

RUINS OF RATHLESS



A Deadly Adventure Locale for

EXALTED



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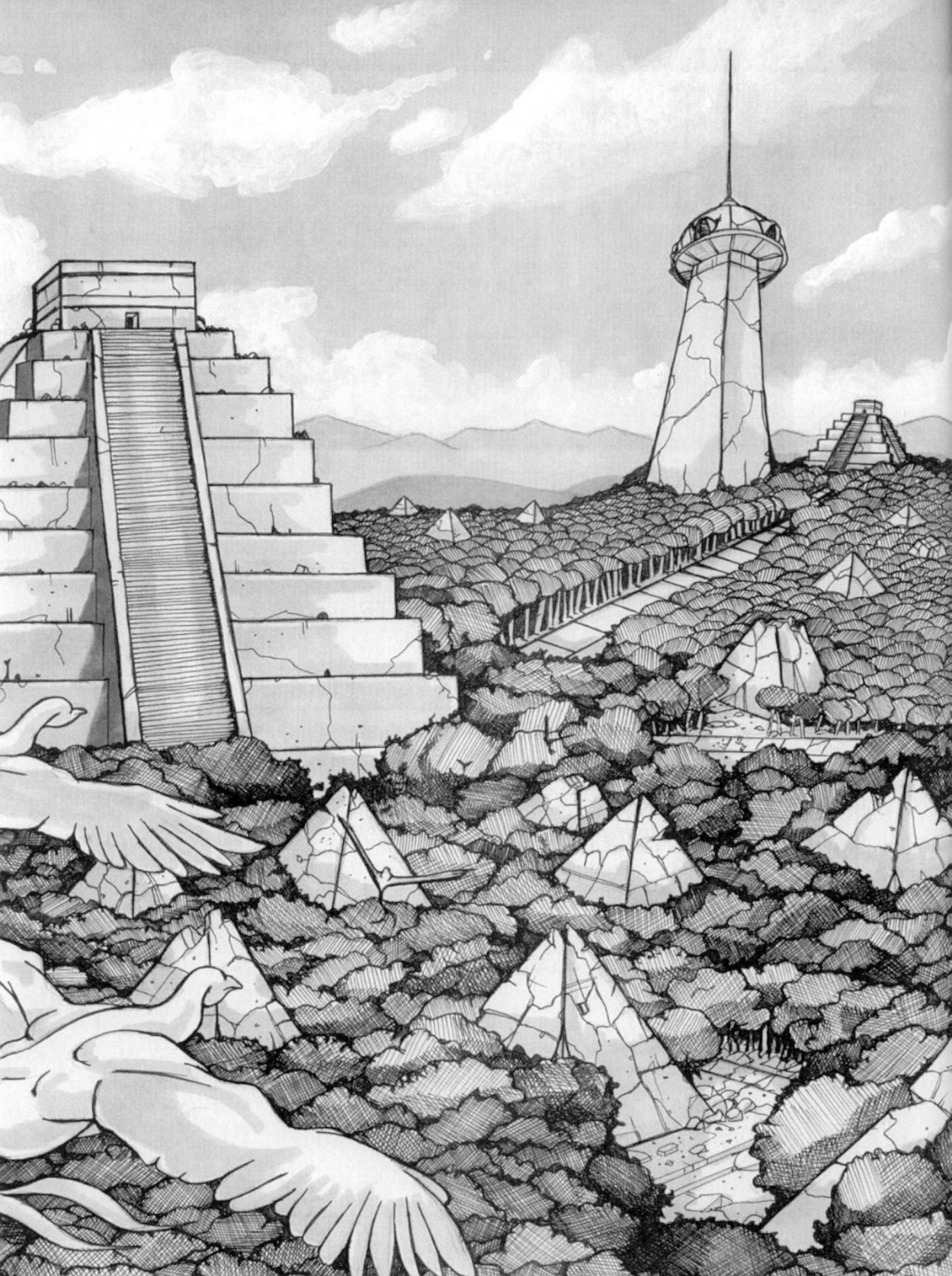
<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN CANADA



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INTRODUCTION



"Into Thalarion, the City of a Thousand Wonders, many have passed but none returned. Therein walk only daemons and mad things that are no longer men, and the streets are white with the unburied bones of those who have looked upon the eidolon Lathi, that reigns over the city."

—H.P. Lovecraft, "The White Ship"

Though it can be very difficult to present adventure material for **Exalted**, **Ruins of Rathess** is an attempt to do so. **Ruins of Rathess** is not an adventure in the traditional sense. It is, instead, a treatment in some detail of a particularly interesting part of Creation, a location where there are a large number of artifacts and plot threads that might draw in a group of Exalts.

The setting is archetypal. Rathess is a vast and ancient city in the Mesoamerican style, overgrown by jungle. Huge pyramids rise above the triple-canopy forest, and intricately carved towers stretch their imperishable bulks toward the tropical sky. The greatest of the city's Manses — once one of Creation's greatest temples to the Unconquered Sun — is now home to a militant ghoulish cult, led by a fallen Solar Exalted, Filial Wisdom. Renegade goblins, lizard-beasts that were once Dragon Kings and terrible nameless creatures stalk the streets of Rathess. Below the city lies an ancient maze of interlocking workshops and

public areas connected by a rattletrap transit system that fails a little more each year. And, of course, in some places the city remains unlooted, a treasure trove of First Age weapons and industrial artifacts waiting for the Exalt brave enough to claim them.

Obviously, many characters will arrive pulling carts and immediately commence commando operations to establish a secure perimeter around the prime looting areas. This supplement certainly accommodates such organized efforts, but that is not all the city of Rathess is about.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There is no "plot" or "adventure" detailed in this book. There is no way that any one story would be interesting to even a small fraction of the different **Exalted** groups out there. Instead, this work is simply a history of the fallen city of Rathess, a description of the city's most interesting areas in the modern day and a roster of statistics for inhabitants and artifacts unique

to Rathess. All are rich with plot threads — Storytellers interested in using Rathess in their games should have little trouble working the city into their series.

Introduction: It's what you're reading right now. The introduction tells you about the book's contents and suggests how you might want to approach the text.

Chapter One: History and the Dragon Kings: This chapter covers the history of the race of the Dragon Kings and the history of the city of Rathess.

Chapter Two: The City and Vicinity: This section details the difficulties of travel to the city and the major features of the city and its surroundings in the modern era, including the nearby stronghold of Khryal and the Cult of Han-Tha, the dark ghoulish-god of Rathess.

Chapter Three: Stalkers, Gods and Other Foes: The chapter provides statistics for the city's inhabitants, both material and spiritual, and includes statistics for Dragon Kings at all levels of civility, for the major gods of the city, for the Goblin King and for some of Rathess' more unique creatures.

Chapter Four: Rewards of Rathess: This chapter provides statistics for the many artifacts unique to the city of Rathess and guidelines for handling some of the more abstract benefits that can be gained from the city.

USES FOR RATHESS

This book is useful for more than just characters who wish to be scavenger lords on a grand scale. Rathess as detailed in this book is static thing, a series of areas inhabited by this or that horrifying monster. But Rathess exists in Creation as a symbol of mystery, power and sun-worship. It is a place that has drawn many hundreds to it since its fall, and it is so deadly that many of its secrets still remain undiscovered even today. Below is a list suggesting different reasons Rathess might enter your series, beyond mere treasure hunting.

- The players' characters may have visited Rathess during their preludes or after their Exaltations. Characters may have come and gone without coming into contact with Filial Wisdom, they may have escaped from captivity at the hands of the Cult of Han-Tha, or the Goblin King may have even tutored them after their Exaltations — he is, after all, a fellow Solar.

- Storyteller characters may have gone to Rathess and learned its secrets or gained access to some of the powerful artifacts that remain in the ruins. Storyteller characters may also have plans to go there in the future in search of knowledge, wealth or power. Characters with no interest in Rathess may find themselves going there anyway in order to pay back a mentor or ally for previous assistance.

- Characters may seek out Filial Wisdom, either to destroy him as an Anathema or a corrupt Solar or to make him part of some scheme or alliance — there are certainly many individuals in Creation who would tolerate a necrophage as an ally of convenience. The Goblin King would be an excellent ally. Storyteller characters may have already allied themselves with Filial Wisdom and use him as an unexpected wildcard. Characters associated with the Cult of the Illuminated may be sent to recruit him, if the cult's Sidereal masters come upon documentation of his previous contacts with the cult.

- Characters may seek out Rathess simply because it is so dangerous and remote. Players' or Storyteller characters on the run may seek to hide in the ruins and may even prepare bolt-holes in the city in case they are later forced to flee. Only a group of very determined gods or Exalts is going to confront a character hiding behind a locked stone door on the sixth level of Rathess' underways.

- The city of Rathess itself is a tremendous asset. As the one-time capital of Creation, Rathess is an ideal capital-in-exile for Solars raising the banner of a reborn Solar Deliberative. If the city itself were somehow restored, its infrastructure would be more than sufficient to support the administration required to govern Creation. Presumably, the characters would defeat Ma-Ha-Suchi, Rakshi and any other interested parties as proof of their power and serious intent.

Characters with large retinues or hosts of demons might wish simply to use the city as a fortress or a staging area. Such activity is not limited to the players' characters. There are slightly more than 150 Solars active in Creation. If your game stretches over many years, chances are that, sooner or later, someone will proclaim the Solar Deliberative from the Pyramid of the Sun in Rathess or use Rathess as her fortress.

- Rathess itself is a treasure-trove of information for characters seeking to restore the lost glories of the First Age. While it might not seem dramatic, characters who wish to build vast and splendid cities will need to learn the art somewhere. Sewage, water, lighting and other public works are wholly inadequate in most Second Age metropolises. Savant-engineers who want to remedy this situation for their glorious sorcerous capital or to improve the lot of Creation as a whole can learn a great deal about sanitation, public works and the provision of other essential services from Rathess. While the capital of the Dragon-Kings is hardly the only such city in Creation, Rathess is the largest, and it offers features for study that cities such as Denandsor do not, such as the tube system, the flying towers and the many examples of flying devices.

• Likewise, the magical technologies of the Dragon Kings are of great general interest to savants. Once, the magical workings of the Celestial Exalted and Dragon-Blooded could support the sorcerously advanced civilization of the First Age. Now, in the shattered Second Age, the sorcerous lore of the Solar Deliberative is largely forgotten. It is probably true that, at one point, personal predispositions and specialized education on the part of Celestial Exalted savants made the Dragon Kings' magical endeavors interesting curiosities and little more. However, without the strait-jacket of those centuries of research, young Exalted have every reason to pursue understanding of these novel processes and devices. Exalts who wish to equal the glory of the First Age without aping it could well benefit from studying and improving upon the wonders of the Dragon Kings.

• In addition, the constructs of the Dragon Kings are better suited to creation, use and maintenance by low-Essence beings. Whatever their potential may be, the truth of the present is that the Solar Exalted are young and relatively low in power. It will be several centuries until they can match the wonders of the First Age Exalted with their own art. Yet, the Dragon

Kings made a society of wonders without much more power than young Exalts. Exalted who wish to quickly improve the world around them would be well served to emulate them.

This is particularly true of the use of vegetative technology in the city. These plant-machines effectively maintain themselves. While they are challenging to breed and adapt to new environments, it's probably easier to breed new sorts of

pumping-vines than to construct an entire city's worth of sorcerous infrastructure.

• An entire race of the Solars' coreligionists lies prostrate in the First City. The Dragon Kings prowl the city and its underways as savage, flesh-eating beasts. Solar Exalted especially may be compelled, either by their own moral compass or by the Unconquered Sun, to return the Dragon Kings to civility. Lunars may also seek to resurrect the Dragon Kings because of their savage demeanor.

Again, Storytellers should keep in mind that the players' characters are not the only beings in Creation. Other Solars may attempt to civilize the Dragon Kings, or the sleeping elder Dragon Kings

may themselves awaken and begin civilizing their own people.





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CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY AND THE DRAGON KINGS

Long ago, millennia before the gods overthrew the Primordials, the proud and noble Dragon Kings were the lords of Creation. In this primeval aeon, the world was newly made and far less stable — terrible earthquakes, fiery volcanoes and vast hurricanes were extremely common, and only the toughest creatures could survive. One of the four breeds of Dragon Kings lived in each of the world's four directions — the center of the world alone was empty of their presence, as the Blessed Isle was the domain of the gods when they were not serving the Primordials in the Celestial City of Yu-Shan.

In the West, amphibious Dragon Kings ruled the islands. They hunted kraken and other deadly sea beasts of the oceans. In the North, great winged and furred pteranodon-like Dragon Kings were the lords of the upper air and the icy wastes. In the savanna and deserts of the South, huge and deadly Dragon Kings hunted prey and left enigmatic rock paintings and stone sculptures that humans still marvel at. However, the lush forests and verdant jungles of the East were the heart of the Dragon Kings' civilization. Here, tall and elegant Dragon Kings with brilliantly scaled hides built great cities, worked powerful magics and created wonders that rivaled the glorious Celestial City of Yu-Shan.

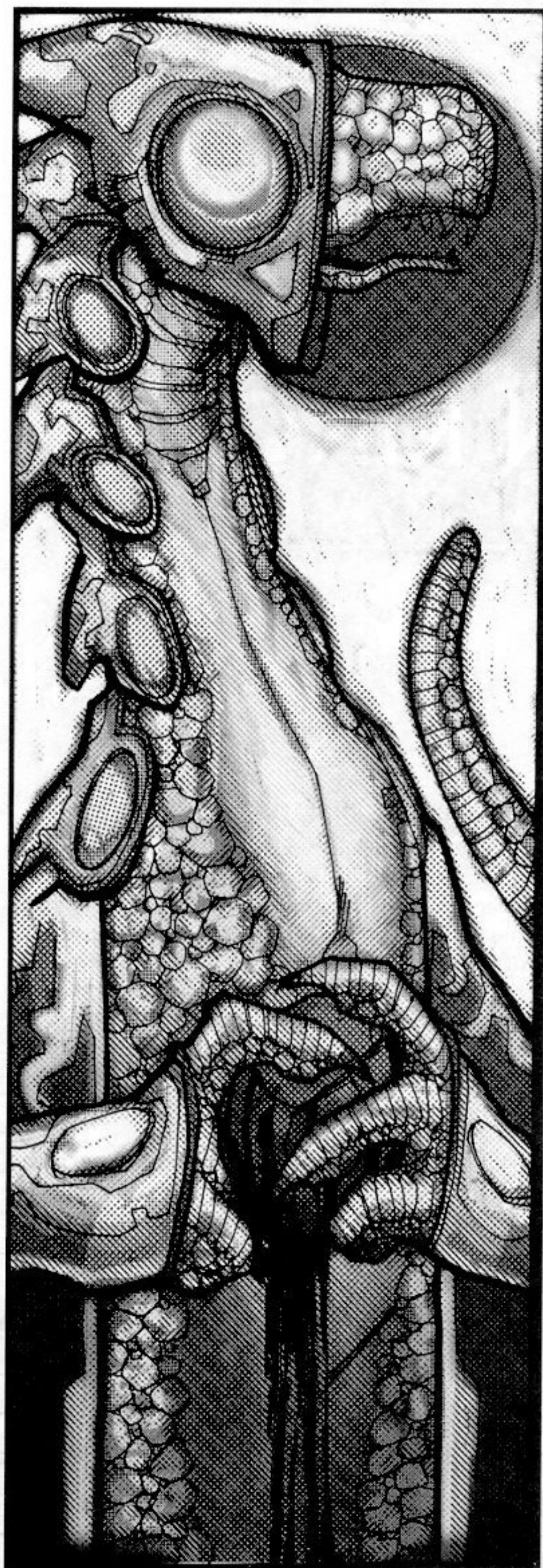
THE COMING OF HUMANITY

There were never more than a few tens of millions of Dragon Kings — their proud and carnivorous race demanded much territory, and even the Primordials feared a world overrun with these powerful creatures. Although the Dragon Kings obeyed the dictates of the Primordials and the gods, once the world had become more stable and less dangerous, the Primordials decided that the Dragon Kings provided too little worship and wished to have a host of servants who were both faithful and easily controlled. To this end, the Primordials created humanity.

Initially created to serve the Dragon Kings and to worship the gods and the Primordials, humanity remained in this role for countless centuries, living and working in the cities of the Dragon Kings. Dragon King populations were sparse — many humans ran away and lived in savagery on the edges of Creation and in desolate waste places. Captured escapees and those who offended their reptilian masters were sacrificed on top of the great sun temples and their hearts offered up to the Unconquered Sun.

The Dragon Kings worshiped the Unconquered Sun, and the vast majority of them remained loyal to him when the gods rebelled against the Primordials. Unfortunately for the Dragon Kings, while the Primordials

History



greatly underestimated the power of the newly created Exalts, they were well aware of the danger posed by the Dragon Kings. The Primordials slaughtered the rebellious Dragon Kings by the millions, using weapons that utterly destroyed both their spirits and their bodies. Also, as a condition of their aiding the gods, the leaders of humanity demanded that if the rebellion succeeded, humans would forever be free of the Dragon Kings' rule.

When the war ended in victory, less than 30 million Dragon Kings remained. The Northern Dragon Kings were nearly extinct, and only a few million of both the aquatic and the Southern Dragon Kings remained. The Eastern Dragon Kings alone survived mostly intact. Dragon King civilization became centered in the jungles of the East, and they retained dominion over both these jungles and a portion of the deserts of the South. The Exalts ruled the rest of Creation, including the Blessed Isle. The Celestial gods vacated the mortal world entirely when they took control of the Heavenly City of Yu-Shan.

Although the Dragon Kings had never been especially cruel or terrible overlords, many humans resented their previous masters. However, the gods made powerful treaties between the Exalts and the Dragon Kings, binding each group to respect the other and to work together as allies. In addition, many humans and Exalts had been greatly impressed with the ferocity and valor of the Dragon King warriors. With almost 80 percent of the Dragon Kings gone forever, the negative feelings against them rapidly faded — mortal man and Exalt alike knew that the Dragon Kings would never again dominate the world.

