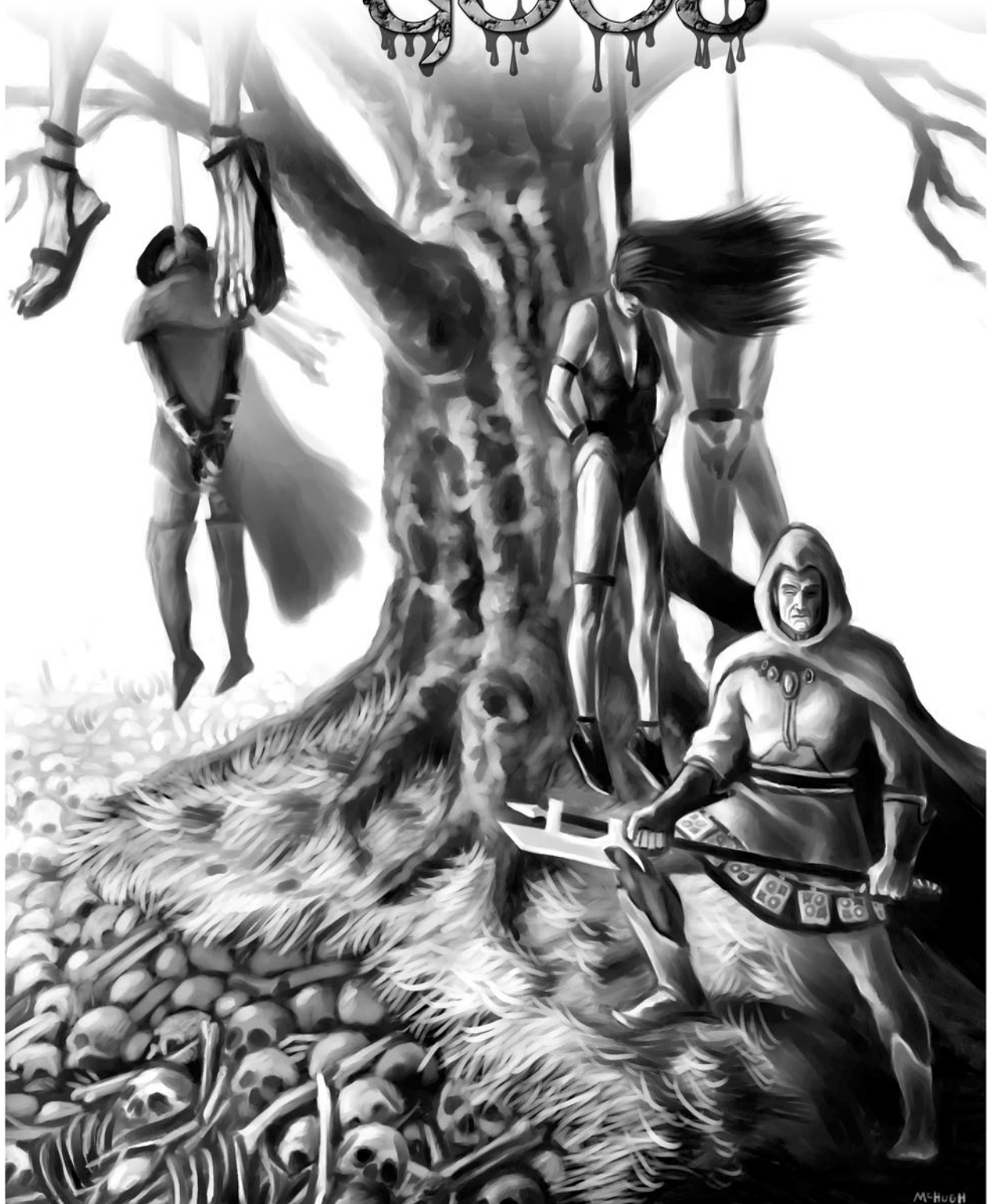


SCOTT KNIPE

CHARNEL GOOS



A mini-supplement for Sorcerer

CHARNEL GODS

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My artists did a phenomenal job. Jeremy and Doug are consummate professionals, and they were exceptional in dealing with my constant mood shifts. Dave came on late with a couple pieces that just screamed CHARNEL GODS. I can't thank the three of them enough.

Paul Czege contributed much in the way of inspiration, as well as pure grunt work. He did the maps, coded the first promo piece for my website, provided sound editorial advice, and even suggested a major rule change which made it into the final draft. I hope to return the favor one of these days.

Matt Snyder is a genius and a hell of a nice guy. He cobbled this baby together nicely, and I doubt there's any way I'll be able to return that favor. I'll sure try though.

Matt Gwinn is the talent behind the Con edition, as well as much of my current web design. More than that, Matt's been a good friend for over a decade now, and for that I am grateful.

The CobbCon playtesters get special mention for calling CHARNEL GODS the best game they ever played. Okay, not all of them said that, but here are their names anyway: Jennifer Elenbaas, Jason Fox, Eric Spahr, Crystal Fisher, Mitch Walinski, Martin Cobb, and the ubiquitous Matt Gwinn. Thanks guys!

My wife, fine woman that she is, contributed her eagle-eyes to my effort, proofreading the manuscript at various stages. Typos and grammatical mistakes are my own; you should have seen it before she got to it.

DEDICATION

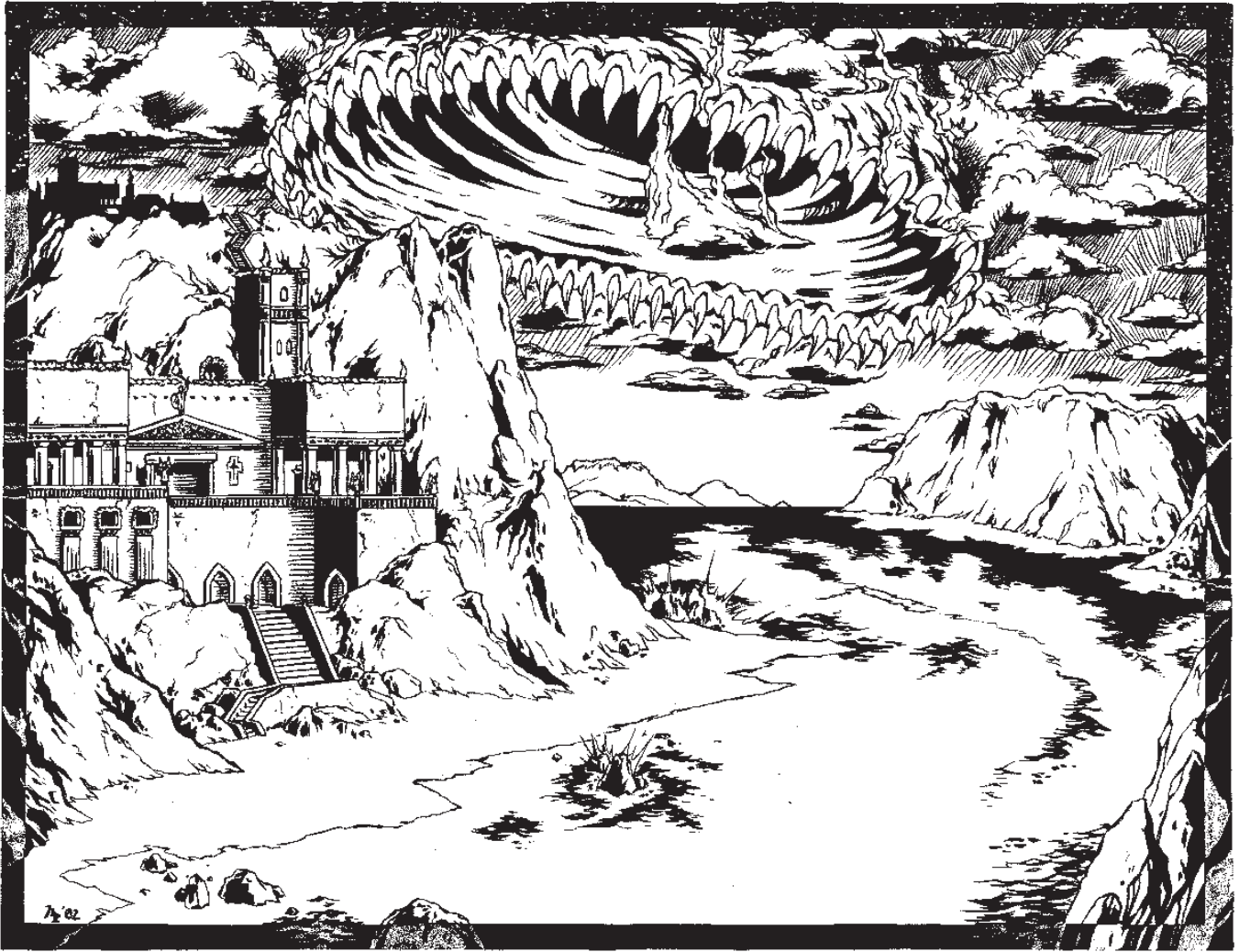
CHARNEL GODS is dedicated to the memory of my friend, Michael William Pyorala. Something few people know is that Mike actually contributed to the game, years ago, when we were calling it Doomfarer. It's finished now brother, and I only wish you were here to play it with me. Love and Respect.

Check out the Michael W. Pyorala tribute site at <http://bigdaddypie.org/index.html>

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CHAPTER ONE: SETTING

In the beginning, there was only the Void. Absolute in its nothingness, it was devoid of all things. Light and dark, warmth and cold, love and hate...all things were equally absent in the Void.

When the Old Gods came into it, they found despair in its utter bleakness. A creeping melancholy settled upon them, and in time would have been their end. To guard against this, they created many things to distract them. They surrounded themselves with diversions, things to please and amuse, but they were never enough in the looming presence of the Void. So they created more and more things, until eventually the Void was hidden from their sight, completely eclipsed by Creation, and it was to their liking.

There was one place, though, where nothing could be created, and through which the Void was always visible. The Old Gods called it the Black Gulf, and

they never strayed too near it. Nevertheless, it held their attention and consumed their thoughts, for the Void could not be ignored, even with the many splendors of Creation all about.

From the Black Gulf the Nameless Ones came. They were strange and alien, older than the Old Gods, and far more terrible. They poured forth, a writhing, flapping, chittering horde. The Old Gods stood against them, but they were few, and the Nameless were many. Gods and Nameless alike died in that battle, but while the Gods' ranks dwindled, the Nameless seemed endless.

One after another they fell, until the Black Gulf itself choked on the bodies of the dead. For a time the Nameless were trapped on the far side, barred entrance from Creation behind a wall of carrion. The Gods had earned a momentary respite, but it was not long before the Nameless emerged glistening, having clawed their way through muscle and bone and viscera to enjoin the battle anew.

Many times this happened. The Old Gods would push back the Nameless and seal off the Gulf with the bodies of the deceased, and the Nameless would undertake the grisly journey back, to renew the battle once more. The Nameless were relentless and the Old Gods were failing, their numbers greatly diminished. Finally the Gods came to a grim realization. When the next lull came, the few that remained retired to a dark and secret place, and there they engaged in acts blasphemous even for the divine.

They forged the Fell Weapons.

Tempered with the darkest passions of their creators, the Fell possessed the will to fight and persevere, even should their bearers fall. They bore names; names like Trinfendel, Periffon, Noc Tis, Cebbeline, and Mabross. And they were given a purpose: To maintain the corpse-wall that separates the Void from Creation.

Soon after, the Nameless Ones burst forth again. The Old Gods awaited them. Drove after drive of Nameless died on the ends of Fell Weapons and Creation itself was draped with gore. Ultimately, though, the effort was in vain; the Nameless truly were without end, and the Old Gods were overrun. Their bodies fell into the Gulf and there came to rest atop the heap of Nameless, sealing the Gulf one last time.

Their bodies became a world, and it was called Naur Tier. From their moldering flesh, new life sprang. And as Man prospered atop, the Nameless clamored below, clawing and scratching at its underbelly, dragging themselves ever upward. In time, just as the Old Gods did, Man will lay himself down to defend Creation. And should he forget the lessons of his forebears, he is forgiven, for the Fell Weapons remain, and they remember...

CHARNEL GODS

CREATING AN Epoch: SCOPE AND SCALE

One thing you'll have to decide about your Epoch is how broadly imagined you want it to be. Is it going to be a small kingdom with lots of high-impact things going on, or do you want dozens of nations and cultures spread out over huge distances?

There's no right answer to this, but keep in mind that Epochs are meant to be destroyed by the players. Rather than cram every idea you have into one setting, save a few for later—you'll get a chance to use them.

CREATING AN Epoch: PSEUDO-HISTORICAL OR PURE FANTASY?

When it comes to imaginary worlds, pulp fantasy runs the gamut, from places that are clearly parallel versions of our real world to those that never have existed, and never could. Naur Tier falls more into the former; it is definitely "like Earth." Hell, it might be Earth, just vastly separated from the small bit of history that we happen to know.

When creating the sample Epochs for this game, I stuck to the easily recognizable archetypes. This imagery is familiar, and carries with it a lot of emotional baggage that players can easily buy into. This is a good shortcut to be aware of, especially when designing a setting that your players will likely torch within a dozen sessions or so: Familiar archetypes communicate a whole lot of information in very few words.

Still, if you've got the time, feel free to be as weird and wild as you want. Just expect to do a lot more work up front.

Charnel Gods takes an unusual approach to its setting. It wants you to destroy it.

Naur Tier is a world much like our own. It is warmed by a single sun, and the oceans are ruled by a single moon. It has four seasons. Its days are twenty-four hours long, and there are 365 of them in a year. The laws of nature function pretty much as we would expect them to. Sadly, it is a doomed world, serving only as a barrier between Creation and the Nameless Ones.

Its history extends on into eternity, and that eternity is fractured into smaller bits called Epochs. An Epoch measures the lifespan of a single civilization, from its humble beginnings, to its ignoble final days. Your game will likely transcend several of them.

There are an infinite number of Epochs to set your game in. It is beyond the scope of this text to describe even a fraction of them...you'll have to make your own.

What this means is that you – the GM and the players – can create your own fantasy settings for CHARNEL GODS, and you can do so without fear of conflicting within someone else's vision of the game so long as you stay within a few fairly broad parameters. Those include:

- ❖ **PULP FANTASY.** This is a pulp fantasy game; *Sorcerer & Sword* provides the introduction you need to this brand of heroic fiction.
- ❖ **NAUR TIER.** The game world is called Naur Tier, and if you're playing Charnel Gods, that's where you're at. Fortunately, any setting that is basically Earth-like could exist in Naur Tier.
- ❖ **SORCERY.** Sorcery functions in a very specific way within this game, and most of the text is devoted to that information. The Fell Weapons, how the rituals work, the Nameless Ones, the Carrion Fields, Naur Tier's grim cosmology ... all of that and more is essential to Charnel Gods.

