

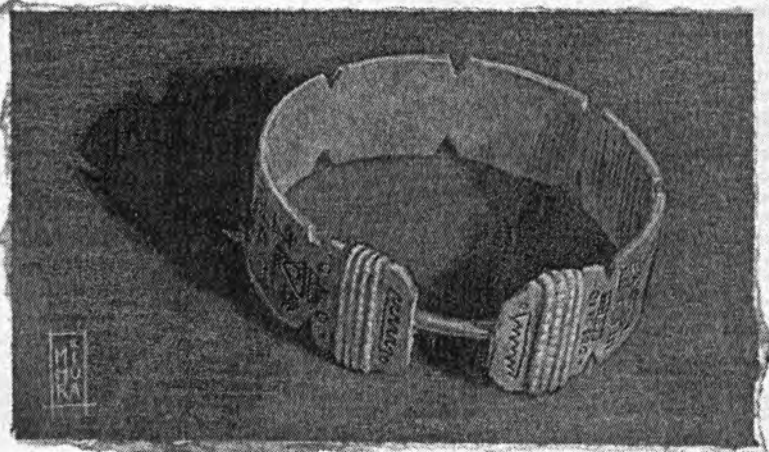
PROVIDENCE

THE HORIZON STRIDERS



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THE HORIZON STRIDERS



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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*We shall not cease from exploring
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
— Eliot 1819–1880*

When night settles over Providence, people stare into the dark sky. The glow from distant cities flickers in the sea of black. For many people, these lights are beacons hinting at countless adventures; most are content to merely dream of the mysteries between them and the far-off lights. For others, the call is irresistible – they must leave their homes behind to venture into the unknown and learn what the world holds for them. Some call these men and women explorers, pioneers or pathfinders. Providence knows them as Horizon Striders.

For four centuries, Providence's people could only dream of what lay beyond their cities' walls. Their homes were prison camps – punishment for a failed rebellion on their home world of Yas'Wail. Warden chains held the populace in place, preventing them from exploring their surroundings. Eventually, several camps freed their prisoners, allowing them to stretch their wings for the first time in centuries. Initially, there was a rush to learn more about the fantastic bubble realm that was now their home. The few people who returned safely from these expeditions spoke of the terrifying yet fantastic dangers beyond the walls of their cities. Still, people continue to have an irresistible desire to learn what is out there, to slowly push back the boundaries of the unknown.

Almost 500 years ago, with the appearance of superhuman Shards in 1091 E.M.D., the Yas'Wailians' ability to learn of their dangerous world improved greatly. The desire to discover continued to push people farther, slowly forcing the world to relinquish some of its secrets. Thousands of mysteries, however, still remain firmly within Providence's elusive grip.

Horizon Striders are an elite group among Providence's adventurers. While many uncover secrets, Striders devote their lives to understanding the world around them. More so, while explorers venture into the unknown, they eventually return home once they have found their goal. Explorers still consider themselves members of the Alliance of Kings, the Merchant Bands or the Wardens; they have a home and often a family. Horizon Striders no longer consider themselves members of a particular society – they are simply Horizon Striders who call Providence their home. For them, "home is where the horizon sleeps." They have chosen to leave their past behind in a search for what the world holds.

To the people of Providence, Horizon Striders represent much more than brave explorers. They are defenders of those in need and, for many people, the only source of news. The stories Striders tell late at night in bars or around camp fires serve as the only information most Yas'Wailians hear of the world beyond their immediate surroundings. In a time when every facet of the world is in danger, Striders serve as Providence's only means of worldwide communication.

To many people, Horizon Striders are one of the few remaining sources of hope. Regardless of ideology, Troupial or caste, Horizon Striders use their abilities and knowledge to help people in need. In these troubled times, the people of Providence could not be in greater need of this help.

THE



THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

ALSO CALLED: THE ORIGINAL STRIDERS TRAVEL TO AN ANCIENT PLACE

Based on the journal of Vodal Kaleste, told from his perspective and in six parts by Striders of great repute.

PART ONE

1117 E.M.D., 20th day in the "ill fortune" month of Erchoi.

This eve's task, like many days and nights before, consisted of charting the rich landscape of the Deep. Our exploration party included five members of the Horizon Striders, a renowned division of the Cartographers. Our whole cast, also known as the Eleven, was nestled in the stone citadel of Cliff-Spider. We had already gained a reputation across the land as the greatest and bravest of our lot – even surpassing the honour of the Cartographers. Although the other Striders basked in the glory that sheathed them, I was weary of such praise; we had much work ahead of us, and little time for leisure.

After a few moments of distraction, I was inexplicably and quite suddenly grasped with apprehension about our direction. I looked to Mikhail, whom I could ever count on to measure any level of danger, and sensed his own distress – still he failed to object to our path.

The night was particularly dark. Few fires illuminated the horizon, and a thick mist began to overtake the landscape. Despite our obvious hesitation to explore this uncharted canvas, we pushed farther ahead; in this and in most cases, duty presided over fear and occasionally, reason. The forest's trees, which already seemed larger than possible, had grown to such a size as to blot out most of the sky. The only lighting, which now resembled a faint haze more than a star, shone from Cry-Star, which rested in waters above the virgin ground we threaded. Nyshelle led our party. She was a Swan unlike most of her ilk, uninterested in art, and the effects of her powerful presence on others. Perfecting her physique and skills occupied her attention. Dane, who normally took charge of excursions, had taken the other five members of the Horizon Striders on another expedition.

Nyshelle was the perfect choice to head this particular group. Her strength and endurance matched that of the toughest Drummer. Her skin, as thick and resilient as the Dak'woot tree's own, allowed her to face the jungle's dangers fearlessly. In addition to such gifts, Nyshelle had the most extensive knowledge of mysterious plants and beasts among us.

The Swan forged confidently ahead, ensuring that the path was safe for our passage; deeply focused on the task at hand, she only now noticed the odd shape and size of the trees, and the light above that faded slowly with each heavy step. The concern that initially had shown only on Mikhail's face and my own now spread to our whole group – even to our worry-proof leader. Finally, Nyshelle looked up at the sky

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and noticed Cry-Star's dim lights. Surprised, she raised her hand slowly motioning us all to halt.

"We have gone farther than ever before in these parts. There are plants and creatures here I have never laid eyes upon before. Perhaps the city's lords will be content to know that we have gone this far."

For the first time in months, Nyshelle had questioned our role in exploring these parts. Some of Cliff-Spider's ruling Houses believed that a colony lay hidden beneath the thick and tangled jungle's cover. Determined to discover such a place, Nyshelle had already gone farther than anyone – even Cliff-Spider's nobles – had ever expected. Perhaps our dauntless leader was finally beginning to accept what most of us already knew – if such a colony existed, the jungle had long ago proclaimed its supremacy and swallowed it completely.

"Perhaps the lords are mistaken and there is no colony in these parts." Rodel, our group's spirited Dove, always felt perfectly at ease to offer his opinion without cause or request.

Roan, who in every way possessed a personality that contrasted the Dove's, glared angrily at Rodel. These last two members of our party, though loathe to admit it, complemented each other quite well; this might have explained why Dane always chose to pair them together.

Nyshelle also stared at Rodel, but to Roan's surprise, seemed to support the Dove's observations. "In any case, this place is so inhospitable that there does not seem to be any animal life. Maybe we should turn back."

"Wait!" Mikhail raised his hand to object. Since the Raven rarely questioned the perceptions of others – despite his obvious superior senses – everyone turned their attentions towards him. "We are not alone."

PART TWO

Mikhail's revelation that someone, or something, was near us sparked our instinctual defensive position – a stance each of us learned after months of training. "What is it?" our Swan leader whispered.

"I don't know, I can't focus on its form."

"Its?" Nyshelle muttered to herself as she turned to Mikhail who completely focused his concentration and vision on the hidden creature.

Although the other members of the group had not heard Nyshelle's observation, there was no doubt that Mikhail had understood.

"Whatever it is, it's not Yas'Wailian; it's much too fast... and large," he added.

Every member of the party tried to grasp this shadowy form Mikhail was describing, but failed to perceive even a hint of movement.

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Experience had taught Nyshelle that it was pointless to ask the others whether they could see anything: no one possessed senses as heightened as Mikhail – not even a Hawk like myself. For this reason, she focused her attention towards Mikhail alone. “What’s it doing? Is it preparing to attack?”

“No. If anything, it’s looking back at us, waiting and wondering why we are not tracking it. This creature is clearly intelligent. It knows I can see it, and is hoping we are curious enough that we will investigate.”

“How can you be sure?” Nyshelle asked.

“The creature is a quadruped, and it is staring at us. It stopped moving when we did. It then made several brisk movements so that I could see its form. Considering that it was able to move undetected before, I believe this indicates that it was trying to get our attention.”

Nyshelle shook her head in disbelief. “It’s a good thing you’re here; we would never have seen it otherwise.”

The Raven continued to report his findings as if he had not heard her observation.

“After the creature noted that I had seen it, it paused and stared at us. It then turned and slowly walked away from our position, paused again and twisted its head to look in our direction. It is now sitting and waiting.” After Mikhail finished, he turned to Nyshelle.

“What do you think it means?” he asked. Although it was evident Mikhail had already formed his opinion, the Raven still asked for Nyshelle’s experienced viewpoint.

Before Nyshelle could reply, Rodel offered his opinion. “Perhaps it’s afraid we’ll attack it?”

Roan, who was always impatient when faced with the Dove’s often misplaced interjections, barked back his own guess.

“That’s unlikely; if it wanted to attack, it could have taken us by surprise easily. According to what Mikhail said, it hopes to lead us somewhere.”

“I agree with Roan and Mikhail,” Nyshelle finally said. “We will follow the creature to its destination.”

“But what if it’s a trap?” Rodel asked, clearly concerned with this course of action.

Nyshelle turned slowly to each member of our group. The frown on her face signalled to us that we should stay alert and focused. “Then we shall prepare for anything.” Nyshelle’s golden eyes danced on each of our forms, then paused at Rodel and Roan to emphasize her point. “We have trained for this very eventuality.”

Regardless of their individual quirks and flaws, Nyshelle knew she could always count on her group to act as a team. “Mikhail,” she exclaimed, “you will lead us. If you sense any deception on the creature’s part, we will turn away.”

Mikhail moved ahead of the group. Despite his discomfort with his new position, he took charge of the situation, and his fears.

"Very well, follow me," he voiced confidently.

When we began moving in its direction, the large beast rose and moved deeper into the jungle, disappearing in thick shadows.

PART THREE

We moved through the brush, deeper into the uncharted territory, and farther than any other Yas'Wailian. The jungle's floor was dry and sandy, as if rain had not blessed it in centuries. Periodically, large crevices marked its surface, making movement treacherous and slow. Still, each member of our group followed Mikhail's lead, confident in his ability to guide us. Nyselle, who followed Mikhail from a distance of mere steps, was as secure in abdicating her lead as she was in assuming control. Curious as to our progress, and the pace of the creature we were tracking, she approached Mikhail and whispered in his ear.

"Can you see the beast more clearly now?"

"Unfortunately," Mikhail replied, "I cannot see details of its form since the surrounding vegetation blankets it with shadows. I sense no other animals near the creature nor circling our position."

"Very well, let us continue on this path."

Nyselle again moved away from Mikhail, yet maintained a comfortable distance should any trouble plague him ahead.

My position was to the rear of the group, within grasping distance of Rodel who maintained his silence. The farther we moved, the more the floor began to slant in a sharp and downward slope. Many of the smaller plants we had struggled with previously were now absent. The trees however, dwarfed the massive forms we had seen before, completely blotting out any light from the world's ceiling. The shadows that had surrounded us now covered the entire landscape. Their overpowering forms were so thick and ominous that the apprehension I had experienced hours earlier renewed with greater vigour. Despite my best efforts to remain calm, a penetrating fear overtook my limbs, making every step I took heavier than the last. The inky darkness became so thick that Nyselle asked for Rodel's assistance. The Dove's casual disposition often led outsiders to believe that they should dismiss his skills and abilities; fortunately, Rodel's spectacular manipulation of light made him one of the Cartographers' most valuable members. So great was his command of brightness that he could light a large field as easily as he could generate the faintest wisp. The subtleties of his light were the perfect contrast to his demeanour, which lay open for all to observe.

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Nyshelle knew asking Rodel to light our path made us vulnerable to any would-be assailant. Still, anyone who could make a move against us here would probably already possess a familiarity with these strange jungles – an advantage we did not possess. Undoubtedly, Nyshelle had come to the same conclusion as the rest of our group: should anything choose to attack, lighting our path would at least let us know what was coming. Nyshelle had barely begun asking for Rodel's help before a soft orb of light appeared above Rodel, his hands raising almost as if to support the glowing sphere. As the light flickered, the shadows that masked every living shape seemed to retreat erratically like wounded animals. Other shadows however, far more stubborn than the small shapes Rodel had just scurried away, refused to budge. Almost immediately after conjuring the light, Rodel's features revealed a hint of surprise. Nyshelle, however, had failed to notice the Dove's confusion.

"Can you generate more light?" she asked.

"Of... of course." Rodel still had not recovered from his astonishment. Perhaps for the first time in his life, he had, for a moment, doubted in his ability to dispel darkness.

"Is everything all right?" Nyshelle asked, eventually noticing the Dove's perplexity.

"Yes, it seems I must have underestimated the depth of these shadows." After recovering from his surprise, Rodel again waved his hands to produce a greater glow above his head. This time the small shadows that surrounded us vanished from our sight; still, all around us, more columns of darkness refused to let the light intimidate them from their ground.

A few feet away, Mikhail asked for our leader's attention. Concerned, Nyshelle quickly moved to Mikhail's side, distracting her from the questions she had planned to ask of Rodel's difficulties.

"What is it Mikhail?"

"The creature – I have lost it from sight. I have, however, found something else."

"What?" Nyshelle asked again.

"An immense wall. Either the beast is hiding behind it," Mikhail pointed at the shadows ahead, "or it brought us to its desired destination."

"I don't understand. I don't see anything."

Following Nyshelle's lead, Rodel approached Mikhail. The Dove's light, as intensely as it now shone, failed to dispel this peculiar darkness.

"What wall?" they asked in unison. Taking a few steps ahead, Mikhail stretched his hand and placed it firmly against a tall shadow that stood before him. Expecting his hand to merge in the darkness, both Nyshelle and Rodel were stunned to find that it lay solidly against the shadow, as if resting against a cold and polished stone.

Mikhail turned his head slowly towards them both. "This wall," he finally replied.

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PART FOUR

All of us stood before the massive shadow. Besides the dark form that lay at our feet, to the left and right were thick tree stumps in an arranged manner, disappearing in insubstantial shadows after a few feet. The wall, made of a solid opaque form, extended above and beyond the row of beaten trees, following the programmed path of its architect. It too merged with the shadows that masked the rest of this fantastic creation.

"How is this possible?" someone finally asked.

Roan approached the strange surface, touched it, then quickly pulled his hand away. "A wall made of shadows?!" he commented.

Our leader tried hard to contain her wonderment. "Can you see beyond it, Mikhail?"

"No. I cannot see a thing."

Rodel grew impatient. "What's happened to the creature we were tracking?"

"I hypothesize that it is either behind the shadow, or that it has led us here on purpose," Mikhail repeated.

"It must be lying behind the wall!" the Dove exclaimed.

"Perhaps," Mikhail muttered. "Or maybe that is what it wants us to believe."

Mikhail crouched and pointed to the sandy ground; he then traced an outline of the tracks the creature had left behind; the path led directly to the wall.

"That's it then, it must lay behind the wall," Rodel emphasised as he pointed to the tracks he had previously failed to notice.

"It would seem so," Nyshelle added. She looked at Mikhail who did not appear to embrace the idea.

"If it is behind the wall," he began, "then why did it not wait for us to see it. One thing is certain – the creature wants us to follow its path. It has made every effort to draw our attention. If it wanted us to follow it behind this structure, why not wait until I saw it go through the wall."

"Maybe it thinks that you saw it," Roan offered his opinion.

Mikhail objected. "I don't think so. It always made great effort to keep my attention."

"Then what do you suggest?" Nyshelle asked, signs of frustration slowly becoming visible. Perhaps she now regretted following the beast.

"I do believe that it wants us to breach the wall; however, I do not think it lays beyond it. For whatever purpose, though, it wants us to believe it is."

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For several minutes, our party paused to consider our options. Frustrated, I found myself wishing I could voice my concerns aloud — my abilities had both blessed me with great gifts and cursed me with eternal silence; some say, it is a small price to pay for great powers.

Nyshelle rose slowly from the floor, ready to pronounce her decision. "Whether the beast is behind or not, I say that we attempt to go ahead. If we do not, this conundrum will forever haunt us. I will view returning home without answers as a failure."

One by one, we all rose to show our support, despite some reluctance and apprehension.

"Very well, let's figure out how to do this." The unanimous support we presented pleased Nyshelle.

"Besides, if we return to Cliff-Spider and tell them we found this wall without investigating farther, they would probably send us back here to find its source," Rodel muttered under his breath.

Although Roan tried hard to conceal from Rodel the faint smile forming on his features, he obviously agreed with the Dove's observation.

Nyshelle began observing the wall, first from a distance, and then by stroking her strong fingers across the smooth surface. "Mikhail, can you see anything at all?" Our Swan leader was hoping Mikhail would provide her with some clue as how to proceed.

"Unfortunately not," he said, disappointed that he could not provide greater assistance. "The only thing I can note is the utter lack of light penetrating this form. It is possible the wall is so thick that it prevents me from seeing beyond it."

Roan looked up trying to discern the height of the wall. From our position however, it seemed as if the wall reached above endlessly. "Maybe we could fly over it," he suggested.

Nyshelle looked up herself, but shook her head. "I don't think so. We would have to pass the trees' canopy, leaving us open to attack."

She moved away from the wall, pacing between us and the shadows that surrounded us. Nyshelle hesitated for a moment, then finally looked at Roan.

"I think I have an idea."

PART FIVE

Nyshelle moved close to her friend and placed her hand on his shoulder. "I think if you could try to find an opening in the wall, perhaps you could use your abilities to turn into vapour and pass through this wall. I realize it is risky and I do not want you to..."

"You do not even need to ask," Roan said, interrupting Nyshelle, "of course I will do it."

Nyshelle looked at Roan's body as it gradually dissipated to a cloud. At first, Roan's insubstantial form prodded the darkness desperately looking for an opening, but could not find even a sliver to pass through. To increase his chances of locating an aperture, Roan's gaseous form began climbing higher and farther away from our position. Nyshelle's pained expression betrayed her worry and her regret at asking Roan to do this. As she was about to call him back, I moved towards her and grasped her arm, stealing away any sound ready to emerge from her curved lips. Nyshelle turned to me, tears swelling in her eyes. As much as she always tried to hold back her Swan heritage, her keen empathic senses could feel our dread and Roan's fears. For the first time ever, I felt Nyshelle completely understood the message I spoke through my eyes; even if she had not asked for Roan's help, he eventually would have offered it himself. Had I miraculously found the power of speech at that very moment, I would not have uttered a sound.

Rodel noticed our exchange and offered his opinions. "It's quite possible this is the missing colony, and its people are kept from the outside world because of this wall. Maybe whoever lies beyond the wall will greet Roan with joy."

"You assume that there is someone living there," Mikhail added.

Our group waited impatiently for our exploring comrade to return. Mikhail continued his scans of the dark wall in vain, while Nyshelle paced about the lighted area Rodel worked hard to maintain.

After a few moments, a slow rumbling emerging from the ground drew our attention to the darkness, which began parting. Stone and dark structures lay beyond the wall, which now offered a large opening inviting us within. We hesitated to move until Mikhail noticed Roan's still form laying on the floor some distance away. Although we moved towards our colleague in unison, there was no doubt that we all suspected that a trap lay ahead. "Be prepared for anything," Nyshelle voiced sharply.

A dull grey glow, whose source I could not detect, illuminated faintly the area around us. Was this solely for our benefit, I wondered; were hordes of strange creatures or soldiers preparing to greet us, or swarm upon us?

As we moved slowly past the opening, we began observing the structures around us. A great number of citadels and towers lay scattered about the strange and bare landscape. The darkness we believed to be a wall was part of a massive dome that wrapped this area like a protective shroud. As we moved farther into the dome, it became increasingly clear that this was a city the jungle and the darkness hid from the eyes of the world.

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Some of the city's twisted stone towers appeared fused with a solid darkness. Towers made entirely of this black substance, reached to such great heights that they pierced the dome. Upon closer examination, the shape of the structures and the carving of the stone was clearly Yas'Wailian in design. There were large open windows, extended balconies, and statues of winged folk scattered atop the open roofs and domes of some structures. "Unmistakably Yas'Wailian," Mikhail stated. Unmistakably Yas'Wailian, I agreed in thought, yet clearly not entirely Yas'Wailian. The statues depicted emaciated people, layered with strange markings, and dark, lifeless eyes – all quite unlike Yas'Wailian representations, which strive to emulate life. The stone also looked more ancient and withered than the oldest palace or hall in Cliff-Spider, and many of the sigils and crests carved into the rock were completely unrecognizable.

"Why is this place so quiet? Doesn't anyone live here?" Rodel asked.

"I am certain we will soon find out," Nyshelle expressed. "Our primary task right now is to retrieve Roan and to make sure he is unharmed."

We finally reached Roan, who lay unmoving upon the cold stone floor. I bent down observing our friend, happily noting he still drew breath. As I rose to present my findings to my worried comrades, I noticed four shapes which moved behind them. The expression on my face was enough to warn them of any impending danger.

"What..." Rodel voiced as he turned to confront whatever had distracted me.

Several feet behind us, four winged shapes approached. As they moved slowly towards us, a cloud of darkness followed them closely behind.

"Who are you?" Nyshelle shouted.

The menacing darkness, almost as if it could sense our distress, began moving at a speed far too great to react. The blackness consumed each of our forms, and the world which just moments ago had seemed strangely peaceful, disappeared in a thick black shadow-blanket. Rodel instinctively reached for my hand.

"We're in trouble," was all the usually gabby Dove could say.

PART SIX

The silence that had been the dominating feature of this apparently deserted city shattered with the arrival of the four strangers. Now, a thick blackness dominated our view. Rodel, whose instincts in the face of danger often surprised the rest of our troupe, drew a great light from within his breast. The intensity of the light surprised us all, but it shook the winged assailants who recoiled and scowled in anger. Rodel's shining form cast away the nearby shadows and allowed us to view our foes in greater detail. Like the statues all about this city, the winged folk, some Iblii and some Seraph, were covered in strange tattoos. Their skin, as pale as a Swan's white feathers, lay bare, revealing dark veins protruding underneath. Their eyes, which matched the total darkness of the strange towers, blazed with fury and pain upon sight of Rodel's intense flare.



Mysteriously, two more forms appeared from shadows to combat the light they clearly saw as a threat. One of the four strangers ahead of us raised his hand as if preparing for combat, while the others matched his actions with awkward movements of their own. From each of their fingertips, strands of blackness shot out and battered our bodies with astonishing speed and ferocity. The strange energy landed against Nyshelle's chest sending her crashing to the floor. A wide wave of sharp, black blades assaulted Mikhail rending his clothing useless, and slicing his flesh. Narrow streams of blood began flowing from Mikhail's wounds; one strand's course flowed into his eyes blinding him and rendering him motionless. Mikhail kneeled in pain and wiped his hands over his eyes, smearing the deep-red juice across his face. Angered at this sight, I outstretched my hands, which shook with fury, and unleashed a powerful wave of sound. The blast cascaded against our foes, and shattered one of their forms. Nyshelle, who had just recovered from an assault, rose and prepared to charge an albino. As she moved one foot, a block of darkness began spreading up her second foot eventually encasing her whole leg. Soon afterwards, her other leg faced the same predicament. As the rest of us prepared for a concerted attack, darkness emerged from the floor and grasped our wrists and feet in a similar fashion. In a matter of seconds we were all motionless. Nyshelle, who could have probably drawn enough strength to shatter her restraints, ceased to struggle when she noted our paralysed forms. It was clear we had lost this battle.

Shadows overtook us all again when Rodel could no longer generate any light. After a few moments, a dull glow illuminated the area. Before us seven virtually naked forms lay some distance away, while one woman dressed in black robes approached Nyshelle. "You are the leader, are you not?" The other albinos whispered to each other using a tongue incomprehensible to the rest of us.

The woman was about to move towards Mikhail when Nyshelle drew her attention.

"Yes, I am the leader. I am responsible for this group."

"Very well," she responded. "Hear this and spread this word among your people."

The robed woman moved back towards her friends.

"We are the White Crow. We will grant you your lives so that you may deliver a message to your leaders. Be warned that we have observed you and continue to do so. You have pillaged this world and shattered the harmony that once existed. You and your people are like a plague upon this world. This forest is ours and you are never to approach this land again. A time will soon come when our great and wise judgement will determine your fates and that of your brethren."

Darkness again consumed our restrained bodies. Each of us could feel a stir and sense that we moved as if levitated.

The darkness vanished and we were again within the forest. All hints of the city, the wall, and any restraints had dissipated like a cloud. I began tending to Mikhail, who seemed more concerned with Roan's now stirring form.

Nyshelle and Roan looked about to discern their location.

"Where are we?" She asked, looking at Mikhail for answers. Rising slowly, the injured Raven took some time to assess our position.

"Some distance away from our previous position, but near enough to our path that we may return home."

"Then let's be on our way," she said. "We have suffered enough injury this day."

"The creature," Mikhail replied. "It lays in our path, and moves in the direction we must travel."

"What? That cursed beast!" Rodel exclaimed.

"I believe it is directing us home," Mikhail said, interrupting the Dove.

"At this moment Mikhail, I care not what it wants," Nyshelle added. "We should leave this instant."

Not taking the time to even reflect on our disturbing and dangerous encounter, we returned home, battered and worried at the future.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY

IT ALL BEGINS

The Horizon Striders' origin dates back to 1115 EMD, when the guilds first appeared. One of the first guilds to earn a place of prominence was the Guild of Cartographers. The Cartographers were people who chose to use their new-found Shard abilities to explore the world of Providence. The secrets they uncovered in their quests raised the guild to a level of great importance; wealthy nobles eagerly funded the explorations hoping to benefit from their discoveries. In little time, the membership of the Cartographers swelled, making it the largest of the guilds at the time.

There were two groups that quickly established themselves as premiere members of the Cartographers. These were the Cliff-Skimmers, who moved on to form the Guild of Messengers, and the Horizon Striders, founded by Dane Lanois.

Dane was an Eagle who turned his back on a noble life to join the newly formed Guild caste. Once in the Cartographers, his natural leadership skills prevailed, compelling him to gathering fellow members into an elite group. His goal was to put together a group of people who compensated for each other's weaknesses. While he declined the title of leader, those within the Horizon Striders recognized his importance in the group's foundation.

With their diverse abilities, the Horizon Striders handled virtually every situation Providence threw against them, quickly elevating the Striders as explorers without equal. A few years after their formation, half of the group discovered the White Crow city of Aerie. Though the encounter proved near-fatal for the five members, the discovery instantly cemented the Horizon Striders' names in Providence's history.

The Cartographers continued to grow in stature off the patronage of various nobles. Within the guild, however, two factions pulled in opposite directions. One saw a great potential for political and monetary gain while the other only wished to help enlighten society. For a few decades, this internal dichotomy remained in balance; the Cartographers continued to explore the world around them while still accepting commissions from nobles. As the guild grew larger and gained more political sway however, the two sides argued increasingly. What had been a debate of ideals turned into vicious political infighting, eventually leading to the death of the Guild Master, Bredanne Platoth. Bredanne was the guild master for close to 15 years, during which time she worked hard to appease both factions within her guild. Her replacement, Chareles Nekrot was not concerned with balance – his sole goal was to gain wealth and power. The Cartographers were the easiest road to this goal.

Several members within the guild suspected that Chareles had used the Guild of Dusk to eliminate Bredanne, though they were unable to uncover any proof. In 1238 E.M.D., disgusted with the political bloodshed within the guild, many Cartographers left. The Horizon Striders and Cliff-Skimmers were the two most prominent groups to turn their backs on the Cartographers.

The Cliff-Skimmers moved on to become the Guild of Messengers in Sun Guard. At every turn, the Cartographers have despised the Messengers, working long and hard to destroy them. The Horizon Striders avoided a similar vendetta. Many historians wonder why, though most point out that the Horizon Striders never reformed as a new guild. As such, the Cartographers never saw them as competition for the power they were attempting to build. The Messengers, however, directly competed for the money and patronage the Cartographers sought.

For the following years, the Horizon Striders returned to a simpler life of exploration without the worry of political strife. One evening, all 11 Horizon Striders gathered in a small pub in their home city of Cliff-Spider, talking in hushed tones over their meals. Before night settled upon Providence, they rose and left the pub, heading for the upper caves of Cliff-Spider. Rumours speak of them leaving as mere mortals and returning as gods; the truth is not far off.

It had come to the attention of Nyshele Glaier that a creature the Striders had encountered during the discovery of Aerie made its home several miles away from Cliff-Spider, in the spire. She feared the creature was an Elothorin Avatar. Nesting so dangerously close to their home, she called the others together to discuss what to do. After a lengthy discussion, the others agreed it was necessary to first learn if it was in fact an Avatar before taking further action. They also secretly prayed it was an Elothorin Avatar – the great beasts were still enigmas to the Yas'Wailians, one that the Horizon Striders were eager to learn more about. The possibility of discovering an Avatar was more than they could hope for. The Horizon Striders left that evening to find the creature who called the Crysarius Bridge home.

They searched the upper caves of the Crysarius Bridge for several weeks. Finally, they stumbled across the resting place of an Elothorin Avatar they eventually called Thunder Roar. Thunder Roar was a massive, mutated Tuscani with wings – a huge catlike creature whose roar was a deafening peal of thunder. The Horizon Striders were to discover that was but one of its many powers.

Thunder Roar was hibernating when they encountered it. Bones from various creatures, mystical artifacts and other oddities littered the cave floor. Overcome with curiosity, the Horizon Striders remained to observe Thunder Roar. They wished to learn everything possible before it awoke. They were also undecided as to a course of action. They knew well what happened the last time an Avatar had been disturbed – Sky-Spite had destroyed Haak San Baza.

They feared if they took action, nearby Cliff-Spider would be endangered. The group also feared, were they not to act, they might endanger Cliff-Spider by allowing the creature to remain. Furthermore, it appeared that Thunder Roar was hibernating in a nest. There were no eggs visible which led some Striders to believe it was simply bedding. Still, it did resemble a nest, leading them to wonder if the Avatars procreated and, more importantly, what happened when they did.

Over the following weeks, the Striders quietly observed the Avatar and explored the caves around them. One day, without warning, Thunder Roar awoke. The Horizon Striders had expected some indication of its awakening, planning to leave before. Now, they had no choice. As Thunder Roar rose, it moved instantly to attack the intruders. The Horizon Striders began using their potent Shard abilities as they raced for safety. It was only a matter of time before one of the Horizon Striders fell to the supreme power of the Avatar. Refusing to abandon their fellow Horizon Striders, the others turned and attempted to drive off Thunder Roar. One by one, they fell to the overwhelming attacks of the beast.