Rathess was the greatest of the Dragon Kings' cities — it, the host of smaller cities that surrounded it and its companion city of Shakanzer in the mountains to the South formed the heart of Dragon King civilization and culture. For millennia, during the glorious era of the First Age, the Dragon Kings lived in Rathess and their other cities, trading with mortals, guarding the frontiers of Creation and becoming exotic but loyal allies of the Solar Deliberative. Their devotion to the Unconquered Sun earned them many friends and allies among the Solar Exalted. Some Dragon Kings were proud warriors who fought rogue spirits and the terrible forces of the Wyld alongside their Dawn Caste allies. Others studied the powers of the gods and used their facility with spirits and their ability to enter the Celestial City to earn great acclaim as companions and aides to silver-tongued members of the Eclipse Caste. Although many Dragon Kings became friends or allies with Exalts of all sorts and even some mortals, their unshakable ties to the Unconquered Sun caused the Dragon Kings to regard the Solar Exalted as their closest allies.

THE FIRST CITY OF CREATION

Rathess was originally a Dragon King settlement auspiciously located midway between the Elemental Poles of Wood and Fire. Nestled among the verdant jungles of the Southeast and built next to the great freshwater lake Therak, Rathess had its origins in the time before the rise of humanity. It was a vast military camp, temple complex and staging area for the Eastern Dragon Kings in their civil wars. Without any rivals in the mortal world, the Dragon Kings warred amongst themselves over religious and political differences. The battles between different factions of the cult of the Unconquered Sun, for example, were particularly bloody, as each side attempted to prove its devotion to their god by their prowess in battle and the number of hearts sacrificed to him. In the end, it was the Eastern Dragon Kings who prevailed over every other breed, and their capital, boldly named Rathess (or “First City” in the High Holy Speech), soon became the center of the entire Dragon King civilization.

For millennia, Rathess grew under the Dragon Kings. Its leaders fostered learning and military skill, building both universities and military camps in almost equal number. Ironically, these achievements focused the Dragon Kings inward, for there was little that they did not already know, thanks to their closeness to the gods and the Primordials, and few enemies worth fighting, except for one another. Factionalism and religious strife remained a source of unrest in Rathess throughout its history. The latter proved especially problematic, given the large number of temples constructed in the First City. Brutal and without inhibitions, the Dragon Kings loved nothing more than to war amongst themselves, and religion provided them innumerable opportunities to do so. At its height, the Way of the Pyramids boasted dozens of temples along its length, chief of which was the Pyramid of the Sun, dedicated to the Dragon King’s godly patron. The Temple of Leeayta, the Lizard Queen, was also important, as were many others.

During the war against the Primordials, Rathess once again became a base of military operations. Its walls filled with refugees from all over the Eastern edge of Creation, including many humans and their Exalted leaders. Unlike many other cities, Rathess fared quite well during this period and was never subject to fire by Primordial weapons or targeted by any of the most malevolent servants of the Primordials. Even so, the First City suffered, and there were constant terror attacks — which delighted the combative Dragon Kings to no end. It was during this time that the vile god Han-Tha first appears in the records of the Dragon Kings. A scavenger deity, he did not take an active part in the war, preferring to lurk in the shadows, consuming the fallen and encour-

aging any who would listen to him to seek strength in necrophagy and other dark deeds.

After the Primordials were defeated, Rathess retained much of its increased population, including many humans and Exalted. In the earliest days of the First Age, the city served not only as the capital of the Dragon Kings, but also of the Realm, as all human cities of any size were destroyed by the time the Yozis were imprisoned in Malfeas and the war ended.

This situation did not last long, for the Solars soon chose to move their seat of power to Meru, on the slopes of the Elemental Pole of Earth. In this great undertaking, the Solars were joined by their Dragon King allies, who had bound their own fates to those of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun. During the brief period when Rathess served as the capital of the Realm, it grew even larger, and its structures multiplied in both size and ostentation. The Pyramid of the Sun had stood since the time before humanity’s birth, but it nevertheless grew thanks to the efforts of the Exalted, who used it as the seat of the Solar Deliberative until their Palace of the Deliberative Senate was completed in Meru.

THE REALM OF THE DRAGON KINGS

One of the first tasks the Deliberative undertook was the reduction of the survivors of the Primordials’ army. The Dragon-Kings clamored for revenge for the millions the Primordials had slain, and they were put to the fore in these battles against Primordial holdout forces.

The Solar Deliberative gave the Dragon Kings a great deal of latitude in these campaigns, allowing them to wage war against the Primordials’ servants as they saw fit. It also gave leave to the Dragon Kings to seize as much territory as they wished in the process. The Dragon Kings were also fully supported by the Deliberative, who dispatched the Lunar Society to assist them and tackle any enemies too powerful for the Dragon Kings and their *olchilik* god-warriors. The Solar Deliberative was hardly in need of revenues and believed — quite rightly — that territory subjected to the authority of a coreligionist client race was as good as territory ruled directly. Furthermore, the Solars understood well that they needed to assuage the bruised egos of the Dragon Kings, who had suffered great casualties and whose position in Creation had declined precipitously since the rise of the Exalted.

FOR LEEAYTA AND THE UNCONQUERED SUN!

The Dragon Kings proved superbly adept at defeating the remaining servants of the Primordials. Combining their remarkable martial abilities with sorcery and wisdom, the Dragon Kings were ideal allies to the Solars during this critical period of history. While the Celestial Exalted busied themselves with the training of young Exalts, the foundation of





the Realm's system of governance and the other necessities of young nations, the Dragon Kings swept the length and breadth of Creation, searching out all who might oppose its new masters.

Rathess grew in size as the Dragon Kings reconquered more and more of the lands between the Elemental Poles of Wood and Fire. Their soldiers garrisoned many fortresses and caserns in those regions, and their administrators brought civilization and learning to the rough humans who inhabited these lands, many of whom were escaped slaves or human refugees driven into the wilderness during the generations of the Primordial War. As the Dragon Kings' dominion increased, Rathess expanded to keep pace with the needs of region it now governed. For the first time since the end of the war against the Primordials, the fortunes of Rathess — and the Dragon Kings — seemed to be on the rise. Just as the gods themselves had rewarded the Exalted, the Solar Exalted rewarded the Dragon Kings as allies and as friends. In all but name, the Dragon Kings were the co-rulers of Creation with the Chosen of the gods, a situation that pleased them greatly and could well have ensured perpetual peace.

For their efforts, the Unconquered Sun rewarded his faithful servants. He sent one of his foremost servants, Leeayta, to oversee the Dragon Kings' and advise them in their activities. So closely associated did this spirit become with the Dragon Kings that she acquired the appellation "the Lizard Queen" and was soon recognized as the civic deity of Rathess. Under Leeayta's guidance, the Dragon Kings defeated many enemies of the Deliberative and seized their lands and goods for themselves. The Dragon Kings again proved their reputation throughout Creation as warriors without equal and as stalwart defenders of the Celestial Bureaucracy against any who would dare to oppose it.

When the Solar Deliberative moved to Meru, all of Rathess mourned. With the foundation of Meru, Rathess decreased forever in importance. It remained, however, a glorious city, filled with many grand buildings and home to savants and heroes with reputations spoken of across Creation. Mortals and Exalts alike continued to throng the streets of Rathess, visiting its many temples, monasteries, universities and manufactories. Yet, the tide of history had turned, perhaps not clearly, but inexorably. Not only had the Dragon Kings declined in population, the First City itself was no longer the premier settlement in Creation. The Dragon Kings may have been there first, but humanity now enjoyed the favor of the gods and the might of the Exalted. Under the leadership of the Solar Deliberative, the Exalted wrought wonders like none other than the gods and made the Dragon Kings' own accomplishments seem feeble.

THE CORRUPTION WITHIN

This situation ate away at the heart of the Dragon Kings' society. Rathess' citizens enjoyed lifestyles and amenities unseen elsewhere in the world, but the city was in decline. At first, the Dragon Kings did not revel in their power or authority. They simply accepted them as the just gifts of both the gods and the Exalts, the fitting fruits of the Dragon Kings' long labors in defense of Creation against the Primordials and their allies. The Dragon Kings had never sought these honors, nor did they believe them to be worthy in and of themselves. The value they saw in them was in the approbation of the gods and the Exalted that accompanied them — at least at first.

During the early First Age, Creation was at peace. There was no urgency, so the Dragon Kings dithered and delayed in the details of their administration, preferring to spend their time waging internecine conflicts over political and religious affairs, as they had in the past. The Solars saw little reason to reprimand their allies, since, as the Dragon Kings correctly surmised, there was little need for rapid action. The Realm enjoyed the luxury of indolence and self-absorption, and even the Solar Deliberative recognized this fact. Consequently, the Dragon Kings occupied themselves with their own pursuits after knowledge and with increasingly outré spectator sports in their many elaborate arenas and coliseums. As Meru increasingly eclipsed the First City in the affairs of the Realm, these tendencies in the Dragon Kings only became more pronounced. The rewards they once did not seek became more and more important until they were eventually the primary reason the Dragon Kings undertook any significant endeavor.

In what became known as "Wars of the Flowers," one gladiatorial team fought against another in massive staged battles highlighted by gouts of gore (called "blood flowers" in the High Holy Speech). Scholars waged wars of words with their rivals, and their protégés often did more than that. Merchants contended with religious foot soldiers for attention and influence, attempting to secure their dominance through any means necessary.

Most disturbing of all were the continual battles between the temples of Rathess. Once, the leadership of the Unconquered Sun was unquestioned. All Dragon Kings acknowledged him as their lord and patron in the heavens and paid him the obeisance he was due. All the residents of the city assiduously observed the great festivals at the Pyramid of the Sun. These were the most important events in the life of the city, and none denied them.

This process took time and did not occur in all members of the race at once, nor did it become so widespread as to undermine Rathess or its dominions. Rather, it represented a subtle shift in emphasis from the earliest days of the Dragon Kings. Where once the Dragon Kings were content to serve the Realm as best

they could, they now saw doing so as the means to other ends — personal power and profit among them.

THE GHOUL KING REAPPEARS

Many Dragon Kings grew tired of the sports, scholarship and other activities that filled their days. Even the continued patronage of the Unconquered Sun and Leeayta was insufficient to slake their thirst for diversion from the realities of a slow decline into irrelevance.

The Solar Deliberative was worried by the slow abasement of its ancient allies. It did what it could to stir the Dragon Kings from their self-satisfied stupor and set their sights on cultural development — or at least on seeking out the hidden enemies of the Realm — but its efforts were to increasingly little avail. The Dragon Kings were creatures of conflict, and the world of the First Age left them no outlets save avarice and sectarian violence. Eventually, as the Great Curse blossomed, the Solars became increasingly paranoid and tyrannical. Soon, it was a cause of great concern that the Dragon Kings paid so little heed to the defense of the Eastern reaches of Creation, and the Solars turned their gaze elsewhere and sponsored others who might better serve them in the defense of the Realm. The Dragon Kings barely noticed this change in focus, and those who did saw it as further proof that Rathess must tend to its own affairs rather than act as lapdog to the Solar Deliberative.

The Dragon Kings experimented with dark sorcery and the summoning of demons. They employed their alchemical skills to bring about ever-more-bizarre results. And, as always, they turned to warring amongst themselves. The introduction of new gods made this even easier, as the partisans of the old ways expressed their distaste for “apostates” through violence.

For it was that some Dragon Kings — only a few at first, but eventually growing to greater numbers — sought out the worship of local gods and spirits. Some did it as a form of entertainment, while others joined such cults as a rejection of the Celestial Incarna they felt had turned the pages of history on their race. As Rathess’ fortunes declined, the priests of city’s temple challenged the pride of place given to others. Encouraged by the worship of alien deities, such as that of Han-Tha, the Dragon Kings saw such disputes as but other ways to hold back the boredom that filled their lives. Street battles between monks, priests and devotees became just another spectator sport with which the world-weary Dragon Kings entertained themselves. Worst of all, those loyal to the Unconquered Sun eventually lost the upper hand in Rathess, leading many of the gods, such as Leeayta, to abandon their Dragon Kings to their fate.

The decline was due in large part to the fact that the city’s population was declining in intelligence, thanks to their inattention to the quest for personal enlighten-

ment. Without careful spiritual study and supernatural tutelage, the Dragon Kings had difficulty rising above their reptilian nature. Without the constant tutelage of the gods, the Dragon Kings’ warlike ways made their race’s overall degree of mental development decline. By the late First Age, the city had become a cauldron of seething resentments and hostile cults.

Into this unpleasant environment, the Eater of the Dead, Han-Tha, decided to make himself known once more. This strange and alien god had lurked on the edges of Dragon King society since the days of the Primordial War. Until now, he had gained only a handful of worshipers. The Dragon Kings of old had seen little worthy of reverence in his creed, for his interests were decay, corruption and the decline and fall of nations. He also preached that it was from death that one could gain the greatest power, a doctrine that found a place in the hearts of a growing number of Dragon Kings. Han-Tha taught his followers that, by feasting upon the (literal or metaphorical) flesh of the dead, they could find strength even in decay. As Rathess sank deeper into its own decay, this distinctive doctrine of the Ghoul King proved particularly attractive and garnered his cult even more worshipers. As despicable as many Dragon Kings found the Eater of the Dead, he had earned a place for his temple along the Way of the Pyramids. Han-Tha became as much a part of Rathess as the Unconquered Sun himself.

DECLINE

The worshipers of Han-Tha became increasingly dominant in the affairs of the city, demanding ever-greater privileges. In turn, worshipers of Leeayta urged the Dragon Kings to seek strength not in decay, but in war, entreating the people to take up the challenge of the Solars to protect the edges of Creation in the defense of the faith of the Unconquered Sun.

Just as Rathess descended into anarchy and the cult of Han-Tha seemed on the verge of achieving dominion where once the Unconquered Sun reigned supreme, the Great Curse finally overwhelmed the Solar Exalted. The Solars were always given to dark moods and immoderate urges. Now, however, the Curse could no longer be ameliorated; it governed every aspect of the Solar Deliberative’s actions in Creation. Even the most loyal of allies and servants were treated harshly, lest the Exalted give their enemies an opening by which they might do harm to the Realm. For groups such as the Dragon Kings, the situation was even worse. The Exalted had not been able to rely upon them for many years. Indeed, many believed they could no longer trust these remnants of the Primordial regime. So it was that Rathess was made a Solar protectorate and its governance handed over to a junta of Solar and Lunar Exalted, whose mission it was to ensure that the city not become a chink in the Realm’s defenses.



THE END COMES

Han-Tha now exerted immense influence in Rathless. His followers were everywhere, and they stoked the flames of hatred against the Exalted. With the Exalted now behaving like the mad demigods they had become, the Eater of the Dead saw this as the perfect opportunity to pursue the apotheosis that he sought. By inflaming the Dragon King's hatred to the point where it would spark the Solars' own insecurities, Han-Tha could effect the greatest destruction ever seen — and his own elevation to even greater power under Heaven. That his followers would undergo their own more limited apotheoses only made it easier for him to convince them to take part in his insane plan.

Unfortunately for Han-Tha, he never had a chance to put his plan into action. The Dragon-Blooded proved to be even more duplicitous than the Ghoul King himself. They ambushed the Solars and wiped nearly all of them from the face of Creation. The resulting upheaval drew the Terrestrial's attentions elsewhere, and they withdrew from Rathless. The First City was now left to its own devices. Han-Tha was enraged. He ordered his followers to begin a series of riots and assaults, designed to bring the city down from within. The Eater of the Dead still hoped that he could engineer the fall of the city and thereby increase his own power. Despite his best efforts, Han-Tha

failed. All he succeeded in doing was to convince a handful of remaining civilized Dragon Kings to join the Solars against the treasonous Dragon-Blooded. Yet, Rathless continued to stand — for a time.

That was until the Dragon-Blooded drove two stragglers of the Solar Purge back to Rathless. While the savage Dragon Kings fought amongst themselves, these two Solars and their few allies fought against a large number of Terrestrials sent to hunt them down. In the end, the Dragon-Blooded won the day, and Albaio and Pleasant Clouds were both slain. Rathless was devastated in the process, and the Dragon Kings' population was decimated. Though not occurring as he had planned, Han-Tha initially rejoiced. Before the Sidereals had even finished interring the Solars into the city's catacombs, the followers of Han-Tha were creeping into the deserted streets to consume the corpses and await their own apotheoses.

But they never came. Neither Han-Tha nor his minions could derive the necessary sustenance to effect his plans. Though in ruins, with its population dying, Rathless still stood, hanging on to the barest threads of existence where, here and there, groups of Dragon Kings eked out an existence in the ruins. It was but a shadow of its former self, but it survived nonetheless. In its survival, there was still life enough to stave off Han-Tha's plan and to frustrate the Ghoul King for several centuries to come.





THE SECOND AGE

The final fall of Rathess took time. Under the new Dragon-Blooded Shogunate, Rathess remained a protectorate of the Exalted. Bereft of divine patronage and without the protection of the Solars on which it had come to depend, the city kept its gates closed. Rather than risk drawing the ire of the Terrestrial Exalted or the gods, the Dragon Kings withdrew from Creation. This was not a conscious decision so much as an irrefutable fact. The Dragon Kings had dwindled in number, and those that remained were increasingly bestial and filled with rage. Even if they had wished to participate in the politics of the Shogunate, they could not have done so in a meaningful way. But the new Age had one more surprise in store for Rathess.

COUP DE GRACE

Because Rathess was now a ruined shell that had closed itself off from the rest of Creation, the Dragon-Blooded did not impose their ways on it. Indeed, the Daimyo of Deheleshen treated it more like a game preserve or a tribal reservation than a subjugated state. The grand Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon were not destroyed as reminders of deities now anathematized by the new Immaculate Philosophy. Perhaps the Dragon-Blooded might have turned to such things in time, but the daimyos' competition for status and power soon consumed the entire attention of the Dragon-Blooded Host. So it continued for the length of the Shogunate, until the Great Contagion spread throughout Creation. This plague slew the vast majority of the remaining population of Rathess. The Dragon Kings appealed to their gods to save them, turning back to Leeayta and the Unconquered Sun, neither of whom answered their prayers. The few that survived vainly fled the region, hoping to escape the disease's wrath.