Epochs

The good news is that creating an Epoch isn't that hard. Here are a few guidelines:

1. **IMAGERY.** How would you describe this Epoch to someone else? What imagery comes to mind when you think of it? What books, movies, or music would you recommend to someone to help them get the "feel" for it?
2. **GEOGRAPHY.** What does it look like? Get out a piece of paper and draw a map. You'll note that there is no "default" map for Naur Tier. Epochs span billions of years, and in that time, geography changes. Continents drift, coastlines come and go, mountains rise and fall, etc. In short, Naur Tier can look like whatever you need it to – you can map the whole world or just a small portion, as you see fit for your game.
3. **POLITICS.** What nations are there? You should probably note these on the map as well. Remember, this goes well beyond just political boundaries – how are these people ruled and how did they come to be this way? What kind of politics do these people practice?
4. **BELIEF.** Who are these people? What do they look like?

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What do they believe? How do these beliefs manifest as behavior? How do politics and religion mix in this Epoch? How old and advanced is their culture?

5. CONFLICT. What kinds of conflicts are present in this Epoch? Which nations are at war? Who's plotting against whom? What threats exist to the populous at large?

Of course, you can take these steps in any order, and embellish them with as much or as little detail as you want. *Sorcerer & Sword* provides great advice about developing setting through play, and I suggest you take that advice to heart; give just enough information to get the players' imaginations working, and leave plenty of open space for them to roam around in.

At this point, though, you're only half done.

MAKING YOUR SETTING SORCEROUS

At the beginning of this chapter you read the Creation Myth, which describes the making of everything, the war between the Old Gods and the Nameless Ones, the forging of the Fell Weapons, and the advent of the world, Naur Tier. This information is fact as far as the sorcerers are concerned (although, see the sidebar, The Sorcerer's Heresy). What you need to decide is how much or little of this information is known by the common man, and how that affects their worldview.

One possible extreme is that they know all about it, and accept it as truth. The idea that all of your gods are dead and that one's only purpose in life is to serve as an extra corpse on the pile to help keep the Nameless away from Creation is fatalistic to the extreme, and such an Epoch would be all doom-and-gloom.

The other possibility is that they don't know anything about it. For whatever reason, sorcerers are the only ones to know the truth, and they choose (either through formal agreement or informal "unspoken rule") not to educate the masses. Perhaps they do so for selfish reasons, fearing retaliation from the common folk, or maybe they just choose to "protect" them from the awful reality of their existence.

More than likely, your Epoch will fall somewhere between these two extremes. Elements of the Creation Myth will have crept into common understanding, and these partial truths will be reconciled with whatever other beliefs the people hold. Consider these questions:

- ✱ If a boy were walking among the valleys beyond his father's farm and the rolling hills suddenly shifted, becoming twisted, knotted corpses of long dead gods and monsters, what would he make of it?
- ✱ With each new Epoch, sorcery must be rediscovered, its secrets pieced together from remnants of the past. Some Epochs make the leap quickly, while others take millennia. Knowing that once sorcery is introduced into a civilization it begins its downward spiral, how recent a development is it in this Epoch?
- ✱ The Fell Weapons bring with them misery and suffering. Who catches the blame for this; the sorcerer, the Weapon, or something else?

Following from the cosmology, you'll need to determine how much the common man knows about sorcerers. Sorcerers find it hard to keep a low profile; with nasty weapons at their sides, they are, by definition, the most



CREATING AN Epoch: FANTASY FOLK.

Pulp fantasy isn't about elves and dwarves; the closest thing you might have to a demi-human is the howling man-ape out in the woods. Nonetheless, it's easy to work fantastic races into Charnel Gods, by making them Ancients. These aren't player characters mind you – they're technically demons – but if the imagery appeals to you, there's no reason you couldn't incorporate some of it into your game.

awesome and impressive people around, and they tend to draw attention. Stories spread like wildfire, and any demonstration of power by a sorcerer will almost certainly lead to rumor-mongering. Consider these questions:

- ✱ If a townspeople sees a woman bearing a strange and finely wrought weapon, what is their first thought?
- ✱ If a peasant observes a sorcerer doing something obviously superhuman, does he attribute it to the weapon, the person, or something else? If the person, what then does the peasant make of the weapon?
- ✱ What word do the people have for the bearers of the Fell, if any (perhaps they call them “sorcerer”, but if so, why?)? What do they call the Fell, if anything?
- ✱ Are sorcerers always lone-wolf types, or are there orders of them? What are these orders like, and what do they expect of their members?
- ✱ Are sorcerers thought to be heroes or villains, or can they be both? From where did this particular viewpoint spring?

Finally, you’ll need to decide on a couple game mechanics: Score Descriptions and Past. These are extremely important; they serve to inform your players’ understanding of the setting through the most important thing in it – their characters.

The only Score Descriptions which necessarily remain the same from Epoch to Epoch are those for Lore. Stamina and Will Descriptions may vary, as is appropriate to the individual Epoch. You must select a half dozen or so (from the list in Chapter Two) to make available to the players, keeping in mind that your selections will color the Epoch in a very real way. Choose Descriptions that interest you, and that evoke the right atmosphere for your Epoch.

As with Descriptions, Past will vary from Epoch to Epoch. You need to come up with a short list to present to your players, as examples of what would be appropriate to the setting. Players are encouraged to make up their own Past, but your samples should set the tone and inspire thought.

Other Stuff

DUNGEONS. Civilizations in Naur Tier are built on the rubble of the past, so it wouldn’t be wrong for you to imagine a world overflowing with ruined temples, ruined castles, ruined cities...ruins, ruins, ruins. Not only is the imagery cool, but it gives you plenty of excuses to run nasty *Sorcerer*-style dungeon crawls. And the really fun part is that you and your players get to imagine these dead Epochs, and maybe sometime down the road you’ll go back in time and play in one of them. If this sounds like your thing, make a few notes about what those past Epochs might have been like, or at least what’s left of them for the current heroes to see and explore.

FLORA AND FAUNA. CHARNEL GODS isn’t the sort of game where you would want, or need, an elaborate bestiary.

Nonetheless, if there are certain creatures that are especially important to the setting and you think your players should know about them, go ahead and scribble down a few notes.

CREATING AN Epoch:

So what should we call you?

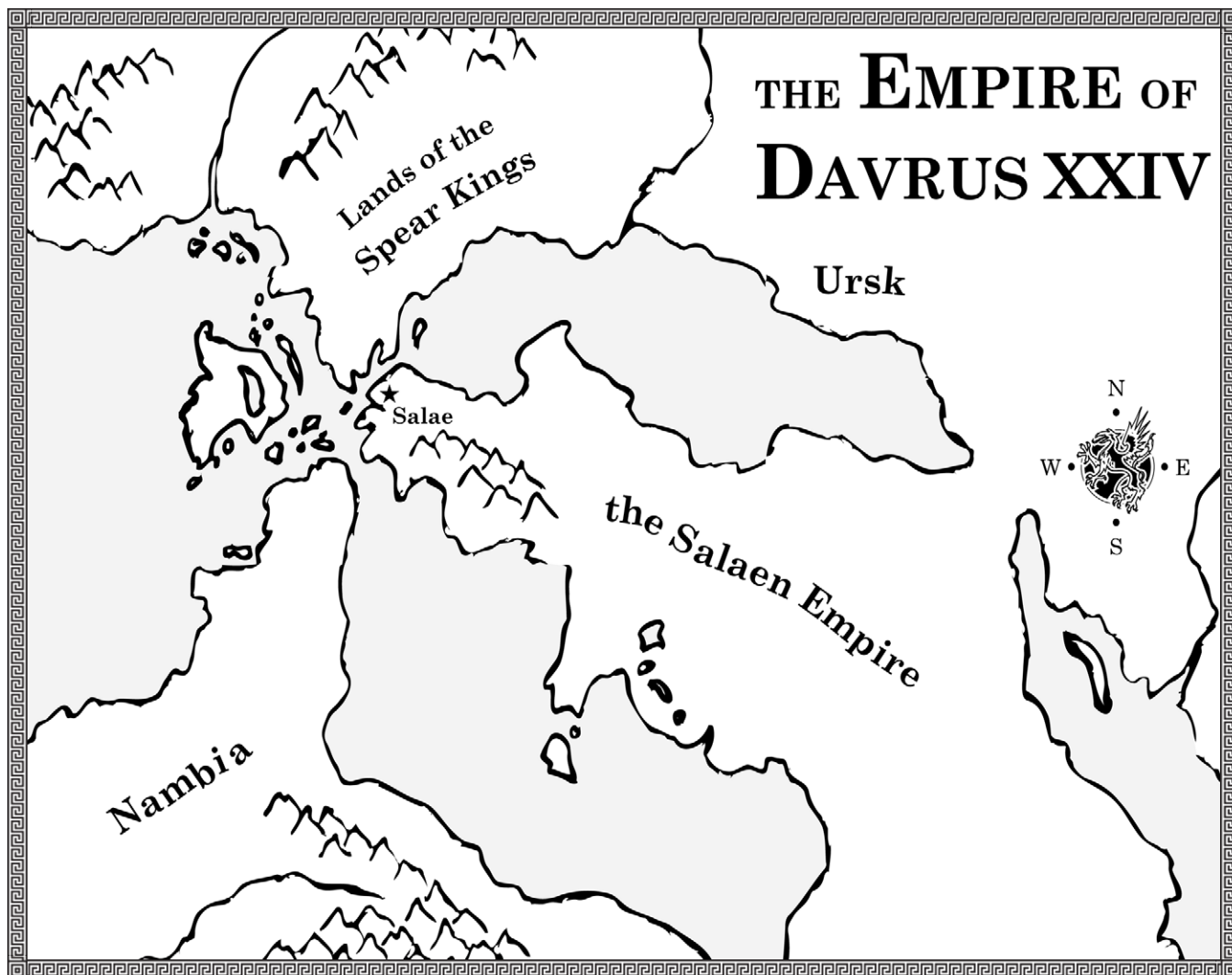
The word “sorcerer” is a game term and may not be what the PCs are actually called within the setting. What the PCs are called is up to the GM, the players, and the kind of setting they want to create. Informal titles might include “bearer”, “wielder”, “weaponmaster”, or yes, even “sorcerer”, depending on how their activities are perceived by the population at large. Sorcerers might refer to themselves and others as “accursed”, “blessed”, “burdened”, “brother”, or any other name that might seem appropriate. More formal titles can be created to represent orders of sorcerers: “The Circle of Nine”, “The Black Guard”, etc.

Likewise, the Weapons might be called many things. While “Fell Weapon” works as both a game term and a title within the setting, natives of a given Epoch might have their own vocabulary when referring to these things. “God-arms”, “demonblades”, and “the Fell”, are all likely examples.

The Sorcerer’s Heresy

Does it seem like the Creation Myth is a little too...convenient. It rationalizes and justifies the deplorable behavior of the sorcerers, claiming that such behavior is necessary to hold back the Nameless hordes. Is it possible that the Myth was the product of feverish minds, put forward by early sorcerers to justify, if only to themselves, what it is they do? Or perhaps it is the work of the Fell Weapons, whose motivations are more than a little suspect? Some believe so.

There are those who doubt the Myth, who wonder if the Nameless really are the threat it says they are, and whether the Fell truly are altruistic defenders of Creation. Some even go so far as to suggest that it is the corruption caused by the Fell that attracts the Nameless and permits them into the mortal world, not the other way around. In any event, the truth is forever in doubt. No sorcerer openly speaks of such things; to call into question the Myth is tantamount to blasphemy, for which death is a certain punishment.



The SALAEN Empire

A Sample Epoch

IMAGERY, TONE, AND INSPIRATION

The inspiration for this Epoch is ancient Rome – maybe what Rome would have become in two or three hundred more years. We’re talking aqueducts, coliseums, chariots, and statuary. It’s not clean and pretty though...the people here wallow in shit, beg for their dinners, and die in the streets like dogs. It’s definitely in its decline.

Watch Spartacus or check out a good ancient history textbook for inspiration.

Geography

The Salaen Empire originates in the Grimaan Peninsula and extends outward, all the way to the Great Eastern Sea, and north and south to the savage borders of their neighbors. In the north are the lands of the Ursk

DESCRIPTION SCORES FOR The SALAEN Empire Epoch

Stamina

- * Trained Soldier
- * Savage-Raised (the Spear-Kings, Urskén, or Nambian)
- * Regimen
- * Large
- * Robust
- * Unnatural Means

Will

- * Driven
- * Lover
- * Desperate
- * Angry
- * Grizzled
- * Hedonist

and the Spear-Kings, and to the south the dark jungles of Nambia.

The capital city of Salae sits at the tip of the Grimaan Peninsula. On a clear day, it can see the sea-cliffs to the north marking the territory of the Spear-Kings, and the coasts of Nambia to the south. These are, in theory, the farthest reaches of the Empire, although they have yet to persuade the inhabitants of those places of that.

Salae itself is a sprawling city. The streets are wide and, for the most part, clean. An enormous coliseum is at its center – the hub around which all else exists. The Emperor's palace is nearby, built upon a slight rise, so as to look over the entire city. Near the coast is the slavers' quarter – a place civilized folk avoid, especially during the nighttime hours.

The People

The generations of expansionism have made the Salaen people a mish-mash of ethnic traits and qualities. The average Salaen can be tall or short, light or dark skinned, fair or dark haired.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

The Empire is ruled by the Emperor, most recently Davrus XXIV. Normally the Emperor is assisted by the Senate, but since Davrus' ascension their influence has waned, as he chooses to ignore their counsel.

The Empire is comprised of dozens of small provinces. Once these places were nations unto themselves, but the past Emperors practiced an aggressive form of expansionism which few could resist. Nonetheless, many of these places retained a cultural distinctiveness, permitted by the tolerant policies of the Emperor and his Senate. That is no longer the case, as Davrus has declared himself to be the one true deity and has decreed all opposing beliefs to be heretical, punishable by death.

Most of the Salaen Empire recognizes sorcerers, although they possess little true understanding of sorcery. In the past, the Fell Weapons were thought to be gifts from the gods, and sorcerers to be the chosen bearers of said gifts. More recently, Davrus has claimed that he is the source of power behind the Fell Weapons, and that the sorcerers are agents to the throne. Few, if any, give much weight to his insane proclamations, but everyone pays them lip service anyway, preferring that to death at the end of a Legionnaire's sword.

The North AND the South

In both directions lie wild, untamed expanses of land.

The Salaen expansion of years past was finally halted at the northern borders of the Spear-Kings and the Ursk. These savage people proved too hardy and resilient for conquest, even for the Legions' superior man power and technology. Like their homelands, they are a brutal and harsh people, primitive by any Salaen's measure. Emperor Davrus still entertains hope of bringing these stray sheep into the fold...

