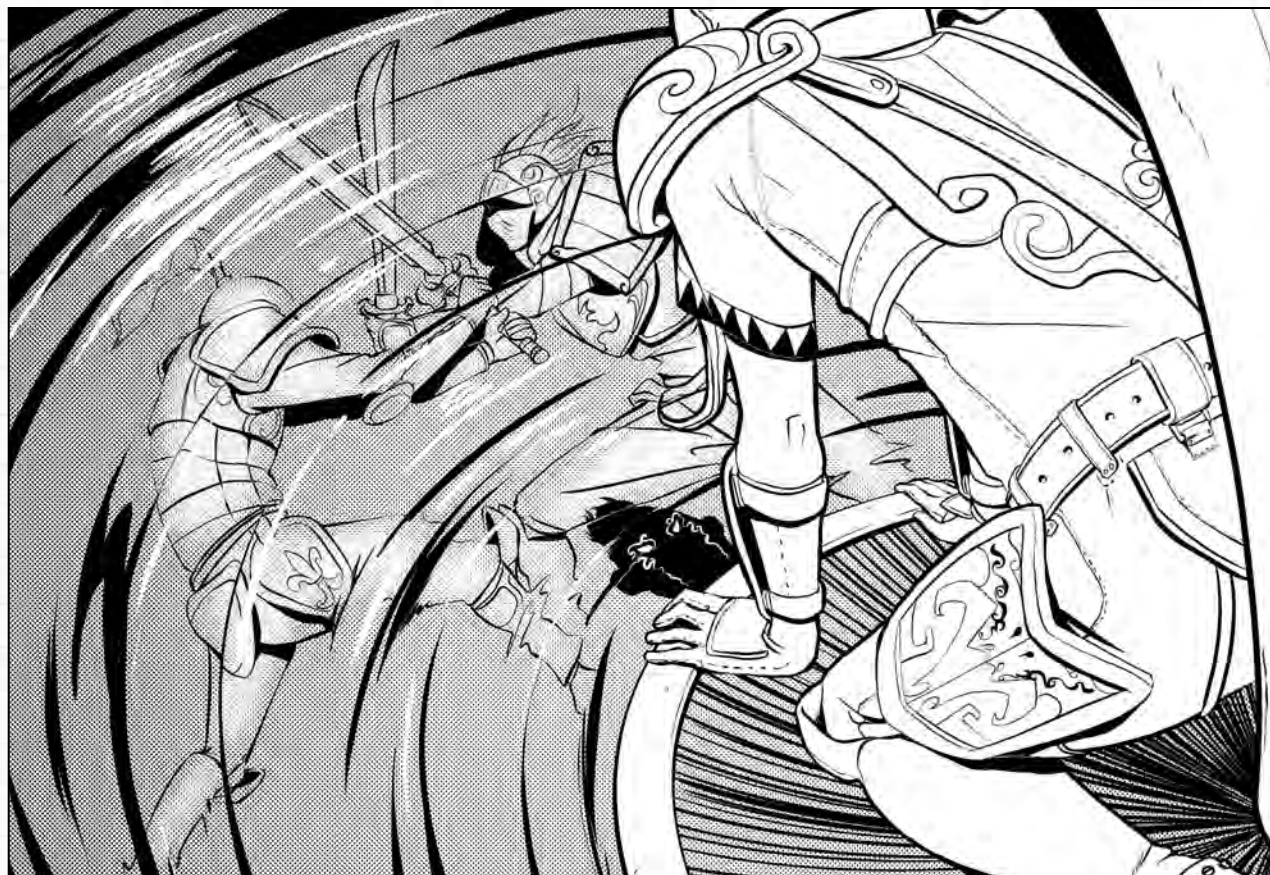
Expanded Wyld Mutation Table					
Terrain	Difficulty	Interval	Success	Failure	Botch
Bordermarches	2	Monthly	—	Pox	Deficiency
Middlemarches	3	Weekly	Pox	Debility	Deficiency, Debility
Deep Wyld	5	Daily	Affliction	Deformity	Debility, Deformity
Pure Chaos	7	Minute	Blight	Abomination	Deformity, Abomination

breaks all boundaries, a strong-willed person can sometimes pull information about other places and other times from its kaleidoscopic reflections of Creation.

Visions-quests often answer more questions than the quester asks, if he is perceptive enough to recognize them. The Lunar Exalted sometimes use vision-quests as a method for increasing their Essence, Intelligence or Integrity ratings, among others. Most characters enter the Wyld with a ready supply of hallucinogens, which tend to accelerate the process of finding the proper vision.

A character wanders for days, weeks or sometimes months before he finds himself back in Creation, sometimes wiser and sometimes just madder. The drugs may muddle the entire experience into one blurred fog, the quester might retain a memory sharper than anything before experienced or anywhere in-between.

To perform a vision-quest, a character must remain in the Wyld long enough that the Wyld Exposure table (see **Exalted**, p. 283) has called for three rolls. This might be three months wandering the Bordermarches, two months in the Bordermarches and one week in the Middlemarches or any other combination of locales. Using powerful hallucinogenic drugs at frequent intervals reduces the period to two rolls. Most cultures that practice vision-quests add various trappings—drugs, rituals, sacrifices, talismans and the like, which generally add one die to the roll—but this is the core of it. If the character survives that length of time, his player rolls (Perception + Occult) to determine the result. Charms may not enhance this roll: the character submits to the Wyld; he does not try to force it through his own Essence.





- **Botch:** What the character sees is maddeningly uncomfortable, impossibly disturbing or otherwise terrible. It may be relevant to the question, but it provides no answer. Instead, the character develops a derangement of the Storyteller's choice (debility-level if the character quested in the Bordermarches, deformity-level in the Middlemarches or deeper). He may try to vision-quest again, but he suffers a -6 penalty on all rolls to resist exposure and find his answer. This penalty drops by one for each month clear of the Wyld.

- **Failure:** The character grows ever closer to the answers he needs but they stay continually out of reach. He gains a derangement of the Storyteller's choice (deficiency-level in the Bordermarches, debility-level in the Middlemarches, deformity-level in the Deep Wyld or worse). Just as on a botch, he may immediately try the vision-quest again, but the penalty is only -4.

- **1-3 successes:** The character encounters a scene or series of scenes in the Wyld that pertain to the question he asked. At one success, the vision vaguely directs the character to a source of information in Creation, requiring a great deal of interpretation. Additional successes clarify the matter to the point where, at three successes, the character receives clear directions where to seek his answer.

- **4-6 successes:** The character's experience in the Wyld answers the question he posed when he entered. Four successes are as one success, providing a vague answer but at least the character doesn't need to look any further. Six successes provide a clear, direct answer.

- **7+:** The vision-quest answers the character's original question and supplies hints about some related questions, or questions that develop from the answer.

During the vision-quest, characters still have encounters in the Wyld and must deal with Wyld exposure. Any of these might kill the character or drive him back into Creation before the quest ends.

POWER-QUESTING

Similar to vision-questing, power-questing is when the character enters the Wyld seeking not an answer but a tangible boon. Cultures where Wyld mutations are not abnormal, or even where they are expected, frequently use power-questing to gain their beneficial disfigurements.

TREASURE-QUESTING

The vision-questing procedure can also apply to attempts to locate specific items or places within the Wyld. Just about anything *might* exist; whether the Wyld creates a desired location or merely guides a character to it may be a distinction without a difference. The more successes rolled, the closer the quester comes to whatever she wanted to find, whether diamonds or a double of her lost love. If a character seeks artifacts, demesnes, magical materials or other supernatural treasures, add the relevant Background rating (at least one) to the difficulty for the (Perception + Occult) roll. If the roll fails because of this added difficulty, the character has merely found a Wyld-phantom that quickly evaporates within Creation.

Wyld shamans, or instance, often quest in hopes of gaining an enlightened Essence.

In short, a character willfully exposes herself to the Wyld in an effort to gain a desired mutation. The most difficult part of the process is guiding the mutation. Questers accomplish this by seeking out Wyld encounters that seem more likely to provide a certain sort of mutation, with the force of their wills or through many other rituals and methods.

Trying to control the mutation actually makes it more dangerous. While a character traveling through the Bordermarches may gain a pox should she fail to resist exposure, a power-quester in the same area might earn the desired pox on success but a deficiency on failure. After a character has spent enough time in a section of the Wyld to trigger a single roll against exposure, her player rolls (Willpower + Essence) and consults the table.

Characters can also use the power of the Wyld to remove that which it bestowed. The Wyld is fickle and dangerous, but some people are desperate enough to try. Power-questing to *remove* a mutation rather than gain one uses the same chart, except that the character removes a pox, affliction and so on after a successful roll *and* the difficulty of the roll increases by one.

Power-questing Table

Terrain	Difficulty	Success	Failure	Botch
Bordermarches	3	Pox	Deficiency	Debility
Middlemarches	4	Affliction	Deficiency, Debility	Deformity
Deep Wyld	6	Blight	Deformity, Debility	Deformity x 2
Pure Chaos	8	Abomination	Abomination, Debility	Abomination, Deformity x 2

PROTECTION FROM THE WYLD

More often than people want to use the Wyld, they want protection from it. Since jade obelisks and reality engines are in short supply, all of the peoples that live near the Wyld have devised ways to protect themselves from its effects. Even Wyld mutants seldom wish to gain harmful mutations, or in fact, any new mutations at all. The methods of protection are quite varied. Thaumaturges can craft warding talismans. Shamans and summoners can call upon local gods and elementals whose Charms can protect a tribe from the effects of the Wyld.

TALISMANS

The thaumaturgical Art of Enchantment can create warding talismans against the Wyld. One common sort of talisman is carved from hard, fine-grained stone such as agate or jade. These talismans look like plum-sized globes or palm-sized plaques bearing stylized images of humans, maps of Creation or sigils of Gaia, Autochthon, Luna or other supremely powerful entities. Another common type of talisman consists of fine cloth embroidered with metal thread. When the Delzahn tribes of the South lived near the Wyld, they embroidered copper, silver or golden sigils and arabesque borders on their robes, the metal depending upon the wearer's status and the potency of the robe's protection. The Delzahn of Chiaroscuro now live thousands of miles from the Wyld, but they retain the custom. Either form has the Resource costs and difficulties to create of any other warding charm (see *Exalted*, p. 379).

