Kingdom of Halta™

A Kingdom in the Trees for

EXALTED™

Kingdom of Valeta™

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SPECIAL THANKS

Nixi Cat Chesnavich and **Alia Ogron** for their patience and companionship.

Jim "Brommy Massage" Zubkavich for being a great guy and White Wolf's whipping boy for the con season. Help, computer!

STOOPID... SO STOOPID!

Brian would like to apologize to Jake Parker for accidentally leaving him out of the credits for **Sidereals**. Jake did the signature characters in Chapter Five. Oops, I'm really sorry about that, Jake.

WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING

1554 LITTON DR
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
30083
USA

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PRINTED IN CANADA

The Kingdom of Halta™

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter One: The Kingdom of Halta	8
Chapter Two: Magical Beings of Halta	44
Chapter Three: Beasts, Manses and Sundry Wonders	66

INTRODUCTION

"It is his chair," said another; "his place is ready. None knows the ways of the King of Shadow Valley."
"He comes sometimes at this hour," said a third, "as the boar comes to Heather Pool at sunset. But not always. None knows his ways."
"If they caught the King," said another, "the forest would perish. None loves it as he, none knows its ways as he, no other could so defend it."
—Lord Dunsany, *Don Rodriguez*

The Threshold of **Exalted** is home to many kingdoms. Most are petty autocracies, miniature Realms ruled by despots who are themselves tiny imitation Empresses. But though these are the majority, they are not the only sort of nation to exist in the Threshold. Many large states maintain stable governments with distinct cultures. These nations are profoundly influenced by the gods and magical world around them, and foremost among these nations (both in terms of political importance and degree of magical influence) is the arboreal Kingdom of Halta.

Kingdom of Halta explores this wooded kingdom, a redwood paradise that serves as the very instrument of its forest gods, who do not rule it as princes, though they are in its people's hearts. It was likewise shaped by Lunars, but it is not their tool. It is forever a product of its endless rivalry with the ground-dwelling Fair Folk, but it has come to an uneasy understanding with the fey and is not defined entirely by its opposition to faerie. Finally, Halta is forever locked in a brutal war for land with the Linowan, a great tribal nation whose people are the protectors and servants of their deciduous gods just as the Haltans are the guardians of their redwood habitat. All of these conflicts serve to create a diverse and flexible society.

Now, at the dawn of the Age of Sorrows, that society faces its greatest challenge. For many centuries, Halta has managed to profit from many supernatural influences without becoming beholden

to any one patron. But that time is passing, and indeed, may already be gone. Just a few years ago, Haltan troops marched with the armies of the Bull of the North against the Tepet legions, committing the kingdom to a military alliance with the icewalker warlord. The Haltan's armed resistance against the Realm at the side of one of the Anathema meant the Realm could never accept honorable peace, and the Haltans must now win or die.

But only a few hundred individuals in Halta — the survivors of those commando units that were present for the fighting — know exactly what sort of war the kingdom will face. When the fighting concluded, most were withdrawn while those troopers whose units were totally destroyed gradually filtered back.

These individuals have largely recoiled in horror from the future they see before them, as their kingdom, armed with swords and mail, is drawn into a war of gods and Essence-powered First Age weapons. What they took part in was a heavy skirmish in a much larger war, and those present know it was just a taste of what's to come. They have seen whole cities slain with sorcery. They have seen Celestial gods and demons fight at the behest of the Solar Exalted against ranks of Terrestrial Exalted in warstrider battle armor.

Yet, they lack a way to relate the truth of the matter to their society. The Haltan nation is one hardened to atrocity — its people have lived for centuries in the wilderness, in uneasy alliance with the Fair Folk and in incessant conflict with the Linowan nation. Still, even in the midst of this bloodshed, Halta's lands have remained safe and its people have remained largely unchallenged. Now, the haunted-eyed veterans of the war to end the Age must attempt to relate this new state of affairs to local rulers eager to draw parallels with their own military service and experiences.

Some of these veterans claim that the Haltan people must disperse to the forests and dwell in tiny hamlets. These soldiers are variously seen as poltroons, alarmists and sympathizers to the Silver Pact. Certainly, many have gained a new appreciation for dispersion of the population in the face of the awesome displays of the war between the Tepet legions and the Bull of the North.

But not all the soldiers who served in the campaigns are so fearful. Some simply do not feel that Halta is in danger. Some believe that the kingdom's great tree cities are no target for imperial retaliation, while others simply see no alternative and soldier on, often hoping that their positions will allow them to rebuild their society after the impending destruction. Many of these disillusioned veterans hold up the Seventh Legion as an example, and officers have begun to study intently the restoration of the Deheleshen Dominion in the days after the Contagion.

And many, of course, have become converts to the Solar cause. The Bull of the North and his fellow Solar Exalted are nothing if not possessed of an overwhelming personal magnetism. Those who came to know the Solars often came to love them, through admiration, force of personality or the overwhelming radiance of the Solar Essence. Many of those who fought at the Bull's side have come to adopt his bluntly stated vision of Solar conquest as a necessity driven by the turning of the Age. While they do not emphasize their beliefs to this effect, many believe that the destruction of Halta, if it is to come, is effectively foreordained. What matters to these officers is that the wars that are now inevitably to sweep the face of Creation are resolved as quickly as possible, and the only stable arrangement — Solar rule — has been achieved.

But while the Bull of the North may hold a nuanced view of the oncoming Age of Solar dominion and may be willing to step aside for some more promising leader, many of his followers are not so broad-minded. Halta's military now has an active cult of the Bull, and it has become dangerous to speak out against the Solar or his campaign. Members of the Bull's personal cult have suppressed criticism of the Solar and his plans and are one of the major reasons that public panic and political criticism over the current military situation has not become more widespread.

And so, largely ignorant of the existential threats it faces, the Kingdom of Halta proceeds toward a future of strife. It is a vast calamity for the people of Halta, and while it has already been set in motion, the kingdom has not yet reaped the terrible consequences of its deed. Its gods have not yet awakened to the full urgency of the Age of Sorrows, and its people remain happy and content as wars that will rend their nation asunder brew. It is a place that heroes could protect or seek to convert to their banner — or a place whose resident Celestial Exalted might lead to greatness or disaster in the years ahead.

How To Use This Book

The purpose of **Kingdom of Halta** was to give an appealing setting area suitable for use as a "home base" for your game or as a major possession and story element for more experienced Celestial Circles. This book details the Haltan people, their gods and the places of magical interest within their lands. Anyone who seeks to control it or to act within its boundaries will have to come to terms not just with the Haltan people, but with these beings as well.

Useful References

Beyond the core **Exalted** rulebook, **Kingdom of Halta** draws material from many other Exalted sourcebooks. **Scavenger Sons** is the most useful secondary reference, and in many cases, the material in this book assumes the reader is familiar with that work's treatment of the North and East. Likewise, many of the deities in this book have relationships with those described in **Games of Divinity**, and this book assumes the reader can refer to that text. **Exalted: The Lunars** is also extremely useful because the Haltan kingdom was strongly influenced by Luna's Beloved.

Less important but equally enlightening are **Caste Book: Dawn** and **Aspect Book: Air**, which each detail the mind of one of the overall commanders in the war — the Bull of the North in the case of **Caste Book: Dawn**, and Tepet Arada in the case of **Aspect Book: Air**.

Finally, least crucial of all are **Creature of the Wyld** and **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded**, both of which contain useful information, but neither of which is crucial to the understanding of this product.

Introduction — What you're reading right now. Tells you about the book's contents and suggests how you might want to approach the text.

Chapter One: The Kingdom of Halta — Details the economy, government and culture of the Haltan people.

Chapter Two: Magical Beings of Halta — Provides statistics and descriptions for many of the spiritual beings in the Haltan area. The emphasis is placed on beings that might provide interesting adventures for players' characters.

Chapter Three: Beasts, Manses and Sundry Wonders — Provides information on these things, from the minor talismans the Haltans employ to the holy places most important to the beings described in this book.

Lexicon

Though Halta is an Eastern kingdom, its people have many specialized words not used outside their society. What follows is a brief list of specialized Haltan vocabulary. Only words that are unique to Halta are included. The list also includes the proper names of important Haltan gods and other magical beings.

Amber Majesty: The Queen of the Wood of the forest around the Haltan capital of Chanta and enforcer for *Glorious Jade Branch*. Amber Majesty is a powerful divine supporter of the Haltan throne and often considers those who endanger the Kingdom of Halta to be guilty of endangering the forest.

ata-beast: An intelligent animal. Ata-beasts are seen as citizens and equal to humans in Haltan law. They have rights and can own property, but many attach themselves to humans for practical reasons.

Bloody Sky: The lesser elemental dragon of fire charged with kindling forest fires in the East, Bloody Sky is an unpopular but civil god, who sees his job as a highly necessary one.

Glorious Jade Branch: Glorious Jade Branch is a servant of Caltia who is more loyal to the God of the Northeastern Forests than to the Celestial Order. He has become a patron of the Haltan people, using *Amber Majesty* to enforce his will.

Marika: The swamp-witch is the faerie ruler of the rivers and watercourses of Halta. She enjoys catching fishers and others who stray near the water, but her aquatic minions lurk on the forest floor as well.

san-beast: A half-intelligent beast. While well-treated and protected by law, the san-beasts are not seen as free individuals, but instead, as a form of property.

Slulura: Slulura is the faerie "Lord of the Lower Branches." Slulura has come to admire humanity. His men will not even attack humans on the ground, and he has fought a war with his fellow nobles over the issue. Slulura's troops are those that most ardently defend Halta from Linowan raiders.

Yesryk: The God of Raptors and Arboreal Hunting, Yesryk resentfully serves Grala, Mistress of the Endless Hunt, but considers her patronage of human assassins impious and resents her authority. Yesryk is worshiped by many in Halta who use birds to hunt.

Young Monkey: A tea used by many Haltans to maintain their flexibility and triple-jointedness. Drunk by some older individuals in the East to maintain their own limberness.

Yseult: Yseult is a faerie noble. The so-called "Queen of the Stone Forest" used an Essence-weapon in a moment of desperation during a war with Slulura and accidentally changed her own flesh to stone. Since then, she has not shown herself in public, for she fears the transformation destroyed her beauty.

CHAPTER ONE
THE KINGDOM OF HALTA

Halta is a huge nation that encompasses most of the enormous redwood forest that stretches from the dense forest a few hundred miles north of Mount Metagalapa to the headwaters of the Silver River in the North. To the west, it begins at the boundary between the deciduous and evergreen forests, which occurs at the headwaters of the Eastern branch of the River of Tears, where streams and rivers from the Haltan lands converge into this great river that ends near Nexus. However, while the land is vast, most of it is an enormous and wild forest that is completely uninhabited. Although Halta has a population of 23 million people, the Haltan cities and towns are similar to the islands in the Western Ocean — dozens or hundreds of miles of dangerous and ungoverned forests separate one city from another. While the Queen and her nobles claim to rule Halta, they actually only control the portions within a days travel of the various settlements. The beasts and gods who have lived here since the end of the First Age rule the rest of this land.

The Trees

The Haltans live in an evergreen forest. Near the forest's western border, it contains a relatively equal mixture of pine, fir and redwoods, but even here, the Haltans live only in the redwoods. Deeper into the forest, the redwoods grow taller and completely dominate the forest. Ironwood grows in the southern portion of the Haltan land and makes up as much as a third of the trees near the forest's southern border. However, the majority of the forest consists of several varieties of exceedingly tall redwoods. Throughout most of Halta, mature redwoods are between 15 and 45 feet in diameter and between 200 and 400 feet tall. In the furthest reaches of the East, these giants become many miles tall, but only barbarian tribes inhabit these strange and remote regions. Redwoods live for many hundreds or even thousands of years and are highly resistant to both fire and disease — most of these trees predate the Contagion. A few of the larger trees naturally become hollow inside, creating large spaces that can be home to hatra packs and colonies of giant bats or comfortable dwellings for Haltans who wish to be completely surrounded by their beloved trees. The boundary of the Haltan lands is extremely stable to the north and the south — here, the redwood forest ends because the climate becomes too cold or too warm to support the giant trees. However, the western border of the forest is far less stable. Most of the Linowan lands have the correct soil and climate to be the home of either its current mixture of oak trees, maple trees and meadows or to become part of a further expanse of the Haltan redwood and pine forest. Only the combined actions of Haltan tree planters and Linowan foresters keep the current boundary stable.

CHANTA

The arboreal city of Chanta is the largest city in the Haltan Republic and one of the wonders of the Threshold. In addition to being the capital of Halta, Chanta is also is the center of Haltan life and culture — it is the residence of the Haltan queen, Chaltra Evamal, and the meeting place for the Council of Nobles. Many of the finest craftsmen live here and although it is far from any of Halta's borders, its location on one of the larger rivers means that it has access to imported goods from all over Creation. Chanta is also a center of Haltan military activity and the location of the Varigeth Military Academy, where Haltan commandos receive specialized training.

Chanta has a population of over a million people, and they reside in the trunks and on the branches of hundreds of huge redwoods that are all at least 300 feet tall and 30 feet in diameter. The wealthiest residents live within the naturally hollow upper portions of some of these trees. However, most Haltans live and work on the large platforms that are either anchored to the trunk of one tree and supported by two or more branches or that stretch between several of the forest's closely spaced trees. The largest of these platforms are almost 1,000 feet across. Chanta consists of many thousands of these platforms.

OTHER HALTAN CITIES

Halta contains several dozen large and medium-sized cities. None of them are more than 600 miles from the nation's western border, but travelers in the western portions of Halta can travel from a city to any of its neighboring cities in less than two weeks. Most Haltan cities exist to take advantage of some local resource. Many are built on rivers. The city of Glorious Crown is located near the kingdom's largest enclave of Fair Folk, and the southern city of Caltia's Triumph is located in the largest groves of ironwood and is the center for ironwood harvesting and for the manufacturing of ironwood tools and weapons. Other cities, including Kajeth, River Blossom and Resplendent Peak are located on major trade routes that lead to the North or to the Scavenger Lands.

KAJETH

One of the larger Haltan cities is the trading metropolis of Kajeth. Located at the headwaters of the Rock River, at the southern edge of the Great Redwood Forest, Kajeth is a mixed city. Most of it sits up in the low trees found near the forest's edge, but the foreigners' quarter rests entirely on the ground. To protect it against raiders, the entire city is located within the depths of the forest, more than two miles from its edge. Because Kajeth is far from the Linowan lands, the treaty with the Fair Folk does not extend this far south. The boundary of the Fair Folk treaty is more than 50 miles north of Kajeth, so mortals may safely walk upon the ground.

Like the rest of the city, the portions on the ground consist of a mixture of living trees and carefully worked wood. However, it looks much like a normal Threshold city, and most foreign traders are far more comfortable here than they are up in the trees. Kajeth is the primary source for Haltan-made goods throughout the Scavenger Lands and the destination for most foreign traders who wish to sell their goods to the Haltans. Although foreigners can often obtain considerably higher prices for exotic animals and skilled metalwork in Chanta or most other Haltan cities, the difficulty of traveling through the forest means that all but the most skilled and dedicated traders sell their goods in Kajeth.

Kajeth has a population of almost half a million people — more than 50,000 of them are either foreign traders or foreign-born immigrants. Many Haltans rightly claim that Kajeth is the least Haltan city in the Republic. Not only does it contain far more foreigners than any other Haltan city, it is also isolated from the rest of the Haltan Republic. It exists as the terminus of a peninsula-like extension of Halta that has small client states to the left and right (see p. 17). Nevertheless, the Haltan reverence for animals is still present, and the law severely punishes anyone who mistreats them. Animal sellers also refuse to sell creatures to anyone that they suspect will mistreat them, regardless of how much money the potential buyer offers. However, the ata-beasts that live here rarely speak around non-Haltans, and beastmen avoid Kajeth because they do not wish to deal with the fear and hatred that most outsiders have for their kind.

Kajeth is also the center for the breeding of the rare and valuable semi-intelligent Haltan horses. Large stables are located on the edge of the foreigners' quarter. Although most beast-sellers will only sell these horses to Haltan travelers, many foreigners come to Kajeth in hopes of obtaining one. Horse breeders take special care in deciding who they will allow to purchase one, especially if the buyer is a foreigner. As a result, ownership of a Haltan horse is a rare badge of honor, and foreigners who obtain one treat it extremely well.

RESPLENDENT PEAK

Located near the great glacier that forms the headwaters of the Silver River, the city of Resplendent Peak is the northernmost Haltan settlement and the center for trade with the Haslanti, the icewalker barbarian tribes and the elk beastmen who wander the Northern wastes. Unlike other Haltan cities, Resplendent Peak hosts many visitors who arrive by air. As a result, it contains a tall mooring mast for Haslanti airboats. Airboat passengers make up over a quarter of the foreigners who visit this city — Haslanti come here to trade feathersteel and mammoth ivory for high quality woods and medicines.

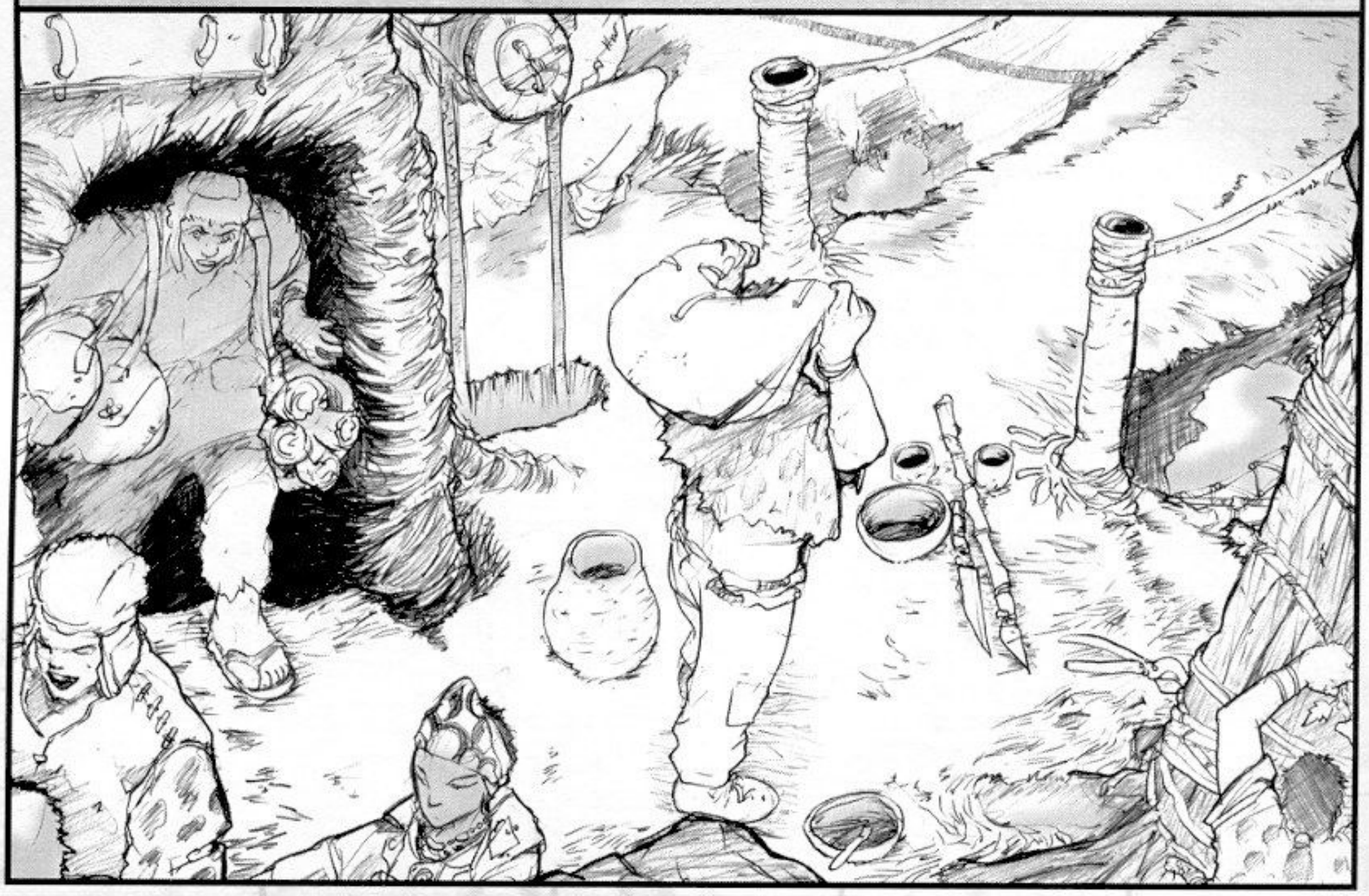
Proving Ground
Resplendent Peak
Bloody Sky's Manse
River Blossom
Golden Leaf Canal
Sal-Maneth
Yagan and Glorious Crown
Trino
(Vengeful Thunder)
Goldwood Ruins
Xaal
Black Branches
Chanta
Glorious Jade Branch's Sanctum
Rubylar
Roran-jin
Talinin
Fallen Lapis
Bloody River
Yesikar's Aerie
Shandir Woods
Ardeleth
Jarrith
Gossamer Stockade
Rajeth
Noss Fens
Mount Metagalapa
Valley of the Shards
Greyfalls
Rock River
North
800 miles
Great Forks
Marita
Nathir
Mist Island
The Kingdom of Halta

HALTAN TREE PLATFORMS

These dwelling platforms, as well as almost all of the buildings in this and every other Haltan city, are all made of a mixture of living trees and dead wood. Most of the city is shaped from living trees — arborists and tree-sculptors work together to create new branch paths, dwelling platforms and buildings. Most of the city's dwelling platforms are made of networks of long, narrow branches woven together so tightly than they are watertight, supported by the same dense woods used in the construction of ships. The walls and roofs of most of the houses and shops on these platforms are made of similar materials. When arborists cannot make a structure from living wood, the tree sculptors cut dead branches from living trees and harvest the wood from trees that have died.

For visitors used to terrestrial cities, one of the most amazing features of Chanta and the other Haltan cities is how three-dimensional they are. Redwoods are hundreds of feet tall with large branches at various levels. Most trees in the city contain at least three and, sometimes, up to eight or ten platforms at various levels. Going from one level to another can involve climbing ladders that are as much as 100 feet high. Goods and people who do not wish to make this climb ride between the levels in counterweighted elevators pulled by well-trained forest baboons. In Chanta, several dozen elevators come from the ruins of the First Age city of Sal-Maneth (see p. 13). These elevator tubes operate without any external aid.

Residents move horizontally between dwelling platforms using paths made from the redwood's wide branches. The largest branches of these giant trees are at least 12 feet wide. Arborists use both ironwood tools and mortal magic to shape the tops of most of these branches into smooth paths with low foot-high rails on either side of the paths and ropes or living lianas on one side, to provide a secure purchase for the elderly and the infirm.



Like Kajeth, Resplendent Peak used to have a foreigners' quarter located on the ground. However, 27 years ago, a raid by a band of icewalkers destroyed much of this portion of the city, and the Haltans reconstructed these buildings above the ground. To avoid future problems, the entire city is now located up in the trees. The only sections of the city that remain on the ground are the stables and the quarters for the people who tend and guard the horses. Unlike Kajeth, the Fair Folk treaty holds to within five yards from the edge of the forest — the stables and their associated buildings are located just outside of this boundary. After the icewalker attack, the inhabitants built a well-fortified stockade around the stables and other building still

located on the ground. Unlike Kajeth, Resplendent Peak is a completely Haltan city, in large part because the Silver River connects it to the rest of the Haltan Republic. Because the entire length of the Silver River is within the forest and safe from Linowan raiders, travel between Resplendent Peak and the rest of the Haltan Republic is relatively fast and easy. Resplendent Peak is small for a Haltan city, with a population of only 60,000. The trade with the Haslanti is exceedingly lucrative, and merchants place the Haslanti goods on barges and ship them south to Chanta and the other larger Haltan cities. Barges leave Resplendent Peak at least once a week and arrive equally often. The large and prosperous city River Blossom, located on the edge of the Five Rivers Region are these barges' final stop on the Silver River and the intersection of the Silver River and the Golden Leaf Canal that connects it to the other Haltan rivers.

SAL-MANETH AND OTHER FIRST AGE RUINS

There are three ruined First Age cities within the Haltan forests. However, two of them are located on the ground and the Fair Folk looted them long ago. The largest and least ruined of these cities, Yagan, is the home of the largest tribe of Fair Folk in this forest. Although the Fair Folk allow diplomatic visitors to freely walk its glass and stone streets, they do not permit scholars to investigate their home. The Haltan city of Glorious Crown is located less than two miles from the outskirts of Yagan and serves as the primary point for trade between the Fair Folk and the Haltans. Yagan is the home of the region's finest Fair Folk glass workers and gossamer smiths and the source for many of the gossamer goods, glass weapons and minor enchantments found in the East. Careful traffic between Yagan and Glorious Crown is quite common, and Fair Folk regularly walk the streets of Glorious Crown. No one still remembers the name of the second First Age city. Today, it is only known as the Goldwood Ruins because the leaves of all of the trees that grow up through its ruined streets are tinged with gold and glow softly at night. This city is completely ruined, and only a few broken pillars and mostly fallen walls show that it ever existed.

Unlike the other two First Age cities, Sal-Maneth is not located on the ground, and so, the Fair Folk never looted it. Although it is now lies partially in ruins, it was one of the wonders of the First Age. While the other two First Age cities in this forest were originally in large clearings in the trees that have now overgrown their ruins, Sal-Maneth floats over the Blackwater River in a region where the trees are relatively sparse. Covering an area of more than two square miles, Sal-Maneth is an openwork tracery of metal and glass that hovers amidst the redwood forest. The city consists of a large number of separate towers and plazas that are connected by curving arabesques of multicolored metal. These arabesques are walkways that are all 30 feet wide with a tracery of narrow but sturdy rails on either side. The walkways and plazas all appear to be exceptionally thin and flimsy but are as durable as any other First Age structures — each walkway has a soak of 20L/24B and requires 25 health levels to sever.

The city floats serenely 150 feet above the ground, and none of the careful tinkering by scholars or Exalts has managed to change its position. Sorcerer-architects designed Sal-Maneth to reside in its current location, the pattern of towers, plazas and walkways leave large open spaces for the hundreds of ancient trees that grow up amidst the structure of the city. Some unknown magics also prevent any trees from growing in a way that would harm any portion of the city. Unfortunately, Shal-Maneth suffered severe damage during the violent riots that occurred when the Contagion first touched this city. Almost a quarter of the city's towers and plazas now lie broken on the ground, and an equal number are twisted and bent — many towers lean at disturbing angles, and there are a multitude of broken and buckled walkways and plazas. Today, Sal-Maneth is home to almost 100 scholars, almost that many crazed or deeply antisocial squatters and, in parts, nests of dangerous animals such as hatra and huge wild spiders.

Although Sal-Maneth was clearly one of the most beautiful and impressive First Age cities, few Haltans wish to live in a ruin suspended precariously above the ground by unknown enchantments. Although the scholars have learned little about the magics that support this floating city, investigators regularly turn up small useful items such as crystals that provide both light and heat upon command. Almost a third of the intact towers remain sealed, and some scholars suspect that they may contain even more wonders. Gaining access to the exterior of Sal-Maneth is quite easy, as eight heavy-gauge rope bridges connect it to the largest surrounding trees.

VILLAGES AND TOWNS

The Haltan nation is considerably more urban than most other lands. Half of the population lives in cities of more than 10,000. Large numbers of farming villages are unnecessary — even the largest cities are spread out enough and the forest rich enough that each city can produce all of the food that its inhabitants require. Also, life in the forest is far more dangerous than living in the rural portions of other nations, so people congregate in larger groups for safety. This is especially true within 200 miles of the Linowan border. Although this region is quite populous, there are no settlements smaller than

10,000 people here simply because Linowan raiders can easily wipe out smaller communities. Also, each settlement must be large enough to support a well-supplied defensive garrison.

Villages and towns located far from the Linowan border generally fall into one of two types. There are many enclaves of unusual populations such as beastmen or groups with eccentric religious or social practices such as the Panests, whose multi-partner families always consist of a mixture of both human and intelligent animals. These communities tend to be self-sufficient, small and isolated. Although few turn away visitors, most do not welcome them, and isolated settlements greet non-Haltans with a great deal of suspicion and prejudice. The other sorts of small settlements are towns located on trade routes between large cities. Although internal trade is somewhat less common in Halta than it is in most nations, the residents of these towns can still make good money administering to the needs of travelers. These trade stops are also centers for specialty manufacturing, providing the town with a ready source of goods to trade with travelers. Such towns all openly welcome travelers, since they form the community's lifeblood.

Regardless of the exact nature of the settlement, the Haltans build most of their smaller towns and villages on a similar plan. They are never walled because to do so is impossible. Instead, they consist of a collection of between three and a hundred dwelling platforms, each of which houses between two dozen and a hundred people or holds a similar number of shops and other services. To protect the inhabitants against wild animals and possible Linowan raids, residents build these dwelling platforms closer together than those in Haltan cities. In the smallest settlements, all of the platforms may be built between the same cluster of three or four trees, each platform lying only five or six yards above the one below it. In areas with dangerous animals or where fear of Linowan raiders is high, villagers build wooden stockades around the individual dwelling platforms, providing protection against attack.

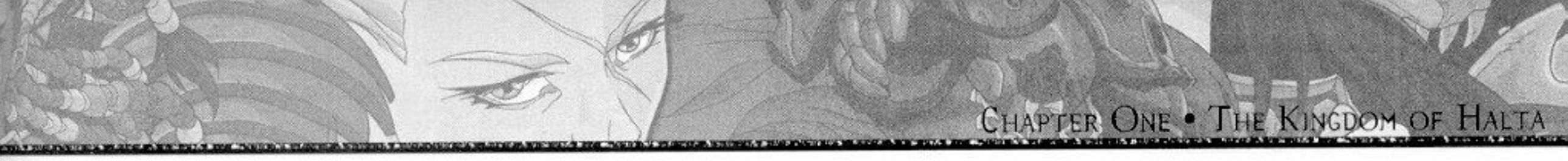
Towns become both more civilized and larger the further one moves away from the Far East. In the middle and western portions of Halta, the smaller towns generally have a population between 300 and several thousand. Dwelling platforms are larger and contain up to several dozen well-made individual houses and shops. Since most settlements are located on regular trade routes, the inhabitants have access to both metalwork and ironwood tools made in the southern portion of the Haltan lands. As a result, carving and shaping wood is relatively easy. Most of the larger towns also contain at least one shaman-priest or arborist capable of using minor magics to cause living wood to grow into useful shapes. In most communities, this mixture of magic and skilled handiwork produces beautiful architecture consisting of a mixture of living wood that have been shaped into useful forms, walls of polished planks and roofs made from a series of overlapping wooden shingles that are each the size of a moderately large shield. Shaman-priests also work powerful talismans against fire and wild animals into the dwelling platforms of all but the poorest towns. The towns founded on trade routes are usually wealthier than the more isolated ones built by various fringe groups. However, the natural abundance of the forest and the package trade using strix couriers allows even the remotest towns to prosper.

THE FAR EAST

Unlike other civilized nations, the dividing line between Haltan barbarians and civilized citizens is highly ambiguous. All of the large cities are within 600 miles of the nation's western border. Further to the east, there are only villages, towns and a few small cities. The further east one travels, the less densely populated and less civilized Halta becomes. Eventually, the towns and small cities give way entirely to tribal villages of tree-dwelling barbarians found throughout the Far East (see **Scavenger Sons**, pp. 30-32).

These barbarian villages and towns normally contain between 50 and 300 residents. Each dwelling platform holds a single large longhouse where the inhabitants live and work. These barbarians perform specialized industries such as leather tanning, soap making or other noxious or potentially dangerous activities on smaller platforms located away from the main dwelling platforms. Having few metal or ironwood tools, the barbarians must make their dwelling platforms and longhouses from rudely dressed logs that they strip and carve roughly into shape. Covered with thatch made from dried branches, these structures are both sturdy and moderately comfortable but are far from beautiful.

In the smallest barbarian settlements, the inhabitants use dwelling platforms solely for various crafts and live in sleeping platform built inside of large hollow redwoods. This arrangement provides excellent protection against wild beasts, so long as the residents make certain that poisonous snakes and other small and deadly wildlife cannot manage to slip through cracks in the trees' trunks. The inhabitants of these isolated villages are illiterate and rarely have contact with anyone other than Haltan traders or the members of a nearby tribe. Most barbarian villages welcome friendly and polite strangers who are either visibly Haltan or who are traveling with Haltans. However, they normally greet non-Haltan travelers with suspicion and distrust. They sometimes kill unaccompanied foreigners if they appear to be dangerous, wealthy and lacking in defenses or even simply rude and unmannered.



However, these tribes consider the Haltans to be valuable allies. Traders and diplomats from the more civilized portions of the Haltan Republic regularly visit these Far Eastern barbarian and Wyld-barbarian tribes. The Haltan people have friendlier contact with barbarian tribes than any other civilized people in the East. The barbarian and beastmen tribes who live in the forest to the east of Halta are actually client states of the Haltan nation. Like civilized Haltans, these tribes live perpetually in the trees. However, they lack writing, metalworking and the other attributes of civilization. More importantly, they lie outside the boundary of the Haltan treaty with the Fair Folk and must constantly watch for Fair Folk raiders. Thankfully, the Fair Folk in this forest prefer the richer hunting found near the Linowan border. These barbarians have little understanding of civilized politics — instead, the tax collectors, diplomats and traders who visit them undergo various grueling ordeals to become full members of the tribe. Anyone traveling with one of these visitors is automatically a welcome guest of the entire barbarian tribe. These tribes do not pay ordinary taxes, but they regularly send gifts of exotic plants, potent drugs and powerful healing herbs to their Haltan brothers and sisters.

Visiting tax collectors take these gifts and deliver them to the government coffers in Chanta. Also, the barbarians are eager to trade for metal tools and weapons and other civilized goods. In return, the tribesmen offer rare plants, unique animals and exotic skins available nowhere else. The best traders cultivate close enough ties with the barbarians that they will simply barter life flowers and other rare plants with the traders, rather than requiring them to go along on the expedition to actually collect these plants. Because of these efforts, the Haltans have a regular supply of the various types of life flowers, as well as bright morning and soma (see **Scavenger Sons**, pp. 32-33). They also have access to deadly poisons such as death sap (see **Scavenger Sons**, p. 32), which commandos and assassins use to good effect against the Linowan. Because the Fair Folk do not patrol the floor of the easternmost forests, these lands are also the source of most metal ores used in the treetop forges of the Haltan Republic. Although the barbarians know nothing of metalworking, they know that traders pay well for the strange rocks they gather from various outcroppings, cliff edges and ancient ruins.

Drug Cost in Halta

Because of their close ties with the Eastern barbarians, reduce the cost of all plant-derived medicines, drugs and poisons by • within the Haltan Republic.

The Wild Lands

Between the cities and towns of the Haltan Republic there are vast expanses of ungoverned and ungovernable wilderness. Despite being located in the midst of a large and highly civilized kingdom, these forests are almost as wild and dangerous as the deadly jungles of the Southeast. These regions contain only untamed beasts, wild gods, hermits, bandits and strange and isolated villages.

Bandit Settlements

The difficulties of travel means that remote settlements located well off of established trade routes can remain isolated for decades or even centuries. Most of these settlements are remote communities that desire no contact with any outsiders. However, just as pirates thrive in the oceans of the West, many bandits place their villages near the trade routes between large Haltan communities. The Haltan government cannot patrol even a tiny fraction of its forests or locate these hidden settlements. Therefore, Haltans who are both poor and lacking in morals sometimes leave their communities to become bandits. Many bandit leaders are Haltans who served a term in the military and then decided that using their skills against poorly armed traders was both safer and more profitable than attacking bloodthirsty and savage Linowan warriors.

These brigands place their settlements at least several days travel off of one of the larger trade routes. Either using information about upcoming caravans provided by comrades located in a nearby city or simply lying in wait until a caravan arrives, the bandits drop down upon travelers and attack them with spears, nets and well-trained predators such as giant wolf spiders. While some of these gangs simply release the people of the caravan once they have stripped their victims of all wealth, many bandits kill their victims to keep them from revealing information about the bandits

If the bandit settlement is near one of Halta's borders, the bandits often sell their prisoners into slavery to the Guild, barbarian tribes, slavers from the Hundred Kingdoms or even the Linowan. Since selling other Haltans into slavery and dealing with the Linowan are both capital crimes punished by turning offenders over to the Fair Folk, bandits who engage in such practices are particularly ruthless — they know that they can expect no mercy. Such bandits can be extremely difficult to locate. However, most have members who travel to nearby cities to buy supplies and information. Bandit strongholds are usually located because informants or observant Monitors notice these visiting bandits and the Guard tracks them back to their lairs.

There are also dangers far more mysterious than villages of brigands. Some isolated villages are actually

encampments of ravagers. These predators not only rob their victims, they also either devour their souls or sell them to the Fair Folk in return for gossamer artifacts and other magics. Some of these villages have existed for many decades — in these twisted communities, most of the inhabitants have traces of Fair Folk in their ancestry, and some are full-fledged half-breeds. The most powerful half-breed nobles are powerful enough to command weak hobgoblins, who often make up a substantial portion of such bandit gangs. These ravager villages are extremely difficult to locate — the residents never visit Haltan cities to trade and only see other mortals when they attack them.

Other than actually tracking ravagers back to their homes, the only other way to locate them without powerful magics is to make a deal with one of the leaders of the Fair Folk Host. Even this tactic sometimes fails, regardless of the price the Haltans offer — some of the leaders of these villages are the half-breed children of powerful Fair Folk nobles who are unwilling to turn over their own by-blows. Hundreds of people with partial Fair Folk ancestry live in Halta, so the existence of murderous Fair Folk half-breeds living in villages up in the trees does not break the agreement between the Fair Folk and the Haltans. However, if any hobgoblins are discovered working with the ravagers, the leaders of the Fair Folk must pay a substantial fine to the Haltan government — some Fair Folk nobles attempt to prevent ravagers from using hobgoblins, but most simply pay the fines. Exalted and other beings that possess powers that allow them to find ravager villages can earn substantial rewards by locating these settlements and either killing the inhabitants or bringing them to justice.

The strangest of all of the hidden villages are those inhabited by a mixture of mortals, elementals, minor gods and the God-Blooded. Such places are often halfway between bandit villages and the centers of exotic spirit cults. Especially close to the Far East, the Haltan forest is supernaturally verdant, and wood elementals are far more common here than in lands further from the Elemental Pole of Wood. Green-Beards, Artisans, stick persons, dryads (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 42-45 and 62-64, as well as the **Exalted Storyteller's Companion**, pp. 62-64 and 71-72) and other spirits rule small areas of the Haltan forest, either alone or in small groups. Some kill or drive off all mortals who trespass in their domains, while others demand tribute or worship in return for allowing mortal travelers to pass safely through the lands they claim.

Few gods can resist the attraction of worship and the other gifts and services that mortals can provide. As a result, small communities can easily grow up around a single small god or a small group of spirits that claims dominion over an isolated section of the forest. These mortals and their descendents become both devoted to and dependent upon their gods. After a few generations, most or even all of the mortals living in these small communities have the blood of one of the gods they worship running through their veins.

The inhabitants of these spirit-based communities are often exceedingly strange, and most outsiders, including other Haltans, avoid them. Occasionally, traders who visit such communities return with odd artifacts, strange plants and even stranger stories. Otherwise, these villages remain isolated unless some unsuspecting traveler strays too close. The exact reception visitors receive depends upon the nature of the small gods who control the town. Most demand that intruders leave after paying some form of toll, which may include prayers, offerings and other forms of obeisance to the local gods.

However, some of these communities are both more unusual and more dangerous. In some, residents sacrifice or mutilate outsiders to honor the local gods. In others, outsiders are required to perform some task, which can range from spending a night of exotic and potentially dangerous passion with one of the gods to creating a work of art or performance in honor of the gods. These gods often expect heroes and Exalts to raid a rival spirit community. The later is especially common if two spirit communities are bitter rivals but have made pacts not to attack each other. These local gods kill or curse visitors who refuse to perform the requested task. However, powerful and dangerous visitors who perform the requested task well will occasionally be rewarded with a piece of ancient knowledge — like all other small gods, the spirits who create these communities are immortal beings who may possess information that can be found literally nowhere else.

The Allied Kingdoms

Much of the southernmost quarter of the Great Northeastern Redwood Forest lies outside of the Haltan Republic. This region is many hundreds of miles from the Linowan barbarians and consists of several small forest kingdoms loosely modeled on the Haltan Republic. These nations are both far smaller than Halta and less well adapted to life in the forest because they lack Halta's close ties with the forest spirits. The region contains five major nations that are all client states of the Haltan Republic. The five kingdoms are Jarrith, Shandir Woods, Bloody River, Gossamer Stockade and Ardeleth.

Bloody River, Ardeleth and Jarrith all lie to the west of the narrow extension of the Haltan Republic that ends in the border city of Kajeth. The other two nations are both east of Kajeth. Because the Linowan are no threat and because these nations are not part of the Haltan Republic, none of them are subject to the Haltan treaty with the Fair Folk. In all five nations, mortals may safely walk on the forest floor, so long as they make certain to avoid the burrow loks and other dangerous animals and wilderness gods. With the exception of Bloody River, the residents of all of these communities live in the trees. However, they also spend time on the forest floor, hunting and looking for valuable resources.

The inhabitants of these nations were originally Haltans who split away and founded their own kingdoms many hundreds of years ago, when the Haltan people were still exploring and expanding through their forest. These peoples all have the green hair and reddish-brown skin of the Haltans. Gossamer Stockade and Bloody River both broke away because powerful nonhumans ruled their people. Gossamer Stockade is ruled by a pair of Fair Folk nobles who fled from the Wyld after their political faction was defeated in one of the Fair Folk's continual power games. This pair of Fair Folk, Obsidian Wave and Plestara, are stern but fair rulers, and Gossamer Stockade is a prosperous kingdom that regularly trades with both the Haltan Republic and the nations of the Scavenger Lands. Much of Gossamer Stockade's prosperity is due to the fact that the rulers brought several hundred obedient Fair Folk commoner servants with them when they fled from the Wyld. These commoners perform much of the less desirable work in this nation, and many are skilled whitesmiths and woodworkers whose work in popular throughout the Scavenger Lands.

The harsh triumvirate of gods who rule Bloody River forbid all other worship in their land, and even young children must offer prayers to the three several times a day. Gradig is a powerful god of metalwork who rules this hilly forest kingdom because it contains large deposits of both iron and silver and small deposits of gold. His two lovers, Dreaming Lotus and Rejak, assist him. Dreaming Lotus is a spirit in charge of the local flowering plants, and Rejak is the local forest walker. Although Bloody River's inhabitants live in inside hollow trees or on low platforms built three to six yards up the trunk of their giant redwood trees, the remainder of their settlements are located on the forest floor inside stockades made from a mixture of magically shaped living trees and carefully worked woof. Inside these stockades, the locals refine the ore from the land's abundant metal deposits and create excellent metalwork. Although the inhabitants actually cut down redwood trees to burn as charcoal for their forges, Rejak makes certain that they do not cut too many trees and that new trees rapidly replace those that the local mortals cut down. This kingdom takes its name from the red forging residues that foul the land's main river. Although the locals could work to keep the

river cleaner, their rulers forbid this because Gradig has been feuding with the local water elementals and river gods for the past two centuries.

Mortals rule the other three kingdoms. These nations are quite similar to the Haltan Republic, except that they are both smaller and less civilized.

The foul shadowland of Noss Fens lies at the southern edge of the forest. The Deathlord known as the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils rules this fell land. The Haltans and their allies strenuously avoid all contact with Noss Fens and the zombie hordes that patrol its borders.

HALTAN CULTURE

Halta is a highly literate society — most members of the upper and middle classes can read, and almost all of them know the basics of their own history. The story of Halta begins shortly after the Contagion and the fall of the First Age. There are no written records from these early and terrible days — scholars must rely upon accounts written a century or more after the events described.

As the Contagion ravaged the cities of the world, many people who were not yet infected fled into the deep forests, seeking to isolate themselves from the dying masses in the rest of the world. To avoid the bands of marauding hobgoblins and Wyld-tainted animals that wandered the forests of the East after the Contagion, these people learned the ways of the forest and became adept at hiding in the trees when enemies came near. After a few decades spent in this desperate fashion, the oldest Haltan legends speak of beneficent gods coming to help these refugees. These gods taught the refugees how to live in the trees and make full use of the forest's great bounty.