Even more primitive are the dark people of the Nambia jungles. Little is known of these tribal kingdoms, save that they are a superstitious breed, sharing the mystery-haunted jungles with all manner of terrifying creatures. The Salaens enjoy a brisk slave trade along the northern coast of Nambia, but they dare not venture further than that.

The Eastern PROVINCES

The easternmost provinces of the Empire were once home to a proud

CHANNEL GODS

society of nomadic horse-warriors, but less than a decade ago they were annexed by the Salaens. As such, they are the most recent addition to the Empire, and their pride prevents them from seeing themselves as subjects to any Emperor. While they have not the man-power to stage an insurrection, they quietly talk among themselves about the day that all will be returned to them.

It is their misfortune that Emperor Davrus' ears are so keen, for their whispers have reached even his courts, and he has dispatched his Third Legion, under the command of the sorcerer Lurr, to quell their treacherous murmuring.

SORCERERS AND SORCERY

The suffering that permeates the setting – and there's been a lot of it since the advent of Davrus XXIV – is largely the fault of the Emperor, and not the Fell Weapons. In fact, sorcery was little known or practiced prior to his ascension, but his insanity has driven the most willful citizens of the Empire to drastic action, and these valiant souls have delivered into the world an unprecedented number of Weapons.

When Davrus took the throne, a mere six months ago, he declared all of the Empire's existing deities – of which there were many – dead. This assertion seems to be borne out as more and more folk discover the Carrion Fields. Most people are not sure if Davrus is in fact the one true god, but they have little trouble believing that he somehow found a way to murder the Empire's old pantheon of gods and demi-gods. This idea, though, dovetails nicely with the appearance of more sorcerers and their Fell Weapons, who are more frequently being regarded as avatars of the dead deities.

Sorcerers are not called "sorcerers" in this setting; there is no formal term, although many have taken to calling them Stahns (always followed by their actual name, as in Stahn Malachibus). The Fell Weapons are called simply "Weapons", and while recognized as symbolic items, are not regarded as the source of a sorcerer's power.

SAMPLE PASTS IN THE SALAEN EMPIRE

- * Noble (any blood relative of the Emperor)
- * Legionnaire
- * Gladiator
- * Charioteer
- * Slaver
- * Senator
- * Slave
- * Chieftain

The River Rowan

A Sample Epoch

Description Scores for The River Rowan

Stamina

- * Robust
- * Trained Soldier
- * Regimen
- * Street Urchin
- * Throwback
- * Unnatural Means

Will

- * Brooding
- * Sense of Morality
- * Driven
- * Lover
- * Righteous
- * Loathsome

Imagery, Tone, and Inspiration

Think Eastern European scenery mixed with Reformation-era Italian architecture, and you'll have the look for this setting. Take Machiavelli's *The Prince* and throw in a healthy dose of spaghetti westerns, and you'll have the right feel. There are even guns – black powder matchlock and flintlocks.

The River Valley (and beyond)

Rowan is a river valley, nestled between a pair of craggy mountain ranges to the east and west, and bounded on the south by the ocean. The river is the lifeblood of the kingdom, running the length of the valley, providing both irrigation and commerce for the many agrarian communities up and down its banks. At its mouth is the capital, Praha, a sprawling mass of buildings built haphazardly upwards as well as outwards, and all centered around the aging royal palace.

Away from the river, the land becomes rocky, eventually giving way to rolling foothills. This is somewhat of a frontier, generally disregarded and avoided, but there are still some who try to tame these places. Theirs is a hard life, but one generally free of the politics and troubles of the river folk.

There are other places in this Epoch besides the river valley – kingdoms across the oceans to the south – but they are of little concern, since they have yet to discover the Fell Weapons. The movers and shakers are all in Rowan, which is itself an insular nation, moved by its own internal strife, with little regard for places outside its borders.

The People

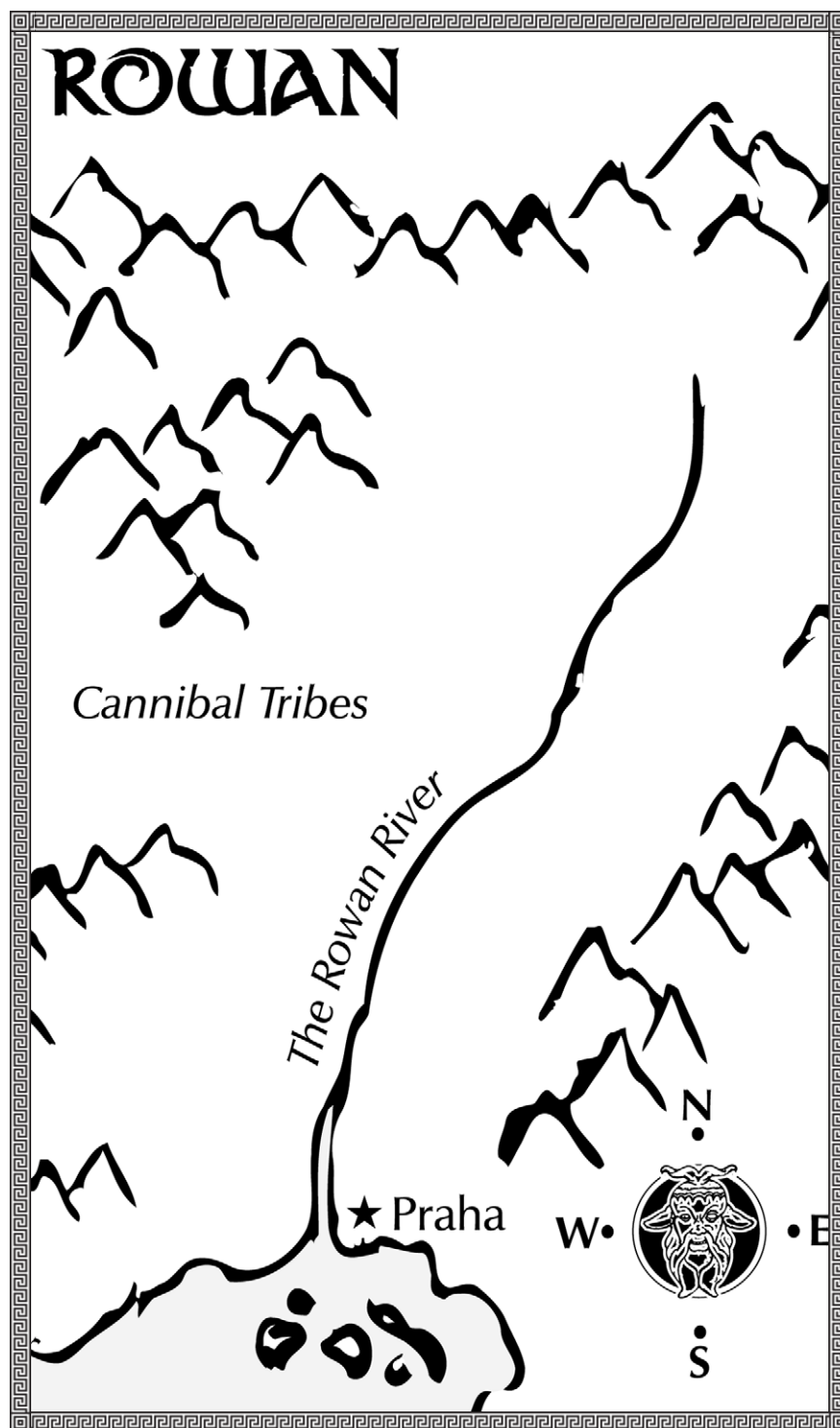
The people of Rowan are tall and lanky, with dark hair and dark eyes. Of course, there are exceptions. Rowan prostitutes frequently ply their trade with the southern foreigners at port in Praha, sometimes resulting in fair-haired and fair-skinned bastards. Occasionally, an unfortunate woman finds herself at the mercy of a Cannibal Tribesman, and having survived the ordeal, ends up bearing his devolved progeny.

Politics, Politics, Politics (and a little Religion)

The King is dying and is without an heir. His council of advisors – the Magistrates – jockey amongst themselves in a never-ending series of betrayals and power plays, all designed to improve their position in relation to the soon-to-be-vacant throne. There are wheels-within-wheels turning within the castle walls at Praha.

Each of the Weirs (river-towns) is ruled over by a minor noble – a baron, count, or duke, depending upon the size of their holding. Each of these individuals holds some claim to the throne, and as such, are targets for the Magistrates schemes. Alliances are made and broken daily, and assassination attempts are frequent and unrelenting. Much of the kingdom's nobility is in hiding or fears for their lives, leaving the people of the river valley to fend for themselves. The kingdom is in shambles, and lawlessness prevails.

Where, then, are the spiritual leaders during this time of need? They're



SAMPLE PASTS IN The River Rowan

- * Magistrate
- * Footsoldier
- * Cavalryman
- * Noble
- * Prostitute
- * Merchant
- * Foreigner
- * Tribal Chieftain

FLORA AND FAUNA IN The River Rowan

Beastmen

(these are a Man-ape variant, as described on page 73 of *Sorcerer & Sword*)

Stamina: 6

Will: 2

Nature: 6

Humanity: 1

Notes: Beastmen attack on the Edged table (claws and teeth)

around – Rowan sports a monotheistic theology of which all of its citizens are nominal members. But in recent years, as technology and science have exploded onto the scene, religion has faded into the background of public interest. Combine that with the political faux pas of siding against the Magistrates in favor of established nobility as successors to the throne, and one can see the position the Church is in.

THE CANNIBAL TRIBES

As if its internal affairs weren't problem enough, the river valley suffers depredations from the north. Late last autumn, droves of beastmen fell upon the valley, bringing with them terror and violence. But that wasn't all, for on their heels were the Cannibal Tribes – savage nomads who were to the beastmen as buffalo were to the plain Indians. To the Tribesmen, it didn't seem to matter that they shared a common ancestor.

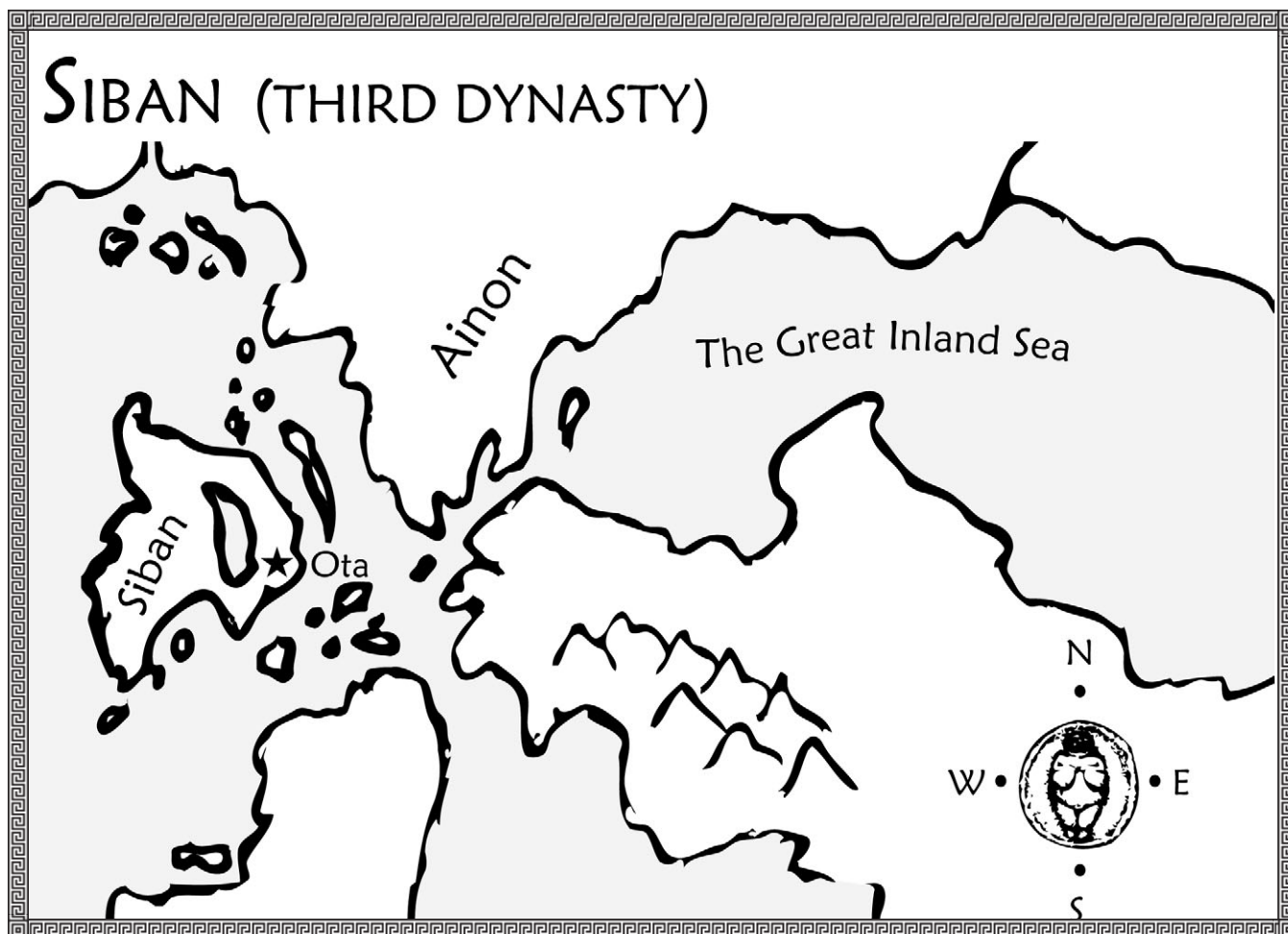
The beastmen and the Tribes are a formidable threat bearing down on Rowan – one they are either unaware of, or choose not to recognize. Furthermore, something drove these creatures from their native lands into the realm of the river kingdom, and it might be the most dangerous enemy of all.

SORCERERS AND SORCERY

Sorcerers in Rowan are largely thought to be villains. This is because the most public members of their ranks are always in league with the Magistrates. In fact, it was the Magistrates themselves that made possible sorcery, pushing forward the research and making available previously obscured or forbidden resources. Even so, few Magistrates actually possess Lore scores, and those who do seldom go so far as to Bind a Fell Weapon, preferring instead to let others do their dirty work. Amazingly, they manage to keep their sorcerous allies as allies by providing them with all manner of temporal power and gifts; as it turns out, properly recruited sorcerers can still be tempted by these things.

Pacting happens a lot in this setting; it is almost as prevalent and important as the Binding of Fell Weapons. The labyrinthine schemes of the Magistrates require patsies and lackeys who do as they are told and ask few questions. For this, Pacting with Bygones or Ancients provides the perfect answer.