PROTECTION RATINGS

Tribes that survive in the tainted lands or the Wyld for more than a few years may combine both talismans and blessings by spirits and generally enjoy a +2 bonus to all of their rolls to resist the Wyld. Often, chiefs, shamans, renowned warriors and war bands that deliberately travel deeper into the Wyld win or are awarded additional protections that grant them between a +3 and a +5 bonus on all rolls to resist the effects of the Wyld. One result of these protections is that the shamans and the leaders of tribes of Wyld mutants and beastmen can go on vision-quests and power-quests into the Middlemarches and return bearing both valuable knowledge and a variety of deliberately chosen mutations instead of coming back with blasted minds and twisted bodies.

CREATING TALISMANS AGAINST THE WYLD

One degree of Enchantment allows characters to create talismans that provide +1 die to rolls against both mutation and Wyld addiction. These talismans also add their bonus to all rolls for power-quests and vision-quests. Two degrees of Enchantment let the thaumaturge increase this bonus to +2 dice, and three degrees of Enchantment raise the bonus to +3 dice. The bonus from a talisman stacks with any bonus gained from protection by spirits. However, multiple talismans are not cumulative: only the higher bonus applies.

Masters of Enchantment can also create talismans that provide complete protection against mutation and Wyld addiction within the Bordermarches unless the wearer botches the mutation or addiction roll. However, because these talismans specifically protect bearers against *Bordermarches*, the talismans offer no protection against the deeper levels of the Wyld. Also, this protection does not stack with ordinary talismans against the Wyld: a character may wear one or the other, but not gain the benefits of both. Such talismans count as one-dot artifacts.

HOUSE OF REFUGE (ARTIFACT •)

The most powerful protection available from thaumaturgy can block the mutational and addictive effects of the Middlemarches, and reduce Deep Wyld exposure to Bordermarches level. These wardings, however, can only protect a small, fixed location such as a hut. The hut itself must be specially constructed with protective sigils worked into its walls and ceiling. Small fetishes crafted from wood, stone, shell, feathers and other materials face each cardinal direction (with one on the center of the roof), while a miniature obelisk incorporating a bit of jade or moonsilver is buried beneath the center of the floor. The House of Refuge covers (thaumaturge's Essence x 100) square feet. An entire hamlet might pack into a House of Refuge during a Wyld storm or (for Bordermarches communities) on nights of the full moon. If the community is too large to fit in a House of Refuge, the protection is usually reserved for the children.

WYLD WATCHES

Communities living in or near the Wyld often possess a talisman known as a Wyld horn or a Wyld watch that warns of the Wyld's approach, or (if used within the Wyld) of the approach of a deeper level of the Wyld. Even tribes of Wyld mutants who worship the raw power of the Chaos do not want the roiling madness of the Deep Wyld to sweep over them without warning.

All of these talismans are at least as large as a man's head and have a variety of methods of providing warning.



Wyld watches made in the South often contain small, ever-burning fires that suddenly leap, crackle or roar when the Wyld nears, while Northern Wyld watches look like vessels whose flutelike openings emit an unearthly shriek or moan. All of these warnings become stronger and more insistent if an actual Wyld storm approaches. Regardless of the talisman's power or design, groups who live near the Wyld always dread this warning and have learned through bitter experience the necessity of moving themselves and their possessions within minutes of their Wyld watch's alert.

Wyld watches made by initiates of thaumaturgical Enchantment warn when the Wyld comes within 100 yards. Watches made by Adepts of Enchantment warn when the Wyld is half a mile away, and those rare devices made by Masters of Enchantment warn the members of the tribe when the borders of the Wyld move within half a dozen miles.

RITUALS AGAINST WYLD ADDICTION

Wyld mutant tribes that dwell within the Wyld can use thaumaturgy to avoid the dangers of Wyld addiction. Once a month, on the night of the full moon, their shamans lead the tribe in rituals to channel the Wyld's deadly call into a brief bout of frenzy. For most of the night, both young and old scream and dance, run wild, eat and drink to excess, and engage in acts of carnal abandon. They avoid harming one another, but may hunt, kill and even devour any outsiders they encounter. If attacked in this state, the members of the tribe fight to defend themselves.

Geomancy Procedure: *Wyld Blessing* (2, Intelligence 3, six hours). If successful, this procedure prevents Wyld mutation on the night of its performance and cures addiction to the Bordermarches. Also, for the next month, the procedure reduces the level of Wyld exposure by one stage for purposes of Wyld addiction (so Bordermarches cannot addict at all) and reduces the difficulty of rolls to resist unwanted mutation by 1. During this procedure, the Temperance of all participants is temporarily reduced to zero, and they automatically succeed in all Valor rolls.

SPIRIT CHARMS

Spirits that operate near the Wyld have a few common Charms rarely seen among other gods. Most users are terrestrial gods with limited domains, usually touching on the Bordermarches. The god of a river or a tree near a Bordermarch may have one of these Charms, and the god of a small town such as Farhold may have two or three. Celestial gods, such as Omashi, the Arbiter of Territorial

Disputes, whose domains reasonably include the Wyld, might have some or all of these Charms.

Wyld Armor—With this Charm, the spirit protects itself against the ravages of the Wyld. Few gods need to enter the Wyld, but occasionally some feel a motivation to do so. Others have the Wyld thrust upon them, as it erodes Creation. For three motes, the spirit adds (Essence) dice to its resistance against the Wyld for a full day. For every two motes committed to the Charm, the god can extend this protection to one other person.

Wyld Shield—This stronger version of Wyld Armor protects a large number of people, but to a lesser degree. The group of people must be defined in some readily understood and limited fashion, such as "all the people who live in this village" or "that war party there." Every recipient must have prayed to the god, and the Magnitude of the protected group cannot exceed the god's permanent Essence. On the other hand, the recipients gain bonus dice equal to only half the god's permanent Essence (round up) to all rolls to resist Wyld addiction and mutation. The spirit must commit five motes and one point of Willpower to extend this protection for one day.

Wyld Barrier—Another improvement on Wyld Armor offers greater protection to a small number of people. By committing 10 motes and two points of Willpower, the spirit can protect a number of people equal to twice her permanent Essence for a week. The Wyld Barrier adds (spirit's Essence x 2) dice to all rolls to resist the effects of the Wyld. This bonus does not apply to vision-questing, but can apply to power-questing.

Fortress of Creation—Only gods with Essence 5 or higher, or gods of borders and protection, are likely to possess this exceptionally powerful Charm. The god commits Essence and Willpower to bar the Wyld from an area around its sanctum. The more intense the Wyld's influence, however, the smaller the area the spirit can protect—and the Fortress of Creation does not reverse any taint already wrought by the Wyld. For 10 motes and two points of Willpower, a god can purge the Wyld from an area of Bordermarches (Essence) miles in radius. In the Middlemarches, the god can protect an area (Essence x 300) yards in radius, costing 20 motes and four points of Willpower. For 30 motes and six points of Willpower, the spirit forces an area of the Deep Wyld (Essence x 50) yards in radius to remain as solid Creation. The Charm has no effect on Pure Chaos; a spirit needs some trace of Creation to reinforce.

Virtuous Guard—Without sources of sustenance, some Fair Folk see no reason to invade the spirit's territory.

For every two motes committed to this Charm, a god can protect a single person against being emotionally ravaged. To all Fair Folk senses, the person is completely without thought, dream or emotion and cannot be supped upon at all.

MUTATIONS AND MADNESS

Traveling in the Wyld can be a mistake that few will ever forget making. People exposed to the chaotic, warping energies of the Wyld change, often in terrifying ways. They return home with mutations, they return mad or they never return at all. The following mutations and derangements expand on the Wyld mutations found in **Exalted**, pp. 288-290. They can also be used to describe the inborn powers of beastmen, the animalistic war-forms of the Lunar Exalted, hereditary Wyld mutants, unusual God-Blooded and other characters.

MUTATION COSTS AND VALUES

For certain purposes, it is useful to assign point values to Wyld mutations. Most notably, the point total of a character's mutations determine whether he can still live in Creation (see "Too Wyld to Live in Creation," pp. 150-151). These point values also enable beastman, Wyld mutant and other half-human characters to buy their nonhuman features and aptitudes with bonus points (see "Playing Beastmen, Wyld Mutants and Relic Race Characters," pp. 157-160). You also need these point values when you select animal features for a Lunar Exalt's half-human war form (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars**).

The point values of each class of mutation are as follows:

Mutation	Cost
Pox, Deficiency	1
Affliction, Debility	2
Blight, Deformity	4
Abomination	6

In some circumstances, you treat all these numbers as positive. In other cases, you may add the values for poxes, afflictions, blights and abominations, but subtract the values for deficiencies, debilities and deformities. See descriptions of each application for details.

NEW AND REVISED MUTATIONS

Most of these mutations are new. Some of them present revised versions of mutations from **Exalted**,

pp. 288-90, extending them to different power levels or providing options when a character gains the same mutation two or three times.

STACKING POXES

Some poxes change people in ways that can easily be stacked—that is, the mutation could *go further* and increase its bonuses. Generally, such poxes can be taken no more than three times in total, and each additional purchase moves them from "pox" to "affliction" and from "affliction" to "blight." This basic structure can be bent—some mutations can be taken to the "abomination" level, and not every mutation that can be purchased multiple times has its base as a pox.

POXES

Hooves: The character's feet become hooves more appropriate for a horse, a goat, a boar or some similar creature. The character adds +2 damage to his kicks. This mutation does not stack.

Large: (This mutation is appended from **Exalted**, p. 288.) This mutation functions as already written, but if a character gains it multiple times, the Storyteller can either upgrade the mutation to an affliction or blight, or replace it with a deficiency. See *Large*, *Giant* and *Rotundity*.