Some time later – no one knows how long exactly – they awoke to discover that Thunder Roar had disappeared. They were still alive, and were all huddled in Thunder Roar's nest. No one, not even the Horizon Striders, understands how they survived the day. Later, they also learned their innate Shard abilities had increased beyond anyone's comprehension. Somehow, they had become as powerful as the gods of Yas'Wail's fractured past.

The Horizon Striders share theories of what occurred, though none have been able to uncover any answers; they still search for the truth.

Since then, almost 400 years ago, the Horizon Striders have grown into a larger group after they began taking on apprentices. The Horizon Striders are now one of the most respected groups in Providence. No one is certain of how many Horizon Striders exist, but educated estimates figure around 1500. This number, however, is highly suspect as there is little formal organization to the Horizon Striders making it impossible to take a head count. Furthermore, everyone who claims the title of Horizon Strider may not truly be one of their members. For one to be a true Horizon Strider, one must be able to trace their lineage back to one of the original Eleven – the **Ghost Walkers**. **Many falsely claim the title of Horizon Strider, possibly to live up to the Horizon Strider's ideals.** Since a true Horizon Strider did not mentor them, however, they bear the title in name only. True Horizon Striders refer to these people as Lone Walkers (see page 59 for further details on Lone Walkers and Horizon Striders).

Horizon Striders have been responsible for many of the Yas'Wailians' major discoveries. No group has done more to push back the veil of secrecy that covers much of Providence. Furthermore, Horizon Striders have been

instrumental in educating the populace of events unfolding in Providence. They often share their knowledge with commoners, late at night in taverns or around a camp fire. For both their services as explorers and as sources of information, Horizon Striders are widely respected by all of Providence. While they have uncovered countless secrets, there are still others that await discovery.



CHAPTER THREE: THE OPEN ROAD AHEAD

"If you seek for a monument, gaze around."

— Anonymous Horizon Strider to his apprentice

INTRODUCTION

While Horizon Striders have made many significant discoveries in the world of Providence, countless others remain hidden. This chapter uncovers a variety of secrets that Yas'wailians are on the verge of uncovering. GMs may feel free to utilize these ideas as goals for their grand exploits. When designing a campaign focused on unveiling secrets such as these, we recommend the adventures be challenging; the sort of events that immortalize characters in the mythos of Providence. In reality, we often blindly stumble across important discoveries — in gaming, your players should uncover great secrets only after epic quests. Furthermore, while we provide details for GMs, you should feel free to make whatever changes are necessary to ensure each adventure works best in your campaign. If players have already explored the Pendulum Island Chain (see page 42), for example, then move Sun-Spar to another location. Also, should your players read this book, we highly recommend that you change details so there is still an element of mystery and surprise in your campaign. One of the most important themes for an exploration campaign is uncovering mysteries; be sure to maintain this feel.

ELOTHORIN AVATARS

INTRODUCTION

"Ten thousand years ago, on the world of Yas'Wail, the Elothorin creatures descended from the skies and charred the landscape. After losing every battle, the Yas'Wailians tricked the beast gods into portals, leading them to a new realm; this is the place we now call Providence."

— Parhl Vrenaa, Raven Scribe and Historian.

Few things within Providence are as enigmatic as the Elothorin Avatars. These creatures, which have been enchanted with a portion of the Elothorin's essence, are incredibly powerful, sometimes capable of levelling entire cities with ease. The Alliance of Kings and the Merchant Bands have both outlawed attempts to confront or otherwise encounter Avatars, due largely to events such as the destruction of Haak San Bazaa. That law does little to prevent explorers from devoting their lives to studying these dangerous beasts. The lure to learn about these creatures is too tempting for some people; Horizon Striders are no exception.

Most adventurers who encounter an Avatar do not live to tell the tale. Horizon Striders, however, seem to enjoy some level of success in their encounters. For some unknown reason, Avatars are less likely to outright attack Horizon Striders. It is because of these rare encounters with brave Striders that Yas'Wailians have gathered the little knowledge they have on the known beasts.

WAR-DIN: A QUEST IN WEEPING-ROCK

Few people realize the wind-blown sand of Athrin's Desert is a tomb for a lost prison colony. Wardens abandoned the city long ago when their mutated offspring, called Warden Degenerates, overtook the city. Roughly 300 years ago, the Alliance of Kings attempted to reclaim the abandoned colony of Weeping-Rock (see Main World Book, page 68) from the Warden Degenerates who laid claim to it. After many catastrophic defeats at the claws of the abominations, the Alliance of Kings chose to cut their losses. Rather than simply leave, however, Alliance officials felt it was necessary to destroy the city and all its inhabitants. They feared if the Degenerates remained, they would eventually leave Weeping-Rock, becoming a threat to Alliance cities. In a massive undertaking, Alliance Wird Weavers summoned a blinding sand storm, burying the entire city beneath tons of sand.

Though the Alliance of Kings has officially forbidden anyone from exploring Weeping-Rock, they have done little to enforce this law. This has allowed several explorers over time to venture into the city of sand; few ever return. The adventurers who live to tell their tales speak of a ghostly landscape



where nothing lives – in the same breath, they whisper of a powerful, evil presence. Roughly 200 years ago, a Horizon Strider named Letek Mikkot believed he encountered what the shaken explorers spoke of: an Elothorin Avatar now named War-Din.

War-Din is a two-headed, massive Tiger-Wolf with six legs; it is twice the size of a bull Bawk'sha and possesses incredible speed for its mass. War-Din earned its name because of its ability to let loose a terrifying growl that can shatter bone. Its growl also whips the sand of Weeping-Rock into a blinding, slicing storm. War-Din uses its powerful limbs to burrow deeply into the sand. Reports suggest that the creature is searching the buried colony for something, though no one knows exactly what. Because its search occupies its attention, War-Din is potentially the easiest Avatar to approach. If War-Din should become aware of a presence, it would not hesitate to strike violently, attempting to kill anyone in sight.

Many have attempted to discover what War-Din is searching for. Most people read archives attempting to learn what Weeping-Rock held in its days as a prison colony. Others, however, are not content to simply read – they are determined to enter the buried city. Only one adventurer, Divanne Mochismo, has survived to tell the tale. Divanne, was an accomplished Horizon Strider roughly 75 years ago. After several years of research and preparations, she went to Weeping-Rock to learn the secret of War-Din's quest. Upon her return, near death, she spoke of a dark, dry city that stole the air from her lungs. According to her account, buildings were still intact and buried under the sand. Skeletons of Yas'Wailians and various unspeakable horrors also littered the floor. Other bodies, mummified by the dry desert air, were scattered about the city, hinting that Weeping-Rock was not completely abandoned when it was buried.

Today, Horizon Striders claim that Divanne dug into the desert sand, uncovering the tunnels of the buried colony. There she found a secretion had cemented the sand into rock-hard tunnels which connected the buildings of the buried colony. While exploring the labyrinth of caves, Divanne could hear the bellows of War-Din above as it burrowed into various parts of the city. When Divanne shared her tale, her voice dropped to a hoarse whisper as she recounted an encounter with a band of monstrosities racing through the alien tunnels. Most historians who have heard the accounts of Divanne believe the creatures are the descendants of the Degenerates buried within the city. Divanne explicitly spoke of a harrowing escape as dozens of the creatures swarmed after her. Eyes alight, she stressed she escaped only because War-Din tore into a tunnel she had just raced through, preventing the creatures from overtaking her. After a few months of recovery, Divanne returned to Weeping-Rock to learn more. Nobody ever saw her again.

WAR-DIN'S CHARACTERISTICS

Encounters with War-Din should be handled with extreme care – War-Din is presently the most powerful Avatar alive (Sky-Spite previously held that distinction). It is capable of laying waste to an entire city with the same ease that Sky-Spite levelled Haak San Bazaa. However, as with Sky-Spite, it is possible to defeat the Avatars, though War-Din will not be vanquished easily.

War-Din's form is that of a two headed Tiger-Wolf. Though its body was originally a Tiger-Wolf, it has mutated greatly over the past millennia or more. It now possesses a tough, armoured hide and six legs, standing over four times the height of a normal Tiger Wolf. It is unclear how long War-Din has existed in this form – it has always had this body as long as the Yas'Wailians recall.

SIZE: 22 feet at the shoulder

CHARACTERISTICS

2	Coordination	62	Strength	88	Constitution
1	Intelligence	3	Willpower	12	Psyche
0	Appearance	6	Charisma	0	Perception
5	Aura	131	Body	368	Endurance
303	Wird				

SKILLS (THE SKILL LEVELS INCLUDE CHARACTERISTIC RATINGS)

-6	Awareness*	8	CM – Strike	5	CM – Dodge
8	CM – Charge	12	Intimidation	6	Multiple Strike

* Because War-Din is preoccupied with its search in Weeping Rock, it makes Awareness rolls at -6 dice. Its base Perception however, is 0 – it is capable of perceiving things around it normally, it simply tends to ignore what it is not immediately interested in. For example, when rolling to notice a group of Shards approaching from behind, it rolls Awareness + Perception, therefore -6 dice. If War-Din must roll to see a character it is attacking who has just used invisibility, it rolls zero dice (its base Perception) since it is already aware of the person. It can ignore this "penalty" to Awareness rolls if it makes a Willpower roll against a target number of 19, thereby overcoming its trait: Behaviour, Extreme – Preoccupied/Oblivious.

KNOWN ABILITIES (WAR-DIN MAY POSSESS OTHER, UNKNOWN ABILITIES)

Claws – 130 point attack (includes Strength bonus), Hard damage

Bite – 125 point attack (includes Strength bonus), Hard damage

Armour, permanent – Tier 6

Earth Swim – Tier 4

Movement – 2/5/7/13

Sonar, permanent – Tier 3

Wird Armour, permanent – Tier 4

War-Din's Roar

War-Din's namesake roar generates a variety of powerful effects. The roar lasts for 10 rounds and can be done an unlimited number of times per day.

Air Armour, reduced Wird Drain – Tier 8

Earth Swim, reduced Wird Drain – Increases to Tier 7

Sound Blast, Increased Range (x4), Increased Area (360 degrees) – Tier 6

Wind – Tier 10

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance (-5) – Avatar

High Pain Threshold

Susceptible to Shard Abilities

Behaviour, Extreme – Preoccupied/Oblivious

Reputation (-10) – Avatar

THE HORIZON STRIDERS

WEeping-ROCK: THE QUEST

The following pages present maps of Weeping-Rock. GMs may use them to send their players on a quest into the buried city. While this is by no means a complete adventure, it should give most GMs enough information that, with a little effort, they can develop a campaign. Also, below are characteristics for the Kobold Degenerates which characters will encounter within Weeping-Rock. Following that is a legend and brief description of some of the rooms within the tunnels. GMs should feel free to use the information as they please, expanding on what is found within this city. Weeping-Rock is a place of mystery, one that can easily hold long lost and forgotten secrets. However, keep in mind that the Alliance of Kings investigated the city to some degree before condemning it to its present fate beneath the sand. As such, though secrets may be found in the city, they will likely be hidden within the deepest corners and darkest caves.

We also recommend GMs use Weeping-Rock at the end of one main story arc and the launching point of a new campaign. Adventures of this sort should take on an epic feel – after months of adventure, clues uncovered by the characters should point them towards Weeping-Rock. In a grand adventure, they foray into the city, gaining the answers to their questions but discovering new mysteries. This should be the goal of any Providence campaign.

The first part of an adventure within Weeping-Rock is getting into the city. First, characters must obviously get past War-Din, who roams the area tirelessly. Only truly powerful and prepared characters will confront the Elothorin Avatar directly. It is more likely that characters will use stealth to slip past War-Din.

Once past War-Din, the characters will have to dig through almost a dozen feet of sand to find the submerged tunnels. Once the tunnels are found, characters must break into the tunnels – some sort of secretion has cemented the sand together making it rock hard (BPV of 40). Depending on the characters' powers and abilities, digging into the desert sand may be incredibly challenging, especially considering that this must be done without attracting the attention of War-Din. The fact that it is difficult to find the tunnels underneath complicates this task. Characters could spend hours digging in one spot, only to learn that there is nothing but sand beneath them. Certain spells and Shard abilities could be used to help detect the underground tunnels. Also, characters might try digging where War-Din has burrowed into the sand. Once in the tunnels, though, characters will have Kobold Degenerates to deal with.

Needless to say, exploring Weeping-Rock is not an easy endeavour by any stretch of the imagination. As such, we recommend GMs conceal something of value in the buried city; perhaps a powerful magic artifact, ancient tomes of precious information or some other important treasure.

KOBOLD DEGENERATE

Kobold Degenerates inhabit the underground caves of Weeping-Rock. These creatures are small, wiry beings with massive eyes. Their pasty white skin is leathery without a sign of hair. Their arms are large when compared to their diminutive bodies, possessing strong hands and claws to dig through the ground. Records indicate that these creatures travel in large numbers, ranging from 10 to 20 members, making clashes with them dangerous due to the tight confines of Weeping-Rock's tunnels. Worse yet, if a conflict begins, others will quickly begin swarming to the area. Some believe that these are merely the drones of an underground community, guessing that there are more powerful Kobold Degenerates deeper in the tunnels waiting to be found. Lastly, these little monsters can sense Wird; they will mob any Shards or those capable of casting spells, intent on tearing them apart.



SIZE: 3-4 feet tall

CHARACTERISTICS

1	Coordination	0	Strength	0	Constitution
-1	Intelligence	0	Willpower	-1	Psyche
-3	Appearance	-1	Charisma	2	Perception
0	Aura	4	Body	16	Endurance
24	Wird				

SKILLS (THE SKILL LEVELS INCLUDE CHARACTERISTIC RATINGS)

3	CM - Dodge	1	CM - Grapple	2	CM - Strike
2	Hand to Hand				

ABILITIES

Claws - 4 point attack, Hard damage

Bite - 3 point attack, Hard damage

Armour - 1 point of protection

Earthswim, Permanent - Tier 4

Movement 1/2/4/6

Nightvision - The Kobold Degenerates can see clearly in complete darkness, even magically created darkness, at no penalty. When in bright situations (normal, daylight conditions), they have difficulty seeing, incurring a -2 dice penalty. Note: torchlight or other similar sources of light is NOT considered normal light conditions.

Vulnerability to Light-based attacks - Any Light-based attack affects the Kobold Degenerates at one Tier (for powers) or Level (for spells) higher.

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance (-5) - hideous

Behaviour - Territorial

Light Boned

Wird Sensitive

Absolute Sense of Direction

Behaviour - Swarm mentality

Phobia - Light

WEeping-ROCK LEGEND

THE SECRET DEPTHS OF WEeping-ROCK

A – ROCK PILES

Though characters will encounter various piles of debris throughout Weeping-Rock, they will also stumble across periodic mounds of rock which appear very structured. Although the other piles are clearly rubble, these formations seem to have some sort of purpose. Perhaps they are burial mounds. Maybe they are religious alters. No one knows who placed these rocks in such ordered piles. Oddly, rooms with these particular rock piles are never the lairs for Kobold Degenerates, though the little creatures may be found passing through these chambers.

B – LAIRS

Though there are various chambers through the tunnels, some of them are lairs, or the living spaces, of Kobold Degenerates. Though Kobold Degenerates generally roam the tunnels, if characters stumble upon these chambers, they will definately encounter dozens of the little creatures who will attack the intruding characters ferociously.

C – OLD BUILDINGS – BURIED INTERIOR

These chambers are rooms of structures in the buried city. Though badly damaged, there are likely to be paintings, furniture and other signs of Yas'Wailian life littered all over the floors. These rooms may also serve as lairs for the Kobold Degenerates.

D – OLD BUILDINGS – EXTERIOR WALL

These caves have exterior walls of buried buildings. Characters might be able to break through the walls and discover a preserved, buried building or another complex of tunnels. These rooms may also serve as lairs for the Kobold Degenerates.

E – TUNNELS DOWN

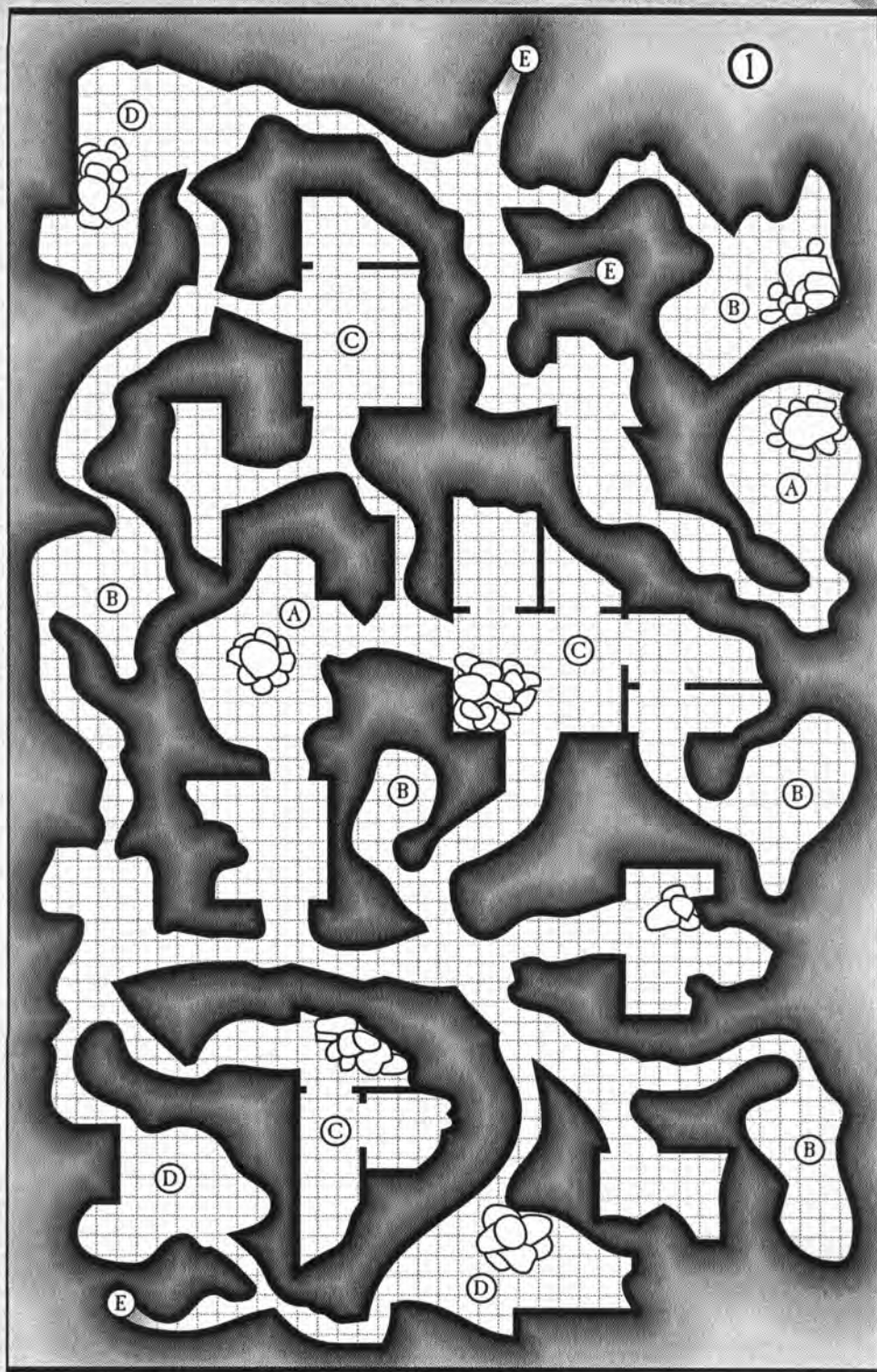
These tunnels slope downwards gently, connecting with the next level of Weeping-Rock.

F – TUNNELS UP

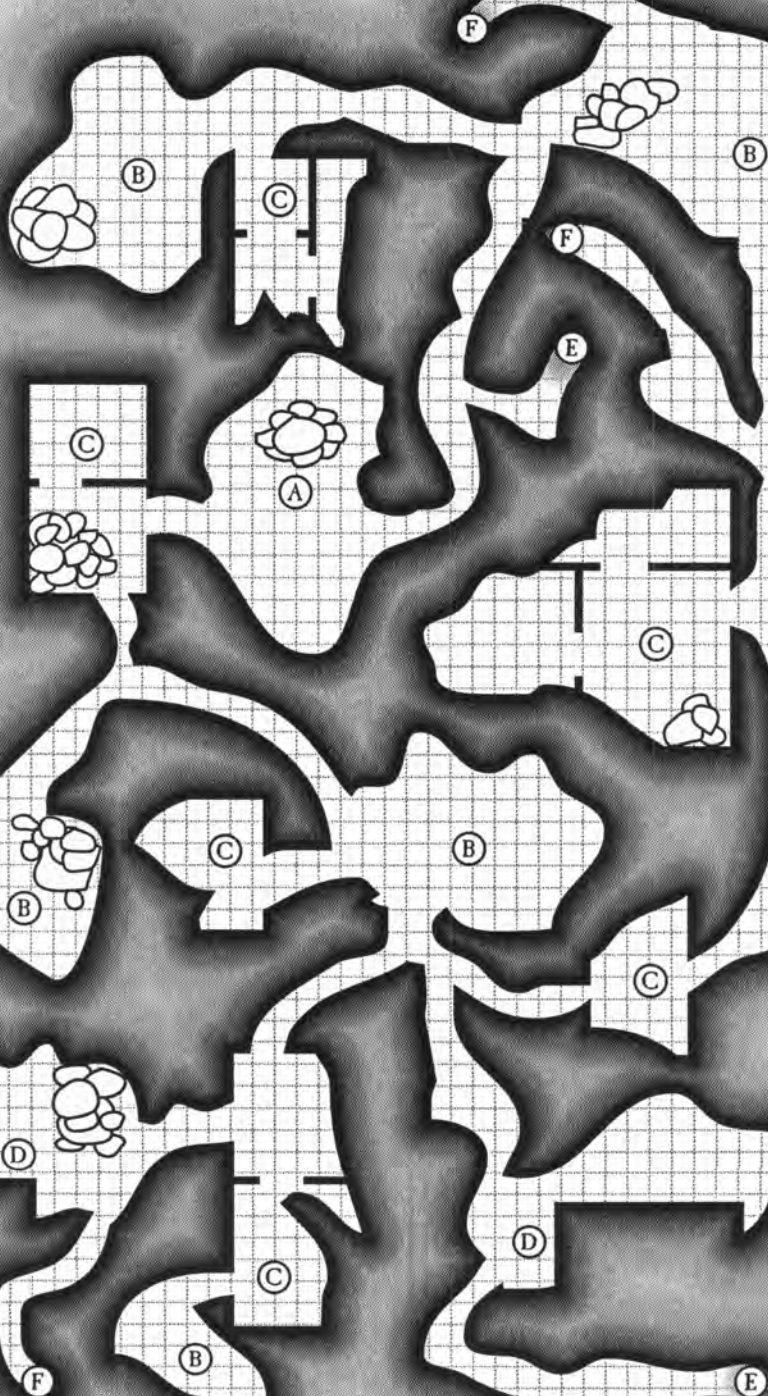
These tunnels slope upwards gently, connecting with the upper level of Weeping-Rock.

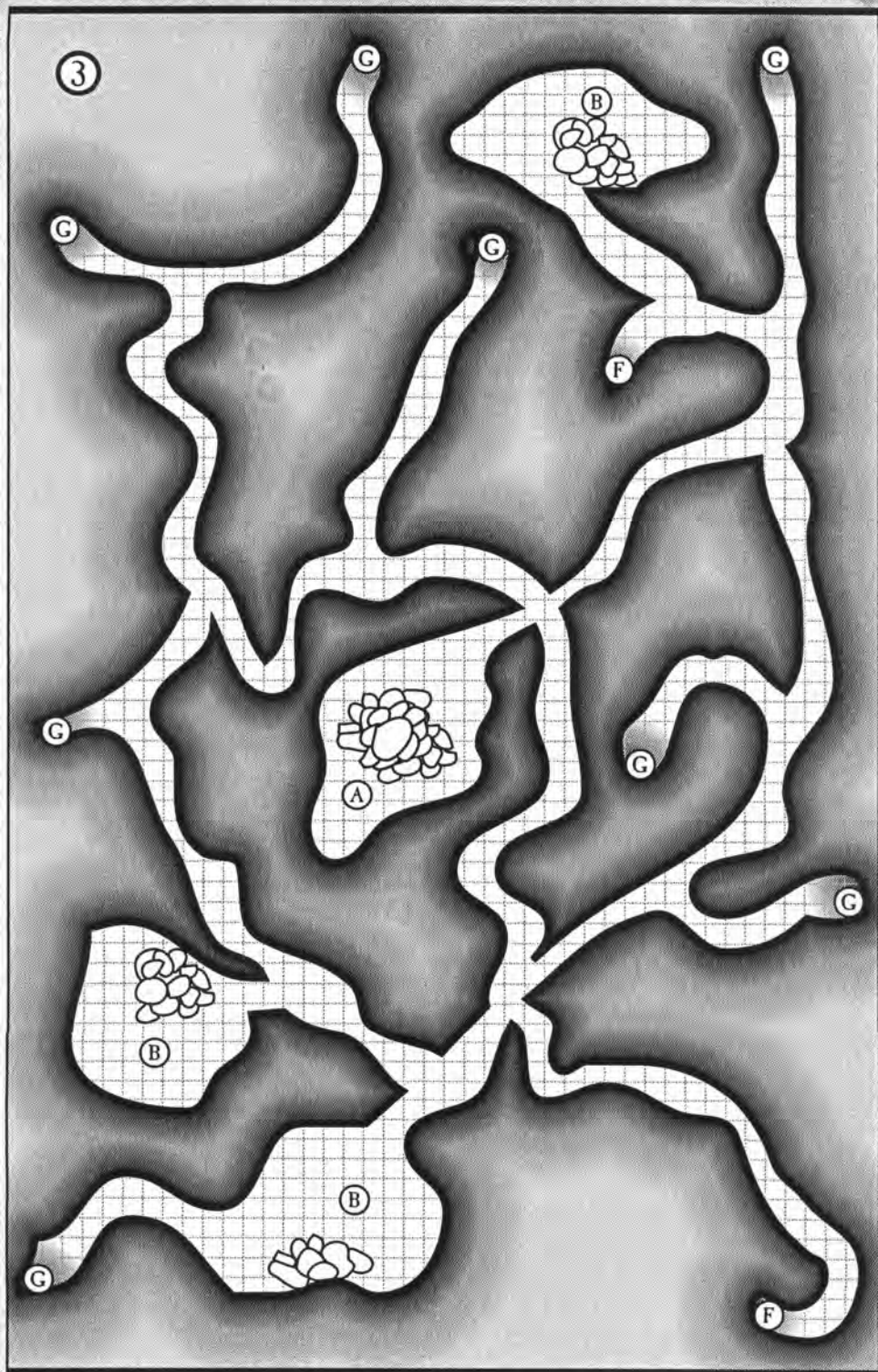
G – TUNNELS INTO THE UNKNOWN

These tunnels slope downwards gently, reaching down into the depths of Weeping-Rock that no Yas'Wailian has ever seen before. What lies at the heart of the buried city is a mystery



2





BLACK DAUNTER: THE MIDNIGHT AVATAR

"The rumours you have heard are all true – an Avatar of the ancient Elothorin does indeed roam the Exodus Plain. It is a wonder to behold, black as pitch with starlight playing across its skin." The Horizon Strider paused to take a sip of ale. Everybody in the congested tavern was huddled around her table, hanging on her every word. The young Dragon arrived earlier in the day sending a ripple of excitement throughout the small community. Everyone hastened to the local pub to hear what the Strider had to tell of the world beyond their village. Returning her mug to the table, the woman turned back to the crowd.

"The creature moves faster than a healthy horned runner in full flight. It runs as if possessed of lightning, fluid and effortless in motion. Rather than confront the magnificent beast, I chose to observe it from a distance to learn more. For several days I managed to avoid its detection – I will never forget that time.

In the few days I followed it, we covered almost a hundred miles in the Exodus plain as it patrolled its territory, driving off all manner of creature. One day, and this sight will remain with me forever, the Avatar challenged a pack of Torradars." A few people whispered to each other, sharing tales of Torradars, the 40-foot tall lizards that roam parts of Providence. They are the largest predatory beasts in Providence. Though few people have seen one, everyone knows of the near mythical creatures. "The Avatar is not small, possessing the body of a massive, six-legged Ursul bear. However, when compared to the majestic Torradar lizard-kings, the Avatar scarcely reached their knees. Regardless, as it had done with every creature before, the Avatar drove off the Torradars."

"The battle was monumental – I would not doubt if our cousins back on Yas'Wail could hear it. If you have ever heard rumours about the ferocity of a Torradar, do not discount them for they speak true. In the face of this ferocity, however, the Avatar prevailed." As she continued her tale of the battle, the young Strider watched as her words electrified her crowd. She noted, with subtle amusement, that several of her listeners were holding their breath as the battle's description neared its climax. Were the storyteller anyone but a Horizon Strider, few would believe her words; details of the struggle seemed fantastical beyond the imaginations of anyone. Uttered by the Horizon Strider, no one doubted a single word.

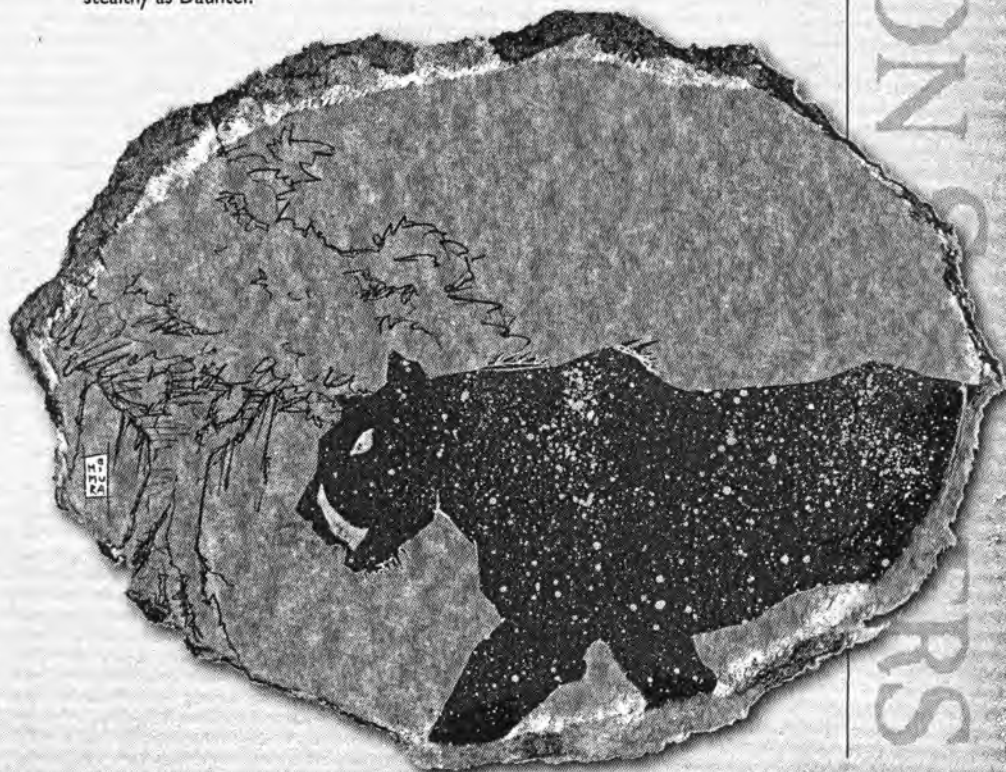
Completing the description of the battle, the Strider watched as her audience began breathing again, settling back into chairs they had been on the edge of an instant earlier. This was not an uncommon reaction. All Horizon Striders learn how to weave words together to capture the imagination and attention of their audience. She again reached for her ale, more to give the people around her a short rest. After a long draw from the mug, she completed the tale of her encounter. "I did not expect to evade the Avatar's perceptions forever. When it finally did notice me, like all the other creatures, it attacked ferociously with the intent of driving me off. I knew its goal was simply to frighten me, so I chose to retreat. I have decided to call the Avatar Black Daunter – the midnight skinned Avatar that lives to frighten. When the sun pulses to light, I will take my leave of you all. I wish to uncover Black Daunter's secrets.