There is one secret organization of sorcerers within Rowan, operating out of the cellars of Churches in every city. It is the Order of Belor, and their creed suggests that the Fell Weapons can only be trusted in the hands of a select few. It is their duty to seek out other sorcerers and judge them; they judge whether that sorcerer, in fact, is worthy and responsible enough to possess their Weapon, and if not, they will dispose of them and take the Weapon upon themselves. They are the ultimate safeguards (see Chapter Four), but unfortunately, some of the Magistrates have discovered the Order's existence and seek now to bend it to their will, and if not that, then destroy it.



The SIBAN DYNASTY

A Sample Epoch

IMAGERY, TONE, AND INSPIRATION

This is an oriental setting: a cluster of islands, vaguely reminiscent of Japan, at war with the Mongol-like people on the mainland. The imagery is obvious – pagodas, rice paddies, big straw hats, dragon-shaped boats, etc. Watch some Kurosawa to get the feel, or maybe Mortal Kombat.

The Island Empire

Clustered about the opening to the Great Inland Sea are literally hundreds of tiny islands, and one large one – Siban. There you can find the capital city, Ota, climbing the terraced sides of the dormant volcano, residences and businesses shouldered up against shrines and crypts.

Across the sea on the mainland are the lands of Ainon, a war-like people just discovering ocean travel.

The People

The Sibanese are short, lean, dark-haired and dark-complected. Their features are delicate, and as a people they are generally quite graceful.

DESCRIPTION SCORES FOR THE SIBAN DYNASTY

Stamina

- * Robust
- * Tortured
- * Regimen
- * Trained Soldier
- * Unnatural Means

Will

- * Righteous
- * Driven
- * Sense of Morality
- * Desperate
- * Afraid
- * Angry

The Aion share a common ancestor with the Sibanese. They have the same hair and skin tones, but are taller and stockier than their island counterparts.

THE MATRON MOTHERS OF SIBAN

Siban is matriarchal. The strongest and most revered image among them is that of mother, and a mother is always the head of her household, subordinate only to her mother. Every village looks to its eldest women for advice and spiritual leadership.

The ruler of all Siban is the Empress. This is a hereditary position, one that the heiress is groomed for from birth. She is not only a political leader, but the caretaker of every woman, man, and child - the symbolic mother of all Siban.

The men of Siban are afforded a fair amount of respect for their role as providers, but they are precluded from political and intellectual pursuits. There is an option, though, for those men who wish to improve their lot: by foregoing their masculinity and adopting a female persona - with everything that entails - a person may become a "near-woman", earning them membership to previously prohibited circles. To do so, one must prove they can "pass", subject to the scrutiny of the elders. Lacking the essential ability to bear children, a near-woman will never be regarded as wholly equal, but her spiritual journey is recognized and valued by the people of Siban. Though accepted, this practice is not widespread, because of its demanding nature.

As you might expect, Siban is a gentle society, with an appreciation for art, literature, history, and relationships. This is especially so in the bustling capital of Ota, where thousands reside, but is still prevalent among the rustic, outlying fishing communities. This was not always so; in the distant past, they fought and won their freedom from their cousins on the shore. It's been generations since they were last roused to violence, but that is about to change.

THE HORDES OF AION

The Aion have no cities or civilization to speak of. What they are is a vast horde sweeping ever westward across the continent, laying waste to everything in their paths. They share a common ancestry with the people of these places - even with the island-dwelling Siban - but if there is a familial bond, it is one of sibling rivalry and jealousy. They do not merely conquer a people - they have no desire to occupy and rule cities - they erase the very memory of them from the world.

Their genocide would be complete, except that the kings of Aion have a taste for exotic women. They capture their foes' daughters and wives and make them concubines in their enormous harems. This is both pleasure and necessity for the Aion. Life among the horde is hard. If a woman falls behind or falls sick, she is left to die - there is no time to cope with their frailty, especially since they are of no use in combat. Yet the horde must maintain its numbers, and thus must keep its breeding population high. Individual leaders are known to have fathered hundreds of children, with nearly as many wives.

The Aion's westward thrust has ended at the coast of the Great Inland Sea. Yet one more enemy remains. Fortunately, some of the Aion's past victims were accomplished boat-makers...

SORCERERS AND SORCERY

Centuries ago, when the Sibans broke from their mainland cousins and took to the islands, it was the power of the Fell Weapons that made it possible. But the heroic women of Sibana were savvy to the Fell, and with no more enemies to fight, they laid the Weapons to rest in the crypts of their dead war heroes. For a time, the Fell tempted the sorcerers of Sibana with their power, but the wisest and shrewdest safeguarded the others, and in time, the hold the Weapons had over their people was broken. Sorcery had come and gone within their society – used for good and then comfortably laid to rest – surely a first in Naur Tier's history.

But the knowledge still perseveres. If an enemy were to rear its head, there are those who could return to the vaults, or instruct others in how to do so, and they would bear back the Weapons to once again protect their Empire.

In Sibana, only a woman – or sometimes a near-woman – can be a sorcerer. Men make good warriors, but they are not good leaders, and thus not fit to bear the Fell. Only a mother's instincts are strong enough to lay down a Weapon when it is no longer needed.

Every leader among the Ainon is a sorcerer...and they have many powerful leaders. It is largely their command of sorcery and the Fell that has enabled them to run roughshod over their neighbors. Every sorcerer is expected to have one or more apprentices – always a boy-child – and when they reach the proper age, the child is sent into the Carrion Fields to search for his Weapon. If he returns, he is elevated among his people and becomes a valuable cog in the rolling war-machine that is Ainon.

SAMPLE PASTS IN THE SIBAN DYNASTY

- * Matron
- * Horseman
- * Hunter
- * Fisherman (or woman)
- * Sailor
- * Priestess
- * Near-Woman

FLORA AND FAUNA IN THE SIBAN DYNASTY

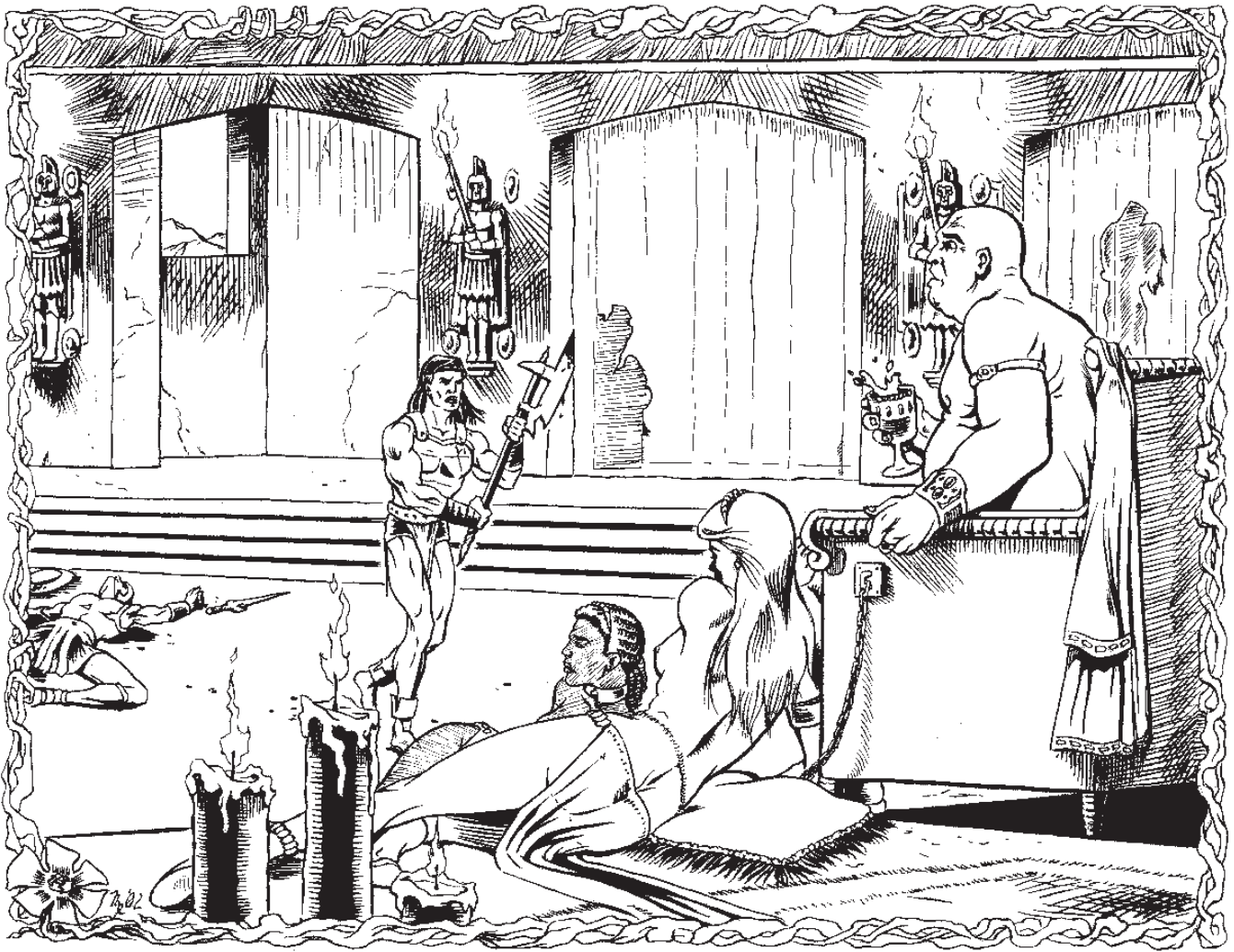
Ainon Warhorses

Stamina: 8

Will: 1

Nature: 8

Notes: A properly shod and armored warhorse will do damage on the Edged weapons table, thanks to the nasty barding and spiked shoes the Ainon use.



chapter two: heroes

When Perul first laid eyes upon Fulvia, he knew he would come to regret it. While her twin assailants forced her to the ground, she continued to bark orders at them, as if instructing common slaves. When one ripped away the embroidered finery to reveal her bare bosom, she scolded him in harsh tones. Even as the third - the leader - loosened his belt, she prattled on, oblivious to the danger she was in. Fulvia was used to getting her way and their insolence was beyond her comprehension.

And it would do her some good, thought Perul, as he stepped forward to announce his presence.

"She's too fine for you," he stated, hefting Noc Tis with both hands.

"Perhaps you'd find the bitches in the coliseum kennels more to your liking."

The man holding his belt turned, leveling a cool gaze at Perul. Then he

noticed the Fell Weapon, and his eyes narrowed. "Nice axe." His glance flickered to his two lackeys, and he tipped his head towards Perul. "Get it for me."

With that Fulvia was free, her attackers on their feet, producing daggers from the folds of their clothing. These were respectable rogues, who, despite their uncouth demeanor, were well-worn in the ways of murder and thievery. They rushed Perul with nary a word or glance exchanged, yet quick and deliberate, like wolves closing in on certain prey.

But Perul was far from certain, insofar as he could be considered prey. He chose one – the one to his left – and engaged him. The axe blow came impossibly fast, more quickly than even a veteran cutthroat could hope to avoid. It smote him along the side of his head, and his jaw fell slack, no cheek or muscle to connect it to the face any longer. He crumpled to one knee, his tongue – a smear of gore and pulp and shattered teeth – lolling loosely from the new orifice.

Perul spun towards the second, bringing Noc Tis under the attacker's roundhouse slash and across his exposed midriff. There was a moment where the man lurched forward, apparently unharmed, his furtive gaze searching for something - perhaps an avenue of escape. A kick from Perul dispelled this notion, slamming him back against a wall, the force of which sent his entrails boiling from the cleft in his belly.

With the two men dying, Perul turned to look for the third, but he had disappeared.

Fulvia, though, had not. She stood there, raven-haired, pale-complected, with eyes like black coals. Her hands were at her hips, and she made no attempt to cover her bared torso. She was not smiling. "Your help was not required. Those men were of use to me." She eyed Perul, and then the axe. "I suppose you'll have to do."

CHARNEL GODS

Characters for CHARNEL GODS are made much like any other *Sorcerer* character, following the rules presented in the basic rulebook and the *Sorcerer & Sword* supplement. Nothing has been changed, just details added to give CHARNEL GODS its unique flavor.

CREATING A HERO

1. Choose scores to a total of ten.
2. Set Humanity to the level of Stamina or Will (player's choice).
3. Choose Descriptions for all three scores.
4. Choose a Past. Its score is equal to Stamina or Will (player's choice).
5. Choose a Price.
6. Choose a Telltale.
7. Create your Fell Weapon. Roll for the Binding.
8. Write your Kicker.
9. List any important NPCs, places, etc.
10. Once over for likeability.

CONCEPT

Before starting, you should have a good idea of the hero you'd like to play and the sorts of conflicts you'd like him or her to face. If not, here are a few questions that should help focus your thinking.

- ✱ What does your hero want? What agenda does he or she have?
- ✱ How willing is your hero to help others? Who would your hero be willing to help and under what circumstances?
- ✱ What image does your hero present? Never mind nationality or ethnicity right now, just focus on what your hero looks like. The details can be figured out later.
- ✱ What's their name? Heroes have cool names, so what's yours?

Don't forget: Much of the game's setting is left intentionally vague, so that you can create and add to it. Want to come from the Red Desert but don't see it on the map? Just figure out where it would be, write its name on the map, and suddenly it exists!

DESCRIPTIONS

Descriptions work just like in *Sorcerer*; they describe how your scores got to the level they are. Stamina and Will Descriptions vary depending upon the Epoch; the GM will tell you which are available for the current game. Lore is what ties sorcerers together, and its Descriptions remain unchanged from Epoch to Epoch.

STAMINA

- ✱ **LARGE.** You are physically large.
- ✱ **ROBUST.** You're just healthy (female characters may substitute Voluptuous).
- ✱ **TRAINED SOLDIER.** The military has made you the person that you are.

CHARNEL GOODS



- ✿ **SAVAGE-RAISED.** You were raised in the harsh outlands, where only the strongest survive.
- ✿ **REGIMEN.** You have some structured routine to keep yourself fit and healthy.
- ✿ **UNNATURAL MEANS.** You have some unusual, possibly supernatural, means of preserving your vitality.
- ✿ **THROWBACK.** For whatever reason, you are somehow less evolved than other humans.
- ✿ **STREET URCHIN.** You've lived on the streets your whole life, and, for better or for worse, it's made you tough.
- ✿ **TORTURED.** You've experienced more pain than any one man or woman should ever have to.

WILL

- ✿ **BROODING.** You are moody and cynical.
- ✿ **RIGHTEOUS.** You know what's right for people, even if they don't.
- ✿ **DRIVEN.** You have some goal or ambition that keeps you going.
- ✿ **GRIZZLED.** You've been there and done that. Nothing keeps you down.
- ✿ **ZEST FOR LIFE.** Self-gratification is your thing; you do what makes you feel good.