Longevity: The mutant ages half as fast as normal. Characters born with this mutation can expect a lifespan of 100 years + 20 years per point of Stamina (barring violence, disease or accident, of course). Such characters mature at the normal rate, enjoy a long, almost changeless maturity and enter middle age around 80. They age slowly from then on, becoming definitely elderly around age 120. Exalted characters cannot possess this mutation. While this mutation can stack once, a quadrupled lifespan jumps to a blight—and such mutations *must* be accompanied by obvious physical changes; negative mutations such as *Diet* combine well with extraordinarily prolonged lifespans.

Night Vision: The mutant's eyes are adapted to see in the dark like a cat or an owl. The mutant can see as easily on a moonless night in a city or a deep forest as ordinary humans can on an open plain or leafless forest on the night of the full moon, and can see as well under the full moon as well as ordinary mortals can in full daylight.

Small: (This mutation is appended from **Exalted**, p. 288.) This mutation functions as already written, but it may be purchased multiple times. Each purchase stacks the benefits of the first. See *Tiny* and *Miniscule*.



Wolf's Pace: The character's legs become longer and contain more power. Often, they take on a digitigrade shape similar to that of a dog or deer. Add two to the character's Dexterity for the purpose of calculating movement during combat, and add two to the character's Strength for the purposes of jumping distances. The character adds one die to single rolls representing competitive running. In long-term movement (see **Exalted**, p. 264), the character may move as quickly as a drawn carriage.

This mutation may be taken multiple times. Each purchase stacks the mutation's benefits, but if it is taken more than once it can never be hidden. See *Gazelle's Pace* and *Cheetah's Pace*.

SPECIAL POX: ELEMENTAL ADAPTATION

The mutant has become adapted to a specific elemental region. Since the Earth Pole is in the center of the Realm, far from the Wyld, there are only four types of elemental adaptations: air, fire, water and wood.

Air Adaptation: This pox renders the mutant resistant to natural cold. The character can remain comfortable and unharmed walking naked through a freezing blizzard or swimming in icy water (see "Numbing Cold" from

the Environmental Effects table on p. 131 of **Exalted**). Not all characters with this mutation must come from the North: a character changed by the Southern Wyld might develop a flame burning in his heart that protects him against cold.

Fire Adaptation: This pox protects the mutant from all natural extremes of hot weather. The character does not require additional water in hot weather. He can remain comfortable and unharmed walking naked under a blazing desert sun (see "Blistering Heat" from the Environmental Effects table on p. 131 of **Exalted**). This mutation does not protect the character from forest fires, lava or other extreme sources of heat. Not all characters with this mutation need come from the South; a character changed by the Northern Wyld might develop veins of ice in her bones that protect her from heat.

Water Adaptation: This pox allows the character to drink salt water without harm. In addition, the character's skin suffers no harm from continuous immersion in salt or fresh water. While the character cannot breathe water, when underwater, he can hold his breath for four times as long as normal (Stamina x 2 minutes + an additional two minutes per success on a Stamina + Resistance roll).



The character also reduces the difficulty of Athletics rolls involving swimming by 1 (to a minimum difficulty of 1) and doubles the character's swimming speed.

Wood Adaptation: This pox grants the character the same resistance to all plant toxins (but not serpent or insect venoms, demonic or alchemical poisons or poisons created by Charms) as all Exalted possess and grants Exalts complete immunity to plant toxins. In addition, the character can move through forests, jungles, and other wooded areas with exceptional ease. The character can climb easily and with great speed—reducing the difficulty of Athletics rolls involving climbing by 1 (to a minimum difficulty of 1) and doubling the character's climbing speed. The mutant also possess green skin that allows her to make food as plants do: if the character receives water and at least eight hours of sunlight each day, she reduces the difficulty of any Survival or Resistance rolls involving finding food or enduring hunger by 1 (to a minimum of 1).

Regardless of which version of this mutation a character possesses, her appearance changes to match the environment to which she is adapted, which may include having vines instead of hair (wood), blue skin and webbed hands (water), lightly furred, ice-white skin (air) or a smooth, lightly-scaled hide (fire). A character can possess only one of these adaptations.

DEFICIENCIES

Allergy: The character develops a new, strong allergy—perhaps to something as normal as fur, but Wyld allergies more often tend toward the odd, such as bronze, animal skin (including cured leather) or salt. Allergies to iron and white jade pop up frequently as well.

Smelling the allergen causes sneezes or coughing. Even brief contact with it induces hives and rashes for a scene, inflicting a -1 internal penalty to all actions. Touching the material for more than two actions (consecutive or within a single scene) deals one level of bashing damage for each subsequent contact.

Hungry: The mutant needs extra food, perhaps to fuel a positive mutation and perhaps due to less efficient digestion. The character must consume 25% more food than normal. Without this, she quickly becomes wan and starts to waste away. Halve the number of days a character with this deficiency can endure hunger before penalties begin to set in, and penalties increase every half-day. The character suffers a -1 internal penalty to all Survival rolls to find sufficient food.

Lost Sense: Characters suffering this mutation lose either their sense of hearing, touch or the paired senses of smell and taste. (Blindness is a debility.) This loss usually cannot be repaired, even by the most skilled

chirurgeon: the eardrum has become daffodil petal, the constant taste of day-old oatmeal overwhelms all other odors and flavors or the character suffers something equally inexplicable.

Rotundity: The mutant becomes 50% more massive, without gaining height or strength. This deficiency can result from gaining the *Large* pox twice, or as a deficiency in its own right. The mutant loses one dot of Dexterity outright; the Storyteller may impose a -1 external penalty to some Strength rolls, when the character's bulk becomes a hindrance (he wastes muscle power just moving his own body). The character does not so much run as waddle: Dash actions move the character only (Dexterity + 4) yards. For what it's worth, the character's threshold for knockback or knockdown checks increases to (Stamina + Resistance + 2).

This deficiency can stack, becoming a debility or deformity.

Temperature Sensitivity: The mutant is unusually sensitive to heat or cold (choose one). This increases the difficulty to all Survival rolls by +1 when the character is within one particular extreme of temperature. The mutant also increases the difficulty of all Resistance rolls to avoid damage from either extreme heat or cold, or dangers such as fire or supernatural ice storms by +2.

AFFLICTIONS

Exalted Healing: The mutant heals wounds at the same rate as an Exalt, including recovery from crippling wounds. Taken twice, this becomes the *Regeneration* abomination. Exalts cannot take this affliction.

Gazelle's Pace: This affliction is equivalent to taking the *Wolf's Pace* pox twice. For long distance travel, the character can move overland as quickly as a horse. However, the character cannot possibly hide this mutation—his legs aren't remotely human-looking.

Huge: This mutation is equivalent to taking the *Large* pox twice. The mutant becomes half again as large as any normal example of his species and has obviously been altered by magic. This mutation adds two dots to the character's Strength and Stamina and provides one additional -0 and -1 health level.

Impossible Joints: This mutation makes all the character's joints reversible and increases her flexibility overall. She can fold herself up into remarkable positions, often fitting into places most people consider impossible. This mutation adds two dice to appropriate Athletics and Stealth rolls and has many potential non-rolled applications.

Inexhaustible: The mutant is an endless wellspring of energy, even when starved and moments from death. He

never suffers fatigue (see **Exalted**, p. 130) from any source, giving the character the ability to run for hours without rest or stand under the hot sun in full armor unbowed.

Short Gestation: Mutants with this trait spend little time in the womb. They go from conception to birth in as little as one to three months. People who get this mutation after birth typically pass it on to their children, so a woman who has it generally spends much less time on a given pregnancy.

Talons/Tusks/Horns: (Revised from **Exalted**, p. 289.) The character sports dangerous talons, tusks, horns or some other hard growth that can be used as a natural weapon, inflicting lethal damage through Martial Arts attacks. Depending on the growths' locations or natures, treat them as punch or kick attacks that inflict lethal damage two greater than normal (i.e., a "punch" deals +2L, the "kick" +5L.) They remain natural weapons and cannot be disarmed, but they can be cut off with a crippling attack. This mutation cannot be stacked or hidden.

Thick Skin: The character's skin becomes denser and heavier than the *Fur/Feathers/Leaves* pox. The skin might be thick and horny, it could be covered in bark and knots or it could have heavy, crocodilian scales and bony nodules. The character gains +2L/2B soak. If a character gains the *Fur/Feathers/Leaves/Scales* pox twice, replace it with this affliction.

Tiny: This mutation is equivalent to taking the *Small* mutation twice. The character is smaller than anyone of her race or species should be—half normal size, at most, and a character could be mistaken for a small child. Increase the mutant's Dexterity by one dot, but reduce her Strength by two and her Stamina by one. Her Move and Dash actions become (Dexterity - 1) and (Dexterity +4) yards, respectively, and the character loses one -1 and one -2 health levels. She also become harder to hit, which levies a -2 external penalty on all attempts to strike her in combat. Immobility reduces the penalty to -1. A *Tiny* character is too small to use most weapons: add 1 to the effective Strength minimum for any weapon.

Wyld Assimilation: The character becomes part of the Wyld. He no longer risks mutation or damage from directly harmful Wyld energies such as frozen fog or the waters of chaos. However, this immunity comes at a price. The character is now a living embodiment of his chosen story and as such, loses the mental and emotional flexibility possessed by both mortals and Exalted. He is also addicted to the Wyld and wants to stay in a region where he can live out his story.

The Storyteller must determine what the mutant's particular story is. If it is a tale of honor and bravery,

then the mutant can never act or even consider acting in a cowardly or dishonorable manner. If it is a story of treachery, the character cannot keep a promise for long, even if he has nothing to gain and everything to lose by betrayal.

This mutation only happens to characters who were either born and raised in the Wyld or who visit it repeatedly for long periods. Because they are inherently tied to Creation, Exalted characters cannot possess this mutation.

DEBILITIES

Blindness: The character's sight no longer works because his eyes may have become opaque crystal or vanished completely, he could see nothing but the fantastic vision of beauty the Wyld revealed to him, or any other reason. The character suffers all penalties described on p. 152 of **Exalted**. This is never a medically reparable problem.