"Now, let me tell you the tale of the time that..."

– Kys Kixle, Dragon Horizon Strider, 1262 E.MD.

Yas'Wailians stumbled across Daunter shortly after arriving in Providence. As wardens drove their slaves with whip and club, expanding Green-Deep's territory, Daunter suddenly appeared in their midst, as though from thin air. Chaos reined when slaves first bolted for safety only to turn back to aid their fallen friends who were cut down by the Avatar. The wardens simply watched as Daunter slaughtered their slaves – hammers and axes bouncing off its sleek skin. As the last slave fell, warden Wird users finally launched bolt after bolt of magical energies at the weakened Avatar. Slightly injured, Daunter slipped back into the forest, disappearing instantly. The wardens, furious at the setback the Avatar's attack caused, launched a hunt. A band of determined soldiers encountered the Avatar again. The battle concluded with the death of Black Daunter at the hand of 20 warden Wird Weavers and Wylders. That was not the last of Black Daunter. The wandering soul of the deceased Avatar, known as a Chaser (see Main World Book, page 196), the Elothorin aspect of the creature moved on, eventually inhabiting a new creature.

No other Avatar presents as immediate a danger as Black Daunter. Daunter has inhabited many forms in its history – its original form was a Modias Lizard. In all aspects it is easily identifiable – its skin turns pitch black with small flecks of light almost twinkling across the surface, presumably an ability gained from its time as the chameleonic Modias Lizard. In all forms, Daunter mutates its body into a lithe, swift killer. No other Avatar is as fast or stealthy as Daunter.



The threat this Avatar presents is not from its deadly abilities – virtually all of its brethren are lethal. It is a danger because Daunter inhabits the Exodus Plain, the home of most Yas'Wailians. The proximity of the settlers to the creature has resulted in numerous conflicts. As such, the Alliance of Kings, the Merchant Bands and the Wardens of Bone-Wail have all placed separate bounties on Black Daunter's head. The Warden bounty is the greatest by far; Bone-Wail insists on gaining the creature's head. The three bounties have led many adventurers to their graves for Black Daunter is not an easy kill.

In 1398 E.M.D., the Horizon Strider Kys Kixle chose not to pursue the bounty on Daunter, but rather to learn more about the Avatar. She was curious why it crossed paths with the Yas'Wailians only by accident, whereas Sky-Spite, another Avatar, sought out people. Kys inferred that Daunter roamed the Exodus Plain with a purpose other than encountering Yas'Wailians. She was the first ever to attribute the possibility that each Avatar had a purpose. Though initially her theory met with scepticism, historians and militia leaders now widely view her theory as accurate.

Over the course of six years, the accomplished Horizon Strider Kys Kixle tracked and observed Black Daunter. She witnessed Daunter attacking all sorts of creatures, always with the intent of driving them off. Each time, Kys believed Black Daunter was clearly attempting to protect something from being detected. The Strider decided to uncover the Avatar's secrets. Sadly, that was the last expedition she undertook – it is believed Kys fell prey to the Avatar she had studied for so long.

Kys Kixle's knowledge of Black Daunter was recovered when a Raven named Réal Luchian found her journal, which now rests in the Grand Repository in Haak San Bazaa. Sadly, Kys omitted the location that Daunter was protecting from her writings. Since then, several Horizon Striders have attempted to locate what the Avatar has been protecting for almost two millennia. Thus far, none have succeeded.

BLACK DAUNTER'S CHARACTERISTICS

It should be clearly understood that even though Black Daunter is one of the weakest Elothorin Avatars within Providence, it is easily a match for a small army. Even the weak Avatars are the destroyers of cities, and the ravagers of small kingdoms. As such, using Black Daunter in a game should only be the climax of a large campaign. Even then, there should be no guarantee that the characters will survive the day – few adventurers have survived encounters with this Avatar.

In its present form, Black Daunter is a massive Cimmerian Panther, a large and sleek predatory cat which roams the Exodus Plain. As always, when Daunter inhabited the beast, it mutated the creature, making it more powerful and dangerous. Also, the creature's normal indigo black fur fell out, revealing Daunter's characteristic pitch-black skin, with flashes of light playing across its surface.

SIZE: 12 feet at the shoulder

CHARACTERISTICS

4	Coordination	26	Strength	58	Constitution
3	Intelligence	6	Willpower	12	Psyche
2	Appearance	6	Charisma	8	Perception
6	Aura	83	Body	232	Endurance
216	Wird				

SKILLS (THE SKILL LEVELS INCLUDE CHARACTERISTIC RATINGS)

10	CM – Strike	10	CM – Dodge	12	Intimidation
6	Multiple Strike	10	Stealth	14	Tracking

KNOWN ABILITIES (BLACK DAUNTER MAY POSSESS OTHER, UNKNOWN ABILITIES)

Claws – 60 point attack (includes Strength bonus), Hard damage
Bite – 65 point attack (includes Strength bonus), Hard damage
Armour, permanent – 16 points
Invisibility – Tier 8 when immobile, Tier 3 when moving, Tier 1 when sprinting
Infravision, permanent – Tier 3
Leaping – Tier 8
Movement – 9/18/26/35
Wird Armour, permanent – Tier 4
Sleek Skin – +6 dice to escape Grapples

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance (-5) – Avatar	Behaviour, Extreme – Territorial
Combat Reflexes	High Pain Threshold
Reputation (-10) – Avatar	Susceptible to Shard Abilities

SUN-SPAR: THE FALLEN COLONY

INTRODUCTION

In 15 E.M.D., explorers from many recently emancipated prison camps scoured the land, searching for the other cities. The explorers who searched for Sun-Spar discovered that the maps leading to the colony were grossly inaccurate. They spent several years combing the area where they suspected Sun-Spar would lay in the hopes of finding another colony to join the slave-liberation movement. Unfortunately, the explorers were unsuccessful. To this day, Sun-Spar remains hidden. Unknown to anyone, it has always been tantalizingly close to the Yas'Wailians.

Shortly after arriving in Providence, the wardens made maps showing the locations of the various prison colonies. Crafted hastily, the maps indicated the colonies' locations by their proximity to a major geographical location (ie: near the Crysarius Falls or in the Crysarius Bridge). The maps of the time depicted Sun-Spar as a coastal city, though it was really built on an island in the Crysarius Sea. The maps failed to show the island chain. Believing Sun-Spar had to lie somewhere along the coastline, several cities sent search parties all over the area to find the lost colony. Explorers searched long and hard, flying over the countryside looking for Sun-Spar; predictably, they were unable to find it.

Sun-Spar was built on the Pendulum Island chain, the land created from the fall of Leviathan's Spire. The island that was home to Sun-Spar, unbeknownst to the original settlers, contained a massive cave in its core. A few decades after the foundation of Sun-Spar, the island collapsed inwards, causing the colony to fall into the cave. Most of the inhabitants died in the horrific disaster. Those few that survived struggled to rebuild their lives. Most of the survivors were members of Sun-Spar's slave population; fearing for their fates, they chose not to attempt to re-establish contact with the other colonies, suspecting that the wardens would keep them chained. The few wardens of Sun-Spar that survived the catastrophe either agreed to work with the slaves or perished quickly.

Over time, the survivors rebuilt Sun-Spar while the island's vegetation grew over much of the hole that the city had fallen into. To anyone flying over the island, the landscape appeared like nothing other than a deep valley. All signs of the city from the air vanished. Also, the survivors were not eager to reveal themselves to the various scouts flying overhead, thinking them to be warden emissaries attempting to reestablish contact with the lost colony.

In 690 E.M.D., the explorers who were searching the Pendulum Islands for spices, minerals and other resources almost stumbled across Sun-Spar. When the Bloodspore Contagion broke out that year, the Alliance of Kings traced it back to the Pendulum Islands. They forbade all travel within the island chain and few adventurers were willing to break this edict; the Alliance killed the foolish few who did without mercy. To this day, Sun-Spar remains lost.

The tranquility in the Sun-Spar colony may soon be shattered. The Guild of Chirurgeons built a secret laboratory in the Pendulum Islands; the guild is studying Bloodspores in the hopes of finding a cure. The Guild Master of the Chirurgeons, Ajandi Melisrian, wishes to use this potential cure in a vicious political gambit to hold onto her power. With the Chirurgeons secretly exploring the islands, they may uncover the lost colony and its secrets. For more information on the Chirurgeons' schemes, see *Cry-Star: First of the Free*, pages 46 and 106 to 108.

THE





TROUPIAL PANTHER AND TIGER

Very few people survived Sun-Spar's fall. Of those that did, Troupial Eagle, Raven, Gargoyle and Hawk were the most prevalent. With their numbers depleted, to survive, there was a great deal of Troupial interbreeding and in little time the populace began to change drastically. For some unknown reason, Sun-Spar saw the birth of Fallen almost 400 years before the rest of Providence. Since then, the entire populace of Sun-Spar has lost the ability to fly. Furthermore, most of the population no longer resembles the traditional Yas'Wailian Troupials; they have become Troupial Tiger and Panther.

Members of Troupial Tiger are believed to be the descendants of couplings of Eagle and Gargoyle parents. They are powerful, noble and fierce people with the physique of their Gargoyle parentage, standing between 6'0" and 7'6" on average. Their skin resembles the fire pattern of a Gargoyle, though the colouring has changed to a reddish-orange and black pattern. They do not have the Gargoyle's horns, though they do possess the enlarged incisors. From their Eagle parentage they gained the sharp eyesight and pronounced, angular facial features. The members of Troupial Tiger tend to be the leaders of Sun-Spar's society and are its fiercest warriors.

Members of Troupial Panther are the descendants of Troupials Raven and Hawk. They possess the sharp predatory physique and movements of their Hawk parentage. Furthermore, though they have five fingers, they possess the Hawk's retractable claws. From their Raven parentage they have adopted the deep black skin colouring as well as their intense, mystical personality. Panthers tend to be the scholars, Wird-users and warrior-scouts of Sun-Spar.

Why have the children of Sun-Spar changed into unique and distinct Troupials? Sun-Spar's few Wird Weavers have several theories, though the truth is that no one is certain.

It is possible that unlike other Yas'Wailians, the inhabitants of Sun-Spar have adapted to Providence in similar fashion to the Lost Tribes. Many scholars in the Alliance of Kings and Bone-Wail wonder why Yas'Wailians have not adapted to the world as the Lost Tribes did upon their arrival in Providence. It is possible something within the Pendulum Island Chain accelerated the process, making the inhabitants of Sun-Spar the first examples of what Yas'Wailians will become in the future. Another possibility is that their exposure to the numerous exotic plants found only in the Pendulum Island Chain has mutated them. Sun-Spar has survived several plant-related plagues similar to Cry-Star's Bloodspore Contagion of almost 1000 years ago. In surviving the epidemics, the survivors may have evolved in unique ways. Once explorers encounter Sun-Spar, it is likely that Wird Weavers will attempt to learn the cause of the occurrence of Troupials Tiger and Panther.

Sun-Spar still has Eagles, Hawks, Gargoyles and Ravens, though they are all born Fallen. Also, their numbers continue to decline steadily each year,

replaced with more and more Tigers and Panthers. Providence's other Troupials are no longer present in Sun-Spar. Most of them either died when the city fell or disappeared shortly afterward.

It is very likely that Sun-Spar's inhabitants know little of what has taken place in the outside world. They have hidden from the warden oppressors for over a millennium. The histories of Sun-Spar tell of vile, evil tyrants who ground the slaves to dust before the colony's collapse. Citizens of Sun-Spar teach their children that contact with the outside world will mean death. This will make initial contact with Sun-Spar touchy at best as they have little desire to be uncovered. However, if convinced that the outside world has changed, Sun-Spar will slowly establish contact with Alliance and Merchant cities. However, convincing Sun-Spar of the fall of many warden camps will be challenging, since the colony's inhabitants will remember the ancient evil of wardens.

THE SUN: AN ENIGMA ENCASED IN MYSTERY

With the possible exception of the locked gates to Yas'Wail, nothing has occupied the attention of scholars and explorers as much as Providence's sun. The sun is a massive globe nestled in the centre of Providence, lanced by the Great Bridge, the largest of Providence's spires. Yas'Wailians in Providence know not the beauty of a sunrise and sunset. The sun rests in place pulsing from light to dark over a 36-hour cycle; this cycle gives Providence its days' shimmering light and its nights' oppressive darkness. Furthermore, Providence's glowing orb is always at "high-noon," making all the shadows fall straight down.

What has occupied the time of so many Yas'Wailians, however, is the mystery of the sun's origin. While Yas'Wailian's only possess limited understanding of solar systems and stars – recorded lore from their days on Yas'Wail – they believe it is unusual for a sun to rest in place. For this reason, many scholars have tried to unravel its mysteries. Countless explorers have attempted to fly to the sun to learn what it truly is. None have returned to tell their tale. The closest anyone has ever witnessed and survived is about five miles from the sun; at that point, most people turn back from the orb's intense and relentless heat. Those brave souls who continue beyond that point are never seen again.

One of the disputed theories about the sun is that it is a tear in the fabric of the Tapestry, akin to a Grand Retribution. The Tapestry is, according to Wird scholars, the fabric of magic in Providence. These same scholars hotly debate what may have caused this tear in the Tapestry. Was it the White Crow upon their arrival? Was it the Elothorin itself? Did the repeated opening of the gates create it? This last theory carries the most credence to date, as even the most inept Wird manipulator can sense the Wird pulsating from the sun. Also, the infatuation of the Wird Hounds with the sun lends more credence to this theory. Bone-Wail created these Wird-altered creatures to track down

sources of Wird, in particular freed slaves who used Wird. When initially released, the Hounds raced to the nearest spires, howling at the sun; shortly after, Bone-Wail abandoned the creatures as failures. Scholars patiently study the reaction of the unnatural beasts; they believe the Wird Hounds may provide clues to the origin of Providence and the sun in particular.

Another belief is that the sun is the heart of the planet that makes up Providence. This theory makes use of similar information used to prove that the sun is a tear in the Tapestry. Proponents of this assumption refer to Wird lore, citing that life generates Wird. As such, the immense levels of Wird the sun generates may indicate that Providence is a life form of some sort. Since Providence is surrounded by earth, scholars theorize that the life within the sun is the life of a planet – its very heart.

The final speculation, a relatively new one, is that the sun is the egg of the Elothorin. These theorists agree that life generates Wird; therefore it would require an incredibly powerful life form to generate the amount of Wird emanating from the sun.

THE GATES: THE LOST VOYAGE HOME

The gates are huge mile-wide discs fashioned in bedrock; they represent the Yas'Wailians' only hope of returning home. However, many fear that this is a false hope since no one knows how to reactivate these ancient relics.

Yas'Wailians constructed the gates over 10 millennia ago on their home world as artifacts of immense power to expel the Elothorin Avatars to another realm. When the gates proved successful, the rulers of Yas'Wail continued to use them, banishing anything and anyone undesirable, and creating a utopian society. This peaceful epoch did not last once a rebellion shattered the calm. After years of bloodshed, the rulers crushed the rebellion, again turning to the gates to rid themselves of their problem. This brought many Yas'Wailians to the prison world of Providence. During the initial years of the exile to Providence, the rebels' keepers, the wardens, possessed spells that permitted them to return to Yas'Wail. Shortly after their arrival however, the spells ceased to function and the gates locked away any access to Yas'Wail.

Today, there are only six known copies of the spells; Bone-Wail holds three, the Alliance of Kings has two (one in both Cry-Star and Cliff-Spider), and the last is in Haak San Bazaa. When the Alliance of Kings formed and Cry-Star and Cliff-Spider began linking their politic structures, the rulers of the cities realized that the copies of their spells were different. This instantly led them to conclude that each gate must have a specific spell to unlock it; since the wardens had travelled countless miles, used many gates, and kept poor records of their travels, no one knows which spells may activate which gates. After the Lost Wars of 1421 E.M.D., the Swarm Dancers and Serpenkine

revealed the presence of three gates: one for the Alliance, one for the Wardens and a final for the Merchant Bands. Each government tested the spells in their possession on their own gates with little success. Shortly afterwards, the Alliance approached the rulers of Haak San Bazaa informing them of the different versions of the spells, knowledge the Merchant Bands had not uncovered. After brief negotiations, the two governments allowed spellcasters access to their gates in hopes that the other's versions of the spell would work; again, they met with failure.

Recently, the Lost Tribes have renewed their aggressive stance towards Yas'Wailians. Bone-Wail and the Alliance of Kings recognized that if they wish to survive any future conflict, they must unite; Regent Caiylus of the Alliance was forced to grudgingly admit the need for a truce with the warden city. With this recent pact, talks of granting access to the other's gate have begun. Pride on the side of both parties, however, has made negotiations proceed at a snail's pace. Neither faction wants to reveal the location of their gate. Many diplomats fear they may not reach an agreement in time to prevent a catastrophe. Politicians from the Merchant Bands and Bone-Wail have made only minimal efforts to open similar talks.

Since learning of the separate versions of the spells, all three governments now search for the gates that are linked to their spell variants. They have also begun searching for other copies of the spell in hopes of finding the one that will lead them to Yas'Wail.

THE SUNDERLANDS

"In 1514, we, the people of Sun Guard, had to leave our homes behind. As we parted, we looked back upon the rising waters and knew that we would never again walk upon our land."

— Lady Kharaada Emberleen, former ruler of Sun Guard.

The once glorious city of Sun Guard now lies at the bottom of a rising sea known as the Sunderlands. Despite this great tragedy and the loss of countless lives, Sun Guard is not completely abandoned. Neel Rigte, a Horizon Strider who can move freely through water, is investigating the Sunderlands and the remains of Sun Guard. Neel initially spent several years investigating the gates and their history. He has found indications of a gate near the colony of Sun Guard; Neel now searches for proof of its existence in the submerged region.

During his exploration, Neel began to suspect that someone in Sun Guard had uncovered the location of a gate and used a copy of a spell, successfully unlocking the gate. He believes the gate did not open on the home world of Yas'Wail, but in a different location, at the bottom of some alien sea. This, and not a Grand Retribution, as many people believe, caused the flooding in the region. A few others share this hypothesis though many more scholars discount

it. If the flooding was the result of an opened gate, surely one of Sun Guard's survivors would have proof that supported the theory. None of the questioned refugees ever revealed any information. It remains to be seen whether Neel's theory is correct. Neel is not the only Horizon Strider searching the Sunderlands and Sun Guard's remains – many others are diving into the secrets of the submerged area.



THE LOST PRISON COLONIES

WILD GROVE: THE ROVING CITY

The colony of Sun-Spar was not the only camp explorers sought out after their liberation. Similar to Sun-Spar, maps leading to the colony of Wild Grove proved to be inaccurate. Unlike Sun-Spar, which could not be found, it appeared as though Wild Grove vanished. Scouts sent from Cliff-Spider and Cry-Star followed maps to a series of roads that supposedly led to the city. The path, however, converged on barren ground. While the forest was slowly reclaiming the area, there were no other signs of a colony. Something had apparently lifted the entire city from the ground.

While attempting to discern the fate of the missing prison colony, scouts and explorers heard several interesting tales from Free Tribes, bands of escaped prisoners who forged lives in small villages throughout Providence. The freed slaves spoke of a colony travelling across the tree tops of the Deep. Initially, most people who heard these accounts ignored them as the fanciful ramblings of fools from the outback. When authorities began hearing identical rumours from different regions of Providence, they gave it more credence. The Alliance of Kings instructed their explorers to remain vigilant for signs of this moving colony.

Discovering Wild Grove is a quest that will be fraught with danger for it is presently located in the heart of the Deep, one of the most lethal regions in Providence. Unbeknownst to the original settlers of the colony, they built the city upon the backs of several massive, hibernating insect-like creatures known as a Gibraltar Beetles. To date, most specimens that Yas'Wailians have encountered measure roughly 30 meters in diameter and resemble giant land crabs. These colony creatures are vegetarians, feeding on trees and large bushes. Because of their size and appetite, they thrive exclusively near the Deep, a region lush in vegetation. Wild Grove was built on the backs of 15 enormous Gibraltar Beetles that measure from 100 to almost 500 meters across, making these the largest creatures, by far, in Providence.

Two decades after Wild Grove was settled, the insects awoke from their state of hibernation and rose from the ground, lifting most of the small colony on their backs. They began travelling further into the Deep, covering dozens of miles in a day. After a week, they settled in an area, feeding on the vegetation. The insects paid no heed to the fractured colony upon their backs. The citizens of Wild Grove, for their part, were in a state of panic. When calm reclaimed them, they found themselves well within the Deep. Since the beetles ignored them, they chose to do nothing for the time being, and embrace the relative safety of their new environs – any attempt to leave would expose them to the uncharted dangers of the Deep. Though not destroyed, their colony was badly damaged.

To survive, the wardens of Wild Grove freed their slaves, understanding that full cooperation, and not subjugation, would allow them to live. Over the following decades, the colony adapted to the insects' movements. The pod of beetles would feed in an area for two months then enter hibernation for roughly three decades. They would then rise again and move on to a new location hundreds of miles away. The people of Wild Grove rebuilt their city in small patches upon the backs of the creatures, and modified the buildings to withstand the beetles' movements. Since the beetles move with a grace that belies their immense size, the mobile city suffers little damage when the colony moves. Though they have attempted on numerous occasions, Wild Grove's citizens are completely unable to control the movements of the beetles – they follow wherever the beetles choose to go.

If Yas'Wailians encounter the lost colony, Wild Grove's inhabitants will be sympathetic to the Alliance of Kings. They will eagerly aid them in their search for the key to unlock the gates, and in any conflicts with Bone-Wail. Wild Grove does not, however, feel any hostility towards the Lost Tribes. Unlike the other Yas'Wailians, Wild Grove has had very few hostile encounters with the Lost Tribes, especially the White Crow and Swarm Dancers. The White Crow are content to allow them to travel where the beetles take them, so long as they don't infringe upon the boundaries of Aerie. This does not mean they share favourable relations – merely that the Crow tolerate the colony.

The Swarm Dancers, the insect-like Lost Tribe, view the people of Wild Grove very favourably, believing the colony's inhabitants share in the ways of the Dancers, particularly due to their close relationship with the beetles. It is unlikely that Wild Grove would participate in a war against the Lost Tribes.



THE

RIDERS

STONE-TREE: THE CITY OF LOS

As one enters the abandoned prison colony of Stone-Tree (see the Providence Main World Book, page 58), they encounter a quiet city, overgrown with lush vegetation. Birds scatter at the first sign of disturbance, one of the few signs of animal life. Very quickly however, the peaceful, pleasant veneer begins to lift. A latticework of wild vines, roots and moss holds Stone-Tree's facade together. Without the vegetation, many of the city's structures would be nothing more than rubble. Furthermore, while the birds in the area may be beautiful to behold, they are predators and scavengers that eagerly await anything foolish enough to venture into the tight confines of the valley city. Few people are willing to risk the dangers of the fragile city and its avian hunters. The wardens removed anything of value from Stone-Tree long ago when they abandoned it. Treasure hunters claimed anything left behind in the years that followed. The city, however, is home to a secret that Yas'Wailians have not laid eyes upon in over 1000 years.

The ruling family of Stone-Tree, House Sypher of Troupial Raven, possessed exceptionally powerful manipulators of Wird. In efforts to create creatures of war, they performed various painful and hideous experiments on their population. The mages of House Sypher performed most of these experiments in a concealed laboratory dug deep in Mount Unshate. This laboratory remains hidden to this day.

In one of their more extreme experiments, the Sypher Wardens accidentally created a horror that quickly turned against them. Unbeknownst to the Alliance of Kings' historians, the creature was indirectly responsible for instigating the prisoner uprising of 102 E.M.D., which led to the abandonment of Stone-Tree. The creature proved to be nearly invulnerable to physical and magical attacks and quickly cut through the warden guards. Noticing that the warden guards were occupied elsewhere, Stone-Tree's slaves took this opportunity to mount an escape. Thankfully, most prisoners who escaped were able to flee the city before encountering the abomination that lay within. This hidden sliver of Providence's history is recounted only by a few Horizon Striders who have ventured in the remains of the city, and uncovered many clues. The few wardens who escaped knew of the evil presence in Stone-Tree, and managed to take root in Bone-Wail, forever foregoing any hope of reclaiming their homes.

Several centuries later, the Alliance of Kings investigated the city: they knew nothing of the laboratory and found no traces of its remains. All they saw was a city on the verge of ruin, virtually reclaimed by wilderness. They also chose to turn their backs on Stone-Tree. It served no tactical advantage and would require too much effort to rebuild.

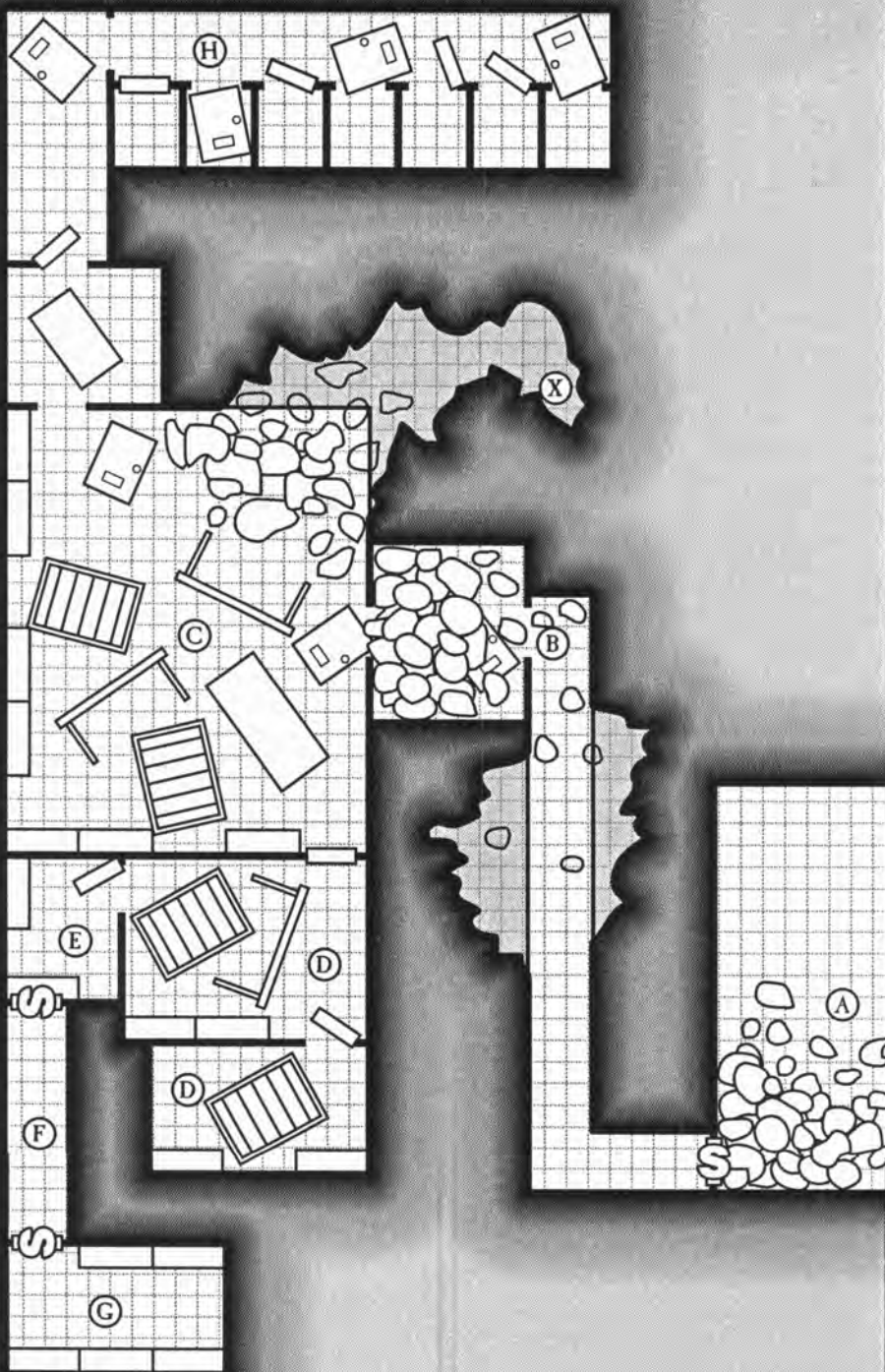
The laboratory, however, remains virtually intact, buried behind several feet of collapsed rock. Within the morbid, dank room lies several powerful

artifacts and tombs of lost arcane knowledge. The monstrosity, now known as Los, the Yas'Wailian term for "labour of ages," also lies within the laboratory. It is in a state of hibernation, waiting for the light of day to once again fill the room. Over the past thousand years, it has grown more powerful and hideous than any mind can comprehend, feeding on ambient Wird.

With the recent push by the Alliance of Kings and Bone-Wail to uncover the secrets to the gates, it is possible that explorers may decide to return to Stone-Tree to search for copies of forgotten spells that could lead to Yas'Wail. Anyone who returns to Stone-Tree may stumble across Sypher's laboratory. Within its musky chamber, they will discover a wealth of magical knowledge and artifacts. None of it will be helpful in unlocking the gates, though it might prove useful in combating Bone-Wail's Ravagers. The treasures within may never see the light of day even if the laboratory is uncovered – once it is opened, Los will awaken and attack anything in sight. There are also reports that the Elothorin Avatar Fire Rush lives in the area as well.

THE HOR





STONE-TREE LEGEND

THE SECRET LABORATORY

A – CHAMBER OF RUINS

Stone-Tree was built into the cliffs of a narrow valley. Structures are cut deep into the cliff walls. Access to the secret laboratory, deep within what was a noble's home, appears like many other rooms in the abandoned prison colony. Broken furniture and debris litter the floor, cracks stretch across the walls and floors. This room, however, is the location of the secret door leading to the colony's lost laboratory. Characters, in their adventures, may uncover a long lost map indicating the location of the secret door in Stone-Tree, leading them to this room.