Most Haltan scholars now assume that these stories are merely legends or that the gods in question were the forest walkers and other spirits that the Haltan people deal with today. The truth is far stranger. The easternmost edge of the Great Redwood Forest was one of the many locations where the Lunar Exalted fled when the Dragon-Blooded killed their Solar spouses. Two of these Lunar Exalted took pity on the human refugees and taught them how to live high up in the trees, using the forest's great natural bounty to allow them to thrive and prosper. During this time, the Lunars' beastmen allies also showed the refugees the proper way to live in these forests. After several decades, the Lunars moved deeper into the Wyld, leaving some of their hawk and serpent beastmen behind them.

Although the Haltans long ago forgot the identities of their ancient benefactors, the Lunars' lessons formed the basis of the future Haltan culture. In the many centuries since this era, the Haltan people have expanded throughout the trees and have created an advanced and extremely far-reaching civilization. Like most other civilized nations, the Haltan people have little contact with the Lunars. However, their Lunar protectors' secret aid combined with the strength of the Haltan defenses means that almost no Lunars send barbarian hordes to ravage Haltan cities. As a result, most Haltans are less hostile to Lunars Exalted than members of other nations. However, no Haltans know that a pair of Lunars greatly aided the ancestors of their people.

Since that time, the Haltan people expanded throughout the Northeastern Redwood Forest. Unknown to any outsiders but a few traders, the Haltan Republic's influence actually extends far to the East, and most of the barbarian, Wyld-barbarian and beastmen tribes to the east of the Haltan Republic are loyal client states of this nation. Although only loosely connected to the civilized portions of the Republic, there are seven large barbarian tribes, including two composed primarily of Wyld barbarians and another two that consists solely of beastmen, who swear loyalty to Halta. Because the Haltan nation stretches almost 2,000 miles north to south, the barbarians in these seven tribes have little contact with each other, and none of them are aware of the existence of more than one of the other tribes. These barbarians supply rare plants and superlatively trained scouts as their tribute-gifts to Halta and swear to deal peacefully with both Haltans and other barbarian client states. In

LUNAR INFLUENCE

A pair of Lunar Exalted, Rain Deathflyer and Silver Python, both of the No Moon Caste, first taught the Haltan how to live in the forest many centuries ago. They still protect Halta, and their influence on Haltan society has been subtle but profound. They helped convince the Fair Folk to agree to the treaty that bars them from the trees and used their sorcery to help create some of the semi-intelligent animals (san-beasts) now native to Halta. Also, these two Lunars created the hawk and serpent beastmen who live in Halta and make up much of their priesthood.

These Lunars' goal was to create a people that embodied the strength and self-reliance of barbarians and the learning, specialization and organization found in civilized lands. While Halta is somewhat more civilized than either of these two Lunars expected, they are not displeased with this nation and have decreed that no other Lunar can attack it or send barbarian or beastmen raiders to attack its cities. Other Lunars are free to visit, but if they attempt to attack the Haltan nation, they will first have to defeat these two ancient Lunars.

return, the barbarians gain access to Haltan traders who sell them goods that tribes elsewhere can only acquire by theft or pillage.

Life in the Trees

Unlike the cities and towns in other civilized nations, every Haltan settlement is both a part of and surrounded by a verdant and potentially deadly wilderness. While their arboreal lifestyle protects them from dangers such as burrow loks (see p. 68) and tyrant lizards, they must contend with poisonous serpents, voracious hatra packs (see p. 72), hungry strix and many similar dangers. For most civilized farmers and urbanites, the wilderness that lies at the edges of their kingdoms is a terrifying place that is home to murderous gods and hungry beasts. The Haltan people make no such separation between tame and wild lands — they love the wild forest that they live in but are also extremely aware of the dangers it holds. They understand that they must be wary of giant wolf spiders hunting their children, but they also understand that their way of life avoids the endless labor and the constant threat of famine faced by most other civilized peoples.

Arboreal Agriculture

Instead of plowing fields and planting grain and vegetables, Haltan tree-farmers tend various trees and vines that produce edible crops. Instead of grain, the Haltans have two primary staples — an edible moss that grows on the trunks of redwood trees and a type of pine nut that grows on evergreen vines that wind their way around these redwoods. Since redwoods make up the majority of the Haltan forest, both crops are exceedingly plentiful. Small troupes of trained monkeys gather most of the moss and nuts for the tree-farmers. The moss is dried and ground into a paste used to thicken stews and porridges, while the pine nuts are either ground into flour or pressed for edible oil. When correctly prepared, Haltan nut bread is as fine as good wheat bread, but many visitors find Haltan food extremely strange.

In addition to moss and pine nuts, tree-farmers tend and gather a vast array of fruits and berries that grow on vines that wind their way up the trunks of the great redwoods or on other trees that have found a niche in these forests. Haltans even harvest a rare and expensive variety of wild rice that grows exclusively in the large bowl-like depressions found at the crowns of many of the oldest redwoods. Several varieties of edible mushrooms that grow on the trunks of dead trees also form a significant part of the Haltan diet. In addition, many wealthy foreigners prize these mushrooms as exotic delicacies — dried mushrooms are one of Halta's most lucrative exports.

Despite their extensive skill at taming all manner of animals, the Haltans actually have few domestic food beasts. Although they collect eggs from several species of domesticated birds, the idea of keeping animals to kill and eat is foreign to the Haltan people. Instead, almost all of their meat comes from hunting and trapping. Haltan hunters and trappers and their animal companions bring back great numbers of forest birds and animals. The most popular meat animals are large tree sloths that move slowly through the forests eating tender young shoots. Even outsiders agree they are delicious, and since these creatures are exceptionally slow and stupid, the Haltans believe they can have no other use.

The Haltans also lower great nets into the rivers and send down trained animals to catch fish and other aquatic life. Since their rivers are rich with trout and freshwater mussels, this food makes up a significant portion of the Haltan diet. Haltan people actually eat slightly more meat than most civilized peoples, but even in Halta, the urban poor subsist on nut bread, mixed greens and moss and berry porridges.

Much to the dismay of some visitors, the Haltans, since they do not grow grain, lack beer. However, Haltan tree-farmers have bred a variety of grape vine that climbs up redwood trees, and these grapes provide them with several good wines. The Haltans also make berry wine, mead and a drink made from fermented tree sap known as sek, that tastes somewhat like a sharp, woody beer. Because of their proximity to the Far Eastern forest, the Haltan people also have access to all manner of recreational drugs. Only the shaman-priests use the most powerful ones, such as bright morning. However, many herbalists grow coca, marijuana and qat in large, soil-filled planters. The Haltans regard recreational drugs as perfectly reasonable forms of entertainment.

Unlike many in both Nexus and Chiaroscuro, few Haltans become addicted to harmful and debilitating drugs. Public overindulgence of any intoxicant is rare — few who cannot maintain their balance or walk safely along one of the many aerial bridges between dwelling platforms survive long in cities built hundred of feet above the ground. Also, the Haltans pride themselves on their responsibility and self-reliance — parents teach their children how to safely and responsibly use intoxicants. As a result, the number of drug addicts is far lower here than in many other civilized nations.

In other civilized lands, large cities must rely upon food imported from farms that are at least several days journey away. These massive food shipments are unnecessary in Haltan cities because the forest is rich enough and the cities spread out enough that tree-farmers can gather and grow sufficient food in and near the city to provide for the needs of all inhabitants. The only foods that the Haltans regularly ship between cities are exports

from other nations or emergency supplies shipped to areas experiencing one of Halta's rare famines. This abundance of food is the primary reason that the Haltan Republic can thrive even though it has somewhat less internal trade than other civilized nations.

HALTAN WOODWORKING

In addition to being exceptionally skilled at taming and breeding animals, the Haltans are equally skilled working with plants and other organisms. On the southern portions of the Haltan forest, ironwood trees grow amidst the redwoods. Like the inhabitants of Farhold, Haltan woodworkers know the secret of making ironwood as strong as steel (see **Scavenger Sons**, p. 91). Many Haltan weapons are made from ironwood, including most of the exceptional weapons made by Haltan armorers. The Haltans are also extremely adept at working redwood bark and other plant fibers into all manner goods. They can make cloth as fine as well-made linen or wool out of certain mixtures of fibers. In addition, the Haltans make both buff jackets and paper from these same materials. Their buff jackets range from ones equal to those made from fine leather to extremely durable ones reinforced with ironwood. Both varieties are unusually light and comfortable.

Their paper is as good as any found outside the Realm, and since redwood is highly resilient, their books are extremely durable, resisting both age and insects well. Haltan printers also use brightly colored dyes that they sell to traders throughout the East. Because they print both the text and the illustrations for their books using carefully carved wooden blocks, the Haltans mass produce popular books. Like many peoples in the East and the Scavenger Lands, most Haltans are at least somewhat literate, and most people who are not poor own at least one or two books.

However, the Haltans' most amazing creations are living plants. A special luminescent fungus that grows on old trees provides light in Haltan cities and towns. These bulbous fungi, known as glow-pods, provide illumination equal to the brightest oil lamps, without any need for fuel or other tending. At night, Haltan cities are almost as brightly lit as some of the First Age metropolises that still retain portions of their original Essence-based lighting. Haltan tree-farmers bred these fungi from existing luminescence fungi found in this forest, with splendid results.

These tree-farmers have also domesticated wild versions of the exotic vines that First Age Celestial sorcerers created long ago as a way to provide many Eastern settlements with water. Several thick leafy vines as big around as a human thigh enwrap all the redwoods that support the Haltan dwelling platforms. These vines reach high up into the forest canopy, where they spread large fronds that catch rainwater. In addition, their deep roots draw water up from the ground. The Haltans place metal and wooden taps in these vines and draw off large amounts of potable water. This faintly green, fresh-smelling water is the primary reason that many Haltan settlements can exist far from rivers and streams. These water vines only grow in the Haltan forest, despite many attempts by outsiders to grow them elsewhere.

TRADE & TRAVEL IN THE FOREST KINGDOM

Travel through the canopy of the Haltan forest is considerably slower and more dangerous than more ordinary travel by either land or water — the forest is home to all manner of dangerous animals and gods, and a fall can mean death, or worse. Although there are carefully grown and tended branch paths and vine bridges within the Haltan cities and towns, the forest between settlements is far less tame. Although experienced Haltan travelers suffer little risk of falling to their deaths or being captured by the Fair Folk, outsiders unfamiliar with travel in the forest canopy usually need to hire Haltan guides to avoid these problems. Also, every traveler must consider the various dangerous spirits and animals that inhabit this forest. Giant spiders, deadly serpents, hatra, hungry gods and many other creatures are more than happy to devour mortal travelers. Although the Haltan people are on good terms with most of the spirits of the forests, there are plenty of small wilderness gods who hate all mortals.

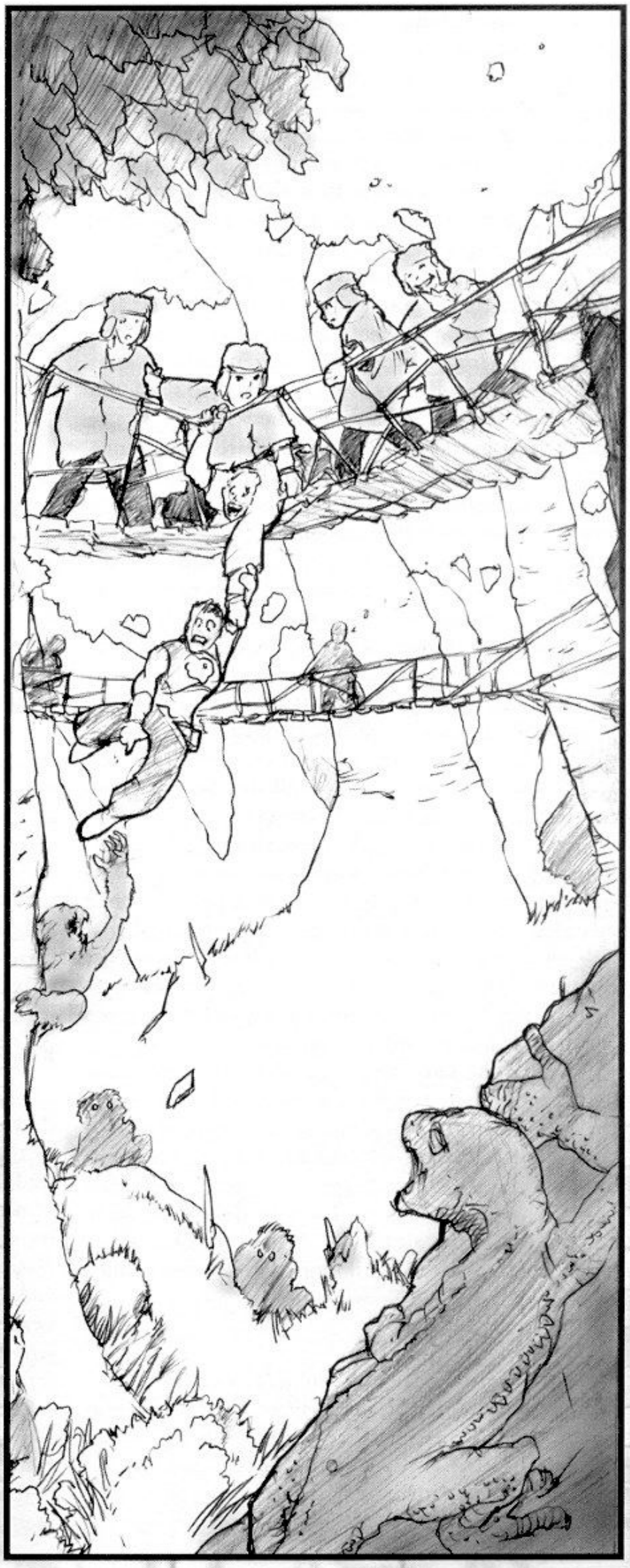
Travel through the forest is also exceptionally slow. Although there are regular paths between nearby settlements, these arboreal roads are generally little more than wide, well-marked branches that foresters have cleared of all large obstructions. While Haltan travelers frequently use forest baboons (see p. 69) and giant wolf spiders as pack beasts, riding is impossible in the trees, and so, all travel is done on foot. Even on the best path, travelers can rarely move faster than 20 miles a day. Travel is even slower when making journeys of more than 60 miles — although foresters mark all paths with large symbols carved or inlaid into tree trunks, they do not have the resources to clear ever path. Problems such

Name	Soak (L/B)	Mobility Penalty	Fatigue	Resources
Barkcloth Buff Jacket	4/4	-0	2	••
Ironwood Reinforced Buff Jacket	6/6	-1	2	•••

as fallen or broken branches and the webs of huge predatory spiders occasionally cause significant detours. As a result, few travelers on these more distant routes can walk more than 15 miles a day. Long-distance travel in the Haltan Republic is even rarer than it is elsewhere, which serves to isolate the interior of Halta from the war-torn border regions. The vast majority of trade occurs between settlements that are less than 60 miles apart, and even in these cases, travel is substantially slower than it is elsewhere.

To counteract this limitation, the Haltans have developed a way to rapidly send messages and goods long distances. While messenger birds are common throughout Creation, instead of tying short messages to the legs of small birds such as mospids and raitons, the Haltans use intelligent and semi-intelligent strix and diving herons (see p. 68) as their primary messengers. Strix can carry as much as 50 pounds of small, well-balanced cargo from one end of this forest kingdom to another in less than two weeks. They can easily cover 400 miles a day and can fly for up to two days before they need to land at a settlement and have a raptorist feed them and allow them to rest for a day. Although diving herons are smaller and can only fly for a day before they must rest, they are more common and carry most of the messages and packages that weight less than five pounds. The government uses the fastest birds for its own messages and packages. However, anyone who can pay for their service can send a package by one of the owls or herons owned by one of the various messenger companies. Letters and packages under five pounds cost • to send, and larger packages cost ••.

Both varieties of avian courier are smart and well-trained enough to know how to get to any of the major cities and to all nearby settlements from almost everywhere in Halta. They carry messages and small valuable cargo such as drugs, medicines, gemstones, fine metalwork, enchanted artifacts and trade goods from the Fair Folk. At least one strix or diving heron courier visits almost every settlement in Halta every week, and the large cities usually receive more than a dozen strix couriers every day. Although people move from one town to another quite slowly, messages and small packages can travel across Halta several times faster than in nations with well-maintained post riders. The combination of slow travel and fast



communication promotes both local self-reliance and a sense of national unity.

The presence of both forest hermits and officially maintained way stations make travel through the forest considerably easier and safer, if not faster. Although living alone can be exceptionally dangerous, a few Haltans feel called to commune directly with their forest. These recluses live alone, praying incessantly to the woodland gods and seeking to learn their wisdom. The local forest gods protect many hermits because they find these recluses interesting or enjoy their prayers. The rest live near settlements, and especially devout Haltans support them. Most hermits do not dislike other people — they simply feel compelled to live even closer to the forest than other Haltans. As a result, many hermits live in hollow trees near one of the well-traveled trade routes. They often exchange food and shelter for goods and supplies unavailable to someone living alone in the forest. While a few hermits are mad or greedy enough to harm or kill visitors, most enjoy brief periods of company. However, these hermits are relatively rare, and so, most travelers must find other accommodations.

Every city is responsible for building small way stations along the routes to other settlements. So long as travelers stay on the marked (if also often wild and occasionally dangerous) path to their destination, they will find a way station approximately every 15 miles. Most are little more than a small dwelling platform covered by a slanting roof and stocked with a large water vine and a sealed barrel full of jerky and dried cakes of fruits and nuts. All of these way stations are marked with small groves of unusually bright glow-pods — on a moonless night, travelers can see this glow more than a mile away, a fact that has saved the lives of many lost caravans. Occasionally, hermits live in these way stations — they help to maintain and expand the stations and care for lost and injured travelers.

One of the more serious problems that can occur during travel is encountering a greedy or hostile god. If the gods living near a large Haltan settlement or along a trade route become too troublesome, the local noble will send out a shaman-priest (see p. 27) or, if possible, a powerful being such as an Exalt to deal with them. Otherwise, the gods are free to rule their domains as they wish. See pages 15-16 for information about god-ruled communities in the deep wilderness.

River Travel

Although the Haltan Republic is a kingdom built entirely in the trees, the land's rivers and streams are as important as they are to other mortal kingdoms. The Fair Folk control the entirety of the forest floor, but the Haltans have negotiated a deal so that ships equipped with special banners are safe from the Fair Folk's predations. Each banner is made of gossamer and is impossible for mortals to counterfeit. Haltan traders purchase these banners from the Fair Folk. At special docks underneath various settlements, there are ladders and simple pulley elevators up into the city or town. Although docking and unloading a riverboat is somewhat more difficult when stepping out of the boat onto solid ground is an invitation to be devoured by the Fair Folk, riverboat travel between Haltan cities and towns located on waterways makes up a substantial portion of all Haltan trade. There is little risk of river attacks by Linowan raiders since the Fair Folk eagerly watch the rivers, hoping for ships bearing fake banners to deliver a dozen or more victims into their tender mercies. Because these tributaries all lead to the River of Tears, which lies in the heart of Linowan territory, the vast majority of Haltan river traffic is internal trade between different Haltan settlements. Most large Haltan cities, including the capital of Chanta, are located above these rivers. Since river travel is several times faster than travel through the trees, the standard way of moving people or large packages long distances is to journey to the nearest settlement along a river and take a river barge to the settlement closest to one's destination. To assist in such travel, the Haltans use the Golden Leaf Canal that connects all of the many tributaries of the River of Tears. A relic of the First Age, this single arc-shaped canal is located approximately 200 miles from the Linowan border and connects all of these rivers together. It is 60 yards wide, 30 yards deep, lined with unbreakable glass and possesses enchanted locks and dams that allow easy and rapid transport between the various rivers. Although shipping distances can be long, riverboats generally travel 60 miles a day with the current and half that against the current. However, traveling between rivers is a lengthy process, and so, journeys between widely separated cites are still slow.

External Trade and Travel

The Silver River is northernmost tributaries of the River of Tears. It lies well outside of the area controlled by the Linowan. Haltan traders travel up this river to trade with both Northern barbarians such as the icewalkers and with Haslanti traders who regularly visit the small but thriving settlement of Resplendent Peak. Haslanti air boats and barges and iceships carry cargo and passengers between the heartland of the Haslanti League and Resplendent Peak, where they are transferred to shallow-draft riverboats that sail southward into the heart of the Haltan Republic. The current conflict between the Linowan and the Bull of the North has not significantly disrupted this trade because the Haltans remain allied to this barbarian leader. The Bull of the North's army provides both Haltan and Haslanti merchant ships with safe passage, in return for these

vessels helping to carry supplies and troops. This agreement is the reason that many Haltan merchants who trade with the North are in favor of continuing the Haltan alliance with the Bull of the North — the costs have been cut by more than half, and the cargo is almost never lost or destroyed.

In addition to the river trade with the Haslanti, Haltan traders also have regular trade routes going from the southern edge of their forests down to the Hundred Kingdoms, Great Forks, Nexus and the rest of the Scavenger Lands. The primary trade route is down the Rock River to the Yellow River and, from there, into the heart of the Scavenger Lands. Along this trade route, goods and people ride on large Haltan barges made from fallen redwoods. Haltan traders export carved wood, honey, dried mushrooms, brightly colored vegetable dyes, exotic drugs, books and fine bark cloth. In return, the Haltans import both metal and metal goods, glass, cloth (especially silk and cotton), spices and exotic pets.

Any trader who can bring in a breeding pair of interesting and potentially tamable creatures to the Haltans will almost certainly be able to sell them for high prices. Attractive and unusual creatures from outside of the East can sell for as much as ••• for a single creature or •••• for a breeding pair. Wealthy Haltans often compete to see who can own the most unusual and exotic pets, and pets imported from far away are exceedingly popular. Although most Haltans have no interest in traveling, many of the rich enjoy owning visible reminders of other lands.

Stories about the traders who make this journey are common entertainments in the interior of the Haltan forest. Because most Haltans live in their tree cities for their entire lives, they see traders who venture down to the ground to take boats within the forest as unusually brave. Similarly, they consider anyone who dares to regularly venture outside of the forest to be exotic, highly courageous and rather eccentric.

However, some Haltans love to travel and hope to find wealth and fame selling Haltan-made goods to buyers for whom the Haltan tree cities are almost legendary. Others seek to share their love of animals with the rest of the East and the Scavenger Lands. Leaving Halta to perform animal shows throughout the East and the Scavenger Lands, these performers are driven by a mixture of wanderlust and an evangelical zeal to convince less enlightened peoples of the wonders of which animals are capable. Most performers hope that their efforts will improve the way the people in other lands treat their pets and other domestic animals.

These performers have become a well-known feature in the lands to the south and southwest of the Haltan Republic. They usually travel in large enclosed wagons made of brightly painted and elaborately decorated redwood. The small gray-green Haltan horses that pull their wagons are at least as intelligent as a smart ape and often work as part of the show. While these animal performers rarely bring disturbing creatures such as giant wolf spiders along on their travels, tree-pards, mospids, flying serpents, ink monkeys, tree-singers and large bats are all frequent performers in these shows. These performers travel with one or two fully intelligent animals, and in some cases, these creatures actually run and direct many of the animal shows. However, the Haltans learned long ago that these animals should not openly demonstrate their ability to speak human tongues — the inhabitants of other lands fear speaking animals and assume that they are either demons or dangerous foreign gods.

Except in large cities such as Nexus, where their presence is completely unexceptional, foreigners normally consider these performers to be almost as exotic as their animals. Because the Haltan ability with animals is widely considered somewhat magical, people who see these shows frequently ask these performers to tell fortunes, make charms and perform curses. Most performers support themselves and their animals with their shows, but many do supplement their income by working as herbalists or charm makers. Others actually tell fortunes, using their animals to spy on the town they are visiting and provide information to make their predictions seem more accurate and credible.

The Test of Survival

One of the central ways that the Haltan people insure their continued closeness to the forest is through the test of survival. When they come of age, between 12 and 16, all Haltan children go out into the forest alone for two full weeks. They make this journey with nothing more than clothes, a knife, a blanket, flint and steel and one full waterskin. At the end of this time, they must return with either an animal they have killed or a rare plant they have harvested. Youths who cannot succeed in killing an animal or harvesting a rare plant within two weeks must remain in the wilderness until they have done so. All Haltan children who wish to officially become adults must pass this test. Thus, in Halta, the seriously deformed and the mentally deficient rarely become legal adults. Although it is purely voluntary, anyone who has not passed this test is not eligible to marry, inherit property, speak in the local council or hold any sort of office. As a result, almost everyone who believes he has any hope of surviving the test takes it at the first opportunity. Those who don't usually have someone who acts as their guardian.

In addition to helping to bring everyone who takes it closer to their forest, this test also keeps the Haltan people fit — the weak and the stupid are far less likely to

survive the test. Although almost everyone who takes it survives, approximately one person in forty does not. Haltans consider these losses to be terribly sad and do their best to prepare their children for this test. However, the shaman-priests claim that dying during the test is proof that the child's soul was not suitable for incarnation in Halta, and few suggest eliminating this rite of passage or making it any easier. How would their society benefit from the inclusion of such individuals, they ask?

Haltan medicine is exceedingly advanced, both because they regularly call upon various small gods for aid and because they have access to the vast herbal pharmacopoeia of the Far Eastern forest. However, injury and infirmity render some people unable to move easily and safely about. The well off move about in sedan chairs carried by large baboons. Most others must limit their movements and rarely go far from home. Suicide is quite common among those who suffer injuries that render them unable to freely move about in their beloved forest.

THE HALTAN PEOPLE

Haltan natives are tall, slender people with dark eyes, reddish-brown skin and straight shiny hair that comes in various shades of green. They normally go barefoot, and their toes are slightly longer and more flexible than those of most mortals, in part due to the consumption of the herbal tea "Young Monkey." All Haltans have either three dots in Athletics or (at minimum) one dot in Athletics and two dots in the specialty "Moving in Trees." As a result, every Haltan who is in good health can move safely and rapidly through the arboreal cities. Negotiating life high in the trees is no riskier for them than negotiating the dangers of more ordinary cities, such as speeding carriages or lurking footpads, is for other urbanites.

ANIMALS IN HALTA

The Haltans are widely known to love their pets and to have domesticated animals like giant wolf spiders and strix that no one else has ever succeeded in taming. However, these animals serve as more than simple pets. Animals such as forest baboons, giant wolf spiders and many similar creatures actually perform much of the simple manual labor in Halta. Trained animals harvest fruits and nuts, carry messages, stoke forge fires, clean and perform a wide range of similar tasks. While fully intelligent animals (known as ata-beasts, see p. 67) are citizens with as many rights any other Haltan, most animals are either normal but exceptionally well-trained creatures or specially bred animals that are as intelligent a small children or bright apes. The Haltans consider all animals that lack human intelligence, including these semi-intelligent animals, to be property. Although they treat all of their domestic animals with care and respect, any creature that is not capable of both communication and rational thought is well-treated property and not a citizen. While the Haltans have strict laws about how owners can treat their domestic animals, these creatures are still far cheaper to employ than human workers. Much of this land's prosperity comes from the fact that trained animals perform most of the simple labor that slaves or peasants would do in other lands. A few Haltans object to using animals as servants or slaves, but the government knows that the Haltan economy would greatly suffer if these views became popular, and so, the shaman-priests denounce them as foolish and ignorant.

The most striking consequence of the Haltan reliance upon animals is that they consider the line between humans and other animals to be relatively unimportant. Anyone who was born in and can survive in the forest and who can speak in the local councils is considered to be a Haltan citizen, regardless of whether this citizen has hands, paws, wings or some odd mixture of appendages. This attitude is the primary reason that intelligent animals are so well accepted in Halta. The sight of Haltans speaking to animals as their equals amuses many visitors, just as hearing the animals respond with clearly reasoned speech usually disturbs these same foreigners. At the same time, even humans incapable of passing this critical threshold are treated as pets and tended like animals.

HALTAN GOVERNMENT

Queen Chaltra Evamal is 39 years old and has ruled Halta for the past 17 years. The Council of Nobles chooses all new queens from among the ranks of the previous queen's close relatives, including both her children and her nieces and second cousins. When the queen turns 40, or sometimes earlier, the Council of Nobles assembles and works with the queen to decide upon her heir. The Council of Nobles, with the advice of the current queen, elects the new queen.

Many have commented that Halta is a meritocracy disguised as a monarchy. However, nobility in Halta is not hereditary — all nobles win their station through a rigorous competition. Prospective nobles must demonstrate their competence at everything from knowledge of Haltan history and law to public speaking and animal handling. The nobles prefer individuals who have actually fought against the Linowan, but almost a third of all nobles have never done so. Deputies decide the results of the initial competitions, but the assembled Council of Nobles votes on the final selection of new nobles. The

Playing Nobles

All Haltan nobles must have at least Bureaucracy ••, Lore ••, Performance ••, Presence ••, Socialize ••, and Survival ••. In addition, they also have Backing (Haltan Government) at •••• or more, Influence • and Resources •••. Nobles wear rich clothes of their own choosing. However, they must all openly wear a palm-sized pendant of a stylized redwood made of jade and silver.

nobles hold these contests once every three years, in Chanta. Competing is free, but individuals from elsewhere in Halta must make their own way to Chanta. Only native-born Haltans can become nobles. By tradition, the Council reserves a few dozen of its 500 seats specifically for intelligent animals.

Nobles normally serve until they either die or retire — however, they must step down if they are convicted of a serious crime. While senior nobles live in the capital city of Chanta and work with the queen to decide large-scale policy, the Council of Nobles assigns every new noble to a district that she administers and is responsible for. To prevent favoritism, the Council never assigns new nobles to districts where they have lived. Although all regional nobles are required to send regular dispatches to the Council in Chanta, they have a great deal of authority over the region they govern. However, there are also checks to make certain that they do not abuse their position.

Every three years, the residents of a noble's district are asked to rate the performance of the noble in a secret ballot. The nobles must make these ratings public, and the Queen and her appointed advisors offer boons and reprimands based both upon these ratings and upon a review of the noble's performance by the senior nobles. The Queen rewards exemplary performance ratings with wealth and prestige, while negative ratings can result in everything from official reprimands to being assigned to a smaller and less problematic district — a noble who receives several severely negative ratings usually has his status revoked by a vote of the Council. While review by the senior nobles is difficult to influence, many nobles hold elaborate festivals before the populace rates their performance in an effort to use food, drink and entertainment to win positive votes.

For several hours every day, every regional noble must be available to address the concerns of the people in his district. These nobles also lead the local councils where citizens may speak their piece and vote on certain local matters. In return for this service, nobles are both well paid and highly respected. Some of the most skilled and diplomatic nobles are deeply loved by the people in their district, and most are accorded both affection and respect by all civic-minded Haltans.

Governmental Structure

Under the nobles, the Haltan government is divided into three large departments. The Department of Halta administers justice, collects taxes and directs public-works projects. The shaman-priests control the Department of Religious and Natural Affairs. This department governs both Haltan relations with the gods and the Fair Folk and the Haltans' interactions with their sacred forest. Arborists in this department must approve all significant alterations made to living trees. The third division of the government is the Department of Warfare, which controls the Guard and the elite commandos (pp. 30-36 and p. 77). Although fully independent in matters relating to war, the Department of Warfare must loan surplus troops the Department of Halta. These soldiers perform almost all public works in Halta.

The Department of Halta

The Department of Halta is in charge of administering the nation. While both the Department of Religious and Natural Affairs and the Department of Warfare both have complete and independent authority over matters that fall within their purview, the Department of Halta is both the largest and the most powerful of the three branches of government. As part of the activities of this department, the police force arrests wrongdoers, judges and mediators conduct trials, builders plan and execute public-works projects and civic improvements that do not involve alterations to living trees, and bureaucrats set and collect taxes to pay for all of these many efforts. The nobles and the Queen both take an extremely active roll in directing the activities of the Department of Halta. While the other two departments possess a great deal of autonomy, the bureaucrats who administer this department simply obey directives of the nobles and the Queen.

Justice

The Bureau of Justice is one of the most important of the bureaus in the Department of Halta. The judges

Playing Judges and Mediators

All mediators must have at least Bureaucracy •, Presence •, Socialize •, Lore •• and Investigation ••. The position comes with Backing (Haltan Government) • and a salary worth Resources ••. Judgeship requires an additional • in each of these prerequisite Abilities and, likewise, increases the Background rewards by •.

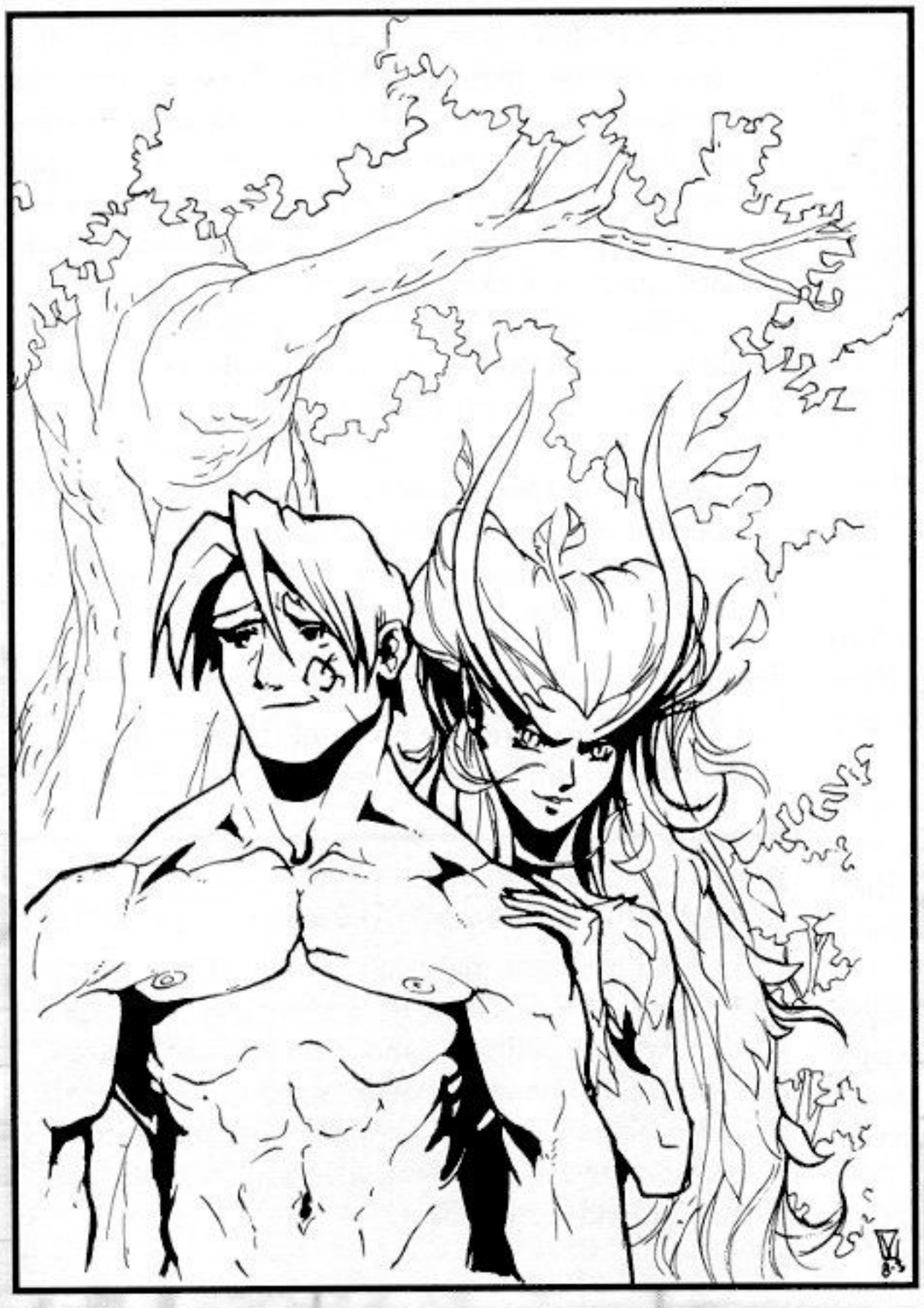
control this bureau. These judges attain their positions through a series of tests similar to those involved in becoming a noble. Anyone who passes the tests given by the local judges becomes a professional mediator who helps to resolve minor disputes. Local nobles appoint judges from among the ranks of mediators who have practiced for at least six years. A judge tries all serious crimes. During a trial, the judge assigns everyone involved a mediator to present her side of the events in question. The judge then attempts to sift through the testimony and evidence to uncover the truth and apply the Haltan law code to this case.

PUNISHMENTS

Fines are the most common punishments for theft, watering wine, minor vandalism, striking a noble or shaman-priest and other minor crimes. Professional mediators decide these disputes, assigning half of the fine to the victim and the other half to the government. A judge tries crimes that are more serious — punishments for such offenses range from heavy fines to periods of indentured servitude, involuntary exile or even death. All decisions are final unless the accused can convince the local noble to review the case and send it to another judge for a single retrial. While the same laws bind both nobles and commoners, nobles usually receive a retrial if the verdict goes against them. The government owns indentured servants and leases them out to work as porters and in other similar physically demanding or potentially dangerous occupations. Terms of indenture can range from six months to a decade but are never longer — Haltan law forbids lifelong slavery.

Exiles receive a special tattoo on one cheek to let everyone know that they are not allowed back into Halta on pain of death. The Haltan government gives both exiles who return and criminals who are condemned to death to the Fair Folk. While stories say that victims greatly enjoy their last days, the idea of having one's soul devoured by the Fair Folk induces the same visceral horror in the Haltans as it does in everyone else.

Judges reserve the death penalty for traitors, ravagers, mass murderers, paid assassins, exiles who attempt to return and anyone who breaks the Fair Folk treaty (killing one of the Fair Folk who is on the ground while the attacker remains up in the trees). Simply harming one of the Fair Folk under similar circumstances is grounds for immediate and irrevocable exile — the Haltan government is completely unwilling to risk the enmity of its inhuman allies. All of these laws also apply to foreigners. While important diplomats and high-ranking Guild representatives will avoid death or indentured servitude, they must pay all fines, and judges can exile them if they commit a serious offense. Except in the case of ravagers, the death sentence is carried out by handing the condemned over to the Fair Folk.



Although relatively lenient with most offenders, Haltan justice deals with ravagers (see **Scavenger Sons**, p. 129) particularly harshly. Since Haltan judges do not trust the Fair Folk to kill their allies — ravagers are the only criminals who the Haltans actually execute on their own. Executioners give them drugs to enhance their suffering, impale them on tree branches and leave the offenders to die slowly.

For any noncapital crime except harming the Fair Folk, there is another option in addition to fines, indentured servitude or exile — military service. Any Haltan in good health and under the age of 35 can instead opt to receive military training and volunteer for dangerous missions against the Linowan. The shaman-priests call upon the gods to curse the individual to die a lingering and painful death if she ever flees or betrays her comrades to the Linowan (this curse is equivalent to the Male-

The Haltan Forest Walkers

The Haltan woods are large enough that is actually contains a hierarchy of forest walkers. The most powerful is Glorious Jade Branch, god of the entire Haltan forest. He is Caltia the Eternal's chief lieutenant and directs the actions of the other lesser forest walkers. A trio of gods — Resilan, Whispering Needles and Shining Trunk — control the portions of this forest that are dominated the great redwoods — Resilan controls the northern portion of this forest, Whispering Needles controls the central portion of the Haltan wood, and Shining Trunk controls the southern extents. Tylokan Root Binder controls the mixed forests that lie on the borders of Halta, and steel-skinned Ubil is the god of the ironwood groves in the southern portions of Halta.

diction Charm, but it only affects humans with an Essence of 1 or lower). Also, her comrades are under orders to kill her if she ever looks like she will do either.

Once she has finished training, the military assigns the new recruit to be part of a team of commandos or assassins that sneaks deep into the heart of Linowan territory to kill important tribal leaders, to steal or destroy powerful artifacts or to cause similar forms of destruction and terror. Commanders assign penal recruits to the most dangerous missions but attempt to make certain that the convicts have some chance of survival. For any crime less than exile, the criminal must go on at least half a dozen missions. Exiles must go on a full dozen. Only half of penal recruits survive this duty, but the government acquits those who survive of all crimes, and most Haltans consider them to be brave and valiant heroes.

The Department of Religious and Natural Affairs

The Haltan people are even more deeply enmeshed in a web of alliances and worship with various powerful gods than most civilized societies. Not only do they have an unusually close relationship with their gods, they also have an alliance with the dreaded Fair Folk.

Gods and Religion

One of the most important reasons that the Haltan Republic has never allied itself with the Realm is religion. Although there is a moderate degree of religious freedom in Halta, the shaman-priests expect everyone to worship at least some of the many forest gods. The popular pantheon includes Caltia the Eternal (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 29-31), Yesryk the Hawk God (see p. 51), the animal avatars of serpents and monkeys (see **The Book of Three Circles**, pp. 76-77), the local forest walkers and the dryads of the trees that form an integral part of the worshipers' homes (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 43-45). In addition to making prayers and offerings, most Haltans deeply love their forest and the animals that live there. As a result, sincere worship of the gods associated with their homeland is universal. Both the shaman-priests and the government openly tolerate ancestor cults, cults dedicated to the Celestial Exalted or even the worship of the Dragon-Blooded. However, Haltans consider anyone who does not openly revere the gods of the forest to be both highly suspicious and potentially treasonous.

One of the reason relations between the Haltan people and the gods of the forest are so close is that the Haltan Republic provides a great deal of aid to its gods. Some of the shaman-priests work with wood elementals to train the arborists who tend to the forest. These arborists are lay priests who are also important officials in the Department of Religious and Natural Affairs. They tend to the health of their forest, treating sick trees and making certain that neither agriculture nor cities harm the forest in any serious fashion. More importantly, both the arborists and the military work to help the Haltan forests expand. The Haltan people form an important part of Caltia's strategy to defeat her rival Jorst by eventually transforming the meadows and oak forests of the Linowan lands into redwood forests. The Haltan people are under Caltia's protection — in return for their worship and aid, Caltia and the various other gods provide many forms of aid to the Haltan people. These gods frequently dispatch minor elementals to teach the shaman-priests and to defend Haltan settlements.

The Shaman-Priests

The shaman-priests are the religious officials of the Haltan Republic. They are the spiritual leaders of the Haltan people, and they control the government's

Playing Haltan Arborists and Priests

All arborists have at least Craft (Forest Care) •••, Occult •••, both Lore and Medicine • and Backing (Haltan Government) and Resources ••. Priests must have at least both Performance and Presence •• and both Lore and Occult •••, as well as both Backing (Haltan Government) and Resources •••, Influence • and at least one san-beast (see pp. 67-74) follower who serves as their symbolic spirit guide. Exalted shaman-priests can have either a familiar or a san-beast follower as their spirit guide.

HAL FEVER

Hal fever (see **Scavenger Sons**, p. 27) is a form of madness that only afflicts the Linowan. After a mild fever, the victim's hair turns as green as a Haltan's, and he rapidly come to either love or be completely obsessed with the Haltan redwood forests. This madness is not a natural one — instead, powerful forest spirits loyal to Caltia the Eternal deliberately infect the enemies of the forest with it. In RY 417, one of Caltia's God-Blooded daughters became a powerful shaman-priest and successfully petitioned the Goddess of Madness in Yu-Shan to create this new madness for Caltia. Since the spirits who carry it cannot leave the redwood forests, it only affects Linowan who have frequent contact with this forest.

Unless a shaman cures the Linowan or the victim is strong-willed enough to transform his growing love for the forest in to an obsessive hatred (this requires a Willpower roll at difficulty 4), he soon flees into the Haltan forest. The Haltan government accepts victims of Hal fever as citizens after a few simple tests to insure that they have not simply dyed their hair green. Once the disease has run its course (which takes between three and ten days), the transformation is both complete and permanent, and neither shamans nor gods can reverse it. Hal fever claims only a few hundred victims a year and does little to reduce Linowan numbers. However, its presence is demoralizing, and it provides the Haltan military with much useful intelligence about the Linowan because the majority of Linowan who have frequent contact with the redwood forests are raiders and border guards. Anyone without Linowan ancestry is immune to this madness — however, some traders from nearby nations have some Linowan ancestry, and a few of them have gotten it. Fortunately, most traders know that Hal fever is both noncontagious and very rare.

Department of Religious and Natural Affairs. In addition to leading and officiating at the Haltans' many religious ceremonies and rituals, the shaman-priests also serve as the government's official negotiators with the gods, elementals and Fair Folk who are so much a part of Haltan life. Most priests are adept at the various sorts of minor magics that mortals can perform, as well as being both effective counselors and skilled performers. In this role, they also have the responsibility of performing marriages, celebrating births, insuring that the spirits of the dead are properly reborn and that the grieving are comforted.