SURVIVOR OF A PAST Epoch

You are holdover from a past time, an Epoch long since gone. By hiding in the Carrion Fields, where time slows, you've survived, in ways best left unmentioned. This new world is strange and unsettling...a mystery to you. But some things remain unchanged, like the Fell Weapons.

A Survivor of a Past Epoch will have a wide variety of skills – almost anything the player can think of – but should fall short in certain key areas specific to the new Epoch he occupies.

- ✱ **SENSE OF MORALITY.** You do things because they're right.
- ✱ **DESPERATE.** You'll succeed, not because you want to, but because you have to.
- ✱ **LOVER.** The love of some person keeps you going, although that person may change on a daily basis.
- ✱ **BRUSH WITH THE UNKNOWN.** Early in life you had a run-in with a Fell Weapon, the Carrion Fields, or a Nameless One, and it has left you changed.
- ✱ **ANGRY.** Your rage keeps you going, and you're seldom shy about expressing it.
- ✱ **AFRAID.** Fear is a universal motivator; it grabs on and doesn't let go.
- ✱ **LOATHSOME.** People are repulsed by you, and you delight in it.

LORE

- ✱ **NAÏVE.** Things just happen to you.
- ✱ **LEGACY.** You've inherited your knowledge and power.
- ✱ **ERUDITE.** Books and tomes are your best friends. You're a scholar of the first order.
- ✱ **INTUITIVE.** You just seem to understand things, making leaps in logic not possible for others.
- ✱ **MENTORED.** Someone taught you everything you know.
- ✱ **VETERAN.** You've been around.

PAST

Past and how it works is described in *Sorcerer & Sword* (pg. 41). The GM will provide a list of sample Pasts appropriate to your Epoch, but feel free to invent new ones as needed.

The Past of Immortal (*Sorcerer & Sword*, pg. 41) is not available in CHARNEL GODS, replaced instead by Survivor of a Past Epoch (see sidebar). This new Past is available in any Epoch.

PRICE

Prices in CHARNEL GODS usually point to a part of your character's backstory, showing how he has been marked by the events leading up to the first session. Some examples include:

- ✱ **LAME.** Your hero has suffered a debilitating injury at the hands of some enemy, perhaps a Bygone encountered in his first foray into the Carrion Fields. -1 to all actions that include running or balance.
- ✱ **SCARRED.** As above. -1 to all casual interactions.
- ✱ **PARANOID.** The Fell Weapon is valuable, everyone wants it, and they'll do anything to possess it. You know this first hand – look what you did to its last owner. -1 to all actions unless under physical attack.
- ✱ **DENIAL.** Just because every other man, woman, or child to ever possess a Fell Weapon has ended up dead doesn't mean you will. -1 to rolls involving interaction with your own Fell Weapons.

CHARNEL GODS

- ❖ **BRUTAL.** The world's coming to an end? You might as well be at the front swinging a weapon. -1 to all Humanity rolls.
- ❖ **FORLORN.** What's the point? The world's coming to a violent end anyway, so why bother doing anything? -1 to rolls when you have to take decisive action.
- ❖ **DISBELIEF.** The myths are all a bunch of hooey. -1 to any roll involving a Ritual.

TELLTALE

The obvious Telltale in this environment is the Fell Weapon itself. Fell Weapons are not things you simply hide under your hat; they are hard to conceal, and their special nature is obvious to other sorcerers. They can be left behind (though neither sorcerer nor Weapon are fond of doing so) but even then the character will likely manifest unusual behaviors that call attention to its absence – feeling for where it normally rests, bringing it up in conversation, etc. Even in CHARNEL GODS, sorcerers find it difficult to hide what they are.

DEMONS

The only demons capable of being Summoned and Bound in CHARNEL GODS are the Fell Weapons. There are a few Bygones and Ancients lurking about, but these things can only be Pacted with.

Chapter Three provides the rules for creating your first Fell Weapon, or you can pick from the list of pre-made Weapons in Chapter Five.

KICKER

Coming up with a compelling Kicker is often the most difficult part of character creation. A good Kicker will include these things:

- ❖ You should write your Kicker as though it were the first paragraph of a story or novel. It should grab the attention of anyone who reads or hears it, and involve them in the hero's story. It should make clear who the protagonist is, and hint at what he or she is about.
- ❖ *Provide Conflict.* A Kicker poses a problem or quandary that the hero has to resolve.
- ❖ *Provide content.* Much of the game's setting is left intentionally vague, and this is a great time to start authoring stuff. Come up with names of people, places and things you think are cool and tie them to your hero in a very immediate way by making them part of your Kicker.
- ❖ *Inspire Action.* The Kicker needs to get the character moving and doing something right away. It doesn't need to be combat, but it should present a difficult situation that needs immediate attention.
- ❖ *Create difficult choices.* A Kicker should suggest a number of possible decisions, and favor none of them. Furthermore, a Kicker is not something that can easily be resolved with a couple of die rolls; it's going to require some effort on the player's part.

At the tops of Chapters Two, Three, and Four you will find the Kickers for our sample heroes - Perul, Fusae, and Rowan.



SORCERERS AND THE COMMON MAN

A very important element of Charnel Gods is how mundane folk perceive the hero. While they lack a Lore score, and thus can not properly identify a sorcerer on sight, they can sometimes make incredibly viable assumptions. If a person is carrying around a nasty-looking weapon, they might rightly guess that that person is someone special. Special people attract attention, both wanted and unwanted, and this is often how adventures begin. It's hard to keep a low profile in this game, and half the fun comes from being entangled in the webs spun by others.

THE WEAPONLESS HERO

It is entirely possible to create a hero with all of the abilities of a sorcerer, but without a Fell Weapon. Perhaps he hasn't found one yet, or maybe he's eschewed that role. Whatever the reason, this is a perfectly viable, although underpowered, character to play. Have fun.



CHAPTER THREE: SORCERY

The sweet-fens of Antrarch had nothing on this place...its stink was palpable. Little surprise that; this was a Carrion Field, and Fusae expected no less. She choked back her rising gorge, readied Noc Tis, and took in the scene.

It was worse than she could have imagined.

To call it a Field was a misnomer. In this case it was the ruins of some pre-historic structure – a tumble of blocks and columns, lying at odd and dangerous angles, mostly given over to the swamp now – which she had to pick her way through. It was treacherous going, ever downward, struggling against damp, mossy surfaces that provided purchase for neither hand nor foot. She could smell, nay, taste, the rot, and breathing became an act of will.

After some time the descent became less rigorous, and shortly after that was level ground. Here the water had pooled, stagnant and fetid, nearly

knee high. This was worse than the precipitous trip down – less demanding physically, but emotionally exhausting. Wading through that sanctum - blindly placing one foot in front of the other, occasionally sensing movement in the water that she knew was not her own – was a trauma Fusae would not soon care to repeat.

With each new step the air hung heavier, more pungent, almost sickly sweet. She found herself moving more quickly, wanting to be through with this business and away from the stench. She stepped through a partially fallen arch, ducking beneath its toppled frame, and found herself, finally, within the inner sanctuary. There, half-submerged in murky water, its eyes long since rotted from their sockets, was the enormous, putrefying head of a god. Its mouth hung open, cavernous in its frozen scream, and things swam to and fro within.

Fusae cast about the room, searching for signs of what she had come for. There were none. She glared at the surface of the foul water, took one deep breath, and then plunged into it. There was silence, and the pool went still. Several moments passed – many more than should have been possible - before she surfaced, gasping for breath. A moment later the water in front of her erupted. Rearing up to a height twice that of a man, not unlike a serpent but with a dozen limbs and a body surmounted by a crocodile's head, was the Ancient, Balberith.

Fusae held Noc Tis between her and the beast. Its cold eyes fell upon the axe, and it spoke.

“A Fell? Theyyy diiidn’t sayyy she would bear a Fell,” it hissed.

Fusae glared at it. “Who? Who told you I was coming?”

“Theyyy diiid.”

Fusae allowed one hand to run the length of the axe’s shaft. It was warm to her touch, seeming almost to throb.

“Who?”

“Theyyy...”

She cinched her grasp near its head, and it jerked in her hands.

“Nevermind. I’ll find them myself.”

Noc Tis leapt forward, towards the beast.

What's *Sorcerer* without a little sorcery? Here then are the rules for Humanity, the rituals, the Fell Weapons, and an assortment of other sorcerous tidbits particular to CHARNEL GODS.

HUMANITY

In CHARNEL GODS, Humanity measures one simple thing: How much good you do your fellow human beings. Characters with high Humanity scores often get that way because they recognize this and behave selflessly. Those with low scores are exactly the opposite, ignoring, or sometimes causing, anguish and suffering. Circumstances that would provoke a Humanity loss roll include:

- ✱ Inflicting undeserved suffering or anguish – physical, mental, or emotional – upon a fellow human being.
- ✱ Ignoring any amount of suffering that you could prevent.
- ✱ Ignoring a great amount of suffering that you might be able to prevent.
- ✱ Contacting, Summoning, or Binding a Fell Weapon.

Humanity gain rolls are a bit trickier. They include:

- ✱ Proactive offerings of selfless goodwill, charity, or compassion.
- ✱ Preventing a great amount of suffering.
- ✱ Attempting to prevent a great amount of suffering, even though you know you can not succeed.

Note that a character's personal motivation has absolutely nothing to do with whether he gets a Humanity gain or loss roll, only whether his actions serve or harm other people. A hero who chooses to slay a marauding beast terrorizing a village may earn a Humanity gain roll, even if he only did it to impress a certain village maiden.

Humanity loss or gain has a ripple effect; your actions influence those around you, and their actions affect many others, and so on. Behave humanely; you make the world a better place. Act indiscriminately or with unusual cruelty and you take everyone one step closer to eventual destruction.

Zero Humanity is a condition in which civilization can not exist. When even a single sorcerer bottoms out his Humanity (allows it to drop to 0), the Epoch comes to an end. The fallen sorcerer acts as harbinger of the apocalypse, getting to describe how his actions brought low human civilization. The other sorcerers in the game get a last opportunity to resolve their conflicts and finish up their stories. Do that, and the game is over, although Chapter Four presents an option where characters in the next game can "inherit" some of the qualities – and baggage – of their players' old sorcerers.

The Rituals

Here are the rituals associated with sorcery, translated into CHARNEL GODS terms. While most function exactly as in any *Sorcerer* game, a few are different enough to require special attention.

CONTACT

Contacting is about information gathering, and it takes two forms in CHARNEL GODS.

The first involves Contacting a Fell Weapon that you are not Bound to. This form of Contacting does not actually involve communicating with

the Weapon, and may not even be supernatural in nature. What's really going on is the sorcerer plying his Lore score against the available resources, looking for answers to whatever questions he has. How those answers are acquired is up to the player, and is probably a function of the character's Lore Description – maybe he's read something in a tome that verifies his suspicions, or perhaps he's gleaned some rumor while bedding a world-wise whore. It may even be that he had some vision or dream that has guided his search.

A sorcerer may Contact a Weapon that he is Bound to at any time, and such Contact can be considered direct, supernatural communication between the two of them. What form that communication takes – voices in the head, hallucinatory images, strange compulsions or urges – is the province of the GM. This form of Contact is performed as normal, modified positively or negatively by the strength of the Binding (at the discretion of whomever it favors).

Contacting of either sort incurs a Humanity loss roll.

SUMMON

A sorcerer does not perform a ritual that will magically bring a Fell Weapon to him. Fell Weapons are Immanents, meaning they exist in the real world and the Carrion Fields already, and the game rules for Summoning reflect the character physically going to where it is.

The search for a Fell Weapon is an arduous, almost mythical journey fraught with rigor and peril. It's one of the most interesting, and protagonizing, events that a player character can undertake. So, while a sorcerer does not summon a Fell Weapon, a player can make a Summoning roll to reflect the character's struggle to acquire one. Doing so reflects a considerable investment in game time, although in real time it's only one or a few dice rolls.

A Summoning roll of this sort is made exactly as described in the *Sorcerer* rules (pg. 87), with the following caveats:

- ✱ Prior to the roll being made, a player can describe the events of his search, so long as he conforms to the information provided in the Contact. Truly compelling narratives can earn the player a bonus die or two.
- ✱ Murdering other human beings to earn bonus dice –i.e., sacrifices – still works, but is interpreted as killing those who stand in your way, not as actual, ritualistic sacrifices.
- ✱ Fell Weapons are never easy to find or get to, and they never just fall in your lap. They are always guarded, blocked, or made inaccessible in some way. The Summoning roll represents the sorcerer's ultimate confrontation with these obstacles, and because their natures may vary, so might the Score the sorcerer plies against them. Physical challenges would require Stamina, while psychological ordeals might call for Will (either would be modified by Humanity, as usual for Summoning rolls).
- ✱ Failure does not necessarily mean defeat – a player may elect to increase an existing Price by 1 or take an entirely new Price at 1 and narrate a victory instead.
- ✱ It can not be re-rolled (as described in the *Sorcerer* rule-book); a failed Summoning may only be converted to victory by trading it for Price (as described above), or the failure



stands (a new Contact roll could be made later though, followed by a new Summoning roll).

Summoning of this sort does still incur a Humanity loss roll.

The Hero with Multiple Weapons

One Fell Weapon should be more than enough for any sorcerer, but there are some who will risk bearing two or more. The complication here is that their Desires are quite foul and a sorcerer may find himself unable to keep one or more of the Weapons happy. Nonetheless, a savvy sorcerer may find ways to play their personalities against each other, leveraging more power for himself, at the risk of angering his servants if he is found out.

Necromancy

In a game called Charnel Gods, you'd think that Necromancy would be a big deal. The fact is, though, that much of the game's power lies in the absolute finality of death. There is no way to commune with the spirits of the dead or to resurrect lost loved ones. A powerful supernatural creature might have some way to animate a corpse for use as a mindless servant, but Necromancy itself simply does not exist in Naur Tier.

Banish

Banishing a Fell Weapon can be attempted as described in the *Sorcerer* rulebook, with a Will+Humanity versus Power+Will roll. What's different here is that Banishing does not make a Fell Weapon go away, it simply breaks the Binding you have with it. The Weapon itself remains, unless you choose to hide or destroy it. Keeping an unbound Weapon is a dangerous prospect, as the item is now open to Contacts from other sorcerers, and may draw quite a bit of attention from interested parties.

Banishing other sorcerers' weapons is a risky venture as well, as they will not often take kindly to such activity. And unlike the normal *Sorcerer* rules, you never get a Humanity gain roll for Banishing other people's Weapons.

Banishings can not be attempted in the Carrion Fields.

Bind

Binding a Weapon is simple, yet frightening. Not only must you claim the Weapon for your own, but in word or gesture you must declare your undying devotion to it, very much like courting a romantic partner. You should be expressive in the way you claim the Weapon, describing the event as dramatically as possible, perhaps going so far as to prove your fidelity to the Weapon through some appropriate deed (knowing its Need and Desire would be helpful here). The GM should consider giving really good descriptions extra Bonus Dice...the player will need them. The roll itself is Will versus Will, performed in the normal manner.