Deterioration: One of the character's Attributes constantly weakens over time to the point of the character's death if she does not act to strengthen it. Each month, the afflicted Attribute decreases by 1. Only a dedicated regimen of preventative exercise or medicine—lifting weights for Strength, practicing riddles and puzzles for Intelligence, cleansing the skin regularly for Appearance—can alleviate this degeneration. The regimen consumes two full weeks of training time in each month, during which period the character can do little else. After three months at one dot, a character's deteriorating Attribute drops to zero, at which point almost nothing short of Exalted-level medical aid can return it to one dot. The character is also Incapacitated and losing one Dying health level each month, until dead.

Fragile: The character's bones are weak, offering less protection than those of a normal human. Perhaps they have become chalk or glass. Half of all bashing damage the character suffers becomes lethal damage instead, as bones fracture.

Lame: One of the character's legs has warped to the point of near-uselessness, or both have become shriveled and weak. A mutant who suffers this debility twice has legs that cannot be used at all and may even have withered and fallen off. See **Exalted**, p. 152 under "Sample Amputation Effects" for what happens when a character cannot use one or both legs. This mutation cannot be hidden.

Slow Healing: The mutant does not recover well from injury. Wounds take a long time to disappear and diseases linger. Double the length of time necessary to heal any given wounds, and increase the difficulty of the treated and untreated morbidities by 1.





BLIGHTS

Cheetah's Pace: This blight is equivalent to taking the Wolf's Pace pox three times. For long distance travel, Cheetah's Pace provides the speed of a simple horse relay. The mutation alters a human recipient's entire body: when running at full speed, including Dash actions, the character must go to all fours. This is not compatible with carrying weapons ready for use, or any other activity that requires hands; when the character stops running, she must spend the normal amount of time to draw weapons or otherwise prepare to use her hands again (typically a Miscellaneous action or a Join Battle roll, as circumstances warrant).

Enlightened Essence: The Wyld tears away the character's blinders, revealing the truth about Essence and the nature of Creation (and other places). Shamans seek this mutation more than any other when they go power-questioning in the Wyld. The character gains an Essence pool equal to his permanent Essence x 10. From then on, he can increase his Essence trait by spending experience points at the normal rate for heroic mortal characters. Only the first third of this pool is accessible unless the character spends a point of Willpower to free up the rest for a scene.

Some mortals can learn select spirit Charms, Terrestrial Circle sorcery or supernatural Martial Arts, if they have willing tutors. Exalted characters cannot acquire this mutation, and the process of Exaltation overwhelms and burns away this mutation.

Giant: This mutation is equivalent to taking the Large pox three times. The creature grows to twice the size of the tallest normal example of his species. Some Giant animals might be mistaken for larger species of their class (a Giant housecat for a panther, for instance) but most cannot be mistaken for natural creatures. The mutation confers three dots of Strength and Stamina, as well as additional health levels: -0x1, -1x2 and -2x2.

Miniscule: The Wyld reduces the character to no more than one-fourth her normal size. Reduce Strength by three dots and Stamina by two (to a minimum of one); the character can only go 1 yard on a Move action and (Dexterity) yards on a Dash. (This does not affect movement rates for flying creatures or characters, however.). The creature loses one -0, one -1 and two -2 health levels, but any attempts to hit her suffer a -4 external penalty due to her size (immobility reduces this to -2). All Stealth rolls gain a +3 bonus. Tools and clothing not made for the character's specific size impose significant penalties—she cannot use most weapons at all.

DEFORMITIES

Short Life: The mutant ages quickly and has an abnormally short lifespan, though the degree varies. Some mutants age twice as quickly, dying in their 30s or 40s. Extreme cases die of old age only a few years after birth. They reach maturity at similar speed.

Surrendering Flesh: The mutant's body refuses to grow or repair itself as normal. Children who develop this mutation cease to mature. Anyone who suffers it never heals lethal or aggravated damage, and even bashing damage takes five times as long to heal. Only healing magic can repair the character's wounds, though some rare medicines can give him temporary health. Sweet cordial heals one level of damage and allows the character to heal normally for a month, celestial wine heals one level per glass and three glasses heals three health levels and allows the character to heal as normal for a full year and a day.

Wracking: The character suffers excessive pain whenever he consciously activates a mutation. The retractable claws tear through his skin when he calls upon them, or hawking up a toxin causes his own glands to pulse painfully. Each such use inflicts one level of lethal damage on the character and is accompanied by such terrible pains that he loses two dice from all pools for his next two actions.

ABOMINATIONS

Dragon's Breath: The mutant develops a form of attack that she may project at nearby enemies from her mouth. The attack may be flame, acid, shards of ice, stinging candy-wasps or whatever else the Wyld inflicted on her. The attack requires a (Dexterity + [Archery, Athletics or Thrown]) roll, has a base damage of (Stamina + Essence)L and a maximum range of 10 yards. The character's mouth, lungs and internal organs all change shape to accommodate this strange bodily function. Some mutants develop external organs to contain the attack, which may only be used once every 10 actions (as it needs to recharge).

Stone Body: The character's entire body becomes some very hard substance—if not through and through, then very nearly so. Whether his body now consists of crystal lattices, carved teak, cooled lava rock, never-melting ice or something stranger, the character loses one dot of Dexterity (minimum 1), but gains one dot of Stamina, +6L/+6B soak and four bonus dice to Survival rolls.

DERANGEMENTS

Sometimes, the Wyld damages the mind instead of the body. Scenes in that fabulous Chaos can change



people completely without affecting their looks: walking through the forest where every leaf looks like your mother or fighting your way backward into your childhood can provide trauma enough for any number of psychoses.

Wylde-induced derangement is not the same as when a character becomes a living archetype. *Wylde Assimilation* forces a character to play a role in a story (and is discussed on p. 147), while derangements inflict portable madnesses. Not to say that the two mutations are incompatible—the mad thaumaturge and delusional liege are both common archetypes.

Derangements have different levels of severity. Each mental malfunction ranges from the merest deficiency to a controlling deformity. Also, derangements don't count as mutations for the purposes of determining whether a creature can survive in Creation—meaning that people can go completely mad and still return to Creation for a “normal” life.

Though this chapter separates derangements from physical mutations, it is only for ease of use. They may still be acquired as deficiencies, debilities or deformities.

Derangements do not only come from the Wylde. They can be caused by normal events in Creation, too. Also, keep in mind that derangements can be mixed and matched. For instance, auditory hallucinations fit well with multiple personalities. Virtue Flaws (see **Exalted**, pp. 102-105) can serve as inspiration for inventive derangements. The Exalted may be more likely to develop derangements in ways similar to how they suffer the Great Curse, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Some Charms might heal derangements. The Dragon-Blooded's Purity of Mind Method is one such Charm.

AMNESIA

The character forgets fragments of her life because of physical or mental trauma.

Deficiency: Mild amnesia suggests that the character forgets significant parts of his life or loses the last few hours.

Debility: The derangement erases large sections of the character's life and identity, such as where she lives or everything that happened since her Exaltation. The player must roll (Intelligence + [Integrity or relevant Ability]) at difficulty 2 to remember details not prearranged. Remembering something that should have been lost costs one point of Willpower.

Deformity: The most potent amnesia cuts most of a character's life. Characters may even begin life anew with little more than their muscle memory and ingrained reflexes, remembering only brief flashes. The amnesiac may continue to forget, requiring successful (Intelligence + Integrity) rolls to recall even things learned after the

traumatic event. For instance, a character might progressively forget everything that happened more than one hour ago.

DELUSION

The character believes things that are not true, despite attempts to convince him otherwise.

Deficiency: This manifests as minor unreal expectations, such as stones being able to float or a personal ability to drink without getting drunk. When a belief is debunked, the character becomes a little confused but proceeds as normal—until the delusion returns.

Debility: These delusions are broader beliefs. A warrior who fought a phantom horde in the Wylde might believe himself invulnerable to blades, leading to valiant (if foolhardy) actions. Another character could be certain that fire quenches thirst. Resisting such a delusion requires one point of Willpower, which few spend until they have proof, such as a cut or a singed mouth. Then they realize the truth for the length of a scene.

Deformity: The worst delusions cannot be shattered. A person who believes himself the Scarlet Empress could insist that “her” foes betrayed her and changed her shape, or that it is a wide conspiracy—Anything to avoid the truth. Realizing the fake nature of her belief costs two points of Willpower for five minutes, and even then, the delusion quickly returns.

HALLUCINATIONS

The character senses things that aren't there. These hallucinations may trigger any of the senses, from sight to touch, though the derangement is often consistent for a single character.

Deficiency: These hallucinations affect only a single sense at a time and appear when the character is stressed: (at two temporary Willpower below normal). The character might see things moving out of the corner of her eye, or hear people call her name. The hallucinations could lead the character astray or strangely reveal true information—but since the source of the hallucinations is the character's head, their truth is always coincidental.

Debility: This level of hallucination often registers only in one sense but may spread to as many as three when they grow strong. The character suffers hallucinations when down two temporary points of Willpower and stronger hallucinations when down four Willpower points. The hallucinations are undeniable to the character and seem fully real. They often become complete characters of their own to the victim. Spending a point of Willpower reduces the hallucinations to the least severe kind, but only for a scene.





Deformity: Hallucinations consume the character's life. He sees and hears things all the time. They become worse when he's down at least two points of Willpower and color everything he senses when he's spent four or more Willpower points. Examples include watching the walls run with melting rainbows and hearing the satrap speak only to you with her second face. By spending a point of Willpower, the character can reduce the hallucinations by one severity for a scene.

OBSESSION

The character becomes increasingly focused on a single goal or object.

Deficiency: The derangement causes little more than distraction. When the subject of a character's obsession is present, she suffers a -1 internal penalty at any action not directly related to achieving the obsession's goal.

Debility: The obsessions become grander in scope. Instead of collecting pretty stones, he collects jade weapons; rather than lighting every candle she sees, the character wants to start bonfires whenever fuel is available. The obsession should be more dangerous or more common, and the penalty to resist it increases to -2.

Deformity: The character's obsessions rarely leave her time to think about anything else *and* easily get her in a great deal of trouble. She suffers a -3 penalty when resisting an obsession.

TOO WYLD TO LIVE IN CREATION

Excessive mutation can render a person, plant, animal or spirit too strange to survive any longer in Creation. In extreme cases, a creature might not even survive in the Bordermarches. Storytellers can decide for themselves which of the Wyld's own inhabitants can live in Creation, based on the mutation's style.