However, their most important and difficult function is acting as official intermediaries between the Haltan people and the various powerful beings who also reside in their land. The shaman-priests honor the gods, pray for boons and help the nobles negotiate with the Fair Folk, and the most skilled shaman-priests summon elementals. They ask for specific favors from the gods and seal all agreements between the Haltans and the Fair Folk. In addition to boosting morale and praying for good luck in battle, military shaman-priests are also in charge of crafting powerful talismans as well summoning and bargaining with the minor elementals that they convince to fight alongside Haltan soldiers. Shaman-priests all wear loose jackets and baggy pants decorated with trim made from bright green fur and embroidered all over with passages from various religious texts. Shaman-priests all must have a san-beast companion who serves as a spirit guide and a visible connection to the natural world. This creature, know as the shaman-priest's fetch, accompanies her whenever she is on duty. If this animal ever displays open hostility or fear toward the priest, her superiors will carefully review her orthodoxy and devotion. Shaman-priests who mistreat their fetches are stripped of their rank and exiled.

The government encourages the few outcaste Dragon-Blooded and God-Blooded living in Halta to become shaman-priests because they can deal with gods and elementals far more effectively than ordinary mortals. Many of the shaman-priests are beastmen (see pp. 74-77 for more on beastmen in Halta). Because of their deeper connection to animals and the natural world, Yesryk and the animal avatars view these priests with special favor. However, despite the reverence in which most Haltans hold their gods, all sane members of the populace fear direct contact with these powerful beings. Caltia's visits to Chanta every decade are occasions for both rejoicing and fear. While most Haltan feel great love for the forest when they place their hands on the trunk of a worship tree and say prayers to the local forest walker, they are as reluctant to actually meet a forest walker as any other mortal.

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS

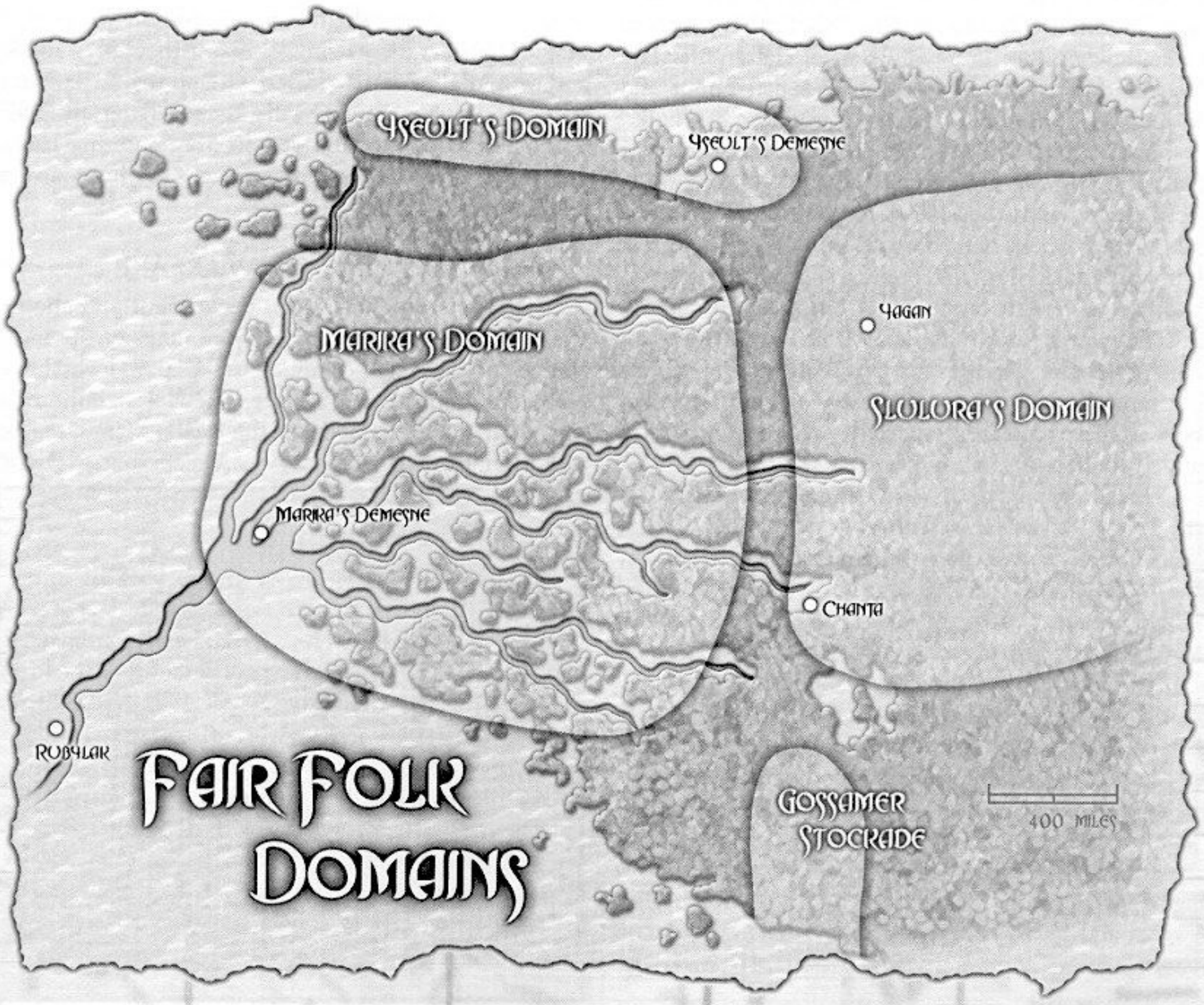
Although dealing with the gods and Fair Folk is the most crucial part of their duties, most Haltans primarily know their local shaman-priest as the person who performs the various ceremonies that mark Haltan life. Every new moon, the Haltans gather to honor the powers of earth, winter, night and death. In dimly lit and solemn outdoor ceremonies, they raise their voices in prayer to all of the hidden and secret spirits of the forest and say prayers to their ancestors. The next day, at noon on the first day of each month, the Haltans gather to celebrate the powers of light, summer and life. In sharp

contrast to the quiet and restrained new moon rituals, these sun rituals are highly festive and joyous. After these ceremonies, there is a vast feast, and the participants consume large amounts of food and intoxicants. The Haltans always hold both sorts of ceremonies in public — all members of a community gather to worship and celebrate together. In large cities such as Chanta, the residents of each neighborhood gather together to worship. Both sets of ceremonies also honor Caltia — the new moon rituals in her aspect as the dread protective goddess of the land in winter and at night, while the noon festivals honor her as the goddess of the wild and living land.

The Fair Folk

In addition to their alliances with gods and elementals, the Haltan people have also made elaborate deals with most of the local Fair Folk tribes. The Haltans' close relations with these soul-predators and dream-thieves further serves to increase the animosity felt by the Linowan and their allies. The Haltans signed the oldest and most basic treaty with the Fair Folk in RY 281 — this treaty states that any mortal or animal that touches the forest floor is fair game. However, if the individual can climb a tree, she is safe. People above the ground can either lower ropes or come down to the forest floor to directly aid or defend someone who the Fair Folk are pursuing. However, the treaties forbid anyone from attacking the Fair Folk while up in the trees, just as the Fair Folk cannot attack anyone up in the trees, and Fair Folk who wish to climb up into the Haltan world must ask permission of the local leaders. Also, all Fair Folk are fully subject to Haltan laws and customs while they are up in the trees.

This treaty was originally simply a statement of the realities of living in the forest. There are several large communities of Fair Folk living in the Northeastern Redwood Forest, and they used to regularly hunt every mortal who lived here. However, these Fair Folk prefer to do their hunting on the ground and the mortals sought safety in the trees. Aided by both Caltia and Glorious Jade Branch, the Haltan leaders long-ago negotiated this



treaty to stop the ceaseless warfare between the Fair Folk and the Haltan people. The Fair Folk agreed to the treaty both because it provided significant benefits to them and because they feared the gods turning the wrath of the entire forest against them. This treaty also provided protection against attack by the Linowan barbarians, and today, the Fair Folk act as the Haltans most important line of defense against such attacks. While some of the Fair Folk tribes never signed these treaties and periodically attack Haltan cities and town, the Haltans know much about the Fair Folk and are always ready to defend themselves against these inhuman marauders.

The Fair Folk occupy an exceedingly ambiguous position in the lives of Haltans. The fey are murderous slavers and soul-eaters who prey upon mortals. However, the tribes who abide by the treaty also protect the Haltan lands — fear and disgust are intermixed with both admiration and gratitude. When a military observer reports that a large Linowan raiding party has been capture by the Fair Folk, Haltans cheer and comment on both the Fair Folk warriors' martial prowess and the Linowan raiders' incompetence. Also, the fact that all Linowan captives who are not ransomed within one lunar month are sold to the Fair Folk further serves to make the Fair Folk an integral part of Haltan life. The lives of these captives purchase gossamer armor and weapons and various minor magics from the Fair Folk.

In addition, while almost all members of the Fair Folk host stay on the ground, cataphractoi sometimes work closely with the Haltan military. Some of these inhuman warriors help protect Haltan cities against Linowan attack, but most prefer to accompany Haltan raiders who venture out to attack Linowan settlements. Every city near the border has at least two or three Fair Folk protectors. Over half of all raiding parties against the Linowan include at least one member of the Fair Folk, as these protectors especially enjoy expeditions to attack civilian targets.

This ambiguity means that Haltans are less fearful of the Fair Folk than most other mortals. Much of this acceptance occurs because the Fair Folk usually abide by the terms of the treaty when they visit the Haltans' arboreal realm. Haltans greet Fair Folk ambassadors with a mixture of gratitude and nervous fear.

Evidence of the contact the Haltans have with the Fair Folk is quite obvious — in return for rare drugs from the Far East, exotic art works, exquisite performances and criminals condemned to death, the Haltans receive Fair Folk artifacts, gossamer armor, weapons and inhumanly perfect finery. Some of the most skilled and experienced Haltan warriors fight in a panoply of featherlight gossamer plate, wielding exquisitely sharp glass swords and spears. These worthies are able to take on three or more Linowan warriors and win. However, the Haltans also keep cold iron weapons in their armories, in case their dangerous allies should ever turn on them.

Religious Crimes

In private, the Haltan people can worship any gods or elementals they desire — some even worship the Lunar Exalted. Although the shaman-priests do not forbid Haltans from worshiping the Dragon-Blooded, they strongly frown upon this practice, and many Haltans suspect anyone who does so of secretly supporting the Realm. For the same reason, the priests forbid anyone from following the Immaculate Philosophy. Also, any Haltan Dragon-Blooded who sets herself up as a figure of worship is severely fined and will be exiled if she does not recant. Although the Haltans have an unusual degree of religious freedom, Haltans see some beings as being completely inappropriate to worship. Both public worship of the Fair Folk and attempting to convert others to this path are serious crimes punished by fines or indentured servitude. Haltans kill all ravagers on sight. The greatest religious crime is honoring or attempting to contact demons. Worshiping, or even calling upon, the Yozis is punishable by death, as is any attempt to summon demons — both the shaman-priests and the Council of Nobles consider these beings to be antithetical to all life and will not tolerate anyone attempting to contact them. The Haltan military will attempt to stop any Exalt accompanied by a bound demon from entering Halta and will immediately ask foreign Exalted who summon demons while in Halta to leave.

The Department of Warfare

The generals control this department and choose their replacements from among the ranks of the most skilled and dedicated commandos (see p. 77) who have completed a full term of service. The Haltan military is organized along the model of the Realm's fangs, scales, talons, wings, dragons and legions, except that, in Halta,

Fair Folk Protectors

In return for receiving first pick of all condemned criminals and war captives, a few Fair Folk cataphractoi help to protect Haltan cities from attack. Mostly, they are servants of Slulura, Lord of the Lower Branches. They live in special shrines on the edge of the city where shaman-priests tend to them and provide for their every need. However, if gods, beastmen or the Linowan attack the city, the cataphractoi help defend it with their powers and their inhuman martial prowess. Also, when such attacks are rare, they supplement their diet by accompanying Haltan commandos on raids against the Linowan.

these groupings are called cones, leaves, twigs, branches, trunks and trees. In addition to protecting their communities from attack and making raids against the Linowan, Haltan soldiers also perform the actual labor for many of the Department of Halta's public works. These troops form Halta's primary fire-fighting force and work to both repair the many aerial bridges and keep the branch paths between nearby settlements passable and relatively safe. Such noncombat duties take up the majority of the time of soldiers garrisoned in towns and cities.

THE GUARD

Far from the border, the war is only a story told by travelers. The only impact the war has on such places is that every citizen who is in good health must serve four years in the defensive Guard, starting when they turn 18. The Guard makes up the vast majority of the Haltan military and consists of moderately trained warriors who protect Halta from attack but never venture beyond its borders. All loyal Haltans regard this service as a sacred duty to both their nation and their gods. Guard members spend most of their time performing public works such as bridge repair or fire fighting. Unless they volunteer to serve in one of the border fortresses (see p. 32), the military stations all Guard members in their hometown. Fortunately, many adventurous youths wish to either prove themselves or see more of Halta than the city or town they grew up in, and so, there is no shortage of volunteers for the border fortresses. After their term of service, anyone who excels at military service and who wishes to stay on is eligible for membership in the Haltan commandos. The commandos are considerably smaller than the Guard and are composed exclusively of highly trained warriors and skilled commandos who are specially trained to spy on and attack Linowan military camps and civilian settlements. The commandos include both brave volunteers and the occasional prisoner seeking to void his crimes though courageous service to the Haltan nation.

MILITARY STRENGTH

Because all Haltans spend four years in the military, the Guard is a force of approximately one and a half million infantry. Only around one in twenty protect the 25 border fortresses. The rest protect various cities and towns. Recruits receive six months of training before they start active duty, and once they are out of the Guard, the government lowers the taxes of citizens who are good health if they spend one day every month training. These ex-Guard form a reserve militia of 600,000 who help to defend settlements from attack. The Guard has ordinary Second Age armor and weapons, and the only major difference between it and any other military force in Creation is that 80,000 members

of the Guard are ata-beasts. Forest baboons, tree-pards and other large and deadly arboreal creatures serve in ordinary scales as scouts and ordinary soldiers. However, any ata-beast capable of flight is always assigned to the aerial corps in charge of carrying messages and supplies to troops in the field.

The commandos are a small, highly trained force of almost 60,000 elite troops. Anyone who wishes to become one of the commandos must undergo a year-long, rigorous training program — two-thirds of those who start this demanding course cannot finish it. Part of this training includes teaching them how to fight on the ground in conventional battles. Soldiers who pass this training must then sign on for a 10-year tour of duty, after which they receive a generous pension (Resources •••). Two-thousand five-hundred of the commandos staff the small border outposts, while another 15,000 control and direct operations in the border fortresses. The remainder command the garrisons in various Haltan cities or perform raids into Linowan territory. These elite troops mostly possess ordinary Second Age gear. However, approximately 2,000 of the best of the elite troops own gossamer armor and weapons that the Haltans purchased from the Fair Folk. Troops equipped with gossamer armor and weapons have special units that form most of the front line in any battle.

The Border Fortresses

In addition to posting garrisons of between 1,000 and 50,000 troops in every city or large town, the Haltan military also controls a series of 25 forts that protect Halta's 2,500-mile-long western border. The military built these forts 100 miles apart, and each one is the size of a large town. They represent the heart of the Haltan military might and are self-sufficient communities. Within each fortress, commandos teach new members of the Guard how to be soldiers, armorers forge new weapons and armor, experienced troops drill so that they can retain their edge, and skilled smiths repair and polish battle-worn weapons and armor.

These fortresses both protect the interior of Halta from attack and serve as Halta's primary defense against forest fires, especially forest fires set by Linowan raiders. To make them more difficult to overrun and to maximize the protection the structures receive from the Fair Folk on the ground, all of the border forts are located between 20 and 40 miles from the actual border. Also, soldiers strip the lower branches from all trees within a quarter mile of the fortress, making them far more difficult to climb without the ladders and rope elevators that the military uses to transport people and goods to and from the ground. As part of their agreement with the Fair Folk, a small encampment of fey lives quite near each fortress. The Fair Folk are happy to keep this part of their deal — these forts are obvious targets for Linowan raiders, and most Fair Folk warriors have developed a taste for the suffering of the Linowan. As a result, these fortresses are almost impregnable from the ground — all successful attacks have come though the trees, and most involve either supernatural aid or assistance by one of the rare Haltan traitors.

These forts consist of a series of cylindrical and square buildings attached firmly to several large trees. These building all have roofs and floors that are at least as solid and well built as their walls. Unlike Haltan cities or towns, each of these buildings completely fills an entire dwelling platform. Each structure is connected with the other buildings that make up the fort by means of short covered walkways that are equally well fortified. Heavy doors are mounted where one of these walkways enters a building — if attackers breach a walkway, the doors protect the buildings on either side. All outside surfaces of both the buildings and the walkways are covered in the almost-fireproof bark of redwood trees that has been treated with special chemicals brewed from vines that renders it tougher and even more resistant to fire.

The Fortress Defenses

All fortress walls have a soak of 6L/10B, with 12 health levels required to damage one and 24 to destroy one. These walls are also fireproof — they are immune to damage by normal fire, including firewands (see **Scavenger Sons**, p. 37) and other military fire sources such as Southern fire arrows (see **Savage Seas**, p. 119). They halve all damage (before subtracting soak) from all fire-based Charms, spells or artifacts. The windows of each fortress are designed to allow those inside to attack outward without penalty but still provide 75 percent hard cover to anyone inside who is actually attacking an opponent outside of the fortress (-1 vs. hand-to-hand attacks, -3 vs. ranged attacks). Also, military arborists prune all nearby trees so that there are only two or three ways to approach or leave the fortress, funneling all potential attackers into one of a small number of paths that the Haltan soldiers can easily defend. Climbing the tree or taking some other more difficult route requires a difficulty 4 Athletics roll. Charms such as Graceful Crane Stance or Monkey Leap Technique remove these penalties and allow Exalts to attack the fortress from any direction by making a difficulty 1 Athletics roll.

Each fortress holds between 5,000 and 7,000 inhabitants. Half of them are in the Guard and 500 to 700 are commandos. The remaining 2,000 to 2,800 residents are chirurgeons, cooks, smiths, food gatherers, animal trainers and similar support personnel. Each fortress also includes at least 2,000 san-beasts. Most help to gather food, but some carry messages, and the remainder are

dangerous creatures such as hatra, strix or tree-pards who fight alongside their human masters. Also, all of these fortresses contain at least 300 ata-beasts soldiers. Serving in these fortresses is often the first introduction that some young Haltan volunteers from smaller towns have to working closely with intelligent animals. Working and fighting alongside these creatures serves to greatly increase tolerance for ata-beasts and is one of the reasons that the Haltan nation is so accepting of these beings.

In addition to the well-armed and armored soldiers, each fortress is also equipped with between two and four sailcutters (see **Savage Seas**, pp. 121-122) facing each of the possible approaches to the fortress. These sailcutters are ideal for killing large number of troops or for knocking them off of a branch. If needed, each sailcutter can also be rapidly transformed into a pair of ordinary light ballistae. In addition to the above defenses, every fortress is fitted with one or two heavy catapults mounted in fortified enclosures located on the roofs of the largest structures.

Because all border fortresses are more than a day's journey from the border, Linowan raiders are rarely able to attack them. However, since all Haltan settlements near the Linowan are at least 40 miles from the border, any raiders must either be small enough to sneak past the border patrols or large and well-equipped enough to be able to defeat one or more border fortresses. Because these fortresses are almost impregnable to ordinary mortals, this rarely happens. In the past century, only one border fortress has fallen to Linowan attack, and that only happened because these Linowan raiding force included several outcaste Dragon-Blooded and a powerful artifact the Linowan queen borrowed from the Realm.

Sailcutter Effects

The player of anyone standing on a branch or uncovered walkway who is hit by an attack by either a sailcutter or a light ballista must make a Dexterity + Athletics roll for her character with a difficulty of 4. Failure means that the character falls off of the branch and hits the ground 150 to 200 feet below. Players of characters with an Athletics score of 3 or more dots who do not botch the above roll can then make another Dexterity + Athletics roll with a difficult of 3 to have their characters catch hold of some branch or vine and so avoid falling to the forest floor. Anyone whose player botches the first roll or fails both rolls lands on the forest floor. In addition to taking normal falling damage, the character must now face whatever Fair Folk are in the area waiting for combatants to fall.

Observer Posts

The border fortresses are Halta's primary line of defense against Linowan attack. However, in order to marshal their forces successfully, the Haltans need to be aware of any Linowan incursions well before they near the border fortresses. In addition to paying Fair Folk for such information and sending intelligent strix and diving herons up to perform aerial reconnaissance, the Haltans maintain a network of small observer posts far closer to the Linowan border. Located between two and five miles from the edge of the forest, these outposts hold between 18 and 24 Haltan commandos, including at least one ata-beast or Exalt capable of either flight or extremely rapid movement through the forest. Located no more than 20 miles apart, observers carefully camouflage these outposts and move them at least once every two years. At any time, half of this force is on patrol, while the remainder stays at the outpost.

The outpost itself is located near the top of one of the taller trees and is fitted with a small but powerful telescope. In addition, almost half of the post's personnel are always out patrolling the forest. All observers carry one well-trained san-raiton or san-mospid with them. These swift birds can remember and speak any short message they hear and fly either to the outpost or the nearest border fortress, depending on what command they are given. The outpost also has message birds trained to deliver messages to nearby outposts and border fortresses as well as to the nearest encampment of Fair Folk.

Serving at a border outpost is considered extremely hazardous duty. In addition to simply reporting on Linowan incursions into the forest, these outposts are also the first active line of defense against Linowan raiders. Once the soldiers stationed have reported the presence of a Linowan raid, they send out a team to follow the raiders and attempt to kill as many of them as possible. These missions are highly dangerous, especially when the commandos sneak after and harass a large military force to weaken it before a trunk of the Haltan military engages it. Because the Linowan must spend more than a full day in the forest to reach even the nearest settlement, these observers have time to seriously disrupt most raids and kill everyone in smaller raiding parties.

Very few Linowan are able to travel rapidly through the trees. During the night, the exhausted Linowan raiders either sleep in shifts or creep slowly through the dangerous and unfamiliar forest. In either case, the Haltan observers set traps for them, sneak down and kill raiders in their sleep, steal or destroy their weapons and supplies and otherwise attempt to harass and slay the raiders.

HALTAN TRAPS

Haltan soldiers excel at setting traps to kill or injure invaders in their forest. Any Haltan character with two or more dots in Survival can create similar traps on a successful Dexterity + Survival roll at difficulty 2 (higher if only inferior materials are available).

Deadfalls: The most common traps are deadfalls, which work exceptionally well against large groups of invaders, either on the ground or in the trees. Some require that an enemy break a concealed line; soldiers set others off manually when enough of their enemies are underneath. A deadfall brings down a dozen or more logs onto the heads of anyone within five yards of the center of the deadfall. Everyone in this area takes 14 levels of lethal damage (no roll). Two or more successes on a Dexterity + Athletics roll allows a character to jump out of the way and so reduce this damage to 7L damage (roll as normal). Noticing a deadfall is quite difficult, especially if it is being set off manually. Characters will need to be suspicious, and even then, their players must garner three or more successes on a Perception + Awareness roll. Fortunately, Charms such as Surprise Anticipation Method that prevent sneak attacks will warn characters of this or any other trap a turn before it goes off.

Snares: Although they only work on a single target, snares are both easy and fast to construct. Soldiers simply use bent branches and sturdy ropes to hoist anyone who steps into a well-concealed loop of rope high into the air. In addition to hanging upside down at least 20 feet in the air, the Haltans place these traps such that anyone caught in one slams into the trees while going up, causing 7B damage (armor protects normally). Noticing a snare before stepping in it requires three or more successes on a reflexive Perception + Awareness roll. A character must have a knife easily accessible or use a stunt to cut himself free from a snare. Cutting a tough rope while hanging upside down is far from easy (difficulty 2, one roll per turn). Also, a character who gets down without aid takes falling damage unless she possesses a Charm that allows her to avoid falling.

The Linowan learned long ago that raiding parties have little chance in the Haltan forests unless they are either accompanied by powerful beings such as Terrestrial Exalted or contain at least three dozen highly trained and heavily armed warriors. As a result, the Haltan observers either face large and heavily armed war parties or extremely small bands of Dragon-Blooded, summoned demons and other similarly formidable beings. In either case, the risks are exceedingly high — making this duty one of the most dangerous in the Haltan military.

FIRST AGE WEAPONS

In addition to its Second Age weapons, the Haltan military also possesses 53 light implosion bows. Ordinary soldiers can use the 32 powered by alchemical reagents. Engineers long ago modified all of these First Age weapons so that they can be partially disassembled and carried by a pair of flying ata-strix. These artifacts are located so that the ata-strix couriers can transport at least six from the various cities where the weapons are stored to any border fortress or border conflict in under a day. The military also has 19 lightning ballistae that it has stationed in various cities. Chanta has six, River Blossom has four, while Kajeth, Resplendent Peak and Glorious Crown each have three. These artifacts are not easily mobile and are an important part of these cities' defenses.

FOREST TACTICS

The vast majority of the Haltan military is only prepared to fight in the trees. In their standard formation, individual leaves (25 soldiers) keep at least two other leaves in sight, but the leaves fight with 50 to 100 yards between them. When fighting enemies who are on the ground or less experienced with moving through the trees, their primary tactic is for the various leaves to all get above their enemies, encircle them and fire missile weapons down upon them. In short order, any attackers on the ground will also soon have to face bands of hobgoblins determined to capture them for their leaders' pleasure.

When facing enemies in the trees, the Haltan forces gradually close in while continuing to attack with missile weapons. Periodically during this advance, the Haltans will cease their missile attacks to give the swift-moving ata-beast soldiers such as tree-pards and forest baboons a chance to make swift attacks on the enemy and then dart out of range. Eventually, the remainder of the Haltan soldiers are close enough to engage in hand-to-hand combat. Using the trees to their best advantage, Haltans continually advance and retreat up and down the trees they are on, attempting to avoid giving their opponents any opportunity to strike back.

These tactics work exceptionally well when facing either Linowan war parties in the trees or Linowan deforestation squads on the ground. Deforestation squads containing between 100 and 5,000 warriors attempt to cut down trees and set fire to the forest. While the bulk of the Haltan forces attempt to kill or drive off the raiders before they can light fires, several branches fall back and attach powerful anti-fire talismans to all trees near the

ones the Linowan are attempting to burn. When used properly, these talismans prevent fires from spreading. The soldiers also alert any nearby Fair Folk. In addition to capturing raiders, the Fair Folk are often willing to use their powers to put out fires. Since adult redwoods easily survive all but the worst fires, these tactics are sufficient to keep the forest safe. Shaman-priests assigned to work with the military spend a significant portion of their time creating and repairing these anti-fire talismans.

When facing bandits or other opponents who are equally skilled at moving through the trees, Haltan soldiers use similar tactics, but are far more mobile and avoid closing with their enemies until they have weakened them with sufficient missile fire. Fortunately, the military can usually overwhelm these enemies with sheer numbers. If they can get above their enemies, they drive them down to the ground, into the arms of the waiting Fair Folk.

Warfare Outside of the Forest

Haltans avoid large battles outside of their forest, since the vast majority of their forces have no idea how to effectively fight on the ground. Instead, the skilled commandos only leave the forest to execute swift and deadly raids against the Linowan or other external enemies. Moving quickly and silently under cover of darkness and using their woodcraft to cover their tracks, these raiders enter Linowan territory undetected. Here, they make a single directed attack and flee. Although they are fully capable of fighting large battles on the ground, they avoid doing so.

Small outposts along the Haltan border (see p. 33) serve as staging areas for spying missions and raids into the Linowan lands. The Haltan military sends specially trained soldiers out to the outposts where the observers brief them on any recent developments along the border. These spies or raiders then sneak into Linowan territory and perform their missions.

Undercover Missions

There are Haltan spies who have lived as Linowan warriors or worked in Linowan border fortresses for more than a decade. These spies pretend to be from a distant part of the Linowan lands and often live among the Linowan as an ordinary tribesman for up to a year before they attempt to impersonate a warrior, armorer or someone else associated with one of the large, well-organized Linowan war-bands. These spies report all plans and developments they overhear

to their team members at a nearby Haltan border outpost. Some give coded messages hidden in lockets or the handles of knives to wandering traders who are actually Haltan couriers. Others regularly sneak out to a set rendezvous location with a Haltan message bird. These spies enable Haltan generals to learn details of the Linowan relations with the Realm. These same spies have also stolen or destroyed many of the minor artifacts, such as wheeled carts carrying fire projectors (see **Savage Seas**, pp. 122-123) or light implosion bows, that the Realm sold or leased to the Linowan in return for their services as mercenaries.

RAIDING

Although there are many stories of heroic Haltan spies stealing valuable artifacts or copying secret messages from the Realm, the vast majority of expeditions into Linowan lands are short-term raids to attack nearby towns or the camps of warrior bands and otherwise cause large amounts of death and destruction in a short time. Most raids take only a single night, and even the exceedingly dangerous raids deep into Linowan territory rarely involve traveling more than four or five days from the edge of the forest. During these missions, the Haltan raiders move swiftly through the night, and when dawn comes, they hide in oak groves, barns or small caves. Since all raiders are highly experienced at both running and marching on the ground, they can move up to 30 miles a day. The most common types of raids are assassinations and terror raids.

ASSASSINATIONS

Assassinations involve a handful of exceptionally well-trained Haltan warrior-spies attempting to kill an important or especially dangerous Linowan. Terrestrial Exalted, brilliant generals and shamans who have close ties to powerful gods are the most common targets of these attempts. Teams of ordinary mortals who attempt such assassinations almost always lose one or more members when their targets are other mortals — attempts to kill Exalts often fail and frequently result in the loss of entire teams. Therefore, the Haltan military actively attempts to recruit Exalts as assassins. Mortal assassins are also especially eager to serve on teams that include one of the Exalted. If the Exalt has access to either sorcery or artifacts such as a globe of transport (see **Ruins of Rathess**, pp. 86-87) or a chariot of aerial conquest (see **Castebook: Dawn**, p. 78), she can move her team almost anywhere in the Linowan lands in less than dozen hours. The few assassin teams that include Terrestrial Exalted have gained both fame and fortune by killing dangerous Linowan no matter where they attempt to hide.

TERROR RAIDS

Teams that go on terror raids are considerably larger. Instead of killing a single target, the goal is to drive back Linowan settlers from the border and to harm the ability of the Linowan military to attack Halta. Setting fire to villages and warrior camps is the most common tactic in terror raids. However, some teams also perform more heinous and terrifying acts such as killing all of the inhabitants of a Linowan village while they are sleeping or poisoning wells with slow but deadly poisons. Although some Haltans are troubled by the nature of such raids, everyone living near the Linowan border understands that the Linowan regularly attempt to perform similarly horrific attacks on the Haltans. The goal of these terror raids is to drive both soldiers and settlers back away from the edge of the forest and, if possible, to expand the forest by giving military arborists time to plant and tend redwood saplings without interference.

VISITING HALTA

Serious paranoia is rare in Halta. There is no real danger of the Linowan impersonating Haltans — none of them have grown up with the level of comfort climbing and moving through the trees that all Haltan take for granted. However, trust does not come easily to Haltans who live near the Linowan border — Linowan warriors bands regularly stage sneak attacks or send in squads of assassins and terrorists who impersonate visiting merchants and diplomats. As a result, the very cities that have the most external trade are also the ones that trust foreigners the least. Haltan merchants prefer to deal with established traders or their close relatives — people who have been visiting Halta for the last two decades rarely turn out to be assassins. However, most Haltans view foreigners who have not visited Halta before and who do not have someone to vouch for them with suspicion and distrust. Anyone who is obviously from far away — like black-skinned traders from the Southeast or blue-haired Westerners — is clearly not Linowan and is rapidly accepted. However, Haltans are exceedingly suspicious of any unknown foreigner who looks like she might possibly have Linowan ancestry, which includes almost anyone from anywhere in the Northeast or the more northerly portions of the Scavenger Lands.

A branch of the Haltan military, known as Monitors, is in charge of policing all settlements near the Linowan border. In addition to patrolling the branch paths and dwelling platforms of the aerial cities and watching for signs of trouble, Monitors also keep a vigilant eye upon all new visitors. They constantly follow all new or suspicious visitors. Monitors allow the most trusted visitors to roam more freely but keep track of their movements by questioning loyal citizens and

Long-Term Spies

The Monitors' greatest fear are Linowan spies. Almost all Linowan spies impersonate visiting foreigners — it is almost impossible for an ordinary mortal not raised in the Haltan forest to believably impersonate someone who grew up running from tree to tree along narrow branch paths. Since the Linowan have no forest cities to practice in, there are few long-term Linowan spies in Halta. In contrast, most Haltan spies in Linowan lands impersonate the Linowan. Haltans who wish to lean to impersonate the Linowan spend several years in the Hundred Kingdoms learning to live on the ground and to move and act naturally while away from their beloved forest.

Those few Linowan who successfully impersonate Haltans are always eager to expand their numbers by finding and paying Haltan traitors. Linowan agents in the Hundred Kingdoms attempt to recruit overly greedy Haltan traders, while Linowan spies look for poor and amoral Haltan youths who find easy riches more appealing than loyalty and honor. Like Haltan spies in the Linowan lands, these Linowan agents sometimes work as assassins or attempt to steal valuable artifacts. However, they are mostly looking for information on raids, allies and any unusual artifacts the Haltans may have acquired.

using specially trained tree-pards and giant wolf spiders to track their movements. Since most foreigners are unused to living so far about the ground, they usually stay on one of the larger dwelling-platforms of the city they are visiting, only venturing off with the aid of a Monitor who acts as their guide. If a foreigner leaves the dwelling platform he was staying on without a guide, his Monitor simply follows him.

Unlike other members of the military, Monitors do not wear uniforms. They wear special electrum pendants that they can display openly or hide, depending upon how discreet they wish to be. Although traitors are relatively rare, the Monitors also attempt to locate and track down anyone working to betray the forest kingdom to its Linowan enemies. Ignorant outsiders sometimes describe the Monitors as a ruthless secret police. However, they leave Haltan citizens strictly alone unless the Monitors have some reason to suspect that they are involved in some threat to the Haltan nation. Although the Monitors occasionally thwart theft, smuggling and murder, they only investigate a crime if it initially appears to be part of a larger threat — they leave ordinary crimes to the city police. Monitors are only present in settlements near the border or in ones that outsiders regularly visit. Monitors are retired commandos who wish to continue to serve their nation.

The War

The Haltan nation has been at war with its Linowan neighbor for many centuries. Although the heart of this conflict is the endless dispute between Caltia the Eternal, God of the Evergreen Forests, and Golden-Eyed Jorst, God of the Deciduous Forests (see **Games of Divinity,** pp. 29-31), the war is more than a personal spat between two gods. The Haltan people and the Linowan have been killing each other in thousands of small battles, raids and assassinations. Haltans who lives near the border hate the Linowan with a deep and lasting passion. The destruction and death caused by Linowan raiders means that, even in the Haltan cities that are untouched by it, few advocate finding any end to this war beyond killing all Linowan warriors and conquering their nation.

Forest Warfare

Until the Bull of the North decided to attack the Linowan's southern allies, there was little open warfare between the Haltan and Linowan armies. In large part, this was because any possible battlefield would greatly favor one side. The Linowan would almost certainly win any battles fought in their lands and badly lose those fought up in the Haltan forest. The Haltans and the Linowan first came into conflict 500 years ago, when these two expanding peoples met at the boundary of the Great Redwood Forest. Shortly after the terrible battle that resulted in the creation of the shadowland now known as the Field of Woe, the Haltans negotiated their treaty with the Fair Folk in RY 281, to help prevent a large-scale invasion of their forests by the Linowan.

In RY 318, before they understood the full magnitude of the danger presented by the Fair Folk in the Haltan Forest, the Linowan attempted to conquer the Haltans. An outcaste Dragon-Blooded known as Summer Conflagration lead the attack. She was the queen of the Linowan people at that time and sent her army in great war canoes on a mission to burn Chanta to the ground. She planned to drive off the Fair Folk with her Charms and her army's superior numbers. Unfortunately, the Fair Folk Host was far larger and deadlier than any of the Linowan expected. The day after an initial encounter where she burned a band of Fair Folk into ash, an enormous horde of hobgoblins and several dozen Fair Folk warriors attacked her army. The Fair Folk killed Summer Conflagration, and the hungry and merciless soul-eaters devoured her troops. Only a few dozen members of this great force returned to report on their disastrous defeat.

THE BULL OF THE NORTH

For hundreds of years, both sides raided the other, but there was no large-scale open warfare. Since they have no other large, well-organized enemies, the Haltans had no experience with the realities of warfare in the Age of Sorrows. All of this changed in RY 761. The new and highly charismatic leader of the icewalker barbarians is a Solar Exalt known as the Bull of the North. He wished to extend his reach to the Scavenger Lands and hopes to eventually bring both the vast wealth of Nexus and the military might of Lookshy in the lands under his sway. His first step in this campaign was to make an alliance with Bloody River and Ardeleth. He sent two members of his Solar Circle — Raneth of Diamond Hearth and Nalla Bloodaxe from Whitewall, as well as soldiers, sorcerers, artifacts and four Northern-born Dragon-Blooded to help these small kingdoms conquer the tribes south of the Linowan.

The Exalts rapidly passed information back and forth between these two fronts using a combination of Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, several small flying vehicles and Charms. In addition, the Bull's ally Samea is a Zenith Caste Solar Exalted who is also a powerful sorceress. She regularly cast the spell Swift Spirit of Winged Transportation to move hundreds of soldiers and many tons of equipment to their southern allies in less than a day. Using these methods, the Bull of the North was able to direct this campaign from afar without needing to worry about outdated or incorrect information. The Linowan were naturally alarmed at the Bull of the North's actions — a successful conquest of the Rokan-jin and Talinin tribes would allow the Bull of the North to attack their lands from both north and south and then send the mass of his armies through the conquered Linowan lands to attack the heart of the Scavenger Lands.

In response to the Bull's efforts, the Linowan aided their embattled southern allies. The Bull's forces swiftly escalated the scale of their raids and soon began conquering towns and laying siege to several Rokan-jin cities. Shortly after the Linowan became involved in this war, the Haltan queen asked to make an alliance with the Bull of the North against their common foe. She committed nine trees of the Guard and one tree of commandos to aid the Bull of the North. Also, the Haltans used their barges to carry soldiers and supplies down the Haltan rivers and their ata- and san-beasts carried messages and supplies for the Bull's forces. The Haltans joined this war both because the queen decided that any enemy of the Linowan would make an excellent ally and because the nobles were worried that anyone who did not fight alongside the Bull of the North might become his next conquest.

The war dragged on for many months, becoming increasingly large and deadly. The battle of Jin-Dan left the capital of Rokan-jin in flames and killed more than 10,000 of its residents. As the war continued, the Linowan conscripted entire Talinin villages, while the Bull's forces did the same with villages in Ardeleth. When the Bull of the North sent the sorceress Samea, the Second Circle demon Florivet (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 97-98) that she had summoned and a pair of ronin celestial lions (see **Games of Divinity**, p. 33) into this battle, the Linowan appealed to the Realm to intervene. The Realm sent the bulk of the powerful Tepet legions near the end of 763. Although this force was extremely familiar with Threshold warfare and was led by several old and highly experienced Dynasts, few in these legions had any experience fighting battles against a large army bolstered by Celestial Circle Sorcery and martial Charms capable of aiding an entire army.

Similarly, the Bull's allies had never faced any the Realm's legions before, and the well-disciplined might of the Tepet forces initially forced the Bull's forces to retreat. However, after the Realm's forces won a few promising initial victories, the Bull directed the bulk of his Exalted allies to concentrate on destroying the Tepet forces, while his mortal troops took care of the Talinin and the Rokan-jin. Shortly after that, the Bull and the two members of his Circle who had yet to make an appearance — the icewalkers Crimson Antler and Fear-Eater — joined the battle. The mammoth avatar allied with Samea accompanied them. For the first time, the Bull himself engaged the legions of the Realm in battle. On the next new moon after their arrival, Samea also summoned the Second Circle demon Gervesin (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 99-100).

The Haltan forces played an important roll — one of the Bull's favorite tactics was to have his own troops drive the Tepet forces into or near a forest where several trees of Haltan Guard waited. Haltan military engineers also constructed many traps, and ata-beasts performed valuable reconnaissance. For most of the war, the Guard suffered only moderate losses, since it only fought the Tepet forces from the trees and the Realm troops had little experience fighting an arboreal foe. However, the commandos suffered extremely heavy losses, since they served as scouts, assassins and saboteurs. While teams were often able to sneak into the Tepet camp and destroy or steal crucial items, often few or none of the commandos survived these missions.

The magic of the Bull's Exalts and the dedication of his forces turned the tide in just over half a year, and the Tepet made a desperate and ultimately futile retreat toward the Realm-controlled city of Greyfalls. Slightly more than a year after the Tepet legions entered the war,

Timeline of the War

761, Month of Resplendent Air: The Bull sends a portion of his forces to attack the Rokan-jin and Talinin tribes that lie immediately south of the Linowan.

762, Month of Ascending Water: The Bull sends the sorceress Samea to aid his forces, and the Linowan aid the Rokan-jin and Talinin — the raiding escalates into open warfare.

763, Month of Descending Earth: The Linowan request aid from the Realm.

763, Month of Descending Wood: The Tepet Forces join up with the Linowan and their allies.

763, Month of Resplendent Fire: The Bull and the remainder of his Circle join the war.

764, Month of Ascending Air: The Battle of Krellen Ford — four dragons of Tepet forces defeat five dragons under Mors Ialden and force them to retreat.

764, Month of Ascending Air: The Bull's forces under Mors Ialden retreat and are reinforced by a two dragons led by Samea. These combined forces devastate the pursuing Tepet legion.

764, Month of Resplendent Air: Half the Tepet forces fight a large contingent of the Bull's forces at the Battle of Ironthorn Forest. The Dynasts gravely wound Samea, and the Tepet legions force the Bull's troops to retreat. In return, the Bull's Circle kills seven Immaculate Dragon-Blooded, and the Circle's demons and elementals destroy five warstriders.

764, Month of Ascending Water: The Battle of Fallen Lapis — a pair of Sidereal Exalted working for the Bronze Faction kill all inhabitants of the Ardeleth capital of Fallen Lapis. Then, the Bull of the North and Samea kill one of the Sidereals, and the Bull's forces destroy the Tepet troops working with them.

764, Month of Resplendent Water: Tepet Arada orders the Tepet forces to retreat to Greyfalls.

764, Month of Ascending Earth: After pursuing and slowly destroying the Tepet legions for two months, the Bull's troops slaughter the remaining Tepet troops in the Battle of Futile Blood in the Valley of Shards.

the Bull's forces wiped out their last remnants. The loss of these legions stunned both the Realm and its Linowan allies. Word of this defeat spread rapidly throughout the Threshold, and many queens and princes of the Threshold now believe that the Realm has ceased to be a threat to anyone outside of its borders.

Major Battles

The battles between the Tepet legions and the Bull of the North's forces were on an epic scale that few had seen since the early days of the Scarlet Empress. While mortal soldiers fought each other with swords and spear-studded shield walls, summoned demons ripped entire talons of soldiers limb from limb in seconds, while demons and huge earth elementals leveled the Rokan-jin city of Carnelian Peak and the Ardeleth town of Osak. The Solar Exalted used powerful sorcery to drop barges full of rocks on enemy camps and Samea summoned five Second Circle demons to reinforce the Bull's army. In these battles, mortal warriors did little more that provide support to the might of the Exalted and occupy areas that the Exalts conquered, while the various supernatural warriors moved on to their next objective.

The Exalts on both sides concentrated on slaying other Exalts and destroying siege weaponry and fortifications. Although some of the more powerful Exalts could slay an entire wing of mortal soldiers in a few minutes, mortals were rarely the targets of the Exalts. However, when they were, they died — and in vast numbers. A single experienced Dragon-Blooded could easily slay almost 100 mortals in an hour, and one of the Solar Exalts could easily kill a score of mortals in less than a minute.

The Tepet forces arrived at Greyfalls on an enormous train of huge barges. The legions then marched to the warring kingdoms located 350 miles northwest of Greyfalls. This force was led by 50 Dynasts and possessed 15 common warstriders. The first engagement between the Tepet legions and the Bull of the North's forces occurred near the small village of Krellen Ford. Four dragons of Tepet troops encountered five dragons of the Bull of the North led by his Dragon-Blooded lieutenant, Mors Ialden. Ialden's forces were sacking Krellen Ford when the Tepet dragons attacked them. Ialden fought valiantly but was unprepared to face highly disciplined imperial troops supporting 10 experienced Dynasts, including three sorcerers. Despite the fact that Ialden was leading a force of 2,500 troops, he ordered a retreat after his army took heavy losses, including all of its supplies and most of its cavalry. The Battle of Krellen Ford was the only large-scale victory the Tepet forces secured during this entire campaign.