In the aftermath of the Contagion, the armies of the Fair Folk entered the world. Once, they merely harassed merchant caravans and led astray patrols. Now, the Fair Folk acted boldly and waged total war upon Creation. In the process, they transformed reality into madness according to their wishes. Portions of the Wyld bled into normal reality and warped the landscape around Rathess, particularly to the south of the city. Though the Fair Folk spared little time on the fallen towers, a few places in the ruins of the First City show the twisted shapes and mad polychromatic colors characteristic of the Wyld's touch. Elsewhere, the jungle reclaimed the ruins and made it inhospitable for all but the most daring — or greedy — of mortals to enter. Over the centuries, Rathess has become renowned as the treasure trove of the Southeast. Explorers from the Scavenger Lands, for example, have picked the surface

structures of Rathess clean, making it even more difficult for those who wish to follow in their footsteps.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE DRAGON KINGS

Since the dark era of the Contagion, hostile action by the other inhabitants of the city combined with the innate savagery of the Dragon Kings has kept all but a handful of these once noble beings from again attaining the faintest shreds of civilization or enlightenment. Because they live such short, brutal lives, there are only now a few tens of thousands living Dragon Kings anywhere in the world. The vast majority of the remaining Dragon King spirits have had, at most, one brief reincarnation since the coming of the Contagion — none of their spirits has had time to adapt to Creation's new conditions and hardships.

Without any simple route back to civilization, Rathess has remained a ruin where the Dragon Kings continually reincarnate as savages that war against one another and hunt their prey in packs armed with rude spears and deadly traps. None who visit Rathess today realizes that these "stalkers" are the same beings who once ruled this ruined metropolis. The only remnants of the Dragon Kings once great civilization are a few dozen semi-savage primitives struggling to remember fragments of their past lives and eight of the greatest Dragon Kings who still lie in enchanted preservation chambers deep under Rathess.

RECENT EVENTS

Of course, there are always individuals willing to brave the unknown, especially if there is a chance to obtain glory and power in the process. Treasure seekers, explorers and archeologists all made their way into Rathess in the years after the Contagion. A few of the lucky ones succeeded in taking away wonders that few had ever imagined, let alone seen. The majority, though, run afoul of the ruins' more sinister inhabitants, whether the Fair Folk, the goblins of Han-Tha or even the degenerate Dragon Kings who stalk the broken buildings and shattered temples of Rathess.

The Empress also took much interest in Rathess. Over the centuries, she sent numerous expeditions into the ruins, seeking wonders and artifacts of the First Age. They fared little better than the rest. If anything, the Dragon-Blooded have had the least success in probing the ruins of Rathess. This fact has only emboldened the Terrestrial Exalted, who are even now preparing another such expedition, believing that this time they shall succeed where they have failed in the past.

The Solar Exalt Filial Wisdom, one of the Exalted who escaped the Wyld Hunt in the days of the Scarlet Empress, sought to reclaim Rathess for himself. He believed Rathess held great power. Drawing on strange





memories of the city before its fall, he returned to the ruins and sought out its wonders. Han-Tha saw in Filial Wisdom the chance to spread further death and destruction and possessed the Exalted, who now “rules” the ruins as the Goblin King and Han-Tha’s chief servant in Creation.

Unlike many who came before him, Filial Wisdom seeks to rebuild Rathless and enlist the support of the remaining Dragon Kings. He has been there for almost a decade, and he seeks to show the world that Han-Tha is a savior as well as a destroyer, a plan of which the Ghoul King approves wholeheartedly. Indeed, the Eater of the Dead wishes to prove himself. Deprived of his victory in the past, Han-Tha hopes that he might find a way to harness the ruins of Rathless to serve his own goals and to complete his ascension to the ranks of the Celestial Incarna. Han-Tha and Filial Wisdom have been gathering and drilling their forces in secret. Though they confine themselves to the Pyramid of the Sun and its immediate environs, their spies range much farther afield, and the Cult of Han-Tha will become aware of any large or noisy expeditions within 30 miles of the city. The cult has recently begun to conduct limited sweeps of the city, but it operates in some secrecy lest it draw the attention of the Wyld Hunt or the local powers.

As recently as last year, there was an expedition sponsored by a Guild factor in Thorns that was making systematic forays into the ruins. However, 11 months ago, its prying finally displeased Han-Tha, and Filial Wisdom led his host against its camp. The resulting battle was short and sharp, but Filial Wisdom learned his lessons and reorganized his troops. A few captives still remain, slave-acolytes of the cult of the Eater of the Dead.

Now, as the Solar Exalted return to the world, Rathless once again beckons. Whether it will one day reclaim its place as Creation’s First City or become an abode of evil, only the Maidens know for sure.

THE DRAGON KINGS

The Dragon Kings are beings halfway between gods and mortals. They were the Primordials’ first experiment at creating thinking beings who were fully a part of the physical world. Although their souls were immortal and retained within them some memories of their past lives, their bodies were merely mortal flesh and, although strong and durable, rarely lived longer than 350 years. When one of the Dragon Kings died, his spirit was reborn within the egg of another of his kind. The process of rejoining a physical body striped most of the memories and power from the Dragon-King’s spirit, reducing it in Essence and leaving it with only fragmentary images from its past lives.

For the first years of its life, the newly born reptile was a mindless savage, driven by the instincts of its reptilian form. A tutor wise in the lore of civility was required to train the young Dragon King and allow it to become something more than a mindless predator. Complicating matters, the Dragon Kings’ fast-growing bodies mature fully into deadly carnivores in only five or six years. When the Dragon Kings ruled Rathless, the young were kept in large specially made pens and carefully walled game parks, where they were given extensive physical training through various hunting games but were not allowed to run wild and possibly harm civilized beings. After many years of special training, the spirit within the beast awakened, and the creature could slowly be trained to civility, returning both sentience and personality to its new body. As the spirit within the Dragon King slowly grew in power and education, it also recalled fragmentary memories of its previous lives. The Dragon Kings’ memories of their past lives are similar to those possessed by all of the Celestial Exalted and become somewhat more intense and detailed as the creatures rise in Essence. By the end of its fourth decade, a Dragon King’s education would be complete, and it could now look forward to three centuries of life, during which it would continue to slowly grow in both skill and power.

THE CIVILIZATION OF THE DRAGON KINGS

The Dragon Kings were a proud and volatile race. Dueling was an accepted way of settling disputes, and while most duels ended at first blood, fights to the death were not unknown. However, the death of one of the duelists was considered only a minor tragedy, because every Dragon King who died would soon be reborn. Although all but fragments of the Dragon King’s prior lives would be forever lost, the individual’s personality and his likes and dislikes would all remain. The Dragon Kings felt that this constituted spiritual immortality and, therefore, had little fear of death. Once their training was completed, Dragon Kings were generally expected to pick up their lives where they’d left off. Being creatures of deep passion, both love and hatred normally endured from one life to the next, even if the reasons for these feelings no longer remained. An elaborate code of honor and dueling was necessary. Without it, feuds between rivals could be literally never-ending.

The Dragon Kings worshiped the Unconquered Sun. While they also honored a host of other, lesser gods, the sun was the center of their world and the heart of their faith, at least until the late First Age. Every dawn, there were worship services atop the Pyramid of the Sun in Rathless and atop similar temples in their other cities. The carnivorous Dragon Kings offered the hearts of living animals to the sun and, not infrequently, the hearts of the own people as well.

Death was never something the Dragon Kings simply accepted — since they viewed it as a punctuation to the chapters of their immortal existences, they preferred to meet it on their own terms. Although some Dragon Kings arranged to die hunting dangerous prey or attempting some heroic feat, when many Dragon Kings neared the end of their lives, they offered up their own hearts to the sun, asking the priests to make their deaths sacred offerings to their god.

The Dragon Kings viewed the first half century of each new life as a time for growth, for reflection and (most importantly) for relearning both civilized wisdom and their code of honor. They also believed that anyone who committed serious crimes had forgotten or never learned these essential lessons. To help remedy these deficiencies, criminals were made into involuntary sacrifices to the Unconquered Sun. The Dragon Kings saw hastening an offender's death and rebirth as a way to force him to relearn these essential lessons and so to overcome his past mistakes. Although these sacrifices were deemed inferior to the willing offerings of weary or aged Dragon Kings, the Unconquered Sun accepted all hearts given to him.

When the Dragon Kings ruled humanity, they also sacrificed human criminals to the sun. Once the Primordials were overthrown and the gods freed humanity, this practice ceased. On rare occasions, the Solar Exalted agreed that humans who committed serious crimes against the Dragon Kings should die in this way to atone for their offenses against Heaven. However, the Solars only allowed the worst human criminals to be sacrificed in this manner.

In the first days of the Contagion, many Dragon Kings blamed the traitorous Dragon-Blooded's murder of the Solar Exalted for the ravages of the disease. Groups of Dragon Kings left their cities to hunt down members of the Dragon-Blooded to sacrifice upon the Dragon Kings' altars to restore the favor of the Unconquered Sun and end the terrible Contagion. Although nearly 100 of the Dragon-Blooded had their still-beating hearts ripped from their bodies in this vast orgy of blood, not even these sacrifices satisfied the Unconquered Sun, and the plague continued.

THE MAGICS OF THE DRAGON KINGS

The Dragon Kings were Essence-channelers of some skill, practicing various elemental Essence-shaping techniques to transmute themselves and perform other magical effects. While not so versatile as Charms, these Paths came easily to the Dragon Kings, and many mastered several such techniques.

DRAGON KINGS AND ATTUNEMENT

Dragon Kings can attune to items of the Five Magical Materials or to other magical items requiring Essence commitment. They can attune to orichalcum items for the normal commitment cost and gain the orichalcum Magical Material bonus as if they were Solars. They can also attune to items of their own technology at normal cost. However, items of the other Magical Materials or general magical items of mortal human manufacture require the Dragon Kings to commit double the normal commitment cost and provide no Magical Material bonus (the Dragon Kings cannot force full attunement).

ESSENCE

The Dragon Kings have an Essence pool equal to (their Essence x 4) + (their Willpower x 2) + (their Conviction + Valor). As with spirits, they are fully harmonized to their entire Essence pool; expenditure of Essence does not cause Dragon Kings to display anima banners.

Among the Dragon Kings, permanent Essence is also a measure of enlightenment and civility. Mechanically, their Essence scores determine both how much they remember of their past lives and how high both their magical Paths and their Intelligence can rise. It costs a Dragon King (current rating x 8) experience points to increase her permanent Essence. A Dragon King must undergo (her current Essence rating x 2) months of intensive training in manners, behavior and martial philosophy each time she wishes to increase her Essence score.

Essence	Personality and Memories	Maximum Intelligence
1	The individual is a bestial savage but possesses many keen instincts	1
2	The individual is fully civilized, but has no memories of its many past lives	3
3-5	The individual possesses memories of its past lives similar to those of the Celestial Exalted	5
6	The individual possesses an inhuman level of intelligence and can increase Abilities and Virtues up to 6	6

THE TEN PATHS OF PREHUMAN MASTERY

Unlike Exalts, Dragon Kings do not learn Charms. Instead, they have 10 orderly Paths to wisdom and power. There are two Paths based on each of the five elements. Learning a Path is much like learning an Ability—each Path must be learned in a fixed order. For example, a character can only learn the third dot in a Path after the character has learned the first two dots. Dragon Kings can learn no more dots in any given Path than their permanent Essence.

It costs a Dragon King 7 experience points to develop the first dot in a Path, and it can be advanced at an experience point cost of (current rating x 5). The training time is (the Path's current rating) weeks. Dragon Kings cannot develop a Path past 1 at Essence 1 or past 3 at Essence 2. At Essence 3 or higher, they can advance their Paths to 5, and those who exceed 100 years in age can advance as high as 6.

The Clear Air Path concerns knowledge and perception. The Dragon King hones his mind and senses so that he can perceive all forms of magic and the flows of Essence or overhear a whispered conversation taking place 100 yards away. At higher levels, the Dragon King can touch an object and know its history, discover someone's inner secrets or learn the most critical flaws in a wall or a suit of armor.

The Celestial Air Path first allows the adept to see and communicate with unmanifested spirits, to strike them with weapons, to enter a spirit's sanctum (or even the sacred city of Yu-Shan) and, eventually, to summon and command the obedience of both elementals and demons.

The Solid Earth Path was used to construct the Dragon Kings' vast cyclopean cities and enormous temples. Practitioners learn to shape stone and earth solely by thought and, eventually, to temporarily transform themselves into beings of living stone.

The Yielding Earth Path concerns healing the living, repairing that which has been broken and, finally, learning to craft inhumanly fine items and to unlock the powers inherent in various crystals and the Five Magical Materials. This Path is the origin of the Dragon Kings' crystal technology.

The Blazing Fire Path involves the creation and control of both light and flame. As worshipers of the Unconquered Sun, this Path was deemed sacred by the Dragon Kings—their priests all were adepts in it.

The Flickering Fire Path is the Path of physical prowess. Students of the Flickering Fire Path learn to jump, climb and fight with great ability. At higher levels, they learn to move with unparalleled speed and to battle multiple opponents at once.

The Flowing Water Path involves learning the secrets of movement. First, the Dragon king learns to walk up walls or even across empty space as easily as she could walk across a floor. Eventually, she learns how to walk through walls and how to cross short distances with a thought.

The Shimmering Water Path involves the control of stealth, illusion and deceptive appearances. At low levels, practitioners can disguise themselves or hide more effectively. Eventually, they learn to become nearly invisible or to create multisensory illusions that can fool pursuers or entertain a crowd.

The Growing Wood Path allows the Dragon King to communicate with and eventually shape and control all manner of plants. Adepts of this Path were the ones who created the Dragon Kings' powerful vegetative technology.

The Shaping Wood Path concerns the control of the adept's physical form. Practitioners can shape their bodies in a multitude of ways and can eventually learn to make minor changes to the bodies of others.

SAMPLE PATHS

The following are samples of the Dragon King's various powers. Stalkers often demonstrate these abilities naturally, but their low Essences keep them from developing significant powers.

THE PATH OF BLAZING FIRE

- **First Light**

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

The character can conjure a small light sufficient to illuminate an area 10 yards on a side. This light can be cast on any object the character can touch, including on other characters. A character who is a recipient of this light cannot effectively hide until the effect ends. Even if the character becomes invisible or immaterial, the light will remain visible.

- **Lesser Conjunction of Flame**

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Scene or until extinguished

Type: Simple

The character can cause any flammable object she touches to burst into flame. This flame is as intense as a campfire. In addition, the character can apply the flame to a nonflammable object, which will be unharmed but will remain covered in flame for the duration of the spell. When used on the blade of a weapon, or even on a cestus, this power adds a number of dice of damage equal to the character's permanent Essence score. This flame will not harm its creator, although other fires created by it may do so.

THE PATH OF FLICKERING FIRE

- **Flashing Agility**

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Permanent Essence in hours

Type: Simple

The character can add a number of dice equal to her level with this Path to all Athletics rolls involving jumping, climbing or balance. All of the character's initiative totals are increased by the same amount.

- **Fiery Prowess**

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

The character's jumping distance is multiplied by his level with this Path. Also, the character's score in this Path is also added to all of her player's attack and parry rolls for this turn.

- **One Fire, Many Flames**

Cost: 3 motes per additional action

Duration: Instant

Type: Extra Action

The character can spend 3 motes of Essence to perform an extra action. The Dragon King can perform no more extra actions in any given turn than her Essence. The cost for this effect must be paid for each additional action the character takes. The character cannot split her dice pools when she uses this effect.

THE PATH OF SHAPING WOOD

- **Shaping the Bark**

Cost: 3 motes (and an additional mote to remove)

Duration: Indefinite

Type: Simple

The Dragon King can alter the structure of her hide and claws, adding +1 to both her lethal and bashing soak and +1L to all attacks made with her claws and teeth. With 3 or more dots in this Path, this bonus rises to +2L. Although the changes made using this ability are permanent until the committed Essence is released, civilized Dragon Kings did not keep them active at all time, since the alterations make fine manipulation and social interactions difficult (+1 difficulty on all rolls for either).



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CHAPTER TWO

THE CITY AND VICINITY

Rathess is surrounded by countless miles of some of the deadliest jungles in the Southeast. This verdant and hostile rainforest is home to tyrant lizards, packs of carnivorous hatra and voracious colony spiders. If the characters are not lucky enough to possess spells or artifacts that allow them to fly over all of these horrors, by far the safest way to travel to Rathess is to sail down the Vaniwayan River.

THE VANIWAYAN RIVER

This deep watercourse runs from the great Wyld area to the south of Rathess into the Grey River that enters the sea near Nexus. The Vaniwayan joins the Grey River about 500 miles west of Rathess and extends 600 miles between the Grey River and Rathess. The confluence of the Grey and Vaniwayan rivers is located on the edge of the jungle, at the town of Chaing-dav. Chaing-dav is a trading town of 2,000 inhabitants, where half-civilized trappers and herb gatherers exchange the goods they have extracted from the jungle for jade and various civilized goods. For the past 50 years, it has also been the primary embarkation point for Rathess.

Until two years ago, Chaing-dav held a imperial garrison — the Scarlet Throne kept track of every traveler to Rathess who passed through this town. However, the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress and the decline in the Realm's fortunes caused the empire to

recall this garrison for more urgent duties. The year after that, the town lost contact with the Guild expedition that had been living in a camp outside the city for almost three years.