Binding a Fell Weapon automatically incurs a Humanity loss roll.

Punish

Fell Weapons can not be punished. They are beyond such indignities.

Contain

Contains are sometimes set up to prevent Fell Weapons from being moved from a room, person, or container. This doesn't really stop the idle passer-by from picking it up and moving it, but it does prevent the Weapon from causing itself to be moved through surreptitious influence. The greatest quality of a Contain, however, is that it prevents a Weapon's Power from dwindling should its Need fail to be met, the uses for which are many.

A Contain can be prepared as described in the *Sorcerer* rules with a Lore versus Power roll.

Pacting

There are things in Naur Tier that sometimes don't belong, Bygones from past Epochs and Ancients from worlds before. Their strange natures make them useful to sorcerers, who can sometimes Pact with them.

Pacting in CHARNEL GODS implies a mystical "agreement" with the creature in question. The creature is contracted to perform a task, and must live up to its part of the bargain.

Pacting is handled exactly as described in *Sorcerer & Sword*.

Attempting it incurs a Humanity loss roll.

FELL WEAPONS

What's a fantasy game without its magical items? The image of the warrior-hero bristling with armor and weapons is so familiar as to be cliché. Well, rest assured, the cliché remains intact...CHARNEL GODS is all about this sort of thing.

Creating a Fell Weapon follows much the same procedure outlined in the *Sorcerer* rulebook (pp. 47-62), with a couple adjustments...

CREATING A FELL WEAPON:

1. All Fell Weapons are Object demons – specifically a personal weapon of some sort. They are also Immanents, meaning they exist wholly in the mortal world, or in the borderland known as the Carrion Fields.
2. Telltales. Fell Weapons are real, tangible objects. Their Telltale should be that they look special somehow. They should never be non-descript; there should always be some specific, visually interesting element to them.
3. Choose its abilities. The total number of abilities sets its Lore score.
4. Choose an appropriate Stamina score. Don't be afraid to make it pretty high – these are mighty, mighty artifacts borne into battle by gods – they should be hard to damage or destroy. A minimum of 7 is suggested.
5. Set its Will at one die higher than Stamina or Lore, whichever is higher.
6. Set its Power score equal to Will.
7. Decide on its Need.
8. Choose its Desire.
9. Once over. Give the Weapon a cool name and make sure everything fits your concept of it.

Need

Need is easy. It should be something easily fulfilled, perhaps even trivial – a symbolic gesture or statement. Don't let it be boring. Think about the Weapon and its relationship with humankind. Consider the imagery and language you find interesting. Use Need to incorporate that stuff into the game.

Remember, because you can easily fulfill Need, it becomes your bartering chip against the Weapon. The question isn't "can I satisfy its Need?" but rather "Will I?" It has plenty of leverage to use against you; don't be afraid to push back.

Unbound Fell Weapons, or Weapons kept in Need, do not wither away; they're Immanents and have no place else to go. They will remain at 0 Power but will not lose Stamina as described in the *Sorcerer* (pg. 59) rulebook. Unbound Weapons can do little except hope for a sorcerer to find them. A Weapon kept in Need will eventually rebel against its sorcerer (see below).

Desire

The Fell Weapons were tempered with the darkest Passions of the Old Gods, and their Desires reflect this.



Sample Desires

No list could comprehensively describe all of the various Desires a Fell Weapon might have, but here are some examples:

- * Carnage
- * Tyranny
- * Subjugation
- * Cowardice
- * Fear
- * Villainy (lawbreaking, criminal behavior, etc.)
- * Perversion
- * Torment (inflicting actual physical pain)
- * Cruelty
- * Miserliness
- * Melancholia
- * Loneliness
- * Anarchy
- * Hopelessness
- * Jealousy
- * Morbidity
- * Apathy
- * Lethargy
- * Indulgence
- * Paranoia
- * Depravity

A Fell Weapon's Desire always manifests as a specific negative behavior or condition that it espouses and seeks to engender. Each is, in its own way, a form of social malaise, that when followed through to its natural conclusion, could bring about the end of a society. Fulfilling a Weapon's Desire means walking that path with it, helping it to spread the suffering it so adores.

Helping a Weapon meet its Desire almost always incurs a Humanity loss check.

Common Weapon Abilities

Almost any Ability listed in the *Sorcerer* rulebook (pp.52-57) can be made to work with a Fell Weapon, even those that seem inappropriate or useless. Some, however, are so ubiquitous they deserve special mention.

SPECIAL DAMAGE. No surprises here; most Weapons have it. Don't be afraid, however, to go with the Non-lethal version if it suits your vision of the Weapon – it disables opponents quickly without rendering the victim a fine red mist (most of the time).

ARMOR. This is good for a Weapon that you want to beef up and protect from damage. The other use is the more traditional conferring of the power upon the wielder, which is always handy.

VITALITY. Vitality is good for all the same reasons Armor is.

TAINT. See the sidebar.

BOOST. Everyone likes Boost, but it's not the combat power you might expect it to be. Remember, when Boosting something, a Weapon's Power is reduced to 1, which means any Special Damage a Weapon has is likewise reduced. Boost is actually more useful when used in conjunction with non-combat actions, or with Scores like Will, Lore, or Cover.

COVER. Lots of Weapons come with the ability to confer a Cover upon their bearer, allowing them to behave proficiently in a way that accommodates the Weapon's Desires.

TRAVEL. As described below, Weapons will sometimes manifest the Travel ability, allowing them to show up when and where they are needed without necessarily having to be carried there. Occasionally, a Weapon might also bestow a special form of Travel upon its master.

LINK. This one is useful, particularly when you lose track of the Weapon, or when some selfish person makes off with it. It's really good when combined with Travel, allowing you to call your Weapon back to you regardless of where it is (so long as it wants to come back).

DAMAGE

Regardless of shape or size, all Fell Weapons do damage as appropriate to their weapon type, unless given the Special Damage ability.

COMMUNICATION

Being Object demons, Fell Weapons have a hard time expressing themselves.

The simplest method they have of communicating their wants is by granting or withholding power. This is straightforward but vague; the

demon's displeasure is obvious, but how to appease it may be less so. A sorcerer may not even know if it's the Weapon's Need or Desire that needs to be met, and some liberal interpretation may be necessary.

A sorcerer may, however, communicate more directly with his Weapon by attempting to Contact it. Contacting is performed as normal, with one side or the other benefiting from the strength of the Binding (at the discretion of whomever the binding favors). If successful, the player can describe how the Contact is established; perhaps he engages in some hasty research to shed light on his problem, or maybe the demon's will is received more directly, in the form of urges or visions. The GM must describe what information is gleaned from the Weapon; no successful Contact ever does nothing (i.e., the GM answers the player's questions, at least to some degree, possibly interweaving the Weapon's Need and Desire into the communication). This is a great way to get to the heart of a matter when a Weapon is being difficult, but since Contacting requires a Humanity loss roll, it is not something to be attempted carelessly.

Mobility

Fell Weapons are immobile. In and of themselves they are incapable of movement. Not surprisingly, though, they get moved around a lot. People pick them up, carry them somewhere, drop them or lose them or pass them on to someone else...in this way, Fell Weapons see a lot of the world, and usually end up exactly where they want to be. This can be accomplished through pure narrative, or more proactively by assigning the Weapon the Travel ability.

DESTROYING A FELL WEAPON

Fell Weapons are extremely difficult to destroy. Not only do they have very high Staminas, they sometimes have Armor and/or Vitality conferred upon themselves. If the Weapon is Bound to the sorcerer, he must first Banish it before he can attempt to do damage to it.

BINDING STRENGTH AND COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS

The strength of one's Binding works exactly as described in the *Sorcerer* hardback (pg. 88), with one addition: The Binding strength may be added to or subtracted from any attack roll, at the discretion of whomever it favors. This is the big magical bonus you're looking for in a magic weapon, and even if the Binding favors the Weapon, it can be quite beneficial (although it certainly puts you at the beck-and-call of the demon).

BEING SEPARATED FROM YOUR WEAPON

There may come a time when you and your Weapon are parted, at least temporarily. This is bad! The Weapon can not confer power upon you if you are not in direct contact with it. What's worse, it could be stolen or lost while it's out of your sight. Obviously, you do not want to be separated from it for long. Likewise, the Weapon does not want to be long from your presence. Without a hand to wield it, a Fell Weapon is useless.

Still, if you can get it to agree to a temporary parting, you can put the Weapon down and go about your business. If you can not get it to agree to such a deal and you choose to leave it behind anyway, the Weapon automatically goes into Need.

Sometimes the parting of wielder and Weapon is not voluntary. Fell Weapons are highly prized, even by those who can't understand their true

Taint

The demon Ability Taint is special enough in this setting to merit some discussion. Until a sorcerer reaches 1 Humanity, Taint functions pretty much as described in the *Sorcerer* rulebook (pp. 55-56); the sorcerer's Humanity is reduced by 1 for a period of hours or days, and they undergo a physical and mental transformation that somehow reflects the Desire of their Weapon.

When a sorcerer's Humanity is at 1, and is then reduced to 0 by the Taint, all of the above still occur, and something else. At 0 Humanity, the following benefits are gained:

- * He/she can neither gain nor lose Humanity.
- * He/she can tell by looking at a sorcerer what their Humanity score is.
- * He/she can enter the Carrion Fields at will.
- * He/she is not required to meet his Weapon's Need.
- * He/she can use his Weapon's abilities at will, with no chance of them being withheld.
- * He/she can communicate with the Weapon as though he/she were in Contact with it.

The only limitation imposed by Taint is that the Weapon's Desire must be fulfilled as often as possible; the sorcerer and the Weapon are one at this point, and neither can ignore the wants of the other.

A sorcerer's Humanity reduced to 0 because of Taint does not trigger the endgame events described in Chapter Four, although it should provide a taste of things to come.

nature, and are often the targets of thieves. Unless the Weapon has the Link ability, its master may not be able to find it, but so long as it's Bound, it can still use its powers in its own defense. If it has the Travel ability, it'll likely find its way back to its rightful owner, regardless of who stole it or where it is taken.

REBELLION

The *Sorcerer* rulebook (pp. 93-94) describes the subtleties of Binding and how demons can rebel against their masters. That's pretty much how it works in CHARNEL GODS except for one small point: rebellious Weapons who have reached stage 3 on the rebellion chart will almost always fall into the category of Vengeful. This isn't a hard-and-fast rule, but it does suit their personalities.

CARRION FIELDS

PORTRAYING THE CARRION FIELDS

Never allow the Carrion Fields to be generic, and never use stock footage. Each one is special. Make note of specific details – the expression on the face of a long dead God, the unusual anatomy of a decomposing Nameless One, etc. Instead of piling them full of endless corpses every time, try pulling back a little – the entire Field might center around a gigantic hand sticking out of the ground, or a place where skulls hang from the trees instead of leaves (and falling to the ground as the autumn of mankind approaches). It's an unusual setting element...milk it for all it's worth.

The Carrion Fields are an otherworld (see *Sorcerer & Sword*, pp.32-34), bordering on the very fringes of reality. They are the final resting places of the Old Gods and the Nameless Ones, where the real world bleeds away to reveal the world described in myth. They are morbid, festering places, where even the sky seems to be dying. Time slows to a standstill there, and the ponderous corpses of the CHARNEL GODS can be seen rotting eternally, a fixed part of the landscape. The only life such a place sports are scavengers – vultures, hyenas, crows, maggots – and the occasional Bygone or Ancient.

When the Nameless come through, this is where it will happen.

Carrion Fields can be good places to gather information, or perhaps to find a Fell Weapon, but should otherwise be avoided.

BYGONES

Bygones are creatures of an older time, remnants of a past Epoch who survived by lurking near the timeless Carrion Fields. Once they were just normal people or animals – perhaps strange by current standards, but perfectly mundane in their native eras. The longevity granted them by the Carrion Fields, and their proximity to the otherworldly things therein, has changed them. These are the monsters of your Epoch; they can be dragons or dinosaurs, or any other thing you may want or need for your story.

In game terms, Bygones are Beasts (see *S&S*, pg. 50). They can be Pacted with, but no other ritual can be used to affect them.

ANCIENTS

The Creation Myth describes how Naur Tier was formed from the lifeless bodies of the Old Gods and the Nameless Ones that came to rest in the Black Gulf. But that event was not unique; many times before the Gulf had been filled with corpses, and each of those times whole worlds came to be on the backs of the deceased deities, only to be later destroyed by the Nameless. The Ancients are the inhabitants of these dead worlds, who have somehow managed to survive at the fringes of Creation.

The Ancients are very, very strange. They hail from times and places pre-dating Naur Tier, and are under no obligation to abide by the laws of nature as man understands them. Perhaps they were once great and mighty, but their time has passed and they are much diminished for it. In game terms, they are Pagan Things (*S&S*, pp. 50). Their Needs and

CHANNEL GODS



Desires vary, but are usually something a human could relate to rather than being incomprehensible. They can be Pacted with, but no other ritual will work upon them.

NAMELESS ONES

The Nameless Ones are extremely rare and often incomprehensible. In game terms, they are Old Ones (S&S, pp. 50-51). Their Desires are strange, varying wildly, although the destruction of all of Creation is apparently one of their goals. No ritual works upon them, not even Pacting.

Some Nameless roam Naur Tier freely, trapped on this side of the Gulf during the last battle.

Note that there is no time frame for the Nameless Ones' return to the world, no ticking clock that the players' have to beat. Some Nameless roam about Naur Tier, trapped on this side of the Void. Others may arrive later, their emergence coinciding with the sorcerers' dwindling Humanity. But if the PCs keep their Humanity up, the Nameless may never rear their ugly heads...leading some to speculate as to whether the Sorcerer's Heresy is more than just idle chatter.

CHAPTER FOUR: PLAYING THE GAME

T Tyler watched from his hilltop vantage as the beastmen fell upon the encampment. The sentries were no match for the savage creatures, and it took but moments for the screaming to begin. Here he could see two beastmen, in silhouette against a raging campfire, pulling and tugging at a guard between them, until the man finally came to pieces. Not far off a soldier impaled one of the howling brutes upon his spear, but could not free the weapon quickly enough to fend off its three companions. All around the camp carnage was wrought, and Noc Tis was more content than it had been in quite some time.

Leading the beastmen here had been an easy trick. Why a regiment of the royal guard would be so far out from Praha was a mystery, but one Tyler didn't care to solve. He had recognized the insignia of Ladisalus, and that was enough for him. Any opportunity to strike a blow to the Magistrate was not to be squandered.

There was no need, though, to watch the final grisly business. He hefted the axe to his shoulder and turned towards the river.