The next major engagement occurred when the imperial forces pursued the remnants of Ialden's troops until they were able to rejoin a group of elite warriors led by Samea. She used spells such as Magma Kraken and Summon the Army of the Wild while a Second Circle demon and two celestial lions protected her from harm. This mighty force killed four Tepet Dynasts in less than a minute, and the remainder of the Tepet

forces immediately retreated. Two other Dynasts died when they stayed behind to buy their comrades time to run.

At this point, the Tepet forces split in half. A group composed of their most experienced troops, lead by 10 Dynasts in warstriders and a dozen Immaculate martial artists set out to destroy Samea. Unfortunately for the Tepet legions, Haltan ata-herons had been observing their progress since Tepet troops first engaged the Bull's forces. Two weeks after the battle of Krellen Ford, the Bull's forces set up a hasty ambush. Aided by a legion of his troops, a tree of Haltan troops, the remainder of his Circle and two Second Circle demons, the Bull attacked the imperial forces as they passed through the small but dense Ironthorn Forest. The Dynasts gravely wounded Samea and their legions slew almost half of her troops. However, the cost to the imperial troops was immense — the Bull and his warriors destroyed five of the 10 warstriders and slew and almost half of the Tepet soldiers, including seven of the Immaculates. This was the first all-out conflict between fully equipped imperial forces and an army led by a Circle of Solar Exalted. In the course of this battle, fire elementals commanded by both sides burned the entire forest, and a trio of First Circle demons escaped to prey upon the countryside when the Bull himself killed both of the Dragon-Blooded sorcerers who had been controlling the demons.

Although this battle occurred almost four years ago, Ironthorn forest remains a burned ruin that contains a small shadowland at its center. One of the Erymanthoi still lives in the midst of this shadowland and regularly ventures out to prey upon nearby villages. Thankfully, the local people destroyed the other two demons several years ago. In the aftermath of the battle of Ironthorn Forest, Tepet Arada, commander of this section of the Tepet Legions used his Charms to send a message back to the Sidereal sorcerers in the Heptagram, requesting further aid and detailing the magnitude of the threat they were facing. The next day, a great flying barge from the Realm landed near the Rokan-jin city of Carnelian Peak carrying the remainder of the Tepet legions, including another half dozen Dynasts.

For the next two months, this half of the Tepet forces and the bulk of the Bull of the North's army had a series of sporadic engagements interspersed with long periods of intelligence gathering and attempts to set ambushes. Both sides realized the terrible cost of lengthy battles, and most engagements were either swift raids or attacks on temporarily isolated portions of the other's forces. Despite the fact that the legions had artifacts that granted them limited protection from Celestial Circle Sorcery, devastating attacks by Samea, the Bull of the North and the various other Exalts, elementals and demons working with them swiftly reduced the

numbers of the imperial troops while taking substantially less damage.

The remainder of the Tepet legions reinforced the bulk of the tribal warriors who were currently fighting a contingent of the Haltan troops under the command of Mors Ialden and aided by two celestial lions and a Second Circle demon. Both sides were evenly matched, and they fought dozens of battles over the course of the next half year. The Haltan forces were slowly retreating, and during this retreat, the mixed Tepet and tribal force destroyed the city of Osak. However, losses by this half of the Tepet legions were quite severe. Used to swift victories, their morale began to slip.

The Battle of Fallen Lapis

As both halves of the Tepet legions began to weaken, they rejoined, and Tepet Arada sent another message to his Sidereal allies to come and use their magics to aid the legions. At this time, the combined might of the legions were attacking Fallen Lapis, the capital of the forest kingdom of Ardeleth. In an effort to demoralize their enemies, Tepet Arada requested that the Sidereals destroy this city. A single day later, every mortal inhabitant of Fallen Lapis died in less than five minutes — a pair of the Sidereal Exalted attacked the city before the inhabitants could rally against the Realm's forces. Accompanied by a trio of Dragon-Blooded guards, who carried them to the city in magical whirlwinds, the sorcerers each cast the spell Cantata of Empty Voices. A minute later, almost the entire population of the city lay dead. Unfortunately, less than an hour after the Sidereals killed the city's inhabitants, the Bull of the North and Samea arrived in a flying barge, along with two dragons of their troops and two other Solars. Mad for vengeance after this devastation, the Bull and Samea used their Charms to track the sorcerers back to Greyfalls where they were resting. Before the two Sidereals could flee back to the Realm, the Bull of the North slew one of them with a single arrow. Meanwhile, outside the ruins of Fallen Lapis, the remainder of the Bull's army killed almost a dragon of Tepet troops while Mors Ialden and Fear-Eater slew another five Dynasts. The Battle of Fallen Lapis was the turning point of the war and the last time the Tepet forces achieved even a temporary victory.

The End of the Tepet Legions

The death of a Sidereal meant that the Bronze Faction now refused to directly intervene in this war. Its withdrawal of support meant that the Bull's forces were capable of vastly more powerful magics that the Dragon-Blooded had no way to counter. At this point, Tepet Arada's nerve broke, and after sending a message to Greyfalls requesting that reinforcements meet them on their way back to this city, he ordered a full retreat. This order marked the beginning of the Tepets' long and bloody defeat. The army had a 400-mile journey back to Greyfalls and a 250-mile journey before it would meet up with its escort. Over the next two months, it managed to travel less than 200 miles. Constant raids and ambushes greatly slowed its progress. At the beginning of this retreat, the Bull of the North was using exclusively Exalts, demons and elementals to attack the legions, gradually reducing their numbers at little risk to his own forces. His magical shock troops would strike rapidly and then depart less than five minutes after they attacked. The Tepet forces were unable to retaliate effectively because the last of their sorcerers fell during the beginning of this retreat.

The Battle of Futile Blood

Both the numbers and the morale of the remnants of the Tepet legions plummeted, until the last members of this once-mighty force faced a larger and more powerful army in the narrow and partially forested Valley of Shards. Known as the Battle of Futile Blood, this battle was the end of the famed Tepet legions. Attacked in the open by Exalts and demons, the Tepet troops retreated to the forest, where three trees of Haltans slew the remaining Tepet forces without ever setting foot on the ground. Unfortunately, the cost to the Haltan forces was also exceedingly high, almost a quarter of the Haltan troops died, most when the Tepet Dragon-Blooded set fire to a portion of the forest in an effort to break out of the Valley of Shards.

Relics of the War

These battles were some of the first large-scale open warfare involving multiple Solar Exalted since the Usurpation. The results were more terrible than mere mortals can conceive of. The Valley of Shards now contains a small shadowland. Also, nine members of the scale of warstrider-equipped Dynasts once called the Scale of Righteous Blazing Triumph fell during the battle of the Valley of Shards. The Bull of the North's Dragon-Blooded allies salvaged six of these warstriders. However, terraserpents summoned by Samea swallowed three warstriders and buried them deep under the earth. Today, the remains of these warstriders lie 15 yards underneath the valley floor, in the heart of the shadowland.

To avoid haunting by the ghosts of fallen Dynasts, the Bull buried his fallen enemies with full honors and sent their swords back to their families. However, some were destroyed, lost under the earth or buried under fallen trees and the ashes of the forest fire.

THE FUTURE OF THE WAR

The last of the minor barbarian kingdoms south of the Linowan fell near the beginning of 765. Since that time, the Bull of the North has stopped to consolidate his victories before tuning his attention to either the rich Linowan lands to the north of these kingdoms or the Hundred Kingdoms to the south. The Haltan troops pulled back during this time, and there is currently an intense ongoing debate about their future roll in this war.

Naturally, many members of the Council of Nobles are eager to have powerful allies such as the Bull of the North. However, soldiers who witnessed the destruction of the city of Fallen Lapis or its aftermath have seen the devastating attacks the Realm is capable of sending against unprotected civilians. Many of the generals who participated in this war now strongly urge both the Queen and the nobles to pull out of the alliance with the Bull of the North and to retreat into the deep forest until this war is over. While some nobles heartily agree with these sentiments, others see working with the Bull of the North as an unparalleled opportunity to destroy the Linowan menace once and for all.

Currently debate is deadlocked — many nobles and generals are waiting to see what both the Bull of the North and the Realm will do next. Most nobles worry that the Bull of the North will tell the Haltans they must either remain his allies or face conquest. As a result, both the Council of Nobles and the Haltan military are eagerly searching for Celestial Exalted allies who have no ties to the Bull of the North. Shaman-priests are currently negotiating with Caltia and other powerful gods and Fair Folk nobles for help protecting Haltan from such devastating attacks. Meanwhile, some shaman-priests have left Halta to seek Exalts willing to help protect both the Haltan Republic and the entire forest from attack by either the Bull of the North or the Realm.

Many Haltan citizens are also now listening more closely to other stories of the newly returned Solar Exalted destroying cities. Everyone in both the Haltan military and the Council of Nobles knows that Chanta or any other Haltan city could one day come under similar attack. The awful fate of Fallen Lapis proved the vast power of Celestial Circle Sorcery. As legends of Solar Circle Sorcery and the most powerful First Age artifacts again begin to circulate, Haltan leaders realize

the true horror of the dawning Time of Tumult. Some leaders worry that there may be nowhere safe to hide and are considering what alliances they can make to protect the Haltan cities from the threat of city-killing magics.

Eastern Halta and the War

Much of the Haltan Republic is located far from the border and the war. Although these remote cities and towns suffer occasional attacks by Dragon-Blooded raiders working with the Linowan, such attacks are extremely rare. Few foreign traders visit these settlements, and so, even fewer Linowan spies ever have a chance to attack these settlements. Instead, these settlements primarily worry about less human enemies such as hostile elementals, Fair Folk, behemoths, Wyld-twisted animals and beastmen. Some inhuman foe attacks these settlements several times a year. Most of residents care little for the war with the Linowan because they have their own conflicts with which to deal.

To the inhabitants of these cities, the Linowan are distant and almost legendary foes, and the world beyond the borders of their forest is an alien and distant place that they consider only slightly more real than most myths. These Haltans hate the Linowan, but it is an abstract hatred, much like the way people hate mosquitoes or smallpox. The only significant contact these people and intelligent animals have with the war is through the Guard. When they join the Guard, young people who wish to travel and possibly build a life in Chanta or one of the other large cities request a posting near the border as their first step in accomplishing this goal. Those who decide that they actually prefer the life they grew up with return from this duty bearing tales of wildly painted Linowan raiders with filed teeth who murder children in their beds.

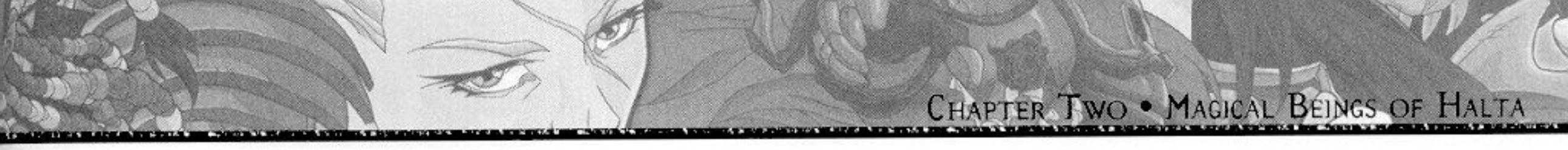
Possible Future Events: Lunars

With the growing threat of both the Bull of the North and retribution by the Realm, the two ancient Lunars, Rain Deathflyer and Silver Python who protect Halta begin to take an active role directing this nation. They call two packs of young Lunars to help them protect Halta from any outside invasion and use their magics to create enchantments that will protect the cities from harm. Eventually, the Realm becomes aware of the active role these Lunars are taking and begins preparations to attack Halta, while the Bull of the North offers an alliance to these Lunars, bringing Halta into the very heart of the events that its mortal leaders sought to avoid.

Possible Futures: Problems with the Hawkriders

For the past three decades, the Haltan Republic has also faced aerial attacks from the South. The hawkriders of Mount Metagalapa have begun raiding the edges of the Haltan lands (see **Scavenger Sons**, p. 95). The limits on the range of their hawks prevent them from striking deeper into Haltan territory. Unfortunately, the Haltan trading city of Kajeth is within range of these attackers.

After much planning, the Haltans prepare a counterattack against Mount Metagalapa itself. Using a force composed of intelligent and semi-intelligent strix, Haltan Dragon-Blooded, air elementals, Fair Folk who are able to fly and several aerial chariots on loan from their Fair Folk allies, the Haltan force will attempt to capture Mount Metagalapa. If this conquest proves to be impossible, their secondary goal is to seriously harm the hawkriders and capture as many baby riding hawks or hawk eggs as possible. Haltan animal breeders are certain that they can improve the stamina, the breeding success and the intelligence of the Metagalapan riding hawks. Several generals in the Haltan army hope to eventually build a large aerial cavalry — such a force would great aid Haltan efforts against the Linowan and other foes. These generals are also some of the strongest proponents of dropping out of the alliance with the Bull of the North, to avoid fighting two separate wars at one time. Most generals agree that attacking Mount Metagalapa is far safer than becoming involved in the battles between the Realm and the newly returned Solar Exalted.



CHAPTER TWO
MAGICAL BEINGS OF HALTA

The Haltan forests teem with life. Its human inhabitants know well the power and magic of the redwoods — the Haltans hunt and thrive in the deep woods, giving their thanks to the arboreal gods. But behind every shadow in the forest lies a secret, some of which have been buried since the First Age. With the Solar Exalted returning to the world and with the chaos caused by the Empress' disappearance, how long can these secrets stay buried?

The forest gods that the Haltans worship are not the only magical beings in the forests. Lunar Exalted, other little gods and stranger beings still make their homes beneath and in the trees. The Fair Folk, too, hold power on the forest floor and use the Kingdom of Halta as their political battleground.

Gods and Elementals

As is so common in the Threshold, Haltans live their day-to-day lives surrounded by the miracles and messages of the little gods. In Halta, few gods worry about the mandate of the Exalted, and most of the powerful ones have long ago come to an accommodation with the various Exalted powers of the region. These spirit beings profoundly touch the lives of those who worship them, bringing favor to the members of their cults and shaping society and Creation to protect and uphold their estates.

AMBER MAJESTY, QUEEN OF THE WOOD

Description: A forest the size of Halta has more than one King of the Wood, of course, but Amber Majesty is the one with the most direct involvement with the human inhabitants of her forest. Unlike most elementals of her kind, she is well aware that she does not rule the Haltan forests, but merely defends the trees themselves. Her "district" surrounds the capital city of Chanta in a circle measuring 200 miles in diameter. Other Kings of the Wood hold sway outside that area, and most of them are the more traditional sort who fancy themselves lords of all forests.

Upon the founding of the Kingdom of Halta, however, Amber Majesty received a visit from Glorious Jade Branch. The forest walker flattered the elemental, asking her if she would lend her strength and cunning to making sure that mankind never abused the trees. Amber Majesty was so taken by the notion of being allowed a place in the Celestial Hierarchy, even an unofficial one, that she never realized she was being duped into meting out discipline while Glorious Jade Branch remained a favorite god. She might not even care. She loves her role as guardian of the forest, and her proximity to the largest city in the Republic means that she has plenty of opportunities to visit her justice upon offenders.

Amber Majesty stands nearly nine feet tall. Her bark-covered skin is a deep red color, and her hair is a cascade of golden sap that glitters when sunlight touches it. The war club she carries is much more slender and supple than the huge maces that most of her kind wield, resembling a staff made from new-cut wood.

The Wood Queen's justice is harsh but necessary only when an offender has committed a crime directly against the forest or the trees. Often, she simply kills the hapless human and leaves his body stuck to a tree, encased in amber. If she is feeling especially malicious, she might banish the human to the northern woods where Yseult's forces will quickly abduct him and take him back to their queen. Amber Majesty is most often called upon to make examples of visitors who disgrace their Haltan hosts by attacking the forest, or offenders against Queen Evamal (those who act against her act against the Kingdom, and therefore the forest).

Nature: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 20, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 4, Valor 4

Abilities: Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Airtongue, Forest-tongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 5, Lore 2, Melee 4 (Staff +2), Occult 3, Performance 4, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Socialize 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Backing 3, Contacts 4, Cult 2, Followers 3, Influence 2, Manse 2

Charms: Affinity Element Control (Wood), Benefaction, Dematerialize, Details, Element Touch, Foretell the Future, Form Match, Geas, Imprecation, Instill Obedience, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Travel, Largess, Malediction, Measure the Wind, Natural Prognostication, Summon Food, Tiny Damnation, Tiny Gift, Touch of Grace, Words of Power

Elemental Powers: All elemental powers

Cost To Dematerialize: 10

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Staff: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 10L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 20L/30B (Tough bark, 10L/10B)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 109

Other Notes: None

Bloody Sky, Elemental Dragon of Forest Fires

Description: Forest fires are terrifying affairs but necessary for the ongoing growth of the redwood forests. Both the Linowan and the Haltans revere Bloody Sky, the Elemental Dragon of Forest Fires, but each nation blames the other when a forest fire actually erupts.

Bloody Sky, for his part, doesn't really care what people think of him. He loves what he does — sweeping across the forests in a sheath of fire and destruction, turning the sky a vivid red and sending all before him into panicked flight. Displays of carelessness attract the Elemental Dragon of Forest Fires — in fact, "You'll bring down Bloody Sky!" is a common Haltan admonition meaning "Be careful!" or "Don't be an idiot!" The phrase enjoys usage among Linowan, too, although the meaning is slightly different. There, it's used to mean, "Do you know what you're doing?"

Bloody Sky appears at the elemental courts when asked, but he finds them tedious. He knows his responsibility — to set forest fires so that trees may burn in order to live. He is therefore unwilling to listen to any bargaining on the part of wood elementals who would like to be spared his fire for one more season or air elementals who object to the smoke he creates. Sixty years ago, he conceded to a plea to delay a forest fire until after Calibration. Waiting even the few months that required was, to Bloody Sky's mind, disastrous, changing the entire nuanced progression of growth, death and renewal in ways that even the wisest savants would be hard-pressed to understand. Now, he is more convinced than ever to keep his own counsel on what, and when, to burn.

Bloody Sky is not capricious. He appears when he thinks it is appropriate. He is not prone to leaving his Manse (see below) for long periods of time, for he cannot help but set fires and has no wish to watch *everything* burn. When he leaves his Manse to set fires, he typically takes the form of a gigantic dragon made of lightning. When he strikes his target, he explodes into a shower of ash and cinders and rises up from the fires even larger than before, now a dragon of smoke and blood-red fire. Bloody Sky occasionally assumes human form. When he does so, he has the appearance of a middle-aged Eastern man, carrying a lit torch and wearing a stern expression.

Bloody Sky's Manse is located in the far northeast corner of the Halta forests. The area for miles around the Manse's center is burnt and blackened. Every few centuries, all manner of plant and animal life bursts forth from the ashes, and his domain teems with life for a few short days. Then, he destroys everything there and rebuilds his home. The fires he causes during this cycle of destruction can be seen from Chanta, and Haltans and Linowan both take them as portents of dire futures for the coming year.

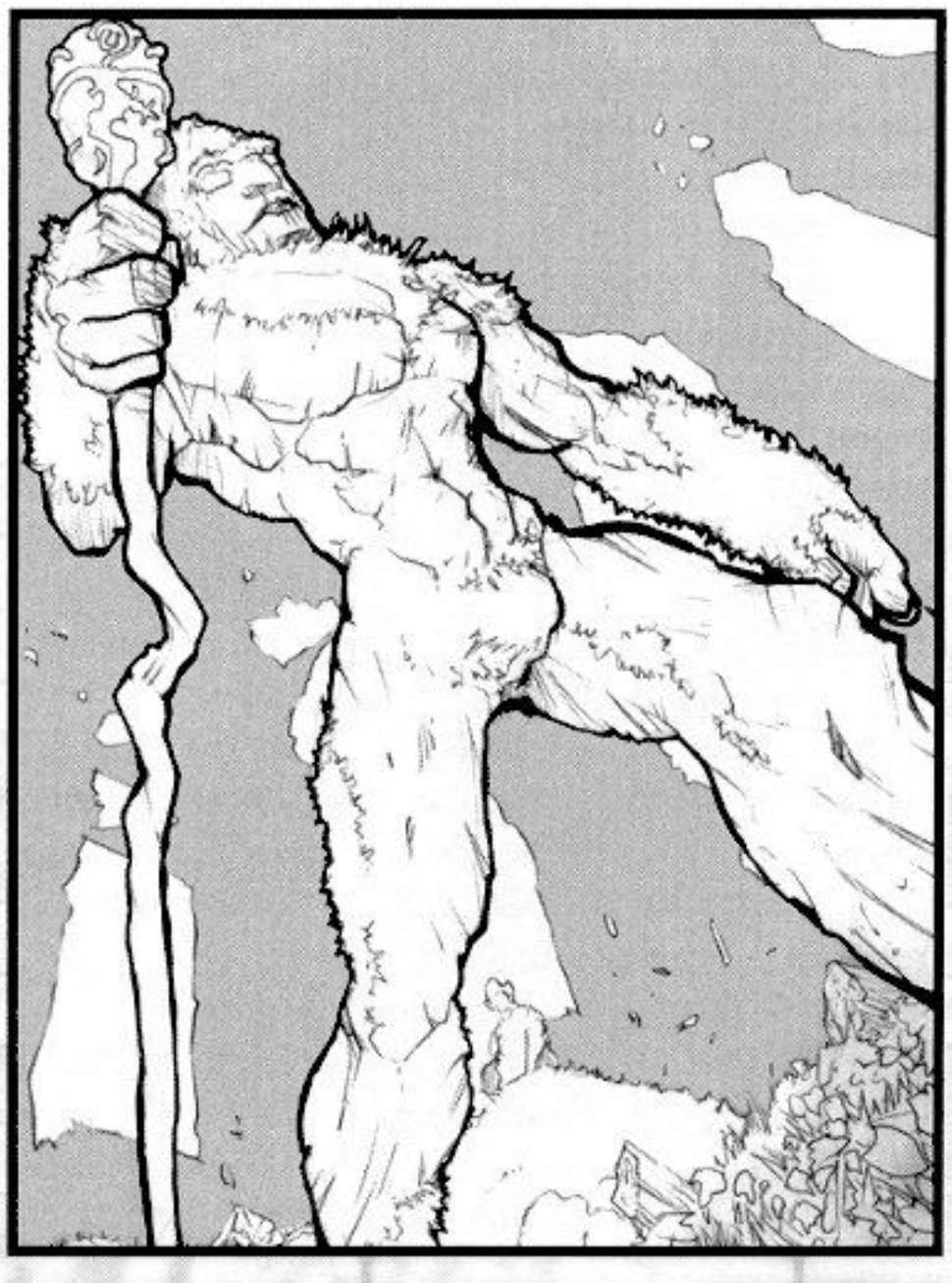
Nature: Paragon
Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 9, Charisma 5, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 4, Valor 4
Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 4, Endurance 4, Lore 5, Melee 2, Occult 3, Presence 5, Resistance 4, Socialize 4, Survival 2
Backgrounds: Cult 3, Followers (Fire Elementals) 4, Influence 3
Charms: All spirit Charms
Elemental Powers: All elemental powers
Cost To Dematerialize: 60
Base Initiative: 10
Attack:
Punch: Speed 10 Accuracy 8 Damage 7B Defense 8
Kick: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 9B Defense 7
Fiery Detonation: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 20L**
Dragon Bite: Speed 12 Accuracy 18 Damage 18L Defense 7*
Dragon Claw: Speed 12 Accuracy 20 Damage 20L Defense 10*
Dragon Tail: Speed 6 Accuracy 10 Damage 21L*** Defense 9
* Bloody Sky may make two claw attacks and a bite attack every turn without splitting his dice pool.
** This attack cannot be blocked, but may be dodged. He may only use this fiery breath seven times per day, but can do so as frequently as he desires. The breath has a range of one mile. Whatever it strike is set on fire for seven turns. Treat as a bonfire (see **Exalted**, p. 244).
*** Double damage to object and structures.
Dodge Pool: 0 **Soak:** 19L/24B (Dragon hide, 15L/15B)
Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/-4/-4/-4/Incap
Essence: 7 **Essence Pool:** 129

Other Notes: Bloody Sky only leaves his Manse to begin forest fires, but sometimes, he lingers in human form after the fires begin. He understands that he isn't exactly loved among the human populace, but he considers his work very important and is likely to hold a grudge against anyone who takes direct action against him.

Glorious Jade Branch, Forest Walker of Halta

Description: Glorious Jade Branch is the chief lieutenant of Caltia the Eternal and the most powerful forest walker in Halta. He directs the activities of the other three forest walkers of the kingdom and makes sure that they remain faithful to Caltia and do not abuse the humans living in the Haltan forests. He is also responsible for ensuring that the human inhabitants of Halta treat the forests (and the forest walkers) well, though he tends to leave any minor offenses to the Haltan government. Truly serious acts against the forest are usually accidental, and if spiritual intervention is necessary, Glorious Jade Branch prefers to let the Queen of the Wood called Amber Majesty mete out justice. By allowing the elemental to serve as the disciplinarian, he remains forever a humanist and an advocate to the Haltan people.

Glorious Jade Branch probably knows more about the Haltan forests than any other being still extant, simply because he takes great pains to remain on good terms with as many parties as he can. He is a polished diplomat, meeting one morning with the fey queen Marika in her watery Demesne, visiting Yesryk the Hawk God in his lofty home the next day and exchanging respectful conversation with Queen Chaltra Evamal in Chanta that evening. Seeing the god walking through the forest, the redwoods gently bending out of his way, is considered a good omen in Halta.



Glorious Jade Branch, like all forest walkers, can take the form of any creature living in the Kingdom of Halta (one more reason why he is so well informed). When traveling across the country, he usually assumes the form of a gigantic man made of wood, nearly 150 feet tall, carrying a great spear marked with the sign of Caltia, his mistress. When he needs to be more subtle, he takes the form of a Haltan man in his late teens, with a wide smile and a ready wit. In any form, Glorious Jade Branch causes his eyes to glow a rich silver color when he wishes to reveal his identity.

The forest walker wants little but to serve his mistress. However, as his mistress lives for her eternal hunt, Glorious Jade Branch holds much of the practical power within the Haltan forests' Celestial Hierarchy. If a more driven being such as Yesryk or the fey queen Yseult managed to gain even a small measure of the information he holds, that being could exploit such information against Caltia and the entire Haltan forest. Glorious Jade Branch is well aware of the power that information brings, however, and while he is an excellent listener, he is very careful of his words around strangers. Glorious Jade Branch has made it widely known that he will parley with representatives of any god, Exalt or force in Creation — even the Fair Folk — but he has never entertained an emissary from a Deathlord.

Sanctum: Glorious Jade Branch's sanctum is a small copse of young redwoods roughly 100 miles west of Chanta. Sparse compared to the dwellings of most forest walkers (included his three subordinates), Glorious Jade Branch retreats here when he needs time away from his role as diplomat of the forest and mouthpiece of Caltia the Eternal.

Nature: Follower

Attributes: Strength 10-30*, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8, Charisma 6, Manipulation 7, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

* When 150 feet tall.

Virtues: Compassion 5, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 4 (Halta +3), Dodge 3, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Barbarian Tongues, Forest-tongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 5, Lore 5, Melee 5, Occult 4, Presence 5, Resistance 5, Socialize 5, Stealth 2, Survival 5

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5+, Cult 5, Followers 5+, Influence 4

Charms: Affinity Element Control (Wood), Element Control, Hurry Home, Instill Obedience, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Hide, Landscape Travel, Materialize,

Measure the Wind, Portal, Principle of Motion, Sense Domain, Shapechange, Tracking, Transport, Weather Control, Words of Power
Cost To Materialize: 48
Base Initiative: 9
Attack:
Attack as an Animal: Speed 12 Accuracy 12 Damage (as animal +2L) Defense 12
Great Spear: Speed 15 Accuracy 14 Damage 21L/23L*// 51L/53L** Defense 12
* +2 damage for the next scene if charged with 3 motes of Essence.
** When 150 feet tall.
Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 19L/23B (Tough bark, 15L/15B)
Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 96
Other Notes: Glorious Jade Branch's spear changes size with him and can be charged to wither life from anything it touches (other than him).

Kola, Keeper of the Stone Riddle

Description: In the center of the Proving Ground, past the myriad dangers that the area presents, is the Stone Riddle Demesne. One of the most powerful in Creation, the fact that no living being has successfully claimed it is a testament not only to the reverence which the Lunars and Haltans place on the Proving Ground, but to the power and patience of the earth elemental who resides here.

Kola remembers the time before the Stone Riddle formed, when the Demesne was merely a trickle of Essence from deep within the earth. He remembers the Solars and the Dragon-Blooded battling across his domain during the Usurpation, as well as the Lunars fleeing into the Wyld and the carnage of their meeting with the Fair Folk. Through it all, Kola remained steady and stoic, but as the years went by, his Demesne grew more well protected as the Stone Riddle labyrinth grew more complex and dangerous.

Kola resembles a pile of boulders stacked into a vaguely humanoid shape. When visitors manage to solve the Stone Riddle and enter his Demesne, he opens his eyes and speaks. Rumblings from under the ground often accompany his voice. He grants Blessings to those who solve the Stone Riddle, regardless of the method they use, but is more generous to those who do so patiently and slowly. A conversation with Kola is perhaps one of the greatest rewards of solving the Stone Riddle. His long memory includes conversations with elemental dragons, forest walkers, Celestial Exalts and the Fair Folk. Kola does not keep secrets — if asked a question, he answers it honestly and to the best of his ability. If someone asks him not to repeat something, he won't, but he is amazed at how few beings ever think to ask for his silence on sensitive topics.

Sanctum: Kola dwells within the Stone Riddle, and it is his sanctum.
Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 2, Stamina 8, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 3
Virtues: Compassion 5, Conviction 5, Temperance 5, Valor 4
Abilities: Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 2 (Elemental Courts +3), Brawl 5, Dodge 1, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Flametongue, Forest-tongue, High Realm, Riverspeak, others) 5+, Lore 5, Occult 4, Presence 4, Resistance 5, Survival 5
Backgrounds: Demesne 5, Resources (Buried Riches) 5
Charms: Affinity Element Control (Earth), Benefaction, Camouflage, Dematerialize, Details, Dreamspeak, Element Control, Endowment, Foretell the Future, Geas, Hand of Destiny, Hurry Home, Imprecation, Instill Obedience, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Hide, Malediction, Natural Prognostication, Portal, Measure the Wind, Scourge, Sense Domain, Stillness, Stoic Endurance, Stoke the Flame, Summon Food, Tiny Damnation, Tiny Gift (normally Endurance or Survival), Touch of Grace, Transport, Weather Control, Words of Power
Elemental Powers: Aegis, Coarse Skin, Consume Element, Day to Night, Dragon's Suspire (Hurled Rock), Element's Domain, Enshroud, Rejuvenation
Cost To Dematerialize: 70
Base Initiative: 5
Attack:
Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 9L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 3 **Soak:** 24L/28B (Stony hide, 20L/20B)
Willpower: 10 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 128
Other Notes: None

SWEET HARVEST, GOD OF THE VINES

Description: Black Branches is a village to the north of Chanta, only a few hours walk from the end of one of the tributaries of the River of Tears. The inhabitants of the village grow grapes and sell the fruit — and the wine that the make from it — in Chanta and to traders who happen to pass their way. A visitor to Black Branches would see a complex system of catwalks and vine ladders leading into the higher reaches of the trees, where the branches hang heavy with grape vines. As these vines are parasites, the villagers are very careful to make supplication to both the dryads residing in the trees and to the God of the Vines, a spirit called Sweet Harvest.

Sweet Harvest is not actually a god of grapes or even of wine, but of the parasitic plant that the inhabitants of Black Branches use to make wine. She draws her power both from the veneration of the villagers and from the trees on which she lives, much like the vines themselves do. She can normally be found lounging about in her sanctum, waiting for one of the villagers to fawn over her. Sweet Harvest usually appears as a young woman with skin of a rich, wine color and thick black hair. A sweet smell follows her everywhere, and her touch leaves purple, grape-like stains (villagers from Black Branches are often immediately recognizable by these marks, as they are nearly impossible to wash from clothing). She does not anger easily, but when force is necessary, she wields a whip made from vine.

Sweet Harvest, like many spirits of parasitism, was a minor spirit until humans stepped in. When the Haltans discovered that they could cultivate the grapes (and more importantly, that they could make a decent living from trading the wine thus produced), Sweet Harvest appeared to them and demanded worship in exchange for bountiful harvest. Working out the details took some time — as stated, the spirits of the trees on which the vines grow wished to be acknowledged as well — but over the course of years, the God of the Vines has easily become the preeminent spirit of the village. She demands little enough from her followers — she is vain and proud, and so, a song or poem composed in her honor satisfies her. The attention of a comely youth will do as well, and the sight of a young man returning home by dawn's first light, covered in wine-stains, elicits snickers and knowing glances from other villagers, but most of them visit Sweet Harvest at least once in their lives. Simply making the climb to her sanctum and clearing away some enough leaves so that she can sun herself normally keeps Sweet Harvest happy, and during harvest festivals, she dances and celebrates along with her worshipers.

Of late, however, the God of the Vines has become very concerned. Her vines stretch outward from the village, and she does not tell her people all of the secrets she learns. She has seen the spider beastmen of Xaal drawing close to her people day by day, and she knows that when a villager disappears while on a hunt, his death is not always the fault of the Fair Folk. From speaking with other spirits of the forests, she knows the nature of the Last Hunter, but fears the Lunar sorcerer terribly. She knows that his forces could wipe out her small village and destroy her way of life, and whether or not she actually cares for the mortals who eat of her fruit and drink of her wine, she has no desire to fall to simply being the spirit of a parasitic vine again.

Sanctum: Sweet Harvest has a home in the tops of the trees comprising the village of Black Branches. As one climbs higher, the vines grow thicker and darker. These ever-present vines are what give the village its name. Near the treetops is a small "landing" woven from vines, and there, Sweet Harvest reclines, waiting for tribute. When entertaining, Sweet Harvest reshapes her sanctum to simulate furnishings and, sometimes, even walls, although the God of Vines is not known for her modesty.
Nature: Hedonist
Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 2, Temperance 2, Valor 3
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Endurance 3, Lore 3, Melee 2 (Whip +3), Performance 3 (Dance +2), Presence 4, Resistance 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3
Backgrounds: Contacts (Other Spirits) 3, Cult 1, Followers (Villagers) 5, Influence 2, Resources 2
Charms: Affinity Element Control (Wood), Details, Host of Spirits, Hurry Home, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Hide, Landscape Travel, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Principle of Motion, Sense Domain, Stoke the Flame, Summon Food, Tiny Damnation (Usually reduces target's Wits or Appearance), Tiny Gift (Usually adds to Charisma or Stamina)

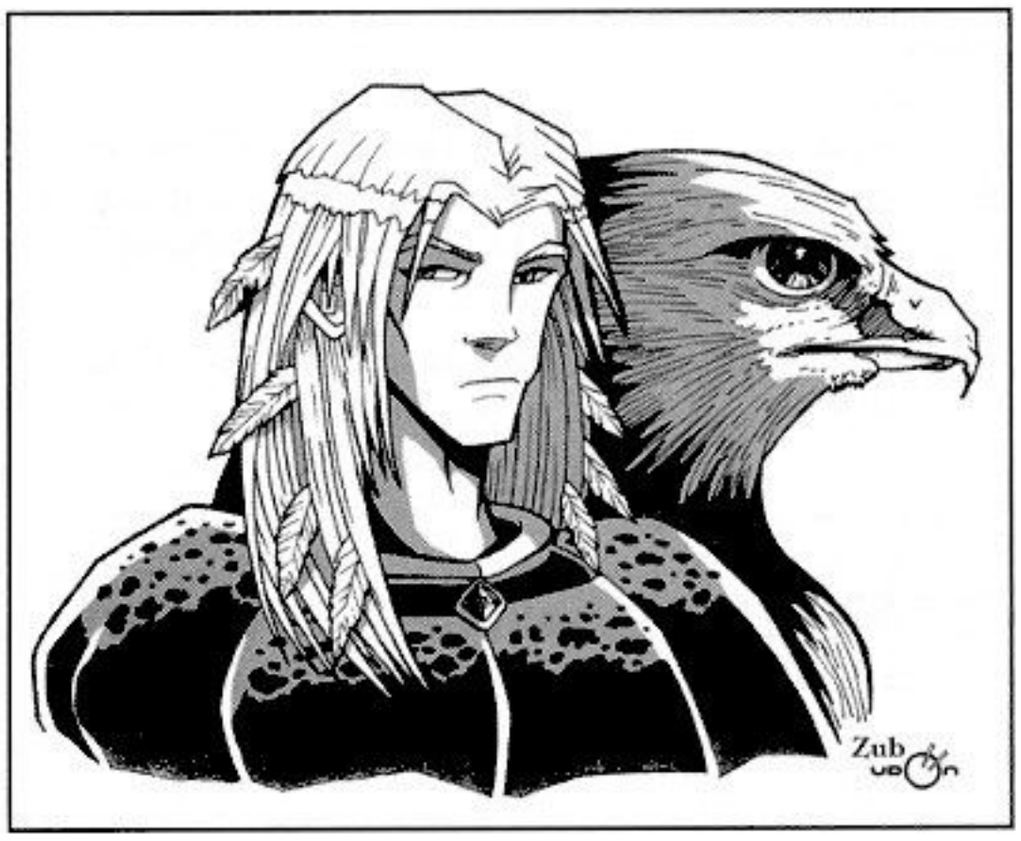
Cost To Materialize: 30
Base Initiative: 5
Attack:
Whip: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 3L Defense 8
Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 2L/3B
Willpower: 5 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 60
Other Notes: None

Yesryk, God of Raptors and Arboreal Hunting

Description: While not nearly as revered as the trees themselves, the Hawk God Yesryk is the object of a great deal of worship throughout Halta, usually from young men providing for their villages and from professional hunters. Yesryk is a god of the hunt, and while technically subservient to Grala (see **Games of Divinity**, p. 31), he is rarely to be found in the same region as his "mistress." He is a proud, noble god, and while he accepts worship from humans, he is more interested in veneration from the hawkmen of the Eastern forests. Yesryk's domain consists of any hunt conducted from or in the trees and of all arboreal birds of prey. He does not object to Haltans keeping raptors as familiars or even pets, so long as the birds are allowed to hunt.

Yesryk sometimes appears in the form of a tall, muscular man with hawk feathers wound through his long hair but, more often, takes the form of a giant hawk or a hawkman. In his hawk form, his wingspan is so wide that he can barely maneuver between the trees, and his claws are so large that he can catch and kill fully grown wild boars easily. As a hawkman, he stands nearly eight feet tall and is covered with coppery feathers. While he is still able to fly in this form, his feathers are strong enough to repel arrows. He occasionally bequeaths a feather to a skilled hunter (human or beastman). These feathers provide one extra die on all Survival rolls made to hunt prey in or from the trees.

Yesryk enjoys worship from human hunters throughout Halta. They show him reverence by hunting in his name and, especially, by catching prey that would please him (he is especially fond of monkeys) alive and then marking the animal and releasing it unharmed. Young hunters also collect hawk feathers and wear them in Yesryk's name, although plucking such feathers from a living animal is considered an affront to the Hawk God. Some villages hold ritual hunts in his honor, but Yesryk does not approve of any hunt that ends with food going to waste, and so, anything caught during the hunt must be consumed or otherwise used. Killing a raptor, especially a hawk, for any reason is a sure way to earn Yesryk's anger. Offenders often find themselves plucked from the trees by a gigantic hawk and brought to Yesryk's Manse, never to be seen again.



Yesryk, although a servant to Grala, is unhappy with his mistress. He feels that her patronage of all hunters, including those humans who "hunt" men (assassins, in other words) is a betrayal of what it truly means to be a hunter and predator. He would like to depose her and take her place within the Celestial Hierarchy but, as of yet, does not possess the raw power to do so. He realizes that he would have to contend with Grala's sister Caltia in order to reach this goal, and he knows that confronting either of the sisters (to say nothing of both of them) within the Kingdom of Halta would be suicide without powerful allies. Yesryk keeps careful eye on all who hunt in the trees of the Eastern forests, looking for anyone — spirit, Exalt or human — who might aid him in his quest. He has already begun quietly sending messages to Storms-As-He-Walks, hoping that the powerful elemental might aid him.

Sanctum: Yesryk's Manse is described in detail on pages 83-84.
Nature: Traditionalist
Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 8, Stamina 5, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 6, Intelligence 4, Wits 5
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 4, Valor 4
Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 4 (Sight +3), Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 1, Dodge 4 (Aerial Evasion +2), Endurance 4, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Barbarian Tongues, Forest-tongue) 2, Lore 4, Melee 3, Occult 3, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Socialize 2, Stealth 4, Survival 5, Thrown 5
Backgrounds: Cult 2, Followers (Beastmen and Human Hunters) 5+, Influence 3
Charms: Essence Bite, Host of Spirits, Hurry Home, Instill Obedience, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Hide, Landscape Travel, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Principle of Motion, Sense Domain, Stillness, Stoke the Flame, Tracking, Words of Power, Uncanny Prowess
Cost To Materialize: 52
Base Initiative: 13

Attack:
Bite: Speed 13 Accuracy 12 Damage 14L
Claw: Speed 15 Accuracy 12 Damage 10L Defense 12
Spear: Speed 16 Accuracy 12 Damage 13L Defense 11
Dodge Pool: 12 **Soak:** 10L/15B (Copper feathers, 8L/10B)
Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 104
Other Notes: None

EXALTED

Though Halta is not ruled by Exalted, the Chosen influenced its history, beyond even the cultural shadow the Scarlet Dynasty casts across the Threshold. Lunars shaped the people of Halta in the days after the Contagion, and outcastes walk among the kingdom's population and influence its course. What follow are some of the most important Exalts in Halta.

MORS IALDEN, THE BULL'S PAWN

Description: Tepet's legions lie in ruins. The war between the Haltans and the Linowan rages on, but the Realm now takes a keen interest. A Solar Exalt encourages the war, seeking to extend his power ever southward. And in the southern forests of the Haltan Republic, a Terrestrial Exalt named Mors Ialden wonders how so much blood and suffering came to stain his hands.

Mors Ialden is an outcaste, born outside of the Realm's Dynasty — and glad of it. He grew up among the icewalkers, a staunch defender of his homeland and a warrior for his people. He repelled attacks both from beasts and invaders as a teenager and trained his fellows in the best ways to kill not only prey animals, but more exotic foes, such as beastmen. He also mastered the art of close combat, both barehanded and with a club. Ialden wanted nothing more than to be his people's champion.

Ialden underwent the Exaltation at the age of 17, much to his parents' surprise (he has never discovered where in his ancestry the Exaltation comes from but hasn't pursued the matter). He immediately became the leader of a small tribe and began staking out his own territory. His original goal was to unite any other tribes in the area, so as to better put forth a concerted response to any incursion — and he probably could have succeeded. Two years after his Exaltation, however, Yurgen Kaneko found him.

Ialden had accidentally led a hunting party too near the den of a mad Lunar, and the beast slaughtered most of them before the Bull of the North appeared. Radiant as the sun, terrible as thunder, the Solar slew the crazed beast and then turned to Ialden, still standing despite several horrible wounds. "Your life drains away to the taiga, and yet, you stand," he said.

"How can I sleep while the light burns so brightly?" Ialden answered.

Yurgen, impressed with the boy's stamina and heart, bound his wounds and helped the survivors of the attack reach a nearby village. Later than evening, Yurgen offered Ialden his patronage. Ialden, still awed with the power of the Solar, accepted, little knowing that he had agreed to war with the Realm.

Several months later, Haltan attack parties under the leadership of Mors Ialden struck against the Linowan border states. The war accelerated from there (see Chapter One for details), but Ialden never doubted his purpose or his mentor. He viewed the Haltan Republic coolly at first — his mentor had taught him that the Haltans and the Linowan and their struggle, was inconsequential as far as they were concerned. Ialden's skill as a leader and his natural charisma allowed him to sway the Haltans to his banner, but he saw them as a means to an end. Even as the Tepet legions entered the war and began to fall, even as he led more and more Haltans to their deaths, Ialden remained staunchly loyal to the Bull of the North.

And then came the Battle of Futile Blood.

Mors Ialden, in command of a party of Haltan warriors, was present at this battle. The forest flashed with blazing animas and sorcerous displays of power. The Linowan and their allies fought well, and many of Ialden's troops plummeted from the trees with arrows piercing them or were dragged down by demons. The better-prepared Haltans would likely have won, but just as the Linowan were about to surrender, reinforcements arrived. There were only a

few, but they were all Dragon-Blooded, and they nearly turned the tide of the battle. In the end, they fell as well, but they cost Ialden and his people dearly. When the battle was finally over, Mors Ialden was one of the few left standing, and he walked the forest floor, the phantasmal thorns of his anima churning the bloody soil around him.