A large pile of boulders in the corner of the room conceals the door. In order to ensure that Los would remain in its tomb, someone placed wards upon the boulders. These wards prevent Los from moving or otherwise affecting the boulders. The enchantment, however, also affects Shards. Anyone with Shard powers will not be able to affect the larger boulders – they cannot lift them with enhanced strength nor blast them with ranged powers. Spells, however, are not affected. Blue electricity will spark across the rocks, protecting the boulders from any Shard-based energy blast. Similarly, anyone attempting to lift the rocks will meet the blue electricity. This will prevent characters from laying their hands on the rocks (the electricity does no damage however). This shield will push a shard's hand back with a Strength of 49! If Shards win an opposed roll against the ward's immense strength, they may grasp the boulder and move it.

Though they are protected from Shard-based powers, the rocks can be manipulated by any type of spell as normal – the shield is only effective against Shards. To move the boulders requires a Strength of 15 or higher. To destroy the boulders requires the characters destroy the boulders which have BPVs ranging from 40 - 100.

Once the rocks are moved out of the way, the characters must find the secret door which will require a Perception roll against a target number of 23.

B – BOULDER FILLED ROOM

This room is filled with boulders similar to the ones found in the Chamber of Ruins. Apparently whomever sealed the laboratory really wanted it left sealed.

C – MAIN LABORATORY

This is the room where the wardens of Stone-Tree preformed their hideous experiments. Littered around the room are tables, shelves, broken vials, skeletons, scrolls, books, devices of torture and other paraphernalia one might expect to find in a warden's laboratory. Characters might find a few trinkets of value, most notably the various scrolls and books which record some of the wardens' experiments and their knowledge. The paper, however, is very brittle due to the centuries which have passed. Unless the characters exercise extreme caution in handling the papers, they may crumble to dust with the slightest touch.

D – LIBRAIRIES

These rooms served as libraries and reading rooms for the wardens. Scattered around the rooms are hundreds of ancient scrolls and books. As with those found in the Main Laboratory, characters will have to be exceptionally careful when handling the old paper.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS

E – LIBRARY

This library, like the others, has scrolls and books scattered all over the floors. The room, however, also has a secret door concealed behind one of the book shelves. Characters must make a Perception check against a target number of 25 in order to notice this door.

G – CORRIDOR OF TRAPS

This short corridor contains various traps designed to kill anyone attempting to get to the room at the end. However, the door at the end is concealed, making the corridor appear like nothing more than a dead end. Characters must make a Perception roll against a target number of 25 to notice the secret door at the end of the corridor.

There are several traps, most of which are now useless, rendered inoperative by the passing centuries. Some, however, still await to be triggered. Characters must make a Perception roll against a target number of 21 to notice each of the three remaining traps. Once found, the traps must be disarmed with a Trapping skill roll against a target number of 17. Failure to notice the traps or disarm them will result in one character (either the first character down the hallway or the character attempting to disarm the trap) being affected by one of the three following effects:

Poison Dart – Unless the character makes a Dodge roll against a target number of 23, they are hit by a dart which does 2 points of damage. If damage is taken, the character will take 3 points of damage per round for 6 rounds from the potent poison covering the dart.

Pit – The character falls 20 feet onto sharpened spikes. The pit which the character falls into is too narrow for flight. Unless the character makes a Coordination roll against a target number of 15 allowing them to leap aside or grab the pit's edge, he or she will fall and take 15 points of Hard damage.

Collapsing Ceiling – A large chunk of the corridor ceiling falls onto one or more characters unless they make a Dodge roll against a target number of 19. If the slab of rock hits them, they take 30 points of Hard damage from the crushing weight of the rock in the first round, and 20 points of Soft damage per round afterwards until someone lifts the rock off the character (requiring a Strength of 10 or more).

G – SECRET LIBRARY

This library is the store room of the Sypher Wardens' most valued knowledge. Though some of the books were removed when the city was hastily abandoned, many still remain. This room will surely contain some valuable information and possibly some powerful artifacts and other magic items.

H – PRISON

These small cells are where prisoners were held when the wardens experimented on them. Little can be found here except the skeletons of the long dead.

X – X MARKS THE SPOT

Los, after being trapped in the laboratory, attempted to dig through the rock to freedom. He realized his energy would be expended before he could reach freedom, so he stopped and entered hibernation, awaiting the day that someone would free him. He remains at the end of the tunnel, waiting...

LOS'S CHARACTERISTICS

Millennia ago, the wardens of Stone-Tree created the monstrous Los in horrific experiments. The wardens hoped to perfect a process for mutating prisoners into creatures of war. While they succeeded, they could not control their creation – Los turned on the wardens. While attempting to deal with the rampaging beast, the prison population of Stone-Tree took advantage of the chaos, rising up against the wardens, breaking free from their chains. This forced the wardens to abandon Stone-Tree, leaving their escaped prisoners to defend themselves against Los. Los was eventually trapped by unknown means in the laboratory where it was created and left for dead. Los did not die – it went into hibernation, growing stronger, and waiting to be freed from its secret tomb.

Los was created from the tortured body of a Gargoyle. Over the passing centuries, Los has mutated even further. Today, everything about Los is grotesquely exaggerated. Its limbs, massively muscled, are disproportionately long for its body. Los's horns have grown to measure four feet in length as they curl back over his head and back. His fangs are almost too large for his massive mouth. Sharp, rigid bony plates accent Los's leathery, thick skin. The creature's image becomes even more terrifying when one sees its eyes, burning green flames that can incinerate a person in an instant.

SIZE: 12 feet tall

CHARACTERISTICS

0	Coordination	30	Strength	25	Constitution
-3	Intelligence	1	Willpower	2	Psyche
-3	Appearance	0	Charisma	2	Perception
3	Aura	49	Body	116	Endurance
108	Wird				

SKILLS

5	CM – Charge	3	CM – Dodge	4	CM – Grapple
6	CM – Strike	6	Intimidation	6	SP – Flame Blast
6	SP – Vampiric Touch	6	SP – Ranged Attack	4	Multiple Strike

ABILITIES

Note: Though Los is not a Shard, for gaming purposes, its powers are treated exactly like Shard abilities, including Wird cost.

Claws – 70 point attack (includes Strength bonus), Hard damage

Bite – 65 point attack (includes Strength bonus), Hard damage

Horns – 75 point attack (includes Strength bonus), Hard damage

Altered/Inhuman Sense, Infrared Vision, Permanent – Tier 6

Armour, Permanent – Tier 4

Flame Armour – Tier 3

Flame Blast, Increased Range (x4), Concentration – Tier 8

Resist Heat/Flame, Permanent – Tier 5

Resist Cold, Permanent – Tier 5

Running – Tier 6

Vampiric Touch – Tier 3

Wird Armour, Permanent – Tier 2

TRAITS

Abnormal Appearance (-5) – Monstrous
Combat Reflexes

Behaviour, Ext. – Aggressive
High Pain Threshold

THE HORIZON STRIDERS

FORGOTTEN CITIES

Rumours abound of the existence of structures and settlements that predate those of the present day Yas'Wailians. A few people scoff at this gossip though many educated Yas'Wailians realize it is distinctly possible that settlements from several thousand years past do exist. These same scholars know the Lost Tribes are Yas'Wailians who came through the gates several thousand years ago. The Lost Tribes certainly created fortifications to protect themselves from the world. Some of those camps likely grew to become the current cities inhabited by the Lost Tribes. It is possible that other cities or camps were abandoned or lost over the passing centuries.

Thus far no one has found one of these forgotten cities, though several Striders, including Jonthon Arrowfell, a Fallen Eagle archeologist, have spent

countless years searching. Some people wonder why Horizon Striders continue with what seems a fruitless search. Stories circulating among Striders hint at the location of several forgotten cities. Rumours allude that these cities hold ancient treasures from over 5000 years ago. Some Horizon Striders feel that finding the key to the gates will occur through the discovery of one of these forgotten cities and their treasures; they believe that some lost records will point the way to unlocking the gates back to Yas'Wail.

A few Horizon Striders believe that Jonthon has already uncovered several

forgotten cities and is completing his diary before revealing their locations. Since this rumour surfaced, however, Jonthon has been travelling The Deep, and no one has been able to confirm the rumour validity with him.



CHAPTER FOUR:

HORIZON STRIDER CHARACTERS

HORIZON STRIDERS VS LONE WALKERS: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Providence is home to many explorers – few of them are Horizon Striders. What distinguishes them? In the simplest of terms, explorers become Horizon Striders when they complete their apprenticeship under an established Strider – one who can trace his or her apprentice lineage to one of the Ghost Walkers, the original Horizon Striders of Cliff-Spider. Afterwards, Striders-in-training may proudly bear their title. Although the Horizon Striders have no organization in the true sense of the word, each Strider is responsible for maintaining and respecting certain cherished precepts. The first is quite simple: Horizon Striders are never to interfere in politics. The nature of their explorations makes any political affiliation limiting. To be the most effective explorers, Horizon Striders cannot be constrained by any borders. In addition, Horizon Striders learned long ago, with their separation from the Cartographers, that politics do not mix well with their goals. The Horizon Striders serve all of Providence, and to ally themselves with one government would prevent them from serving all of the populace.

Horizon Striders who bear the title must also vow to respect the great responsibility that comes with the title. Should any member of the Striders defile the reputation of the group, either by spreading false rumours, or using the name of the Horizon Striders to wreak mischief, other Striders would not hesitate to denounce such a member, and may even seek to bring the miscreant to justice. On rare occasions, some members who have become Horizon Striders become involved in politics, or defile the name of the Striders in some way. When this occurs, other members will usually inform anyone concerned or involved with the Strider that the member in question has been removed of his or her title, and that the person is not worthy of the respect due a Horizon Strider. Finally, other members may also track this person down and warn him or her not to use the title of Horizon Strider.

LONE WALKERS

Some explorers adopt the title and practices of the revered wanderers of Providence. They may do so out of genuine respect for the Horizon Striders, or to gain the respect and admiration the people of Providence grant them – their reasons are their own. However noble or corrupt, according to other Horizon Striders, these pretenders are not real Striders – they are explorers that Striders refer to as Lone Walkers. The people of Providence can rarely tell the difference between a Horizon Strider and a Lone Walker. Striders, however, recognize the difference immediately. When Horizon Striders engage in Batal,

THE HORIZON STRIDERS

the ritual of the first Year Ring (see page 122), a mystical link is generated among all Horizon Striders. This link allows Striders to know when they face someone of true lineage.

The men and women who bear the title of Lone Walker are not Horizon Striders, and don't gain any of the benefits other than the Striders' Reputation (see page 126). The motives behind this deception will dictate the reaction of society upon learning that these people are not real Striders. If the person's motives are respectful, the public may choose to overlook the distinction



between Lone Walker and Strider. If the person was purposely attempting to deceive people for nefarious reasons, the reaction will be harsh; no one appreciates being played the fool.

REQUIREMENTS FOR HORIZON STRIDER CHARACTERS

Besides the Characteristic Minimums and the required skills (see page 103), a character must be a Shard to become a Strider apprentice. Some Horizon Striders have befriended non-Shard explorers, teaching them as though they were apprentices. However, these people are not Horizon Striders and will never undergo Batal. Stories circulate that some Striders have broken this tradition, performing Batal on non-Shards. The end of each tale varies from the poor apprentice bursting into flames to the ritual simply failing. Each story tells, in one way or another, that non-Shards cannot develop into Horizon Striders and become linked to the core group. For people that exhibit exceptionally little prejudice, it is perplexing to many outsiders that there is this restriction. When asked, Striders will usually explain that a person needs the superhuman abilities granted by Shard powers to survive, and to experience the Batal. Regardless, there has never been a Horizon Strider that was not a Shard.

There are no requirements, however, to become a Lone Walker. The title is a reference to anyone who chooses a life similar to a Horizon Strider's, travelling and exploring the world. For example, Horizon Striders sometimes refer to Trackers as Lone Walkers; this angers many Trackers who dispel the haughty claims of the Striders, and affirm that they are actually Trackers (see *The Ecology*, page 94).

THE BENEFITS OF TRUE LINEAGE

When characters complete their apprenticeship, they gain several advantages in game terms. Characters become well regarded by many people in Providence, gaining the Striders' Reputation (see page 126). They also develop the ability to sense other Striders in their area, though this sometimes takes some months to develop fully (see page 126). Lastly, depending on which Ghost Walker they trace their lineage back to, they may have one of their Shard abilities increased by one Tier (see below).

THE GHOST WALKERS

MORTAL GODS OF PROVIDENCE

The fire, turned to embers hours earlier, gave off a subtle and warm glow. The activity in the tavern was winding down as patrons slowly left, making their ways home. A few clients, as always, remained while the bartender, an old Rat named Reza Meenok cleaned up.

One such group of four sat in a corner finishing their ales. The friends got together once a year to share stories and enjoy a night among friends. They were trappers and traders who made their livings off the exotic animals around the small community.

"I saw a Ghost Walker the other week." The Hawk's blunt statement sent his comrades into a fit of roaring laughter.

"Yeah, right! And I saw a Torrader fly!" The young Dove's comment sent her comrades back into fits of laughter.

"I did! Honest. I saw this ghostly fig... fig... this ghostly shape," the Hawk countered, alcohol making him stumble over his words. "I couldn't hear over the thunder and lightning that exploded with every word he spoke..."

"And he breathed fire too, right?" It was clear from the hysterical reaction to the Dove's retort, that the others did not believe the poor Hawk's claim.

Reza continued cleaning the bar, listening to the light-hearted jabs at the poor Hawk's insistent accounts of his sighting of a mythical Ghost Walker. Some of the outlandish claims the Hawk made in his attempt to prove he had seen a Ghost Walkers forced Reza to periodically suppress a chuckle. He had heard all sorts of accounts of similar sightings, of course, though it still amused him to hear the fantastical tales.

"I'm sorry gang. I'm closing up now. I gotta ask you to leave, though I hope to see you all again soon." At Reza's request, the four rose to their feet, laying a few copper rods – melian tasks – on the table to pay for their drinks. Reza could hear their banter continue back and forth as they moved into the night.

As Reza lifted chairs atop the tables, he noticed a quiet Hyena sitting in the corner near the fire. "Oh. Sorry. Didn't see you there." It surprised him that he failed to notice the man earlier in the evening. His eyesight, he thought, must be failing him in his old age.

"I'm closing up now. I'm going to have to ask you to leave. But feel free to come back tomorrow. With luck, that bunch will be back with their enlightened views on the Ghost Walkers," Reza chuckled.

"That's all right. I've already heard every description of the Ghost Walkers possible." The man said as he rose to his feet in a smooth, fluid motion. "I thank you for your patronage Reza. I also would like to inform you of a danger." The stranger eased towards the Rat. His movements were almost imperceptible, like water flowing down a gentle stream. Reza sensed something about the man that both unnerved him and reassured him at the same time.

"Reza, your little community is in danger. Within a year, this village will be completely submerged." Reza thought to question the man – it was impossible for his village to be submerged underwater; the nearest body of water was almost two days travel away. Looking into the eyes of the man, however, stopped his challenge before he could voice it. He saw within those eyes a sea of power and information that instantly dispelled all doubts.

"You are respected by the people here. See to it that they leave this area before it is too late. When the waters come, they will arrive suddenly and violently." With that, the man turned and drifted through the door. Reza heard the faint jingle of jewelry as the man left.

Reza lowered himself into the chair he was about to put away. He knew with a certainty that surprised him that the man was one of the fabled Ghost Walkers. The mythical

explorers weren't the gods that people described them as – they were as normal as the next person; normal, yet powerful. Worse yet, he knew if the man was indeed a Ghost Walker, then the words he spoke must also be true. His home was in danger. Reza was suddenly very afraid.



To most people within Providence, the Ghost Walkers are merely the stuff of folk tales and fanciful legends. Few people believe the original 11 Horizon Striders still walk among the living. This disbelief is perfectly acceptable to the Ghost Walkers. They know that if the population became aware of their existence for the past 500 years, cults, and eventually religious worship, would follow. While the Ghost Walkers appreciate admiration and respect, they wish to avoid being worshipped as gods, for they know that they are merely mortals who are long-lived. As such, they make an effort to maintain the air of mystery that surrounds the Eleven.

THE LINEAGE OF THE GHOST WALKERS

No one has been able to uncover how or why, though many have tried, but when apprentices undergo Batal, their Shard abilities may become more powerful. Each Ghost Walker has a certain power orientation – only abilities from the same grouping as the Ghost Walker in question will increase in potency after Batal. If characters possess a power from within this grouping, they may increase one of these abilities by one Tier at no extra point cost. If they do not possess a power from within this group, they do not gain any increase. This extra Tier of power occurs after a character goes through the Striders' ritual of Batal. Of course, this assumes that the character role-plays the period of apprenticeship. When a player creates a character that has already undergone the period of learning, they must select under which Ghost Walker they can trace the lineage of their apprenticeship, and figure out whether any of their powers are similar to the Ghost Walker in question. If one is from the same power-grouping (i.e. cold-based, fire-based, etc...) as the Ghost Walker, then the player may increase the Tier of one ability by one at no additional cost (i.e. Tier 3 to 4). GMs and players should not choose a Ghost Walker lineage simply because they wish to receive a Tier bonus in a particular power; they should select a Ghost Walker background that suits their characters' outlook, even if it will not allow them to gain a Tier level in any of their abilities.

The Striders under each Ghost Walker tend to possess similar Shard abilities. Striders of Canelle Fire-Tongue are often Shards with fire-based powers while Striders of Odal tend to be Shards with heightened senses. This occurs primarily because a Horizon Strider usually approaches a potential student who is similar in outlook and abilities. Often, a person's personality is influenced by his or her Shard ability. Fire-based Shards tend to have rash and fiery personalities, while those with increased senses tend to be patient and observant. This is not an inflexible rule, merely a general trend. It is just as possible for a fire-based Shard to be quiet and observant and a senses-based Shard to be boisterous and aggressive.

We recommend players be allowed to choose their Ghost Walker lineage. During game play, however, if a Strider approaches the character and offers to mentor them, the GM may decide which Ghost Walker the Strider represents.

MIKHAIL ODAL THE WISE

"It is experience, not time, that measures the passage of years"

— as recorded in The Ecology by Danyell during his apprenticeship to Mikhail Odal

BACKGROUND

Mikhail Odal grew up in the lap of luxury. Born to a Pure family in Cliff-Spider, Odal never yearned for anything in his youth — except fulfilment. Because of his noble Raven heritage, Odal's parents pushed him into academic studies. From an early age, his grasp of Wird lore astounded his professors, though he showed little innate aptitude to manipulate the energies he so clearly understood. More so, it was clear to those people who chose to take notice, he cared little for academic studies. His parents, preoccupied with their own daily agendas, failed to notice their son's discontent. His professor, a Wird Weaver named Shirlee Kandel, however, saw her pupil's unhappiness. Shirlee chose to talk with Odal in the hopes of learning the reason for his melancholy. After several weeks of prodding, she finally learned that Odal wished to live a more active life. Hours spent in study in a library were acceptable for the mind — he wanted to challenge his body.

Shirlee decided, rather than continue teaching the boy lessons he cared little for, she would change her methods. Unbeknownst to his parents, Shirlee took Odal on several excursions into the forests. She taught the young boy about the world, allowing him to better understand Wird and how it interacts with life around him. This new forum was exactly what the restless boy needed. With his body stimulated, his mind once again devoured Shirlee's teachings.

One day, while showing Odal the wildlife around Cliff-Spider, the two stumbled across a pack of Leurin. Odal immediately recognized the danger they were in as the predatory pack began to circle them. Though Shirlee attempted to calm the boy, Odal began to panic. Slowly the sound of blood pounding in his ears deafened Odal as he saw with crystal clarity the pack slowly move in to attack. He could smell energy in the air as Shirlee began manipulating magic, compelling the creatures to accept the two as pack members. As the Leurin casually turned away, Odal's anxiety subsided. He noticed however, that his heightened senses remained — he could still sense things like never before. Shirlee explained to the confused boy that he had experienced an Epiphany — he was a Shard.

A few years later, after several more outings with his teacher, Odal decided he wanted to use his new powers to further explore the world around him. Through Shirlee, he learned to respect and admire the world beyond the city walls. This drew him to the newly formed Guild of Cartographers, a guild of explorers. His parents were outraged by his decision and took out their anger on Shirlee, blaming her because their son abandoned his family heritage. They had her cast out of Cliff-Spider's society. Before leaving for Cry-Star, Shirlee spoke with Odal one last time. "I do not blame you for what has happened to me. Instead, I thank you. You have reminded me how glorious our world is. I

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now have a chance to once again explore it as I did many years ago. I now go to experience a world I have forgotten." With that, the two parted ways, each to explore the world in all its wonder.

ACTIVITIES

Odal was last seen in Cry-Star, teaching a young new Horizon Strider named Danyell. Teaching the promising youth was but one of his goals that stormy evening. For decades, Odal has studied retributions and their effects on the world. He has amassed a wealth of knowledge on the damaging warps in the Tapestry, learning much of the mystical nature of Providence.

When the Grand Retribution formed near Sorrow Lake, which is now the Sunderlands, Odal investigated. He spent several months secretly spreading rumours, working to encourage the people of Sun Guard to begin evacuating before the flooding struck. Because of his advance information, thousands of lives were saved. While studying the retribution, he came across stories of Ja'tamma, a creature that presents one of the greatest potential threats to all of Providence (see *The Ecology*, page 67). After further investigation, Odal became deeply alarmed as he learned not only were the stories true, several other threats to Providence's safety were appearing in the Sunderlands. Concerned, he summoned the other Ghost Walkers to discuss what to do. They decided that Sol I'ban, because of his powers, would study why the Sunderlands breach presents such an unusual threat compared with other retributions; Odal would stay to study the various threats being created in the Sunderlands. This task is what brought him to Cry-Star that stormy evening, searching for rumours of Ja'tamma's activities and movements.

There are stories of Odal travelling to the Calm-Purity school of Wird in Cliff-Spider to speak with Tauriel Halshandra. Most Wird users recognize Tauriel as the foremost authority in Providence on retributions, having developed many theories and spells on how to mend the damage of the Yas'Wailians' manipulation of the Tapestry. Some feel that Odal passed along knowledge of retributions to Tauriel, allowing him to develop the spells that have made him famous. Those who study the Ghost Walkers however, discount this rumour, pointing out that the original Eleven have rarely involved themselves directly with the affairs of society. Others, however, feel that Odal may have discovered how to mend retributions and chosen to act despite the Ghost Walkers' tradition of remaining uninvolved. Many Horizon Striders argue if anyone would have uncovered how to mend a retribution, it would be Odal. Furthermore, though the Ghost Walkers appear to be immortal, most scholars who know of their existence do not doubt that they would die with everyone else should a retribution destroy Providence.

STRIDERS OF ODAL

The Striders of Odal are often observant characters who sense everything. They live by the word "Listen." This simple word means so much

more to them than that. For the Striders of Odal, the word means Listen – Understand – Experience – Become; sensing is but the first step that eventually leads to uncovering the greatest truths that lie beneath all things.

Striders of Odal may increase any one Increase Sense or Altered/Inhuman Sense. Note, this is only one sense – if the characters possess Increased Senses without specializing in one sense, they may only increase one of their senses by one Tier. All others remain at the normal level. For example, a character with Increased Senses, Tier 4 could have Increased Senses – Sight, Tier 5, and all others at Tier 4.

ADASHKA MINORRA THE SOULFUL

"... for all that nature by her mother wit could frame in earth."

– Adashka Minorra in a sermon to Slaywinds in reference to Providence
(Stephen Spencer 1909–)

BACKGROUND

Adashka Minorra grew up in a small village several miles away from Cliff-Spider. Her parents were simple folk who, like many others in the village, tended a farm, eking out a happy life. For most of her life, Minorra was content in her village until she realized there was more outside. At the age of eight, a caravan of travellers from another village came to trade goods. When the caravan arrived, virtually everyone gathered, greeting their old friends, and exchanging stories. While caravans came to the village many times before, this was the first time that Minorra fully grasped what it meant – there were other villages besides her own. With this realization, their stories suddenly fascinated her – she was eager to learn what was happening elsewhere.

Minorra now looked forward to the arrival of caravans with palpable anticipation. Each time her village sent out a caravan of its own, she pleaded with her parents to be allowed to accompany it. Eventually, to please her, they consented. Over the following weeks, Minorra travelled to six villages and each was an experience that she treasures to this day. Over the following years, she accompanied the trade caravans more regularly. With each trip, her fascination with people from other regions grew. For most of her life she had only known the people of her village. As she gained a greater understanding of each new village, she realized that each community had its own personality, and its own way of thinking.

A few years later when her mother died, emotions overwhelmed Minorra triggering her Epiphany, granting her powers over earth. For a few years, Minorra used her abilities in ways that made the most sense to her – helping her father with the farm. Word of her powers, however, trickled back to nearby Cliff-Spider. The first guild to learn of her was the Guild of Cartographers, who instantly sent a representative to recruit her. The guild was eager to expand its membership and sought any potential recruit.



When the Cartographer arrived in the village, Minorra was enthralled. She had not yet met anyone from Cliff-Spider, though she had heard of the grand, monolithic city. When he offered her membership in the Cartographers, she leapt at the chance. The offer presented her with the means to travel the world and visit countless other communities, especially Cliff-Spider. Also, the Cartographers offered her money that she passed along to her father allowing him to retire in comfort, something that pleased her greatly. Though leaving home was difficult, Minorra has never regretted her decision. Each new community she encounters still fills her with wonder.

ACTIVITIES

Minorra is the spiritual voice of the Ghost Walkers. She was last seen near the Slaywind settlement of True-Door in the company of a Storm-Charger, religious brethren of the Slaywind archers (see Main World Book, page 185). Her religious connections, however, go back much further than that. Minorra has long been fascinated with religion and spirituality. For several centuries, she has researched the Old Ways: the abandoned religions of Yas'Wail. She has also spent a great deal of time investigating the new rising religions such as Fenrad's and Paallau's cults.

Unknown to many, Minorra has joined, at various points in the last 500 years, the D'Shau Monks, the Slaywinds, the Kestrels, and Providence's two cults, learning their teachings. Minorra's study of religion is not a quest for the truth of whether there are gods. Minorra firmly believes that the concept of godhood is purely relative. Yas'Wailians are as to gods when compared to the smallest ant while the Elothorin appears like a god to a Yas'Wailian. Her quest for spiritual knowledge is fuelled by her belief that religion is the easiest route to understanding the minds of Yas'Wailians. While her fellow Ghost Walkers explore the world around them, Minorra has chosen to explore the world within each person. She feels that all outward answers will become clear once people can solve their inward mysteries. It is for these reasons that she has spent centuries studying religion. It is clear, however, that Minorra has uncovered several religious secrets believed lost from Yas'Wail, most importantly the Storm-Chargers. The Slaywinds and D'Shau Monks pray that the sighting of a Storm-Charger with Minorra near True-Door was accurate. Both groups see difficulties on the horizon for the Yas'Wailians and they know that the people will need spiritual help and guidance in the coming tumultuous years. With the aid of the Storm-Chargers, the D'Shau and Slaywinds feel that they will be able to forge a path for society, leading them to salvation and safety.

Aside from the rumours of her involvement with the various religious cults and groups in Providence, many believe Minorra has spent time studying with each of the Lost Tribes. The rumours revolve mostly around the White Crow and the Serpenkine, potentially the two most religious of the Tribes. Many suspect the rumours of her studies with the Serpenkine are accurate due to their treaty with the Alliance of Kings. Few, however, give credence to the

belief that the White Crow allowed her to study with them; the Crow have been enemies of the Yas'Wailians since the first encounter with them.

STRIDERS OF THE MINORRA

The Striders of Minorra tend to be people who are interested in religion, spirituality and the like. Their interest in faith drives their desire to explore. Though they may not be directly interested in religion, they often explore religious temples and shrines, learning more about their people through their discoveries. The Striders of Minorra and Striders of Lanois often get into lengthy discussions about the psychology of the Yas'Wailian mind, discussing the ramifications of politics and religion, and the similarities of the two.

The Striders of Minorra may increase any one earth-based Shard power by one Tier. They usually also possess a variety of religious, history and psychology skills that aid them to understand religion.

CANELLE FIRE-TONGUE THE WILD

"I am Fire. My other elements, I give to baser life."

– Canelle Fire-Tongue upon learning of her Shard abilities
(William Shakespeare 1564-1616)

BACKGROUND

Canelle Fire-Tongue grew up in the harsh surroundings of a Free-Tribe located in Athrin's Web. From a young age, it was clear that Fire-Tongue possessed an adventurous spirit. Once she could walk, the young Gargoyle would wander the small community, getting into plenty of trouble. Once her wings fully developed, granting her access to the air, there was little holding her back from roaming where she wished. Though her parents attempted to prevent her from wandering too far from the settlement, life in a Free-Tribe taught them Fire-Tongue must fend for herself to survive – they could not be there for her all the time.

Ironically, her dangerous expeditions into the surrounding mountains saved Fire-Tongue from death. One day, while the young Gargoyle explored caves and valleys in the region, a warden scout party attacked her village. Though the Free-Tribe's warriors were veterans, they were no match for the Wird-enhanced warden guards and their Ravager partners. In a brutal battle, everyone from the small village was slaughtered. Fire-Tongue returned from her foray in the mountains as the warden patrol was departing. Fury overcame her at the sight of her murdered family and friends. She watched as the remaining wardens turned to deal with the surviving youth. Although possessed by rage, Fire-Tongue merely watched the warriors close in on her, preparing for the kill. As the nearest warrior raised his sword, Fire-Tongue calmly said "I am Fire. My other elements, I give to baser life." The warden hesitated for an



instant at the girl's perplexing comment, a hesitation that proved fatal. Suddenly her rage which was screaming for release exploded outward in a burst of flame. She watched, detached from her body, as fire lanced from her fingertips, burning through the attacking wardens and Ravagers as though they were made of parchment. In no time at all, her assailants lay smoldering at her feet, a testament to her epiphany.

Bent on revenge, Fire-Tongue left her village shortly afterwards, intent on burning Bone-Wail to the ground. On the way, however, she met with a travelling Kestrel, a Gargoyle named Drog. Drog saw in the young woman a rage that threatened to engulf her. Fearing for the young girl, he decided to travel with her in the hopes of helping her. In their travels, Drog spoke of the Kestrels' pursuit of Becoming Fire: the goal of enlightenment (see the Kestrels: Becoming Fire). As a Gargoyle whose skin bore fiery patterns, as well as her developing Shard ability to wield flame, Fire-Tongue believed she was somehow in touch with fire. To Drog's delight, she decided to join the Kestrels in the hopes of gaining a complete understanding of how fire intertwined with her fate. She also hoped to learn the Kestrels' fighting skills, which she would bring to bear against the wardens of Bone-Wail. While learning the ways of the Kestrels however, the rage within Fire-Tongue subsided as she gained enlightenment. Drog was doubly delighted when she abandoned her vendetta against Bone-Wail.

It was with the Kestrels that Fire-Tongue met Dane Lanois who had close ties with one of the Kestrels' Shojans, their keeps' leaders. While speaking with the young woman, Fire-Tongue grew interested in the Horizon Striders and chose to accompany Dane in his travels. Fire-Tongue eventually joined Dane's growing group of Horizon Striders, though she has always considered herself to be a Kestrel as well as a Horizon Strider.

ACTIVITIES

Canelle Fire-Tongue is the most active of the Ghost Walkers in her quest for answers. While the others are patient and wait for solutions to become clear, she prefers to vigorously search for the clues needed to reveal the answers. Fire-Tongue's fiery personality exemplifies her lack of patience.