Today, anyone can hire a boat to Rathess, though persuading a crew to stay in Rathess for an extended period may be hard; there is considerable worry that Ma-Ha-Suchi's gathering host will soon force the evacuation of the area. Despite the fact that they no longer have a presence in Chaing-dav, the Realm still maintains an interest in anyone traveling to Rathess. Chaing-dav has five paid imperial agents (the stablehand at the hostel, the mayor, the mayor's assistant, a matronly housewife-about-town from a wealth family and one of the town whores). Any of these will report any particularly outlandish or notable travelers to the commander of the imperial forces 700 miles upriver in the city of Jades. The Dynasts are especially worried about the possibility of Anathema gaining access to the secrets and powerful artifacts located in Rathess. The imperial garrison in Jades offers a significant bounty (enough to make a Resources •••• purchase or to raise a character's Resources to ••• permanently) for reliable reports of Anathema heading for Rathess. Any such report will result in a troops from the garrison looking into the situation.

LOCAL IMPERIAL TROOPS

The garrison at Jades consists of a wing of elite troops (185 man muster strength) under the command of an old and respected Air-aspected Dragon Blood (approximately 300 experience points) and her two younger Dragon-Blooded lieutenants (approximately 150 experience points each), both of whom are Earth-aspected and one of whom has had Immaculate training. The commander knows her troops are inadequate to deal with a Solar Exalted threat and will send any reliable proof of Anathema heading for Rathess back to the Blessed Isle and wait for the Wyld Hunt deal with the problem.

Less certain reports will cause the commander to dispatch a scale or two of soldiers (25 to 50) and one of her lieutenants down the river to Chaing-dav to investigate. If the report seems reasonable on further investigation, the lieutenant and a scale of troops (25) skilled in reconnaissance will continue to Rathess after using a Charm to send a message back to Jades. Without reinforcements, these soldiers will only engage a Solar Exalted if they can find one who is both alone and injured. However, they will attempt to track the Anathema and then join of the Wyld Hunt when it arrives.

If the Wyld Hunt responds, it will consist of three to seven Immaculate martial artists of between 250 and 450 experience points, plus at least one sorcerer who knows Infallible Messenger and Stormwind Rider and who may possibly command quite a number of demons. If the Storyteller is using warstriders from **The Book of Three Circles**, a particularly powerful Wyld Hunt may have access to one or two such suits of armor. The Wyld Hunt will arrive using either Charms, sorcery or a fast-moving First Age vehicle such as a chariot of aerial conquest (see **Caste Book: Dawn**, p. 78). Since it will travel too rapidly to bring along any mortal troops, the Wyld Hunt will join up with between three and five scales of troops from Jades.

Any proof of Anathema involvement will cause the garrison commander to request that the Blessed Isle send out the Wyld Hunt. Fortunately, distance and the difficulty of travel being what it is, unless there is absolute proof of Anathema heading for Rathess, the Wyld Hunt will arrive at Rathess at least three weeks after the players' characters. If the garrison obtains proof that Anathema are heading for Rathess, then the Wyld Hunt will arrive at Chiang-dav two days after they receive news of Anathema activity. The troops from Jades will join them in another two days, and then,

they will all make their way to Rathess in a First Age boat that can move at up to 15 miles per hour. If possible, the Wyld Hunt will attempt to overtake the Anathema before they reach Rathess.

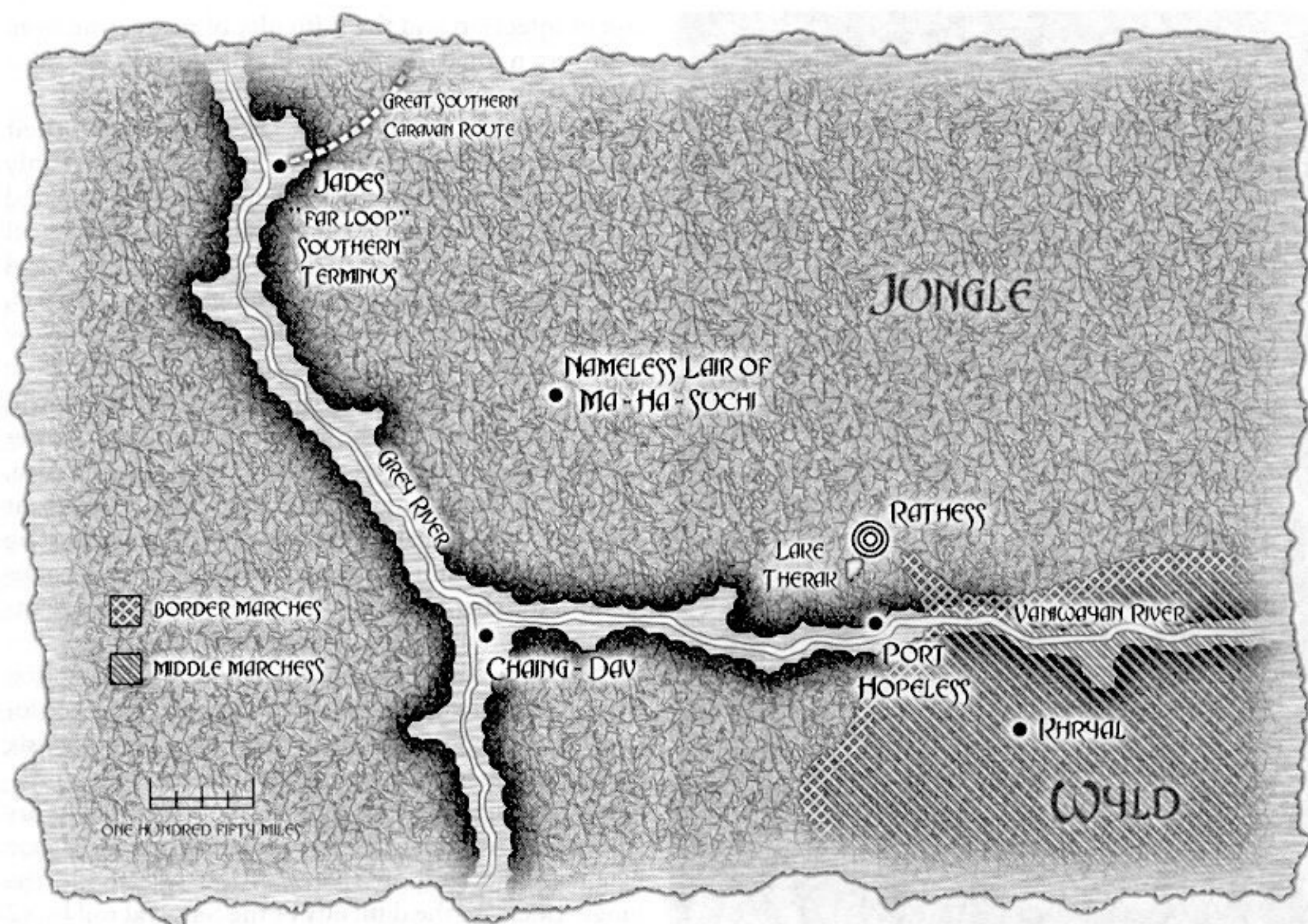
The Vaniwayan originates in a vast Wyld zone and occasionally carries three-tailed fish, jewel-scaled river sharks with herons' wings, great river otters with the heads and arms of women and other Wyld-born horrors. Sometimes, Wyld-spawned seeds that fall into the Vaniwayan wash ashore within the bounds of sane Creation. Although many plants from the Wyld cannot grow where the laws of reality are less flexible, a few of the less fantastic specimens manage to grow and thrive. As a result, a number of large carnivorous plants now grow near the banks of the Vaniwayan.

Despite all of the dangers found in the rivers and on its banks, sailing down the Vaniwayan is still considerably safer than marching through the trackless jungle. The only problem is that the Vaniwayan does not actually run into Rathess — instead, the river lies to the south of Rathess and passes within 90 miles of this ancient ruin. More than 50 years ago, a large expedition financed by the Scarlet Throne used sorcery and First Age artifacts to build a rough but sturdy stone dock where the river passes closest to Rathess. Enchanted with Terrestrial Circle Sorcery to be exceedingly durable and to repel plants that attempt to grow on it, the quay remains in excellent repair. Although there never has been a town built in the thick and steamy jungle surrounding the docks, travelers to Rathess have jokingly named this dock Port Hopeless. Although boats can remain safely moored here, travelers still face a march through the jungle that will take at least eight days unless they are capable of some form of inhumanly rapid movement.

THROUGH THE JUNGLE

Characters traveling overland from Chaing-dav face a journey though approximately 400 or 500 miles of jungle, depending upon whether they are coming from the South or the North. Traveling 100 miles through dense jungle requires at least six days — going by land will from the North takes at least five weeks while coming from the South takes four weeks. Alternately, taking the river route requires a 600 mile trip down the Vaniwayan that takes eight or nine days and a 90 mile trek though the jungle that requires at least five days.

If the characters spend any amount of time in the jungle, it's likely that the journey will be an unpleasantly memorable experience. The jungle is hot, humid and full of every sort of noxious and venomous life. Even if the characters are protected by Charms such as Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, their gear may



not be. All cloth and leather that is not covered in special herbal salves designed to repel insects and fungi will begin to grow mold after several days in the jungle and will be both weakened and permanently blemished in less than a week. The salves necessary to avert such problems can be purchased in Chaing-dav, but must be reapplied every day or two. Characters unfamiliar with travel through deep jungle may forget to perform this sort of maintenance and pay the price for their ignorance. Players must roll two or more successes on a Wits + Survival roll for their characters to remember how to properly take such precautions.

In addition, both food and water are problematic. Stored food and drink go bad very rapidly. Unless the characters purchased food designed to survive jungle conditions in Chaing-dav or some other settlement near the jungle, assume that all stored food is either rotten or swarming with insects within two days. Such food consists of heavily spiced and carefully dried meat and grain cakes. This food must be boiled in water to render it edible and characters who are not familiar with spicy food and whose players botch a Stamina + Resistance roll are unable to eat it because the spices are simply too hot for them.

Both standing and running water in the jungle is usually the source of all manner of unwholesome diseases. Anyone who is not native to the jungle who

drinks water from a stream or pool in the jungle may catch dysentery unless they boil all drinking water. In addition, players must make a roll for their characters once every week for them to resist catching both yellow fever and malaria. The best protection against both diseases is to use a variety of insect repelling salves and ointments. Between the unpleasant tang of all the various salves and unguents and the overwhelming smell of moist decay permeating the jungle, many civilized visitors to this jungle find the experience to be exceedingly harsh and difficult.

Fighting in the jungle is even more dangerous. Because it is so hot and humid, wearing armor is very difficult for anyone not protected from the environment by Charms such as Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit. Players of characters wearing armor must make fatigue rolls for them a minimum of once every hour. Players of characters who are in combat or otherwise performing strenuous exercise must make fatigue rolls for them every 30 minutes (every 15 minutes in the heat of midday). Also, any armor not made of one of the Five Magical Materials will require twice as much care as normal to remain in good condition — both rust and mold are perennial problems in this dense rainforest. Characters will need to spend several hours each day keeping their armor, weapons and gear in good condition.

DYSENTERY

Symptoms: Although rarely fatal, dysentery can be extremely debilitating. It is characterized by fevers, chills and diarrhea. Mortals infected with this fever reduce all dice pools by 2 — they cannot walk more than five miles a day, and they cannot move faster than their Dexterity in yards per turn.

Duration: Dysentery has an incubation time of between two and four days. The fever generally lasts for two or three days, after which time the patient is well but weak.

Vector: Dysentery is normally caught by drinking jungle water that has not been boiled. However, anyone who has taken one or more levels of lethal damage in a jungle and not given magical healing may also catch it.

Treatment: Rest, clean food and water and a variety of herbal medicines are the best treatment for dysentery. Dysentery can also be cured by the Contagion-Curing Touch Charm with one or more successes.

Virulence:	2
Untreated Morbidity:	2
Treated Morbidity:	1
Difficulty to Treat:	3

The risk from injuries is likewise increased. Add 1 to the difficulty of resisting wounds becoming infected in this jungle, and (for mortals only) increase the difficulty of recovering from infections by +1. For anyone lacking the supernatural resistance of an Exalt, injury in the jungle can easily become a death sentence. The only characters exempt from these increased risks of disease are natives of the jungle or those who have lived or worked in a jungle for more than three years. Such characters have developed a natural resistance to many jungle diseases, and the

risk of infection and the difficulty of recovering from it are as normal for them. Jungle natives are also completely immune to dysentery.

In general, Exalts who do not wish to see their mortal companions die in the jungle should either only travel in the company of other Exalts or come prepared with a variety of Charms or wonders to aid and heal mortals. Those who need bearers should hire local porters who are experienced at jungle travel. Porters, guides and guards can be hired in Chaing-dav or in any other moderate-sized town on the edge of the jungle.

Some novice jungle travelers believe that horses will speed their trip through the jungle. Unfortunately, horses are as susceptible to disease and infection as humans. Also, the narrow paths through the jungle and the constant necessity to hack paths with chopping swords or long knives means that it is extremely difficult to take horses along. If the characters do, they will be leading the beasts far more often than they will be riding them.

Food is readily available in a jungle. Roll Perception + Survival (difficulty 1) to successfully forage for food for two people, finding food for between three and six people increases the difficulty of this roll to 2. Unfortunately, finding food that civilized mortals or Exalts are willing to eat can be a very different matter. Large mammals and birds are more difficult to catch in the jungle (increase the difficulty of the Survival roll by +2 to hunt for animals such as wild boar, monkeys or birds). Unless the characters hunt such prey, most of the food will be dubious delicacies such as thumb-sized grubs or spiders the size of dinner plates, which may prove troublesome to characters with delicate palates.

If the characters are near a stream, they can fish. However, jungle streams rarely run straight, and spending time to locate streams and catch fish will reduce the characters' travel time by 3 miles/day, unless the character doing the fishing can move inhumanly quickly through the jungle. In addition, small jungle streams carry a wide variety of waterborne and mosquito-carried diseases; anyone who spends much time near them

JUNGLE TRAVEL TIMES

Type of Movement	Miles/Day
Exalts moving swiftly without porters or any other mortal humans	18
Baggage train with porters and many supplies	12
Baggage train with horses and pack horses*	6

* If one or more Exalts armed with daiklaves or grimcleavers hacks a path through the jungle, then horses can move at the same speed as a baggage train with porters. However, clearing the jungle in this fashion leaves a large and obvious trail and is exhausting work. If only one Exalt is clearing the jungle, then her player must make a fatigue roll with a difficulty of 3. If two or more Exalts share this work, then the difficulty of this fatigue roll is reduced to 2. Remember to add in the fatigue value of the character's armor as well. Non-magical blades cannot be used to clear the jungle in this fashion.

will need to make rolls every other day to avoid catching malaria or yellow fever.

DANGEROUS CREATURES

The jungles around Rathess are thick with animate hazards as well as natural barriers. Storytellers should not hesitate to thrust multiple encounters on travelers. The creatures that follow are not the only possible encounters. Characters may also encounter chaun (see *Creatures of the Wyld*, p. 30), painted Fair Folk nobles leading raiding parties of goblins or the wolfman troops of Ma-Ha-Suchi. The latter move in units of up to 500 and are often accompanied by other, more powerful beings. They are uncommon and found only in patrols of 100 or less in RY 768, but they will patrol the area in great force by RY 775 unless the growth of Ma-Ha-Suchi's strength is checked by some outside force.

Strangle Ferns: These giant ferns sport a mixture of wide feathery fronds and long mobile vines. As fast as a striking serpent and as tough as well-tanned leather, these vines grab warm-blooded prey that passes nearby and attempt to drag it to the plant. Every turn, another vine will strike at anyone held by these vines. Characters who are already held by one vine cannot dodge or parry subsequent attacks. Up to four vines may enwrap a single target. Anyone held by these vines reduces all dice pools by one for every vine holding them. Also, these vines perform a clinch attack on the target. Every turn, the target takes 8B damage (+2B for each additional vine holding the target). If the target is held by more than one vine, then increase the difficulty of escape from the clinch by +1 for every two vines holding the target (+1 difficulty for two to three vines and +3 difficulty for targets being held by 4 vines). Targets who are knocked unconscious are dragged back to the fern where they are strangled until dead. The vines then release digestive juices and slowly dissolve the corpse.

Cannibal Flowers: These huge bromeliads grow on the forest floor. At rest, they appear to be nothing more than large pools of clear water between two and four yards in diameter. However, this seemingly pure water contains a potent paralytic poison (Difficulty to resist 3, Damage: 4B if the target resists, 8B if they don't, with a Penalty of -4 and a Duration of two hours). One turn after anything larger than a house cat drinks this liquid, the leaves of the cannibal flower swiftly enfold both the pool and the drinker. Characters familiar with jungles whose players roll two or more successes on reflexive Perception + Survival roll will notice the true nature of the pool before anyone drinks from it.

Each thick leathery leaf is three or four yards long. The leaves take less than a turn to close completely.



for



To jump out of the way before they fully close, the drinker must succeed at a Dexterity + Athletics or Dodge roll (difficulty 2). Remember to take into account the poison's paralytic effects. Once the flower has closed, anyone trapped inside must cut or bash her way out. The sides of the flower have a soak of 5L/9B. Characters must do 20 levels of damage to the flower to make a hole large enough to escape. Because the flower shifts and moves, roll damage normally for attacks against the inside or the outside of the leaves — the flower is not treated as an object.

Because of the difficulty of fighting while trapped in a giant flower, add one to the difficulty of all attack rolls on top of any poison penalties from which the character may be suffering. Anyone with a Strength + Athletics total of 12 or more can simply force the flower open in two turns. Anyone trapped inside a cannibal flower takes one level of bashing damage every five minutes until she either dies or escapes.

Local tribes use the poison of cannibal flowers, either pouring it into their enemy's cook pots or applying it to their blowgun darts. Reduce the difficulty to resist this poison to 2 if it is used to envenom a weapon.

Flying Snakes: Although they are most common in the Far East, flying snakes live in almost all Southeastern jungles. These poisonous arboreal snakes can easily climb up trees and branches and then fold out their ribs to form a long thin parachute and glide down to strike unexpectedly. Although they rarely grow much more than a yard long, these snakes can often glide more than 100 yards, falling only 10 yards in such a glide and landing safely on another tree or the ground. Fortunately, the poison of these snakes is not particularly deadly.