And just then a female appeared in the flap of a tent. Her hair was a shocking red, her skin a milky ivory, and her eyes... a chill slid down Tyler's back. She sprang from the tent and bolted for the edge of the camp, towards the hills. She made it to the crest of the first, and would have made it farther, but her foot caught on a rock and her legs folded beneath her. The beastmen were right behind.

Noc Tis smote the first alongside its head and it fell to the ground in a pool of blood and brains. The next was upon them before the first had lost its feet, and for its effort was deprived of its head. The beastmen were slow to learn, and the butchery continued for some time. When finally it abated, Tyler and the flame-haired woman were surrounded by corpses and drenched in gore.

For several moments, the only sounds were those from the camp. The snapping of bones, the tearing of flesh – to drown it out, the woman spoke. She spoke for some time, but Tyler heard little of what she said. He stared at her, at her hair and her face, and especially her eyes.

"Are you listening?" she snapped. "We must be away from here. This place is not safe."

Tyler glanced about at the broken bodies and severed limbs. Then he

turned back to her. "You're safe."

She paused. Her eyes had seized upon Noc Tis. "Is that...are you...?" She shifted her gaze to him, tried to see into the shadows around his face. Tyler turned away.

"You can help me. You must. I must get to Praha. I am to be married, to a very important man, in less than a fortnight."

Tyler paused, and after a while he said to his daughter, "We haven't much time then."



CHARNEL GODS

There's more to telling an effective CHARNEL GODS story than just having a hero, an Epoch, and some Weapons for him or her to play with. The rules and advice in this chapter should go a long way towards bringing those elements together into a single, coherent narrative.

USING HUMANITY TO CONVEY TONE

Tone refers to the overall mood and atmosphere of the game. Tone is conveyed in a lot of different ways – through the game's artwork, its color text, the details of the setting, etc. Once the game begins, however, tone is established primarily through the spoken words of the players (in particular, the GM). The GM and the players will communicate what they think the tone of the game should be, often relying on the aforementioned bits to guide them.

CHARNEL GODS suggests a slightly different approach. Here, the tone of the game changes in an organized way, based entirely upon the decisions of the players.

When a player character loses a point of Humanity, it's a sign to the GM and the other players to get grim. When describing the setting or narrating encounters, allow yourself to be a little ominous. Perhaps the sky abruptly goes from sunny to overcast, or maybe you call attention to just how decrepit the buildings in this part of town seem to be. Likewise, when a sorcerer gains a point of Humanity, lighten up a little and let some hope shine through. Perhaps the character catches sight of a smiling child, or they have a warm-and-fuzzy moment with a small kitten.

In most cases, the burden of evoking tone falls to the GM, but remember, the players have a great deal of power too, especially when narrating actions to earn bonus dice. Make them work for it by contributing to the overall feel of the game.

As a final note, keep in mind that none of this is meant to model a metaphysical causality in the game world. The idea that Humanity can affect tone, and therefore game content, is strictly a meta-game concern, existing purely on the narrative level that the players, not the characters, are aware of. It is a metaphor, where the Humanity of the characters is reflected symbolically in their surroundings.

CHARACTERIZING NPCs

A GM's best tool in a game like CHARNEL GODS is a large cast of supporting characters. The key, of course, is the word supporting.

The player characters are the most powerful people in the world. That's a really big deal, because everyone and their brother will want something from them. It's unavoidable; if you're the bearer of a Fell Weapon, people will flock to you, maneuvering to get you on their side. You'll be entangled in plots-within-plots in no time, and seeing your way clear of these situations while retaining your Humanity will be no easy task. Remember, Humanity loss and gain is all about how little or how much you help peo-



ple.

For a GM, designing this supporting cast is the most important thing he can do prior to beginning a game. Come up with a bunch of names – not just two or three, but a dozen or so – and then flesh out a handful of them. Give them some identifying traits - an interesting physical or behavioral characteristic that'll stick in the minds of the players. Then figure out what their agenda is. What are their hopes and dreams? What is their ultimate goal? What are they willing to do to achieve it? Once you know all that, you're ready to play. Don't worry too much about the actual stats; having a NPC's Stamina score on hand is far less important than knowing what motivates them and what they'll do once the sorcerers enter into the picture.

Finally, leave some names on your list undeveloped. Players have a great deal of control in *Sorcerer*, and there will come a time when they introduce or ask about a character that you had absolutely no intention of doing anything with. When they do this, run with it - it means they're interested. Having a name on hand, or maybe a personality quirk to attribute to him or her, will go a long way towards making that character a living, breathing part of the game, and will keep your players invested in what's going on.

PLAYING THE FELL WEAPONS

Just because Fell Weapons can't talk doesn't mean they're lacking in personality.

Playing the Fell is almost entirely accomplished through the give and take of power. Not just whether the sorcerer will have access to the Weapon's power, but when, and which powers he'll be allowed to utilize. This is the only way they can express themselves to the outside world, and they use it to their fullest, sometimes behaving quite fickle just to remind the sorcerer who's really in charge.

In regards to each other, the Fell are remarkably diverse. They should not automatically be considered allies or working towards the same goals. They may have comparable Desires, but that isn't an indication of alliance, merely of similar natures. Each thinks his way is best; look at their Desires and the circumstances that have brought the Weapons together, and then decide how one would react to the other. If their Desires are mutual or complimentary, they may choose to work together, or at least tolerate one another. If their Desires are in opposition, such that obtaining one would forego the other, they will likely become hostile or jealous of each other. And just because one Weapon reacted a certain way towards another once before does not necessarily mean it will always react that way; the fell are savvy to their wants, and are perfectly capable of changing an opinion of someone or something when it suits them best.

EARNING BONUS DICE

The *Sorcerer* rulebook describes how players can earn bonus dice by cleverly describing their character's actions. All of that works here, with a couple additional considerations.

- ✱ Tone. As described above, tone counts for a lot in this game. If your descriptions appropriately add to the mood and atmosphere of the game, the GM might award you a bonus die.
- ✱ Taking action. As described in *Sorcerer & Sword*, pulp fantasy heroes are men of action. Authors seldom explain or

NPC HUMANITY

In Charnel Gods, Sorcerers and their Humanity are the yardsticks by which an Epoch's morality and wellbeing is measured. As the sorcerers' Humanity dwindles away, the world around them falters, slouching towards its ultimate doom. What this means in game terms is that sorcerers should seldom encounter NPCs with higher Humanity than their own; a building can not be stronger than the foundation upon which it is built.

This does not mean that they should never encounter such a person, just that it should be rare. And remember too that Humanity does not dictate behavior or ethos – a person with 1 Humanity can behave as morally and "humane" as one with 10 – it merely reflects their past decisions, and puts them closer to the "endgame".



rationalize the hero's decisions, leaving that to the reader. The same is true in Charnel Gods; if you state a decisive action without commenting on the underlying reason for it, you are entitled to a bonus die, regardless of whether your motivation is obvious or not.

- ✱ Violence. It should be no surprise that a game featuring powerful, sentient weapons would place an emphasis on violence (not necessarily combat, mind you), and when you find yourself engaged in it, you should describe the action to your heart's gory content. Doing so will earn you a bonus die.

INHERITANCE

Sometimes it happens – you just don't want to play your character any more. Maybe you've told his or her story, or perhaps you've just grown bored with them. In any case, you are definitely done with the character, but you don't want to quit playing CHARNEL GODS.

The first thing you must do is resolve your character's Kicker, if you haven't already. If you have, you should figure out what last thing you want your character to do. Retire and settle down? Banish the Weapon? Walk headlong into a suicide mission? Go for it.

Once that's over, you can create your new character. However, rather than starting from scratch, you may elect to build the new character upon the bones of the old. Give it new name, switch around the Scores, choose new Descriptions, new Pasts...whatever you want. The only things that must remain the same are the Humanity score and the Fell Weapon. In this way the character is new, but elements of the story persevere.

This method of character revision allows players to create sagas about cursed Weapons floating from one master to the next, and provides continuity from Epoch to Epoch.

ENDGAME

Naur Tier is gripped in a cycle of birth, growth, death, and then rebirth. It's a very real possibility that armageddon could come to your game, even before you and your players are ready for it. This is how it works:

When a sorcerer bottoms out his Humanity, the endgame is initiated and the Epoch is brought to a climactic close.

The *player* of the doomed sorcerer earns a special title, that of Harbinger. The Harbinger has a special role to play in all of this; he/she gets to describe the events leading up to the end of the Epoch, and ultimately what the apocalypse looks like. The Harbinger gains the following privileges:

- ✱ Limited game mastering power. The Harbinger is all-powerful when describing apocalyptic imagery and events, even when narrating things that are outside the scope of their character's ability. He or she can cause mountains of fire to rain down, oceans to swell up, or anything else they want. Their only limitations in this are that:
 - a) They can not kill other player characters or any NPCs significant to their experience.
 - b) They must be able to relate any devastation they cause to a Humanity-losing action their sorcerer took sometime during the game.
- ✱ Their sorcerer becomes a Charnel God. This may include phys-

ical or mental alterations, at the player's discretion. The sorcerer no longer needs to meet the Weapon's Need or Desire (actually, the latter will be met over the course of the endgame). He or she can call on any of the Weapon's abilities at any time, with no chance of it refusing him. The sorcerer may communicate with it as though the two were in constant Contact. He or she can look at another sorcerer and automatically tell what their Humanity is. The sorcerer can enter the Carrion Fields at will, and can never gain or lose Humanity again.

The main disadvantage of being the Harbinger is that when the endgame is over, you have to create a new character from scratch to continue playing. The benefits of Inheritance (described above) can not be applied to your next character.

The players (including the Harbinger) should use the endgame to tie up the loose ends of their individual stories. They can seek out loved ones to say goodbye to, pursue rivals to mete out final justice, or do whatever else they want. The bare minimum here is that they should resolve their Kickers.

The game master's job remains the same; his focus is on helping the players finish up in a suitably dramatic way, while incorporating the information provided by the Harbinger into everything that happens.

Time should flow freely during the endgame; this is the epilogue to the sorcerers' stories and they should be allowed to tell them the way they see fit. The endgame itself has no time limit – it can be an hour or several sessions – but should not be concluded until all of the players have had a chance to resolve their current Kickers to their satisfaction.

Once an Epoch has been concluded, those players whose sorcerers did not hit 0 Humanity may make new characters for the next Epoch using the Inheritance rules, if they wish.

SAFEGUARDING

It may become a priority of the player characters to protect their Epoch, or perhaps an NPC sorcerer feels inclined to protect it from them. This is the one time where NPC sorcerers become necessary foils, as the whole idea hinges on someone being able to look at a sorcerer and know that he or she is about to go over the edge. This is called safeguarding, and here's how it works.

On page 43 of the *Sorcerer* hardback are the rules for using Lore to determine another sorcerer's Humanity score. In CHARNEL GODS, sorcerers use this a lot. They keep an eye on each other, aware of the potential for disaster should one fall from grace. If a sorcerer gets close to the bottom – say 1 or 2 Humanity – other sorcerers may take a considerable interest in them. Those who are inclined to safeguard their world will choose the least of two evils and attempt to destroy the teetering sorcerer. If they're successful, they'll usually confiscate their Weapon and begin the search for a new, hopefully less reckless, owner.

It should be noted that sorcerers practicing safeguarding will be seen by other sorcerers as allies of the Nameless. Most safeguarders are advocates of the Sorcerer's Heresy (see Chapter One), and are probably pariahs among their own kind.

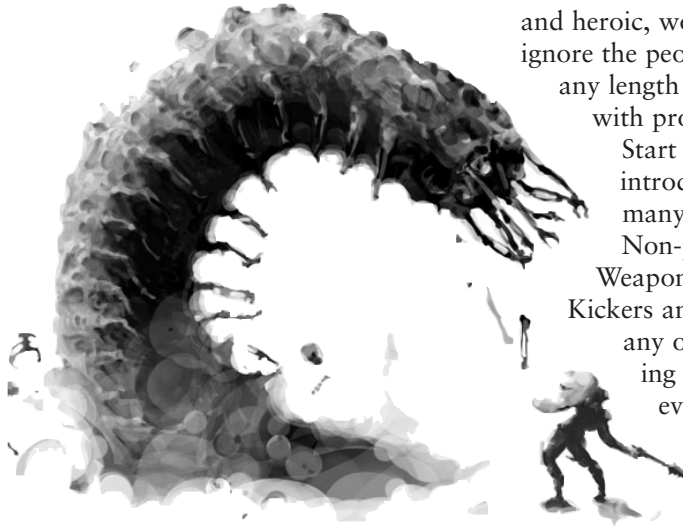
SO WHAT DO YOU DO?

Many games bring a lot to the table, and while the players like it, they can't figure out what they're supposed to do. That shouldn't be a problem

GENOCIDAL PLAYERS

It's not hard to imagine a player who, when presented with Charnel Gods, will seek to dispense with their Humanity as quickly as they can, thus triggering the endgame practically before the game has begun. There's not much a GM can do about this; even by being stingy in doling out Humanity loss rolls, a ruthless player can just attempt consecutive Contacts until they bottom their Humanity out. The only thing that works here is maturity. If everyone is having fun, it doesn't matter how you play the game. If you're being disruptive and are preventing others from having fun, please remember that this is a recreation you and your friends chose to do together. If it's not your thing, please don't ruin it for everyone else.

CHARNEL GODS



in CHARNEL GODS. This game is all about interacting – positively and negatively – with people, and that's what you will do.

If the GM has a bunch of NPCs (and maybe a Relationship Map, as described in *Sorcerer's Soul*), he should be all set. Every NPC is a potential plot hook; there's hardly a person in Naur Tier who if they happened to meet a sorcerer, or even just someone who looked modestly capable and heroic, wouldn't have a favor to ask of them. The sorcerers can't ignore the people around them; the Humanity rules make it impossible for any length of time. This is a powerful tool for engaging the players with provocative situations; use it your advantage.

Start with the PCs' Kickers. Use the Kickers as springboards to introduce some NPCs, and then let the plots unfold. There are many factions vying for the players' attention in CHARNEL GODS: Non-player characters with their pleas and schemes, the Fell Weapons with their Needs and Desires, and the heroes with their Kickers and other long-term goals. The key is not to favor one over any other – facilitate the pursuit of personal agendas while forcing the heroes to deal with their Kickers, their Weapons, and every member of the supporting cast who shows up with a hand out. It'll all come to a head in due time and the players will have to sort it out, hopefully with their Humanity intact.