Creatures that merely offer unlikely combinations of different aspects or parts of people, animals and plants usually survive in Creation without any trouble. Even a creature as bizarre as a buck-ogre is still just a collection of ordinary, flesh-and-blood parts.

Anything that cuts across kingdoms of life, or combines organic with inorganic parts, generally do not thrive in Creation but can live in Bordermarches or tainted lands. The hatra trees of the East cannot live in Creation because they combine plant and animal characteristics (though their hatra offspring can live in Creation, since they are entirely animal unless they enter their reproductive cycle.)

Creatures that cut across states of matter, such as trees of solid fire or beasts of living gold, are not improbable; they are flat-out impossible. They can survive only

in the Middlemarches or Deep Wyld. The Fair Folk and Lunar Exalted have Charms that can bring such creatures into Creation for a while—but without such protection, these creatures usually sicken and die even in the Bordermarches. The exceptions, such as flame gryphons, resist Creation's quelling influence through their own will and Essence.

In cases in which characters or animals suffer mutation, Storytellers can use the number and severity of mutations as a guide to whether they can live in Creation. Add the point values of all the characters' mutations, as described on the table on p. 144, but leave out derangements. Treat all the values as positive. Compare the total to the character's Willpower.

Willpower or Less: The character (or other creature) can live in Creation indefinitely. The mutations are not heritable outside the Wyld—but within the Wyld, creatures with similar mutations may breed to generate a new species or a new race of humanity.

(Willpower x 2) or Less: The character can no longer live in Creation indefinitely. Such creatures can live and reproduce themselves in Bordermarches or tainted lands, but are sterile within Creation. After (Stamina) months in Creation, however, the character or creature sickens and loses one unsoakable, unhealing level of bashing damage every day until it returns to the Wyld. The Wyld-spawned offspring of such creatures might survive in Creation, though. Characters this severely mutated also suffer a one-die penalty to Temperance rolls—added when the player rolls to resist gaining Limit, or subtracted when trying to resist temptation or other cases in which a high Temperance is desirable. The Wyld infects its victims with a taint of mad passion more subtle than any derangement.

More Than (Willpower x 2): The creature cannot live for long outside the Middlemarches or Deep Wyld. After (Stamina) months in the Bordermarches, or (Stamina) weeks in tainted lands, the mutant suffers one unsoakable level of bashing damage every day that cannot heal until it returns to the Wyld. Such a character or creature can survive only (Stamina) *days* in Creation, then suffers the above damage every hour until death or return to a suitably Wyld region. The mutant also takes a 2-dice penalty (plus or minus, whichever is appropriate) to Temperance rolls. Once a person becomes this severely mutated, however, *Wyld Assimilation* becomes extremely likely, and the character no longer desires to leave the Wyld anyway.

Remember that these penalties only apply to characters or animals that have been directly mutated by the

Wyld. These penalties do not apply to creatures born with mutations, such as beastmen or Wyld mutants, though Storytellers can use the mutation totals as an additional guideline when deciding if a Wyld-beast can live in Creation.

INHABITANTS OF THE WYLD

Many unusual people... or person-like beings, anyway... live in the Wyld. What follows are a few of them.

FLAME GRYPHON

Flame gryphons are one of the most beautiful and deadly threats of the Southern Wyld. They can live indefinitely in Creation, but cannot breed there; flame gryphons move freely from the Bordermarches to the Deep Wyld. They look like lions the size of aurochs, with the heads and forelegs of eagles, claws and talons of glittering gold and eagle-like wings of gold and scarlet flame. Although flame gryphons can speak in voices that combine the tones of a lion's roar and eagle's scream, their personalities remain animal: most of the time, they show no interests beyond food, a warm den and the joy of the hunt.

However, flame gryphons have three personality traits that go beyond animal concerns. They hate all horses and horse-like beings and kill them whenever possible, beyond what the flame gryphons can eat. Flame gryphons cannot accept any other creature as their master; they defend their Rookery (see p. 114) so fanatically because they cannot bear the idea of their chicks raised to serve another. Any power sufficient to compel a flame gryphon's will causes it to tear and claw themselves to death. Lastly, they are vain: flame gryphons love to be seen, to inspire wonder, fear and awe.

Now and then, a flame gryphon agrees to let a raksha (or other powerful being) ride it. This is not service, but a partnership of equals. The character gains a powerful, flying steed and ally in combat; the flame gryphon gains a partner to assure it of regular meals and chances to amaze the dull, boring folk of Creation.

Motivation: Stay free, look glorious, kill horses.

Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8; Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4; Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 4, Linguistics 2, Martial Arts 4, Presence 4, Stealth 2, Survival 4

Essence Powers:

Command Beasts: Flame gryphons can reflexively command any non-intelligent animals except familiars.



Controlling a mount or other animal that is currently with its owner, his player calls for a resisted roll of the flame gryphon's (Charisma + Presence) vs. the owner's (Charisma + Survival). This effect costs two motes and lasts for a full scene. A flame gryphon must use this separately to command multiple animals.

Immunity to Command: These intensely supernatural creatures are immune to all effects that force them to obey someone, including shaping attacks. They do not need to expend Willpower to resist unnatural mental influence. If a flame gryphon becomes the target of a controlling effect that is defined as irresistible, the flame gryphon immediately dies rather than submit.

Join Battle: 6

Attacks:

Bite: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 16L, Defense 8(4), Rate 1

Claw: Speed 4, Accuracy 12, Damage 13L, Defense 12(6), Rate 2

Wing Buffet: Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 17L, Defense 8(4), Rate 2

Soak: 12L/16B (Tough Hide, 8L/8B)

Health Levels: -0x3/-1x3/-2x3/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5

Willpower: 7

Essence: 3

Essence Pool: 30

Other Notes: A flame gryphon's wing buffet inflicts damage through fire. If a target is immune to fire, the wing buffet deals an equal amount of bashing damage instead.

Flame gryphon allies are Familiar •••••.

IWAU TAMOTSU,

THE WATCHER WITH EYES OF STONE

The Watcher with Eyes of Stone rests beneath the Weeping Maiden in the far West. The island is a thin cone of stone tapering down into the water, and Iwau Tamotsu is a vast coral reef spreading miles around that island. The island, in fact, is a gigantic spike piercing the Watcher's heart and pinning the guardian to that place in the ocean. When ships or large creatures near the Weeping Maiden's isle, Iwau Tamotsu rises from the depths to crush and devour the ship or creature.

Little is known about the Watcher with Eyes of Stone. Even its name is secret and lost. For reasons unknown, anything consumed by the Watcher washes up on the shores of the Blessed Isle the next day. The Watcher once did this to deliver intruders to the gods who lived on the Blessed Isle. Today, the Watcher only confuses the locals. Living creatures it endeavors to eat whole, delivering them to the Isle alive.

Motivation: Protect the Weeping Maiden from all who approach.

Attributes: Strength 57, Dexterity 1, Stamina 37; Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 5; Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 1

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 6, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Seatongue) 1, Martial Arts 6 (Ships +3), Presence 5 (Scaring Others +2), Resistance 6, Sail 5*, War 4 (Navies +3)

*Iwau Tamotsu cannot actually sail a ship, but has vast knowledge of sailing ships and could serve as a wise tutor.

Backgrounds: None

Essence Powers:

Coral Life-and-Death Encouragement—The Watcher with Eyes of Stone may instantly re-grow or repair parts of its coral structure. For four motes per health level and one point of Willpower, Iwau Tomatsu heals one level of damage it has taken or temporarily adds one -0 health level. Phantom health levels disappear when filled with lethal damage or at the end of the day.

Encircling the Maiden—Iwau Tamotsu spends 10 motes and one point of Willpower to create an impenetrable shell of coral over the island on which the Weeping Maiden rests. The shell cannot be harmed as long as the Watcher spends one mote each action to keep it intact. Otherwise, it has Hardness 10 and 20/40 health levels. The shell slowly crumbles after one scene.

Guardian Birth Division—If properly motivated, the Watcher with Eyes of Stone may split off a fraction of its bulk to



create a new guardian. This costs 40 motes and two points of Willpower and reduces Iwau Tamotsu's Strength and Stamina permanently by one each. The new guardian has its own identity and must soon be connected to something as a guardian. It must also grow in power before it can become as powerful as its parent. This has happened three times before—one such guardian was destroyed just five years ago when it failed the Bronze Faction.

Ripple-Sensing Quiver—Nothing in the sea remains hidden from the Watcher. This power costs three motes and may be activated reflexively. It makes all things within 40 miles of the Weeping Maiden and touching the ocean a valid target for the creature's Awareness-based action, regardless of magic.

Tsunami Wave Eruption—The Watcher activates this power when beset by many intruders. Heaving its body from the ocean floor, Iwau sends a massive wave rolling outward from the island. This is an attack on everything on the ocean within 100 miles. The attack automatically hits, barring special defenses.

Join Battle: 7

Attacks:

Coral Strike: Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 26B, Defense —, Rate 5

Coral Crush: Speed 8, Accuracy 63, Damage 57B, Defense —, Rate 1

Tsunami Wave Eruption: Speed 9, Accuracy —, Damage 80B, Defense —, Rate 1

Soak: 24L/49B (Steel-hard coral, 6L/12B; Hardness: 6L/12B)

Health Levels: -0x10/-1x25/-2x20/-4x5/Incap

Dodge DV: 0

Willpower: 10

Essence: 5

Essence Pool: 90

Other Notes: As an enormous creature, the Watcher may engage in mass combat as a Magnitude 9 unit for the purpose of offense and defense (but not for health levels). Coral strike represents long branches of coral jutting from the ocean to pierce hulls and sink ships. The coral crush is when many branches surround a target and close on it to crush. When attacking targets smaller than a ship, Iwau Tamotsu attacks with an accuracy of 4 (coral strike) and 20 (coral crush). Tsunami Wave Eruption strikes any creature or object on the ocean's surface, no deeper than 100 yards or no higher than 500 yards above, regardless of size.