Hatra: Different varieties of these ravenous creatures live in both the deciduous forests of the East and in the jungles of the Southeast. Jungle hatra are the size of a small cat 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 30 and 60 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 sometimes active in the daytime in multi-canopy jungle. Colonies roost in one of the many large hollow trees found in this jungle and will fly out and attack anything that comes nearby. Hatra trees can sometimes be spotted by the bones lying around them. Since everything decays so rapidly in the jungle, players must make a successful difficulty 3 Perception + Survival roll in order for their characters to notice these bones.

Colony Spiders: Most spiders are solitary beasts. However, in the deep jungle, some spiders have learned that teamwork pays off. Different varieties of colony spiders are different sizes, but in general, they range in

size from small cats to large dogs. Regardless of size, their tactics are the same. In the deepest portions of the jungle, these horrors work together to weave huge webs that can trap prey as large as a pony. Their webs vary in strength, depending upon the size of the spiders. Escaping from the web of one of the smaller spiders requires two successes on a Strength + Athletics roll, while the largest of these spiders weave webs so tough that the player of the person who is trapped must roll five successes in order for his character to escape.

It is possible to cut someone out of such a web, but the attack must do at least four health levels of damage. Also, all attacks must score at least three successes, or the weapon also becomes stuck. The easiest way to free a character from a web is to use fire. A torch or similar sized flame can free someone from a colony spider web in two turns. The player of anyone who is stuck in these webs must make all rolls for his character (to attack the web or to do anything else) at +1 difficulty. Roll Perception + Awareness with a difficulty of 2 for a character to notice the web before he walks into it. The difficulty of this roll increases by +2 if the character is foolish enough to travel at night. Colony spiders use the same Traits as giant wolf spiders (see *Exalted*, p. 316) except that they have venom equal to ordinary poisonous snake venom and they attack in groups of six to fifteen.

CANNIBAL TRIBES

Although the city of Rathless is free from human tribes except for the horribly twisted underpeople (see p. 75), several tribes of Wyld-touched cannibals dwell in the vicinity of the city. Although there are unusual individuals in each tribe, most members of these tribes have similar Wyld mutations. Most have green skin, a thin coat of green fur and black eyes, devoid of whites or irises. A few have tails or claws, but most lack more extreme mutations.

The members of these tribes are fairly timid individually and long ago learned that they must use extreme cunning to face well-armed civilized visitors and that, even with the advantages they gain from keeping to the trees and using missile weapons, they often lose one-on-one combat. As a result, they prefer to attack in large groups, and they will only attack individually if bathing or investigating some curiosity distracts a lone member of an expedition. Also, when faced with large or particularly well-armed groups, they will set traps on the forest floor. Once a good portion their targets have been immobilized or seriously injured by the traps, the cannibals attempt to incapacitate and capture the remainder using poison darts, thrown clubs and other missile weapons.

One of their favorite tactics when facing small groups of visitors is to sneak down late in the night when the person on guard duty is nearing the end of his watch.

CREATURES OF THE JUNGLE

Creature	Physical Att. Str/Dex/Sta	Willpower	Health Levels	Attack Spd/Acc/Dmg	Dodge/Soak	Abilities
Strangle Fern	6/3/6	N/A	-0x5/-2x2/-4/1	Fronk Choke: 6/8/8B	0/5L/9B	Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Survival 4
Flying Snake	1/4/2	2	-0/-1/-2/1	Bite: 7/7/1L	7/0L/2B	Athletics 4, Awareness 2 (Smell +2), Dodge 3, Martial Arts 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3
Hatra	1/4/2	3	-0/-1x2/-2/1	Bite: 7/7/2L	8/1L/2B	Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3

At this point, half a dozen or more barbarians encircle the camp just outside the circle of firelight, while another waits in a tree just above the guard. At a softly whistled signal from this barbarian, those encircling the guard will attempt to dart or club the guard into unconsciousness. The remaining barbarians immediately rush up and attempt to club and dart everyone who is sleep-

ing, preventing the sleepers from getting up and offering effective resistance.

Once they have secured everyone who didn't escape, the barbarians haul their captives up into the trees. Here, they proceed to test their captives to see who will live and who will die. They test each captive individually — some, especially those who seem weak and unlikely to possess

WYLD BARBARIANS TRAPS

The Wyld barbarians of the Southeast excel at setting traps. These traps are designed to avoid killing their victims, but the barbarians have no qualms about seriously injuring or even maiming those that they capture. They also take great joy in torturing and eating their captives. Any 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).

Snares: The most common type of trap are snares — bent branches and rude but tough ropes 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 cannibals place these traps such that anyone caught in one slams into the trees while going up, causing five levels of bashing 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 maximum). Also, characters who get down without aid take 4B of falling damage.

Deadfalls: When faced with large groups of intruders entering their territory, barbarians often construct deadfalls. Some such deadfalls require that a character break a concealed line; others are set off manually by the barbarians when enough of the characters 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. Two or more successes on a Dexterity + Athletics roll allows a character to jump out of the way and so reduces this damage to seven levels of lethal damage. 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.



the skills of a warrior, are tortured. Captives fail this test if they break and begin to beg for the torture to stop (make a Stamina + Endurance roll for the character and garner two or more successes to avoid him breaking). Others, especially those who fought back during capture or who are armed, are forced into single combat with giant wolf spiders, small jungle cats, a half a dozen hungry hatra or, occasionally, a brave and deadly barbarian warrior.

The captive is forced into a small stockade with her opponent and then thrown a rude knife and a single mundane sword or spear. Captives who survive these contests are allowed to live, so long as they don't attempt to kill the barbarians. As a reward, every captive who succeeds can choose one other captive who will automatically live without having to endure these horrific trials.

Captives who fail are saved from death (but not from mauling), but the fate that awaits them is even worse than a clean death. Anyone who fails these trials is killed and eaten. However, eating captives demands a special ceremony and a gathering of all members of the tribe to share in the feast — captives who fail these tests are normally kept alive for three or four days. Then, during a gathering of the entire tribe, all sacrifices are tied to a wooden altar, and the tribal shaman cuts their still-living hearts out of their bodies. The shaman places the heart at the top of a tall tree, while the cannibals cook and eat the body. They kill one captive every day until they devour all the captives.

The few savants who have survived a stay with these Wyld barbarians suspect that the captives are killed in that way either because the barbarians possess ancient stories of the sacrifices of the Dragon Kings or because the spirits they worship ask for such sacrifices. Exalted who attempt to communicate with the barbarian's gods will discover that their chief deity is Shining Flower, Mistress of Hearts (see p. 71), who demands at least one human heart every season. Fortunately, travelers to Rathless are common enough that providing these sacrifices is rarely difficult.

These savages give all captives who survive the opportunity to join their tribe. A few do, and individuals captured by these barbarians have reported that these tribes contain a small number of members who were obviously born far from the dense jungles of the Southeast. Most recruits have one or more obvious Wyld mutation — the barbarians ensure the loyalty of new members by exposing them to the twisting influence of the Wyld.

Captives who do not join the tribe are free to leave. However, anyone willing to stay with the barbarians for even a couple of weeks will learn much about Rathless. Although the barbarians never go further into the city than the outermost buildings and consider the city's underways to be both deadly and cursed, they have had frequent contact with both the goblins and the stalkers. The cannibals can provide a wealth of information on

their enemies' movements, how to avoid them, what portions of the city they congregate in and where they avoid going. The barbarians have occasionally encountered the secretive underpeople and their leech hounds and warn guests and allies of these sub-human savages.

In addition, the Wyld barbarians know a vast amount about the plants found in the jungles around Rathless. Anyone who spends even a week or two learning their herb lore reduces the difficulty of all Survival and Medicine rolls by 1 level while in this part of the jungle. Also, characters will learn how to find both cannibal flower poison and blue life flowers in this section of the jungle (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 33) and can find either by gaining three or more successes on a Perception + Survival roll made by their players. Finding either plant requires 16 hours of concerted searching, reduced by one hour for every success above three that the character's player rolls.

THE TREETOP ROUTE

While slogging through the jungle floor is difficult and unpleasant, most mortals have no other option. However, Haltan characters, barbarians raised in the deep forest and anyone with 3 or more dots in Athletics or Charms, artifacts or Hearthstones such as a monkey jewel (see *Caste Book: Dawn*, p. 78) can, instead, take to the trees. The trees in the jungle are close enough together that characters skilled at arboreal movement can move rapidly from tree to tree. Up here, characters are dryer, away from the ground dwelling insects and all of the large dangerous animals such as tyrant lizards. Because of the better conditions up here, reduce the virulence of dysentery by one and eliminate the increased difficulty to recover from infections (but not the increased difficulty to avoid wounds becoming infected).

One of the other advantages of taking to the trees is that the local cannibal tribes are completely unused to meeting outsiders who are also adept at moving through the trees. These tribes of Wyld barbarians look with contempt on anyone trudging through the soggy floor of the rain forest — to them, anyone who walks on the jungle floor is, at best, a beast who might eventually become human and, more likely, a potential meal. However, others who know the freedom of the trees are either potential allies or dangerous rivals.

The cannibal tribes will avoid characters that travel through the trees if the characters are in a large and well-armed group. Even if there are only half-a-dozen, if they are well armed and demonstrate any obvious Charms, the cannibals will set traps but will not directly engage the characters. Both snares and deadfalls can be adapted for use in the trees, so characters traveling this route must still take care to avoid them. Also, anyone encountering a trap while high in the trees may fall from the trees, taking even more damage. Unless protected by Charms

such as Graceful Crane Stance, players of characters who are walking along narrow branches must make a single success on a Dexterity + Athletics roll every time their characters are either hit in combat or dodge to escape an attack, trap or other threat. Failing this roll means a character falls off the tree and his player must make a second rolls at difficulty 2 for the character to safely scramble back onto the branch. A botch on ether roll means the character falls and takes normal falling damage (generally at least 10L). Characters who are clinging to a branch can be helped back up by anyone standing on the branch whose player can achieve a single success on a Strength + Athletics roll.

THE STRUCTURE AND ARCHITECTURE OF RATHESS

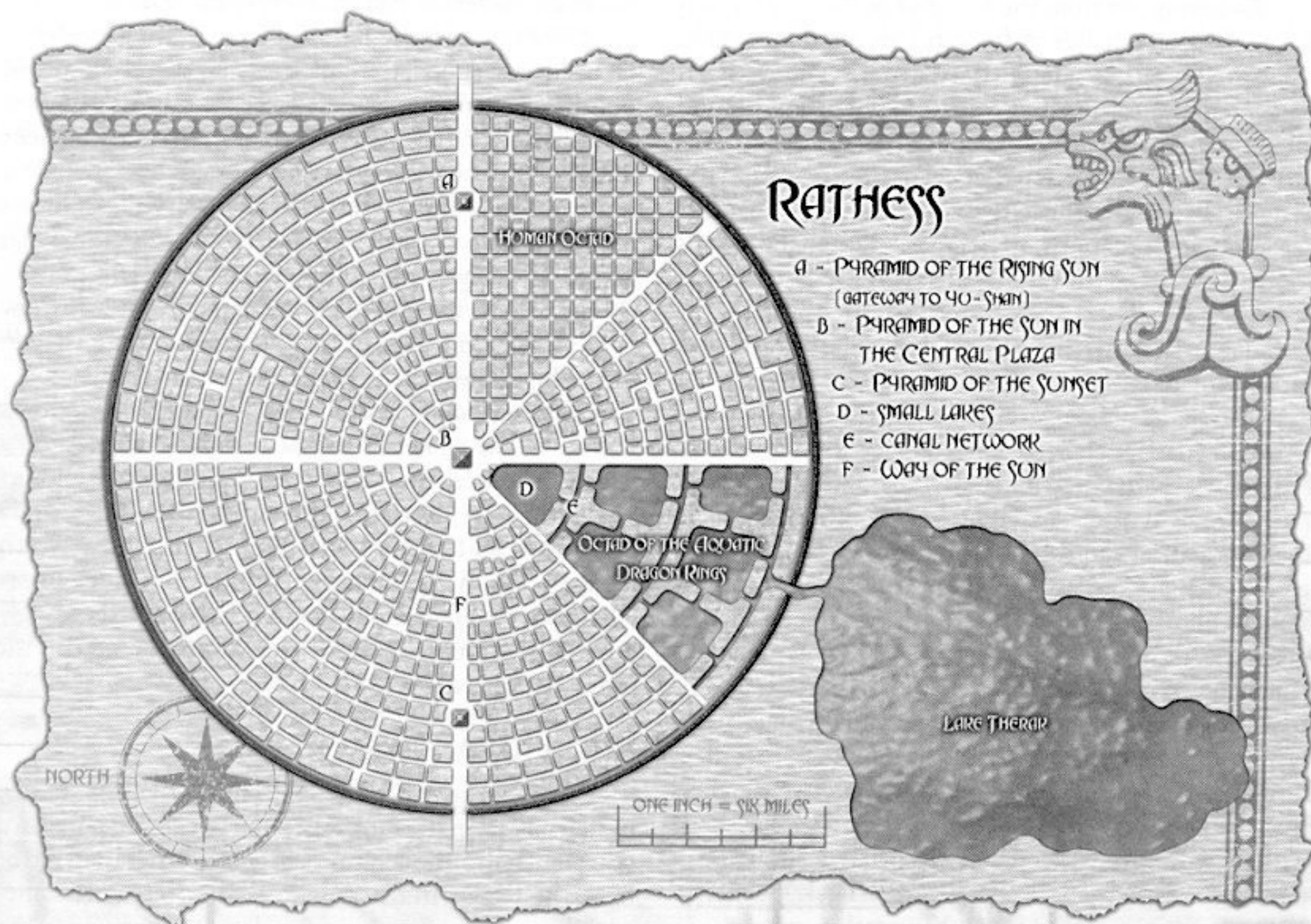
At its height, Rathess was a sprawling metropolis, capital of the mighty Dragon King realm and a protectorate of the Solar Deliberative. Its monolithic surface buildings and sturdy subterranean structures were fashioned at the dawn of the First Age and have weathered innumerable triumphs and tragedies. Although the Contagion and Han-Tha's treachery ended the reign of the Dragon Kings themselves, Rathess remains, its buildings offering mute testimony to the glories of an era long past, when gods walked with mortals and

science and magic were high arts. In the centuries since the final fall of Rathess, much has changed. The jungle has reclaimed much of the city's expanse. Now, Han-Tha the Ghoul King, and his servant Filial Wisdom, the Goblin King, lurk within, waiting for a chance to put their plans into action.

Explorers have looted Rathess of many of its greatest treasures. Yet, despite this, the city still holds mysteries hidden deep within those locations that mortal men cannot easily reach. Likewise, even its more easily accessible buildings have not divulged all their secrets. The Dragon Kings are inhuman, and much of what they do follows a logic alien to human beings. And so, Rathess has not yet fully yielded up all of its contents to the grasping hordes that have dared disturb its funereal slumber — a great deal is accidentally hidden, tucked away in a fashion obvious to Dragon Kings but effectively invisible to casual scavenger lords.

This chapter describes several of the most important places that still survive in Rathess. The emphasis here is on physical descriptions of the locales themselves, as well as their significance to the history of the Dragon Kings. For the most part, inhabitants of the ruins are detailed elsewhere (see pp. 60-77).

Although it was once located in the center of a large clearing, Rathess is now largely a part of the jungle. The outermost buildings have been completely overgrown,





and lianas and low jungle plants grow throughout the city. The Way of the Sun is the first thing that most new visitors notice. This 30-yard-wide path is made of black stone veined with shining gold, and it runs through the city from east to west. There are small pyramids dedicated to the rising sun and the setting sun in the eastern and western ends of the city, and in the center of Rathless lies the huge Pyramid of the Sun. During the day, the entire way shines in the sun, and at night, the gold veins glow softly, providing slightly more light than the full moon to anyone on or near this glorious road. The Way of the Sun is the only outdoor portion of Rathless where the ancient enchantments still protect the stones from weather and wear. Here, not even moss grows between the huge square paving stones, and all of them shine as brightly as when they were first carved. Only weapons made from one of the Five Magical Materials or mundane weapons reinforced with powerful Charms have any chance of damaging or uprooting these stones. The stones have an armor of 15L/20B and cannot be either damaged or pried out of place by mundane weapons or tools unless aided by Charms. It takes 25 health levels of damage to destroy one of these stones or a Strength + Athletics total of 13 to dig out and move one. These stones retain their enchantments if they are moved elsewhere — each two-yard-square stone protects an area 10 yards on a side from weather and wear.

Radiating out from the Pyramid of the Sun (which forms the exact center of the city) are six other roads, three are on either side of the Way of Pyramids. Each road is built from a different color of basalt or granite, and all of them are in fairly good condition, although obviously worn and weathered. Between these roads and the Way of Pyramids, the city is divided up into eight separate radial sections, or "octads." Six of the octads were for the use of the ordinary Dragon Kings, while the seventh is a network of canals that were used primarily by the aquatic Dragon Kings. The eighth octad was reserved for visiting mortals and Exalts.

The six octads of the city used by the land-dwelling Dragon Kings are alien in a vast number of subtle ways. Stairs are a bit too high for comfort, and in many places, ramps are used instead. Ceilings and doorways are taller than normal, and both chairs and reclining couches have grooves designed to accommodate the Dragon Kings' long sinuous tails. Also, the glow stones that light the darker portions of the city are all somewhat redder than is completely comfortable for both mortals and Exalts. Although mortals have little trouble living amidst the wonders of the Dragon Kings, anyone who attempts to run or otherwise heavily exert themselves in this city soon finds that the proportions of the city are not fully compatible with humanity. Subtract one die (down to a minimum of one) from all Stamina + Endurance rolls made for characters exercising on or in Dragon King architecture.

The most obvious difference from human cities is the lack of right angles. Instead, gentle curves and 60- or 120-degree angles predominate. Also, while floors and ceilings are normally quite plain, walls are always decorated with either colorful mosaics or intricate carvings. In and near dwellings or workshops, these artworks are usually complex circular or hexagonal spirals or other intricate abstract designs. However, in public areas, especially near the temples, the carvings reveal scenes from the history of the Dragon Kings. The images include carvings of wild and deadly beasts, heroic battles and religious rituals — including the sacrifice of living hearts to the Unconquered Sun.