Here are few other bits of advice:

- ✱ Throw lots of stuff at the players and see what sticks. Always follow up on what interests them.
- ✱ Create loose ends. Those the players don't tie up become threads for future sessions.
- ✱ Don't present situations with simple resolutions or that favor one particular course of action. Give the players tough decisions to make and then let them make them.
- ✱ Let those decisions guide how the setting evolves. Never limit what the PCs can do because it might "change things too much." Offer them thrones to usurp and empires to overthrow; given that someday they'll destroy everything, all the rest is just child's play.
- ✱ Do not force the player characters together into a "party". Give each player individual scenes that feature his sorcerer, but introduce elements – such as NPCs – that the player will recognize from other sorcerers' scenes. If the players choose to follow these overlapping strands they may eventually have scenes together. If not, they've still shared in the telling of each others' stories via these continuous elements.
- ✱ Do not pit the player characters directly against each other. They may have different goals and may occasionally be at odds with each other, but if one player's story depends on the failure or defeat of another player's character, you have invalidated the latter's experience, leaving them no reason to play the game.

That's it. Get everyone together and have fun.



CHAPTER FIVE: CHARNEL GODS

The Old Gods, the Nameless Ones, the Fell Weapons and their bearers – their fates are a tangled skein of blood, lust, and doom. These are the ones who are dead, dying, or bringing death. They are, each of them, Charnel Gods.

PERUL

The last horse warrior

STAMINA: 4 (Regimen)

WILL: 3 (Driven)

LORE: 3 (Legacy)

PAST: Horselord

PRICE: Denial

HUMANITY: 4

TELLTALE: the Weapon

DEMON: Noc Tis

BACKSTORY: Perul is a Horselord, a member of the great Horseclans that long ago dominated the plains of the east. Once his people shared a common ancestry with those of Ursk, but when he was just an infant, the Horseclans fell before the Empire's drive for expansion. Most clansmen gave up the Way of the Horse and the Hunt, but Perul's father, Prsik, kept the old ways alive in his son. He taught him to ride and to use the bow in the manner of his forefathers, mounted upon charging horse. He also taught him the ways of the God-Weapons.

Then one day, terror came to the Horseplains. Perul watched as his father – accused unjustly of heresy and treason – was cut down by the infamous Commander Lurr. As Prsik lay dying in the shadow of a statue – a statue of the Horselord, nonetheless – Lurr bent down and stole from him Perul's rightful inheritance, the Fell Bow, Carnaebreas. Perul swore then to avenge his father's death and to one day seize back the powerful Weapon.

His first step towards that goal was a journey to the Carrion Fields, where he discovered the axe Noc Tis. Next he set his sights on Salae.

ROWAN TYLER

Enigmatic wanderer

STAMINA: 3 (Trained soldier)

WILL: 3 (Brooding)

LORE: 4 (Intuitive)

PAST: Footsoldier

PRICE: Scarred

HUMANITY: 3

TELLTALE: the Weapon

DEMON: Noc Tis

BACKSTORY: Rowan isn't his name, it's what he does. Tyler spends his days wandering up and down the river, trying to stay clear of those who would manipulate or exploit his gifts, and helping those in need. He knows his presence is a mixed blessing – both a boon and a bane to those around him – and thus he never stays in one place too long. He secretly would like to settle down, but knows that such a thing is impossible. He expects no gratitude from those he helps and will outwardly accept none, but inwardly cherishes it when it is offered.

When Tyler first came into possession of Noc Tis, he was targeted by the Magistrates, who sought to use him as a pawn in their tangled schemes. To avoid the unwanted attention, he fled the King's infantry. Desertion is a capital crime, and if he is caught, he will be executed or relinquished to the Magistrates' clutches.

Fusae

Ainon refugee

STAMINA: 3 (Tortured)

WILL: 5 (Driven, Sense of morality)

LORE: 2 (Mentored)

PAST: Concubine

PRICE: Paranoid

HUMANITY: 4

TELLTALE: the Weapon

DEMON: Noc Tis

BACKSTORY: Fusae lived among the Ainon most of her life, bearing children and catering to her husband, Haru, a powerful king and sorcerer among his people. She seldom spoke, but she always listened, and over the years she gleaned a fair amount of knowledge regarding the Fell Weapons and their proper use. She waited years for her opportunity, patiently biding her time. Finally one day, in the wee hours of the morning following the revelry of a successful raid, and after Haru had finished with her and passed out on the bed, she stole away from him his mighty axe and fled their tent. She escaped to a waiting boat and rowed herself to a nearby island, where she was granted refuge by the Siban.

Fusae is 17. She is mother to two female children; one survives to this day among the horde, while the other died by Haru's cruel hand. Fusae's greatest wish is to free her surviving daughter from bondage, and to avenge the one she could not save.

NOC TIS

TYPE: Fell Weapon, Headsman's axe

TELLTALE: Noc Tis is a single black-steel blade set atop a length of polished ebony. When swung, the blade emits an eerie keening.

STAMINA: 10

WILL: 11

LORE: 6

POWER: 11

NEED: To be touched or fondled in an intimate way

DESIRE: Carnage

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Special Damage: Lethal
- ✱ Mark
- ✱ Cover: Warrior
- ✱ Perception: Can perceive vulnerability, whether it's physical, psychological, or emotional. Victories from this roll can be rolled over to subsequent attempts to exploit that weakness, including combat.
- ✱ Vitality
- ✱ Taint

TRINFENDEL

TYPE: Fell Weapon, Longsword

TELLTALE: Trinfendel is an unusually shaped broadsword, whose blade flares near its point, creating a deadly cutting edge. The metal itself is black, but becomes a radiant white near its polished edges. The hilt is wrapped in strips of pale white hide, and the weapon itself is heavier than its size would indicate.

STAMINA: 10

WILL: 11

LORE: 5

POWER: 11

NEED: Flattery, praise, and adoration

DESIRE: Tyranny

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Special Damage: Lethal
- ✱ Boost: Will
- ✱ Cover: Overlord
- ✱ Link
- ✱ Taint

PERIFFON

TYPE: Fell Weapon, Two-handed sword

TELLTALE: Periffon is as long as a man, four feet of blade and a hilt nearly so. The hilt is ornate, wrapped in crimson leather with an intricate crosspiece of woven metal that crawls up both sides of the blade. The average man would have difficulty wielding Periffon effectively, even with two hands.

STAMINA: 8

WILL: 9

LORE: 5

POWER: 9

NEED: Start a rumor in its presence

DESIRE: Anarchy

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Special Damage: Lethal
- ✱ Cover: Demagogue
- ✱ Boost: Will
- ✱ Travel (shows up in the right place, at the right time)
- ✱ Perception: Can sense unrest and dissatisfaction in others. Victories from this roll can be rolled over to charisma or oratory checks when trying to exploit that discontentedness.

CARNAEBREAS

TYPE: Fell Weapon, Shortbow

TELLTALE: Carnaebreas is a bow made of bone, with toothy-looking spikes jutting from its outward edge.

STAMINA: 8

WILL: 9

LORE: 4

POWER: 9

NEED: To witness humility before it

DESIRE: Subjugation

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal
- ✱ Ranged
- ✱ Fast
- ✱ Perception: Enhanced vision

CEBBELINE

TYPE: Fell Weapon, Dagger

TELLTALE: Cebbeline is a frightening dagger, its outward edge being a jagged row of serrated teeth. Its hilt is polished bone and slightly curved, to give any swing of the Weapon a nasty cutting arc.

STAMINA: 7

WILL: 8

LORE: 6

POWER: 8

NEED: Tell it a secret you were supposed to keep

DESIRE: Paranoia

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal
- ✱ Perception: Can hear whispers as if they were screams
- ✱ Boost: Lore
- ✱ Hint
- ✱ Cover: Spy
- ✱ Cloak

Skael

Type: Fell Weapon, Spiked chain

Telltale: Skael is an impossibly long length of chain, composed of thick spiked-and-bladed links.

Stamina: 7

Will: 8

Lore: 4

Power: 8

Need: To hear about someone's sick fantasy

Desire: Depravity

Abilities:

- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal
- ✱ Hold
- ✱ Armor
- ✱ Perception: Senses anxiety, guilt, arousal, or inhibition.

Irkspire

Type: Fell Weapon, Spear

Telltale: Irkspire is more like a pike than a spear, being exceptionally long and more suited for melee than throwing. Its head is exceedingly long and broad, a razor sharp wedge easily the length of a longsword, and much wider. Strange glyphs etched in red crawl across the surface of the blade, and the shaft is made of black metal.

Stamina: 8

Will: 9

Lore: 5

Power: 9

Need: Irkspire's wielder must promise, in word or deed, to never part with it

Desire: Melancholia

Abilities:

- ✱ Special Damage: Lethal
- ✱ Perception: Can sense despair or sorrow in others. Victories from this roll can be used in a subsequent roll to exploit or play off of that person's suffering.
- ✱ Hold
- ✱ Link
- ✱ Travel

MABROSS

TYPE: Fell Weapon, Spiked Shield

TELLTALE: Mabross is an enormous black tower shield. It has a skull embossed on the front, from whose forehead two forward thrusting spikes emerge.

STAMINA: 10

WILL: 11

LORE: 8

POWER: 11

NEED: To be displayed prominently before an audience

DESIRE: Fear

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Armor (upon Mabross)
- ✱ Protection: the Special Damage attacks of other Fell Weapons (upon Mabross)
- ✱ Armor (upon the sorcerer)
- ✱ Protection: the Special Damage attacks of other Fell Weapons (upon the sorcerer)
- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal
- ✱ Confuse
- ✱ Perception: Can sense fear or unease in others. Victories from this roll can be used in a subsequent roll to exploit or play off of that person's anxiety.

SKELLDURAN

TYPE: Fell Weapon, Nasty looking punch-spike

TELLTALE: Skellduran is a long, slightly curved spike of bone – maybe a tooth from some long-dead god – with leather straps to bind it to its wielder's fist (or potentially some other body part – an elbow or knee, for example).

STAMINA: 7

WILL: 8

LORE: 5

POWER: 8

NEED: To be in the presence of its master when he/she breaks a promise

DESIRE: Cruelty

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Special Damage: Lethal
- ✱ Vitality (upon itself)
- ✱ Vitality (upon its master)
- ✱ Perception: Can perceive longing or neediness. Victories from this roll can be used in a subsequent roll to exploit or play off of that person's desires.
- ✱ Taint

Gutterblax

TYPE: Nameless One

TELLTALE: Gutterblax could be a hill, if hills were composed of bilious, suppurating flesh, and were capable of locomotion. Gutterblax is huge - a two-hundred foot wall of fat, scabs, and pus. Its limbs project from its midsection - blobs of cellulite with a few toes or fingers at the ends. There is no distinct head, just a horizontal slit near the top of its body above which set a pair of glinting black eyes. It is crowned by a mass of jutting horns and antlers, most of which are cracked and splintered.

STAMINA: 30

WILL: 31

LORE: 3

POWER: 31

NEED: Raw meat (and lots of it)

DESIRE: Worship

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Armor (rolls of blubbery flesh)
- ✱ Daze
- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal (any attack it chooses to use)

Lashtipus

TYPE: Nameless One

TELLTALE: Lashtipus is among the Nameless loose on Naur Tier. She is an enormous worm-like creature, a thousand feet long, with a head not unlike a vulva lined with bony protrusions. She's a random force of destruction - unknowable and unpredictable. She has ranged all across the face of Naur Tier in her vast lifetime, laying waste to one Epoch after another.

STAMINA: 50

WILL: 51

LORE: 7

POWER: 51

NEED: Wanton destruction

DESIRE: Ruin

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Big
- ✱ Travel (burrowing)
- ✱ Transport
- ✱ Spawn
- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal (spittle)
- ✱ Ranged (spittle attack)
- ✱ Special Damage: Lethal (bite)

GRAZELINGA

TYPE: Nameless One

TELLTALE: Grazelinga has the form of a twelve foot tall crone. Her back is hunched, her face a twisted mockery of something that might once have been vaguely human. Her crooked body is cloaked in a thick shawl, from which only her talon-tipped hands can be seen, constantly kneading the air, as though rending invisible flesh. Despite being a Nameless One, she is fairly approachable – she won't necessarily consume trespassers without first hearing their pleas. She has considerable knowledge and could provide many resolutions to long-running debates, if only her answers weren't cryptically obfuscated in insane babble.

STAMINA: 9

WILL: 10

LORE: 9

POWER: 10

NEED: Fresh blood

DESIRE: To collect knowledge

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Boost: Lore
- ✱ Hint
- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal (her nasty talons)
- ✱ Cover: Crone
- ✱ Command: Scavengers
- ✱ Taint
- ✱ Range (Taint)
- ✱ Warp
- ✱ Perception: Grazelinga knows the darkest secrets of any person whose blood she tastes

BALBERITH

TYPE: Ancient

TELLTALE: Balberith looks a bit like a reptilian centipede with a crocodile's head. She's fifteen feet long, intelligent, and ravenous.

STAMINA: 5

WILL: 6

LORE: 4

POWER: 6

NEED: A day's sleep

DESIRE: Worship the Nameless Ones

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal (constriction and death roll)
- ✱ Travel: Amphibious
- ✱ Armor
- ✱ Cloak (stealthy, especially underwater, and very patient)

NIFFLOG

TYPE: Ancient

TELLTALE: Nifflog's body is long, tubular, and reddish-brown. It has no discernible eyes, although it does have something akin to a mouth, from which it can extend a half-dozen "tongues" – slimy tendrils that serve as eyes, ears, nose, as well as tongue. The lower portion of its torso is truncated into several "tails" – tentacle-like limbs that allow it locomotion and fine motor coordination. It can move along any surface, although it is not particularly fast.

STAMINA: 3

WILL: 5

LORE: 4

POWER: 5

NEED: Moisture

DESIRE: Survival

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Travel (can move along any surface)
- ✱ Travel (amphibious)
- ✱ Perception (360 degree sensation)
- ✱ Cover: Wizen creature

FIRSKIR

TYPE: Bygone

TELLTALE: The Firskir resembles nothing so much as a giant flying snake, save for the broad, thickly muscled set of forequarters it has, from which extend its membranous wings. They make excellent mounts.

STAMINA: 6

WILL: 4

LORE: 3

POWER: 7

NEED: Raw meat, the equivalent of a horse

DESIRE: To bask in the sun

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Travel (flight)
- ✱ Transport
- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal

Uda

TYPE: Bygone

TELLTALE: The Uda are a resilient species, combining traits of lizards and primates. They can range in size from monkey-like to ape-like. They have smooth reptilian skin, which they occasionally must shed, long prehensile tails, and faces and body shapes that are eerily human. To top it off, they often sport horns or antlers – ram-like or antelope-like. The Uda are a social creature and often seek out humans to help allay their loneliness; for this reason, they make good companions.

STAMINA: 3-4

WILL: 6

LORE: 5

POWER: 6

NEED: Large quantities of food and drink

DESIRE: Companionship and constant attention

ABILITIES:

- ✱ Cloak (chameleon-like skin)
- ✱ Special Damage: Non-Lethal (a vicious headbutt)
- ✱ Travel (they can climb almost any surface, walk along a taut rope, and brachiate among trees)
- ✱ Fast
- ✱ Perception (all of their senses are quite keen)