He found one of the Dynasts who had arrived late to the fight, lying there in a pool of her own blood. From her armor, she appeared to belong to House Tepet. Although fatally wounded, she tried to stand. Ialden, moved by her determination, drew a dagger and offered to end her suffering. She scoffed, saying, "End my suffering? Look around you. My suffering is a tear in the ocean, outcaste. This agony will stain the East for centuries." With that, she fell upon her own sword.

Ialden looked around him and wept. For the first time, he felt that his actions might have been wrong — he had once only desired to unite his people and keep them safe, and now, he had drawn suffering and death down upon the Haltan people. His people, the Haltans, the Linowan — they were all simply defending their homelands from incursions. It was the Bull of the North who was the true aggressor. Maddened by that realization, he fled northeast, into the forest. He flees even still, terrified to face Yurgen again but knowing that, someday, he must answer for the suffering of the war he helped begin.

Mors Ialden is a Northern man barely 20 years of age. He has the white hair and skin typical of his people, and his features have not yet taken on any of the elemental aspects of one of the Terrestrial Exalted. His face is haggard and careworn, and his armor (jade plate taken from a fallen foe) is nicked and stained with blood. Normally, he covers this armor with a long elk-skin shirt and leggings.

Nature: Martyr
Aspect: Wood
Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 2, Valor 5
Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 2 (Halta +2), Brawl 4 (Fighting in Trees +2), Craft (Woodworking) 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Linguistics (Native: Airtongue; Forest-tongue, Riverspeak) 2, Lore 1, Medicine 2 (Battlefield Medicine +2), Melee 3 (Club +3), Performance 1, Presence 2, Resistance 5, Ride 2, Socialize 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Thrown 4 (Spear +2)
Backgrounds: Command 3, Mentor (Bull of the North) 4, Reputation 3
Charms: Become the Hammer, Benevolent Master's Blessing, Blade-Deflecting Palm, Chaos-Warding Prana, Defense-from-Anathema Method, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Dragonfly Finds Mate, Effortlessly Rising Flame, Falling Star Maneuver, Hopping Firecracker Evasion, Impervious Skin of Stone Meditation, Infection-Banishing Prana, Loyal Weapon, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Seeking Throw Technique, Spring Follows Winter, Stoking Bonfire Style, Strength of Stone Technique, Swallows Defend the Nest, Threshold Warding Stance, Unsleeping Earth Meditation, Vengeful Gust Counterattack, Whirlwind Shield Form, Wild-Wandering Forester Charm, Wood Protection Form and any other Charms or Combos the Storyteller feels are appropriate.
Base Initiative: 7
Attack:
Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 3B Defense 8
Club: Speed 7 Accuracy 10 Damage 5L Defense 9
Spear: Accuracy 11 Damage 6L (Rate 2, Range 30)
Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Dodge Pool: 7/5 **Soak:** 14L/16B (Jade articulated plate, 12L/14B, -2 mobility penalty)
Essence: 4
Personal Essence: 11 **Peripheral Essence:** 32
Other Notes: Ialden's Command Background represents the Haltan soldiers he could have at his command should he decide to resurface. He is presently assumed to be dead by most of Halta and is widely regarded as a hero.

Arr-D'gado, Stalker of the Proving Ground

Description: The Proving Ground is, as the name suggests, a harsh place to make a life. Prey exists, but it is hardly plentiful, and what game roams there is quite capable of injuring a predator if not killed cleanly. The natural and magical hazards of the Proving Ground make it a natural "pilgrimage" site for Lunars of all lands — but only one has chosen to make it his home.

Arr-D'gado was born to an Eastern tribe called the Blight Hunters and raised to venerate death and the dead as his gods. But Arr-D'gado was different from his fellows, and that difference disturbed them. Perhaps his skin wasn't the same deathly pale as his fellows or his breath seemed to warm the air too much. Regardless, Arr-D'gado was cast out from the Blight Hunters one morning. Although the pronouncement was banishment, he knew differently. He had to reach a safe distance before nightfall, or else, his tribe's hungry ghosts would surely devour him.

And so, he ran across the snow like a hare, never looking back at the western sky, always looking forward toward his shadow to see how much time he had. As his shadow grew long, he realized he'd never have enough time to outrun the ghosts. His steps faltered once, and as he stumbled, he discovered the ground had grown stony beneath him — he was in the Proving Ground.

The Blight Hunters had legends about the Proving Ground, but nothing very detailed. All Arr-D'gado had heard was that a land of jagged rock and dangerous beasts existed far to the East. That he'd managed to run that

distance in a day amazed him, but as the sun set, he knew that his pursuers would be close behind him. He plunged deeper into the Proving Ground, looking for a safe place to hide.

He eventually reached a copse of trees that gave off such heat that they shimmered in the twilight. He crawled between the trunks and waited there for the hungry ghosts. They were not long in coming. They howled and gibbered through the Proving Ground, wailing their hatred for the world and scenting for the man who had eluded them. As they grew closer, Arr-D'gado, weary from running, his body leaving crimson smears across the jagged rocks, realized that if they found him in his hiding place, they would kill him easily. He emerged and left a trail of blood for them to follow.

The ghosts followed the trail for hours, Arr-D'gado staying always ahead, just out of sight. Finally, when they caught him, he was sitting on a hilltop, looking away. They climbed the hill to seize him, and Arr-D'gado stood to face them… just as the sun rose behind him. "If I die here, let me rot on this stony ground before serving death again," he said, and collapsed upon the hill. The last sound he heard before passing out from exhaustion was the screams of the hungry ghosts, melting in the sun.

But Arr-D'gado did not die. Luna came to him as a warming breeze and light on his face and Exalted him. He emerged from the Proving Ground to join the Silver Pact, who fixed his caste as a Changing Moon. Since then, he has returned to the harsh, stony land he calls home. He claims the fire Demesne in which he first hid as his lair and acts as a patron of wisdom and strength to any human who braves the Proving Ground without losing nerve or breath. Arr-D'gado is merciful as Lunars go, but he would sooner die than be ousted from his home. He despises the undead and any who serve them and carries a grudge against the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils, as it was she who yoked his people to the service of death.

Arr-D'gado, when in human form, stands five and half feet tall. His skin is paler than most Easterners (as is true of all Blight Hunters), but his eyes are a deep, rich brown, and his body is hale and vital. The palms of his hands are black and padded like a cat's (his Tell). He dresses in animal skins. When hunting or expecting trouble, he wears armor fashioned from the skin of a steel shadow (see p. 72).

In beastman form, Arr-D'gado grows to nearly nine feet in height. His face contorts into that of a mountain lion and fierce claws spring from his fingertips. Arr-D'gado uses this form exclusively for battle, preferring to hunt in human or mountain lion form.

Nature: Survivor
Caste: Changing Moon
Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 2, Temperance 2, Valor 3
Rank: Uf-ya
Renown: Succor 10, Mettle 45, Cunning 30, Glory 25
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Craft (Tanning) 4, Dodge 4, Endurance 2, Investigation 1, Lore 2, Melee 3, Presence 1, Resistance 3, Ride 2, Stealth 4, Survival 3 (Proving Grounds +3), Thrown 2
Backgrounds: Cult 2, Demesne 2
Charms: Beast Instinct Method, Body Weapon Technique, Crouching Tiger Exercise, Deadly Beastman Transformation (x2), Deadly Claw Blow, Finding the Spirit's Shape, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Predator Grace Method, Shaping the Ideal Form, Steel Paw Style, Towering Beast Form, along with any other Charms or Combos the Storyteller feels are appropriate.
Deadly Beastman Bonuses: +2 Strength, +2 Dexterity, +2 Stamina
Deadly Beastman Gifts: Bestial Reflexes, Rugged Hide, Terrible Beast Claws
Base Initiative: 7 (12 in beastman form)
Attack:
(Beastman form; Arr-D'gado never fights in human form)
Bite: Speed 12 Accuracy 12 Damage 11L
Claw: Speed 15 Accuracy 11 Damage 9L Defense 11
Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge Pool: 8 (10 in beastman form) **Soak:** 6L/8B; 8L/10B in beastman form (Steel shadow-skin armor, 5L/4B)
Essence: 3
Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 36
Other Notes: None

The Last Hunter of Xaal

Description: The No Moon known only as the Last Hunter is not a native of Haltan lands. His story begins much further south, in the court of his former lover, Raksi, the Queen of Fangs.

The Last Hunter is old (though not nearly so old as his venerated mother) and from early youth was a cunning, amoral creature. Born two centuries before the Contagion, his mother became a consort for Raksi, and before long, the children his mother bore to the Queen of Fangs overshadowed his place in his family's tribe. He hunted the Southern jungles with his half-brothers and -sisters, allowing them to wander into danger and even death if it would protect him or win him glory. He allowed entire hunting parties to die weakening a beast whose skin he wished to take, simply so he could deliver the deathblow and claim the glory and trophy. This ruthlessness wasn't without wisdom, however. Most of the Last Hunter's siblings were God-Bloods and, as such, were much more capable hunters (physically) than he could ever be. But regardless of the reasons for them, the Last Hunter's tactics earned him first resentment — and then plans for revenge.

At the age of 14, a hunting party from Mahalanka ambushed him and left him in the deep jungle, bound in a net, at the entrance to a hole inhabited by a monstrous spider. The writing on Last Hunter's throne in Xaal (see p. 82) tells the story of what happened next:

And as I lay there and the spider emerged from her hole to feast, I felt the blessing of Luna even though no moon shone that night. Luna came to me and became one with the spider and offered to love me in her way. I knew then that I would not survive unless I could change the spider — but how can such a beautiful creature change?

I freed myself from the ropes and vines in which my brethren had entangled me, and I loved the spider, the moon, my true and only mother that night. And she sank her fangs deep into my flesh, and I felt her venom course through me, and yet, I was the spider as well, and no spider can be felled by its own venom. I loved the spider, and come morning, my senses cleared, and I was surrounded by webbing, ichor and the bloodless remnants of the form Luna had taken to show me my true place.

I took the form of the spider, and I stalked those who had thought to kill me. And I took their blood and feasted upon their insides, and then, I truly was the Last Hunter.

The story goes on to explain that the Last Hunter was accepted into the Silver Pact and, to no one's surprise, fixed as a No Moon. He expected Raksi to try to kill him for

leading her children into slaughter, but the Mistress of Mahalanka instead took him as a pupil and lover. The world's most accomplished Lunar sorceress taught him the secrets of magic, but the Last Hunter was never quite at ease around her. He was too much the spider… and he knew that the female spider devours the male when she tires of him.

Whether or not Raksi ever actually intended to kill the Last Hunter was never discovered. The Last Hunter never gave her the chance. He stole into his her chambers while she was holding court and copied as much of her magical writings as he could. Taking these scraps, he fled north, eventually arriving at a Manse called Xaal. (The Manse of Xaal is described in detail later in Chapter Three, beginning on p. 81. How the Last Hunter took the Manse and how he came to an accord with Rain Deathflyer and Silver Python is likewise addressed later in the chapter.)

While not nearly so old and powerful as Raksi, the Last Hunter is still a force to be reckoned with. In human form, his Tell — multiple spider's eyes — is easily visible. Thick bristles sprout from his back and arms, and he wears black armor hewn from the skins and shells of dozens of different beasts. He does not carry weapons, trusting on his Martial Arts and sorcerous expertise in combat. He wears the Hearthstone of Xaal (see p. 83) around his waist on a silver chain.

The Last Hunter rules his own Manse now, has his own beastman children and, in his way, has escaped the legends of being "Raksi's pet." But he still fears her and knows that the only way to put those fears to rest is to journey south again and return to Mahalanka. At times, he wonders if Raksi even remembers him — he took a mere fraction of the magical writings she had accumulated, barely enough to warrant notice. But the Queen of Fangs' justice is harsh, and as long as the Last Hunter stays in the center of his own web, he will never face it. This is the dilemma that gnaws at him — Raksi might forgive him, or she might at least give him the chance to redeem himself for his theft and betrayal. But Raksi is a much greater hunter than he, and what creature would knowingly walk into the spider's web?

In his beastman form, the Last Hunter grows two extra arms and chitinous armor over his entire body. The armor showcases his Hearthstone and obscures his human features completely, save for his ever-present silvery eyes. He stands nearly 10 feet tall in beastman form.

Nature: Savant
Caste: No Moon
Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5
Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 3
Rank: Ikth-ya
Renown: Succor 10, Mettle 20, Cunning 80, Glory 40
Abilities: Archery 1, Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 2, Craft (Architecture) 4, Craft (Stonework) 2, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Investigation 1, Linguistics (Native: Forest-tongue; Flametongue, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 4 (Manses +2), Martial Arts 5 (Multiple Opponents +2), Melee 2, Occult 4 (Sorcery +2), Presence 3, Resistance 3, Socialize 3, Stealth 5, Survival 5 (Forests +2, Jungles +1), Thrown 4
Backgrounds: Cult 1, Followers (Beastmen) 5, Manse 4
Charms: Adder Fang Method, Blossoming Gift of Luna, Body Weapon Technique, Bowing Reed Technique, Breath-Drinking Executioner Attack, Calling Luna's Favor, Claws of the Silver Moon, Crouching Tiger Exercise, Deadly Beastman Transformation (x4), Deadly Claw Blow, Deadly Viper Strike, Finding the Spirit's Shape, Hide of the Cunning Hunter, Humble Mouse Shape, Masking the Brilliant Form, Moonsilver Monkey Exercise, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Regaining Breath Exercise, Shaping the Ideal Form, Sinuous Striking Grace, Tyrant Lizard Strike, along with any other Charms or Combos the Storyteller feels are appropriate.
Deadly Beastman Bonuses: +3 Strength, +3 Dexterity, +5 Stamina
Deadly Beastman Gifts: Bestial Reflexes, Gift of Hands, Glue-Foot Climbing, Horrifying Might, Spider-Foot Climbing
Spells: The Last Hunter can cast spells from the Terrestrial or Celestial Circles. All of his magical knowledge was either taught or stolen from Raksi, and he has not learned all of the magic has brought with him from Mahalanka. He can have access to any spells the Storyteller feels are appropriate.
Base Initiative: 10 (13 in beastman form)
Attack:
The Last Hunter rarely uses weapons, preferring to attack with his Charms and martial arts skills when he bothers with close combat at all.
Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Dodge Pool: 9/8//12/11 **Soak:** 10L/12B//13L/17B (Black armor, 9L/9B, -1 mobility penalty)
Essence: 4
Personal Essence: 20 **Peripheral Essence:** 52
Other Notes: None

SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

The people of Halta venerate the dead much as any other Eastern people do, hanging the bodies of the deceased from trees deep in the forest. These ghost trees are places of great spiritual power, but for the most part, the ancestors keep to their place — the Haltans are too friendly with the gods of the wood to fear the ghosts of their ancestors. For more information on ghosts in general, see **Exalted: The Abyssals**. What follow are spiritual beings of Underworld energy unique to Halta.

THE SILVER CHILD AND THE SHADE TIGER

Inhabitants of the Realm often think of Halta as some kind of barbaric jungle, and whenever stories of the Haltan forests reach outside ears, they usually serve to reinforce such notions. One commonly told story involves a ghostly, ash-gray tiger stalking the woods, never seen in the same place twice and always on the prowl for flesh, blood and Essence. The Shade Tiger, as it is called, hunts the entirety of the Kingdom of Halta and attacks without warning or mercy. The tiger is never seen during the day and behaves in many respects like a hungry ghost, and it is more frequently sighted around shadowlands.

Storytellers in Halta know another facet of the story, however: The Shade Tiger is not alone. A spirit, the ghost of what appears to be a girl-child, pursues it endlessly. While the Shade Tiger is not particularly secretive, springing from the shadows to attack and occasionally leaving badly wounded (and terrified) witnesses behind, the Silver Child rarely appears to the living. When she does so, it is usually to administer a deathblow to a victim of the tiger too badly wounded to survive, but enough still-living people have seen her for stories of her existence to spread across Halta.

Most assume that these creatures are gods of some kind. Some savants posit that they might be ghosts, but wonder how the Shade Tiger and the Silver Child could roam across the forests so freely. Where are their bodies? Why have they not found peace? What passions could possibly drive them?

Only a few beings in all of Halta know the answers to those questions. Glorious Jade Branch, god the Haltan forest, knows the true nature of the Silver Child and the Shade Tiger. Slulura, the Fair Folk noble whose forces hunt the eastern reaches of the Haltan forests, has gleaned enough from stolen nightmares to guess. But the being with the most intimate knowledge of the ghostly pair is the No Moon Silver Python.

Before Silver Python and Rain Deathflyer instructed the Haltan people in how to build their kingdom, Luna Exalted a young girl from among them. Silver Python took an instant liking to the girl, in part because she had a natural bent toward sorcery. He took her on a student, tutoring her in magic and the harsh life of being a Lunar Exalt. The girl, Arphene, learned well enough, but she was young. Silver Python had long forgotten what it was to be a child and pushed his student ever harder to master sorcery and become a fine hunter. One day, while practicing a spell much too advanced for one of her learning, she lost control of the magic. The spell exploded, killing her.

Silver Python came running, and when he saw her small body, broken and burned by the force of the magical backlash, his mind went numb with shock. He buried her and then assumed his totem formed and ran off into the trees, not stopping until he was miles away. Over time, he has forgotten exactly where he buried Arphene's body, to his eternal regret. That knowledge would be extremely helpful now.

Arphene's soul split when she died. Her po took the form of the tiger, her totem animal, while her hun retained her human mien. Both ghosts began hunting the area a few miles around their makeshift grave, but they have grown in power over the ensuing centuries. The two halves of Arphene now roam the entire Kingdom of Halta, the tiger forever hunting fresh prey, the girl endlessly hunting the tiger.

The Shade Tiger

Description: The Shade Tiger is, in some ways, a hungry ghost, although its physical body has long since crumbled to dust. Given the sheer power of the soul that spawned it, however, the Shade Tiger is not as frail as most such beings. It becomes solid at night, like most hungry ghosts, and is vulnerable to sunlight. However, it possess the unique ability to create a "den" in which to flee the light of day, rather than being confined to the Underworld (see sidebar).

The tiger is a hunter, and it feasts on anyone unfortunate enough to attract its attention. It hunts mortal sorcerers, those who dabble in parlor tricks, specifically. On the rare occasions that it has had the opportunity to attack true (Exalted) sorcerers, it does so with cunning and patience far beyond that of any hungry ghost or mere animal. Recently, it slew a Dragon-Blooded sorceress in the village of Strix' Roost, roughly 20 miles north of Chanta. The Exalt's family is now hunting the creature, but as they are unaware of its true nature, they have little idea where to begin. Word has not yet reached Silver Python of this occurrence, but when it does, his guilt might propel him to take some action — or he might simply trust that now that Terrestrial blood has been spilled, the tiger will finally be caught.

The Shade Tiger resembles an adult tiger, standing nearly four feet at the shoulder and measuring more than 10 feet from head to the tail. At first glance, it appears to be a solid ash-gray color, but close inspection reveals that its pelt is subtly striped. The creature exists only to kill, but still thinks like a predator — it will not attack well-equipped or strange targets and only chooses prey it feels it has a chance of defeating. It is aware of the Silver Child and can sense her presence if she is within half a mile of it, but it cannot use its Charms or Arcanoi on her.

The tiger is not aware of its once-human nature and does not respond to human emotion or logic. Attempts to communicate with it using mundane methods of conversation are fruitless. Charms that make the user seem impressive or intimidating simply encourage the tiger to flee. A dedicated character, however, might be able to communicate with the beast. Such a feat would require the character to be able to speak Old Realm and to communicate with animals to some degree. The tiger is a hungry ghost, though, and so, speaking with it would necessitate holding it at bay, awakening its sentient mind and then cowing it into submission or coaxing it to speak through the hate and rage in its soul.

Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 5

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

THE SHADE TIGER'S DEN

The Shade Tiger possesses a unique Charm — it can hide in any shadow for the duration of the day. The Den of Shadows automatically disappears at sunset (and the Tiger springs forth from its lair, ready to hunt). While in the Den of Shadows, the Shade Tiger is Elsewhere and is, therefore, unaware of any happenings in the living world or the Underworld.

DEN OF SHADOWS

Cost: 5 motes
Duration: One day
Type: Simple
Minimum Temperance: 2
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: None

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Survival 4
Backgrounds: Cult 1
Charms: Den of Shadows, Essence Bite, Materialize, Principle of Motion
Arcanoi: Aura Reading Technique, Black Breath of the Abyss, Corpse-Fed Radiance, Delicious Essence Scent, Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch, Taste the Demon Wind
Cost To Materialize: 20
Base Initiative: 10
Attack:
Bite: Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 14L Defense 6
Claw: Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 14L Defense 6
Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 6L/8B (Ghostly hide)
Willpower: 5 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 63
Other Notes: The Shade Tiger is a unique creature and breaks many of the rules regarding hungry ghosts. Arcanoi that target hungry ghosts (see **Exalted: The Abyssals**) work against the Tiger, but all rolls to use such powers on the beast are at difficulty 3 (or +2, if not normally difficulty 1). In addition, the Silver Child will fight with all of its considerable power against any attempt to bind, tame or capture the Shade Tiger (if anyone is going to bring it to heel, she feels, it must be her).

THE SILVER CHILD

Description: In life, Arphene was a Lunar Exalt and a gifted, if inexperienced, sorceress. As a ghost, she is a legend, as beings in both Creation and the Underworld leave sacrifices for her (more properly, they leave sacrifices to keep the Shade Tiger away, as few living beings actually know about the Silver Child). She has learned much in her long, long tenure as a ghost, but the drive to find and consume her lower soul spurs her on just as strongly as it ever did. She is a curious soul, however, and is quite capable of being distracted from her hunt for short periods of time. She is interested in sorcery of all kinds, and the few beings in Halta who know of her existence are mortal sorcerers and God-Bloods.

The Silver Child remembers her mentor, Silver Python, but has no desire to take revenge upon him. She blames herself for her own death, believing that if she had better control over the magic he was teaching her, she would still be alive. She has not seen Silver Python since her death, however — whenever she feels tempted to seek him out, she remembers that there is another great cat that she must catch first.

Arphene usually appears as an Eastern girl in her early teens. Her hair is silver and gleaming, as are her eyes, and her face is perpetually set in a grimace of determination. She wears silver armor and carries a hunting spear and a bow. She can track the Shade Tiger unerringly, and while she doesn't necessarily care for the lives of humans, she does attempt to prevent the tiger from killing (she doesn't wish it to grow stronger). Just as she is unaffected by the Shade Tiger's Arcanoi and Charms, when she faces the beast, she has only her skills as a warrior to rely on.
Nature: Explorer
Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 4, Valor 4
Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Craft (Moliation) 3, Craft (Pandemonium) 3, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Investigation 2, Lore 3, Medicine 2, Melee 4 (Spear +2), Occult 5, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Survival 5, Thrown 3
Backgrounds: Ancestor Cult 1, Underworld Cult 2
Passions: Compassion: Protect the Living from the Tiger 2; Conviction: Hunt Down the Shade Tiger 5; Temperance: Learn as Much Magic as Possible 4; Valor: Succumb to Lethe Only After the Tiger is Gone 4
Fetters: Clearing where body is buried 2, Silver Python 1
Charms: Principle of Motion
Arcanoi: Aura Reading Technique, Black Breath of the Abyss, Call the Ravening Hound, Corpse-Fed Radiance, Delicious Essence Scent, Diversion of the Savage Hunter, Hand of the Wind, Painting the Sunset Picture, Steeling the Spirit, Strike of Dead Hands, Tame the Wicked Appetite, Taste the Demon Wind, Waxen Ghostly Flesh, Yielding Spirit Form
Cost To Materialize: 45
Base Initiative: 8
Attack:
Spear: Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 6L Defense 10
Composite Bow: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L (Rate 3, Range 250)

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 9L/10B (Silver hunter's armor, 8L/8B, no mobility penalty)
Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 91
Other Notes: The Silver Child's two Cult ratings do not reflect worship or reverence so much as fear. Those who venerate her know that her presence usually follows (or presages) the Shade Tiger's, and thus, they make offerings to keep the beast away. Very few, if any, people on either side of the veil of life know that the girl *hunts* the tiger. None understand the true relationship between the two beings.

Deadwood Ghosts

Description: Trees, as every Haltan knows, have spirits, just like everything else in Creation. Near the Fields of Woe, however, the ashen trees of the Underworld have their own spirits… and they are hungry.

Deadwood ghosts are the spirits of certain kinds of trees in the Underworld. They emerge from their trunks at night and hunt for sources of Essence. They can absorb Essence from any living creature they can catch but hunger for the potent Essence of the Exalted in particular. They travel in packs of four or more and hunt in tandem, sharing in the fruits of the kill. Like hungry ghosts, they have little in the way of human intelligence but are quite cunning and are capable of luring prey into ambushes and using pack tactics. Savage Ghost Tamer Arts and Charms meant to be used against ghosts function normally against deadwood ghosts. They understand fragments of Old Realm, but someone trying to communicate with them is in for a frustrating process. Conveying anything more complex than fear or menace to a Deadwood Ghost requires a Charisma + Presence roll at difficulty 2.

Deadwood ghosts only appear in and around shadowlands. They appear as short humanoid figures made of dead, rotted wood. Their eyes glow a vicious, poisonous green, and they hiss with hatred at any living creature that comes near them. Their fingers end in thorny claws, and their passing leaves the foul scent of rotting wood.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3
Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 2
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 2, Lore 1, Occult 1, Resistance 2, Survival 3
Backgrounds: None
Suggested Charms: Cunning Thief, Essence Bite, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Sustenance, Steal Sustenance, Uncanny Prowess
Cost To Materialize: 20
Base Initiative: 6

Attack:
Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 3L
Claw: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 4L Defense 6
Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 5L/6B (Soft, rotted wood flesh)
Willpower: 5 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 49
Other Notes: Although they are not true ghosts, deadwood ghosts are considered creatures of death for the purposes of regaining Essence through respiration.

The Fair Folk of Halta

Three fey nobles claim dominion in the Haltan forests. One views humans the way humans view livestock — best to keep them happy and fat, that they are easier to slaughter when the time comes. One sees humanity (or at least Haltans) as noble and worthy of respect. And the third would like nothing more than to see Halta and everyone in it burnt down to the earth, leaving a flat plain of ash and misery where the Kingdom — and her rivals — once stood.

Outside the borders of Halta, a pair of fey nobles openly rule the nation of Gossamer Stockade. Obsidian Wave and Plestara both occasionally send emissaries to the three Fair Folk nobles of Halta, but the two consider themselves better than Slulura, Marika and Yseult because they have claimed a country of their own and have no difficulty finding dreamers to feed upon. For their part, the fey of Halta don't think much of Obsidian Wave and Plestara — Slulura respects what they have built but disapproves of ruling humans directly, Yseult is disgusted that fey would ever deign to call themselves benevolent leaders of humanity, and Marika is amused that Obsidian Wave and Plestara find such delight in playing with their food.

SLULURA, LORD OF THE LOWER BRANCHES

Description: The Fair Folk have their heroes, their legends and their kings. Slulura is all three.

Slulura is one of the fey who chose to agree to the treaty with the Haltan people (as his element is wood, that decision was motivated in no small measure by a desire to remain on good terms with Glorious Jade Branch and his servants). Slulura, then a minor noble, obeyed the terms of the treaties and even protected some Haltan villages against outside threats in exchange for first choice of prisoners of war. Over time, many villages in the southeastern forests of Haltan erected shrines to the great fey leader, and Slulura developed a great deal of respect for the Haltan people. True, they were human and therefore locked into a rather drab existence, but their passion when defending their homes or making war on the Linowan was intoxicating. Two hundred years ago, Slulura issued a decree that neither he nor any fey under his command would harm the Haltans, even on the ground.

Slulura may have fancied himself a patron of the Haltan people, but the other Fair Folk noticed the delicate wording of the decree. He made no promise to *protect* the Haltans, merely that he himself wouldn't ravage them and that he would prevent his minions from doing so. Still, one bright morning when he visited a village that he had once helped save from Linowan incursion and found the inhabitants soul-dead, drained of passion, he vowed to find the one responsible. He was not long in looking.

Not all of the Fair Folk of the Haltan forests had agreed to the treaty. Some chose to tempt the moon-gods' anger by feeding on whomever they chose, and the fey queen Yseult, who claimed the lands in the northern forests as her own, was one of those. Disgusted when she heard of Slulura's promise not to harm the Haltans, she sent her own minions to ravage the aforementioned villagers and any other that revered Slulura. She expected Slulura to retract his vow when he saw how easily his precious Haltans were reduced to mindless husks. Instead, Slulura went to arms.

For three years, the forests were their battleground. Slulura's forces took to the trees to keep Yseult's away from the villages. Slulura never solicited help from the Haltans, but he did accept the aid of anyone who volunteered. Caltia forbade Glorious Jade Branch from interfering directly, but the mighty forest walker gave Slulura's forces what support he could. In the end, Slulura pushed Yseult's hobgoblins back out of his territories and north of the River of Tears. The last battle of the War of Slulura's Promise was fought outside the Proving Ground, and it was during that battle that Yseult changed the trees surrounding the Stone Riddle into the maze of stone that they are today (see p. 81).

SLULURA'S WARRIORS

Slulura never travels alone. When patrolling or hunting, he is accompanied by a band of three cataphractoi, six hobgoblins (more if he is expecting a serious battle) and two or three of his hunting cats (see p. 72).

Cataphractoi: Slulura's cataphractoi are all aspected toward wood. They carry bows and faerie swords and one has created a war boomerang that wails hideously as it flies toward its target. Slulura's cataphractoi are loyal to their lord, and he has exacted a promise from each of them to follow his prohibition against harming Haltans.

Hobgoblins: Slulura's wood-fey troops either resemble serpents or monkeys. The snake-fey slink silently through the trees, ready to spring on their prey and deliver a venomous bite (Stamina + Resistance difficulty 2, 1L if successful, 4L if failed). The monkey-fey cling to the lower trunks of the trees and carry clubs and slings. Slulura maintains a spawning pit near his home in Yagan where his minions birth these monsters.

Since then, Slulura has become the most prominent Fair Folk noble in western Halta. He makes the ruined city of Yagan his home, but ventures out often to hunt the forest floor and protect the Haltans from incursions. His forces are not the only Fair Folk in Halta, of course — Yseult's influence is still felt in the northernmost reaches of the forest, and the eastern sections of the forest belong to the water-witch Marika. Slulura, however, holds the respect and admiration of the Haltan people, and when the Linowan attack in force, his soldiers often arrive to fight… and to take captives back to their master.

Slulura is a Fair Folk noble and, as such, is graceful and beautiful. His skin is the color of sanded pine, and his eyes are a rich, luminous green. His hair is the color of blood on leaves. He usually appears dressed in fine silks of red, brown or green and rarely goes armed in his own city. When dressed for battle, he wears a suit of faerie armor the color of the morning sky and carries a bow that fires arrows so fine that they find their way between the seams of an enemy's armor. Slulura's sword, Endless Blood, is no less deadly — legend has it that no wound inflicted by the sword ever closes, no matter what manner of herbs or magic is applied.

Nature: Leader
Type: Noble
Element: Wood
Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 7, Stamina 6, Charisma 6, Manipulation 7, Appearance 6, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 5, Temperance 2, Valor 5
Abilities: Archery 6, Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3, Craft (Glamour) 6, Dodge 4, Endurance 4, Investigation 3, Larceny 4, Linguistics 4 (Native: High Realm; Forest-tongue, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak), Lore 6, Martial Arts 3, Melee 6, Occult 5, Performance 5, Presence 6, Resistance 4, Stealth 4, Survival 5
Backgrounds: Allies 5, Backing (Glorious Jade Branch) 3, Contacts 5, Followers (Fey Underlings) 5+, Influence 2, Manse (a level 3 fire Demesne in the ruins of Yagan) 2, Resources 3
Powers:
Control Wood: 5 motes. Slulura can create and control wood. In combat, he can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to his permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice his permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged or parried.
Slulura can shape wood by touch, rapidly molding it into complex and intricate shapes without tools. He can also animate any wooden object within 50 yards, causing it to move and bend at his command or to leap through the air as a missile.
Fearsome Mien: 5 motes, 1 Willpower. Slulura wreathes himself in terrifying illusions, much like a Dawn Caste's anima power. Targets whose Valor + Essence is lower than his highest combat Ability (6) suffer a -2 penalty while in combat with him.
Glamour: 5 motes. As per the "Fair Folk Diplomat" on page 286 of **Exalted**.
Glamour Sorcery: Varies. See **Scavenger Sons** for information on glamour sorcery. Assume that Slulura can cast effects duplicating the following spells, but remember that glamour sorcery takes more time to enact than standard sorcery: Becoming the Wood Friend, Blood Lash, Cantata of Empty Voices, Commanding the Beasts, Death of Obsidian Butterflies, Dolorous Reflection, Floral Ferry, Impenetrable Frost Barrier, Invulnerable Skin of Bronze, Shadowy Simulacrums of Smoke, Sprouting Shackles of Doom, Stormwind Rider, Summon the Army of the Wild, Wood Dragon's Claw and any others the Storyteller feels are appropriate.
Base Initiative: 13
Attack:
Sword (Endless Blood): Speed 14 Accuracy 14 Damage 7L Defense 14
Long Bow (Yseult's Anguish): Speed 13 Accuracy 15 Damage 7L (Rate 2, Range 250)
Dodge Pool: 11 **Soak:** 15L/18B (Morningsky armor, 12L/12B, no mobility penalty)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 50

Other Notes: Iron does aggravated damage against Slulura, and he cannot soak it with his Stamina. Against iron weapons, he has only the 12L/12B from his morningsky armor. Slulura's sword, Endless Blood, leaves wounds that are resistant to healing — all Medicine rolls made to mend someone injured by Endless Blood are made at difficulty 3. The arrows fired by his bow, Yseult's Anguish (so named because an arrow from the bow wounded and nearly killed her during their last battle), are slim and difficult to see. All dodge or parry attempts against them are made at +2 difficulty (including attempts made with Charms or windhands gemstones).

MARIKA, RULER OF THE RIVERS AND SWAMPS

Description: Slulura found the Haltan people to his liking. He respected their honesty and diligence and the way that they paid tribute to the myriad forest gods.

Marika, the water-witch who claims eastern Halta as her hunting ground, is unceasingly amused by this attitude. She views Slulura's admiration of the Haltans about the same as being impressed by a monkey's agility or a great cat's stealth. Of course the Haltans are diligent and hard-working. Of course they cower before gods. That's what humans do.

Marika came out of the Wyld five centuries ago. She states that she left willingly, on a whim, and has never expressed a desire to go back. Yseult tells a very different tale of her exodus (see below), but Marika laughs this story off as ridiculous slander. Whatever the truth of why Marika left, she arrived in Halta and claimed a water Demesne near the delta at the end of the River of Tears, ousting the swamp god who previously held the area and installing her court in the marsh surrounding the delta.

When Glorious Jade Branch first approached her in RY 281 with the original Haltan treaty — that only those on the forest floor were permissible prey for the Fair Folk — Marika accepted. She sent her minions out to the tributaries to collect hapless people collecting roots and fishing on the riverbanks. So effective were her hunters that Haltan experienced a minor famine in RY 282 simply because Marika's forces were abducting and ravaging any who dared fish.

Had this arrangement continued, it would surely have ended in disaster for either the Haltan people or for Marika herself. But then, three years after the treaty was signed, Marika had a visit from Caltia the Eternal. The forest god asked her to reconsider her hunting practices — after all, if she harvested the humans too quickly, there would soon be none left. Marika, though vain and mercurial, knew the meeting for what it was: a threat. Had she disagreed, Caltia might have struck her down then and there. By phrasing it as a request, Marika had the opportunity to accede to wisdom rather than bow before a god. The water-witch, wisely, accepted and decreed that anyone could fish, so long as they did not set foot on the banks of the stream.

When Slulura made his decree never to harm the Haltan people, the swamp echoed with Marika's silvery laughter. She had met with Slulura before and considered the young noble respectable but hopelessly naïve. This promise of non-aggression and, indeed, even of aid to the humans struck her as a young fey's rash vow, nothing more. Yseult, the dark fey queen who claimed the northern forests, agreed, and sent her forces to ravage villages under Slulura's protection.

Marika stayed out of overt conflict during the war between Yseult and Slulura but did allow Slulura's forces to use the rivers to travel north to battle. When the war ended, Marika summoned Slulura to her, where they fashioned their own treaty — he would stay to the western forests but could protect villagers throughout Halta as he saw fit. Any Haltan on the riverbanks, who ventured into the swamps or who wandered too far east fell under Marika's jurisdiction. In addition, her forces could legitimately "collect" any human they found on the ground. Slulura agreed, and the two Fair Folk have been at peace ever since.

Marika is mercurial — she is by turns brooding and garrulous, and those who take audience with her should take care not to rouse her ire. Once she is angered, she is a raging flood, and her fury drowns all around her.

MARIKA'S FORCES

Marika's hunting parties venture forth from her stronghold in small rafts, manned by a cataphract and accompanied by as many as 10 hobgoblins. Marika herself rarely joins these hunts, but occasionally, the need to find her own prey strikes, and she plies the rivers on a craft made of opal and jade.

Cataphractoi: Marika's lieutenants are shorter than most fey soldiers but are graceful and quick as minnows. They carry ornate spear throwers embellished with sapphires and silver. When hunting, they aim to cripple humans on the riverbanks, so that the hobgoblins can retrieve them.

Hobgoblins: Marika's hobgoblins, spawned in the swamp delta at the mouth of the River of Tears, all resemble aquatic creatures. Some have the shells of river turtles, some leap from the water on the legs of frogs, others have gills and lurk underwater for unfortunates diving for mussels.

Marika is not as slim as most Fair Folk nobility. She is voluptuous, with long, blue-white hair and dewy brown eyes. Her skin is the milk-white of a swamp orchid. She dresses in robes seemingly woven from the clear waters of the River of Tears. She rarely enters battle personally, preferring to allow her water-goblin minions to fight for her, but when necessity arises, she wears armor so thin and light that it would seem to provide no more protection than a dousing of water — and yet can turn aside the mightiest blows. In battle, she carries a mace dubbed River Dragon's Ire, a huge weapon fashioned of black jade and ironwood.

Nature: Survivor
Type: Noble
Element: Water
Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 7, Charisma 7, Manipulation 7, Appearance 5, Perception 7, Intelligence 4, Wits 5
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 5
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 3, Craft (Glamour) 6, Dodge 5, Endurance 5, Linguistics 5 (Native: High Realm; Forest-tongue, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue), Lore 6, Martial Arts 4, Melee 5, Occult 5, Performance 3, Presence 4, Resistance 6, Sail 6, Stealth 3, Survival 5
Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Followers (Fey Underlings) 5+, Influence 2, Manse (a level 4 water Demesne in the delta at the end of the River of Tears) 3, Resources 3
Powers:
Control Water: 5 motes. Marika can create and control water. In combat, she can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to her permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice her permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged.
Marika can cause water to flow or cease flowing, part streams and small rivers, walk on water and cause water to actively attempt to drown a swimmer. Water attacks cannot be parried, only dodged.
Fearsome Mien: 5 motes, 1 Willpower. Marika wreathes himself in terrifying illusions, much like a Dawn Caste's anima power. Targets whose Valor + Essence is lower than her highest combat Ability (6) suffer a -2 penalty while in combat with her.
Glamour: 5 motes. As per the "Fair Folk Diplomat" on page 286 of **Exalted**.
Glamour Sorcery: Varies. See **Scavenger Sons** for information on glamour sorcery. Assume that Marika can cast effects duplicating the following spells, but remember that glamour sorcery takes more time to enact than standard sorcery: Between the Minute and the Hour, Corrupted Words, Disguise of the New Face, Floral Ferry, Geyser of Corrosion, Impenetrable Frost Barrier, Impervious Sphere of Water, Incomparable Body Arsenal, Infallible Messenger, the Parting of the Seas, Silent Words of Dreams and Nightmares, Song of the Waves, Unity of Dreams, Written Upon the Water and any other spells the Storytellers feels are appropriate.
Base Initiative: 9
Attack:
Mace (River Dragon's Ire): Speed 9 Accuracy 10 Damage 13L Defense 10
Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 13L/17B (Robes of tears, 10L/10B, no mobility penalty, see "Other Notes")
Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 60
Other Notes: Iron does aggravated damage against Marika, and she cannot soak it with her Stamina. Against iron weapons, she has only the 10L/10B from her robes of tears. Her robes also allow her to stand firm in the face of any attack — she is immune to being knocked back or pushed aside when wearing the robes, no matter how strong the attack (or how much damage she actually takes). Her mace, River Dragon's Ire, sends foes sprawling. If she inflicts any damage on an opponent, that opponent is knocked back a number of yards equal to the health levels inflicted.

Yseult, Queen of the Stone Forest

Description: A promise that one regrets rankles at the heart of anyone unfortunate enough to make it, but for one of the Fair Folk, to whom promises are more binding than steel, the feeling is maddening. Yseult understands all too well the consequences of making a vow without knowing all the facts. The promise she made to Marika haunts her still.

The Fair Folk have their own arcane courts and politics, and mortal men do not understand such things. But in the distant past, before Marika ventured to the Haltan forests, and long before Slulura set foot on the forest floor, Yseult, a mighty fey queen, brought her wrath to Creation. She brought her armies of stony fey out of the northeast, making war on the weakened armies of humanity. Like the rest of the Fair Folk, she was driven back beyond the borders of Creation when the Scarlet Empress turned the defenses she found in the Palace of the Anathema on the fey.

Yseult fell back to the northern forests of what would become the Kingdom of Halta. Her forces decimated, she returned to the Wyld, cursing humanity in general and the Scarlet Empress especially. While brooding in her rocky domain, a fey noble called Marika came to visit, wishing to hear from someone who was actually there how the Fair Folk's armies had been shattered and sent running. When she heard Yseult's stories of solar fire streaming from the sky, driving back the armies of chaos, she shook her head. Invading Creation was a fool's errand anyway,

YSEULT'S WARRIORS

Raiding parties from the stone forest of the Proving Ground ride into Haltan lands to collect victims for their stony mistress. Yseult's earth-hobgoblins crawl up from a spawning pit concealed in the Brittle Fields (see p. 79), while cataphractoi arrive every few years from the Wyld. Yseult herself does not leave her Demesne — she is too ashamed of what she has become. A typical raiding party contains four cataphractoi and 15 hobgoblins.

Cataphractoi: Yseult's elite soldiers are stockier than most fey and carry heavy bows and war axes. They wear armor of stone and diamond. They are slower than is typical of their kind but stronger and sturdier (use the "Fair Folk Cataphract" Traits from p. 287 of **Exalted**, but increase Strength and Stamina by one and reduce Dexterity by one).

Hobgoblins: The earth-fey resemble short, squat humans, but their teeth grind as though made of granite, and they are capable of uprooting small trees to use as clubs (Strength 6). They carry nets woven from the thorny vines of the Proving Ground and small stone knives.