Anyone with Lore •••• and Investigation •••• who studies these mosaics and carvings extensively and examines them in various portions of the city will be able to eventually deduce much about the lives and history of the Dragon Kings. For every week that a character spends at least eight hours a day studying these carvings and mosaics, that character's player may make an Intelligence + Investigation roll. Once 40 or more successes have been accumulated, the character will have a basic grasp of Dragon King religion, history or life cycle, depending on which she has been studying most closely. Because characters must wander from carving to carving to gather the necessary information, using the Dragon-Blooded Charm Elemental Concentration Trance only allows characters to roll once every three days.

Once one of these facets of Dragon King existence has been understood, the character may spend additional months accumulating 40 more successes in order to understand either of the other two aspects of this ancient civilization. These carvings and mosaics also include a large amount of the writing of the Dragon Kings. Once a character has learned all three facets of Dragon Kings life, she will also have learned how to read the script of the Dragon Kings. However, she will only be able to learn how to speak their language by talking to a spirit or a Dragon King who knows this nearly extinct language.

The outdoor areas of Rathless are mostly overgrown and have long ago been stripped of any valuables. As a result, the places that are most interesting to explorers and artifact hunters are the mysterious and deadly underways and the inaccessible sealed towers. Both regions contain both valuable artifacts and much information on the life of the Dragon Kings, but an exceedingly high proportion of those who have attempted to visit either region never return.

THE HUMAN OCTAD

Here, the architecture looks much like that of any ruined city from the First Age. The streets are built on a grid plan, and although they are green rather than red or blue, the towers in the human quarter resemble somewhat less ornate versions of the glass towers found in the

city of Chiaroscuro. The underways are far less extensive than in the rest of the city and rarely go more than four levels deep. The only exceptions are the deep and elaborate tombs of the Exalts.

THE TOMBS OF THE EXALTED

Although it was the capital of the Dragon Kings realm, throughout history, Rathess was home to many humans. Indeed, one-eighth of the city was turned over to humans and the Exalted. These Exalts were primarily military personnel of the Old Realm, but there were also many sorcerers, scholars and priests as well.

The Dragon Kings viewed the Exalted with awe, much as other beings in Creation did, perhaps more, because their own *olchilik* god-warriors were so unpredictable. When one of the Exalted died, the Dragon Kings would entomb him with great ceremony and ritual in a large necropolis located near the Pyramid of the Sun. It was a mark of Rathess' stature that Exalts were often entombed in that city even with Sijan nearby.

At first, these tombs, though large by any standard, were sufficiently small in number as to be distinct from one another. Over time, others were added, and the necropolis grew to immense proportions, requiring two expansions before Rathess fell into such decline that construction halted. During the Usurpation, the Dragon-Blooded and Sidereals who felled Albaio and Pleasant Clouds used the necropolis as their home for the tombs of those Solars, to take advantage of the necropolis' existing defenses. The actual crypts they installed deep beneath the hive of interlocking ossuaries and mausoleums at the heart of the oldest section of the necropolis.

The necropolis is roughly rectangular in shape, although there is a slight imperfection in its western wall owing to a rise in the terrain at that point. The outermost wall is tall, thick and made of polished metal. The wall has 40L soak and is immune to bashing damage. It takes 100 health levels of damage to seriously scar the wall and 200 health levels to break a man-sized hole in it.

Known as the Wall of Illimitable Honor, it features three different gates by which one can enter the necropolis. These gates were kept open during the day from dawn until dusk, after which they were closed and guarded by a special cadre of tomb guards. The tomb guards are long gone, and the gates stand closed but not locked. They have a 30L/50B soak and required 80 health levels to damage or 120 to destroy, but characters can lift them if they can exert a combined Strength + Athletics of 23 on them. Each gate is large enough that four characters can cooperate to lift it. Between the Wall of Illimitable Honor and the next interior wall, there are relatively few tombs, despite the large space devoted to the area. By the time the outer area was walled in, Rathess had begun to serious decline, and most Exalted

were buried in Sijan or elsewhere. As a result, the majority of the structures within this section are, in fact, memorials, shrines and other monuments erected primarily by the Dragon Kings themselves, whose high regard for the Exalted as servants of the Unconquered Sun outshone that of even the humans in Rathess.

The next wall, known as the New Wall or the Wall of Transcendent Glory, surrounds a much smaller area than the outermost wall. This area is more irregular in shape but is still roughly rectangular. There are only two gates to this area, both of which are closed. The New Wall is made of polished stone and each segment is actually a single piece of rock skillfully carved by Dragon King craftsmen. Within its bounds lie numerous tombs, most of which contain the earthly remains of Lunar Exalted. Here, the tombs are more or less evenly spaced and there is little clutter. This area was often used as a meeting place for lovers, informants and anyone else engaged in clandestine activities, since they could usually be assured of privacy. The New Wall is the strongest of the various walls. Each segment has 60L/120B soak. It takes 120 health levels of damage to crack a segment and 360 health levels to shatter one.

The innermost wall, called the Old Wall or the Wall of Sempiternal Majesty, is smaller and square in shape. Made of individual stones held together with mortar, the wall surrounds the original tombs of the necropolis — those of Solar and Lunar Exalted who died assisting the Dragon Kings in their battles against the servants of the Primordials. The wall is a standard stone wall, with 12L and 18B soak, requiring 40 health levels to damage a man-sized section or 80 health levels to knock a man-sized hole in the wall. The tombs here are so large and elaborately appointed that there is very little space between them. In some cases, smaller tombs were added later, and the overlapping mausoleums and cenotaphs form a "roof" over the innermost part of the necropolis. Moving between the tombs is difficult in places, especially if an individual is larger than human-sized. Even in full daylight, this area is often in shadow, which gave the place a haunted reputation. There is only a single gate into this area, which is locked and guarded by a celestial lion (see *Games of Divinity*, p. 33). No one is permitted to enter the area without the permission of the guardian, and all visitors will be escorted by a celestial lion at all times.

Another two celestial lions forever prowl this area of the necropolis for intruders. The lions switch off guarding the front gate occasionally, to alleviate the boredom. They find the area's many small passages to be no impediment at all, and in their long centuries of guardianship, they have found ways to slide smoothly into every location. All three celestial lions have developed the Charms Landscape Travel, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Hide and Tracking, all focused around the area of the necropoli.



They are greater guardian spirits with Intelligence 4 who exist only to guard and who have watched this location for over 1,000 years. Their guard patterns are without flaw, they are quite aware of the city's condition. The lions do not need evidence — they trust their judgment and will immediately devour characters who are, in their professional opinion, probably tomb robbers.

THE TOMBS

In the days before the fall of Rathless, no one dared to enter the tombs themselves. Though as large as small buildings in many cases, it was common knowledge that, along with great wealth, weaponry and magic, the tombs also contained great danger. Dragon Kings and Exalted sorcerers produced many devious traps to prevent robbers from desecrating the tombs. Every tomb within the necropolis, even that of the most minor Lunar commander, is protected by a series of complex mechanical traps, which are buttressed by sorcery as well. While Rathless stood, the Dragon Kings boasted that no tomb there had ever been desecrated — a claim Meru and Sijan could not make.

Each Solar tomb is a vast and amazing marvel, and these tombs continue to resist all mortal efforts to penetrate them. The tombs of the Lunars and Sidereals are somewhat smaller and less elaborate, but they still contain wonders such as ever-burning flames and other elemental protections.

The walls and door of all the tombs are proof against all Charms that have a minimum Essence of 5 or below

that open or bypass doors or locks. They are also immune to Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, have an armor of 25L/30B and require 40 health levels of damage to damage or 60 to destroy. In addition, the traps guarding the Solar tombs do 30L damage per turn from heat, cold or more exotic dangers, such as carefully contained sandstorms that cut like razors.

These wards require a minimum of two turns to pass through unless the characters can fly, jump horizontally more than 30 yards or teleport, in which case the Exalt can pass through the ward with only a single turn's exposure. The Sidereal and Lunar tombs have similar protections, but the wards only do 20L damage per turn and rarely require more than one turn to pass through.

The most honored mortals and Terrestrial Exalted were also honored with tombs, but these are all far more modest affairs and rarely contain wards against tomb robbers.

The crypts of Albaio and Pleasant Clouds are buried deep within the original Solar tombs, and they have their own defenses, which are probably in significantly better condition than those of the necropolis above. The actual traps and grave goods in the crypts are left up to Storytellers.

THE TOMBS TODAY

Now, many of the tombs in the outermost and middle areas of the necropolis have been desecrated, their traps overcome and their grave goods stolen. Only the celestial lions remain to protect the inner necropolis,



and though powerful, they are committed to the defense of the tombs they guard, which makes it difficult to mount an effective defense against determined robbers. In addition, the magic that once protected the tombs has, in many cases, waned, robbing the necropolis the automated guardians of its sanctity.

Despite this, no one has yet breached the Solar tombs beyond the Wall of Sempiternal Majesty. They remain as pristine as they were when the Contagion claimed Rathess. The celestial lions protect these tombs with grave vigilance, and the tombs sorceries, though weakened with the years, remain potent enough to fend off even the most determined robbers. The tombs themselves are likely a treasure trove of First Age wonders, and they are the doorstep to the crypts of Albaio and Pleasant Clouds.

Filial Wisdom and his servants have tried in vain to break into these final resting places of the ancient Solars but without success. The Goblin King has recently begun recruiting outsiders from settlements as far away as Nexus to aid him in his efforts to break into these structures. It's possible that a Circle of Exalted might learn of such plans and follow them, providing the Storyteller with a convenient excuse to bring them to Rathess. Of course, the Goblin King hides his identity and true motivations for wishing to enter these tombs.

THE ACADEMY OF AUSPICIOUS PLUME

Rathess was known for many things in its heyday, and institutions of higher learning were among them. Rathess boasted numerous great universities and schools, each devoted to a number of different disciplines. Everything from philosophy to warcraft and from sorcery to history had a place within the pantheon of the city's many educational facilities. Most of these facilities were destroyed either in the fall of the city or in the intervening centuries. After all, schools make ripe targets for scavenger lords and dilettante savants looking to add ancient tomes to their private collections. Moreover, Han-Tha and his servants have made it a point to wipe out many of the surviving remnants of the old universities so that little remains of ancient Rathess.

Yet, even the wrath of the Ghoul King is not absolute. Despite the best efforts of Han-Tha's servants, there remain pieces of scholarly greatness scattered throughout the ruins. Chief among these is the so-called Academy of Auspicious Plume, named after one of the most potent sorcerers among the Dragon Kings, Auspicious Plume. A Solar expert in both Celestial Circle Sorcery and Dragon King alchemy, Auspicious Plume amassed one of the largest private collections of books and scrolls in Rathess. Upon his death, he bequeathed this great collection to a coterie of fellow savants and scholar-priests, on the condition that they use them to continue his studies into occult matters.

This they did, although not quite in the manner Auspicious Plume expected. The scholars, who considered themselves the sorcerers' heirs, divided up his tomes and artifacts amongst themselves, according to their own interests and inclinations. Thus, historical texts went to one savant, while occult manuscripts went to another, and so on, until all of Auspicious Plume's vast wealth of knowledge had been scattered about the city in a variety of locales, some large and impressive, others small and unassuming. Despite this dispersal, Auspicious Plume's heirs still worked together closely, establishing a curriculum and order of study to which any who sought their wisdom would abide.

THE ACADEMY TODAY

When Rathess fell, the Academy of Auspicious Plume weathered the Contagion better than most. With its decentralized structure and diffuse membership, no one blow could destroy the Academy. Many of the savants who comprised its faculty were killed, and others fled, taking their cache of books and artifacts with them to more stable locales. These actions passed on Auspicious Plume's collection to other lands. Some of the Academy's masters and students remained in Rathess, vainly hoping to use their knowledge to reverse the city's slow decline. Their portion of the Academy's library remained in the ruins after their deaths, where it lay undisturbed for centuries.

The three most prominent Academy scholars who remained in Rathess after the Usurpation were named Herenthid, Methexis and Chikmayiz. Their areas of expertise were (respectively) military science, metallurgy and medicine. Herenthid was, in his final days, quite paranoid and continued to move about Rathess, trying to avoid those whom he believed wished him harm. Methexis and Chikmayiz were similarly eccentric, holding instruction in rather unusual locales, such as the bottom of a large cistern in the human quarter and atop the bell tower of the Temple of Leeayta. Consequently, the precise locations of these scholars' portion of Auspicious Plume's bequest are unknown. They have never been found by any of the many explorers who've set out to look for them, and there are no reports of their turning up in the marketplaces of cities such as Nexus or Lookshy, where Rathessian relics appear from time to time even now.

Although it is far from certain, there is a good chance that these books, along with a number of mysterious wonders, remain hidden somewhere in the ruins. A member of the Guild recently returned from Rathess with stories of having seen a vault in a subterranean section of the city in which was held alchemical devices for working magical metals such as orichalcum and starmetal, along with a vast library devoted to such topics. Only the sudden appearance of a rampaging mechanical automaton prevented his taking back samples





of his find. There are similar tales of explorers finding an armory filled with First Age weapons and armor that bore the symbol of Herenthid — a drop of liquid falling from the sun. True or not, these tales continue to circulate and encourage explorers to find other caches from the Academy of Auspicious Plume. Should anyone find one, it would be a magnificent discovery and sure to create a frenzy among those who seek out power to give themselves an edge in the coming Time of Tumult.

THE ARENA OF ATLAAKI

The Dragon Kings, though admired for their learning, were intensely physical creatures whose culture and instincts urged them to conflict. Many, especially devotees of the god Atlaaki, reveled in tests of strength and endurance, believing they helped to maintain the harmony between body and soul that was essential to a good life. Atlaaki was a bizarre deity, given to flights of wild fancy and unpredictability as well. His priests were his mouthpieces in Rathless, announcing his will to the populace through the sponsorship of impressive games of all sorts. While the vast majority of these games were conventional — races and combats of infinite variety — and practiced throughout Creation, others were more unusual, such as shouting matches, feats of aerial construction and giant board games in which living beings took the place of game pieces. These unusual games were initiated through oracles to his priests. The people of Rathless accepted these oracles in stride, knowing well that the gods have reasons only they can know. Besides, they knew that it was the unusual games that afforded them greater spectacles than could any ordinary race or combat.

The Arena of Atlaaki was maintained by the god's priests and was a marvel of First Age engineering. Its basic structure is that of an amphitheater, with an oblong outer building surrounding an open area in the center. The outer building curved upward, with row upon row of bleacher-like benches, upon which spectators sat while attending an event. At full capacity, the arena could hold over 600,000 Dragon Kings comfortably — more if they were willing to stand and watch, as they sometimes did during particularly unusual events, such as the War of the Flowers fought just before the time of the Usurpation.

The center of the arena was the hippodrome, since it often saw races of various sorts, especially with animals and chariots. However, the hippodrome served many more purposes than that. Located beneath its surface was a network of gears and plates that could be controlled remotely by an operator in the amphitheater. The network allowed the operator to reconfigure the shape, size and contours of the hippodrome, depending on the nature of the tests underway. Thus, artificial hills or pits could be added, moving obstacles introduced and even water flooded into it. In addition, a series of tall obelisks could be raised or lowered in the center of the hippo-

drome, again for a variety of uses — sometimes as goals for team sports, for example, as well as towers to ascend in obstacle courses.

THE ARENA TODAY

The Arena of Atlaaki still stands today, despite the ravages of time. It is noticeably worse for the wear, its stone façades crumbling and large quantities of its benches missing, creating gaps that contribute to the dilapidated appearance of the place. The hippodrome control room still exists, but it has largely been stripped of its levers, dials and sliders. If anyone wished to operate the mechanisms, these would need to be replaced. Over the centuries, rain and other environmental conditions have damaged the network so that it does not operate with ease. The fundamental structure remains sound, and a savant who understood the principles of First Age mechanical engineering could repair it, but even then, the task would be monumental.

Both tasks, operation and repair, require a character to have a expertise in Craft (Architecture), Craft (Metalworking), Lore and Occult. None of these Abilities can be below ••••. Successfully repairing the arena requires an extended action, as well as a great deal of time. Before restoration can even begin, the character's player must make first succeed at a difficulty 5 Perception + Lore roll, which represents the character's ability to grasp the complex mechanisms that power the arena. To draw up a plan to restore the arena likewise requires a Legendary task, this time in Intelligence + Craft (Architecture). Once this groundwork is laid, the character may now begin the slow and difficult process of restoring the structure to working condition. This is an extended action that requires the accumulation of 50 successes each in Perception + Occult and Intelligence + Craft (Metalworking). The rolls are made in sequence, first Perception + Occult until 50 successes are accumulated, then Intelligence + Craft (Metalworking). Each roll represents one month of work. Teamwork is possible, with multiple characters working within the same time period to lessen the overall length of the restoration.

The repairs will requires Resources ••••• worth of spare parts and raw stock, and a workshop costing Resources •••••. The total weight of the repair materials is 10 tons and includes several pieces of 1,000 pounds weight, and they would have to be fabricated on-site or hauled through the jungle. The character's player can make the Perception + Occult rolls on her own, but in order to affect the repairs, the character must have access to a work gang with a combined Strength + Athletics of 400. There is no minimum or maximum contribution that the character can lend to the pool, but any Trait-increasing effects the character uses must last for at least one scene to count toward the total.