When the Sky-Torrent Spire erupted, creating a volcano at one of its ends, she knew it was her's to explore. People witnessed her walking into the lava pits, crawling into molten tunnels, and combing the volcano for its answers. What is disturbing is that she is not the only one rumoured to play among the magma. Fire-Tongue has uncovered a race of creatures living within the volcano, seemingly impervious to its temperatures and flames. She has spoken with Mikhail, the authority on retributions, several times. It disturbs her to know the Sunderlands, the other Grand Retribution in Providence, is also generating new life forms. It is more disturbing to know that these life forms all appear to be terribly dangerous to Providence's native flora and fauna. With this

in mind, Fire-Tongue is studying the new creatures, known as Magma Chameleons, in an attempt to determine how much danger they represent. She is also searching for a way to extinguish the volcano. She knows that to do so requires that she first mend the damage to the Tapestry, something that even Mikhail is incapable of accomplishing. As such, she is well aware that she must learn a great deal more about the volcano's Grand Retribution. If her past is any indication, she will attack this new dilemma with the same intensity she applies to everything in her life.

STRIDERS OF FIRE-TONGUE

The Striders of Fire-Tongue are almost hot-headed in their pursuit of knowledge. In some cases, this epithet becomes literal as these Striders are often the first to venture into the unknown; others often remain behind, still debating and discussing potential problems. While this comes across as reckless, it is actually a result of the apprenticeship of these Striders. The most important lesson Striders of Fire-Tongue pass along to their pupils is how to evaluate quickly and accurately situations and make the best choice in the shortest time possible – drawn out deliberations delay the act of discovery.

The Striders of Fire-Tongue may raise any one fire-based Shard ability by one Tier.

JAUNDUE NOVEK THE NOMAD

"Providence is whatever you see, whichever way you move."

– A common phrase spoken by Jaundue Novek

(Lucan 39–65)

BACKGROUND

Jaundue grew up in the gladiator pits of the Merchant Bands' city of Haak San Bazaa. Both of her parents were warriors who made their living fighting for rich merchant audiences. In this unlikely forum, the two Hawks found love and joined in marriage after a brief courtship. A few months after they wed, they conceived Jaundue. When the managers of the pits discovered that Novek's mother, Estel, was pregnant, they removed her from the active roster for the security of her child. While violence was a common attraction of the pits, enraged animals were usually responsible for the bloodshed. On rare occasions, the gladiators were pitted against each other in vicious battles, though they were never to the death. The owners knew if their gladiators died off, they would lose their resource.

Shortly after giving birth, Estel was eager to return to the fights she so enjoyed. Since there was no longer any harm to the child, the owners agreed. Her first battle was against two sedated Leurin; an easy kill for the accomplished warrior. They had decided to ease their warrior back into the heat of battle since she had been away for several months. Estel was outraged

by the slight and insisted that she be allowed to face normal opponents. Because the audience had also noticed the beasts were sluggish, and expressed its displeasure, the organizers decided Esstel would take part in a real battle.

Her next battle was against two criminals under death sentences. As had happened several times before, the owners of the gladiator pits had purchased the criminals' death rights to pit them against one of their veteran warriors in a death match. The audience watched as Esstel cut the first man to pieces, ending his life quickly. As the crowd roared their approval, they watched the second man move, obviously a more skilful fighter. Sikal, Novek's father, however, watched in horror as he realized his wife was out of shape. While she had remained active during her pregnancy, she was not in top fighting condition. He knew in an instant that she was in serious danger as the criminal moved in for the kill. Sikal leapt into the air, intent on saving his wife but acted a moment too late. As he swept down on the fight, he watched as the criminal pierced his wife's heart with a stake, instantly killing her. The criminal did not live to savour his victory as Sikal cleaved his head from his body in one motion.

In the years that followed, Sikal raised his new daughter alone. Though other gladiators helped in raising Novek, Sikal shouldered the burden of parenthood alone, and hated himself for it. When she reached maturity, Sikal used every ounce of money he could muster to purchase her freedom. Since the gladiator pit managers no longer owned her rights, Novek could leave her life in the warrior pits behind. She promised her father that she would find enough money to buy his fighting rights and save him from the pits as he had saved her. Novek began searching Providence, looking to gather the money needed to buy her father's freedom. It was then that she underwent her Epiphany and came to the attention of the Guild of Cartographers. When they offered her membership within the guild, she instantly agreed. The offer provided her with sufficient money to be able to free her father. Upon returning to Haak San Bazaa, however, she learned that her father had died shortly after she had left. He left behind his weapon for her, a superb scythe, a weapon she carries to this day.

ACTIVITIES

Those that see Jaundue Novek never see her in one place for long. It is rare for someone to spot this mercurial Ghost Walker, for her travels take her into the heart of the Deep, a region most people avoid. Several centuries ago, Nyshelle Glaier, a fellow Walker, commented that it would be impossible for a person to see all that the Deep has to offer. Novek took that as a challenge. For her, the concept of overcoming the impossible is one of her driving goals. Since then, she has come to realize that Nyshelle may have been correct – the Deep is vast beyond anyone's imagining. As she races from one bend of the Deep to the next, she discovers hundreds of new flora and fauna, each one more magnificent than the last. However, with

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each new discovery, she sees the world anew. Novek learned that Nyselle was not implying that it was impossible to simply see everything that the Deep has to offer. Because each new discovery enables a person to see something new in even the most mundane items, one must constantly rediscover things to fully see, and to fully understand them. Finally grasping this lesson, Novek has learned to see the world anew every time she looks at it. However, she, as do the other Ghost Walkers in their different ways, longs for the day when she will see the world in its entirety and understand its every aspect. Initially, a desire to see everything in the Deep drove Novek's travels. Now, her desire to understand drives her continued explorations of a forest she already knows intimately.

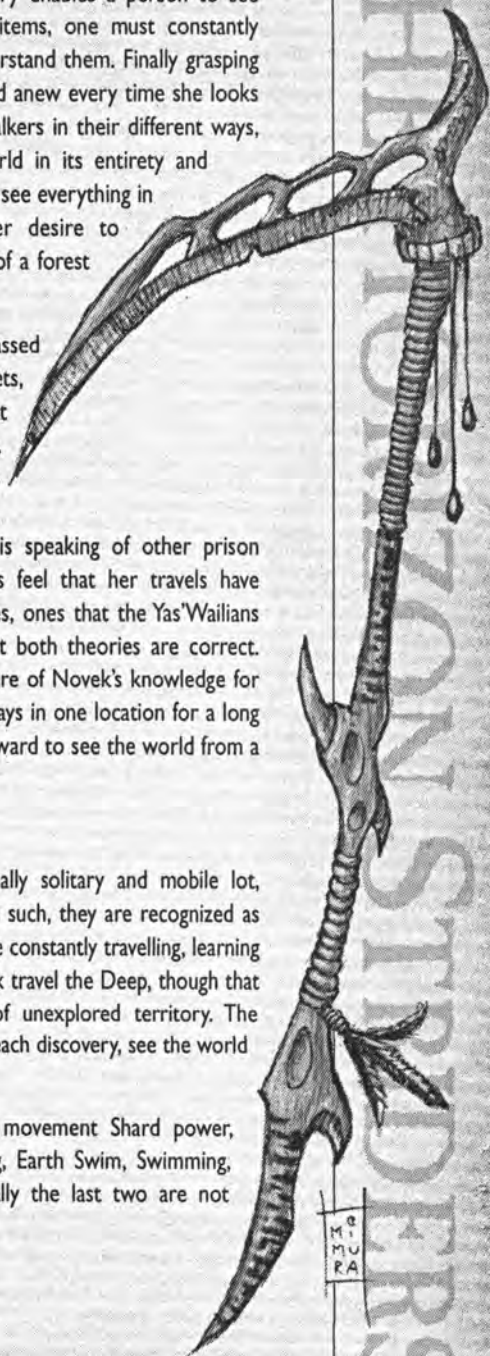
Many people feel that Novek's unsurpassed knowledge of the Deep has revealed many secrets, both terrifying and thrilling. A statement that interests many people is "We are not alone. There are others." Novek never fully explains herself, except to the other Ghost Walkers.

Some people have hypothesized that Novek is speaking of other prison colonies still hidden within the Deep. Others feel that her travels have brought her into contact with other Lost Tribes, ones that the Yas'Wailians have yet to encounter; a rare few suspect that both theories are correct. Regardless, it is difficult to get a complete picture of Novek's knowledge for she has a constant desire to move and rarely stays in one location for a long time. The nomadic Walker constantly moves forward to see the world from a different angle – to see it anew once again.

STRIDERS OF NOVEK

The Striders of Novek are an exceptionally solitary and mobile lot, preferring to remain constantly on the move. As such, they are recognized as the best navigators within Providence for they are constantly travelling, learning the lay of the land. Most of the Striders of Novek travel the Deep, though that is mostly because it is the largest expanse of unexplored territory. The common teaching among these Striders is: "with each discovery, see the world anew, constantly learn and relearn."

Novek's Striders may increase any one movement Shard power, including the following: Flight, Leaping, Running, Earth Swim, Swimming, Glider Membranes or Wings (though technically the last two are not considered Shard abilities).



RODEL HUEIT THE CURIOUS

"Rise up and bathe the world in light"

– Rodel Hueit to his first apprentice, and they to each of their apprentices afterwards

(William Wordsworth 1770-1850)

BACKGROUND

Like so many other Pure Doves, Hueit was going to become an official within the courts of Cliff-Spider. From an early age, he learned the administrative skills that would see him through a successful career as a government official. Hueit thought he was content, living a comfortable life. When he joined the government, working as an aide to the prince, Xoran Tura of Troupial Hawk, everything changed. The two young men quickly fell in love. Although society generally tolerates same-sex relationships, the courts frown upon this and a mixing of Troupials – especially when it involved a would-be king. Also, Xoran's parents had already arranged for his marriage to the daughter of another Hawk House, a move to strengthen his position on the throne. As such, the two were forced to keep their love a secret. Though Hueit was happier than he had ever been, he felt a great sorrow that he could not freely express his love. Over the following years, Hueit grew further disenchanted with the political life. While it introduced him to a man he loved dearly, it also ensured that he could not enjoy a life with him.

A few years later, Xoran went on a voyage of discovery. Like many royal Hawks and Eagles, Xoran's parents sent him into the wilds of Providence to learn about himself, and to become a man. Hueit accompanied Xoran along with a small entourage of guards and physicians. Over the course of the following month, Hueit saw an entirely new world, one that thrived with life and vibrancy, one that did not dictate the emotions of people. He came to love the world outside the spire walls of Cliff-Spider.

Upon their return to the city, nobles threw countless parties celebrating Xoran's passage into manhood. Hueit watched as a whirlwind engulfed his lover, slowly pulling the two further apart. All hope of reclaiming the love the two shared ended when Hueit watched Xoran wed his bride. Hueit realized in that instant that their trip into the wilds had changed Xoran as well. Where Hueit grew to appreciate the wonders outside Cliff-Spider, Xoran became the prince his parents wanted him to be. That evening, heartbroken and alone, Hueit underwent his Epiphany, gaining the ability to manipulate light in fantastic ways.

Hueit decided, upon gaining his Shard abilities, that he no longer wished to remain where he was. Everything around him filled Hueit with sadness, disgusting him. Hueit went to the Guild of Cartographers the next day to join the explorers. He decided that if he could not be with his first love, he would spend the rest of his life with his second love.



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ACTIVITIES

Few things within Providence are mundane and simple – it is a world of wonders and majesty. Among the most spectacular sights in the world are the stalactite–stalagmite towers that reach clear across Providence – the spires. Sometimes referred to as the God's Teeth, an homage to their magnitude, the four towers are the largest geographical structures within the world. The Crysarius Bridge, the Sky–Torrent Bridge, the Moaning Bridge and the Great Bridge – measuring several dozen miles in diameter and hundreds of miles in length, these arches of rock conceal more than people realize. Upon close inspection, thousands of caves are seen covering the miles of rock. Each cave holds hundreds of mysteries, new pieces of the puzzle that is Providence. Rodel Hueit has spent decades exploring the spires, attempting to solve its mysteries.

Though Hueit is fascinated with secrets hidden in the dark crevices of the spires' caves, his present goal is to learn more about Providence's sun. The sun lies in the centre of the Great Bridge, lanced by the pillar of rock. Hundreds of explorers have attempted to fly to the sun, only to turn back from the intense heat or never to return. Hueit believes that by approaching the sun through the Great Bridge, he will avoid the heat and winds that have blocked the other explorers. The various discoveries he has made along the way however, have distracted him from his original quest. Hueit fumes when the other Ghost Walkers jest that he lives up to his Dove nature of being distracted by shiny objects. He retorts that he must explore each new encounter to the fullest, saying, "We must rise up and bathe the world in light. We must push back the dark veil of ignorance." It is this devotion to exploring the world around him, he insists, which has waylaid him from his ultimate goal. Ellane Todillo often shatters his argument by dropping a shiny gem, distracting him from his speech, to the amusement of the others.

STRIDERS OF HUEIT

Few of the Striders of Hueit are as interested in learning about Providence's sun as Hueit is. Exploration tends not to be the strength of the Striders of Hueit – they are the most renowned storytellers among the Horizon Striders. Their primary goal is not discovery, but sharing their knowledge. For them, it is more important to push back the boundaries of the unknown, to enlighten the people of Providence. The simplest way to accomplish this is through discovery. Some of them, however, travel the world looking to encounter other Striders simply to exchange stories, and to help spread information as much as possible. They feel by exchanging information, they help the process of discovery. It is only by knowing what is happening elsewhere that people can fully appreciate what happens near them.

The Striders of Hueit may increase any one light–based ability by one Tier.

SOL I'BAN THE HUMBLE

"Nothing is greater to one than one's self."

– Sol I'ban to a Fallen child

(Walt Whitman 1819–1892)

BACKGROUND

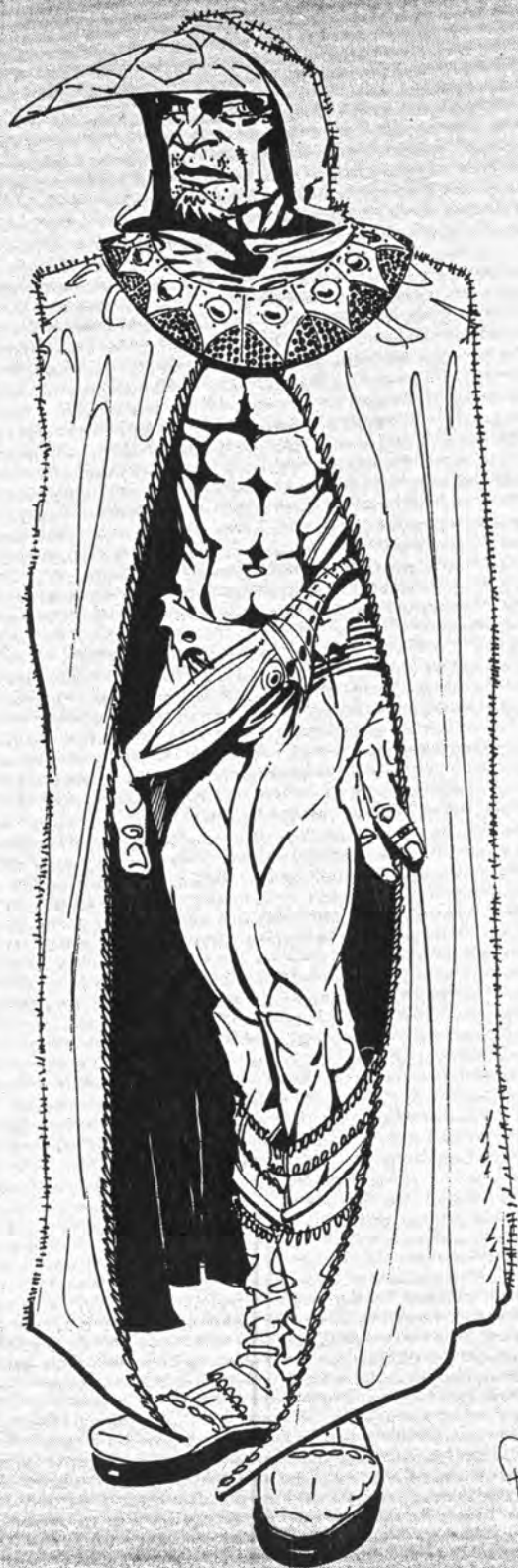
Sol, like so many others, grew up on the streets of Cliff-Spider, living a life of poverty. Sol's Pure Eagle parents abandoned him shortly after his birth, choosing not to live with the stigma of having a Fallen as their child. Rather than commit infanticide like so many others did at the time, his parents gave Sol to a servant, who worked for them. Moira was an elderly woman who, because of a childhood injury, could not give birth. Sol's parents were aware she felt incomplete because of her inability to be a mother. Knowing they could trust her to raise their child, they asked Moira to take Sol as her own. They told her to raise him and never speak of his true origins to anyone. In return for her silence, Sol's parents gave her enough money to move to Freetown and start a new life. Eager for both a child to call her own and ending her life of servitude, Moira immediately accepted.

Life within Freetown was by no means easier for Moira, but she accepted the challenge gratefully. She was happy to live this new life. While she no longer lived in the servant's quarters of a Pure mansion, she could now lay claim to her own home. Despite the difficulties, Moira worked hard to raise Sol well. Within two years however, her money ran out, so she went back to Sol's parents to ask for more assistance. The couple greeted the aging Dove with open hostility. While she never considered them to be friends, she always thought of them as kind people. Before she could justify her need for more money, her former patrons exploded in a fit of rage. They refused to acknowledge Sol was their child and ordered Moira removed from their home immediately. They told her if she returned, she would be killed on sight. She was unable to do anything since the couple was Pure, granting them the right to threaten her thus. As such, Moira fled and never returned; she knew she was now completely alone.

Without any financial assistance, Moira was forced to look for work within Freetown to support herself and Sol. Since he was only two years old, she had a serious problem to deal with – she couldn't leave the boy alone nor could she bring him to work. Eventually, as desperation set in, Moira turned to prostitution to make the money she needed. Over the following years, Moira grew to resent Sol and the life he had forced upon her. The resentment grew to the point where she became abusive, beating him for any reason she could find. At the age of eight, in a particularly violent mood, Moira told Sol she hated him. "You're not even my child! You're the refuse of noble scum! I wish your parents had killed you instead of punishing me!"

That evening, Sol ran away from home and began a life on the streets. Sol adopted the last name I'ban, the Old Yas'Wailian word for rejected, as a

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reminder of his origin. When he underwent his Epiphany, he finally found his way out of the pit of hatred he lived in. He quickly enlisted in the Guild of Cartographers, leaving his past behind him.

ACTIVITIES

Sol I'ban is a Fallen Ghost Walker, something he is now quite proud of. In the early years of his life, I'ban felt oppressed because of his lack of wings and the position society placed him in. He wore this feeling of resentment on his sleeve, making the other Horizon Striders question if he should be in the group. His reason for joining was not to explore Providence but to escape a life of poverty and hatred. Dane, a fellow member, however, saw something within the young man which made him insistent that I'ban remain with them. Over the following years, decades, and eventually centuries, I'ban has realized one's standing within society is not as important as one's self worth. In his years, he has seen Pure rulers die unhappy and alone – he has seen the most wretched Fallen carry themselves with pride and joy, happy for the little things in life. Each of these images taught I'ban that his lack of wings had no bearing on who or what he was. What was important was that he live his life true to himself and not allow the opinions of others to dissuade him. Since that realization, I'ban now sees the world as a better place. He is now the most respected among his fellow Ghost Walkers, eagerly encouraging the others in their every effort.

I'ban, curious about the increasing number of Fallen and Shard births among the Yas'Wailians, has begun studying the various Lost Tribes. I'ban believes that the Fallen and Shards represent the Yas'Wailians' adaptation to the world of Providence. Green People adapted by linking to nature, the Serpenkine assimilated as reptilian forms, and Swarm Dancers as insects. I'ban suspects that the Yas'Wailians' adaptation is the growth of superhuman abilities and the loss of their wings. He also freely admits that if his theory is correct, he will happily watch as the caste system that he still despises is abolished. In his opinion, the Fallen may represent the future of Providence, and not a legacy of shame.

At present, I'ban is investigating the Green People in the Algerra Swamp. With his aquatic powers, he has come to learn that the Green People's home city is a dual city – part of the city is on the top of the swamp while part of it is beneath the swamp's waters. Since the Green People can breathe through their symbiosis with plants, they can easily exist underwater. Rumours also exist that the home city of the Green People is not the only underwater colony that I'ban has encountered in his travels. People whisper that he has encountered another underwater society that lives farther out in the Algerra Sea, possibly close aquatic cousins of the Green People. No one has confirmed the truth of this rumour, though many explorers have attempted to find the submerged city, hoping to cement their name in the records of history.

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STRIDERS OF I'BAN

I'ban counts the most Fallen Striders among his apprenticeship lineage. Those Fallen who do become Striders of I'ban are taught, among the other skills they require, that being Fallen is not a crutch or hindrance. It is simply a part of who they are, though it does not define them. As such, the focus of many Striders of I'ban is on discovering why Fallen and Shards are born. They want to learn why Yas'Wailians began to change, a mystery that has puzzled countless scholars since it began. Present theories suggest that the changes occurring among Yas'Wailians are the effects of inbreeding during their incarceration into prison camps, though many Striders of I'ban suspect this is not true.

A Strider of I'ban may increase any one water-based Shard ability by one Tier.

VODUN KALESTE THE SILENT

...silence...

— Kaleste to all except his fellow Ghost Walkers

BACKGROUND

Vodun Kaleste was a celebrity in Cliff-Spider's high society before his 10th birthday. The young Hawk was blessed with a voice that moved even the hardest soldiers to tears. Recognizing the talent their son possessed, Kaleste's parents petitioned to have him accepted into the Juddial Academy, the most prestigious performance academy in Cliff-Spider. Kaleste's acceptance into Juddial stunned everyone since the Academy is exclusive to Swans. Kaleste's voice, however, forced the administrators of the school to overlook his Troupial.

Over the following years, Kaleste established a name for himself among Cliff-Spider's elite as the most sought after singer. The young boy sang before nobles of all sorts, even Lord Juliard Ras'haad on the day of his coronation. It was on that fateful day, before all of Cliff-Spider's ruling elite that Kaleste's life changed forever. As he sang, the young boy felt a pain behind his eyes, a headache unlike any other he had ever experienced. Suddenly, mid-song, the pain exploded like thunder, cascading through his body and eventually exploding out of his mouth in a deafening blast of sound that shattered glass and stone alike. Debris erupted in the room while people fell to their knees in pain from the explosive outburst. Miraculously, everyone escaped serious injury, apart from minor cuts and bruises. Kaleste, however, lay in a fetal ball upon the stage, traumatized by his Epiphany.

Mercifully, the newly crowned king ordered his physicians to tend to the young boy. Over the following years, Kaleste lived in the palace while the king's royal doctors attempted to heal his fractured psyche. Though physically he was



fine, Kaleste refused to speak after the incident. Lord Juliard continued to support the young boy, knowing he had intended no harm when his Epiphany struck. When the Guild of Cartographers formed in Cliff-Spider, Lord Juliard saw an opportunity to provide the young boy with the help and support his medical staff clearly could not provide. While his physicians were highly skilled, they lacked the experience in dealing with Shards. The Cartographers, however, were all Shards, Juliard requested an audience with the Cartographers' Guild Master, personally petitioning for Kaleste's acceptance into the guild. To no one's surprise, the guild quickly accepted the boy.

Within the Cartographers, Kaleste received the counselling he required. While their assistance helped heal the boy's mental anguish, he still refused to speak. At the same time, Kaleste learned to enjoy being a Cartographer, exploring the world and its wonders. He spent countless hours training, developing the skills he required to undertake his new, chosen profession. After a few years, Kaleste was deemed healed, even though he did not speak. However, by that time he had also earned a reputation as one of the best Cartographers within the guild. It was this reputation that drew Dane Lanois to Kaleste when the Eagle was forming the Horizon Striders.

ACTIVITIES

The silent Ghost Walker Vodun Kaleste is the most elusive of the original Eleven by far. With his ability to utterly control sound and his exceptional skills at stealth, he is capable of passing within a few feet of people without their ever realizing it. This has fostered rumours of Kaleste spying on the activities of Kings and Queens, Wardens and Regents. Parents tell rowdy children that if they misbehave when their parents are away, Kaleste will know for he sees all and is everywhere. The truth is far less devious than all of that. While Kaleste is the stealthiest of the Ghost Walkers, his interests are not in the present day events of Providence's people. Kaleste's fascination lies in Providence's past.

While exceptionally few people know of his activities, several Horizon Striders are aware that Kaleste spends most of his time searching for and studying lost colonies. He looks for new clues detailing the lives of Yas'Wailians from the past both in Providence and on Yas'Wail. People whisper he has uncovered everything within Weeping-Rock and Stone-Tree as well as the lost colonies of Sun-Spar and Wild Grove. They go on to speculate that he has also uncovered other colonies Yas'Wailians are unaware of yet. The truth of these rumours is not far off. Vodun Kaleste has visited most of Providence's lost colonies. Stories circulate among Horizon Striders telling of Kaleste helping Striders who ran afoul in some of Providence's abandoned cities. Kaleste guided the lost explorers through unseen passageways, confident of his way. The stories hint that Kaleste knows the lay of these ancient structures better than those who built them.

Other stories gossip that with his stealthy abilities, Kaleste has slipped into the libraries of the Alliance of Kings, the Merchant Bands and Bone-Wail – even Warden Elarian's personal library. Some feel Kaleste has even penetrated the barriers of Aerie, delving into the White Crow's libraries. If true, he gained access to the largest and oldest source of knowledge in Providence. The truth of this is difficult to gauge for Kaleste does not speak with anyone. His fellow Ghost Walkers understand him sufficiently that there is little need for verbal communication, though others are at a loss when attempting to understand this enigmatic man.

Vodun Kaleste also has not personally taken an apprentice in over 300 years. It is therefore unclear just how much of Providence's past Kaleste has uncovered in his journeys.

STRIDERS OF KALESTE

The Horizon Striders of Kaleste are the most varied in purpose and goal. Unlike most other Striders who tend to follow a similar goal to their Ghost Walker, the Striders of the Silent are usually just explorers. Where other Horizon Striders are more focused in where they direct their energies, the Striders of Kaleste go where uncovered secrets direct them. If their discoveries point them down the path of religion, that is the route they follow. If it points them down the path of history, they will follow it diligently. For them, it matters not what discovery is made, but where it leads them.

Kaleste's Striders may increase any one sound-related power by one Tier.

DANE LANOIS THE OBSERVANT

"The Yas'Wailian is by nature a political animal."

– Dane Lanois in explaining why he studies politics.

(Aristotle 384–322 BC)

BACKGROUND

Dane Lanois was born to lead. From a young age, Lanois's parents raised their son for the throne of Cry-Star. The queen at that time was near the end of her reign and had failed to birth any heirs. Therefore, she would have to name someone outside of her immediate family as the heir to the throne. The royal families, anticipating the coming political machinations, began forging their alliances early to place their candidates in good position to assume the throne. Most historians agree that Dane Lanois was the primary candidate for the position. His parents were exceptionally influential within Cry-Star. Lanois's mother was Mira Glaier, a noble Swan with a long history in Cry-Star. His father, Gavin Lanois, was a leader within Cry-Star's Shredder unit, the city's elite military warriors. With Mira's political background and Gavin's illustrious military career, it was simple for them to secure the backing of several other powerful Houses, most importantly, the queen's own House.

No one, however, ever asked Lanois if he wished to be king. Though the young man exemplified the Eagles' reputation as leaders, possessing abundant charisma and intelligence, he lacked the desire. His Eagle nature, however, ensured that he enjoyed being in control of situations. It was this exact nature that made him dislike the notion of becoming king. It was his feeling that when one ascends to the throne, they lose all control over their lives, becoming nothing more than puppets to the society they supposedly control.

Shortly after his fifteenth birthday, he underwent an Epiphany, gaining the ability to change his shape at will. He kept this information secret for several years for people had mixed feeling about the recent appearance of Shards. Some people saw it as proof of the Yas'Wailians' superiority. Other people, many of them nobles, viewed Shards with fear and suspicion. They felt that the people who possessed fantastic powers presented a threat to their political power. How could a noble control one who could crush rocks with their bare hands?

Two years later, Lord Juliard, the King of Cliff-Spider, decreed that Shards possessed a place within Yas'Wailian society – conveniently beneath the nobility and military. Upon hearing of Juliard's declaration, Cry-Star quickly followed suit. With the arrival of the new Gifted caste, Shards began to band together in groups that eventually became the guilds. The newly formed Guild of Cartographers, the first group of Shards to assume the title of guild, intrigued Lanois. Within this group, he saw powerful people who controlled their destinies as they saw fit. While the Shards were beneath the nobles in social structure, they basically did what they wanted. He looked at his life and saw his control over it continually slipping away as his parents pushed him closer and closer to Cry-Star's throne. The queen of Cry-Star was aging and many people felt that she would pass away within the next few years. When she did, Lanois believed he would become king and lose any remaining control he possessed over his life. He decided his course of action in an instant.

Lanois left Cry-Star without a word to anyone. Though many people searched for him, his ability to change his appearance ensured they never found him. Eventually, when the queen finally passed, another assumed the throne and the search for Lanois ceased.

The young Eagle excelled within the Cartographers. He was a well-trained warrior and quickly learned the survival skills he required. More so, his skills as a leader allowed him to bring together a diverse group of people, each one possessing abilities to complement the others. This group eventually earned the name Horizon Striders.

ACTIVITIES

Lanois is easily the most political of the Ghost Walkers. He constantly urges the Ghost Walkers, and by extension, the Horizon Striders, to become involved in the political development of the Yas'Wailians. Though he did not wish to be involved with them in his youth, he now feels the Ghost Walkers



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should participate. The others, however, have always disagreed with him, feeling that the explorers should not become involved – it is best for them to maintain their focus on discovery. Though it pains him, he has chosen to comply with the consensus of the others. While the Ghost Walkers may have different views of how best to deal with things, they have always conferred on important issues, reached agreements, and worked as one. He will not step outside the bounds the Ghost Walkers willingly set for themselves until the day he convinces his comrades they must aid the Yas'Wailians in their social and political growth.

Though he will not involve himself with the political development of any of Providence's three major governments, Lanois has spent most of his time studying their methods. With his ability to assume any shape he can imagine, it is a simple matter for him to gain entry into any location he desires. He has used this ability to be, literally in some cases, the fly on the wall, witnessing important debates of government. Lanois was present at virtually all the Yas'Wailians' important political moments; the formation of the Alliance of Kings, the creation of the Merchant Alliance, the exile of Jenobay, and the alliance reached between Regent Caiylus and Warden Elarian, to name a few. Always abiding by the Ghost Walkers decisions, he has simply watched, not becoming involved in any way.