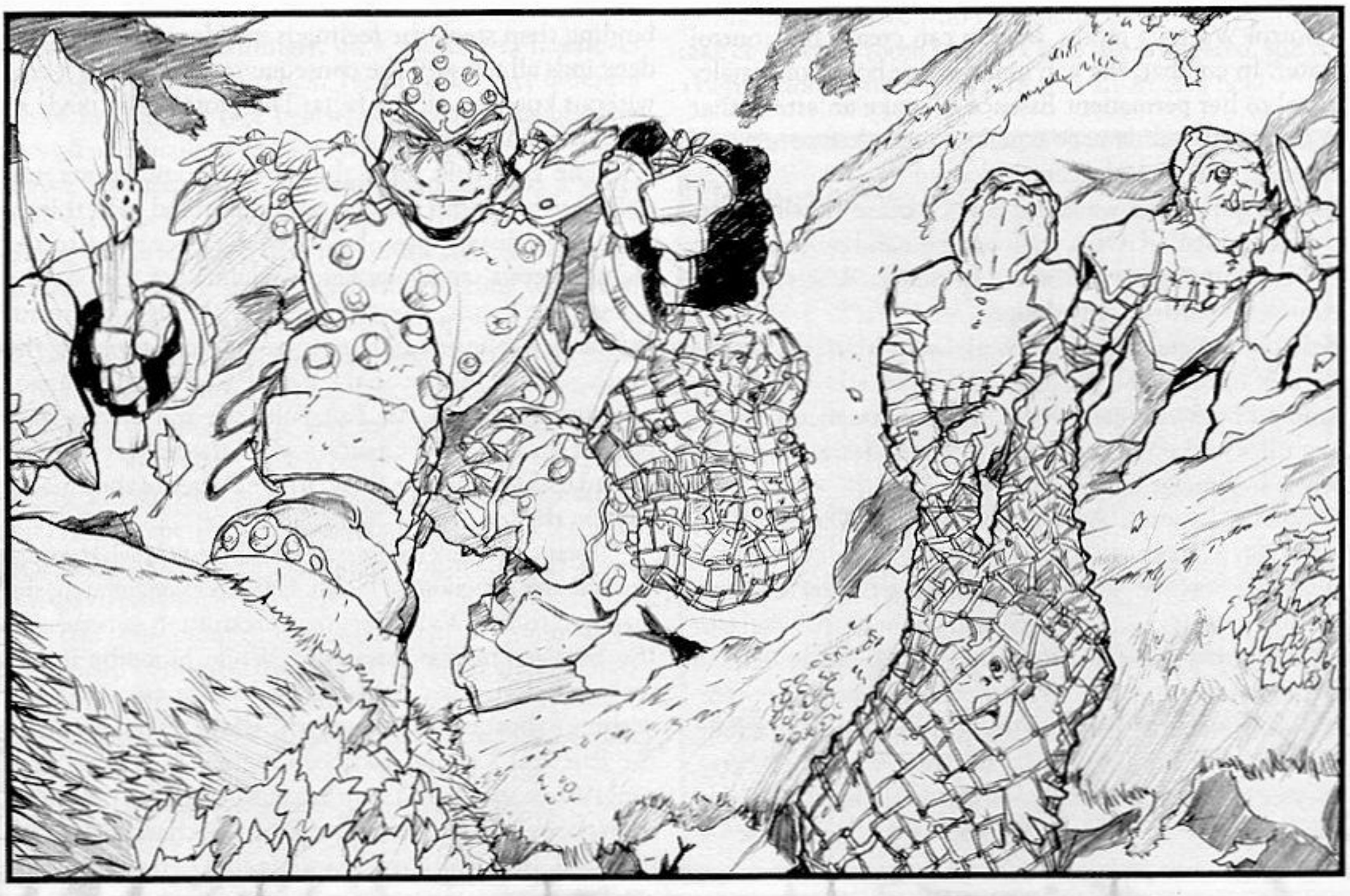
she said. Yseult replied that if the assault had gone on only a few days more, they could have stopped the upstart Empress from entering the palace.

Marika flippantly replied that the entire enterprise was doomed because humanity was too resilient. Like insects, they bred so quickly that even the Great Contagion couldn't fell them all. The best one could do was to live among them, feed from their dreams and await the day when they would destroy themselves.

Yseult, though aspected toward the element of earth, lost her temper then. Hearing this young upstart who had never left the Wyld and never faced humanity on any except her own terms tell her how they could be defeated was too much. She swore to Marika that when the last human being lay dead, she would kill the water-witch herself.

Marika simply smiled and left. The next day, she launched an assault on Yseult's weakened forces, taking her treasures, her slaves and any other plunder she could. Yseult could do nothing to defend herself directly, for she had sworn to kill Marika when (and only when) humanity had fallen. Yseult petitioned her case to the lords of the Fair Folk, but before any decision could be reached, Marika had taken her underlings and left for the deltas around the Haltan forests. To this day, she insists that she left of her own accord, while Yseult maintains she left in fear of judgment.

Whatever the truth, Yseult, weakened and bitter, reentered Creation in RY 270. Her forces preyed on the



Haltan people mercilessly, and she refused to sign the treaty of RY 281, no matter what kind of pressure Glorious Jade Branch and his mistress applied. She hunted the forests at the northern border of the Kingdom, destroying whole villages to feed her lust for souls. The Haltan military, in addition to Silver Python and Rain Deathflyer, kept her forces from advancing very far south, but she remained the most voracious hunter of men in the Haltan forests... until RY 568, when Slulura issued his famous decree, stating that he would not harm the Haltan people.

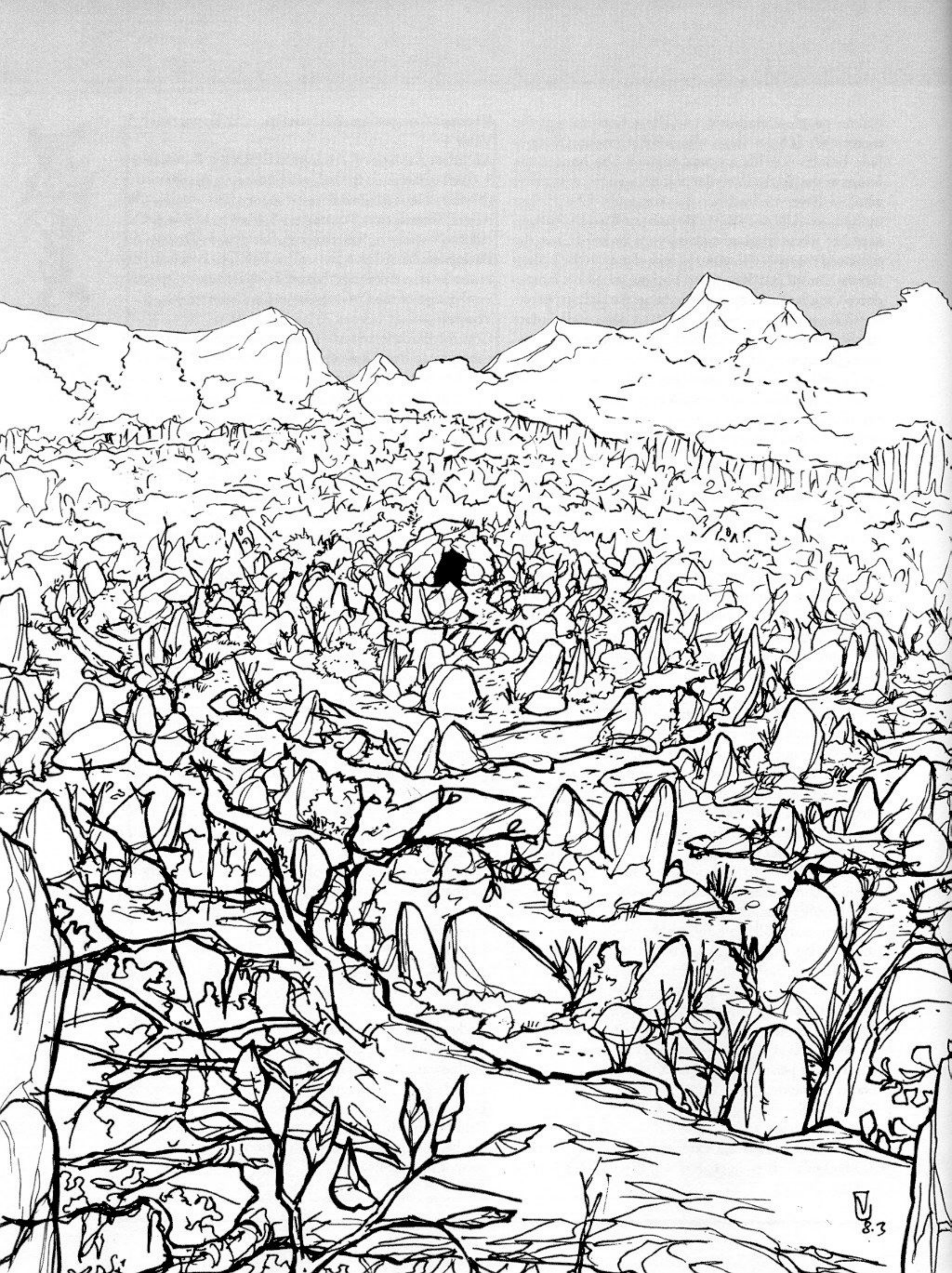
The two faerie nobles went to war, and Slulura surprised the older Yseult with his battle prowess and strategic acumen. He brought the fight all the way to her lands, and there, their forces engaged in what became known as the Battle of Slulura's Promise. As that battle raged on, Yseult saw that her forces were falling. She retreated to her Demesne and brought forth a weapon she had been forging from glamour, a weapon still unfinished. In desperation, she tried to use it.

The woods echoed with a low, mournful tune and all of the combatants fell silent. When the last note faded, the trees for miles around had changed into rough, sharp stone. Slulura, assuming that Yseult possessed magic far beyond his power to fight, ordered his troops back, and in sheer bravado, cautioned Yseult never to leave her stone forest lest an arrow from his bow — which he called Yseult's Anguish — find its mark. Yseult, ears still ringing, still clutching the remains of her weapon, had no response. She could only stare down at her skin — changed to a rough, gray stone by her own magic.

Since then, Yseult has ruled the stone forest of the Proving Ground (see p. 81) as her own domain, sending her goblins out into the forests to capture any Haltan foolish enough to venture to the ground. She intends to kill Slulura as soon as she can, but in keeping with her element, is being patient. She reserves her true venom for Marika, anyway, and wishes for nothing more than to find a way around her promise.

Yseult refuses to appear before visitors, always hiding behind a curtain. Her silhouette is lovely — she appears to be a shapely woman, healthy and athletic. If seen up close, her features are still beautiful, but she appears to be a living stature, a faerie woman carved of granite. Her skin is gray and rough to the touch, her hair is fused into one solid piece of stone, and even her eyes grate slightly when she turns her gaze. She covers herself in fine silks, but she can no longer feel them. She carries a brace of stone hatchets on her person at all times — anyone who dares to look on her without permission is immediately made a target.

Nature: Bravo
Type: Noble
Element: Earth
Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 7, Charisma 7, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 3
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 5, Valor 4
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 6, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 5, Craft (Glamour) 6, Dodge 3, Endurance 6, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Forest-tongue, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak, Skytongue) 5, Lore 6, Melee 4, Occult 5, Presence 5, Resistance 6, Survival 5, Thrown 6
Backgrounds: Allies 4 (other Fair Folk), Contacts 2, Followers 5+ (fey underlings), Manse 2 (a level 3 earth Demesne on the edge of the Proving Ground), Resources 4
Powers:
Control Earth: 5 motes. Yseult can create and control earth. In combat, she can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to her permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice her permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged or parried.
Yseult can shape stone and metal just as Slulura can shape wood. She can also cause the earth within 30 yards to shake hard enough to make horses stumble and panic. The player of anyone standing must make a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll, or his character falls over. (This roll is made at difficulty 3 for running characters.) Flimsy structures may be damaged by this shaking. Yseult may also touch the earth and feel travelers coming from miles away.
Fearsome Mien: 5 motes, 1 Willpower. Yseult wreathes himself in terrifying illusions, much like a Dawn Caste's anima power. Targets whose Valor + Essence is lower than her highest combat Ability (6) suffer a -2 penalty while in combat with her.
Glamour: 5 motes. As per the "Fair Folk Diplomat" on page 286 of **Exalted**.
Glamour Sorcery: Varies. See **Scavenger Sons** for information on glamour sorcery. Yseult specializes in creating weapons, armor and structures out of glamour, but she typically spends years fashioning these items (the last time she tried to use a weapon prematurely, disaster ensued). She is capable of creating works of magic duplicating nearly any spell, but she cannot use sorcery for combat applications (which means that spells such as Death of Obsidian Butterflies are all but useless).
Base Initiative: 8
Attack:
Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 7B Defense 9
Stone Hatchets: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 12L (Rate 2, Range 10)
Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 23L/27B (Stone skin, 20L/20B, no mobility penalty)
Willpower: 10 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 7 **Essence Pool:** 70
Other Notes: Iron does aggravated damage against Yseult, but because of her unique condition, she can soak iron weapons normally.



Chapter Three
Beasts, Manses & Sundry Wonders

The Kingdom of Halta is a relatively new civilization, but the land on which the forests grow holds magic from ages past. Some of these places of power are Demesnes or Manses, ruled by Exalts or occasionally inhabited by mere mortals. Some are tombs from Solars from long ago, and some, like the resting place of Vengeful Thunder, are simply unique.

Beasts

The Haltan people have domesticated more varieties of animals than anyone else in Creation. In addition, fully intelligent animals live among them. Exalted sorcerers created the ancestors of these creatures back in the First Age — today intelligent animals not only live openly among the Haltan people, they are Haltan citizens with as many rights as any human. Some intelligent animals live elsewhere in Creation, but most hide their true nature from fearful and superstitious mortals. All of these creatures can reason as well as any person and can both speak and understand speech. In Halta, the most common varieties of intelligent animals are tree-pards, giant wolf spiders, raitons, strangler serpents, strix, forest baboons, giant bats and large pythons. These creatures most often work as hunters, bodyguards and military scouts, but some are skilled performers, and a few work as shaman-priests or teachers. The Haltans call all fully intelligent animals ata-beasts — there are ata-strix, ata-bats and many others. Because most of these beings lack hands, they either have human servants or human allies or followers who are willing to perform various tasks for them.

Through a combination of mortal sorcery, boons granted by various gods and occasional matings with ata-beasts or beastmen, Haltan animal breeders have also created many breeds of animals that are exceptionally bright but considerably less intelligent than a person. These animals, known as san-beasts, are as smart and as able of understanding speech as four-year-old children or exceptionally bright apes. However, they cannot speak, and the Haltans consider these creatures to be beasts and property and not citizens. San-beasts form a vital part of the Haltan economy and no small part of the Haltan military. San-strix and san-herons can carry messages or parcels faster than any runner, while san-forest baboons and san-wolf spiders form a significant portion of the workforce in most Haltan settlements. There are dozens of breeds of san-beasts. Almost any creature that lives in the forest and could have any possible use to humans has a variety that is a san-beast. Only food animals have no san-breeds — to the Haltans, the idea of eating a san-beast is only slightly less distasteful than cannibalism.

In addition to the plethora of animals used in industry and defense, almost all Haltans have at least one pet and most have several. While cats, mospids, small pythons and trained fruit bats are all popular pets, larger animals such

as tree-pards are also quite common. Anyone who has a friend who will give him the offspring of one of her pets can acquire any normal animal or san-beast. However, beast-sellers will only sell animals to someone who possesses at least one dot in Survival or one dot in the Animal Training specialty. Both are extremely common in the Haltan Republic.

HALTAN ANIMAL LAW

In the Haltan Republic, laws protecting all animals are quite strict. Although mistreating a normal animal or a san-beast is a less serious crime than harming a person or an ata-beast, anyone who does so must pay heavy fines or serve a period of indenture. Haltans also either shun or openly insult such criminals. Repeat offenders are exiled, All domestic animals have limited rights and anyone guilty of deliberately doing serious harm to one cannot own any sort of animal for at least a decade. However, the Haltans understand the cycle of life better than other civilized peoples, and most are willing participants in it. The majority of Haltans see no contradiction between eating meat and treating all animals with kindness and respect.

CHARACTERS HAVING SAN- AND ATA-BEAST COMPANIONS

Haltan characters who wish to have various pets and animal companions can do so relatively inexpensively. All san-beasts are purchased using the Followers Background. Characters who do not mistreat their pets may have as many dots in san-beast followers as they wish, so long as they have at least one dot in Survival. Ata-beasts are purchased as Allies. Only characters with one or more dots in Influence and two dots in Resources are prosperous and important enough for an ata-beast to partner with them. Ata-beasts are like any other allies — they will occasionally ask for favors in return for the ones they perform for the character and will abandon the character if she ignores or abuses them.

These rules replace the information given in **Scavenger Sons**.

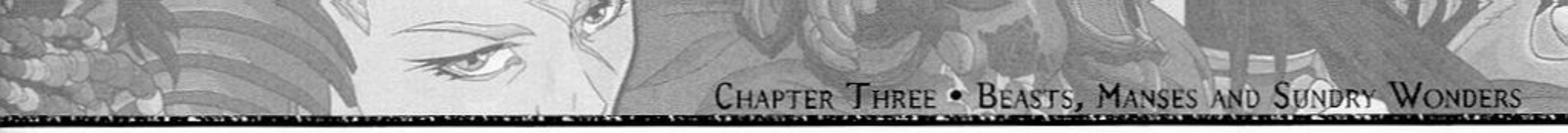
THE ANIMALS

The following are some of the more common animals in the redwood forests where the Haltan people live. The supernally talented Haltan animal trainers can domesticate all arboreal animals. The only limit on the Haltan animal trainers and breeders is that they have difficulty domesticating creatures that cannot easily adapt to life high in the trees. The only non-arboreal animals they breed and train are the Haltan horses, which they bred specifically for people who travel outside of the forests. Many outsiders notice that despite their multitude of pets and domestic animals, Halta is a land without dogs — the reason for this is simple, dogs cannot climb trees. All of the prices listed below are for normal well-trained animals. Storytellers should add one dot to the cost of all san-beasts. The only exceptions to this rule are giant bats, Haltan horses, emerald monkeys, strix and forest baboons. All members of these breeds are san-beasts, and so, the cost for san-beasts is the one listed. In addition to the various animals already listed, trained mospids, raitons and house cats are all common in Halta, and all have a cost of Resources •.

• **Burrow Lok (Not Domesticated):** One of the deadliest predators of the temperate forests is the burrow lok. The size of a small pony, this underground terror excavates borrows that are often up to 30 yards long. Periodically, it will dig larger chambers where the roof is insufficient to support any beast larger than a half-grown child. Anyone heavier walking on the ground over such a chamber will seemingly vanish as he suddenly falls up to three yards into the ground. The burrow lok then launches itself in a vicious sprint intent on jumping upon its prey and savaging him with its saber-like fangs and long digging claws. Other than the fact that it fears the light and has thick, rank smelling fur, few know details of this creature's anatomy or habits — most victims do not survive its attacks.

Resembling a giant badger with long, surprisingly slender limbs, the burrow lok can easily jump 15 feet or more. During mating season or when hunting is poor, the burrow lok will occasionally emerge from its den and stalk the night. It fears sunlight, but its keen sense of smell and hearing can draw it to small campsites miles from its den. A burrow lok can dig with great speed, burrowing through soft earth at a rate of several yards per hour. Because it cannot climb up into the trees, the burrow lok is never domesticated. However, it is a common predator, and anyone who ventures down to the forest floor must worry about both it and the Fair Folk.

• **Diving Heron (Resources •):** Fish provide a substantial portion of the Haltan diet in every settlement located near a river or stream. However, fishing is difficult — thanks to the Fair Folk, setting foot on the ground can lead to a lingering and horrific death. Haltans catch many fish using nets or hooks lowered from the trees. However, the large diving herons also help to catch many of the fish eaten by Haltans. The Haltans train these birds to dive from the trees and then catch and swallow several large fish. The bird then returns to its roost and regurgitates all but one of the fish. Since the entire process only requires a few minutes, the fish are exceptionally fresh and, in most cases, still alive.



These gray, black and reddish-brown birds stand five feet tall, with long thin legs, a long neck and a well-pointed and extremely sharp beak. In addition to catching fish, they are strong flyers and the Haltans also use them as messenger birds to carry small packages between settlements. They can carry at least five pounds, if it is carefully packed. These birds are also quite strong and both san and ata-herons have served with distinction in the Haltan military. When their beaks are fitted with special blades, they can strike devastating blows. Diving herons in the military swoop down from the trees to stab opponents and then fly back out of reach before their opponents can attack them.

• **Emerald Monkey (Resources •):** Haltans keep these small monkeys as pets, guards and working animals. While some live in troops that patrol the forests around border outposts and expensive monkeys with strikingly green fur decorate the shoulders of the wealthy, most of these creatures pick nuts and gather moss for arborists, spin thread and work simple looms for weavers, help woodcarvers polish finished items and otherwise perform a vast number of simple menial tasks. Emerald monkeys perform much of the lowest sorts of labor in the Haltan Republic. Although wild emerald monkeys can be somewhat aggressive, the domesticated breeds are as placid and tame as well-fed house cats. One important side affect of this breeding is that all tame emerald monkeys are san-beasts.

• **Flying Serpent (Resources ••):** Although they are most common in the Southeast, flying serpents live in almost all portions of the Far East. These poisonous arboreal snakes can easily climb up trees and branches, fold out their ribs to form crude wings and glide down to strike unsuspecting prey. They rarely grow much more than a yard long. However, they can often glide more than 100 yards — they will only descend 10 yards during a 100 yard glide and then land safely on another tree or the ground. The poison of these snakes is not particularly deadly, and so, the military rarely uses them. Some eccentric Haltans consider flying snakes to be interesting and exotic pets. A few performers use these creatures in their acts, but most people who own such creatures are status seekers who wish to have pets that are highly unusual and supposedly dangerous.

• **Forest Baboon (Resources ••):** Scholars familiar with the Haltan lands assume that some First Age sorcerer bred these creatures as servants. Ordinary baboons are only found in the South and Southeast and live almost exclusively on the ground. However, these moss-green creatures are well adapted to both life in the trees and to the cold of the Northeast. Although they normally walk and run on all fours, these baboons are able to stand and walk upright — they typically stand between four and five feet tall.

All of these baboons are somewhat more intelligent than members of their species found elsewhere — all domestic forest baboons are san-beasts. Forest baboons are one of the most common domestic animals in the Haltan lands. Although some people keep them as pets or as hunting companions, the vast majority perform jobs that are far more prosaic. These creatures harvest much of the fruits and nuts eaten by the Haltans as well as performing a large number of other simple menial tasks. Along with emerald monkeys and giant spiders, forest baboons form the backbone of the Haltan economy, and in most settlements, they make up almost a tenth of the population. These hard-working creatures perform most of the mindless and unrewarding jobs. They are well treated, and although unusually intelligent, there is no question that they are animals who lack higher ambitions. The position of ata-baboons in Halta is quite different. They are the only species of ata-beasts who have hands and can function without human aid. They are full citizens and have lives that are little different from those of their human neighbors.

• **Giant Bat (Resources ••):** These large semi-sentient bats have five-foot to seven-foot wingspans and are most active in the mornings and evenings. In addition to being extremely acrobatic flyers, these bats also possess

Playing Ata-Baboons

While playing intelligent animals can be quite difficult, ata-baboons can walk upright and use weapons and tools as well as any human character. As a result, they make a far better character choice for adventurous players than other kinds of intelligent animal. However, players and Storytellers should keep in mind that, outside of Halta, the character is still a large moss-green baboon that can speak and walk upright. Depending upon the exact circumstances, non-Haltans might see the character as a pet, a dangerous wild animal or even as a demon or a minor god.

Should anyone still wish to play such a creature, the character should be generated the same as any other heroic mortal. It cannot have a Strength and Dexterity below 2 and cannot have an Appearance higher than 2.

Also, the difficulty of all Social rolls, except Intimidation rolls, increase their difficulty by +2 whenever the character is dealing with anyone who is not both familiar and comfortable with intelligent talking animals. Ata-baboons can never become any form of Exalted. They can gain Wyld mutations, but a large talking baboon who also happens to be a mutant is even more likely to be killed on sight.

BEASTS

Creature	Physical Att Str/Dex/Sta	Willpower	Health Levels	Attack Spd/Acc/Dmg	Dodge/ Soak	Abilities
Burrow Lok	6/3/6	2	-0x2/-1x3/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/5/6L, Claw: 7/7/8L	5/5L/8B	Athletics 4, Awareness 4 (Smell +2), Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Stealth 4
Diving Heron	2/4/4	4	-0/-1/-2/ -2/-4/I	Beak Stab: 7/8/4L (with beak blade, 8/9/6L)	8/1L/4B	Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Stealth 3, Survival 3
Emerald Monkey	1/4/2	2	-0/-1/-2/I	Bite: 6/6/1L	7/0L/2B	Athletics 2 (Climbing +2), Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Craft (Agriculture) 1, Dodge 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2
Flying Serpent	1/4/2	2	-0/-1/-2/I	Bite: 7/7/1L*	7/0L/2B	Athletics 4, Awareness 2 (Smell +2), Dodge 3, Martial Arts 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3
Forest baboon	4/4/3	4	-0/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 6/6/5L, Thrown Rock: 6/6/6L (Rate 3, Range 10)	6/1L/3B	Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Craft (Agriculture) 1, Dodge 2, Stealth 1, Survival 3, Thrown 2
Giant Bat	2/4/3	3	-0/-1 x2/ -2/-4/I	Bite: 7/7/4L, Claw: 9/9/2L	7/1L/4B	Athletics 4 (Flying +2), Awareness 3 (Hearing +2), Brawl 3, Dodge 5, Stealth 3
Haltan Horse	4/3/5	5	-0x2/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 7/5/2L, Kick: 4/5/6B	5/1L/5B	Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Stealth 1

BEASTS (CONTINUED)

Creature	Physical Att Str/Dex/Sta	Willpower	Health Levels	Attack Spd/Acc/Dmg	Dodge/ Soak	Abilities
Hatra	1/4/2	3	-0/-1x2/ -2/-4/I	Bite: 7/7/3L	8/1L/2B	Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3
Slulura's Cat	3/5/3	3	-0/-1/-2/ -2/-4/I	Bite: 8/8/5L, Claw: 8/9/4L	7/1L/2B	Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Stealth 4, Survival 3
Steel Shadow	4/4/4	4	-0/-1x3/ -2x4/-4/I	Bite: 6/7/5L, Claw: 7/8/6L	6/12L/8B	Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Survival 3
Tree Maggot	4/1/6	2	-0/-1x2/ -2x3/-4/I	Bite: 3/4/5L	2/6L/10B	Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 1
Tree-Pard	5/4/4	5	-0/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 7/7/6L, Claw: 7/8/5L	6/2L/4B	Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Presence 2 (Intimidation +3), Stealth 3, Survival 3
Tree-Slayer	6/6/5	5	-0/-1x3/ -2x4/-4/I	Bite: 10/8/8L, Sting: 10/9/9L + poison	8/7L/14B	Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2

*Diff 2 Success 1L Failure 3L Duration/Penalty 4 hours/-2

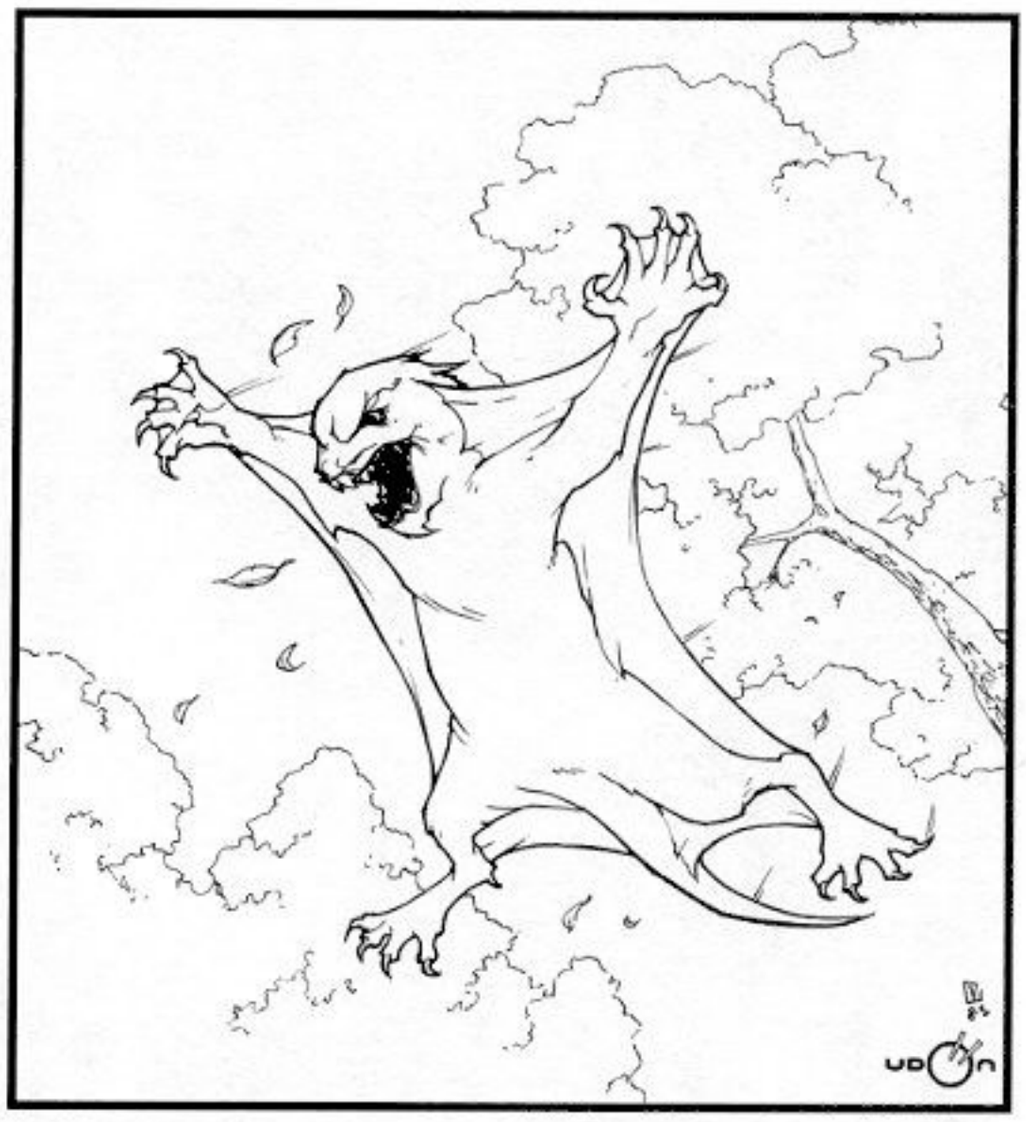
fully prehensile back feet with opposable thumbs and three fingered hands on their wings. Haltan animal trainers train these bats to carry messages and small packages or to gather fruit and hunt for and retrieve small animals. All of these bats are either san-bats or ata-bats.

• **Giant Spider (Resources • to ••):** These large arachnids are normally as intelligent as dogs. The Haltans use them as hunting animals, pack beasts and guards. The elderly and the infirm frequently use san-spiders to help them move safely around a Haltan city or town, and the military uses the spiders as living weapons. Able to move through the forest with great ease, these creatures are one of the more common sorts of domestic animal found in Halta. There are many breeds of spider, ranging from small swift spiders that are only three feet across to huge ones that are six or seven feet across. Also, animal breeders have created many breeds with brightly colored fur that grows in a wide variety of beautiful and unique patterns. The rarest and most expensive breed is Branches-in-Snow — all members of this breed are san-spiders and possess blue-white fur on their bodies, dark slate colored fur on their legs and many bright blue eyes. Some visitors

have noted that the Haltans treat giant wolf spiders much like dogs. San-spiders are capable of manipulating objects with a fair degree of ease, and Haltans frequently use them to fetch items or clean. These spiders also produce silk that is both as beautiful as ordinary silk and considerably stronger. Some ata-spiders are widely renowned weavers and tailors

Giant Spider Silk

The giant spiders of the East produce exceptionally tough silk. They normally use it to help them climb and to weave webs to help them catch their prey. However, ata-spiders can weave this silk into weave ropes, clothing, tapestries, or nets. All of these goods are both beautiful and exceptionally durable. Ropes made from it are exceedingly flexible and weigh half as much as normal rope, and nets made from spider silk add +1 to both bashing and lethal soak. Spider silk clothing is also exceedingly popular, both because the weaving is exquisite and because such cloth as an innate soak of 0B/1L. Add one dot to the cost of all goods made from giant spider silk.

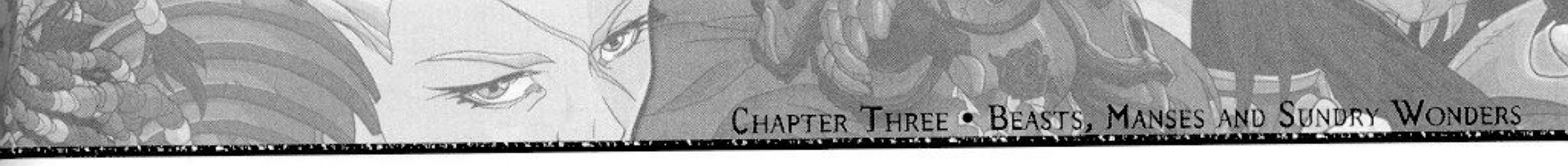


• **Haltan Horse (Resources •••):** These beasts only dwell on the fringes of the forests, beyond the boundaries of the Haltan treaty with the Fair Folk. Kept in special stables on the edges of the forest, the majority of them live in the stables and corrals of the trading city of Kajeth. However, hardier horses that are well adapted to cold live up in the city of Resplendent Peak. Used almost exclusively by Haltan diplomats, performers and traders who travel to other lands, all Haltan horses are san-beasts. The only exceptions are the rare ata-horses who travel beyond Haltan lands. Despite their jobs, ata-horses expect to be treated as equal partners with their riders. Regardless of their intelligence, Haltan horses are all lightly built, somewhat shaggy horses, with greenish silver coats, green manes and a fringe of long green fur around their hooves. Haltan travelers use them to both pull wagons and for riding. Ata-horses permit people they like and respect to ride them and are also willing to work as pack animals. However, few are willing to pull a wagon or a cart, as they regard harnesses and similar gear as degrading.

• **Hatra (Resources •• for a colony of 15):** Different varieties of these ravenous creatures live in both the deciduous forests of the East and in the jungles of the Southeast. The hatra of the Haltan redwood forests are the size of small dogs and have leathery gliding membranes between their legs that allow them to glide as well as a flying squirrel. Hatra are carnivorous, and while a single hatra is rarely dangerous, they live in packs of between 15 and 40 and can kill prey as large as full-grown oxen by descending upon them in a huge flock. Hatra are primarily nocturnal, but they are also active in the daytime in the perpetual twilight of the deep forest. Colonies roost in one of the many large, naturally hollow trees found in the redwood forest and will fly out and attack anything that comes nearby. The bones lying around can sometimes reveal the presence of hatra trees — it requires a successful difficulty 2 Perception + Awareness roll for characters to notice these bones. Tame hatra are rare, and san-hatra even more so. Wealthy paranoids use these creatures as bodyguards, and skilled animal handlers working in the animal corps of the Haltan military train packs of them to be swift and deadly strike teams. San-hatra can be incredibly loyal and effective guards as well as useful spies, saboteurs or hunting animals — there are no ata-hatra.

• **Slulura's Cat (Not Domesticated By Man):** The great faerie lord uses these cats when hunting, but they have another purpose as well. Each of his cats are specially bred to be able to smell cold-wrought iron and is trained to attack anyone carrying it. This detection requires a Perception + Awareness roll for the cat. The Storyteller might increase the difficulty if someone is carrying a very small amount of iron or if the scent is concealed by something else, such as heavy perfume or incense. The cats cannot pierce magical attempts to hide iron.

• **Steel Shadow (Not Domesticated):** These nightmarish creatures are native only to the Proving Ground and nest within the Dark Glass Lowlands (see p. 80). During the day, they sleep beneath the brittle sands. At night, when the earth in their home changes to sharp glass,



they take wing and hunt for fresh meat. Steel shadows resemble raitons but are larger — their wingspans can exceed eight feet. Their backs are jet black, and their underbellies are a sickly ashen color, but their eyes gleam like blue diamonds. At night, they are nearly invisible until they strike, and this fact, along with their nearly impenetrable hides, gave rise to their name. Steel shadows are actually less resistant to blunt weapons than to piercing attacks — a sword might fail to penetrate the creature's hide, while a club easily crushes its bones. Steel shadows' skins can be converted into extremely tough leather armor, providing +5L/+4B with no mobility penalty. Curing the hide properly is difficult, however, requiring an Intelligence + Craft (Tanning) roll at difficulty 5. If this roll fails, the creature's hide rots within a few days of skinning, falling apart and softening into useless, foul-smelling mush.

• **Strangler's Serpent (Resources ••):** Ordinary members of this species of deadly lizard (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 50) are used as guards and as attack beasts by both the paranoid and the military. Hunters who go after large and especially dangerous prey also sometimes use strangler's serpents as hunting animals. However, san-strangler's serpents are vastly more useful. Many of these bright, strong and unusually dexterous reptiles work in the military as the trusted companions of raiders and assassins. Others work as assistants to blacksmiths, carpenters and other skilled laborers who work in professions where sinuous dexterity and great strength are useful. Unlike in other lands, where ordinary strangler's serpents are only found in the company of assassins, in Haltan cities, san-strangler's serpents assist in a multitude of mundane jobs.

• **Strix (Resources •••):** Strix are the largest and most powerful domesticated flyers in Halta. Although both more expensive and less common than diving herons, these great owls carry most of the large packages between Haltan cities — they can carry packages that weigh as much as 50 pounds. In addition to allowing a rapid and thriving trade in medicines, spices and small luxury goods, messenger strix also have saved tens of thousands of lives, both because they can deliver messages with great speed and because they can carry large quantities of medicines to towns facing deadly plagues. All tame strix are san-beasts, and most of those that do not work as messengers serve in the military as either couriers or aerial attackers. Ata-strix are an especially common type of ata-beast.

• **Tree Maggot (Not Domesticated):** One of the most reviled creatures in Halta, tree maggots begin life as eggs about the size of an adult human's head. The creature that spawns them (see below) lays eggs in the highest branches of the widest trees it can find, one egg to a tree. When the eggs hatch, the tree maggots — at that point resembling pulpy, yellow-white grubs about four feet in length — chew through the tree's bark and into the trunk. The creatures burrow slowly, and the mucus-like substance on their skin darkens to resemble bark as it dries. Haltans who find tree maggots in this stage usually put them to torch or stab them with heated metal, rather than let the creatures grow. If not stopped, the tree maggots chew their way into the tree trunk and nest. As they consume the tree from the inside out, they grow to fill the trunk. Consuming an adult redwood can take decades, but once a tree maggot has disappeared into a tree, it is almost impossible to detect until it eats enough of the tree to kill it. The only way to do so is to bore a hole into the trunk of a suspected tree — if the tree "bleeds" a suspicious white sludge, it is hosting a tree maggot (at this point, a poison is administered to kill the foul beast). If the Haltans do not discover the creatures in time, the tree maggot burrows through the tree, leaving slime-coated tunnels. Haltan hunting parties occasionally venture into these tunnels to kill the creatures, but once the tree maggot reaches this stage, its size is difficult to determine. It is always big enough to be dangerous to humans, however (the Traits in the "Animals" box assume a tree maggot of this size).

When a tree maggot completely consumes a tree, it goes into hibernation. It first forms a cocoon around itself, fusing the bark of its host to its flesh. It then extends feelers from its head into the ground to anchor itself (by this point, it has already eaten the tree's roots). Then, it falls dormant and remains so for roughly one season per 10 feet in height of the host tree. During this time, no leaves grow on the tree, and any wood cut from the branches is brittle and useless (needless to say, any structures built using those branches as support is in danger). At the end of its hibernation period, the tree maggot's host begins to vibrate gently, and then, it bursts open with a resounding crack. Between five and fifteen tree-slayers rise up from the tree's carcass and fly off to hunt.

• **Tree-Pard (Resources ••):** Although some Haltans prefer giant wolf spiders, the tree-pard is the single most common animal companion for scouts, hunters, commandos and traders who travel to the Far East. These leopard-sized cats weigh almost as much as a person and are extremely well adapted for live in the trees. Several ata-tree-pards are decorated military heroes, and both normal and san-tree-pards are regarded with the same love that other humans reserve for extremely bright and reliable breeds of dogs.

• **Tree-Singer (Resources ••):** These lovely and magical beasts (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 51) are exquisite performers. Almost every Haltan who leaves the forest to perform animal shows carries at least one of these monkey-like creatures with them. Many wealthy Haltans own these lovely animals, and inns often have small troops that regularly perform for the patrons. Tree-singer shows are an extremely popular form of entertainment, and there is much debate about which inn or playhouse has the best troupe of tree-singers. Naturally, trainers

make certain that tame tree-singers do not to attack or devour their audience.

• **Tree-Slayer (Not Domesticated):** A fully formed tree-slayer resembles an ichneumon hunter but measures more than 20 feet in length. Fortunately, these creatures only live for a few weeks. During that time, they feed daily, cling to the sides of large trees to form and lay their eggs and move on. They feed on warm-blooded prey — burrow loks, wild boars and humans are favorite prey, but sometimes, a group of them will swarm a larger animal, such as a mammoth. The creatures have huge mandibles capable of rending their prey, but they prefer to attack with a poisoned sting. The poison of a tree-slayer is identical to coral snake venom (see **Exalted**, p. 243) in terms of mechanics. Anyone whose player fails the Stamina + Resistance roll is paralyzed for (10 - Stamina + Resistance) minutes, in addition to suffering the damage inflicted, during which time the tree-slayer drains the unfortunate creature of blood and leaves behind a desiccated corpse.

BEASTMEN

Unlike people in the vast majority of civilized nations, the Haltans actually tolerate the existence of beastmen in their land. While ordinary Haltans are uncomfortable around them, beastmen who agree to abide by Haltan law can freely live in their own villages and towns, and a few even reside in Chanta and other large Haltan cities. The majority of beastmen in Halta are hawkmen (see **Lunars**, p. 78) and snakemen (see **Castebook: Night**, p. 15). These creatures are fearsome warriors and dozens have earned great praise through heroism in battles against the Linowan. Those Haltan beastmen who do not live in isolated communities are typically shaman-priests. The Haltans worship both the Hawk God Yesryk and Seris, the Avatar of Serpents, and both gods regard beastmen who share their form as ideal priests. The rest of the Haltan pantheon also responds well to them, and so, most of the senior shaman-priests are beastmen.

Because of their inhuman appearance and their high place in the religious hierarchy, the Haltans view these creatures with almost as much awe and fear as they regard their gods. When a hawk or snake beastman officiates at a large religious service, people see them as living incarnations of their gods. However, the beastmen's interactions with other Haltans are extremely limited outside of such rituals. In Chanta and other large cities, beastmen either live in special districts that outsiders rarely enter or in special portions of the temples forbidden to non-beastmen. Similarly, while no law forbids them from doing so, if a beastman walks into an ordinary theater or tavern, the ordinary humans leave just as rapidly as if a god or one of the Fair Folk entered. In isolated communities far to the East, beastmen and ordinary Haltans occasionally marry, but their children are strange beings who will never find a place in society. The Haltans do not kill or drive out beastmen, but they are always considered both fearsome and inhuman. Also, some of the beastmen in the forest are either bandits or bands of degenerate savages who prey upon Haltan travelers and raid nearby settlements — even the Haltans understand that many beastmen are a deadly threat to civilized existence.

HAWKMEN

Description: Superbly adapted for life in the trees and covered in colorful and attractive feathers, many of these beastmen live in Halta as semi-civilized hunters in isolated communities. However, they also serve as shaman-priests who are especially close to Yesryk, the hawk-headed deity of raptors and hunting in trees (see p. 51). The Haltans fear them much like they fear their gods, but hawkmen in Halta never have to face angry mobs intent on their deaths. Outside of Halta, most hawkmen either live apart from ordinary humans, or in a few exceptional cases, they exist on the fringes of society and work as guides, hunters or trappers who live far from civilized communities.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

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

Abilities: Athletics 3 (Tail +2), Awareness 2 (Vision +2), Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Melee 2, Performance 2, Presence 1, Resistance 1, Socialize 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2 (Feathers +1), Thrown 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 1, Followers (Hawk, Mospid or Owl) 1, Influence 1, Resources 2

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Claw: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 3L Defense 6

Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 5L Defense 4

Short Spear: Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 6L Defense 5

Javelin (with spear thrower): Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 8L Rate 2 Range 60

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 2L/4B

Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: These creatures have the poxes claws, beak (fangs), eye color (+2 to all vision-related Perception rolls), feathers (1L/1B), limited gliding and tail (+2 to all Athletics rolls). They are usually extras.

SNAKEMEN

Description: The snakemen inhabit both the East and the South. While they have many communities of their own in the depths of the Southeastern jungles and the Far Eastern forests, snakemen are also the type of beastmen most commonly found in human cities and thrive in urban environments as much as they do in isolated jungle villages.

New Wyld Mutations

The Beastmen in this book have the following Wyld mutations, in addition to some outlined on page 280-281 of **Exalted**. All but one of these, limited gliding, originally appeared in **Exalted: The Lunars**, and they are reproduced here for the Storyteller's easy reference. Limited gliding is a pox-level mutation.

Limited Gliding: the character has light bones and feathers or small gliding membranes that permit gliding but not any form of flight. The character can slow her falls to the point that she takes no damage from falling, and she can triple the distance she can jump (both horizontally and vertically).

Sturdy: The individual's stature remains unchanged, but he becomes stocky and bulky with muscles and bone. He adds one dot to his Strength, gains lethal soak equal to one-half his Stamina (if he does not already possess lethal soak) and one -2 health level.