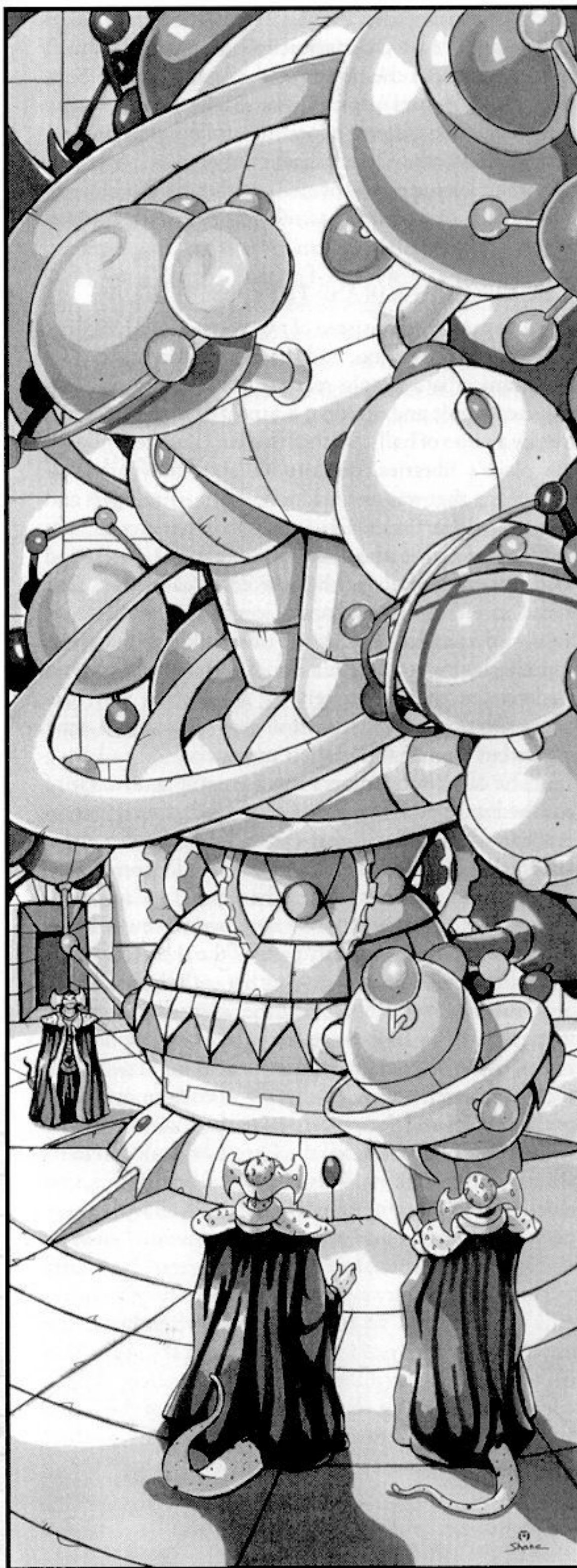
Because the arena is open to the sky, it does not make a very good lair or hiding place. However, there are corridors and tunnels beneath the hippodrome, used by engineers to maintain the system. Goblins and stalkers can be found here, since the humid environment suits their temperaments well. The humidity is maintained by a large reservoir of fetid water that exists beneath the hippodrome. Once, it connected to the water octad, but the conduits have dried up in the last few hundred years. Now, it is a small self-contained ecosystem of its own, a breeding ground for diseases and noxious insects. Anyone swimming in it or drinking it should be treated as having drunk river water.

The arena contains few relics. Most of those that do exist are found either in the areas beneath the hippodrome or fallen down within the gears of the hippodrome itself. Most are pieces of athletic equipment from the First Age or weapons used by combatants in the games. It's also possible that even more exotic devices fell into these regions and were sealed away from the ravages of time, but many would be of little interest (let alone use) to anyone who was not a scholar of antiquities or a practitioner of extinct sports.

THE GREAT OBSERVATORY

The perspicacity of the Dragon Kings was legendary even in the First Age, when mighty sorcery was commonplace and the Solar Deliberative ruled the Old Realm at the behest of the gods themselves. Men attributed the Dragon Kings' foresightedness to astrology — the wisdom of the stars and planets. There is some truth to this attribution, for Rathess was home to numerous observatories and planetariums. The most impressive of these, the exactness of whose measurements attracted stargazers from across Creation, was the Great Observatory, so called because there was none like it beneath the Vault of Heaven. Indeed, its impressive nature was the subject of much jealousy in the Old Realm, especially among the Sidereal Exalted.

The Great Observatory was an impressive structure, built upon a promontory overlooking the bulk of the city. It sat high above the hustle and bustle of the Dragon King metropolis, yet was not wholly aloof from it, for the roads and paths to it were well traveled and known even to outsiders, many of whom trekked across untold leagues to reach this marvel of the First Age. As with so much of Dragon King society, the Great Observatory was a place dedicated to a theoretical science — astrology — that was nevertheless put to very practical ends. The rulers and generals of Rathess frequently visited its halls and consulted with its most learned inhabitants, hoping to divine omens of the future and



Exalted



thereby learn whether their actions might bring weal or woe upon the city. Ordinary people did the same, much to the chagrin of the priests of the Unconquered Sun, whose jealousy and suspicion were easily aroused by any they deemed to trespass upon the purview of their master. Yet, the Great Observatory prospered and operated with the blessing of all the gods, including the Unconquered Sun, to whom the astrologers were as devoted as any in Rathless.

THE EIDOURANION AND THE OBSERVATORY

The building consisted of two parts: an outbuilding, called the Eidouranion, and the observatory itself. The Eidouranion is a simple rectangular building made of polished basalt and obsidian connected to the observatory by a series of halls. Within this building were housed the place's libraries, dormitories and study areas — everything that was needed for both the astrologers and visitors to the Great Observatory. For many, it was sufficient to visit the Eidouranion, for it contained within it wisdom about the heavens greater than that found in entire foreign lands, so great were its storehouses of knowledge. Outside this building, hucksters and charlatans set up their shops, attempting to lend credence to their chicanery by association with the Great Observatory. The astrologers discouraged such rogues but did not forbid their presence.

The observatory proper was a great sphere, made of polished starmetal in quantities that defied imagination even amid the splendor of the First Age. Even more remarkable was the enchantment placed upon it that enabled those within it to view the sky as if the starmetal were, in fact, transparent. The astrologers likewise knew Charms to magnify or clarify parts of the sky so that they might better see its wonders — either with the naked eye or by means of telescopes and other instruments, which they possessed in abundance. The observatory contained countless magical and mundane devices for viewing the night sky, as well as wonders that recorded the movements of the planets and the procession of the zodiac.

But nothing exceeded the Orrery of Arainthu in its ability to inspire awe. This mighty wonder was a vast mechanical representation of the heavens, with every planet, star, comet and other body represented amid its myriad swirling arms and clockwork fingers. Constantly in motion, the orrery mimicked the motions of its heavenly counterparts so perfectly that, oftentimes, the astrologers did not need to view the night sky itself. This device gave the astrologers a similarly perfect skill at augury, so great that they saw the coming of the Great Contagion but not the deception of Han-Tha — their greatest and most costly error in divination.

THE GREAT OBSERVATORY TODAY

Since the fall of Rathless, the Great Observatory has fared poorly. The Eidouranion has been stripped of most of its contents. Its books, scrolls and codices disappeared long ago, along with most of the other artifacts. The observatory itself stands, overlooking the ruins as proudly as it did during the city's height. Although the telescopes and other devices were seized centuries ago, the Orrery of Arainthu remains — inactive and silent. It no longer tracks the movements of the stars and planets but appears to be intact and awaiting the long-forgotten command to begin its work once more. The few explorers and tomb raiders who have visited the observatory and returned have told tales of the orrery's springing to life for short periods of time for no discernible reason.

True or not, Filial Wisdom frequently visits the observatory along with goblin sorcerers and more learned men. He believes — as does his master, Han-Tha — that the ancient device still holds many secrets, including some that might reveal a way to restore Rathless to its former glory. The Goblin King has been no more successful at reactivating the orrery than anyone else, but he tries with increasing regularity. For reasons owing perhaps to his Exaltation, he is convinced that he can restart the orrery and seize its wisdom for himself and the greater glory of the Eater of the Dead.

In point of fact, Filial Wisdom is correct: The orrery can be restarted, but doing so is extraordinarily difficult. Successfully repairing it will require an extended action by a character with Craft (Clockworks) 6, Lore 8 and Occult 7. Before starting this endeavor, the character's player must first succeed at a difficulty 8 Perception + Lore roll in order for her character to understand how the orrery works.

Repair of the orrery is an extended action that requires the accumulation of 100 successes each in Perception + Occult and Intelligence + Craft (Clockworks). Both rolls have a base difficulty of 4, and each roll represents one week of work. The rolls are made in sequence; Perception + Occult first and then Intelligence + Craft (Clockworks). Teamwork is possible, but any helpers must have at least Craft (Clockworks) •••••, Lore ••••• and Occult ••••• to be of any use. This is also the degree of expertise required to maintain the orrery when it is in good repair. Fixing the orrery will cost Resources ••••• and require clockwork components weighing several hundred pounds that can only be obtained in the Imperial City, Nexus or the Varang City-States.

Reactivating the orrery also requires the infusion of 20 motes of Essence. This infusion keeps the great machine operational for one day, after which it must be infused again. The Dragon Kings never allowed the orrery to power down, believing that doing so might deprive them of valuable knowledge. Consequently, an

order of Dragon King sorcerers arose, the Ever-Watchful Keepers, whose responsibility it was to maintain the Orrery of Arainthu and ensure that it was supplied with sufficient Essence to remain in working condition.

The benefits of reactivating the Orrery of Arainthu are discussed in Chapter Four: Rewards of Rathess (pp. 79-94).

THE PYRAMID OF THE SUN

Perhaps the single mightiest structure of Rathess is the Pyramid of the Sun. Even today, when it is but a shadow of its former glory, the Pyramid is a sight to behold. Measuring 700 yards tall at its apex and 800 yards on each of its four sides, it is a testament to the deep and abiding connection between the Dragon Kings and the Unconquered Sun, whom they regarded as a patron deity.

To reach the top of the Pyramid requires an individual to walk up nearly 2,000 steps. In the past, the Pyramid was covered with orichalcum foil that shone like the sun itself. Over the centuries, that metal has been worn away or stolen by robbers. Now, it reveals the bare stone and plaster beneath it. Given the complexity of many of the buildings that surround it, it's clear that the Pyramid is ancient, being the oldest building in Rathess. The Pyramid rests upon a powerful Demesne, which the Dragon Kings saw as a gift from the Unconquered Sun.

Solars played an important role in Dragon King religion and society. The priests of the Unconquered Sun who used the Pyramid for their rituals relied on Solars to channel the Essence used in many of their ceremonies. This the Solars gladly did, for in exchange, the Dragon Kings provided them with access to the vast Manse that existed within the heart of the Pyramid of the Sun. Thus, Zenith Caste Solars would regularly attend ceremonies at the small temple on top of the Pyramid, assisting Dragon King priests and acolytes in their duties. These ceremonies typically involved living sacrifices to the Unconquered Sun, typically animals, and sometimes resulted in one or more of the priests being ridden by a spirit allied to their god. Public attendance to these rituals was not mandatory, although crowds regularly gathered at the base of the Pyramid to watch the proceedings.

Located behind the temple were stairs that led deeper into the Pyramid itself. Within the vast structure, there were numerous rooms, chambers and complexes. These rooms were used for a variety of purposes, most of them relating to the worship of the Unconquered Sun. Many Dragon Kings priests lived within the Pyramid. Indeed, some spent nearly their entire lives here, never leaving their cells or the series of rooms that constituted their communities. A small number of humans lived here as well, but their numbers were never large because few humans worshiped the Unconquered Sun in the same manner as the Dragon Kings.

The heart, both literally and figuratively, of the Pyramid was the Chamber of the Sun. The Chamber of the Sun was a large room near the base of the structure that functioned as a Manse for the Solars who aided the Dragon Kings. The privilege of attuning oneself to this Manse was reserved to a small number of Exalted, usually the most important military and religious figures in Rathess at the time. The generally recognized "first among equals" of the Solars was called the *Rojatan*, or "Sun King," by the Dragon Kings. He was given a place of honor in the city and treated with appropriate respect. The other Solars in Rathess were not expected to abide by his every order, but they often deferred to his judgment out of respect for their hosts, who believed him to be the special servant of the Unconquered Sun.

THE PYRAMID TODAY

The Pyramid of the Sun remains an impressive structure. It overlooks the city just as it did in ages past and offers silent testimony to the glory of ancient Rathess. It is also the lair of Filial Wisdom, who has seized the Manse within its heart for his own. Deluded by the spirit of Han-Tha that resides within him, he has styled himself the new Sun King of the city, doubly ironic given the similarity in the High Holy Speech of the Dragon Kings between his usual title — Goblin King, or *Rojathan* — and the title of *Rojatan*. In any event, the Pyramid is filled with goblins and other servants of Filial Wisdom. Here, he broods and plots the means by which he will restore the city under the rulership of the Ghoul King.

Attempting to enter the Pyramid is quite dangerous. Although its former magical traps and protections have long since been removed by the Goblin King, the presence of so many of Han-Tha's servants makes even getting close to the Pyramid a risky proposition most of the time. On occasion, Filial Wisdom leaves his headquarters and ventures out into the jungles surrounding the city on exercises. When he does so, he leaves behind only a token force of goblins to protect his Manse and the other treasures of the Pyramid. During such times, it might be possible for a small number of outsiders to venture into the structure without immediately meeting their demise. Even so, it remains a dangerous activity and one that no group should attempt without being either extremely powerful or extremely numerous — preferably both.

LAKE THERAK AND THE WATER OCTAD

The most unusual of Rathess' eight octads is the one just west of the southern road. The aquatic Dragon Kings originally inhabited this octad. Lake Therak, a large jungle lake more than 10 miles across lies just outside this octad, and a short channel connects it to the many canals and waterways that this portion of Rathess uses instead of roads. The aquatic stalkers are even more savage and dangerous than the rest of their kind. River dolphins,



giant eels, razor fish and river spiders also inhabit this portion of Rathless. Many of the treasures of this area remain unfound because they lie at the bottom of the foul, slit-filled water that now festers in these canals. Few explorers are willing to risk attack by the many hungry denizens of this octad.

Scholars have only discovered one level of under-way beneath this section of the city, but it remains largely unexplored because the passages are all between 10 and 20 yards in diameter and are filled to within two or three yards of the top with water. Although the ancient enchantments keep this water as fresh as that found in most rivers, venturing into these passages is still exceedingly dangerous. Like the canals on the surface, these aquatic underways are filled with an abundance of life, much of which is carnivorous and would happily attack humans.

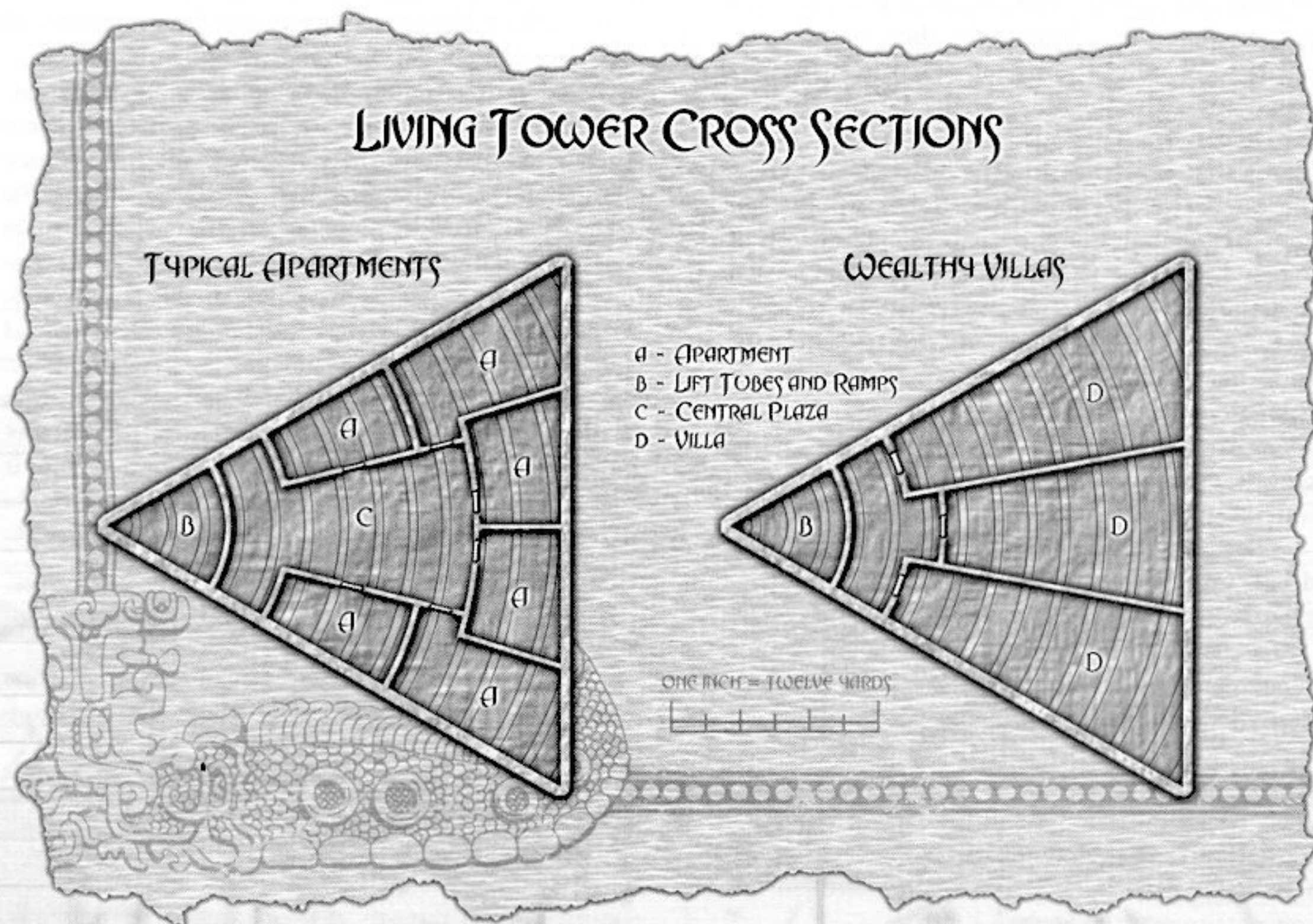
THE LIVING TOWERS

These tall stone towers with huge windows of shining quartz were the apartments and villas of the Dragon Kings. Unlike the pyramids, all of these towers are triangular pillars between 25 and 40 yards across at the base and between 100 and 300 yards tall. Despite the fact that every floor of these towers has large windows that run from floor to ceiling, the towers are completely sealed and very difficult to enter. Their walls and win-

dows are both made of brightly colored stone reinforced with powerful enchantments. Chopping a hole in one of these walls is exceedingly difficult — the walls have an armor of 25B/20L and require 60 health levels of damage to chop a hole large enough to crawl through. The walls and doors of all these towers are proof against all destructive Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, as well as to all Charms designed to open locks. Without powerful artifacts or impressive Charms, the only way into the towers that are still sealed is to find the entrances located in the lower levels of the underways.