Though most Horizon Striders discount the rumors, some, however, suspect that Lanois has not remained as inactive as he would have his fellow Ghost Walkers believe. A few Striders even suspect that he brought about the alliance between Caiylus and Elarian, posing as one to the other. He thereby assured the two governments would work together for the common good of all of Providence's people. With his shape-shifting abilities, it is a simple matter for him to pose as anyone he wishes. Furthermore, his unparalleled knowledge of politics makes it almost effortless for him to ensure the agreement of both parties to something they normally would never agree to. Many suggest that Elarian and Caiylus could never come to an agreement on their own, lending credence to this theory. There is no proof, however, that Lanois was involved in this pact. Since neither Caiylus nor Elarian have spoken of the agreement since, no one can figure out if Caiylus's story matches Elarian's.

Despite some rumours to the contrary, Lanois insists that he is simply studying the machinations of Providence's governments, remaining uninvolved in their workings. The other Ghost Walkers are content to take him at his word – they have trusted him for 500 years, so it likely will not change now.

STRIDERS OF LANOIS

People are most likely to see the Striders of Lanois within a city. Unlike most of the other Horizon Striders, they are interested in exploring the political machinations of the Yas'Wailians in an attempt to better understand the psyche of the people. They feel that by uncovering the motivations behind political action,

one will discover how the Yas'Wailian society is progressing. Through this understanding, they believe, the mystery of the future becomes clear.

Striders of Lanois may increase any one of the following Alter Body – Own powers by one Tier: Change Shape, Increase/Decrease Density or Increase/Decrease Size. The Striders of Lanois often possess a wide range of political skills as well as the normal Horizon Strider skills.

NYSHELLE GLAIER THE FORLORN

"I am the family face. Flesh perishes. I live on."

– Nyshelle Glaier upon the death of her husband and only true love
(Thomas Hardy 1840–1928)

BACKGROUND

The beautiful Nyshelle Glaier grew up in sharp contrast to the stereotypical norm of the Swans. While most other Swans around her became musicians, actors or politicians, Glaier embraced the life of a warrior. Glaier's mother, Mira, was a noble woman in the courts of Cry-Star. Her father, Gavin, was a proud Eagle from the military's elite unit called the Shredders. The two met when Mira and other nobles travelled to Cliff-Spider for diplomatic negotiations. On the voyage, the caravan ran afoul of some of Providence's native threats. Gavin and his fellow Shredders answered the threat instantly, swords and armour glinting in the noonday sun. Mira instantly fell in love with the Eagle, a love her Swan nature refused to ignore. After a brief courtship, Mira won the heart of Gavin and the two wed.

Their first child was Dane Lanois, a young man whom they groomed to become king. Glaier was born three years later. Unlike her brother, Glaier's fate was left to her whim and desire. Growing up in an environment where Dane was training to be a warrior-king, learning from their father Gavin, she became interested in the military arts. She would spend hours practicing with Dane, each one becoming an accomplished fighter. Mira and Gavin thought nothing of the two training together, viewing it like sibling bonding. For many years, Dane was the superior fighter, being three years her senior and possessing the powerful physique of a Pure Eagle. As time passed, however, Glaier's skill surpassed Dane's innate advantage. While Dane learned politics, etiquette and other courtly skills necessary for a king, Glaier was not similarly distracted – she could focus on the warrior's skills. By the age of 11, she became the better warrior, regularly beating her older brother.

The following year, Dane underwent his Epiphany, unbeknownst to anyone, even Glaier, his closest friend. The following year, Glaier underwent an Epiphany of her own. In a sparring match, Dane began using his Shard abilities to tip the tables in a fight he was losing. As he pressed the advantage his superhuman powers granted him, frustration overtook Glaier. In a

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sudden burst of anger, the youngster exploded in a fury of blows, severely wounding her brother by accident. Glaier stood stunned for an instant, watching her brother fall to the floor, blood pouring from many wounds. Before she could act, his wounds healed before her eyes. The two secreted themselves away to discuss and figure out what had happened. They learned that Glaier was a Shard with enhanced physical abilities, stronger and faster than either person had heard of before. With this discovery, the two grew closer together.

The following year, Dane disappeared without a word or trace. Glaier was heartbroken and searched long and hard for her best friend. Though the other family members eventually ended their search for Dane, Glaier always kept an eye out for her brother. One day, several years later, a stranger approached the young woman, now a Shredder like her father before her. Glaier instantly recognized something in the man, and something about the way he moved; suddenly Glaier realized the man was her brother in a different form. In a long conversation, Dane explained why he left and that he was now a member of the Guild of Cartographers, building a group he called the Horizon Striders. He wanted Glaier to come and join him in exploring the world. Though Glaier hated the idea of leaving the Shredders, she found the thought of using her skills to travel Providence's wilds at her brother's side appealing – it felt right. She resigned her post in the Shredders, revealed that she was a Shard, and explained that she was going to join the Cartographers. It is a choice she never regretted.

ACTIVITIES

Glaier, more than her brother Dane, has assumed the role of leadership among the Ghost Walkers. Where Dane is a natural leader who does not enjoy the role, Glaier is a skilful leader who instinctively takes the position. While there is no official structure to the Horizon Striders, nor the Ghost Walkers, the others will often defer to the opinion of Glaier and Dane.

Many decades ago, while leading half of the group, Glaier played an instrumental role in the discovery of Aerie and the White Crow. Something else however, made the discovery possible. A creature led Glaier and her companions on a cat and mouse chase through the farthest reaches of the Deep, eventually bringing them to Aerie. After the near fatal encounter with the White Crow, the creature reappeared, leading the injured Horizon Striders back to civilization. Glaier however, was obsessed with learning more about the creature that had manipulated them so. Mikhail had assured her that the creature was not Yas'Wailian in form – it was an enormous animal of some sort. After she recovered from her wounds, Glaier set out in search of the elusive beast, intent on learning what it was. After some time, she found the animal's lair and called the other Horizon Striders together to discuss what to do. In her search, she came to the conclusion that the animal was an Elothorin Avatar: a mythical beast of tremendous power. The group agreed that the creature had

to be found and studied. Upon their encounter with the Avatar, the Eleven were fascinated, having the opportunity to study it while it hibernated. When it revived from its slumber however, the powers of the Avatar quickly overcame the Horizon Striders; they did not die, however. In fact, they were somehow transformed – they no longer aged and their Shard abilities increased beyond the imaginings of anyone.

Though the other Striders were curious what occurred and why, the question consumed Glaier. Since then, she has been studying the Elothorin Avatars, attempting to learn everything about them in the hopes of understanding what happened to her and her fellow Ghost Walkers. She believes that the answer to that question will solve several other mysteries within Providence.

STRIDERS OF GLAIER

The Striders of Glaier tend to be a brave group. Since they are usually found studying the Elothorin Avatars, they regularly face tremendous danger. The Striders of Glaier are the most likely of the lineage to work with others in their studies, be they fellow Horizon Striders or other hearty adventurers. They are well aware that an encounter with an Avatar alone is almost certainly fatal. With others to aid them, they may survive long enough to pass along their knowledge.

Striders of Glaier may increase either Armour, Regeneration or Modify Characteristic by one Tier.

ELLANE TODILLO THE JESTER

"Alone she rides, alone, the fair and fatal explorer."

– Ellane Todillo, referring to the life of a Horizon Strider
(Lionel Johnson 1867–1902)

BACKGROUND

The devious Ellane Todillo ran afoul of the law many times in her youth. Todillo, along with an older man, a Hyena named Digger, stole from many of the city's rich merchants. Where Todillo was an impressionable, young girl hoping to gain the attention of a man she loved, Digger was far less scrupulous. Digger knew of Todillo's attraction to him, playing upon it to get her to commit most of their crimes, keeping his hands clean in the eyes of the law. Digger, however, was a greedy man, not content with the petty theft Todillo did for him. In a bold move, Digger broke into a mansion, stealing everything of value he could find and carry. The mansion however, belonged to a powerful criminal boss within Haak San Bazaa, an Eagle named Garri Dolman. Suddenly, Digger found himself the target of a massive manhunt by the city's powerful underground.



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Though Digger was foolish enough to accidentally steal from a major crimelord, he was not so stupid as to remain in the city while Dolman's organization looked for him. Though the Watchers would lock him up for his thefts, Dolman's people would kill him. Digger and Todillo fled into the wilderness, leaving Haak San Bazaa behind. His departure however, did not go unnoticed. A week out of Haak San Bazaa, a hunter Dolman sent overtook the two, killing Digger. The hunter ignored Todillo since he had instructions of what to do with her. Suddenly, Todillo found herself very alone, and far away from civilization.

A week later, alone, hungry, battered and terrified, she underwent her Epiphany. In an explosive outburst of frustration, she gained the ability to project and manipulate electricity. Suddenly, she now had the power to fend for herself in the dangerous world. Over the following weeks, months and eventually years, Todillo learned how to survive alone in Providence, becoming very comfortable amidst the wilderness. Eventually, she stumbled upon Cliff-Spider, the massive spire-city. Todillo had finally returned to civilization.

In Cliff-Spider, she realized in little time that her life would be no easier. The unjust caste system ensured that Fallen such as she were not given a fair chance. More so, Todillo did not possess any skills that would give her a decent job. That was until she heard of the Guild of Cartographers. With the Cartographers, she could use the abilities and skills she had developed. Furthermore, it gave her a chance to return to the wilderness, a place she had grown accustomed to in the time since she left Haak San Bazaa. Already an expert at surviving in the wilds of Providence, Todillo quickly rose through the ranks of the Cartographers, attracting Dane Lanois's attention when he was putting together the Horizon Striders.

ACTIVITIES

When not arguing with her lover Roan Predaunt, Todillo spends her time delving into the secrets of the White Crow. While the Ghost Walkers possess vast amounts of knowledge about Providence, the White Crow, being the oldest race in the world, know more than anyone else. Because of this, she has spent several centuries observing the White Crow, periodically entering Aerie itself to learn more about the powerful albino race.

A few historians and scholars believe Todillo struck an alliance with the White Crow and is working with them in their war against the Yas'Wailians. Most Horizon Striders however, scoff at these implications, though there is a hint of truth to the rumours. Todillo has learned of a faction within the White Crow known as the Cabale of the Voice. This group believes that the White Crow should aid the Yas'Wailians in their efforts to leave Providence. Upon learning of the Cabale, Todillo approached them, feeling

they represented her best opportunity to learn more about the White Crow. The Ghost Walker and the faction of White Crow formed a secret alliance. Although she has no intention of becoming involved in politics, she is willing to exchange knowledge with the Crow – after all, that is what Striders do. Through the members of the Cabale, Todillo learned more about the White Crow than she uncovered in over two centuries of study. Much of what she has discovered has her worried. The White Crow are not only an immensely powerful race, they also feel that their war with the Yas'Wailians is justified. The White Crow think the Yas'Wailians overstepped their bounds and that they, as the caretakers of the world, must restore Providence's balance, even at the cost of Yas'Wailian lives. This righteousness of their purpose fuels the White Crow, giving them a conviction that will make them dangerous opponents on the battlefield.

Furthermore, she has learned that First Exile Jenobay, former ruler of the Alliance of Kings, has forged an alliance of his own with the White Crow and the Green People. Jenobay's army of Fallen is camped outside Aerie while he works with the ruler of the White Crow, planning the downfall of the Alliance of Kings. While the Ghost Walkers have chosen to remain uninvolved with the politics of Yas'Wailians, Todillo is attempting to convince the others that the situation with the White Crow and Jenobay is not equivalent to politics between Yas'Wailians – it is a war with another race. It is a conflict, she increasingly believes, the Ghost Walkers must become involved in if the Yas'Wailians are to survive the overwhelming might of the Green People, the White Crow, and Jenobay Mit'ang. Thus far, the others have chosen to wait since a war has yet to break out. When that day comes however, the Ghost Walkers will be forced to decide whether to become involved in the bloody conflict or watch the war unfold.

STRIDERS OF TODILLO

Striders of Todillo follow in Ellane's footsteps, and investigate the White Crow. They, however, remain well outside Aerie's walls, rarely braving the dangers inherent in infiltrating the dark city. Posing as members of Jenobay's army of Fallen however, many of the Striders of Todillo are able to get closer to the city than most explorers. Posing as one of Jenobay's warriors has proven fatal for some Striders, however. Since his army is small, most of Jenobay's **warriors know the identities of everyone else. Still, this risky subterfuge presents most of these Horizon Striders with the best opportunity they have had in centuries to learn more about the White Crow and their activities.**

As well as being highly skilled in the arts of stealth and subterfuge, Striders of Todillo may raise any one electricity-based power by one Tier.

THE HAZARD STRIDERS



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ROAN PREDAUNT THE PENSIVE

"The range of our collective vision is far greater when individual insights become one."

— Roan, explaining the importance of Horizon Striders sharing their information
(anonymous)

BACKGROUND

For a long time, Roan Predaunt never thought of himself as an explorer. Jark'arn and Dot'yl, Dragon advisors to Cliff-Spider's nobility, gave birth to a Bat child they named Roan. Unlike most other Dragons, they decided not to give the boy to a cousin Bat family, choosing instead to raise him themselves. While growing up, Predaunt watched a world of intrigue and politics swirl around him. This excitement and drama attracted the young boy, though his lack of wings guaranteed he could never play a part in the affairs of court. Predaunt knew however, there are two facets to politics. The public face was closed to him because of his Troupial; there was a second, secretive one. The corruptive side however, hid in shadows and called to him from the darkness. By the age of 20, Predaunt was one of Cliff-Spider's most proficient and respected spies. Through politics' ugly side, he was able to become part of a world that interested him.

When the Guild of Cartographers formed, many of Cliff-Spider's nobles publicly supported the guild and its activities. Secretly however, many people distrusted the guild, questioning their motives and goals, particularly since many of the guild's members were from the lowest castes. The nobles ordered Roan to infiltrate the guild and learn more of their activities. Earlier in his career, he had undergone his Epiphany, gaining the ability to manipulate and transform himself into air. With this ability, and his superb skills as a spy, the guild quickly accepted him.

Over the following years, Predaunt gathered intelligence on the Cartographers, reporting his findings to various nobles and officials. During this time however, in order to maintain his cover, Predaunt explored Providence as any normal Cartographer. He also met Ellane Todillo, a fellow Cartographer. From their first meeting, the two argued about anything and everything possible – it was love at first sight. The two spent a great deal of time together, often in deep and heated debates about the mysteries of Providence, the meaning of life, or the time of day, if no other argument was available. Through Ellane however, Predaunt grew to see Providence in a new light. Suddenly the politics of Cliff-Spider lost its lustre; instead, Predaunt started to see it as a petty, paranoid activity. Meanwhile, the unexplored regions of Providence provided him with the same excitement that had originally attracted him to politics. When Dane Lanois offered Predaunt a position in his newly formed Horizon Striders, he accepted. The Bat then used some of his political connections to ensure the group received the backing of Cliff-Spider's elite. Little did they know that Predaunt had turned

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his back on them, now thinking of himself only as a Horizon Strider. He continued to file periodic reports, but slowly worked his way out of the political structure of the city, fully embracing his life as an explorer.

ACTIVITIES

For many years, Predaunt explored the length and breadth of Providence, uncovering many of its wonders. Each new discovery filled him with awe and anticipation of what would come next. Over time, a mystery became clear and it terrified Predaunt and his fellow Ghost Walkers – Providence was beginning to collapse, and there seemed little they could do to stop it. Retributions appeared with greater frequency, becoming increasingly explosive. The appearance of Grand Retributions solidified the Ghost Walkers' belief that the world was dying. The Walkers realized they needed to find a way to save their world. Some of the Walkers began studying the various threats to their world, hoping to find some way to avert the disaster. Predaunt however, began studying the Gates – the portals back to Yas'Wail – possibly the only means to escape Providence should the other Striders be unable to find a way to prevent its demise. His quest is viewed as the last hope should the Horizon Striders and Ghost Walkers fail.

His quest to unlock the key to the Gates has taken him to every bend and curve of Providence. Each new clue uncovered has led him to another hidden hole or cave. After investigating ruins in the Deep, clues would lead him to a Swarm Dancer hive. His next stop might be Elarian's private library. Each wonder created a question whose answer lay elsewhere. Because his quest has taken him all over Providence, many Horizon Striders view Predaunt as the Ghost Walkers' jack-of-all-trades.

Recently, he has spent a great deal of time with Ellane, helping her study the White Crow. People believe this is because he has uncovered evidence that they hold the key to unlocking the gates, implying that it was they who locked them originally. With his help, along with her alliance with the Cabale of the Voice, Ellane has been able to learn a great deal about the White Crow. Predaunt, likewise has uncovered several secrets about the Gates, cementing several of his theories, and bringing him closer to his goal. Unlike the others, he believes he is exceptionally close to finding the ultimate solution to his quest; the key to unlocking the Gates. Until he is certain however, the Ghost Walker is keeping his beliefs to himself.

STRIDERS OF PEDAUNT

The Striders of Predaunt are the most varied of all the Horizon Strider apprentice lineages. Their goals range from exploration of the Gates to any of Providence's other mysteries. While each individual may focus their efforts on one area, as a group, they emulate Predaunt in their general exploration.

Striders of Predaunt may increase any one air-based power by one Tier.

APPRENTICESHIP

THE YEAR OF COMPREHENSION

"I have watched Shanra for over a year now, though I know she does not realize I have been with her all this time. Though she is very skilled for one her age, the young Raven still has much to learn. It is clear she understands that our little world is a wondrous place, one that we must protect, respect and study if we are to ever understand who we are; that was clear while I watched as she nurtured three young Aloak cubs who had lost their mother to poachers. It is hard enough for an individual to survive in this harsh world. That makes her act of kindness all the more impressive. Shanra now had to provide for the cubs as well as herself. I have watched many people in my years, looking for one suitable to be my apprentice. Though many of them possessed skill and ability, I doubt any of them would have chosen to nurture the Aloaks. This is one of the reasons I wish to mentor her, and guide her along the road to becoming a Horizon Strider. It is but part of the reason, however. Still, I had my doubts; as we always do when choosing an apprentice. My mind was decided when I saw her finally leave the now mature Aloaks. The look on her face, filled with pride and happiness at her accomplishment, also showed the sadness within her heart. Though it brought her pleasure to see the Aloaks able to fend for themselves, it obviously saddened her that she could no longer be with the animals. As dear as they are to her, she knows their place is within Providence's wilderness, not as pets to a Yas'Wailian. Shanra understands this world; she respects this world. I hope to show her all the wonders Providence has to offer. Today I will offer to mentor her."

THE TEACHINGS OF THE MENTOR

At some point in the lives of many Lone Walkers, a Horizon Strider observes them, considering whether they are capable of becoming a Horizon Strider. Only those very few that are worthy are approached and offered to be taught how to become Horizon Striders. If they accept, they accompany their mentor until they are worthy of the title of Horizon Strider. In most cases, this takes about a year's time, though it has taken much longer occasionally. It is exceptionally rare for the apprenticeship period to take less than a year.

Each Horizon Strider has a different approach to teaching their apprentices – there are no specific guidelines to the process. There are, however, a number of similarities that exist in all their teachings. The first lessons are often in survival. The mentor teaches their pupil all the skills that they will require to survive in the deadly environment of Providence. Often, the mentor will teach a student how to survive in a variety of environments. Some teachers have focused, however, on a particular climate or region. Frequently, this stage lasts for four to six months since Horizon Striders like to explore the whole realm.

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The second stage occurs when apprentices learn what it means to be a Horizon Strider – they learn respect and kindness. During this time, their mentor teaches them to appreciate Providence and all of her wonders. It is through tolerance that the Horizon Striders have been able to truly discover the world's mysteries. If they did not respect their world, they would surely exploit many of Providence's secrets for their own gain.

Horizon Strider pupils also learn to respect people, regardless of whom they are. While the world has many mysteries, people often hold the key to unlocking them. By showing respect for everyone, Horizon Striders have been able to learn of things they would not have otherwise known. For some,

learning to respect the world and its people is the lesson that takes the longest to learn.

The last stage of teaching, one that usually occurs throughout the learning process, is when the mentor imparts their knowledge of Providence to their student. The Horizon Striders strongly believe in the exchange of information. Only by freely communicating what they know with each other will they gain a complete picture of the world. To prepare their students for their journeys, mentors give them the information they need to survive, and understand the world.

Respect and survival are the main lessons all

Horizon Striders learn, though how these teachings are accomplished is unique to each mentor. When teachers feel that their pupils finally understand what it means to be a Horizon Strider, they give them one of their Year Rings in the ritual of Batal. This signifies they are now one of Providence's elite explorers. After this ceremony, the mentor and the new Horizon Strider part ways to uncover what the world holds for each of them.



INHERITED KNOWLEDGE

Facing the harsh world of Providence alone is often a fatal mistake. For Horizon Striders however, it is a way of life. To survive their travels, Striders learn from their mentors the many skills they will need to see another day. In game terms, Horizon Strider characters must possess the following skills:

Area Knowledge (at least two regions)	1
Area Study (at least two regions)	1
Athletics	1
Awareness	2
Biology – Fauna	1
Biology – Flora	1
Body Language	1
Camouflage	2
Cartography	2
Escape Artist	1
First Aid	2
Imitation	2
Language – Horizon Strider	1
Missile Weapon	1
Scavenging	1
Stealth	2
Storytelling	1
Survival (at least two regions)	2
Swimming	1
Tracking	2
WS – Bow	1
WS – Knife	1

Characters who cannot fly also learn the following skills:

Climbing	1
Jumping	1
Running	1
Sprinting	1

Horizon Striders also possess the following characteristic minimums:

Coordination	0
Strength	0
Constitution	1
Willpower	1
Psyche	0

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THE SKILL OF SURVIVAL

Game terminology and numbers are one thing; survival skills are another. How does one really survive in the wilderness? In a game of Providence, GMs could simply ask their players to make a Survival skill roll against a Target Number (generally 11). If they succeed, they find enough food, water and shelter to get by without any problems. If they fail, they either don't find what they need, or what they find is inappropriate or contaminated. GMs can impose a -1 die penalty to all the characters' actions for the following day (or until their next successful Survival skill roll). This is obviously the easiest method of using Survival, though it certainly is not descriptive or evocative. Some players or GMs may wish to be more vivid in describing a quest for water, food, shelter and the like. By better understanding what the character is actually doing, players and GMs will create a more realistic ambience in their games, often making the role-playing experience much more enjoyable. As such, the following descriptions are actual survival techniques that you can incorporate into your game. GMs may grant players a bonus to their Survival roll if they accurately describe their survival techniques. They may also, depending on the results of a Survival skill roll, describe what the character does, rather than simply stating "You succeed." By incorporating detailed descriptions of activities into a game as either a GM or a player, you establish a stronger sense of the mood, theme and environment.

Note: For further readings on actual wilderness survival techniques, I recommend *The SAS Survival Handbook* by John "Lofty" Wiseman.

A STRIDER'S SURVIVAL TEACHINGS

The most important thing for survival in any harsh environment is preparation. One must prepare for what lies ahead, both the expected and the unexpected. How does one anticipate the unexpected? Sadly, many learn this through trial and error. When people encounter an unexpected challenge, they realize what they wish they had brought with them. If they survive the experience, the next time they venture out they will likely take that piece of equipment, just in case the same trouble occurs. The easiest, and safest, way to prepare for the unexpected is to have as many of the essentials as possible. With a good survival kit, anyone with the appropriate skills should survive.

A good basic survival kit in Providence includes a special rock used to start fires known as a sparkrock, as well as candles, needles and thread, rope and snare wire, a knife, a full water skin and medical supplies. With these basic items, one can endure most situations.

In any setting, there are four goals that must be achieved to remain safe: food, fire, shelter and water. The priority of these basic elements depends on the location – in a desert, water will be the most important goal while on a windswept, cold mountain, shelter will be more important. People must quickly analyze their environment, rank their four basic needs, and address them in that order.

FOOD

In most situations, food will be one of the lower priorities. People can live for up to three weeks before they starve to death, but death due to dehydration or exposure occurs much faster. Food will be your first priority only in truly exceptional cases. However, when it comes time to gather food, it is vital to know where to look and what to avoid. There are two sources of food: plants and animals.

PLANTS

Should you find a new plant and wish to learn if it is edible, there is a simple procedure. If in a group, only one person should do the test. The first step is to inspect the plant carefully. Make sure that it is in the best condition possible. Avoid plants with worms or larva since it is likely overripe and some plants become toxic at this point. The second stage is to crush a small portion of the plant and smell it. If it smells like bitter almonds or fruit, do not eat it. It is likely poisonous. Next, rub some of the plant on your skin, preferably in a sensitive area. If you develop a rash or any form of irritation, do not eat the plant. If there is no reaction, rub a small amount first on the lips, then the corner of the mouth, the tip of the tongue, under the tongue, then finally chew a small portion. If there is any adverse reaction during any of these stages, do not eat the plant. If there is no reaction, eat a small amount of the plant and wait five hours. During this time, do not eat or drink anything. If you feel stomach pain, drink hot water. With severe pain, induce vomiting immediately either by tickling the back of the throat or by ingesting charred organic matter, such as wood. It is preferable to ingest the burnt material as it will both induce vomiting and help to absorb any poison. Should all of these stages pass without any reaction, the plant is safe to eat. However, it is important to note that one should be careful to take note of the state the plant is in. While it may be safe to eat at a given point, three months later as it begins to bloom, for example, it may become highly poisonous. If you see a change in the plant, repeat all the steps again to ensure that the plant has not changed.

ANIMALS

Animals present a new batch of difficulties. While animal meat is very rarely dangerous, one should still exercise caution. The danger is that most animals in Providence are exceptionally lethal. One should observe an animal from a distance first to learn of any potential dangers involved in its capture – is the animal particularly aggressive? Does it have a venomous bite? However, people must find an animal before they can capture it. There are several key signs that indicate the presence of animals. The most obvious is a footprint. Footprints clearly suggest passage. Broken twigs, markings on trees or logs, fur or feathers, signs of feeding, smells and droppings also denote the presence of animals. These markings will not only show an animal's territory, but also give clues as to the animal's type or species.

The easiest and safest way to capture an animal for a meal is with a trap. While attacking a creature with bow and arrow may be more immediate, there is the potential that the animal may survive the attack and turn on the hunter. Placement of a trap is potentially the most important element. If an animal doesn't encounter the trap, the trap won't catch a thing. The best places for traps are game paths and watering holes. Contrary to what many would suspect, near a den or lair is a poor location for a trap for various reasons. First, as the home of the animal, the creature might be nearby when you set the trap. Many animals are normally passive but exceptionally violent and aggressive when their home is threatened. Furthermore, animals tend to be most cautious around their homes.

The type of trap one should build depends on the game being hunted. There are four basic types of traps: snares, dead falls, spear traps, and bird traps. Each has hundreds of variations though they all work on a similar

principle. Snares attempt to capture prey in a wire or rope, strangling or holding them in place. In Providence, these traps are risky as the animal may still be alive when the hunter returns. However, if one wishes to capture the prey alive, the snare is one of the better traps. Dead falls work by dropping a large weight such as a rock or log on the animal to kill it. These traps are risky in Providence when used on large game as most of Providence's wildlife is very resilient. However, if the object being dropped on the animal is large enough, the dead fall



is one of the few traps that can be effective against some larger species. On

smaller animals, however, this is a particularly simple and effective trap. Spear traps work on the simple principle of impaling the game on a sharpened object. These traps are usually very complex in their construction though often prove to be very lethal. One must exercise extreme caution while setting spear traps; since they are complex, it is possible to accidentally trigger the trap, endangering yourself. Bird traps are usually used to capture birds, though it can be used for any type of game. They work by dropping a net or cage over the animal, preventing it from getting away. This type of trap is the least lethal. As such, hunters should only use it when they wish to capture their game alive. Otherwise, they may find themselves faced with a very irate and potentially dangerous captured animal.

Fish are an excellent source of nutrition and are often simple to capture. One can use a bow and arrow (tied to a thin rope to retrieve the fish), a spear in shallow waters, or a line and bait. Insects are also an exceptional source of food. While there is a general stigma to the idea of eating insects, they provide more nutrition than virtually anything else, pound for pound. Also, insects are plentiful in number virtually everywhere. They also present a much smaller risk in gathering compared with many other animals. Larvae are better sources of nutrition than their mature counterparts. Hive-minded insects, however, are often difficult to get to as the hive will protect its larvae at all costs. When using insects as a source of food, avoid bugs that feed on carrion as they usually carry infections and diseases. Also, as a rule, brightly coloured insects tend to be poisonous. Grubs found on the underside of leaves often secrete poisons; they can, however, be used as bait for fishing.

When preparing animals for consumption, try not to waste any part of the carcass. There are basic steps to prepare most animals. The first stage is to bleed the animal, thus preventing the meat from spoiling rapidly. To bleed an animal, simply slit the creature's throat and hang it to drain. Be sure to keep the blood as it is an excellent source of vitamins and minerals. Next, skin the animal. The skin can be used for clothing, shelter and the like. Next, gut the animal. Keep many of the internal organs as they are excellent sources of nutrition. Eat the liver as soon as possible to get the most nutrition possible. The kidneys and heart are great sources of nutrition and add flavour to stews. The bladder is an excellent water skin as it is able to hold large amounts of liquid. The final stage is to finally cook the meat. In many cases, a hunter must first cut the meat into portions, particularly with larger kills. Preserve any meat that is not eaten with salt or smoking for later consumption. The safest approach when cooking meat is to thoroughly cook it. While animal meat is very rarely poisonous, poorly cooked meat can have many diseases, infections, or parasites. Thoroughly cooking meat kills virtually everything harmful, making it safe to eat.

WATER

While food is important, water is vital. The average healthy person can go for three weeks without food – they will die in three days without water. As such, finding water is usually the most important step to wilderness survival. Finding water is but part of the solution. Since people lose water naturally, an average of two to three litres a day, it is also a good idea to know how to retain fluids when water is rare. You can reduce water loss by resting, not smoking, keeping cool, not eating (digestion needs water which will force your body to use what it has available), breathing through the nose rather than the mouth, and not talking. No matter what precautions are taken, the body will lose water. It is therefore vital that a source of drinkable water be found.

The obvious source of water is from a stream, river or lake. However, one should be very careful as the water may be contaminated in some way, doing more harm than good. If there is no green vegetation near the water, it is

probably foul; do not drink it. It is always a good idea to boil water from any source for several minutes to kill off any traces of contaminants.

When a body of water is not available, people can collect water from various other sources. Rain is the easiest and safest source of water. In many regions of Providence, it rains regularly. In some regions, particularly deserts, it rains very rarely. Plants such as cacti and roots can provide water. However, it is important that you test the plant as though you were going to eat it. You can also gather water by digging a hole two feet in the ground and covering it with a water proof covering such as certain animal skins. Place a small rock in the centre of the covering so the skin hangs down in a cone shape.

Place a cup or container of some sort under the skin, and directly below the cone. As the ground heats up during the day, the water in the ground will evaporate. The covering will keep the moist air within the hole, eventually causing it to condense on the covering. As it condenses, the water will drip into



the container, allowing you to gather the water. It is unlikely that you can gather sufficient water from one hole to keep yourself alive, so you should create several holes like this to gather the necessary water.