Toxin: The mutant's spittle is toxic. If he has natural weapons such as claws or talons, they may also be envenomed (allowing him to deliver the poison by claw attack). An average toxin will be Difficulty 2, Success 2L, Failure 4L, Duration/Penalty 2 hours/-3, but depending on the exact nature of the mutation, the poison may be fairly mild (such as snake venom) or extremely lethal (akin to that of an arrow frog — or worse). See "Withstanding Poison" on page 243 of the **Exalted** rulebook for more examples and details. Extremely powerful venoms should require a point of Willpower to generate.

Wall-Walking: The character's hands and feet are adapted to climbing. They may be equipped with short climbing claws, have small spurs that seek out gaps in rock and bark or grow phenomenally sticky. Whatever the modifications to the character's extremities, he can scale most surfaces nearly as quickly as he can run on the ground (Dexterity + 8 yards per turn at a full "run," half that if he wishes to take an action). Exceptionally slick or frictionless surfaces (some First Age buildings, glass sheets, ice) are harder to stick to and may require an Athletics + Dexterity roll to stay on, but the difficulty for even the slickest surfaces should not rise above 2.

Webbing: The character grows special glands that allow him to throw webbing. Depending on the nature of the mutation, he may spit the webbing out through his mouth or from a spinneret located elsewhere on his body. This spider silk is as strong as steel cable and can be sticky or not, as the character desires. The character may use a web line to rapidly descend from a height, can spin webs to trap opponents in (the webbing can be very sheer and hard to spot, requiring a Perception + Awareness roll to discover) or can launch it at an opponent (see chart below for attack stats). Targets that do not manage to dodge the webbing are wrapped up in it as if in a clinch. The webbing has a dice pool of 8 of 8 for purposes of determining if an entrapped character can escape. Webs have 8B/4L soak, and strands can take four health levels of damage before snapping. This ability costs one Willpower to activate for a scene.

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Minimums
Webbing	+1	entangle	1	10	D••

Elsewhere in the world, they are normally beggars or outcastes, although a few have made their way into in low-level criminal organizations. However, in Halta, many work as shaman-priests, and Seris greatly favors snakemen who are shaman-priests. Haltans fear the snakemen, but this fear is mixed with religious awe and not with the hatred and loathing found elsewhere.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3 (+2 Smell), Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Martial Arts 3, Melee 2, Presence 2, Resistance 1, Socialize 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (+2 Track by Scent)

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L Defense 4

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 2B Defense 6

Hook Swords: Speed 6 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 9

Knife: Speed 9 Accuracy 5 Damage 3L Defense 3

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 1L/4B

Willpower: 5 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: As one of the least variable types of beastmen, almost all of these creatures have the poxes fangs, snake scales (1L/1B), eye color (golden and slitted, can see in the dark), hair (none) and enhanced smell (+2 dice to smell-based Awareness and tracking rolls). They are usually extras.

Snakemen can become Exalted, but their lidless eyes and scaled skin make them innately unattractive. They can never have an Appearance higher than one. Snakemen are unusually long-lived, living twice as long as a normal human. However, they are very sensitive to cold and increase the difficulty to all Survival rolls in arctic cold and on all Endurance and Resistance rolls to withstand extreme cold by 1.

SPIDER BEASTMEN OF XAAL

Description: Almost unknown outside of Xaal, the spider beastmen are nightmarish creatures standing nearly eight feet tall. Most of them are bipedal but have three sets of arms — some, however, walk on four legs and use the other four arms for manipulation. Unlike natural spiders, they can and do run in packs to hunt and fight, although, in times of relative peace, they slip into their natural solitary (and predatory) habits.

While all spider beastmen in Halta trace their lineage back to the Last Hunter, they have seen the birth of enough successive generations to continue breeding and thriving even if the Last Hunter fell or left. The spider beastmen breed with each other and, occasionally, with human captives. Usually, spider beastwomen breed with human men, with the typical finale of arachnid couplings.

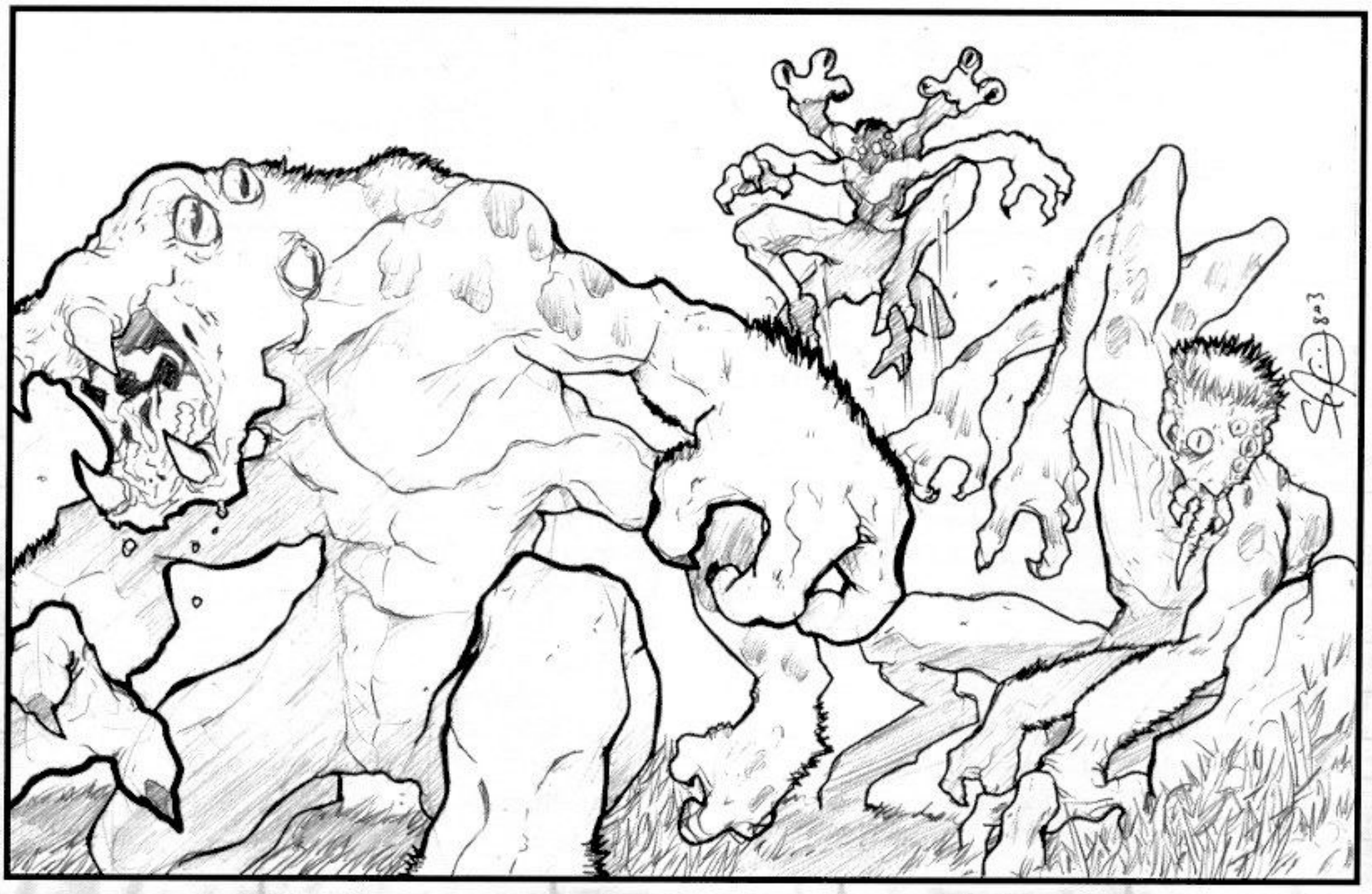
The beastmen feed on any warm-blooded prey large enough to catch their interest. Unlike the natural spiders that inhabit Xaal, the beastmen usually hunt for their prey, rather than waiting for it to simply blunder into a web.

Few human beings even know that the spider beastmen exist. The Last Hunter has made his wish for Xaal (or rather, it's current inhabitants) to remain secret from the human population of Halta clear to his children, and the spider beastmen therefore pursue any witnesses to their activities with fierce tenacity.

The Last Hunter keeps at least 10 of the finest warriors among his children at the Manse at all times, but he can summon others in moments by sending out spiders as messengers. The 20-mile circle surrounding Xaal is home to roughly 40 beastmen. They each hunt in their own small territory — although their cannibalistic tendencies aren't as pronounced as those of the spiders from which they were spawned, instinct dies hard, and battles for prey and hunting domain aren't altogether uncommon. While they're out on their own, the Last Hunter only asks two things of his children — that they bring him any human trespassers they find and that they remain ready to be at his side at a moment's notice. Outside of the territory of Xaal, the Lunar makes no claim on human prey, but he does require that his children abstain from raiding villages. His children occasionally attack lone Fair Folk hunters but aren't foolish enough to ambush fey hunting parties.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

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



Abilities: Athletics 3 (Climbing +3), Awareness 4 (Vibrations +2), Brawl 3 (Multiple Attacks +2), Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Resistance 3 (Poison +2), Stealth 3, Survival 3
Base Initiative: 9
Attack:
Bite: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 4L + poison
Claw: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L Defense 8
Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 3L/6B (Chitinous shell, 2L/3B)
Willpower: 5 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 1
Other Notes: The spider beastmen have the following Wyld mutations: claws, fangs, fur (bristly, spider-like hairs), large, multiple limbs, sturdy, toxin, wall-walking and webbing. Most also have at least two sets of eyes. The females of the species are slightly larger than the males. Older spider beastmen carry stronger poison than youths.

The Haltan Guard and Commandos

Since their fighting style is adapted for life high in the trees, the members of the Haltan Guard and the expertly trained Haltan commandos receive instruction that is rather different from that of conventional infantry and elite troops.

Guard

Description: Composed of conscripts doing national service, the Haltan Guard serve primarily as home defense forces. Though hardy and comparatively well-trained, they are not, for the most part, hardened troops. Most of their military experience consists of public-works projects, with occasional monster and bandit hunts for variety. They make a good showing against irregular opponents, but they are unskilled in mass maneuvers and in no way ready to take the field for magical warfare.
Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 3
Abilities: Athletics 2 (Moving in Trees +1), Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Endurance 1, Medicine 1, Melee 2 (Chopping Sword +1), Presence 1, Resistance 1, Socialize 1, Stealth 1, Survival 2, Thrown 2 (Spear Thrower +1)
Base Initiative: 5
Attack:
Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 2B Defense 5
Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 4 Damage 4B Defense 4
Chopping Sword: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L Defense 7
Knife: Speed 8 Accuracy 5 Damage 3L Defense 3
Spear: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 5L Defense 5
Javelin*: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 7L (Rate 2, Range 60)
* with spear thrower
Dodge Pool: 4/3 **Soak:** 5L/8B (Barkcloth buff jacket, 5L/5B, -1 mobility penalty)
Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 1
Other Notes: Usually an extra.

Haltan Commando

Description: The cream of the Haltan armed forces, these long-service professionals are drawn from the ranks of the Guard and given more extensive training in small-unit operations. Alone of the Haltan armed forces, the commandos are trained for offensive actions. Though skilled, the commandos are still forest fighters, battling in small groups, rather than in large formations. Likewise, though they have some training for fighting gods and demons, the commandos are still not especially suited to a highly magical battlefield.
Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4
Abilities: Athletics 3 (Moving in Trees +1), Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Endurance 2, Medicine 2, Melee 3, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Socialize 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2 (Animal Training +1), Thrown 3
Base Initiative: 6
Attack:
Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6
Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5
Chopping Sword: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 7L Defense 6
Knife: Speed 9 Accuracy 6 Damage 4L Defense 5
Spear: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L Defense 6
Boomerang: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 6L Rate 2 Range 20
Javelin*: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 8L Rate 2 Range 60
* with spear thrower
Dodge Pool: 5/4 **Soak:** 6L/11B (Ironwood reinforced buff jacket, 6L/7B, -1 mobility penalty)
Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 1
Other Notes: Often an extra. Many of the most experienced Haltan commandos have between one and three dots worth of gossamer armor or weapons.

Haltan Weapons

The Haltans never use bows. In the dense redwood forest, the line of sight is short enough that a bow's range is unnecessary, and the higher damage of many thrown weapons makes them far more tempting. The most common Haltan weapons are chopping swords, axes, short swords, short spears, javelins (used with spear throwers) and, occasionally, exotic weapons such as boomerangs,

blowguns, shuriken or sleep grenades (see **Castebook: Night**, pp. 76-78). All members of the Haltan Guard carry short spears, chopping swords, a quiver of javelins and a spear thrower.

The defenses mounted around all cities and military stations near the border include sailcutters to cut down masses of troops, light catapults loaded with gravel and, possibly, one or two heavy ballistae, (see **Savage Seas**, pp. 120-122). These defenses also include many well-trained tree-pards, giant wolf spiders and hatra packs. In addition, at least two or three Fair Folk protectors help to guard the largest and most fortified locations.

Spear Thrower: Spear throwers are specially carved thin, flat sticks that allow their user to throw javelins farther and with greater force. Normally the length of the thrower's forearm, the user balances the javelin on the spear thrower and throws normally, while retaining her grip on the spear thrower. Like javelins, spear throwers use the Thrown Ability. Spear throwers add +2 to the damage of javelins and double their range. 0.5 lbs., Cost: •

War Boomerang: These weapons are curved, flat pieces of sharpened metal that spin through the air with deadly force. While not normally designed to return, highly skilled characters can perform this impressive feat. Characters who have two or more dots in Thrown may make a second, reflexive Dexterity + Thrown roll if the boomerang misses its target. If this second roll succeeds, the boomerang curves around and lands within three yards of the thrower. If the thrower rolls three or more successes, then the boomerang actually returns to the thrower's hand. 0.5 lbs., Cost: •

Name	Acc.	Dmg.	Rate	Range
War Boomerang	+0	+3L	2	20

MANSES

As with all the lands of Creation, Halta is dotted with Demesnes, many of which are still capped with Manses. Most of these ruins are little different from other holy place in Creation, but some are uniquely Haltan. What follows is not an extensive list of Haltan Manses, but rather, a catalog of those that are especially tied to the beings detailed in this book. Storytellers should feel free to lace the landscape with whatever other Manses they desire.

THE PROVING GROUND

Rating: Contains several Demesnes of various levels

One of the most powerful Demesnes in Creation isn't under anyone's control. The Haltans regard the place as sacred, and it figures into the rites of passage of many Northern villages. The Lunars of the Northeast regard the Proving Ground as neutral territory, a good place to fight duels and resolve challenges. The Essence of the Proving Ground is free and wild, and this draws the Lunars to it.

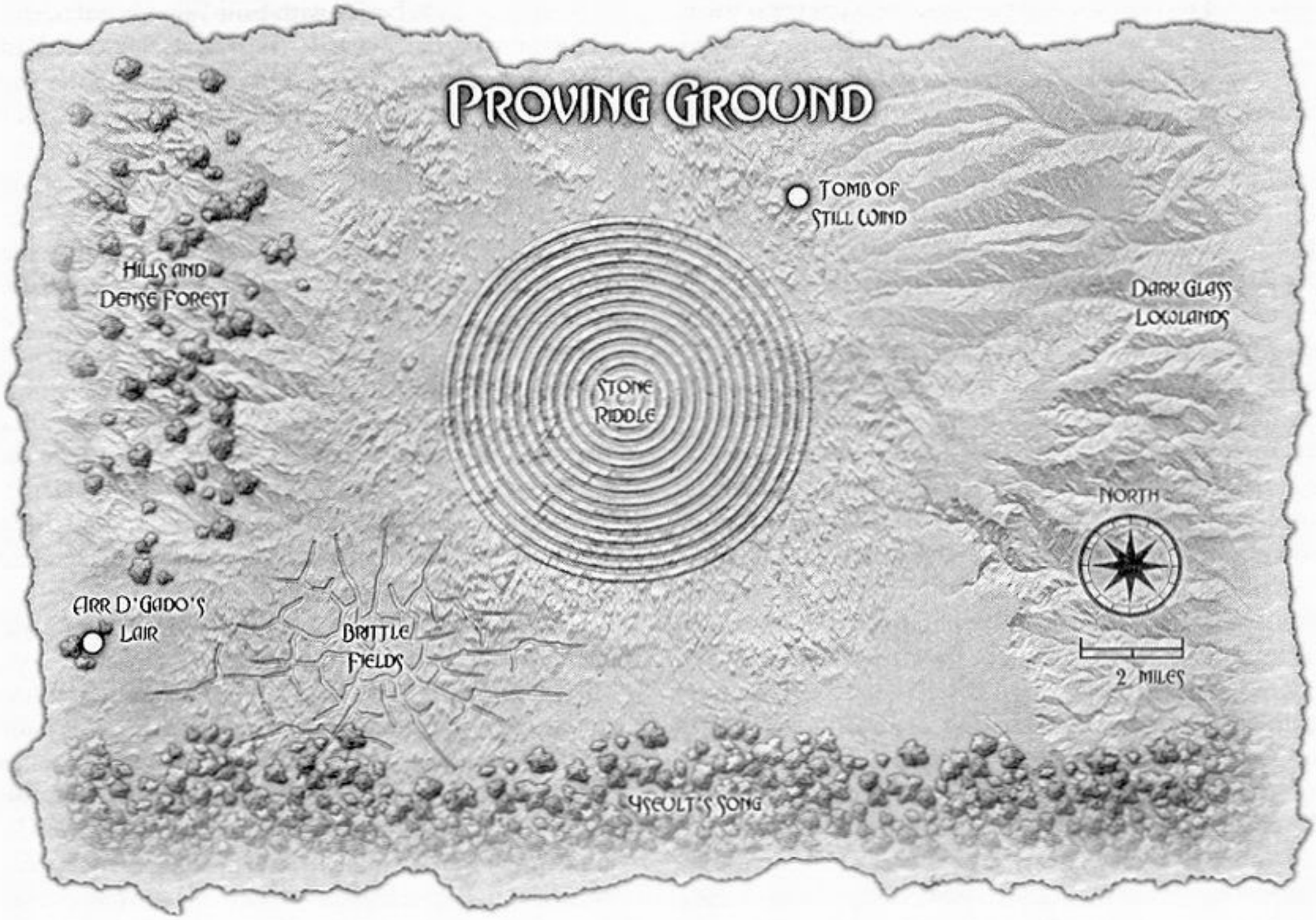
HISTORY

The Proving Ground has little recorded history attached to it. It has been shaped by thousands of years of water, wind and Essence. The Demesne, however, has grown more powerful in the last several centuries than it ever was before. This might explain why the area was never converted into a Manse during the First Age or in the centuries following. The reason for the sudden boost in the area's Essence is uncertain — Lunars tell tales of a major battle between the Fair Folk and the Lunar Exalted within the Proving Ground forever altering the Essence flows of the area but neither Realm nor Haltan histories mention any such event. Regardless, Lunar songlines leading to the Proving Ground tell the stories of skirmishes between the fey and Luna's Chosen, and Fair Folk, if asked, relate their own tales of the battle. In their recollection, the Lunars attacked the Proving Ground and tried to drive the Fair Folk back to the edges of Creation, but the battle ended in a stalemate. Whatever the truth of that battle, it happened roughly 500 years ago, and the Demesne in the heart of the Proving Ground has grown stronger ever since.

The villages in the northern forests of the Haltan Republic first started referring to the clearings and hills surrounding the Stone Riddle as the Proving Ground roughly 100 years ago. A young warrior named Green Jaguar challenged a chieftain for the right to wed the chieftain's daughter. The chieftain, as was customary, gave the young man a quest — "Solve the Stone Riddle." Green Jaguar ventured into the northern forests, climbed the stony hills and vanished for more than a year. When he returned, he spoke in private with the chieftain and, supposedly, told him the secret of the Stone Riddle. What exactly Green Jaguar learned is unknown (and widely considered to be allegorical anyway), but from that point on, the Proving Ground became a destination for young Haltans wishing to prove themselves to parents, lovers and even enemies.

The Lunars have a history with the area as well. Long before Green Jaguar braved the hills, a pack of Lunars from far to the north began a journey that ended at the Stone Riddle. Their journey, fraught with danger, betrayal and blood, is best observed by traveling their songline, which Lunars sometimes attempt to do as a sort of pilgrimage. The songline ends at the Stone Riddle — some say that first pack did not *solve* the Riddle, but created it as a means of blocking the Fair Folk from entering the inhabited forests.

The Fair Folk, for their parts, do not see the Proving Ground as any kind of gateway blocking their path from the Wyld places. Indeed, Fair Folk hunting parties in



service to Yseult occasionally roam the Proving Ground looking for foolish humans trying to win glory (these people have such *filling* dreams). Yseult's forces can't venture much farther south than the Proving Ground without being attacked by fey in service to Slulura (see p. 60). The last battle in the war between them was fought here. During that clash, in a blaze of beautiful chaos, a copse of trees turned to stone and twisted into the labyrinth of the Stone Riddle. Slulura's forces withdrew, but Yseult's never gained any of their ground back. Salvaging what pride they could, however, Yseult's followers refer to the Proving Ground as Yseult's Song, and regard it as a permanent monument to the power of the Wyld.

Description

The area collectively known as the Proving Ground stretches for miles and includes several small Demesnes in addition to the one at the Stone Riddle songline. Reaching the Proving Ground requires following the River of Tears north until its last bend before it ends and then traveling east for several days, or traveling due north from Chanta for roughly 800 miles and then heading west. The Proving Ground doesn't have firmly established borders, but most Haltans have heard enough legends to know when they've reached it.

The Proving Ground is most easily demarcated by a gradually "hardening" of the world — trees become tougher, branches more difficult to break, the ground stonier and less yielding. The animals living in the Proving Ground have adapted to these conditions — very few burrowing creatures dwell here, and the ones that do are massive exaggerations of their usual species. In particular, huge badgers push their way through the earth, and ape-like creatures with large, spade-like claws dig into the iron-hard trees to feast on the insects below the bark — insects that, given time, could bore holes in armor. No fruit grows in the Proving Ground, and plants that are normally edible often bring nothing but stomach pain and bouts of nausea to those who eat them. Pilgrims to the Proving Ground are well advised to bring their own supplies.

Once inside the Proving Ground, a traveler might encounter any one of a hundred dangers. The animal life is only one such potential challenge; see Chapter Two of **Creatures of the Wyld** for a listing of Eastern creatures that might prowl the Proving Ground — claw striders and komodo rats are both good possibilities. The land itself provides many possible trials for brave travelers. Below is a sampling of what the Proving Ground has to offer:

- **The Brittle Fields:** A small section of the Proving Ground is dead — so dead, in fact, that the ground itself is disappearing. The trees are hollow in the Brittle Fields and

collapse if too much weight or pressure is put upon them, potentially burying an unsuspecting traveler. The ground, likewise, can crumble away without warning, dropping the unfortunate into a shallow pit... or a lightless canyon. Somewhere in the Brittle Fields is the spawning pit that births Yseult's hobgoblins.

• **The Dark Glass Lowlands:** Travelers entering the Proving Ground from its eastern border might be tempted to take a small footpath around the steep hills that first greet them. This course of action would prove a mistake. That footpath leads into the Dark Glass Lowlands, a place from which few explorers return. Walking in the Lowlands feels like walking on burnt woods or crushed glass, but the ground looks simply like hard-packed earth... during the day. When sunlight no longer touches the Dark Glass Lowlands, the area becomes more dangerous. The ground become sharp enough to shred leather. Anyone knocked down immediately takes 4L damage (subject to soak and armor as usual) as the razor-sharp earth cuts into her flesh. As if this weren't enough, the Lowlands' native predators — hideous creatures called steel shadows (see p. 72) — unearth themselves and take wing at night, searching for prey.

• **The Lair of Arr-D'gado:** While many Lunar Exalts, over the years, have come to the Proving Ground for various reasons, only one chooses to live there. The Changing Moon Arr-D'gado is described in detail on page 53. His lair consists of a tight copse of trees in the south-western area of the Proving Ground. The center of this copse is a minor fire Demesne (level two), and the trees are perpetually hot to the touch, like stones left in a cookfire. Arr-D'gado is not hostile as a matter of principle but does not take kindly to anyone approaching his home, regard-less of intention. People approaching with respect and an offering, even something so minor as a fresh kill, earn a cordial audience with the Lunar.

• **The Tomb of Still Wind:** The Proving Ground was not always the hostile place it is today, and its borders have expanded considerably over the last few centuries. A Solar tomb rests on the far side of the Dark Glass Lowlands (meaning that anyone trying to reach the tomb would have to either travel through the Lowlands or the Stone Riddle in order to reach it). Still Wind was an Eclipse Caste atypical of her caste. She remained completely silent unless directly addressed, so as to never say anything rash or from spite. This attitude served her well in life — she was well respected, and her wisdom was sought on a variety of topics. When her time came to die, she requested to be buried far away from any major population, living or dead, and that the location of her burial be undisclosed. Her family interred her in the Northeast, under a massive boulder, never reasoning that, centuries in the future, that very boulder would serve as a marker in a Lunar songline.

What exactly is buried with Still Wind is unknown. Among the many fields in which she was an acknowledged expert, however, was medicine, and the rings she wore contained antidotes and medicines for many different types of poisons and ailments.

• **The Stone Riddle:** The center of the Proving Ground holds the most famous and most dangerous facet thereof — the Stone Riddle. The title refers both to the labyrinth of rocks, fallen trees and pits that surrounds the most powerful Demesne in the Proving Ground and to the Demesne itself.

Solving the Stone Riddle requires the skills of a savant, the patience of a monk and the cunning of a hunter. Simply navigating the forests at the outer edge of the Riddle is a task to which few can rise (Perception + Survival roll each day at difficulty 4; higher if anything happens during that day that disorients the character or forces her off her chosen path).

Haltans often think to beat the Riddle by moving from tree to tree, but unlike the sturdy-branched redwoods of their homes, the trees here have sharp bark and few branches. Anyone attempting to navigate the trees must succeed in a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 3 or suffer 3L from lacerations. Exalts, likewise, might think to traverse *over* the Riddle's many unpleasant surprises and dead ends. Taking this sort of "Gordian Knot" approach to the Riddle is by no means impermissible — the first Lunar to go over the maze rather than through it was lauded for his cunning. While other Lunars can take the approach, they gain no Cunning Renown for bypassing the Riddle. However, Glory and Mettle are not at all out of the question — traveling over the Riddle is not safe. Hybrocs and other creatures hunt the Riddle, and climbing over the great stones of the labyrinth puts the traveler without much in the way of cover.

The Riddle is not man-made. It was formed from years of Essence shaping the land around it. As such, while travelers have many times sworn that the trees and stones of the Riddle change to confound them, no human or divine intelligence governs the formation of the Riddle, though the features of the labyrinth do move occasionally due to the power of the Demesne.

At the center of the labyrinth lies the Stone Riddle Demesne. The Demesne consists of a circular expanse nearly 100 feet in diameter. In contrast to the rest of the Proving Ground, which is dotted by hills and stony outcroppings, the Demesne itself is quite flat. Essence pours into the area, however. If someone were to take possession of the Demesne and mine the area, he might find veins of orichalcum, jade or even moonsilver. Tiny rodents made completely of stone scurry across the ground, pausing only to nibble at the semi-precious gems scattered like pebbles across the expanse.

Travelers who solve the Stone Riddle find that the Demesne is not empty — a powerful elemental called Kola dwells here. He grants his favor to anyone who solves the Riddle, although he is more generous to those who solve it by patiently winding their way through the maze, rather than by jumping or climbing over it. He also demands, however, that the traveler never return to the Stone Riddle. Kola, like many earth elementals, knows much of the history of the world and will tell stories of past ages — including that of the Stone Riddle songline — if asked. Kola is described in detail on page 49.

- **Yseult's Song:** Approaching the Proving Ground from the south is perhaps the most dangerous method of ingress, as it takes travelers through the stone forest called Yseult's Song. The trees here are completely petrified, and Yseult's hobgoblins pass through these woods on their way to and from hunting in the Haltan forests. The fey queen is happy to receive Exalted or otherwise magical visitors, but humans are taken before her to be ravaged.

Mechanics

The Proving Ground contains a number of small elemental Demesnes. None have a rating higher than 2 except for one earth Demesne on the southern edge. This Demesne has a rating of 3 and is claimed by Yseult, who garrisons it with a few dozen hobgoblins. A few of the small Demesnes on the outskirts of the Proving Ground may have been converted into Manses at the Storyteller's discretion. The center of the Stone Riddle is a level five earth Demesne, meaning that any Charms or spells aligned to the element of earth receive one extra die if used there.

Xaal, the Manse of Spiders

Rating: Level Four Lunar Manse

The Haltans know something of beastmen, even if they are largely unaware of the factors required to birth these monstrosities. In some places, the Haltans have even seen the hawkmen gliding between the trees and gazed in wonder at their grace and nobility. Few Haltan have ever seen the inhabitants of Xaal, and fewer still have lived to bear witness.

History

Xaal was not originally constructed as a Lunar Manse. The Demesne originally manifested as a wide plain in the middle of the forest where cyclones and storms were common phenomena. The Dragon-Blooded constructed Xaal as an Air-aspected Manse in RY 369, one of the last projects sanctioned by Tepet before his death. The project involved transporting large amounts of marble overland, as well as making sure that the architects and savants brought in to oversee construction were well-protected. The Dragon-Blooded faced challenges, to be sure, from Fair Folk, spirits and other inhabitants of the forest, but they succeeded in constructing Xaal in RY 372 (Tepet himself, who had planned on dedicating the Manse upon its construction, vanished the year before).

Xaal was originally intended as a staging ground for Tepet troops and a way to extend the Realm's power further east. In the first goal, it succeeded fairly well. Perhaps, given a few more years, the Realm would have committed more resources to Xaal, and the Manse would have grown in importance. In RY 400, however, the Last Hunter came to Xaal.

The Last Hunter's personal history and information is given on page 55. His involvement with Xaal began when, while fleeing north from Mahalanka, he stumbled upon the magnificent Manse the Terrestrials had created. He lived in the forests surrounding the Manse for years, never revealing himself to the Dragon-Blooded. Once — and only once — he attacked and fed on one of the Dragon-Blooded's consorts and found himself tracked relentlessly until he led the hunting party to a tree-slayer (see p. 74). Realizing he could never defeat the Terrestrial Exalted by himself, he left and ventured to the edges of Creation and, there, began to breed a race of beastmen.

While there, the Last Hunter received a visit from Rain Deathflyer, one of the two Lunar patrons of the Kingdom of Halta. Rain explained to his fellow No Moon that he would like to see the Realm ousted from the area, but had no wish to see the Last Hunter destroy the Kingdom. The Last Hunter replied that he would claim the territory for 10 miles around Xaal, but no more, and that he would not allow his children to raid villages. Deathflyer agreed to these terms, expecting the Last Hunter to die trying to take the Manse, leaving he and Silver Python to finish the job of destroying the Dragon-Get. The Last Hunter, however, was no fool and built his army patiently and carefully.

The Last Hunter's personal totem is the spider. Web-spinning spiders do not normally work in packs, but the Last Hunter's time in Raksi's court had taught him many important lessons, such as the value of a strong army and the value of cannon fodder. It took him nearly a century, but he bred a race of spider beastmen and taught them to suppress their cannibalistic urges and fight together. When he felt he'd gathered enough soldiers, he brought his unholy children to Xaal.

The Last Hunter and his children arrived in Xaal in RY 540. They did not attack the Manse outright — for one thing, the Last Hunter knew that marching his small force on the deeply entrenched Dragon-Bloods was suicide, and for another, he didn't want to damage the Manse any more than was necessary. Instead, he and his children took up residence in the forests around Xaal and hunted. For months, they captured and devoured anyone who ventured far enough from Xaal and gradually tightened the web around the Tepet Manse. Soon, they had whittled

down Xaal's defenses enough to kill the rest. On a moonless night, the spider beastmen and their Lunar father scaled the columns of Xaal and descended upon the guards, slaying them before they could so much as gasp. The Last Hunter used his command of sorcery to decimate the remaining Dragon-Blooded, and his beastmen children made short work of the human defenders. The last to fall was Tepet Byau, a nephew of Tepet himself. Byau died under the Last Hunter's fangs, and the Lunar drank deep of his blood and then opened the Manse to his children and to all spiders. He then began the long process of changing the Manse to reflect his own Essence.

The Last Hunter has rarely left Xaal in the three centuries since conquering it. The Realm knows that Xaal fell to hostile forces from beyond Creation but has only speculative stories, brought back by scouts and traders, to gauge what really happened in Xaal. The spider sits in the center of his web and broods about his destiny... someday, he will gather his forces and return to Mahalanka.

DESCRIPTION

Xaal sits on what was once a large clearing in the middle of the forest. Constructed almost entirely of marble, the Manse contains no rooms or enclosed spaces (the former residents built wooden dwellings, but the spider beastmen tore them down within days of taking the city). A huge, rectangular expanse of marble serves as the foundation, dotted with towering stone columns and blocks. At the center of the foundation sits the Last Hunter's throne, constructed of marble and reworked jade and embellished with moonsilver. The Last Hunter decreed long ago that any humans caught within the boundaries of Xaal (which extend, by his reasoning, for roughly 10 miles out in all directions from the Manse) are to be brought to him.

The Last Hunter crushed the original Hearthstone of Xaal when he slew Tepet Byau. He wears the current one around his waist (see "Mechanics," below). The formation-point of the Hearthstone is unreachable to most — it lies beneath the Manse in an underground chamber. Use of a Charm such as All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight detects strong magic emanating from the ground, seeping up through the marble. The Last Hunter reaches it by changing into a tiny spider and crawling through cracks in the marble. The only other

way to reach it would be to tunnel from outside the Manse (the vibrations of such an act would no doubt alert every spider beastman in the area, in addition to the Last Hunter himself) or to smash through the marble floor of the Manse. Smashing through the floor would require inflicting at least 100 health levels of damage to it (it has soak 18B/12L). This would also have the effect of sending debris crashing down on the chamber below. Tunneling through the marble would take days and enough workers to chip away at the marble and remove the debris. The rewards of doing so would be great, however. The Last Hunter is an accomplished sorcerer, and many of his magical writings can be found in the chamber.

The marble columns and blocks of Xaal are almost entirely covered in webs. Spiders of all sizes lurk in the Manse, feeding on each other and on any animal unlucky or foolish enough to come close. The number of spiders decreases as one approaches the throne — the Last Hunter is as much a cannibal as any of his "subjects" and has no compunction about eating spiders. Only his beastmen children may approach with impunity.

Beneath the webs, the marble of the Manse is carved with ancient glyphs. Most were originally favoring the Elemental Dragon of Air, but these have been defaced over the course of the Last Hunter's rule. Now, the carvings are exultations to Luna and to the Last Hunter. The throne — kept completely clear of webs — tells the story of the Last Hunter's life (from his own perspective —Raksi might have some different perspectives on the matter). This story is related in his description on page 55.

Xaal, according the Last Hunter, extends outward in a circle for approximately 10 miles in all directions from the Manse proper. Most of the beastmen live and hunt within that territory, meaning that the area has grown steadily devoid of life over the last few centuries. The nearest Haltan settlement is a small village called Black Branches, watched over by a minor god who hates and fears the Last Hunter (see p. 50). The Last Hunter has, to date, forbidden his children from raiding the village outright, but he does allow them to pick off any villager who ventures into Xaal's territory. Beyond that, the beastmen make do with the occasional lost trade caravan and, sometimes, war with the Fair Folk.

Mechanics

Xaal is a level four Manse capping a level four Demesne. It is aspected toward Lunar Essence, meaning that any Lunar Charms or spells receive a one-die bonus when cast within the Manse.

Yesryk's Aerie

Rating: Level Two Wood Manse

To the southeast of Chanta, in the territory protected by the hawk beastmen (see p. 74), lies the Manse and home of Yesryk the Hawk God. The Manse caps a minor Demesne and is nowhere near as awesome as the Proving Ground or as sinister as Xaal, but it serves as home to a god.

The Hearthstone of Xaal

Type: Lunar

Trigger: Tasting Blood

The Hearthstone is an egg-shaped, blood red crystal. It allows the user to draw upon the strength of an enemy. Upon tasting the blood of an enemy, the user may use the last Charm that the victim used. For instance, if the Last Hunter feeds upon a Solar Exalt who tried (unsuccessfully) to dodge the attack using Shadow Over Water, the Last Hunter can then use Shadow Over Water once. The wearer may "stack" a number of uses of the Hearthstone equal to his permanent Essence, absorbing Charms and saving them for when they might be most useful. Charms absorbed through use of this Hearthstone ignore prerequisite Charms but not prerequisite Abilities and Essence (meaning to absorb Shadow Over Water, the user does not need to know Reed in the Wind, but must have Dodge 3 and Essence 1). Combos cannot be absorbed.

History

The beastmen who built it long ago had no means of obtaining other materials and, so, fashioned the Manse out of wood. Old legends among the hawkmen state that their Lunar progenitor helped build the Manse, but if this is true, Yesryk has never confirmed it. It is true, however, that a significant songline ends (or perhaps begins) not three hours' walk from the Manse. The hawkmen speak of an ancient prophecy stating that their father will return along that songline and claim the Manse for himself. Some of the beastmen consider this notion abhorrent (as would Yesryk's human followers, were they to hear of it).

The Manse has stayed sturdy and in place for many years, resting as it does deep enough in the forest and high enough in the trees that no invaders from either the Realm or outside of Creation have successfully assaulted it.

Description

Yesryk's Manse is built on an elemental Demesne of wood. Four huge trees make up the main body of the Manse. At the forest floor, the trees are far enough apart that an entire wagon could fit in between them, but as they ascend they grow closer together until all four trunks meet roughly 50 feet about the ground. At the point where the trunks meet, a large hollow is carved into the wood. Inside this hollow is the formation-point of the Manse's Hearthstone (see sidebar).

The trees continue growing together for an additional 60 feet after the hollow, eventually diverging into four distinct trunks, each with immense branches. These branches are home to the bravest and strongest hawkmen warriors. Each season, Yesryk invites 10 such beastmen to reside in his Manse. These warriors guard it until the seasons change again.

Strong updrafts blow continuously around the trees (the effect of excess Essence leaking from the Demesne). A hawkman can easily ride these updrafts from the forest floor straight to the branches of the Manse, and any creature capable of gliding or flight receives a two-die bonus to any aerial action while within 200 feet of the Manse.

SOOT-STONE

Type: Wood
Trigger: Touch

The Hearthstone of Yesryk's Aerie is smoke-colored gem about the size of a hawk's egg. Yesryk does not carry it himself, preferring to leave it in the hollow of his Manse (since that's where he'd likely need to use it, anyway). He admonishes the hawkmen guardians of the Aerie not to touch the Soot-Stone. They, of course, revere Yesryk enough that they need no such reminder.

The wielder of the Soot-Stone may brush an enemy's flesh with the gem and concentrate briefly. That enemy is then marked for a period equal to (user's Willpower rating) months. The mark manifests physically as a black smudge on the enemy's flesh and can be concealed from mundane sight simply by covering it. However, the marked individual is vulnerable to any Charms that track Essence, including Measure the Wind, whether or not such Charms would normally work on him. Also, the Hearthstone's bearer receives two automatic successes on any attempt to track the marked individual, whether using a Charm or mundane means.

Yesryk the Hawk God returns to his Manse each night after hunting. He sleeps in the hollow in the main trunk. While the Hawk God himself wouldn't necessarily be opposed to visitors, provided they approached with the proper amount of respect and deference, the hawkmen who live in the area consider any human attempting to reach the Manse guilty of blasphemy and attack. An Exalt might have more luck, of course, but as Yesryk isn't worshiped outside of Halta, very few Exalts even know of his existence, let alone his Manse. A geomantic survey would detect the Manse normally.

MECHANICS

Yesryk's Aerie is a level two Manse capping a level three Demesne. As it is aspected toward wood, all Charms or spells aligned with this element gain an additional die when used within the Manse.

SOLAR TOMBS

The Kingdom of Halta does not have any of the more common sort of Solar tombs — the ones with powerful magical defenses erected immediately after the Usurpation to contain the bodies of murdered Solar Exalted. However, that doesn't mean the Solars didn't lay their hand on the land where Halta stands today. Indeed, within the precincts of the Kingdom lie at least two currently forgotten Solar resting places — and possibly others.

THE TOMB OF STARLESS SKY

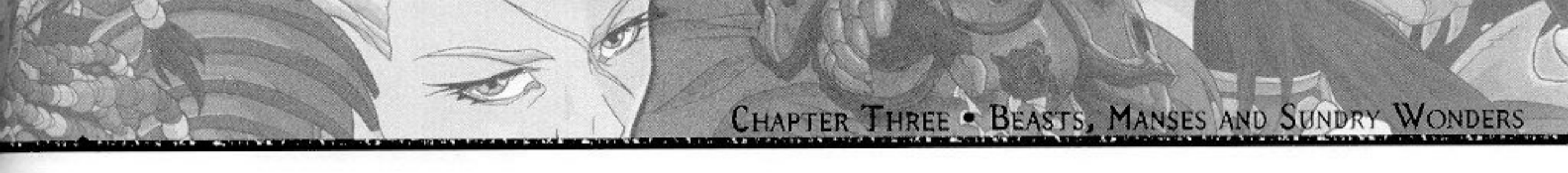
The forests have their civilizations and have for many years. Even in the First Age, before the Kingdom of Halta arose, people lived in and around the trees. From these people, Solar Exalted sometimes rose, and when they came to die, they often instructed their bodies be given to the earth to nourish the trees.

HISTORY

One of those Solars was a Night Caste called Starless Sky. No one who saw her during the day, not even members of her own Circle, could believe that she was a Hidden Sun, however. Starless Sky was one of the most compassionate individuals to ever walk Creation, willing to shoulder any burden to help her fellows — so long as the sun shone. At night, she changed completely. By night, Starless Sky had no scruples, no moral limits and no inhibitions. She would kill, torture or steal as necessary to enforce the will of the Deliberative, and she insisted on acting alone. When the Zenith of her Circle asked her about her connection to a particularly vicious assassination the night before, Starless Sky simply responded, "Who knows what happens when the sun doesn't see?"

Starless Sky did not survive to see the Usurpation. Her body turned up one night floating down the River of Tears. No revenge was ever taken for her death, for her Circle had no idea who might be responsible. "Not even the sun saw you die," the Zenith remarked at her burial.

That burial occurred somewhere in the Eastern forest, but only the other four members of her Circle knew exactly where. They planted a tree over her grave, and surely that tree has grown into one of the mightiest in the forest by now (if indeed it still stands). According to her instructions, delivered by messenger to her Circle the day after her death, her twin short swords were buried with her, wrapped in linen. The messenger also delivered a small sack full of odd-shaped pieces of iron. Starless Sky's Circle



recognized the magic of these objects but, out of respect for her desires, buried them with their compatriot. They each said a blessing over her grave and then went on to perform great deeds, but they never accepted another Night Caste. Starless Sky was still with them, they claimed.

Little was ever written about Starless Sky, and what little survives to the modern day paints her as a demon and a murderer. Even so, a savant reading these histories might well be puzzled on two points. First, although Starless Sky was murdered, her killers were never brought to justice or even identified, and second, the location of her tomb is never committed to record. Starless Sky died as she lived — a true Concealing Shadow.

Description

The exact location of the Tomb of Starless Sky is left to the discretion of the Storyteller. Wherever it lies, however, it is unlikely to be discovered casually — her body was buried under a young tree that now could house a small village. The Storyteller might consider the following options for the tomb:

• The tomb is still undiscovered and rests in a remote corner of the Kingdom of Halta. In this case, the tomb might contain, in addition to the Cold Wind Knives and the Iron Puzzle Box (see pp. 93-94), clues and prophecy relating to the surrounding area and act as a sort of "treasure chest" for clever characters.

• The tree growing over the tomb now forms the heart of a Haltan village. Starless Sky's Essence might well Exalt one of the inhabitants, making her a new Solar. For an interesting twist, consider what might happen if this ruthless and dedicated Night Caste's Essence was twisted into an Abyssal Exalt, perhaps serving the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears or the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils. Consider too who else dwells in the village — gods? Dragon-Blooded? What if they discover the tomb?

• The tomb long ago spilled its secrets to a Lunar Exalt, who now carries the Cold Wind Knives. While he understands well enough what these artifacts are and how they function, the Iron Puzzle Box is quite beyond him. He wears the fragments of the artifact in his mane like trophies but has no concept of the power he could wield if he assembled them, and he has no interest in sharing them with curious No Moons.

• The Redwood Mantis (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 49) or some other force of nature knocks down the tree under which Starless Sky was buried. Her lower soul disturbed, she begins wandering at night, searching for victims. When she sees people, her assassin's instincts take over. People in nearby villages begin to die horrible deaths in the night, and no matter the defenses they erect, the dawn always finds someone else dead.