SEM SEM, CHILD OF THE WIND

Sem Sem is one of the children of the wind. Similar to all others of his kind, he is a child-sized old man, wrinkles and all, who wears dense robes of sky-blue silk. The children of the wind maintain the breath tunnels in the Northern Middlemarches and create new ones; Sem Sem performs his task as well as any other.

Still, Sem Sem has ambition. Many children of the wind do. He wants to find a way to spawn breath tunnels that connect the Wyld and Creation. His attempts have always failed thus far, and frustration may drive him to make odd alliances. Other children of the wind do not consider Sem Sem odd; such unique desires are common enough to make it a quirk rather than a real peculiarity.



Motivation: Keep the breath tunnels in repair; bind the Wyld and Creation through breath tunnels.

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

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 2, Temperance 3, Valor 1

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Craft (Air) 4, Craft (Earth) 4, Dodge 3, Integrity 4, Investigation 3 (Breath Tunnels +2), Lore 2 (Wyld +2), Martial Arts 3, Occult 2 (Wyld +2) Presence 2, Resistance 3 (Elements +1, Travel +1), Stealth 2, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 2

Essence Powers:

Death of the Dragon—Sem Sem spends five motes, and all air within five yards of him ceases to move. This condition persists as long as the motes remain committed. The sphere of dead air travels with him. It follows the normal rules of Creation, acting as a wall to create a lee downwind of Sem Sem.

Drawn from Above—Sem Sem can create an unlimited number of air seeds (see p. 79) at no cost. He requires only a miscellaneous action to draw one from beneath his robe. While he can give Air Seeds as gifts, Sem Sem (and most children of the wind) give them sparingly, mostly out of concern for the breath tunnels.

Healing the Earth—This power allows Sem Sem to repair damage done to objects made of stone. Sem Sem caresses the wound, which fills in as though it were never harmed. Each health level repaired costs four motes of Essence. Children of the wind use this power to keep the breath tunnels whole.

Shivering Shorn—Sem Sem may spend eight motes to deaden all sound within five yards. This power only functions if Sem Sem is currently using *Death of the Dragon*.

Join Battle: 6

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 2B, Defense 7 (4), Rate 3

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 2B, Defense —, Rate 1

Soak: 3L/6B (Sky-blue robe, 2L/3B)

Health Levels: -0/-1x2/-2x3/-4/1

Dodge DV: 5

Willpower: 5

Essence: 2

Essence Pool: 21

Other Notes: As one of the creatures that maintain the breath tunnel network, Sem Sem has an instinctive knowledge of where the nearest several termini are and where they lead. He is happy to share the information, which he can also use to escape threats when necessary.

NO TROUBLE ZHANG, LUNAR EXPLORER

No Trouble Zhang is young... for a Lunar. He's at least 70 now, and many older Lunars tell him he's doing something wrong. Zhang ignores them. Joyful and strong, Zhang wandered the world for a while to figure out what he wanted to do with his Exaltation. His discovery of Ilio Stara helped him figure it out. Now, even as the Child of Luna tries to remake his city-state into a self-sufficient, sustaining community, he also searches the Wyld for more societies to put on the road to their own inner strength. No Trouble Zhang is sure that these people can push back the Wyld with just a little help from him.

Zhang looks like a thin man of average height with a bush of white hair on his head and a thin white beard. In his true form, the expected silver tattoos whorl from around his eyes down his body in occult patterns. His spirit shape is that of a raccoon with a silvery mask. No Trouble Zhang is friendly with all and light-hearted about everything, especially when the situation is serious.

Motivation: Bring lost societies to their feet to strengthen Creation.

Caste: Changing Moon

Anima: Raccoon backed by subtle silvers, whites and blues

Tell: Silvery mark around eyes

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 2



Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (Water) 2, Dodge 4, Integrity 3, Larceny 3, Linguistics (Native: Forest-tongue; Others: River-speak, Old Realm) 2, Lore 1, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Performance 4, Presence 5, Resistance 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 4, Survival 2, Thrown 2

Backgrounds: Cult 1, Influence (Illio Stara) 5, Manse 3, Resources 4

Knacks: Changing Plumage Mastery, Humble Mouse Shape, Luna's Hidden Face, Prey's Skin Disguise, Subtle Silver Declaration

Charms: Culling the Pride, East Mastery Technique, False Burrow Pursuit, First Charisma Excellency, First Dexterity Excellency, First Manipulation Excellency, Foot-Trapping Counter, Golden Tiger Stance (Dodge), Herd-Strengthening Invocation, Instinctive Memory Insertion, Irresistible Silver Spirit, Lunar Hero Form, Mask of White Jade, New Friend Aroma, One of the Herd, Perfect Symmetry, Rabid Beast Attitude, Relentless Lunar Fury, Second Appearance Excellency, Thousand-Claw Infliction

Combos:

Force of Personality (Culling the Pride, First Charisma Excellency)

Attention-Grabbing Distraction (False Burrow Pursuit, First Manipulation Excellency)

Join Battle: 6

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 2B, Defense 9 (5), Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 5B, Defense 5 (3), Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 2B, Defense —, Rate 1

Staff: Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 9B, Defense 9 (5), Rate 2

Soak: 4L/7B (Buff jacket, 3L/4B)

Health Levels: -0/-1x2/-2x2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 6

Willpower: 7

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 17

Peripheral Essence: 32

Other Notes: While No Trouble Zhang can handle himself in a fight, he prefers to find more creative solutions to his problems. He is friendly, earnest and hard to dislike.

BEASTS OF THE WYLD

The beasts that live in the Wyld are more... interesting... than most creatures of Creation. Their characteristics are more varied by far, and the chaos of their home bestows many exotic features upon them.

A few people in Creation value selected Wyld creatures as strange pets, or for some trait that makes them valuable in business or home defense. Wealthy, security-minded individuals cultivate hatra trees to discourage intruders, while daring animal breeders make

money by raising jewel-horned elk. Only creatures that can survive away from the Wyld's comforting energies can be captured and used in this way, and some are completely untrainable.

CREATURES OF THE EAST

Arm Tree



The trees in the Forest of Arms do not have solid wood and bark. Instead, they consist of clustered arms and legs that rise up from the ground and spread out like branches, watching visitors with embedded human eyes. The arms have every skin color known in Creation, as well as skins that clearly have been warped by the Wyld. The eyes likewise vary.

Arm trees try to grab anyone who comes near, because of their method of

cross-pollination: when branches touch, they grab hold while other hand-fruit and arm-cones detach and scuttle across to attach to the other tree. Sharing in this way keeps the trees healthy.



Arm-beast

These crawling, scrabbling arms detach from parent arm trees and seek to join with other trees. Unfortunately, they don't differentiate between arm trees and anything else in the Wyld. By clinching a target and continuing to clinch it for (target's Stamina) consecutive actions, the arm-beast merges with it. Targets so affected gain the *Multiple Limbs* abomination.

People protected against Wyld effects (as by the Solar Charm Integrity-Protecting Prana) cannot be "merged with" in this fashion. That doesn't stop the arms from trying, which inflicts basic clinching damage.

Great Cat-Tree

Great cat-trees are the massive, tree-like cats that are the other sorts of trees in the Cat Forest. Each leg of the giant cat makes up a single tree trunk and the body

is a leafy canopy. It is hard to attract the attention of a great cat-tree, but these enormous creatures do not hesitate to crush something harming the forest—especially at the direction of the Magnificent Suzerainess of the Celebrated Wood.

CREATURES OF THE

SOUTH

Abacasteri

These large, lion-shaped creatures have skin of solid gold, molten gold for blood and shining topazes for eyes. They eat carrion, and their corrosive saliva burns through even the toughest dead skins to reach the feast within. Similar to their relatives in Creation, abacasteri run in prides.

Abacasteri saliva is so acidic that it inflicts aggravated damage, and their blood is so hot that it instantly sears anyone who touches it (one level of aggravated damage). When an abacasteri dies, its body disintegrates into worthless yellow dust, foiling precious-metal hunters. Only by draining the animal of all its burning blood while it still lives, allowing it to die only after it loses its last drop of blood, can preserve its golden corpse. Few people know this, and fewer could actually accomplish it. An abacasteri corpse can be sold for Resources •••••.

Coal Nomad

These single-minded travelers have a human shape but are completely made of coal, from their wandering eyes to their braided hair. They like to wear very bright clothing, though. They wander the Southern Wyld and occasionally the South of Creation, taking everything that isn't nailed down. Luckily for adventurers who don't mind losing their gear, the



coal nomads never harm a living creature. If someone attacks them, however, they try to bind him and carry him into the Wyld with them. Abductees who are not soon rescued are never seen again.

Jewel-horned Elk



Both the male and female of this impressively large Wyld species sport enormous antlers they never shed. More important to Wyld scavengers, these antlers are entirely grown of a single gemstone: ruby, diamond and emerald elk all exist, as do more exotic jewels never seen in Creation. Jewel-horned elk act more aggressively than normal elk, but they are usually content to graze on the crystal plants of the Southern Middle-

marches. Antlers could be sold for Resources ••••.

CREATURES OF THE WEST

Razor Bear



These amphibians are shaped like bears but covered in three layers of fish scales. Their faces sport lidless eyes and barracuda jaws, giving them a truly frightening appearance. Razor bears cannot stand up on their hind legs, but they can cover ground rapidly on

land or in the sea, where they use their short, flattened tail to swim more quickly.

Sea Horse



These are the steeds of the sea. When on solid land, a sea horse looks like a normal equine, albeit one displaying all the colors of the calm and raging oceans. When sea horses are fully submerged in the water (a state they do not shy from), their hindquarters melt into giant, scaled fishtails, reminiscent of the classical mermaid. With this, they

can swim as quickly as they can run on land, and carry riders with them.

In some places in the Wyld, the sea horses run in enormous herds, galloping over living islands and then swimming as a school through the water. Raksha often use them as mounts and playthings, and the Exalted and daring mortals can capture and tame them for use. Sea horses are about as intelligent as a child and can learn many tricks. One counts as Familiar ••••.

Vapor Hawk

These predatory birds coalesce from steam in the far Southwest, where water and fire run together. Refractions of the sun through the droplets of water of which they consist give each vapor hawk beautiful and unique plumage. Some of their feathers have been preserved and form inimitable parts of the renowned cloak worn by the Wavecrest Archipelago's Feathered One. The sight of a non-native thing aloft in their boiling territory enrages the vapor hawks, making them dangerous to most creatures that dare the Steam Tides.