People should never drink salt water or urine as it will induce vomiting which will cause you to lose even more water. Distilling both salt water and urine does, however, create drinkable water. In fact, distilling any water will provide drinkable water. To distil water, place the contaminated water in a container and bring it to a boil. Cover the container and have a tube, which one can make of a hollowed branch, or an animal's cleaned intestine, leading to another container that will gather the clean water. Pure water will evaporate out of the contaminated water. This evaporated water will travel along the tube to the other container. As it travels, it will cool down and form into water droplets. These droplets will gather in the second container as pure, drinkable water.

While salt water is very harmful, it is important that people regularly ingest salt. The loss of salt will result in muscle cramps, dizziness, nausea, and fatigue. A pint of salt water contains roughly the amount of salt a person needs for one day. Do not drink the salt water straight. Either heavily dilute the salt water with regular water or distil it and ingest the salt crystals that will remain. Drinking animal blood also provides salt. The blood will also provide you with other important nutrients making it an excellent resource.

FIRE

Fire is vital to survival for it will allow you to both cook food and preserve your body warmth. While Providence is already quite warm during the day, the body uses energy to maintain its temperature. It is therefore a good idea to use a camp fire to help keep your body temperature up. Also, many animals are afraid of fire; it will keep them at bay. Fire, however, does attract a few animals. Explorers should be sure they know the fauna in the area before they light a fire – more than a few adventurers have suffered severe burns when fire moths have flown into their campfire.

When lighting a fire, it is important to choose a good location. If a fire gets out of control, it can cause severe damage to a large area in very little time. Clear away branches, twigs and leaves to prevent the fire from spreading. If it is particularly windy and you cannot find a location out of the wind, dig a hole and place the fire within it. Also avoid placing wet or porous racks around a fire as they may explode as they heat up.

Different types of wood generate vastly different flames. Hard woods produce more heat and last much longer as hot coals, providing heat for an entire evening. Softer woods burn faster and higher, generating large flames and sparks. This increases the chances of the fire spreading but will work to

discourage creatures that fear flames. Also, the choice of dry or damp wood depends on the desired effect. Dry wood burns cleaner, producing much less smoke. Damp wood produces a great deal of smoke that helps drive off insects. Damp wood however, is very difficult to keep lit.

The easiest way to light a fire is by using a common stone known in Providence as a sparkrock. Striking it with another rock creates a spark – thus its name. This spark and kindling can create a flame. If explorers don't have a sparkrock, they can create a fire by rubbing a hard wood spike on a soft wood base. The friction generated by the two woods will eventually generate enough heat to light kindling. The easiest method to rub the two woods together is by winding a bow string around the hard wood spike. Place the tip of the spike in a small depression in the soft wood base to help keep it in place. By moving the bow back and forth, the spike will rotate quickly, generating the required friction. If a bow is not available, simply rotate the spike in place between your two hands. This will take much longer than using the bow, though it will eventually work.



SHELTER

When choosing a site for a shelter, there are a few things people should be wary of. Hilltops, the bottom of a valley, or areas frequented by animals are poor sites to choose. Hilltops are exposed to winds and easily accessible to Providence's aerial predators. Valleys are poor sites as they are regions vulnerable to flooding. Areas frequented by animals are obviously a bad choice as many of Providence's creatures can be deadly. When searching

for signs of animals in an area, do not forget to look for insects.

The best shelter is a tent on raised, dry ground. When a tent is not available however, hunters must find other ways to protect themselves from the elements. Good locations for shelter are usually under the boughs or roots of a fallen tree, or in a natural depression in the ground. Caves also provide shelter though one must be exceptionally careful as other animals may also be using it as a home. Also, when using a cave, be sure to carefully check for the potential of a rock-slide or cave-in. Leaves, branches, rocks and soil can all be used to help improve the protective value of any of these locations. By creating walls or covers, people can easily protect themselves from the wind and rain.

HORIZON STRIDERS IN PROVIDENCE

"My words are true. Let me tell you a story."

– the traditional introduction to a story between two Horizon Striders.

THE SCEPTICAL OBSERVER

"That's hearsay! They're nothing but tales to sap reason and loosen purses."

Pleased that his friend Ander chose to offer him a meal at the local pub, Jarid was far less content with his selection of "entertainment." Once a year, a Horizon Strider came to their village to offer fantastic tales. Jarid was not shy about expressing his distaste of the explorers. "Like a mindless flock of Mandruu bats," he voiced, "everyone welcomes these travel-worn vagabonds with open arms." Their village, as if suddenly possessed, gathered in a revered ritual, migrating to the pub – some workers to liven their otherwise routine days, others to hear the news of the world.

"Jarid, why don't you hear what she has to say. She just might surprise you." Ander's disappointment was obvious. Jarid recognized this as a clear warning of Ander's displeasure – Ander had not received his friend's criticism of the Strider particularly well. Jarid reconsidered his actions – the least he could do was to graciously accept his companion's offer and keep his reservations to himself.

Jarid and Ander arrived at the pub later than the other villagers. Normally, the clatter and cheer of the crowd easily drowned out the creak of the pub's wooden doors. Perhaps for the first time in Jarid's memory, the pub was silent. Some patrons turned their attention away from the stage to observe the two intruders. Many eyes looked at them only long enough to offer disapproving looks; others shot angry glances. Fortunately, their momentary distraction proved insignificant compared to the tavern's main attraction. At the centre of the room sat a slender, golden-haired woman upon the stage – the rich brown feathers on her wings stood aroused by the moment. It was clear the two friends had arrived at a pivotal point in the Eagle's tale.

Although Jarid never admitted it to anyone, he had yet to see a Horizon Strider. Perhaps his own ignorance fuelled his boisterous dismissal of the explorers, Jarid considered. Was he afraid to admit that he knew very little about the legendary heroes? Jarid pondered the question as Ander found a quiet nook. His friend sat down, eager to hear the sober words that so utterly enthralled the crowd.

After Jarid spent a few moments observing the villagers near him, he reluctantly turned his attention to the stage. The woman had resumed her tale, reaching a crescendo. Although he had heard enough to know the woman spoke of a great discovery, it was not her words alone that evoked a keen awareness and understanding among the patrons – admittedly, in Jarid as well. Rather, the perfect symphony resonating in her voice moved Jarid. Somehow, the Strider could harmonise word and feeling in a perfect union of expression; none of her thoughts, sights and

emotions remained unclear. She shared every experience with the villagers freely, drained of every word and thought. Like hungry beasts, the patrons devoured each and every sacred utterance. No one dared to doubt the validity of a single lyric emerging from her perfect lips – not even Jarid. After thanking her audience, the Eagle faded into the thick curtains framing the stage. For the first time, Jarid felt as if he belonged to a greater whole. The Strider's tale bridged the miles between other communities in Jarid's scattered society, dispelling his feelings of isolation. Also, he gained an understanding of this world – a realm that is not their birthplace. Jarid finally realised he was wrong about the Horizon Striders.



As Horizon Striders travel the world, they encounter hundreds of people; some of them are fellow Striders. When two Horizon Striders meet, tradition dictates that they exchange chronicles of their journeys. In the early years of the Striders' history, this practice began simply to keep friends informed as to the events of one another's lives. Over the decades, this practice became a tradition among all Striders, even for those who have never met previously.

This exchange of stories is important to the Striders for several reasons. The most important commodity Horizon Striders possess is information. More than a sword, food or even water, information can save a person's life. Because of this, Striders share their knowledge in the hopes that what they pass on will save a comrade's life. Also, though a person can travel the length and breadth of the world, they will never see it all. By exchanging their knowledge, they help reveal things to others that may help paint a complete picture of the realm. Often, two Striders have ritually exchanged stories and observed new revelations. Lastly, as with the exchange of Year Rings (see page 121), the sharing of stories helps Striders develop bonds of kinship with each other.

HORIZON STRIDERS AND LONE WALKERS

The interactions of Horizon Striders with Lone Walkers depend largely on the particular Lone Walker. In most cases, a Strider will observe Lone Walkers to decide if they deserve the opportunity to join the Horizon Striders. If they exhibit the traits and characteristics that all Striders espouse, the Strider approaches the person, inviting them to become an apprentice.

The Strider will also watch to determine the person's motives for emulating or imitating a Horizon Strider. The Striders will accept someone adopting their title out of respect. They do, however, strongly object to those who take the title simply to gain the benefits that accompany it. Merchants give Horizon Striders excellent deals on their wares in return for a story, or simply out of respect. Some people take advantage of the kindness of people by passing themselves off as Horizon Striders. When such a deception is encountered, the Strider will make it clear to everyone, including the local Watchers. While few communities have laws prohibiting a person from impersonating a Horizon Strider, few Watchers kindly regard those who deceive people for personal gain. If the person's motives for adopting the Horizon Strider title are honourable however, they have little to fear.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS

HORIZON STRIDER AND THE WORLD

THE ONE WHO COULD NOT REST

Jove felt the eyes of the warden pass over him. He suppressed a sigh of relief as they continued searching, obviously failing to notice the hidden Eagle. Only when the large Dragon turned and walked off did Jove allow himself to breathe again. He was certain he could overcome the warden guard if needed, though, for the safety of the young woman he was escorting, stealth was vital. Jove Isan was a member of a small group of people known as the Slip Walkers. It was their goal to get people out of the oppressive clutch of Bone-Wail's Wardens, and safely transport them to the Alliance of Kings or the Merchant Bands.

Jove turned silently, moving deeper into the shadows to retrieve his charge. The young girl, no more than eight, sat exactly where he left her, not having moved an inch. Through the entire ordeal, she exhibited a focus and control that belied her age. Perhaps she inherited that from her father, a cold and ruthless Eagle warden who raped the girl's mother. That was not important. Though he cared for each of his charges deeply, he would never see her again. If anyone was to truly escape Bone-Wail, it was vital that all links to their past be severed, including how they escaped. As such, Jove decided as a general rule, that he couldn't get to know anyone he liberated, for their own safety.

He leaned close to the girl and whispered for her to follow quietly. As before, she obeyed without hesitation. The two slipped through small crevices, dark holes and all sorts of cover as they made their way out of Bone-Wail. After almost five hours, she stood outside the walls of Bone-Wail, probably for the first time in her life. She looked up at the walls as they reached upwards, disappearing from view in the grey mist. Jove allowed her only a brief rest. They were still far from safe. The girl's eyes snapped down from the wall letting Jove know she was ready to move onwards.

Travel was far more difficult now. The trees surrounding Bone-Wail were withered and petrified allowing for very little cover from view – Jove knew there were prying eyes. They were always there. Ward Dogs, Ravagers and warden guards patrolled the forest searching for any sign of trouble. Thankfully, they were predictable. Jove had figured out their routine long ago and devised a way to safely slip through, though as with all things involving Bone-Wail, it still was not easy. Without a word, Jove moved forward, leading the child through the trees. His path wound through the forest, often doubling back towards Bone-Wail itself. They did not meet with any difficulties. Just as Jove was beginning to think their flight might conclude without event, the girl stumbled over a gnarled root, letting out a brief, short yelp as she crashed to the ground. Jove was instantly by her side, one hand over her mouth while the other checked her leg to ascertain the injury. His eyes, however, scanned the grey haze searching for any hint the sound had been heard.

He allowed himself a whispered curse as he caught sight of two shadows approaching from opposite directions. He removed his hand from the girl's leg and slowly, silently drew his sword. His other hand remained clamped over the girl's mouth. She made

no noise though tears flowed down her cheeks. He had felt the broken bone in her leg. She could not run so he prepared himself to fight. Jove knew he had to kill both the guards before either could sound an alarm, otherwise both he and the girl were dead.

As his muscles coiled, preparing to launch himself towards the nearest guard, the man called out. "Greetings warden. I am sorry to have alarmed you." The man quickly slipped by Jove and the young girl with only a brief glance at the two. Jove noticed the handful of Year Rings along the Swan's jet black wings — he was a Horizon Strider.



"Who goes there?" demanded the guard, obviously weary of anyone outside the walls of the prison city.

"Nerra Johan. I am a Horizon Strider," the Swan replied as he neared the guard. Jove watched as the Strider walked an extra two steps past the guard, forcing the warden to turn his back on Jove and the girl. Without hesitation, Jove took his cue and gently lifted the girl from the ground, hand still firmly clamped over her mouth lest her pain overcome her. Without a backward glance, Jove disappeared into the fog, racing for safety.

Later that evening, several miles from Bone-Wail, Jove sat preparing a cold meal for himself and the girl. Though they were well away from Bone-Wail, he felt it better to avoid the light of a fire. He looked up from the nuts and roots he was cleaning. The young girl sat quietly under a tree some distance away. Her yelp when she broke her leg was the only sound she had uttered since he met her. Sometimes, the determination of people astounded him. He was about to return to his meal when he caught the sight of something in the corner of his eye. Reacting on instinct, Jove leapt to his feet, sword in hand.

"Hold! I come in peace."

Jove relaxed as the Swan appeared out of the shadows, his black form barely visible to Jove's keen eyesight. "I just wanted to check and see if you two were safe and sound."

"Aye. We are. Thanks in large part to you," Jove replied as he reseated himself.

"I'm glad you are both well. It is a dangerous undertaking you have chosen for yourself Lone Walker." Although in his heart he thought of himself as a Horizon Strider, Jove knew that by joining the Slip Walkers, he had broken a sacred Strider trust. "If you ever decide you've had enough of it, you know you are always welcome with us." Jove looked up to see the Swan had again merged with the shadows he so resembled. He sat looking into the dark forest around him for a short while. It was not the first time a Horizon Strider had approached him with an offer to rejoin them. True, to many of Jove's friends, he was a member of the elite explorers. He had spent time apprenticing himself to a Horizon Strider several years ago. When he learned of the atrocities taking place in Bone-Wail, however, Jove could not simply ignore these injustices. Despite the repercussions, Jove focused his efforts on saving people from the prison city. His involvement in the politics of Providence separated him from the Horizon Striders. Still, it was a decision he never once regretted. Looking up at the young girl he had just saved from a life of misery, Jove thought with pride: "Yes, they may call me a Lone Walker, and until Bone-Wail ceases its oppression, I will bear the title proudly." With that, he returned to the task at hand.

Horizon Striders are arguably the single most important group to the people of Providence. While the exploration and discoveries of the Striders have helped the Yas'Wailians in countless ways, this is not the most important service Horizon Striders provide. Providence is a medieval society that covers a broad expanse of land, often separated by hundreds of miles. Because of the tales they tell, Horizon Striders represent one of Providence's only means of communication, particularly in poorly populated regions. Without them, villages and towns would be virtually oblivious to the events going on in the world. Communication between cities would continue, but only at the highest levels of government. For the average citizen on the street, they would become ignorant of events in the world, except those that directly influenced their lives. The need for this primitive communication network is particularly vital due to the impending war with the Lost Tribes, the constant threat from Bone-Wail, and Providence's global disasters.

When a Horizon Strider arrives in a settlement, it is often a source of celebration. For small communities that rarely see Striders, the first evening is often a large celebration where everyone turns out to hear stories told late into the night. Some communities have developed strong ties with particular Striders who visit regularly. These visits turn into annual holidays for the community, festivals that often last several days.

For regions that Striders frequent more regularly, people will travel to hear the latest news, though it is less of a celebration. In return for their services and news, Horizon Striders get a bed and warm meal. Other merchants also discount their prices to Striders as a thanks for their services. This is often the case for medium-sized villages and towns.

Large cities are less excited by the arrival of Horizon Striders. While people listen to the stories told by the travellers, the hustle of city life has often jaded the populace, making them care little for stories of the Deep or the Sunderlands. Also, in large cities, news tends to travel fast by word of mouth. If one person learns of something, within a week, most people have heard it. As such, a Strider's arrival in a large city is rarely an event of note. Some merchants will offer deals, though they rarely get free room and board as they do in smaller communities.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS IN THE ALLIANCE OF KINGS

Horizon Striders enjoy a position of high regard within the Alliance of Kings. The population of the Alliance knows well the service that the Striders have provided. Because of this and the Striders' selfless nature, few leaders within the Alliance will disparage the name of the Striders. The Alliance, however, feels that they own some claim to the Horizon Striders. Many officials within the Alliance governments believe they have the right to order Horizon Striders to perform their bidding. This has created some level of friction between Striders and the governments of the Alliance.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS WITHIN THE MERCHANT BANDS

Horizon Striders have an unofficial relationship with the merchant cities. While they are respected greatly and granted many liberties and freedoms, they must pay for this with information. This is a normal situation in the barter oriented Merchant Bands society, where two parties trade goods or services. Also, for the Horizon Striders, this is a perfectly acceptable "arrangement", for the dissemination of information is one of their primary goals. Because of this unofficial agreement, the Merchant Bands government treats the Horizon Striders with respect, knowing that for any favour asked of the explorers, there will be a price.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS AND THE OPPRESSIVE WARDEN ALLIANCE

Horizon Striders rarely venture to the Warden held cities of Bone-Will and Green-Deep. That, however, is a matter of choice, for few of them agree with the slave conditions maintained by the Wardens. Striders are welcome visitors to Warden cities however, if they respect the ruling authority and the laws of the city. Horizon Striders are expected to tell everything they have learned in their travels without question. In return for the information, they may remain for an evening before leaving. That is the extent of the liberties the Wardens offer. This inhospitable, hostile environment is why few Striders set foot in a warden city twice. Also, the Wardens' belief that the Striders are answerable to the Warden Senate has generated a great deal of friction in the past, more so than with the Alliance of Kings.

THE STRIDERS AND THE LOST TRIBES

Horizon Striders are potentially the only Yas'Wailians that will not be met with open aggression by some of the Lost Tribes. The Serpenkine and Swarm Dancers view Striders with a great deal of respect and often treat them as ambassadors. The Green People and White Crow tend to be less open. The White Crow will rarely attack Horizon Striders outright, but will see to it that they leave their areas immediately, by force is necessary. Green People are more aggressive, though not outright hostile. While they will attack any Yas'Wailian on sight, they will not pursue those they believe to be Horizon Striders if they flee; others however, are usually run to ground and killed. Because of this, most Horizon Striders wisely leave the area quickly if they encounter Green People or White Crow.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS AND THE GUILD OF MESSENGERS

Throughout their history, the Horizon Striders and the Cliff-Skimmers, now known as the Guild of Messengers, have shared an amicable, yet competitive relationship. Both groups fuel each other's desire to uncover Providence's secrets. This friendly competition has created strong bonds of friendship between the two groups. It is not uncommon for a Strider and Messenger to work together for long periods of time.

DRUMMERS, ARCHERS, AND HORIZON STRIDERS

In recent years, due to the impending war with the Lost Tribes, the Drummers and Archers have developed stronger ties with the Horizon Striders. Both guilds know they require some of the information the Horizon Striders possess if they hope to win an eventual war. The Horizon Striders, however, are not willing to see the Lost Tribes slaughtered. They also do not wish the Lost Tribes to overrun the Yas'Wailians. As such, they will provide information that will help the two guilds in defending Yas'Wailian cities. However, they will not provide information that allows either guild to mount an offensive attack against the Lost Tribes.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS AND THE GUILD OF CHIRURGEONS

There has been exceptionally minor contact between the Guild of Chirurgeons and Horizon Striders. Recently, however, the Chirurgeons have lobbied for stricter laws to control the movements and activities of the Striders. Few outsiders understand the Chirurgeons' sudden interest in the movements of Striders. Some people gossip that the Chirurgeons have something to hide and fear the Striders may stumble across their secrets. It's possible that the Chirurgeons fear the Striders may learn of their hidden laboratories in the Pendulum Island Chain (see page 42).

THE HORIZON STRIDERS AND PROVIDENCE'S ENFORCERS OF LAW

Both the Recognizers and Watchers share good relations with the Horizon Striders. Both groups are aware that the well-travelled explorers often possess information vital in apprehending various criminals. In return for this information, Watchers and Recognizers provide Horizon Striders with a great deal of leeway and protection. A Watcher, who would normally stop someone

with a weapon, will allow Horizon Striders to pass freely. Should a Strider be in a difficult situation, a Recognizer will gladly step in to lend a helping hand. These privileges however, fuel a serious backlash if someone impersonates a Horizon Strider. It is not uncommon for unscrupulous Lone Walkers to receive severe beatings at the hands of Watchers.

THE D'SHAU MONKS, KESTRELS & SLAYWINDS

Horizon Striders and Providence's three religious groups share amicable relations. Striders can regularly expect a warm meal and bed in one of the groups' settlements. In return, the Striders carry news from one commune to another and sometimes guide those in search of faith to one of the three groups.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS AND THE ANODYNES

Anodynes and Horizon Striders share strong bonds of friendship. Striders often travel long distances to gather rare herbs, spices and the like which Anodynes regularly use in the making of healing salves and potions. In return for this service, Anodynes eagerly heal injured Striders without question or compensation. Because each group enthusiastically aids the other, it is rare to find a Strider who does not have an Anodyne as a contact and vice-versa.

TRACKERS AND HORIZON STRIDERS

The relationship between Horizon Striders and Trackers (see *The Ecology*, page 94-95) is often similar to the Striders' relationship with Lone Walkers. In most cases, Striders will observe Trackers and watch their habits and methods. As with Lone Walkers, some Striders approach Trackers to gain them as apprentices, though this is rare.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS AND THE GRAND REPOSITORY OF HAAK SAN BAZAA

The Grand Repository in Haak San Bazaa is one of the largest libraries in all of Providence, possessing several centuries of knowledge compiled by thousands of Ravens. This store of knowledge is closed to virtually everyone but a very rare few, with the exception of all Ravens, who are always granted free access to the library. Horizon Striders, regardless of Troupial lineage, are also granted supervised access to the Ravens' records. Because Striders willingly exchange knowledge, the Grand Repository has agreed to let Striders enter when they choose. In return, many Horizon Striders maintain diaries similar to a Raven that they pass along to the Repository when the tomes are filled.

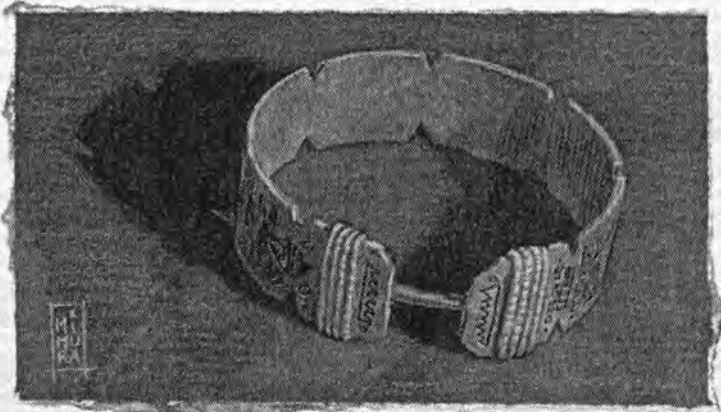
YEAR RINGS: THE TRAVELLER'S CHRONICLES

ORIGIN OF THE YEAR RINGS

The Horizon Striders' Year Rings originated when Nyshelle, one of the Ghost Walkers, gave a ring to each of her fellow Horizon Striders. The group was still in its infancy and still a part of the Guild of Cartographers. Nyshelle wanted to give her new friends a gift to commemorate their being together for the year. She made the rings from stratyte wood, carving the names of each member of the group and their important discoveries into the hard wood. The following year, Dane Lanois offered rings similarly carved from stratyte wood. Since then, on 40 Amadian, the last day of the year, the original Eleven get together to exchange Year Rings. This practice carried over to their apprentices, becoming a ritual all Horizon Striders practice.

Few Horizon Striders get together on 40 Amadian, though some small, close-knit groups like to gather. Striders carve their name and their important discoveries of the past year into whatever material they deem appropriate, though wood is used most often. The carvings are a special form of writing which the Horizon Striders developed over the centuries. It combines pictures and words, allowing them to express more detail in less space when compared with normal Yas'Wailian writing.

Whenever two Striders meet, they traditionally sit and exchange stories. At the end of the story telling, they also trade one Year Ring. This helps draw the normally nomadic and solitary wanderers together, further developing bonds of friendship. The wings of elder Striders tell the tales and adventures of dozens of different Horizon Striders within the world. The only Year Ring Striders will never trade is their first one. They view this ring as their unofficial badge of office, proof that they are Horizon Striders. It is also the ring that records the most important year of their lives: the year they became Horizon Striders.



BATAL: THE RITUAL OF BAPTISM

For me, this past year was much too short. For Kaeten, my pupil, I am sure he would disagree – for him, the year was far too long. His impatience is forgivable, however, for it is tempered with enthusiasm, curiosity and now, finally, knowledge. In these mere eight months, I have guided the young Swan along our journey of discovery. Each day I endeavoured to teach Kaeten a new lesson. I taught him the normal lessons such as how to draw water from toads buried in the sands of Athrin's desert, or how to move unheard through the forests of the Deep. There were lessons on how to survive in the swamp regions of the Algerra and what plants are poisonous. All Horizon Striders teach these basic lessons to their pupils. These lessons, however, are mere trappings of what we prepare our pupils for. The real teaching we must impart upon these young boys and girls is not how to be a Strider, but what it means to be a Horizon Strider; each pupil will then understand how to act as one. Most students wish only to learn the skills necessary to travel Providence safely. We must also teach our pupils that exploration is but the first step they must take. Discovering an ancient temple of a forgotten god is important. Understanding and learning what the temple has to impart upon us is vital. The world speaks to us, and a story lays within everything for us to discover. We must learn to hear these stories for it is our fate to carry these chronicles to the people. Explorers tell tales of battling fantastic creatures and uncovering riches and treasures. Horizon Striders tell tales of Providence – we speak of the nature and history of creatures or treasures, not just the tales of their conquest or discovery.

For many young Striders, this is a difficult lesson to understand. Each person grasps this teaching in his or her own way. For Kaeten, I knew he finally fathomed what it was to be a Horizon Strider when I heard him tell the tale of our encounter with Green People near the Algerra Swamp. The people in the little tavern heard Kaeten speak of our confrontation. They heard how we watched the Green People from a distance, tracking their movements only to be led into a trap from which we barely escaped. There were the expected "ohhs" and "ahhs" at the climactic points of his narrative. The tale I heard was different, however. I listened to him speak of an intelligent people, not the barbarians many believe the Green People to be. His words spoke of intent in their actions, not blind hatred. It was clear from the unspoken words of his story that Kaeten understood what happened and, more importantly, he was attempting to comprehend the Green People. I then realized he now saw wonders and heard whispered stories told only to those who chose to hear.

I now sit alone, knife in one hand and one of my Year Rings in the other. Slowly, carefully, I am carving the tales of the past year into the hard wood. Tonight, I shall take Kaeten through the Ritual of Batal and give the ring to him – his first Year Ring. Kaeten has finally become a Horizon Strider.

– Layt Paro, Dove Horizon Strider, upon completion of mentoring Kaeten Enthall

This ritual, called Batal, is named after the Old Yas'Wailian term for "becoming." Horizon Strider mentors begin this ritual when they feel their pupil has become a Horizon Strider. It is a simple affair beginning with the mentor's seclusion. The teachers take a Year Ring and carve the events of the past year into it, recording the pupil's apprenticeship. Once completed, mentors cut their palms and coat the ring with their blood while reciting their apprenticeship lineage back to their Ghost Walker. This symbolizes that while the Horizon Striders are not bound by birth, they are still bound by blood – they are a family. The Strider then takes the Year Ring and places it on his or her sleeping apprentice. Using their blood, they mark the sigil of their Ghost Walker on the forehead of their pupil, joining the new Strider to their Ghost Walker. Once completed, the Horizon Strider teacher departs – it is now time for the young Strider to forge his or her own path.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE YEAR RINGS

Striders make Year Rings from all manner of material such as stone, wood, bone and crystal. They tend to make them from hard woods since that is the easiest to work with and is a readily available material. While each Year Ring is unique, they generally measure 4–6 inches across and are about a half to one inch in diameter.

Over time, the construction of Year Rings has grown to resemble a ritual. Originally, Horizon Striders hired jewellers to fasten the Year Ring so they would not fall off the wing. Striders learned several secrets from the jewellers allowing them to make the rings themselves. The entire process of making a Year Ring is lengthy, taking several weeks to complete. As such, most Striders work on them over an entire year, recording their progress, and slowly creating the finished ring.

THE WEARER OF THE RINGS

Winged Horizon Striders wear their Year Rings along the outer edge of their wings, piercing them so that the rings encircle the bone. Gliders wear the ring either along the trailing edge of the membrane or around the arm like an armband, piercing the glider membrane.

There was an interesting dilemma when Sol I'ban and Ellane Todillo received their Year Rings – they do not have a wing or glider membrane to pierce. The other Horizon Striders suggested they wear the ring around their arms, like an armband. After a short period of consideration, Sol pierced his arm, placing the Year Ring through the centre of his upper arm. He explained that the other Striders had pierced their bodies, permanently reminding themselves of their fellow Striders who stood with them in spirit when they faced the world alone. He also wanted a similar permanent reminder. Ellane, in agreement, similarly pierced her own arm with her Year Ring. Since then, all Fallen Horizon Striders pierce their Year Rings through their arms.

NEW SKILLS

LANGUAGE – HORIZON STRIDER

Type: Passive

Category: Learned

Support Skills: Language – Yas'Wailian, Language – Old Yas'Wailian, Language Study – Yas'Wailian, Language Study – Old Yas'Wailian

The Horizon Strider language is a written language that Striders use to record their life events on Year Rings – it is not a spoken language. By using this skill correctly, a character can describe various events in an immensely condensed space. Use of this skill also allows one to read the Horizon Strider language. Horizon Striders often use this writing to warn other Striders of dangers in an area or pass along important information, carving messages into stone or wood.

STORYTELLING

Type: Active

Category: Learned

Support Skills: Oration, Language Study, Acting, Imitation, Body Language, Charm

Horizon Striders are masters at weaving words together in tales that capture the hearts and souls of their audiences. Over the centuries, they have learned methods to describe a scene so that those who hear their words feel as though they are a part of the story. Through the use of sound effects, timing, precise choice of words, and re-enactment, their tales have filled taverns beyond capacity in virtually every community they travel.

When using this skill, the character rolls against a Target Number of 11. This number supposes that the Horizon Strider is facing a neutral crowd. GMs may adjust the Target Number to reflect a friendly or hostile audience. A failed result indicates that the Horizon Strider's tale receives no special attention or accolades. Some people may be interested to hear the story, but no more so than a farmer's accounts of his day in the field. If characters succeed their roll, they have captured the imagination of the crowd. Those that hear the Horizon Strider's words will be impressed by the tale. The higher the margin of success, the more impressed the crowd will be. Use the following table as a rough guideline to figure out the reaction of the crowd based on the character's margin of success. It should be noted that this is only a guideline – a sombre, angry group in the Alliance of Kings will be more generous than a joyous crowd in Bone-Wail.

Margin of Success Reaction

1-3	Applause. A few listeners give the Horizon Strider a few Melian Tasks in thanks for the tale.
4-10	Ovation. Several listeners give the Horizon Strider Melian Tasks and the owner of the establishment will likely provide the Horizon Strider with a free meal and warm bed.
11-15	Roaring Ovation. The crowd offers Melian Tasks and even a few Ener Tasks for the tale, and the owner of the establishment will request that the Horizon Strider remain for the week, free of charge, to continue telling their tales.
16+	Celebration. The crowd is not hesitant to offer Ener Tasks for the tale and word will quickly make its way to city officials. They will ask that the Horizon Strider return to the village regularly, their arrival being marked by a large celebration.