• The Iron Puzzle Box began to reassemble itself shortly after Starless Sky's death. After so many centuries, it is almost complete, but even after the last piece is in place, it needs a being of power to activate it. That means that it must be found. To that end, the area surrounding the tomb becomes especially enticing to whatever type of Exalted are closest by, taking on the characteristics of an appropriately aspected Demesne.

The Resting Place of Vengeful Thunder

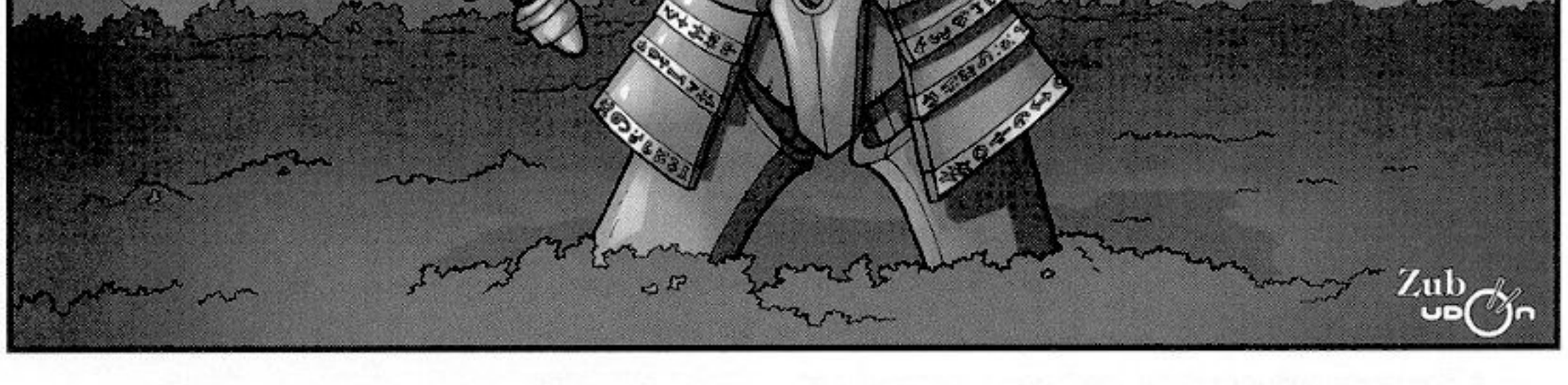
A village in the central Haltan Republic lies dying, as the Essence of the local spirits and the life of its very people is seemingly drawn out day by day. The shaman of the village sleeps fitfully, as dreams of an impossible path plague her. And the hunters of the village return each day with less and less game, reporting that the animals are moving on or simply dying. The villagers debate sending messengers to Chanta to ask for help, fearing that a new shadowland might be emerging beneath their home.

The truth is slightly different, but it may well spell the destruction of the village in any case. The village of Trinu is constructed near the resting place of a First Age wonder, a warstrider called Vengeful Thunder. Now, Vengeful Thunder is awake for the first time in millennia and wishes to reactivate and fulfill the last command his former master gave him.

History

In the forgotten past of the First Age, a Twilight craftsman born along the Eastern coast named Telen Dashua found his skills in considerable demand. Warstriders, the towering suits of armor built for battle with only the most formidable of foes, were difficult to design and assemble, but the Twilight found he had a knack for it. He was only one man, however, and his warstriders took years to construct and, as a result, obtaining his services required great expense or great sacrifice (sometimes both). Few modern historians know that Dashua existed at all, and fewer still could ever ferret out such details as his name or place of birth. Most such historians are more concerned with the final resting places of his creations, anyway.

Some of the warstriders he designed have been recovered by the Dragon-Blooded and used to varying effect against the Realm's enemies. The most powerful of the Twilight's creations, however, have eluded their notice. This was deliberate on the part of Twilight. He made sure that only Solar Exalts used his greatest works (no matter how much the other Exalted might have complained). When the Dragon-Blooded rose up against the Solars, these warstriders were either destroyed or secreted away beyond Creation. One of them, called Vengeful Thunder, remained in use well into the Usurpation War but then disappeared in battle far to the east. The savants of the



time simply assumed the armor had been destroyed along with its owner and never bothered to look for it.

What actually happened, however, was somewhat more complex. Vengeful Thunder's owner was a Dawn Caste named Mal Desirus, a close friend of the Twilight who built the warstrider. The Twilight was an early victim of the Dragon-Blooded's treachery, but Mal was miles from his friend and could do nothing to save him. Swearing that he would sooner curse the name of the Unconquered Sun than present an easy target for the Terrestrials, he stormed east with Vengeful Thunder, slaying anyone who dared cross his path. The way was not easy. He fought his way through entire armies, and by the time he reached the forests, he was tired, and his Essence was nearly spent. He poured his remaining strength into his warstrider, trying to reach the city of Goldwood (see p. 13). At that moment, he found he had marched straight into a trap. One well-placed arrow from a Dragon-Blooded's bow, guided by the Sidereal who had arranged the ambush, slew Desirus without even touching Vengeful Thunder.

The armor, imbued by the Twilight's magic and the Solar bound within it with a limited sense of self and of duty (see sidebar), brought its master further north, away from his enemies, but it could do nothing to save the Dawn Caste. Dying, Mal Desirus gave Vengeful Thunder one final command:

Take revenge upon the Terrestrials and all who stand with them.

So saying, the mighty warrior died. Vengeful Thunder, acting on previous orders, destroyed the body that Mal's soul might rest and then went about its mission. The first creature it met, however, was not a Dragon-Blooded, but a behemoth. Their battle altered the very landscape, uprooting trees and digging vast furrows in the ground, the Essence bleeding from the warstrider fusing the soil into rock around them. While the warstrider slew the beast, the behemoth managed to crack Vengeful Thunder's armor. Vengeful Thunder, still yearning to follow Mal's order of slaughter, fell dormant and remained there for centuries.

Recently, however, the spirit within the warstrider awoke and began gathering Essence in an attempt to find its master. While this may well work, it is devastating the nearby forest and the village of Trinu. At first, weaker animals such as insects and small birds died. In the weeks that followed, the trees surrounding the warstrider's tomb grew sickly and gray, the spirits inside crying out for aid. The villagers of Trinu began to feel sluggish, no matter how much they rested, and larger animals fled the area or died. Now, the Essence drain has reached its apex — any free Essence in the area is drawn down to the warstrider. Soon, it will have enough power to enact its bold plan.

Vengeful Thunder, Royal Warstrider

Nature: Architect
Attributes: Strength 17, Dexterity 5, Stamina 12, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4
Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 2, Valor 5
Abilities: Athletics 6, Awareness 5 (Tracking +2), Brawl 6, Craft (Warstriders) 3, Dodge 5, Endurance 10 (Long Marches +2), Linguistics 1 (Native: Old Realm; Riverspeak), Lore 4, Melee 6 (Daiklave +3), Occult 3 (Sensing Magic +2), Presence 4, Resistance 6, Thrown 5
Backgrounds: Artifact 3
Charms: Cunning Thief, Dreamscape, Dreamspeak, Essence Sink (see below), Hurry Home, Instill Obedience, Measure the Wind, Memory Mirror*, Possession*, Principle of Motion, Sense Domain, Stoke the Flame, Summoning the Loyal Steel, Touch of Grace*, Uncanny Prowess, Words of Power
Base Initiative: 9
Attack:
Punch: Speed 12 Accuracy 11 Damage 30L Defense 11
Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 10 Damage 22L Defense 10
Orichalcum Warstrider Daiklave (Furious Lightning): Speed 10 Accuracy 16 Damage 28L Defense 16
Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 24L/24B (Warstrider armor, 24L/24B, -2 mobility penalty, fatigue value 2)
Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** Not Applicable
Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 80 (12 Committed)
Other Notes: Charms marked with an * can only be used to affect individuals wearing this armor. As the spirit of a warstrider, Vengeful Thunder is considered permanently materialized and can never be killed unless the armor is completely destroyed. However, unless Vengeful Thunder has an Exalted pilot, all dice penalties for continued operation and damage accrue immediately (see **The Book of Three Circles**, p. 123). Such penalties affect all dice pools, although they cannot reduce non-Physical pools below the spirit's Essence. The warstrider can repair minor wear through rest, with every eight hours of immobility acting as one hour of maintenance. However, the spirit cannot repair actual damage without the attention of a smith with access to the necessary raw materials. In its current damaged state, Vengeful Thunder needs well over 100 hours of repair and suffers complete immobility. It only has four dice for most of the few dice pools it may need.

In addition to the normal qualities of a warstrider, Vengeful Thunder also possesses the capability to draw Essence from its immediate area. This "Essence Sink" Charm is unique to Vengeful Thunder. Because Mal Desirus was prone to overextending himself in battle, the warstrider's creator added this function so that Vengeful Thunder could draw enough energy from its surroundings to reach safety in the event of an emergency. Vengeful Thunder draws 20 Essence per day from its surroundings, resulting in the area dying little by little. Essence obtained in this manner is unavailable for Vengeful Thunder's personal use (except for self-defense, see below) and kept separate from its own pool.

The warstrider does not have access to its own Essence pool until it undergoes repair. The area drained increases outward from the warstrider by roughly 10 feet for every day that it maintains the Essence drain (which is why the villagers didn't notice the problem until it was advanced enough to affect them). The system effects of the drain on the area (and any Exalt within the area) are described under Mechanics (see p. 89).

Parameters

- Vengeful Thunder may only be attuned and operated by a Dawn Caste. Another Solar attempting to use the warstrider is met with a warning, while other types of Exalted are simply ignored. Any Dragon-Blooded foolish enough to attempt to don Vengeful Thunder is likely to perish in the attempt; the warstrider discharges a reserve of Essence delivering 30L damage to the hapless Exalt. This attack cannot be dodged or parried and is absorbed only by natural soak. This charge can be emitted for as long as 20 turns to discourage persistent thieves. A Dusk Caste Abyssal *might* be able to attune Vengeful Thunder, given the weakened and confused state of the warstrider's spirit, but this would require the Dusk's player to succeed in a difficulty 4 Wits + Occult roll when the character attunes the armor.
- The warstrider still works to fulfill its last order — destroy all Dragon-Blooded and their allies. While any Dawn Caste could theoretically activate Vengeful Thunder, *only* its owner (Mal Desirus) or its creator — or more precisely, a current incarnation thereof — could alter that command.
- Vengeful Thunder cares nothing for ordinary humans, animals or spirits. While it realizes that its Essence draining is having an effect on the surrounding area, it isn't concerned.

DESCRIPTION

Vengeful Thunder's battle with the behemoth, as stated, rent the land and forests greatly. Over the centuries, the forest has grown around the site of their battle and buried both the monster's skeleton and the dormant warstrider. Currently, searching for the warstrider (or more likely, searching for whatever is draining Essence from the area) yields a small stream leading to a crevice. Following that stream below ground would require some fairly extensive excavation of the forest floor (at least 40 man-hours of work with mortal tools).

Once below ground, the crevice opens up into a small cavern, and the stream drops away into a waterfall. Perceptive characters notice that the earth of the cavern feels more like petrified bone than mud and rock. This is because much of the cavern is in fact the body of the behemoth that Vengeful Thunder battled. Jagged chunks of its bones jut from the walls in places and its veins create a pattern of blues and violets in the rock of the cavern. Following the cavern eventually leads characters to a chamber scattered with stone and pieces of jade — fragments of the warstrider's armor. In the far corner, completely encased in roots, rock and mud, lies Vengeful Thunder itself.

Speaking with Vengeful Thunder requires a Charisma + Presence roll at difficulty 3, although if a Dawn Caste shows her anima banner in the chamber, the warstrider initiates conversation. Cutting the warstrider loose and transporting it to the surface (which would be required if any maintenance is to take place) is a truly herculean undertaking. However, herculean does not mean impossible, especially for a Solar Circle (other types of Exalted might be better served dismantling it and selling it for scrap, but that's not immediately apparent). Vengeful Thunder is weak and confused. If questioned about the Essence drain, it simply states that it intends to "catch the lightning" (see sidebar). It cannot move in this state, although it can discharge its collected Essence as an attack (dice pool of 7 to hit, base damage 4L) on anyone within the chamber, should it feel threatened or should a Dragon-Blooded make his nature obvious. Each attack of this type reduces its collected Essence pool by 5 motes.

CATCHING THE LIGHTNING

What Vengeful Thunder intends to do is likely an affront against the Unconquered Sun and the Celestial Hierarchy. It believes that it can summon its former owner, Mal Desirus, and force a nearby human to Exalt with his Solar Essence. Granted, this would only actually work if the person carrying Mal's Essence died at precisely the right moment, and the resulting Exalt wouldn't carry many of Mal's memories, but Vengeful Thunder isn't aware of those potential setbacks. The warstrider has currently collected roughly 300 motes of Essence from its surroundings, and it intends to attempt to "catch the lightning" when it reaches 500 motes (assuming that it doesn't have to expend any motes to defend itself in the meantime). As stated, the warstrider drains 20 Essence from the surrounding land per day.

As if it needed to be said, most warstriders, remarkable though they may be, are not capable of this kind of planning, let alone the kind of Essence manipulation required to attract the Essence of a Solar. Telen Dashua, the Twilight who created Vengeful Thunder, was a true genius and probably wasn't even aware of what his creation was truly capable of doing. The bond shared between Dashua and Mal and between Mal and Vengeful Thunder is what makes this extraordinary feat even remotely conceivable.

So, with all that said, would it actually work? The answer, of course, depends on the needs of the Storyteller's series. Some possibilities include:

• If the troupe includes a Dawn, the Storyteller may rule that she carries the memories of Mal Desirus already. If this is the case (or if Mal is incarnate in another Solar), Vengeful Thunder's attempt to "catch the lightning" fails spectacularly. The result might be to devastate the area, warping it in much the same way as Essence leakage from a powerful Demesne (see **The Book of Three Circles**).

• The attempt to catch the lightning results in one of the villagers Exalting, perhaps even in the manner than Vengeful Thunder intends. The villager becomes a Solar Exalt, perhaps even carrying the Essence of Mal Desirus. Another option, however, is that Vengeful Thunder triggers an Exaltation from a corrupt Solar Essence — meaning that the Exaltation creates an Abyssal. The Abyssal, of course, isn't under the control of a Deathlord initially but might (if a Dusk Caste) be able to activate Vengeful Thunder.

• The Sidereals might well see Vengeful Thunder's attempt coming and attempt to stop or redirect it. Wrangling an Essence flow of that magnitude, of course, would require more expertise than even most Celestial sorcerers can command, so alternate means — such as capturing a Twilight — might become necessary.

The area surrounding Vengeful Thunder's chamber, as described earlier, is slowly losing its vitality as the warstrider drains away the ambient Essence. The nearest village, Trinu, is small, home to barely 100 people. Common occupations include sloth herding and woodworking, although the village shaman, Miria, is also a noted herbalist. Although she is not an Exalt, she feels the disruption of the area's Essence flows more keenly than most and has become vocal to the village leaders about sending someone to Chanta for help.

Mechanics

Vengeful Thunder's Essence drain makes Essence recovery very difficult. Exalted within the "drain zone" (currently a sphere 150 feet in diameter centered on the warstrider) cannot regain Essence except by sleeping or meditation, and even then, they only regain 1 mote per hour. Charms such as Essence-Lending Method still function normally, however, and Abyssal Exalted can still regain Essence by feeding. Mortals sicken and die within a week (less for children or sickly people) of living in the drain zone.

While a geomantic survey (see **Exalted**, p. 251) or a Charm such as All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight could easily detect the drain zone, no such methods have of yet been used.

Minor Wonders

The Kingdom of Halta stretches throughout a magnificent forest encompassing bogs, fens, fields, dense forest and hills. The land is vast and suffused with Essence, and many of the plants that grow there can be refined into wondrous tinctures and medicines… provided one knows how. Likewise, certain talismans have become popular in the Haltan lands that are seen nowhere else in Creation — and these items therefore fetch respectable prices in the right markets. Finally, the section describes several artifacts and wonders to be found in Halta, some of which have already been described elsewhere in this book.

Plants and Medicines

Each year, Haltan herbalists discover more species of plants and, more importantly, more uses to which those plants can be put. Crates of herbal medicines and drugs find their way from Halta to the Blessed Isle, to Nexus and even further south. Haltans do their best to meet the demand, but many of the plants required for these treatments grow in isolated or dangerous areas or only at certain times of the year, meaning that supplies are scarce and that the best product does not reach the export market. Most of the drugs listed below are easier to come by in Halta than elsewhere. Assume that the Resources cost is one lower to obtain the product within the Republic.

Something else to consider is that many of these plants grow on or near the forest floor — and anyone on the forest floor is in danger of attack by the Fair Folk. Some fey hunting parties even bait snare traps with particularly rare or valuable plants, hoping to catch eager young Haltans. While this is largely seen as one of the dangers of herbalism, Haltans charge high prices for any plant that they must brave the ground to obtain.

Blood Berries

Easily harvested because they grow in the higher reaches, blood berries are the fruit of a particular species of vine. In the last months of Descending Fire, these vines produce clusters of red, oozing berries, which the Haltans then pick and dry in the sun. Named for both their color and their curative properties, these berries help patients recover from blood loss. A character eating a dozen blood berries a day can halve the time required to heal one lethal wound that caused a great deal of blood loss when it was inflicted. The berries have a slightly coppery taste and tend to stain the teeth a vivid red. Dried blood berries keep for a year, after which they lose their potency.

Cost: •• for a packet of 50 berries

Coldvine

These vines grow around trees at the northern edge of the Haltan Republic, and their harvest is dangerous because of biting insects that often live on them. Despite this risk, Haltan villages usually have at least one length of coldvine, and affluent individuals within the Republic hang the vine over their doorjambs as a symbol of wealth and power. Coldvine has one unique and very useful property — it is completely fireproof. Haltans, so careful of even small cookfires because of the potential for forest fire, often build fires in baskets of coldvine. Coldvine is rarely exported, not because there is no market, but because of the danger in harvesting it (which requires special herbal poultices for the harvester's hands afterward to kill the chiggers). This, combined with the vine's slow growth cycle and the value of the vine to Haltans, compels them to keep the vines in the forests.

Cost: •••• for a five-foot segment

Deathlord's Breath

Only a few highly skilled herbalists and assassins know how to concoct this powder. Creating the breath isn't illegal, as it has practical value as well as its less savory uses. However, if the Haltan authorities discover Deathlord's breath in any citizen's home, that citizen will certainly be subject to some meaningful interrogation.

Deathlord's breath is a mixture of poisons, including snake venom, the crushed and dried leaves of several different plants and the powdered shells of the insects that infest coldvine (see above). This mixture is left to sit in the sun for several hours, after which is it is carefully poured

into an amber-glass bottle (storing it in a skin pouch causes it to lose its potency quickly).

Deathlord's breath can be sprinkled around an area to repel the spirits of the dead. Any ghost who approaches the dust must succeed in a Valor roll (difficulty 3) to cross it. Hungry ghosts do not attempt to do so unless they are under orders from a more powerful being. The dust retains its potency for one month, after which the difficulty on the Valor roll falls by one per week until the powder is rendered useless.

If the dust touches a living person's flesh, however, the results are horrifying. If the victim's player succeeds in a Stamina + Resistance roll (difficulty 5), the character suffers 4L over the course of a week and lingering headaches, aches and a wracking cough for several months but survives. If the roll fails, the victim immediately begins to die. She suffers one die of lethal damage per day. There is no natural cure for Deathlord's breath, though Charms and magic and stop the poison normally. When the victim loses her last health level, her body dies but continues walking. The creature is not a true zombie in that no magical force has raised it (and therefore the Zenith Caste's anima power does not function on it), but the player of someone who can command the undead may roll Charisma + Presence for his character to assume control over the hapless person. The victim's soul leaves the body as usual, but the lower soul of someone subjected to this poison almost invariably becomes a hungry ghost.

An Exalt, God-Blood or other exceptional person can fight off the poison, provided that her player succeeds in a Stamina + Resistance roll (difficulty 4) each day for seven days. If she fails even one roll, all previous successes are lost, and she must begin again. Even if she succeeds on a given day, her character still suffers the die of lethal damage.

Cost: •••• for one dose

Iron Bush

Designed in the First Age as a biological weapon against the Fair Folk, iron bushes can be found throughout Halta but do not grow near Wyld areas or Demesnes. The leaves of an iron bush cause a burning sensation to Fair Folk and can be distilled into a liquid that simply tastes foul to humans but inflicts 10L damage to any Fair Folk who so much as sips it (armor, obviously, does not reduce this damage). No Fair Folk will touch an iron bush voluntarily. Only one iron bush grows at a time within a 20 mile area, and once all the leaves have been plucked from a bush, it does not grow new ones for a decade.

Cost: •••• for three leaves

Liar's Mushroom

The Haltan forests contain thousands of plants that humans find useful. Some are used to flavor food, some for medicinal purposes, and some — such as the liar's mushroom — are used to kill.

The liar's mushroom grows in marshy areas, meaning the best places to harvest the fungus are often patrolled by fey raiders in service to Marika (see p. 62). The mushrooms are small and a sickly brown color but are harmless to touch. Once dried, they are almost completely indistinguishable from mushrooms commonly used for food (hence their name and effectiveness as a poison).

Ingesting the mushroom requires a Stamina + Resistance roll at difficulty 3. If the roll succeeds, the victim suffers 2L damage; if the roll fails, the victim suffers 6L damage. Spotting a liar's mushroom mixed in with other, harmless mushrooms requires a Perception + Survival roll at difficulty 4 (at the Storyteller's discretion, an herbalist might be allowed to use Medicine instead of Survival).

Cost: •• for one dose. The sale and use of liar's mushroom is technically illegal within the Kingdom of Halta.

Message Seed

The giant dandelion-like plants that produce message seeds initially grew around a Demesne of air, but have since spread throughout the Republic. They only grow where they can get enough light, however, and so, they commonly spring up in large clearings or around lakes. The weed blooms in Resplendent Fire and produces seeds the size of two fists attached to a stalk with a silky "fan" on the top. These seeds float on the wind over the whole of Halta. Over time, savants became aware that the message seeds floated in a predictable pattern along Essence currents, following dragon tracks. After mapping the path that the message seeds flew along, they began to use them to send letters and messages between villages.

Message seeds are not the most reliable means of conveying a letter, of course — some species of birds eat them, and a rainstorm immediately ruins any seeds caught in it. However, they enjoy popularity with young lovers who wish to send letters to each other without trusting a courier.

Cost: None within Halta. From Descending Fire to Descending Air the seeds are everywhere. They have no value outside Halta.

Mother's Moss

A peculiar rust-colored moss grows on the bark of certain trees in the Haltan forests. Not terribly common as an export (as it only retains its special properties while still alive or within a few days of being harvested without treatment), mother's moss is called so because it holds heat. A few minutes near a fire and a strip of bark with the moss growing on it becomes a soothing hot pack, good for keeping a child warm or easing muscle aches. Important visitors to Chanta who arrive during the colder months are often given beds with large "sheets" of mother's moss under

a thin blanket to keep them warm at night. Herbalists, using a special mixture made from dung, crushed beetles and whiskey, can preserve the moss for about a year (this requires a daily Intelligence + Lore roll, difficulty 2). Fire-aspected Terrestrials can spend 3 motes of Essence per day to allow the moss to retain its special properties, but Exalts typically have better things to do than transport moss.

Cost: •••• for a three-foot-by-three-foot sheet outside of Halta. It only retains its properties for a week at most without the preparation mentioned above. Much of this expense is bound up in the fact that the delivery is, of necessity, rushed. A similar sheet would only cost •• in Halta.

Succor Blossom

The succor blossom is one of the most highly prized plant specimens in the East. Bidding wars, theft and murder commonly follow in its wake, which is ironic considering the blossom's properties. The large white blossoms of this flowering plant can be crushed, mixed with water and a few drops of blood and then consumed, with the result that it heals nearly any wound. So long as the wounded character does not reach the Incapacitated health level, the succor blossom, properly prepared, can restore him to full health within a day. Preparing the blossom requires the player to roll Intelligence + Medicine at difficulty 2 — a failure on this roll means that the resulting paste is too watery and will not confer any healing at all.

The succor blossom is extremely rare. It grows only when conditions are perfect — not too much rain in Resplendent Water, not too hot during Ascending Fire. The flower is so delicate that it loses its petals if the branches on which it grows are jostled the tiniest bit, which means that when a succor blossom is discovered in Halta, the people set up round-the-clock watches over the flower. After the bloom is complete and the paste is prepared, the treachery, murder and bribery begin.

Cost: ••••• for one dose

Totem Leaf

Used for spiritual purposes by Haltans and other forest-dwelling peoples in the East and for recreational purposes elsewhere in Creation, the totem leaf comes from a flowering tree that grows on the southern edge of the Republic as redwood forests give way to deciduous ones. The leaf can be harvested nearly year round (not during the season of Water), but the largest leaves appear during Resplendent Wood. The leaves are coated with an oil that induces mild hallucinations (usually, the would-be seer chews a mouthful of the leaves). While lost to these visions, Haltans believe that one's totem animal or tree can be found. Sometimes, a querist returns from the forest with a direct answer — "The monkey is my spirit guide." Other times, the leaf shows the seeker where to look for his answer.

Cost: ••

WYLD SEEDS

Wyld seeds don't come from any particular plant. They can develop in any tree, bush or root (and even some animals) that grow too close to Wyld areas. They are easily recognizable, however — the seeds are swollen, faintly luminescent and, usually, brightly colored. Haltans occasionally trade these seeds to exiled Fair Folk, as they can feed on them instead of on dreams, but the Haltans themselves are justifiably nervous whenever one of the seeds is nearby. These tiny, harmless looking pods can spread the taint of the Wyld quickly and uncontrollably.

The seeds themselves are harmless to handle. The Wyld energy is bound up inside them. They are usually no bigger than other seeds — as small as pinprick or as large as an acorn. However, if a living thing consumes such a seed, it develops a Wyld mutation — usually a pox or deficiency — within a day or two. The taint doesn't end there, though. If any creature eats the now-tainted animal, it too contracts the taint, receiving whatever level of Wyld mutation the first animal had plus one. For instance, a bird eats a Wyld seed and develops the large pox, growing from a tiny songbird into a crow-sized beast. This doesn't stop a hunting cat from pouncing on it a few weeks later and eating it. However, the cat develops the same pox — large — *and* develops flaps of skin on its side (as the affliction gliding wings). If a party of Haltans were to slay and consume this cat (which would be a fairly obvious mistake, but it is possible), each of them would develop a pox or deficiency, an affliction or a debility and a blight or a deformity. Wyld features do not necessarily stay consistent from one animal to the next.

Fair Folk who eat Wyld seeds or warped animals do not suffer taints, of course. Such seeds actually remove the need to feed on dreams for three days per seed. Eating the meat of Wyld-seeded animals simply nourishes the Fair Folk in the same way the normal food would nourish a human. Planting a Wyld seed yields a tree or bush (depending of what sort of plant the seed originally spawned from) that exhibits Wyld traits. A tree might sport mouths instead of knotholes, its roots might bleed, or it might "bloom" fur or scales instead of blossoms. Unless planted in a Wyld place, however, the seeds these warped plants bear are not Wyld seeds, and the seed may not be viable at all in some particularly stable regions.

Cost: •••• for a single seed, but the sale of Wyld seeds is highly illegal.

YOUNG MONKEY

The most common tea in Halta, Young Monkey is actually comprised of no fewer than 16 different leaves, roots and even insect shells. Contrary to what mischievous young Haltans sometimes tell travelers, no part of the tea actually comes from a monkey. Young Monkey, aside from bringing out the flavor of many traditional Haltan dishes, is also a mild muscle relaxant. Long-term use makes the body supple and flexible, and lifetime use actually relaxes the joints (most Haltans are double- or tripled-jointed). Young Monkey doesn't have much of a following outside of the East (where people aren't often likely to need to jump from tree to tree), but travelers to Halta often buy cases of it once they notice that arthritis is extremely uncommon in the Republic. The tea has other uses, too — at least one brothel in Nexus requires all of its employees to drink Young Monkey on a regular basis so that they remain capable of assuming complicated positions.

Cost: •• for a box of 20 doses

TALISMANS

The following are a few examples of talismans that are commonly found or crafted within the Haltan Republic.

BARK-SKIN CHARM

One of the many small items that Haltans acquire in trade from tree spirits, bark-skin charms are usually small chunks of wood or dried leaves. When consumed (usually mixed with tea), the drinker's skin toughens slightly. This isn't enough to provide any kind of soak bonus (although for the right price, such a thing might be available), but it does prevent the character from suffering from insect bites or the effects of any poison plant that requires skin contact to take effect. These effects last for one lunar month.

Cost: • for one dose

CAT CLAWS

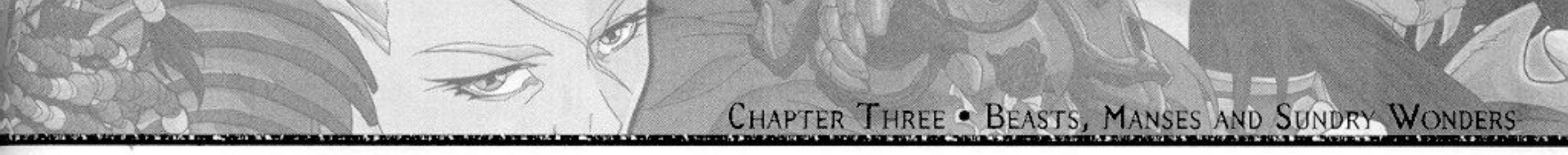
Arboreal hunting cats are common familiars and animal companions in Halta. In particular, they serve as inspiration for Haltans who would hunt quick prey such as monkeys and birds without using thrown weapons. Sometimes, when a cat dies, a Haltan will take its claws and wear them as a necklace or strung around his wrist.

A Haltan who wears a cat claws talisman draws upon the hunting cat's nimbleness and quick wits. The player adds two to the character's base initiative so long as he wears such a talisman. More powerful versions confer an extra die to Dexterity rolls. The cat in question doesn't have to have belonged to the user, nor does it have to be a trained hunting cat, but as these sorts of cats are commonly the ones that Haltans have access to, they are the most likely to donate their claws.

Cost: •• for the initiative bonus version, ••• for the Dexterity bonus version

GROUND CHARMS

Walking on the forest floor is a dangerous proposition for Haltans. Even a brief trip the ground risks capture and ravishment by the Fair Folk. Worse, Haltan law forbids the families of those taken to take any retributive action against the fey, and people thus captured are treated as



dead. Most Haltans hope their companions will kill them with a spear rather than see them dragged off by the Fair Folk. This in mind, it isn't surprising that a great number of talismans in Halta deal with warding off the fey. These take many forms. Small chunks of scrap iron or nails worked into interesting shapes are the most common types — these usually have the same effects as warding charms (see **Exalted**, p. 337). Others are small nutshells placed under the tongue — if the shell's taste suddenly changes to a bitter iron one while the user is standing on the ground, he knows that the fey are near and that he should scramble up the nearest tree. The most valuable ground charms, however, are small chunks of worked amber. Supposedly, if the holder of such a charm is attacked by the Fair Folk, the fey will accept the charm in exchange for leaving him unharmed. The Fair Folk don't always accept them, however, for reasons that Haltans can't fathom. (Haltans are generally unaware of the politics between the Fair Folk, but followers of Marika do accept ground charms, whereas Yseult's raiders laugh at the very notion that a trinket could save a human from the fey.)

Cost: •• for a warding charm or iron nutshell, ••• for an amber charm. The fact that they aren't totally effective prevents their cost from rising any higher.

Hunter's Shirt

Haltans commonly wear animal skins, but a few weavers make their living in the Republic. Clothes made of fabric are rare and expensive, and they tend to become family heirlooms, passed from parent to eldest child, often on the morning of the child's first hunt. Hunter's shirts are talismans that aid in attempts to find food by hiding the hunter from his prey. A player whose character wears a hunter's shirt adds one die to all Stealth rolls made while hunting. Truly old or powerful such talismans might confer additional dice or actually attract prey animals.

Cost: ••, ••• for more powerful or artistically crafted versions

Lucky Rock

Thrown weapons are the most common sort used in Halta. Bows are impractical in the trees (as they require two hands), and melee weapons require getting too close to one's opponents for most Haltans' comfort. Therefore, boomerangs, spears and simple rocks make up a hunter's or warrior's arsenal. The disadvantage to thrown weapons, though, is that they are easy to lose. Many Haltans have a favorite weapon that they have always managed to recover. "Lucky rocks" are such weapons. Most such stones have no effect other than they always wind up back in their owner's possession within a few hours of being thrown.

More powerful specimens (those that are deliberately created as opposed to occurring naturally) confer one- or two-die accuracy bonuses in addition to never being lost. These are usually javelins and boomerangs rather than rocks.

Cost: Nothing for rocks, ••• for javelins or boomerangs

Artifacts

Some true wonders hide under the branches of the Haltan redwoods. The following is a sampling of such artifacts, including some truly extraordinary ones that are mentioned elsewhere in this book.

Cold Wind Knives (Artifact ••••)

This pair of twin blades, each just over three feet in length, were once the prized weapons of Starless Sky, a First Age Night Caste who lies buried somewhere in the Kingdom of Halta (see p. 84). The Cold Wind Knives are made of black steel, their handles inlaid with orichalcum. Once attuned to an Exalt, they confer several benefits.

First, the Cold Wind Knives swallow sound. A target that suffers even one health level of damage from these knives is incapable of speaking for the next hour. The wielder of the knives receives three additional dice to any Stealth roll, so long as the knives are unsheathed.

Second, the knives are tenacious. Once a victim's blood touches the blade of either knife, that knife gently pulls in that victim's direction until he lies dead or until the blood is wiped from the blade. The wielder can track any stationary or slow-moving target with perfect accuracy. Fast-moving targets require a Perception + Survival roll to follow.

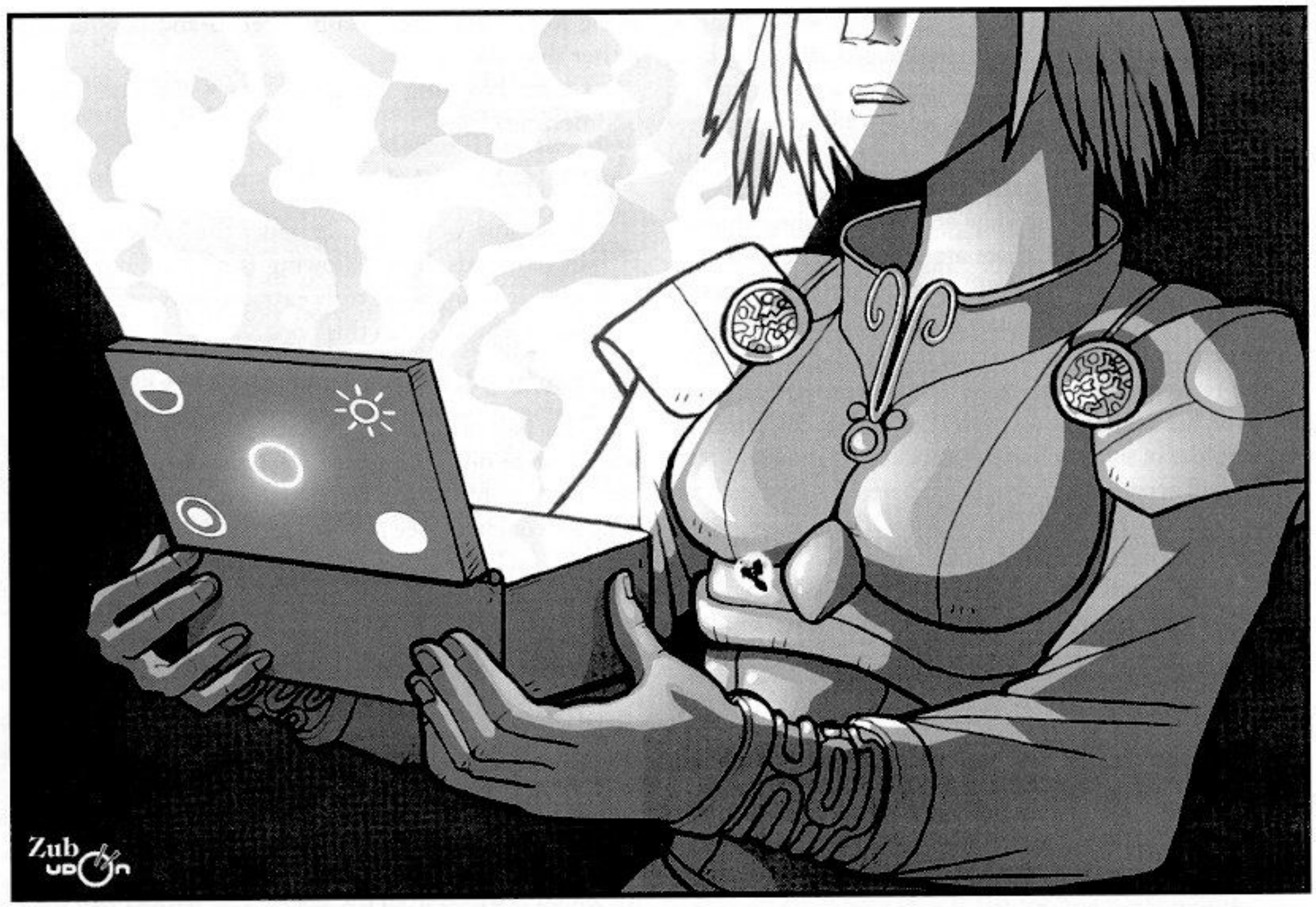
Finally, the knives know their master. The Cold Wind Knives are incapable of inflicting damage on the person to whom they are attuned — *or* to any Night Caste Solar (a secret that Starless Sky took to her grave, among many others).

Name	Spd	Acc.	Dmg.	Defense
Cold Wind Knives	+4	+2	+4L	+2

Iron Puzzle Box (Artifact N/A)

One of Starless Sky's great secrets was the Iron Puzzle Box, a simple metal box seven inches wide by five inches deep by six inches high. When completely assembled, the box appears unremarkable, except for the carving on the top. Four glyphs, each representing one of the castes of the Solars, adorn the lid, one in each corner. The missing glyph, that of the Night Caste, is, in fact, present in the center, but only a character who has attuned the box can see it.

The Iron Puzzle Box is an extremely dangerous artifact, and its origins and first owner are lost to time. Starless Sky took the Iron Puzzle Box from someone upon whom



she passed judgment some moonless night, but she never spoke of it to anyone. Over time, she divined the secrets of the box, including the fact that, by tapping the lip in a precise sequence, the entire box falls apart into 50 small interlocking pieces. Assembling the box once it has been disassembled requires 50 successes on an extended Intelligence + Lore roll, making one roll per hour. A botch at any time indicates that the work of the last two hours was flawed, and the player loses any successes from those rolls. The character need not assemble the box in one sitting (indeed, it took Starless Sky herself more than a month).

Once the box is assembled, it can be opened. Opening the box with no idea what the artifact can do is unwise, however. The box contains everything in any realm in or outside of Creation — it is an opening into Heaven, Yozi, the deepest oceans, the heart of volcanoes, the council room of the Deliberative, the bedchamber of Raksi or anywhere else imaginable (provided the area is not warded against scrying or teleportation). One thing it *cannot* do is reach through time, but it can be used to contact any being capable of communication, ghosts included.

If an attuned character touches the Night glyph and expends 4 motes of Essence, the box opens. If the character knew what place he intended the box to reach or what person he wishes it contact, his player rolls Intelligence + Lore at difficulty 3 to guide the box. If the roll succeeds, the character can now peer into the box and see the intended location as though he were standing there. By picking up the box and moving it, he can move his reference point. All of his senses function normally, but nothing at his destination can touch him unless he reaches into the box (which means he can steal anything that would fit through the box's opening). If the roll fails, the box simply does not function. If the roll botches, the box responds as though someone had opened it with no "destination" in mind.

If a character opens the box with nothing in mind, his player must make a Wits + Lore roll at difficulty 5. If the roll succeeds, the character's mind is filled with images of Hell, Heaven and Creation for a moment, and then, the box snaps shut. The character loses a point of Willpower but is otherwise unharmed, and the player can make an Intelligence + Lore roll to guess at the box's function. If that roll fails, the box opens to Yozi. Worse yet, it cannot be closed until a certain Old Realm phrase is uttered over the box… and the only person who knew this phrase was Starless Sky.

Raptor's Wings (Artifact •••)

Most Haltans prefer to leap between trees or use the extensive aerial walkways between cities, but a very few citizens of the Republic have and can make use of raptor's wings. These artifacts consist of a long, thin piece of metal that stretches along the length of the user's arms and

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Artifact
Sky-Cutter	+2	+5L	2	50	••

across his shoulders. To that strip is attached a complex weaving of feathers, branches and fabric, usually with a depiction of Yesryk the Hawk God or some other aerial spirit. A character wearing raptor's wings can fly at 15 miles per hour for one hour per point of permanent Essence, after which the wings must be hung up and left to recharge for one full day and night. Barely a dozen sets of raptor's wings exist, and crafting a set requires feathers from Yesryk himself or some other spirit of flight. The Raptor's Wings provide +1L/+2B soak to the wearer in addition to the ability to fly. While the character's in flight, his player must roll Dexterity + Athletics at difficulty 2 before the character takes any other action (this roll is reflexive). If the roll fails, the character can take no action that turn except remain in the air. A botch on this roll means the wings become bent and the character immediately plummets to the ground.

Sky-Cutter (Artifact ••)

Virtually unknown outside the Haltan Republic and rare even in that nation's borders, these exquisite arcing blades transcend boomerangs in the way that powerbows shame the finest weapons of mortal archers. Each sky-cutter is fashioned from a single two-foot piece of one of the Five Magical Materials, lovingly hammered or carved according to precise geomantic angles that focus Essence along its cutting edge. Unlike conventional boomerangs, a thrown sky-cutter always returns to its master's hand at the end of the turn if it misses its target. In the hands of skilled Exalted, these weapons may return even after they strike an object. Such a feat requires success at a second, reflexive Dexterity + Thrown roll at difficulty 2. Failure leaves the weapon where it hit. Exalted must commit 4 motes of Essence to attune a sky-cutter.

Orichalcum: Orichalcum sky-cutters fly with the speed and precision of a flashing sunbeam. In the hands of Solar Exalted, these weapons add +1 to accuracy and +3 to their bearer's initiative.

Moonsilver: Moonsilver sky-cutters are subtle and protean, like the crescent moon they resemble. In the hands of their Lunar masters, they add +1 to damage and may collapse to an unassuming blade no larger than a small throwing knife or expand to their full size as a reflexive action.

Jade: Buoyed by the Essence of the elements, jade sky-cutters take their arc from the mountain, the waterfall and the sweeping boughs of ancient trees. Terrestrial Exalted add 50 yards to the range of their attacks and never suffer environmental penalties associated with natural conditions when throwing these weapons, including those from high winds, fog, rain or cover provided by foliage. Penalties for darkness, wounds, range and mystical sources apply normally.

Starmetal: Forged with elegant, auspicious minimalism, starmetal sky-cutters fly along the secret paths of destiny. In the hands of Sidereal Exalted, these weapons never strike an unintended target and always return to their masters, sailing impossibly around every obstacle and bystander to reach victim or hand. Even a botched attack roll brings the weapon in a graceful harmless path that ends in its master's grasp.

Soulsteel: Imbued with cold hunger, these unnatural weapons evoke images of skeletal talons and black birds of prey. These blades relentlessly pursue living victims in the hands of Abyssal Exalted, adding +2 to the difficulty of any dodge attempt to escape them. It is whispered that the champion of the Deathlord Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils uses such a weapon in her hunts.

Soul-Heart (Artifact •)

No mortal knows what lies or lives in the endless groves at the Eastern edge of the world. Some tales speak of woods so magical that every tree is a Manse and every blooming flower a living gem of the purest Essence. Perhaps these are only fables shared by hopeful or greedy sorcerers or lies spread by the Fair Folk. But then, who can explain the soul-hearts? Each a rough orb of perfect amber the size of a child's fist, soul-hearts glow the faint gold of sunlight dappled through leaves. Their light and the faint warmth it provides brings cannot be extinguished without breaking the stone. But that is not their most wondrous property. Those who place a soul-heart beside them as they sleep awaken to find the gem changed, sculpted to the likeness of any one thing they desire. The shape may be literal or figurative, simple or complex — but it is always breathtakingly beautiful. Only the Fair Folk and those left soul-dead by the fey cannot change a soul-heart through slumber, for they have no dreams of their own.

The gems return to their original form one day after their transformation and may subsequently be reshaped. Anyone may study a shaped soul-heart to understand the one who shaped it. This requires a Wits + Lore roll at a difficulty determined by the Storyteller. Simple wants are standard difficulty, while the complicated passions of complicated people may be as high as difficulty 5. Success reveals the Nature of the being studied and the specifics of her desire.

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