CREATURES OF THE NORTH

Carnivorous Moth

Viewed from a distance through the uncertain perspectives of the Middlemarches, one of these monsters might look like an ordinary moth in the moonlit snowfall. A closer view reveals a *big* moth with wings constructed from shining ice and antennae dusted with frost. And then the monster *really* comes close: the carnivorous moth is huge, and its head is a dry human skull with crystalline compound eyes. Its jaw can stretch several feet and is full of shining icicle teeth, and the entire head moves on a flexible neck almost a yard long. Their six legs end in skeletal human hands tipped with long ice-claws.



Worse, travelers seldom see only one carnivorous moth. These horrors travel in packs of between six

and 20. They attack by swarming prey until it is weak, then tearing off hunks of meat for their own family groups. Their brilliantly sharp teeth tear every shred of sustenance off of prey, leaving nothing for scavengers. Even raksha fear hungry swarms of carnivorous moths, because the monsters eat Fair Folk flesh as happily as they do human.

Carnivorous moths are too small for most raksha to ride, but some Fair Folk train them as guardians, hunting beasts or steeds for their smaller minions. A carnivorous moth qualifies as Familiar •••••.

Snow Wurm



Snow wyrms look like enormous, white-furred serpents with dozens of fan-like fins for maneuvering while they fly. The youngest are 30 feet long, and they can grow up to 200 feet long and seven feet in diameter. A grown wurm's mouth stretches wide enough to swallow a cow with a little bit of work, and the teeth are a foot long. Luckily for most travelers, snow wyrms are omnivorous. They happily eat warm creatures for

nourishment, but they are just as content living on ice and stone. Raksha do not tame snow wyrms, but do harvest them for their teeth, which make excellent daggers.

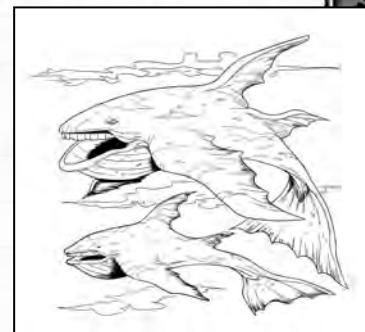
These creatures nest and breed in immense glaciers, but grown snow wyrms travel throughout the Northern Wyld. They lay their eggs in large clutches. The eggs are each about the size of a man's head and are nearly indistinguishable from cloudy ice. The slender, 10-foot-long infant wyrms eat snow and ice and make easy prey for many Northern predators and hunters. The snow wyrms that live do so by burrowing into solid ice for safety. After a few decades of growth, snow wyrms become competitive creatures ready to face the outside world. They can burrow through solid ice as quickly as they fly through the sky. A snow wurm flies about as fast as a man can run and is very maneuverable.

Every decade, most snow wyrms migrate to the Elemental Pole of Air for some unknowable convocation. Adventurers who have traveled there say that a snow wurm much larger than any other holds court at the pole; it may be the god of their kind. Swarms of snow wyrms also visit Northernmost Creation about once a decade. Most

Northern cities have emergency military procedures for when the sky-monsters come to visit. Icewalker tribes, on the other hand, usually hide.

Wind Whale

Wind whales are more than 200 feet long and 40 to 50 feet wide. Internal bladders of a hot and flammable gas keep them aloft. Dense fur helps them stay warm in the frigid, rarefied air miles above the North, where they fly. This fur is often yards deep, and sometimes serves as home for other airborne creatures. The fins and flukes of wind whales are all very wide and flat, the better to catch and direct the wind, and they make superb sails for sky- or water-borne ships. Wind whales feed off of other, smaller creatures that live high in the Northern sky.



Raksha tame the gentle whales and use them as living sky yachts or battle platforms. The raksha mahouts stand on the lip of the beast's projecting lower jaw, giving commands and holding reins that merge with its flesh. Characters with Sail •• and Ride •• may act as mahouts for wind whales after minimal training.

PLAYING BEASTMEN, MUTANTS OR RELIC RACE CHARACTERS

Players who want their characters to start play with mutations can do so. Possessing one or more of these traits does not necessarily mean that the character has ever been exposed to the Wyld. They might be beastmen, the children of Wyld mutants, the God-Blooded, characters cursed or blessed by gods or the Fair Folk or members of unusual races such as the people of the air and the people of the sea. Regardless of the characters' actual origin, these aberrations are purchased from the list of Wyld mutations in *Exalted* (pp. 288-290), in this book, or from *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars*. You or your Storyteller can also design your own mutations.

Beneficial mutations cost as many bonus points as the point values given in the table on p. 144. Harmful mutations can reduce the cost of beneficial mutations: subtract the point values of deficiencies, debilities and deformities from the point total of the other mutations. However, harmful mutations *do not* give characters additional bonus points: the points they provide cannot do anything other than offset the costs of beneficial mutations. If somebody wants her character to start play with



Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/Wits/WP	Health Levels	Attack (Spd/Atk/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
Creatures of the East					
Arm Tree	4/3/6	3/-/3-	-0x8/-4x2/1	Punch: 5/8/4B/2, Clinch: 6/8/4B/1	0/5L/8B
Abilities: Martial Arts 5					
Arm-Beast	4/3/2	3/-/3-	-0x2/-4/1	Punch: 5/8/4B/2, Clinch: 6/8/4B/1	0/5L/8B
Abilities: Martial Arts 5					
Great Cat-tree	9/1/9	2/1/2/3	-0x8/-1x10/ -2x8/-4x4/1	Trample: 5/4/11B/2, Pin: 6/12/9B/1	1/4L/9B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Dodge 1, Integrity 3, Investigation 3, Martial Arts 3, Presence 4, Resistance 4, Stealth 1, Survival 4					
Creatures of the South					
Abacasteri	6/4/6	2/1/3/5	-0x3/-1x3/ -2x3/-4/1	Bite: 6/7/5A/1, Claw: 5/8/8L/2	3/7L/10B
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Dodge 1, Integrity 3, Investigation 3, Martial Arts 3, Presence 3 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3 (Desert +1)					
Coal Nomad	3/2/4	3/2/3/6	-0/-1x3/ -2x2/-4/1	Clinch: 6/8/-/1	3/4L/6B
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3 (Objects +1), Dodge 4, Integrity 1, Investigation 3 (Things +1), Martial Arts 4 (Grapple +2), Presence 2, Resistance 3 (Travel +2), Stealth 1, Survival 3 (South +2)					
Jewel-Horned Elk	6/2/5	3/1/2/3	-0x2/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/1	Gore: 5/6/10L/1, Kick: 5/5/8L/2	2/2L/5B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Integrity 1, Martial Arts 3, Presence 2, Resistance 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2					

a negative mutation, the player can do it for the sheer joy of the roleplaying challenge.

For example, a character with a single affliction would need to pay two bonus points, but if this character also had a single deficiency, then the total cost of possessing both mutations would be one bonus point. If the character had a deformity instead, the cost would be 0 points: a deformity is worth -4 points, but the “extra” two points disappear.

Characters with an Essence pool may spend two motes of Essence in place of one Willpower point to fuel any activation costs required by mutations. As always, the Storyteller may veto or modify the cost of any mutation. In addition, beneficial mutations such as the *Large* pox (see **Exalted**, p. 288) purchased in this manner never increase the character’s Attributes, although these traits provide all of their other listed benefits. (Their benefits to a character’s Attributes are

presumed to be factored into the character already. The starting character still gains extra health levels from the mutation, though.)

Hereditary mutations purchased with bonus points also do not count as actual Wyld mutations and so do not interfere with a character’s Temperance rolls or ability to survive in Creation. Both heroic mortals and the Exalted can freely possess any of these traits and suffer no penalties for purchasing them. However, Exalted characters cannot take some mutations, and a few mutations act differently when possessed by Exalted. See the descriptions of the various mutations for details.

BUILDING BEASTMEN AND RELICS OF THE PAST

With the permission of their Storyteller, players can play beastmen and relics of the past. These characters usually appear as heroic mortals, but they

Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/Wits/WP	Health Levels	Attack (Spd/Atk/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
Creatures of the West					
Razor Bear	9/3/10	2/1/2/4	-0x3/-1x3/ -2x3/-4/1	Bite: 6/11/14L/1, Claw: 5/9/9L/2	3/8L/14B
Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Integrity 1, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 4 (Bite +2), Presence 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3					
Sea Horse	6/3/6	3/1/3/5	-0x2/-1x3/ -2x2/-4/1	Bite: 5/6/6L/1, Kick: 5/7/8L/2	3/4L/7B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Integrity 1, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 3, Presence 1, Resistance 2, Stealth 1, Survival 2					
Vapor Hawk	1/4/1	4/1/3/3	-0/-1/-2/-4/I	Talon: 5/7/3L/2	3/0L/2B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Integrity 2, Investigation 1, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3					
Creatures of the North					
Carnivorous Moth	7/5/6	4/1/3/4	-0/-1x3/ -2x5/-4/1	Bite: 5/12/14L/1	5/10L/13B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3 (Sight +3), Dodge 4, Integrity 2, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 5, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 1, Survival 3					
Snow Wyrn	12/4/6	2/1/4/7	-0x4/-1x4/ -2x4/-4/1	Bite: 5/10/15L/2	4/10L/12B
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 5, Integrity 3, Investigation 1, Martial Arts 5, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 1, Survival 3					
Wind Whale	16/3/18	1/1/2/3	-0x6/-1x5/ -2x4/-4x3/1	Bite: 6/7/19L/1, Ram: 6/6/24B/1	3/9L/18B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Integrity 1, Investigation 3, Martial Arts 3, Presence 1, Resistance 2, Stealth 1, Survival 3					

are human enough to receive Exaltation. Each race shares a specific set of Traits appropriate to that breed. However, Exalted beastmen and relics of the past have the same lifespan as any other Exalt: the cost for the mutations *Increased Longevity* and *Short Life* drop out from the package of mutations. Exalts also automatically lose the *Wyld Assimilation* and *Enlightened Essence* afflictions and need not pay bonus points for them.