Note: It is possible for non-Horizon Striders to have this skill, though it is rare. Because many communities barter instead of use currency, the crowd may offer goods of equivalent value.

NEW TRAITS

SUSCEPTIBLE TO SHARD ABILITIES

Cost: -5

Anyone possessing this Trait is exceptionally vulnerable to Shard attacks. Any damage taken from a Shard-based power does damage as though it were one Tier higher. For example, a character with Flame Blast at Tier 5 normally does 25 points of damage. If she uses her Flame Blast against a character who is Susceptible to Shard Abilities, her attack does Tier 6 damage, or 36 points of damage. This susceptibility includes body-modifications like Increased Strength or Natural Body Attacks, as long as the victim is physically struck by the Shard – hitting them with a weapon won't get the benefits of the vulnerability. As well, Shard defences increase one Tier if physically struck by someone possessing this Trait. For example, a character with Tier 5 Increase Density normally has 3 points of armour. If they were struck by someone who was Susceptible to Shard Abilities, their defenses would be effectively at Tier 6, or 6 points.

HORIZON STRIDER TRAITS

The following traits are required by all Horizon Striders:

SENSE HORIZON STRIDER

Cost: +2

Horizon Striders can sense other Striders in their vicinity. The Ritual of Batal, the Striders' Ritual of Becoming, generates a link between Horizon Striders that they can detect, or more accurately, feel. If they meet another Strider, they may make a Perception roll against a target number of 9. If they succeed, they know the person is a fellow Strider. Should they fail the roll, they can try again after an hour with the target number dropping to 5. This Trait does not act as a homing beacon or special sense – characters cannot perceive a person is a Horizon Strider unless they can see them.

REPUTATION: HORIZON STRIDER

Cost: +4

Because of their helpful nature, Horizon Striders are exceptionally popular and respected in the world of Providence. It is rare for someone not to be helpful and friendly towards a Horizon Strider.

LITERATE

Cost: +5

To record their activities in their Year Rings, Horizon Striders obviously must be literate.

ABNORMAL APPEARANCE: YEAR RINGS

Cost: -1

Because the Year Rings of a Horizon Strider are not easy to conceal, it is difficult for a Horizon Strider to pass unnoticed.

BEHAVIOUR: HELPFUL

Cost: -1

Most Horizon Strider characters take this Trait, reflecting their drive to help society as much as they can. It is not a required Trait.

BEHAVIOUR, EXTREME: DESIRE TO EXPLORE

Cost: -4

Horizon Striders are driven to explore the world around them. While they are not stupid, they often tread places where others fear to go. This Trait reflects their drive to explore the unknown. Horizon Striders who do not take this trait must take the -1 point Behaviour: Desire to Explore.

RECOMMENDED TRAITS

Other recommended, though not required, Traits for a Horizon Strider are:

Resistance to Disease (see Cry-Star: First of the Free, page 132)

Absolute Sense of Direction

Combat Reflexes

Contacts of various levels

Enhanced Senses

High Pain Threshold

Light-Sleep

Poverty



CHAPTER FIVE: SCENARIO HOOKS

Providence presents a setting that is lush and vibrant – full of life and potential. The Horizon Striders, more than any other group, possess the skills required to explore much of what Providence offers. While Watchers, for example, tread in cities, and the D'Shau and Slaywinds delve into the Yas'Wailians' spirituality, Horizon Striders generally explore the world outside Yas'Wailian society.

While a game focused on Striders possesses a great deal of potential for adventure, it creates a substantial amount of work for Game Masters. GMs who centre their campaign around a city location must fill the setting with supporting characters, creating non-player characters. City source books such as *Cry-Star: First of the Free*, and *Cliff-Spider: The War Citadel*, help game masters fill in many of the blanks, creating a complete city environment. While this initial set up phase is laborious (though well worth the effort), once completed, there is minimum work required to maintain a city environment. Once the non-player characters are created, all that is required is to keep their lives dynamic. Adventures with no fixed location require less initial setup, but they require a great deal of work on a constant basis. In most cases, city-based campaigns develop into self-perpetuating stories. One story leads to another in a logical sequence – if a corrupt city official is kidnapping Fallen and selling them into slavery, stopping the official is the first step. The characters will then likely go after the slavery ring, then those who purchase the slaves and so on. One story instinctively leads to another. For games outside cities, the GM must create a new story, and a new adventure each time. It is more uncommon in these games for one story to automatically lead to another. As such, *The Horizon Striders* source book presents a few short adventure ideas. With a bit of work, you can easily develop these outlines into full adventures or even campaigns.

It is important to remember, however, that you can find inspiration for adventures easily in all Providence source books, other books, or any other source. When reading a source book, it is a good idea to keep pen and paper nearby to jot down ideas as they come to you while reading. Also, it is perfectly acceptable to borrow inspiration from outside sources. A Game Master could send his or her characters into Weeping-Rock to face hundreds of alien creatures; this type of setting easily creates a high tempo, exciting game. They might stumble across a predatory creature, for example, a warrior Serpenkine who is testing herself against other warriors. Movies, comic books, and other sources are full of inspiration for adventures. Don't hesitate to use them.

HORIZON STRIDER THEMES

Games for Providence all share a similar theme of heroism. Beyond that, however, each game's subsequent theme depends on the focus of the adventure. For games focused around Horizon Striders, the theme should be one of discovery, revelation and exploration.

GENERAL GAME MASTER TIPS

When acting as a Game Master, it is vitally important to describe the world around the characters using all five senses. Horizon Striders are people who do not simply see the world – they hear it, taste it, smell it, and feel it. When describing a forest scene, add in the smell of pine and musty rotten wood, the sound of small animals skittering through the underbrush, the buzz and bite of insects, and the intense humidity and heat. This level of description helps to put the characters into the scene better than simply stating that they see a bunch of trees. Also, by using the five senses, you can foreshadow upcoming encounters. Odd smells or sounds might indicate dangers in the area. By using all five senses to describe a scene, you enrich your game greatly.

Another important thing to keep in mind when designing a campaign is to keep it focused. Individual adventures can explore a wide variety of Providence's elements. The overall campaign, however, should focus on one specific area or theme of Providence, be it the Lost Tribes, the Gates, the Deep, or whatever you choose. By keeping the complete picture in mind when you design each adventure, your game will become alive, developing into an epic tale. For example, though your characters may explore a lost Yas'Wailian temple, they may find clues to the origins of the Green People, maintaining the tone of a campaign focused on the Lost Tribe. Without this focus, your adventures may be enjoyable but nothing will hold one to the next, making the game feel very episodic, like a poorly written television series. After all, isn't a campaign like a television weekly series? You tune in once a week (or month depending on your schedules), to follow the adventures of your characters. Each week's episode is one adventure or game session. The entire season makes up the campaign. By developing your adventures along a similar line, you will enjoy greater success in drawing your players into the game environment you are creating.

TRAVELLERS IN NEED

PLOT

While exploring the Deep, the characters come across a caravan; it has fallen prey to a small group of Green People and Serpenkine warriors. The caravan was transporting supplies from Cry-Star to a military outpost and wandered into Serpenkine territory, hoping to cut a few days off its voyage. The decision of the caravan members to take a short cut proved costly – the caravan

lost its supplies and only a dozen of the original 50 travellers survived the encounter – all badly injured. Without help, they will clearly die within the next few days for they are still about two weeks hard travel from the nearest village.

The caravan needs help to get safely through the Deep. It is highly unlikely the characters have enough supplies to feed almost a dozen injured people so they must provide for the others while protecting them from Providence's dangers.

EXTENDED PLOT THREADS

This adventure, while simple, can easily lead to an investigation of the Lost Tribes, including their movements and activities. Furthermore, the caravan may have been transporting more than simple supplies. What if the caravan was transporting important documents of the Yas'Wailians' plans against the Lost Tribes? It could also have been carrying a magical artifact. Without sufficient forces to reclaim the lost cargo, the characters may be the only way for the Yas'Wailians to retrieve the items from the Lost Tribes.

WALKER ROVERS

PLOT

The characters discover a small, abandoned village, likely the home of a Free Tribe (people who escaped prison colonies) from long ago. After searching the village for several days, they uncover several documents, artifacts and artistic treasures. Carefully gathering everything together, they begin travelling towards Haak San Bazaa, intent on handing the items over to the Grand Repository for further study.

En route, a group of Lone Walkers ambush the characters, intent on stealing their discoveries. Several of the items will fetch a small fortune on the black market in Haak San Bazaa or in Bone-Wail. The Walkers' primary goal will not be killing the characters – it will be capturing the artifacts. That does not mean they will not fight for the treasures they seek. It is likely the characters will want to reclaim the items, leading to a cat-and-mouse chase through the wilderness and possibly even into the city itself.

A variation of this plot could involve wardens from Bone-Wail just as effectively.

EXTENDED PLOT THREADS

This sort of adventure can easily lead the characters toward treasure merchants as they attempt to retrieve various other artifacts that have passed through the black markets. This can provide them with items which hint at the location of lost colonies, hidden stores of knowledge, or the like. This will also give a Game Master a perfect opportunity to introduce the characters to other city-based characters, bringing a Strider and Watcher together for a game, for example.

DISASTER ON THE HOME FRONT

PLOT

A pack of animals threatens a small village the characters regularly visit. It could be anything from a Gethryn, to a pack of Leurin, to a pack of gigantic Torraders (see The Ecology for various creatures). The villagers beg the characters to help them and kill the creatures before they destroy the village or harm anyone. The characters, however, are unlikely to want to kill the creatures. In most cases, animals do not maliciously threaten society. Because of this and the respect most Striders feel for wildlife, they likely will decide to drive the animals off. Some animals, however, will not move easily. How the characters accomplish this is up to them and could lead to interesting and inventive role-playing.

EXTENDED PLOT THREADS

This adventure is fairly simply on the surface – looking a little deeper, however, presents a variety of questions. Why are the animals suddenly threatening the village? Have they changed migration routes because of a new ecological disaster? Have the movements of the Lost Tribes and their preparations for war driven the creatures from their normal feeding grounds? By making a reason for the animals suddenly becoming a danger to society, this sort of adventure can effectively launch a campaign of exploring various events in Providence.

CRIMINALS AT LARGE

PLOT

When visiting one of the larger cities, the local Watchers, or even a Recognizer, come to the characters asking for help. A criminal wanted for some vile and heinous crime has evaded their capture and fled into the wilderness. The authorities need help to track down and capture the criminal so that they can stand trial for their crimes.

This sort of adventure can become a huge endeavour as the criminal attempts to avoid capture. The criminal may also enlist the aid of friends to help fight off any pursuer.

EXTENDED PLOT THREADS

This scenario can easily lead into a larger adventure. The criminal may be a part of a larger criminal organization. This is an excellent way to bring a Horizon Strider into a city-based campaign or to draw city-based characters into the wilderness.



SPECIAL HERBS

PLOT

While visiting an area, an old Anodyne approaches the characters asking for assistance. An unusual illness has struck a group of children. The Anodyne has done everything they know to cure the disease, but nothing seems to work. There is a possible cure but it requires an extremely rare herb that is several days travel away. The Anodyne needs the Horizon Striders assistance in retrieving the herbs. Without the herbs, the children will surely die. The Anodyne believes they have a week (or other suitable period of time). The characters must race against time in order to get the herbs. This sort of adventure allows players to challenge themselves as they attempt to traverse treacherous terrain quickly yet safely.

EXTENDED PLOT THREADS



While finding herbs to cure a rare illness may be straightforward, the cause of the illness may be complex. What if the Guild of Chirurgeons created the illness as a test of some kind? What if the disease spreads beyond the small village, turning into an epidemic requiring more herbs? If the characters only found a small amount of herbs, they would now have to find more to save the newly endangered people. This simple small adventure could easily turn into something larger.

NOBLE POACHERS

PLOT

Providence's ecology is a complex society where each animal is the prey of something larger and deadlier than itself. Sometimes, Yas'Wailians enter this structure in the hopes of proving themselves over some of the deadlier species. Several nobles arrange long hunting trips, spending long hours killing creatures for the pure sport of it. This lack of respect shown to the wildlife outrages most Horizon Striders. Hunting for survival's sake is a necessity of life. Hunting for sport is unacceptable. It is not uncommon for Horizon Striders to protect the creatures that the nobles so eagerly slaughter.

This sort of adventure could prove very interesting, a game where the focus is to protect animals rather than kill them.

EXTENDED PLOT THREADS

Obviously this adventure would have repercussions – it is doubtful that the nobles would react kindly to having their safari ruined by “overzealous animal lovers.” This could result in the characters attempting to save themselves from the angered hunters.



SALLUSTURM TEMPLE

PLOT

Several years ago, Karyn Tebiak discovered the ancient lost Temple of the Sallusturm Knights (see the People's Knights, page 57). The temple was created long before the Yas'Wailians arrived on Providence, possibly by one of the Lost Tribes before they changed into what they are today. This ancient, magical structure has existed in rumours among scholars, though only one person in recorded history has ever set foot within its walls. Today, Karyn is unable to recall where she encountered the building. Though she attempted to find the temple again, she has been unsuccessful. That does not necessarily mean that it no longer exists. The temple may await another person to find it, waiting to give out some more of its powerful artifacts.

Karyn's accounts of the temple depict an ancient structure built deep in the ground. Dozens of doors line the countless corridors of the structure, each one protected by a deadly trap. Within the pitch black hallways, scratching, slithering sounds can be heard as all kinds of small animals move about, each deadlier than the last. What treasures lay within the temple? Karyn returned with a suit of armour worn by the ancient Sallusturm Knights millennia ago on Yas'Wail. It is very likely that her armour is not the only treasure the building held.

This sort of adventure is a simple one to create. It is, at heart, a simple dungeon crawl. The game master creates a deep dungeon, filled with traps and small but dangerous monsters to challenge the characters' skills of combat and survival. At the end of the dungeon awaits a treasure that will transform one (or more) characters into a legend.

Any sort of dungeon/temple works for this sort of adventure. The key, however, is to make it more than it really is. Be sure to weave a story into the exploration of the temple. It is far more interesting and exciting to be part of a story rather than opening a door, battling the monster behind it and rolling the dice to disarm the next trap. Whether it's the Temple of the Sallusturm Knights or a lost D'Shau temple, the building should tell a story. There should be clues as to the lives of the people who lived there; what happened to them? Where are they now? What did they know? Just as the pyramids in Egypt tell the tale of a society 5000 years ago, a temple in the Deep of Providence should tell of the Yas'Wailians who created it – if it was Yas'Wailians.

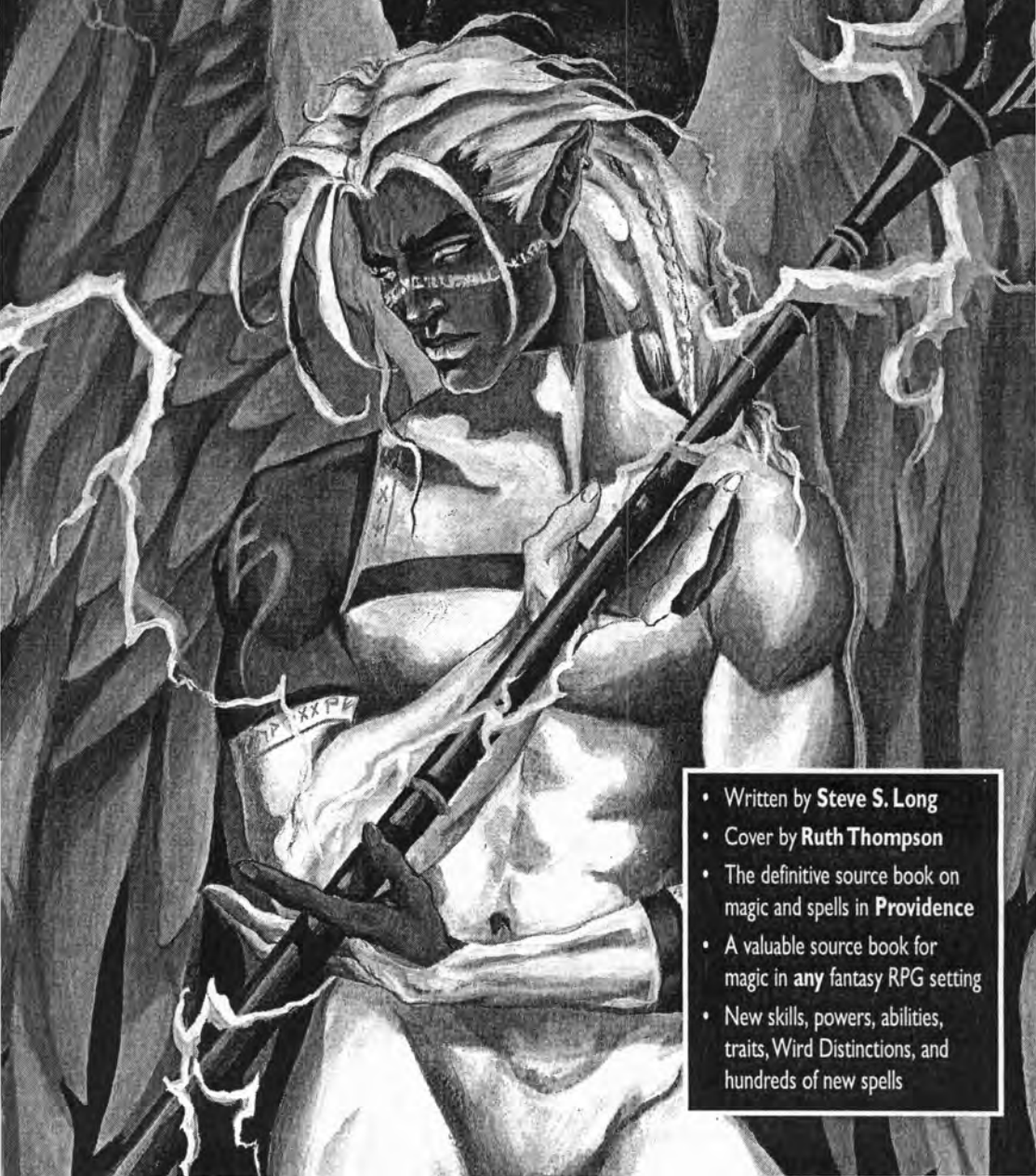
EXTENDED PLOT THREADS

It is important to keep in mind that the Temple of the Sallusturm Knights is not a simple dungeon – its discovery should not be a trivial thing. This discovery should be the climax of one story arc that leads into a new one. For example, the characters could explore various lost temples and cities, discovering clues as to the whereabouts of the Temple of the Sallusturm Knights. After several months, the characters finally discover their long sought after goal. After an arduous foray into the temple, they return with a powerful artifact. This artifact should make the characters into heroes of a large, epic struggle. Launch a war and make the characters pivotal heroes in the battles. Make Bone-Wail turn on the Alliance of Kings so the characters can rush in to hold back Elarian's armies.

One very important thing to keep in mind about the Sallusturm Knights is that they were grand heroes of the Eagles. It is very possible that only Eagles with a pure heart and noble soul can bear their artifacts.

PROVIDENCE

THE BOOK OF WIRD



- Written by **Steve S. Long**
- Cover by **Ruth Thompson**
- The definitive source book on magic and spells in **Providence**
- A valuable source book for magic in **any** fantasy RPG setting
- New skills, powers, abilities, traits, Wird Distinctions, and hundreds of new spells

MAIN RULE BOOK

The Providence Main Rule Book is a complete and extensive role-playing game. Although it is designed for use in the world of Providence, the Creative System provides players and game masters with the necessary rules to play in a wide variety of fantastic settings. This illustrated book includes over 100 skills, over 75 powers, and more than 150 spells. The Creative System provides gamers with complete control over the creation of characters. This simple system is based on points, allowing each player to create truly individualistic personalities. The Main Rule Book also includes an introductory chapter to the world of Providence, and a short story which launches the Providence epic. Finally, the Main Rule Book includes an 8-page full-colour introductory primer painted by the renowned fantasy and Marvel Masterworks artist Dimitri Patelis.

MAIN WORLD BOOK

The Main World Book welcomes all brave adventurers to the exotic and mystical realm of Providence. The Main World Book is written by Lucien Soutban of White Wolf's Montreal by Night. Constantinople by Night plus many others. Within the confines of this prison world rest the descendants of another realm's rebels; this colourful assembly of races, including the proud Eagles, the shrewd Dragons, and the defiant Jackals, is but of hint of Providence's many inhabitants. The Main World Book provides generous details about the world's geography, history, and Providence's character occupations of Kestrel, Slaywind, Drummer, Mockingbird, and many more. This lavishly illustrated volume entices first-time explorers to uncover a number of fearsome opponents, including the authoritarian Wardens of Bone-Wall, and the ancient Lost Tribes. Readers of the Main World Book will understand why Providence is fractured, and why the world's only hope of survival lies in the unshakable will and courage of heroes. Finally, the Main World Book includes a full-colour painted fold-out map of the spherical world of Providence.

GM COMPENDIUM WITH GM SCREEN

The GM Compendium is the essential tool for every Providence Game Master. The Compendium gives detailed information and characteristics on Providence's most influential and powerful characters; these men and women, both heroic and villainous, provide a rich backdrop, and add a majestic feel to every campaign. Read and learn the secrets and motivations of Providence's diverse cast of characters. The GM Compendium also includes a beautiful half or full page illustration for each of the book's 31 personalities. In addition, the GM Compendium is a useful source book for players, providing several characters with story ideas that can lead to exciting adventures. The GM Compendium also includes a GM Screen with important rules and information that facilitates the playing experience. Finally, this source book includes magic items, new powers, and an 8 page sheet insert for both male and female characters.

THE ECOLOGY

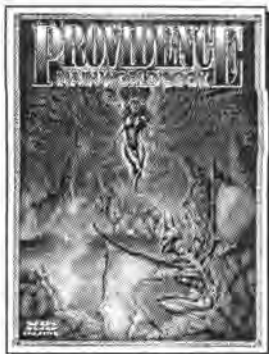
The Ecology is the ultimate explorer's guide to the creatures of Providence. The Ecology unearths three fantastic tales of discovery; each one revealing rich details of the most powerful and exotic creatures in the realm of Providence. Join the young Eagle Lord Canaius through treacherous terrain on his journey of discovery and maturity; Tall the Huntsman, master guide and mentor, teaches the young Eagle respect and humility for Providence's land creature. The Ecology's second tale recounts the story of Danyell, the apprentice Horizon Strider, as he discovers the many dangers of the sea, and learns from one of the legendary Ghost Walkers. The final narrative is an ancient excerpt from the diary of a future king as he travels with Lorchus'el the hunter, and uncovers the mysteries of Providence's flying creatures. In addition to these tales, the Ecology includes game statistics for each creature, conveniently located in the back, as well as detailed rules on poisons, potions, and swarm attacks.

CRY-STAR: FIRST OF THE FREE

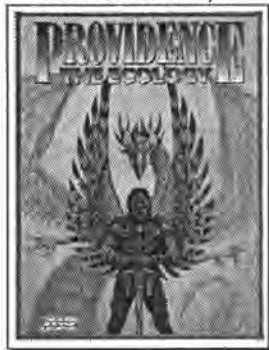
Cry-Star, capital of the powerful Alliance of Kings, stands firmly upon the majestic waters of the Crysarius sea. Cry-Star: First of the Free provides intimate details about the city's downtrodden Fallen, and its nobility, which lives segregated upon elevated stone platforms. Infiltrate the city's tumultuous royal court, and uncover a wealth of information on Providence's guilds; peel away the veiled layers that conceal the conflicts which threaten to render the fabric of this fractured society. In addition, this source book explores the rebellious plans of the city's Wayfarers, and their enigmatic ruler Firedrake. Finally, Cry-Star: First of the Free provides over 25 pages of important structural floorplans, and neighbourhood maps of the city.

CLIFF-SPIDER: THE WAR CITADEL

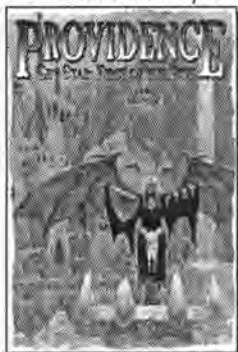
Sheltered within one of Providence's massive rocky spires, Cliff-Spider is a symbol of the strength and resiliency of the Alliance of Kings. The War Citadel is a unique city built entirely within natural and Wind-crafted caves, making Cliff-Spider the most formidable fortified city in the realm. Follow the guided tour throughout the city, meet its colourful inhabitants, and uncover the agendas of various factions; encounter the mischievous Vasker Traask in the hidden depths of the Boneyard, and travel to Castlewold to learn the secrets of the militia's elite Pathfinders. Cliff-Spider: The War Citadel includes maps of each of the city's levels, as well as floorplans of castles and guild manors. Finally, Cliff-Spider includes a complete adventure, and countless story threads that cement this source book within the world of Providence.



Providence Main World Book
Available at a store near you



The Ecology
Available at a store near you



Cry-Star: First of the Free
Available at a store near you

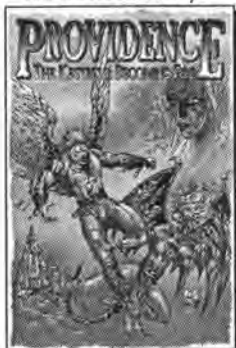


Cliff-Spider: The War Citadel
Available at a store near you



People's Knights

Available at a store near you



The Kestrels: Becoming Fire

Available at a store near you



Book of Wurd

Coming to a store near you (summer '99)



Bone-Wall: City of Chains

Coming to a store near you (fall '99)

THE RECOGNIZERS

The Recognizers illuminates the dark and mysterious past of Providence's bounty hunters. The first section of this detailed source book describes the organization's history and structure, as well as hunting strategies and traps. The Recognizers explores a wealth of organizational secrets, including new skills, traits, and spells. This source book also details the Recognizers' weapons of choice - the many variants of the Web-Stick. Finally, the Recognizers contains in-depth information, including characteristics for the realm's 20 most wanted criminals, known as Warrants. In addition to their histories, each Warrant entry includes a full-page illustration in the format of a wanted poster - the ideal game prop.

PEOPLE'S KNIGHTS

The People's Knights are the shining heroes of Providence - the men and women who selflessly dedicate their lives to the betterment of society. The People's Knight's source book is the ultimate guide to superheroes in the fantasy world of Providence. Learn to develop your own unique knight by delving into the makings of a hero. Readers of this volume will also learn about Providence's greatest People's Knights, including Paragon, leader of the most legendary heroes in Providence, and the glorious Knight Sallustum. Each entry is accompanied by historical and statistical information, as well as a beautiful full-page illustration of each hero in costume; this attractive and detailed presentation allows players to become any of Providence's heroic People's Knights.

THE KESTRELS: BECOMING FIRE

The spiritual ways of the Kestrel warrior are finally revealed in this source book of Providence's ultimate martial artists. Uncover the mysteries of this ancient order, from its tragic history to its secretive practices. Learn about the mercenary Kestrel Kenja, the enigmatic and authoritarian Trian, and the order's elusive enforcers, the Gath Hadatchi. This beautifully-illustrated tome provides exhaustive details on new martial arts, including the Tekkan and Mal-shan arts, as well as a wealth of new combat manoeuvres. In addition, the Kestrels includes new spells for those members who practice the Wird-ways. A complete adventure, as well as a number of campaign ideas, are included in The Kestrels: Becoming Fire. Finally, Greg Luzniak, of DC Comics' Lobo, provides artwork for this source book.

THE HORIZON STRIDERS

What secrets lie hidden in the frail remains of the Stone-Tree colony? Who are the Ghost Walkers, and what is their connection to Providence? This informative source book answers these and many other questions, and reveals the breadth of knowledge of Providence's premier explorers: the Horizon Striders. Learn the secrets of the Striders, and become an elite explorer by surviving the many dangers that inhabit Providence's hazardous terrain. Follow the teachings of a mentor on the year-long path of apprenticeship, and inherit the privilege of bearing the legendary Year Rings. Finally, this source book is an essential tool to spark a campaign across Providence, providing players and game masters with many enticing exploration ideas. The Horizon Striders includes 11 stunning character illustrations of the enigmatic Ghost Walkers by the gifted comic book artist Mark Pennington (artist on Marvel's X-Men and New Mutants; DC comics' Legends of the Dark Knight, Shade the Changing Man and Death mini-series; and Todd McFarlane's The Violator and Angelina mini-series).

THE BOOK OF WIRD

The Book of Wird, written by Steven S. Long of Champions/Fuzion and Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG fame, is a bountiful resource for all magic users. This massive, lavishly illustrated tome includes hundreds of fantastic spells for a wide range of Wird casters, including the familiar distinctions of Wird Weaver, Wird Dancer, and Wylder, as well as the new Bright Orioles. In addition, the Book of Wird includes spells for many of Providence's professions, such as the Recognizers, the Slaywinds, and the D'Shau Monks. This encyclopedia of Wird also provides numerous secret spells for the Serpenkine, the Green People, and the White Crow. Finally, the Book of Wird provides detailed rules on the creation of magic items.

BONE-WALL: CITY OF CHAINS

Enter the secluded world of the wardens' prison colony, and forswear all freedom. Bone-Wall is written by Joshua Asheim Mosquera of White Wolf's Montreal by Night and Constantinople by Night fame. Bone-Wall, home of the despotic Dragon Warden Elarian Puradanium, is Providence's most ancient prison colony, standing immovable for millennia in the remains of a petrified forest. Toil in the darkened sectors of the city as a slave worker, or fight a secret battle to free your brethren from the vicious clutches of Ravagers and War Dogs. Bone-Wall: City of Chains is the ultimate guide to the lengthy history, treacherous politics, and corrupt knowledge of the authoritarian wardens. This source book provides a unique setting for adventures in Providence, including detailed maps of the city, and secrets on Bone-Wall's eclectic population.

DELUXE EDITION HARD COVERS

XID Creative is thrilled to announce that we are producing Deluxe Editions of our 6" x 9" source books. All future books, as well as the previously released *Kestrels: Becoming Fire*, *Cry-Star: First of the Free* and *Cliff-Spider: The War Citadel* will be produced **both** as the traditional soft cover editions as well as the high quality, deluxe hard cover editions. XID Creative is producing the new Deluxe Editions for clients who prefer hard cover books. The Deluxe Editions contain the exact same interior as the soft cover editions while sporting the all new deluxe edition cover design.



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PROVIDENCE

THE HORIZON STRIDERS

*Far away, there in the sunshine, are my highest aspirations.
I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty,
believe in them and try to follow where they lead.*

— anonymous

What secrets lie hidden in the frail remains of the Stone-Tree colony?

Who are the Ghost Walkers, and what is their connection to **Providence**?

This informative source book answers these and many other questions, revealing the wealth of knowledge held by Providence's premier explorers: the **Horizon Striders**. Learn the secrets of the Striders, and become an elite explorer by surviving the many dangers that inhabit Providence's hazardous terrain. Follow the teachings of a mentor on the year-long path of apprenticeship, and inherit the privilege of wearing the legendary Year Rings.

Finally, this source book is an essential tool for sparking a campaign within **Providence**, providing players and game masters with many enticing exploration ideas. This is the vital source book for anyone interested in exploring the mysteries of **Providence**.



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