The following is a list of the various mutations possessed by various breeds of beastmen and the base cost in bonus points for that racial package of mutations. In addition to players using these rules to create characters, Storytellers should also use these rules as a guide for creating antagonists. Some races have unique advantages or disadvantages: these can be represented as unique poxes, deficiencies or other mutations. The ambidexterity of the tree folk is an example of a unique

affliction, just as the sun sensitivity of the dune people is an example of a unique debility. Unique mutations should almost never be as powerful as blights, deformities or abominations.

BEASTMEN

The most common beastman breeds roaming Creation include the following:

Chiropterans: (7-9 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Claws, Enhanced Hearing, Fur, Night Vision. *Abomination:* Wings. *Deficiency:* Ugly (their bat-like features make them unattractive to most mortals). Southeastern vampire-bat chiropterans have the debility *Diet* (the blood of mammals or birds).

Dolphinmen and Whalemnen: (3 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Elemental Adaptation: Water, Enhanced Hearing, Large.

Elkmen: (10 Bonus Points; or 6 Bonus Points for Exalted) *Poxes:* Enhanced Smell, Fur, Hooves, Large; *Affliction:* Antlers (as Horns); *Blight:* Enlightened Essence.

Gazellemen: (7 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Hearing, Fur; *Afflictions:* Gazelle Stride, Horns.

Hawkmen: (10 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Claws, Enhanced Sight, Feathers, Tail; *Abomination:* Wings.

Hyenamen: (3 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Hearing, Fangs, Fur; *Deficiency:* Ugly.

Owlmen: (10 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Claws, Night Vision, Feathers, Tail; *Abomination:* Wings.

Sharkmen: (2 Bonus Points; 3 Bonus Points for Exalted) *Poxes:* Elemental Adaptation: Water, Enhanced Smell, Fangs, Shark Hide (as Fish Scales), Large; *Afflictions:* Gills (no lung atrophy), Wyld Assimilation; *Deficiencies:* Atrophy (Intelligence), Ugly; *Debility:* Diet (Raw Meat); *Deformity:* Short Life.

Snakemen: (4 or 6 Bonus Points; 3 or 5 Bonus Points for Exalted) *Poxes:* Elemental Adaptation (East, South or West), Enhanced Smell, Fangs, Increased Longevity, Night Vision, Snake Scales (as Fur); *Deficiencies:* Temperature Sensitivity (cold), Ugly; some have the affliction *Toxin*.

Spidermen: (11 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Fangs, Fur, Enhanced Vision (Four Eyes); *Affliction:* *Toxin*; *Blight:* Wall-Walking; *Abomination:* Multiple Limbs (Arms); *Deficiency:* Ugly; *Debility:* Diet (Raw Flesh).

Wolfmen: (5 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Enhanced Smell, Night Vision, Fangs, Fur, Large.

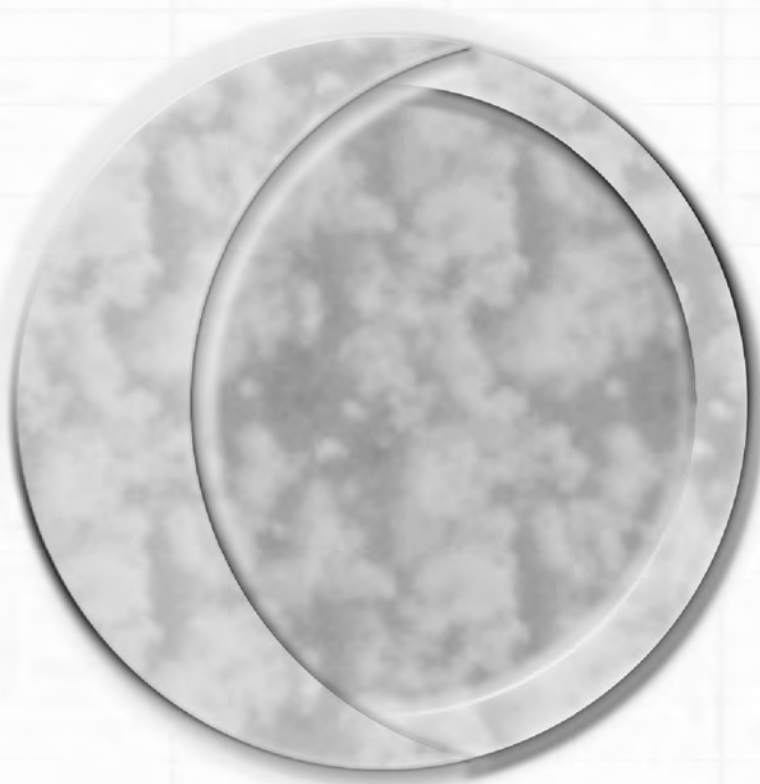
RELICS OF THE PAST

People of the Air: (8 Bonus Points; 7 Bonus Points for Exalted) *Poxes:* Enhanced Sight, Increased Longevity; *Abomination:* Flight.

People of the Sea: (6 Bonus Points; 5 Bonus Points for Exalted) *Poxes:* Elemental Adaptation (Water), Increased Longevity; *Blight:* Gills.

The Tree Folk: (3 Bonus Points) *Pox:* Elemental Adaptation: Wood; *Unique Affliction:* The tree folk are fully ambidextrous, and all have fully prehensile toes. They never suffer an offhand penalty for any task and can hold weapons and tools with their feet as readily as their hands.

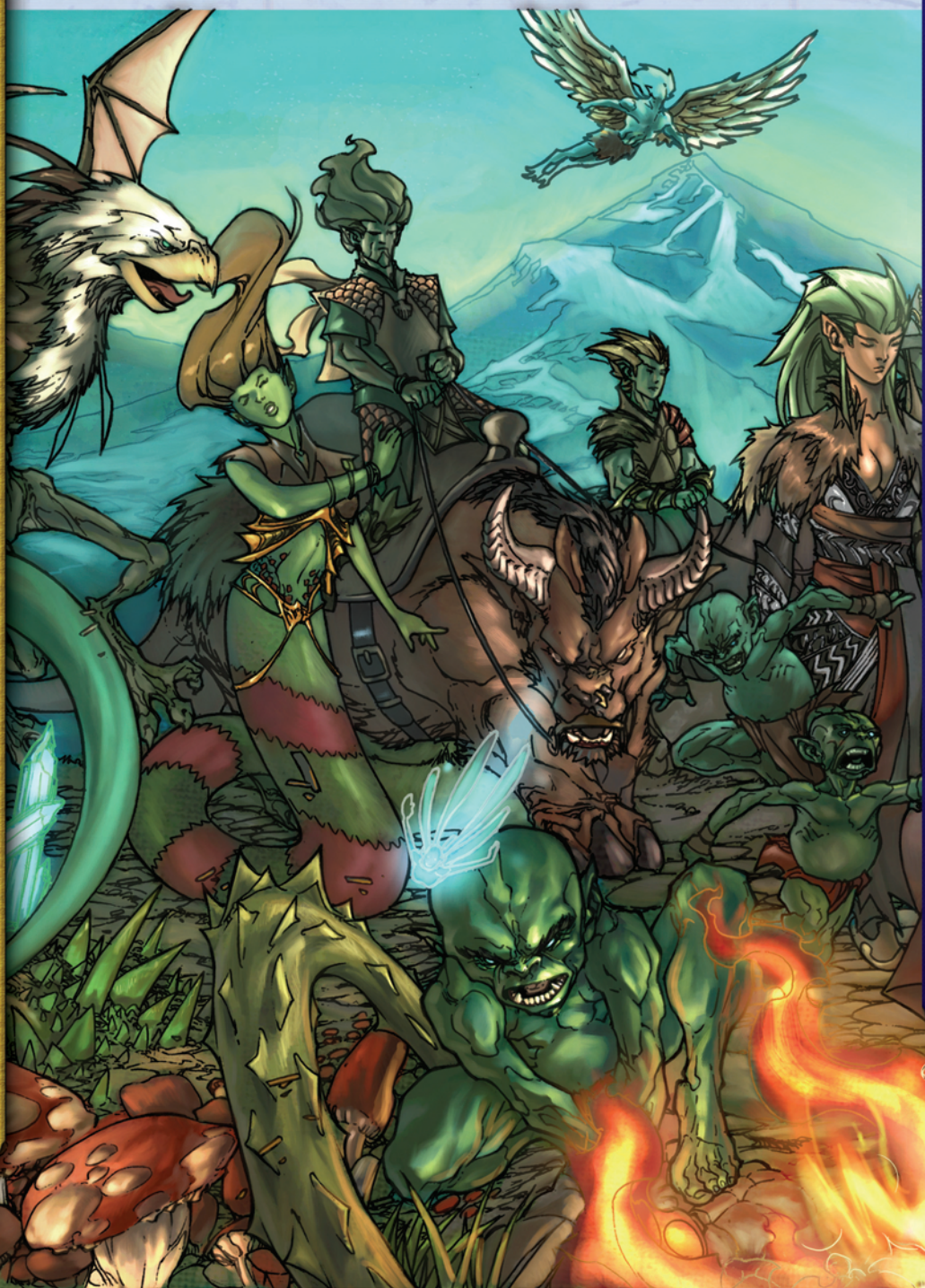
The Dune People: (0 Bonus Points) *Poxes:* Night Vision and Enhanced Sense (Smell). The dune people have eyes with red irises and unusually large pupils, however, their noses appear normal. *Unique Debility:* The dune people are total albinos whose skins burn under bright sunlight and have difficulty seeing in bright sunlight. Dune people are at -1 on all dice pools in direct sunlight and suffers one die of unsoakable bashing damage for each hour of sun exposure. Characters bundled in heavy clothes or otherwise limiting their direct exposure, such as under an overcast sky or darting from shadow to shadow double the interval necessary to inflict damage.



Outside the bounds of Creation, there exists an infinite expanse of roiling chaos that breaks upon the shaped world like a storm-tossed sea against the shore, threatening to wear it away. Where it does wear away, reality breaks down and savage denizens of the chaos beyond Creation dwell.

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