During the Contagion, the doors to the surface and most entrances to the underways were sealed by the Dragon Kings or quarantine teams from the Daimyo of Dehelshen's garrison in the city. However, the portions of the city below the fourth level of the underways were, by that point, largely unused, and almost none of the ramp and lift tube entrances in the lowest of these levels were sealed. Unfortunately, the lower levels of the underways are also the most dangerous.

Just because the surface entrances to one of these towers are sealed does not mean that goblins or mindlessly savage stalkers do not live in them now. Either goblins or stalkers now inhabit over three quarters of the sealed towers, using them as secure bases for forays into the underways or onto the surface to hunt. While some rooms in these inhabited towers remain sealed, most of



the contents of these towers was looted long ago. The fragile objects were destroyed, and almost all of the powerful artifacts have been appropriated by Dragon-Blooded explorers, noble Fair Folk or the dread Goblin King or are being used as rude tools or ornaments by stalkers. Those sealed towers that remain totally untouched contain a wealth of everyday objects and many scrolls in the tongue of the Dragon Kings. However, while many • and •• artifacts can be found in these long-abandoned rooms, almost everything more powerful is located in the deadly underways.

Regardless of whether they have been looted or not, all of these towers are very similar inside. Each floor is three yards tall. On most floors, large deep apartments line the outer walls, and the center of the tower is a large open plaza filled with decayed furnishings and adamant-hard stone tables. The floors of these plazas are covered with the same short grass found in the underways.

These plazas were originally lit with glow stones, but in most cases, these crystals failed long ago, leaving the interiors of the towers plunged into darkness, except on floors where doors to apartments were left open. Off of one corner of the central plaza — replacing the apartment in that corner and extending at least four yards into the public space — is a space containing several public storage closets, three to five lift tubes and a spiral ramp for Dragon Kings who wished the exercise of occasionally walking up and down the height of their dwelling tower. On some floors, instead of a central plaza, there is only a semicircular hallway in from off the lift tubes. This hallway is normally two yards wide. The rest of the floor is filled with one to three large apartment villas for the priest, nobles and other Dragon King worthies. Floors consisting of apartment villas are most common near the tops of the living towers. These large chambers contain the most riches and the best artifacts, but in towers where the lift tubes have failed, they can be very difficult to get to. One of the most prized artifacts to be found in these apartment villas are the crystal ring keys. In all but the most secure Dragon King buildings and rooms, doors automatically open for anyone wearing a crystal ring attuned to a given lock. A single ring is often attuned to dozens of locks — the priests and nobles of the city had rings that could unlock everything from the sealed tower they lived in to the temple treasuries buried deep in the earth.

The smaller apartments are between five and eight yards deep and regardless of their size, all apartments are dominated by large clear quartz windows on one side (or on two or more sides of the apartment villas). These windows can be colored, frosted and even rendered opaque by drawing a few simple symbols on a wall-mounted crystal plaque next to the window. The interior of all these apartments is always a single large open space, with two-yard-tall freestanding screens of colored glass

or sometimes of trellises covered with living vines separating the apartment into various rooms.

Most apartments contain small private mud pools set into the floor. These were used for bathing, relaxation and, sometimes, sleep. Although almost all apartments also contain sleeping pallets of living or once-living beds of soft reeds, many Dragon Kings instead slept in their mud pools.

ESSENCE LEAKAGE FROM DAMAGED ARTIFACTS

Sometimes, one or more of the various Essence-powered artifacts in a room are damaged. Whenever this happens, everything still living in the room becomes twisted and strange. This Essence radiation frequently causes some of the vines living in these dwellings to become mobile or, in some cases, actively carnivorous. These cunning and deadly plants are capable of devouring entire teams of explorers. In some cases, entire floors are filled with these vines. Where the vines in question are mutated defensive systems, the plants will attack and devour everything except stalkers, giving these savages a near-impregnable lair.

THE PYRAMID OF THE RISING SUN

At the eastern edge of the city is a small but vitally important pyramid. Inlaid with small amounts of orichalcum, moonsilver, starmetal and jade, the most distinctive feature of this pyramid is the four-yard-high wall of night black stone on the western most side of the pyramid's flat top. Inlaid in this wall is a three-yard-high arch made of the four Magical Materials mentioned above. This pyramid was where the Dragon Kings held general worship services to their entire pantheon of gods. Here, the Dragon Kings joined with the gods in celebrating their ancient victory over the Primordials, and it is also the place where the priests of the Dragon Kings walked the mystical jade bridge into the immaterial but vast Celestial City of Yu-Shan (see *Games of Divinity*, pp. 11-21). Any character able to see images of the far past will see large groups of Dragon Kings assemble at the beginning of each season to honor and speak with the gods of that season.

Today, this pyramid is one of the gateways to the Celestial City of Yu-Shan. While the sun shines on this inlaid archway on the first day of each season (and during the entire period of Calibration), any Exalt or Dragon King with an Essence of 3 or higher can spend a mote of Essence and walk through the gateway into Yu-Shan. At the beginning of each season, the Exalts are met by the celestial lions who guard the bridge. Anyone who does not have an excellent reason for going to Yu-Shan or

who is not accompanied by a member of the Eclipse Caste is denied admittance.

During Calibration, anyone who can open this door can gain entrance to Yu-Shan for the duration of Calibration. However, during this time many of the common rules of Heaven are suspended — visiting Yu-Shan during Calibration can be fraught with peril.

During the rest of the year, it is still possible for any character who can dematerialize or cast the spell *Open the Spirit Door* (see *Games of Divinity*, p. 49) to pass through the gateway to Yu-Shan. Such characters can then attempt to convince the celestial lions to allow them and their companions in.

THE FLYING TOWERS

Located far from any human habitation, deep in a jungle that was treacherous long before the end of the First Age, the most common way for outsiders to reach Rathless was by air. When visitors arrived, they landed at one of the four flying towers. Each of these towers was once 1,000 yards tall. For most of their height, they are narrow pyramids 850 yards tall and 300 yards across at the base. The tops of these pyramids were great domed circular platforms 100 yards across. Each dome had four large openings where warbirds, globes of transport and similar aerial wonders could arrive and depart. Above each of these domes, rising another 150 yards into the air was the needle-shaped docking mast for the ancient skyships. These masts were 10 yards in diameter, and the three main lift tubes that traverse the tower continue up the docking mast, allowing passengers for the skyships to easily reach the wondrous crafts.

Today, one of these towers is nothing more than rubble and ruins, and a second is only 700 yards tall, its upper portion now broken and shattered. The remaining two towers are completely intact. The partially ruined tower was stripped of all valuables long ago and, today, is overgrown with vines and other plant life and inhabited by a wide variety of animals, including many predatory and dangerous beasts such as large spiders, poisonous snakes and swarms of carnivorous hattera. Although nothing but fragments of various First Age devices and vehicles remain, the rooms are mostly intact, and this tower is identical in structure to the two intact towers. Although visiting this tower is dangerous, its ruined and overgrown state has made it unattractive to both goblins and stalkers. As a result, anyone wishing to explore the two intact towers would benefit from first exploring this flight tower, where they could learn both the layout of the intact towers and the likely locations for First Age vehicles and other treasures. Also, this tower is near one of the greatest potential treasures of Rathless, the ruined skyship (see pp. 44-46).

THE INTACT FLYING TOWERS

Located across the city from one another, both towers are totally sealed from all ground-level access. They are made from jet-black stone reinforced with powerful enchantments. Chopping a hole in one of these walls is exceedingly difficult — the walls have a soak of 20L/25B and require 60 health levels of damage to chop a hole large enough to crawl through. The eight doors in the square base of each of these towers are closed, as are the four large doors to the landing dome. The walls and doors are proof against all destructive Terrestrial Circle Sorcery as well as every Charm designed to open or bypass locks or doors. Only very strong Exalts or characters wearing warstriders are likely to get into the towers through brute force. Everyone else must come up through the tunnels underneath Rathless. The lift-tube shafts and walking ramps into both towers can be accessed on the fifth through eighth levels below the surface. The only problem is that both flying towers are the home to inhabitants who are none too eager to allow intruders into their domains.

INSIDE THE FLYING TOWERS

Regardless of which tower the characters enter or how they get there, the interiors are nearly identical. A trio of lift tubes carry visitors between floors. Steep spiral ramps designed for the Dragon Kings' rugged claws and loping gait serve as an alternative to the lift tubes. However, these ramps were not designed for human legs, and the player of anyone attempting to climb these ramps must make a Stamina + Endurance roll every three floors. Failure means that the character receives a fatigue penalty. Because each tower has more than 300 floors, climbing up the towers by way of the ramps would be a long and painful struggle.

Like most of the rest of Rathless, each floor has ceilings three yards high. Most of the building consists of empty rooms that were long ago looted of everything useful or of the dwellings of the towers' current inhabitants. However, a few dozen rooms in each tower remain locked. Neither the goblins nor the stalkers have managed to open all of the rooms in the towers — the powerful enchantments placed on most important buildings in Rathless make these doors almost as difficult to open or break down as the walls. These doors have a soak equal to 15L/20B and require 40 health levels of damage to chop a hole large enough to crawl through. They are immune to all Charms designed to open doors except for sorcery spells and the Charms of the mighty Solar Exalted. However, crystal keys that allow the user to open many of these doors are not uncommon in some of these locked rooms and in the largest apartment villas of the living towers closest to the flying towers.

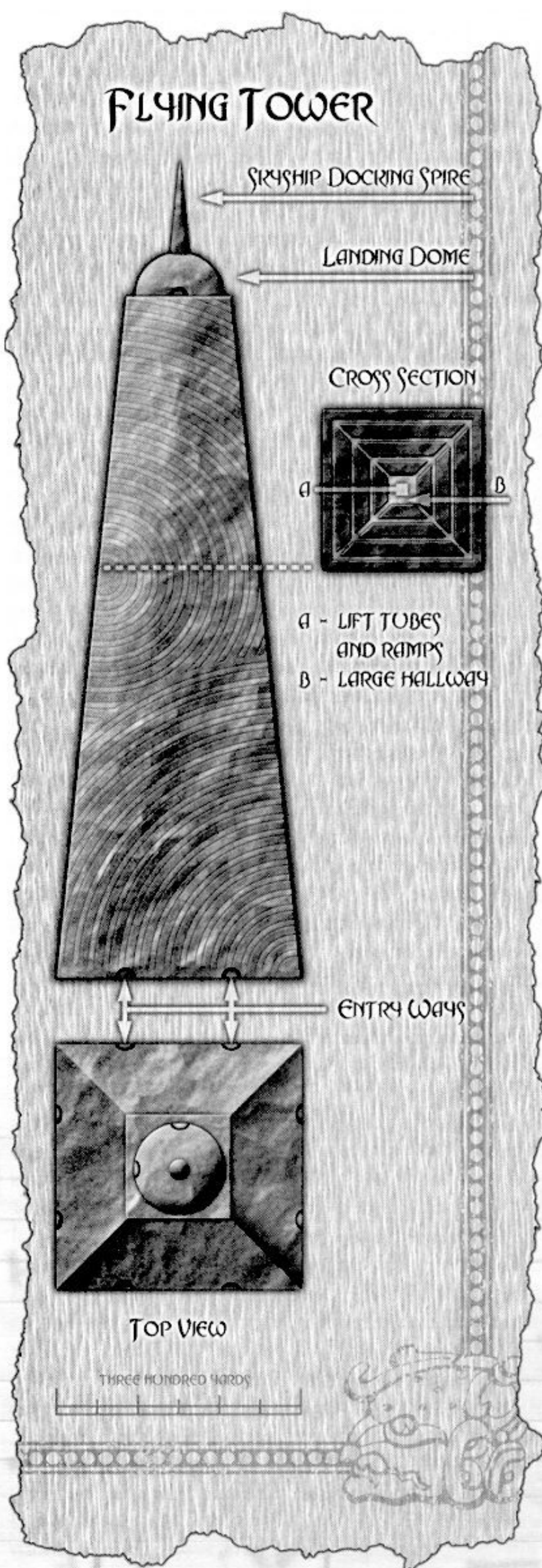
Within these rooms are all manner of artifacts from the First Age. The Dragon Kings made most of the items

found in both towers, but human and Exalted visitors who died from the Contagion or abandoned Rathess when the plague swept through it originally owned many of these artifacts. In most cases, all that can now be salvaged are a few glow-stone hand lights, dreamstones or mundane but exotic jewelry worth between a Resources •• and Resources •••• transaction. However, exploring all of the rooms in one tower will yield up between four and ten Artifact • and •• items, mostly consisting of useful items such as collars of dawn's cleansing light, simple vegetable and crystal technology and shield and Hearthstone bracers. (See pp. 79-87 and also *The Book of Three Circles*, pp. 91-94, *Caste Book: Dawn*, p. 78, and *Exalted*, p. 338). Careful searching (Perception + Awareness at difficulty 5 or higher) will turn up between one and three Artifact ••• items per tower. These more powerful artifacts are typically hidden under debris, in locked compartments or in rooms inhabited by dangerous wild creatures. Almost all of these artifacts will be examples of Dragon King vegetable or crystal technology.

The true treasures of the flying towers, however, are on the landing decks. Here, there are several globes of transport, warbirds (see pp. 86-89) and, if the Storyteller desires, a chariot of aerial conquest (see *Caste Book: Dawn*, p. 78). Choose the exact number of these impressive items based on the needs and power level of the characters in your series. There should be additional vehicles on the landing deck, but they should all be seriously damaged or simply have succumbed to the ravages of time.

Almost everyone attempting to steal one of these vehicles must face the wrath of the goddess Relza. The only exceptions are a few remarkably lucky Celestial Exalted who may find a vehicle that belonged to a previous possessor of their Exalted Essence. Relza will allow Celestial Exalts to take vehicles that once belonged to them. Any Celestial Exalt who once owned one of these vehicles will remember this fact as soon as they see it. However, the Storyteller is the only one who can decide whether to give a character one of these vehicles, and should only do so if they wish to introduce fast and painless air travel into their game. Otherwise, characters will need to bargain with Relza for the use of some of these vehicles. See page 69 for more information about Relza and how to successfully negotiate with her.

Characters interested in repairing any of these vehicles should be forced to scrounge for spare parts and documentation on the operation and repair of such vehicles and possibly seek help from Relza. Check the description of the vehicles for their maintenance requirements. Only the most knowledgeable of savants should be able to repair any of the broken flying vehicles without extensive help from Relza.



THE MASTERS OF THE WESTERN TOWER

The western flying tower is inhabited by goblins under the leadership of a triumvirate of three powerful Fair Folk nobles. These nobles and their goblin servants are not inclined to allow either mortals or Exalts into their lair, especially not Exalts bent on looting and conquest. Any Exalts who gain entry into this tower, including members of the Eclipse Caste, will be disarmed and not allowed to wander freely. While the correct Charms may overcome these restrictions, going head to head with three Fair Folk nobles and many hundreds of goblins will be at best an exceptionally challenging and dangerous task.

Fortunately, the goblins and their masters have little interest in most of the First Age artifacts in this tower. The running water and the light panels are useful, but none of the Fair Folk have the slightest idea how to use any of the flying vehicles. The nobles and their goblins live in this tower solely because it is largely intact and highly defensible. These nobles would certainly be willing to trade some of these vehicles to someone for the right price. They might trade some of the vehicles and devices located in this tower for some of the artifact weapons found elsewhere in Rathess or perhaps for a large supply of young and healthy mortal captives who are ripe for feeding upon. These faerie nobles are extremely ambitious, and one fair price for some vehicles would be to show them how to operate the remainder. Of course, goblins and Fair Folk cataphracts riding on First Age warbirds would then plague Rathess.

Anyone who spends more than a few minutes talking with these three nobles will quickly realize that they covet the Goblin King's power and would happily use these devices to stage a surprise attack on the Goblin King. The resulting battle would be exceptionally bloody, and the nobles would barely lose. This battle would also threaten all mortal and Exalted visitors and any characters who had aided them would either have to flee or face the wrath of the Goblin King.

Ambitious characters could also enmesh themselves in the goblin politics of Rathess. If the characters taught the nobles and their goblins how to use these air vehicles and then actively helped them in their campaign against the Goblin King, the triumvirate would stand a real chance of success. If they won, they would be fairly generous to their allies. The characters could obtain half of the vehicles in the nobles' tower, as well as a host of other minor artifacts. The only limit would be that the nobles would request that the characters forever leave Rathess shortly after the Goblin King was defeated.

The triumvirate is unwilling to share rulership of Rathess and will choose bribery as the easiest way to dispose of possible rivals. If the characters refuse to leave, the nobles will agree to let them stay a short while and will then plot their deaths. Characters will face eldritch

poison, inhuman assassins that attack the Exalts while they are sleeping and similar perils.

Because they have just fought a major battle and have not yet fully established their dominance over the vast goblin horde, the triumvirate would be somewhat weaker than the Goblin King. Should the characters wish to make themselves the rulers of Rathess, helping the triumvirate take over Rathess and then defeating the triumvirate would be one of the easiest ways to ensure success.

Characters who attempt to take any of these vehicles out of Rathess will also have to contend with Relza (see p. 69). She will not be happy to lose any of her precious vehicles, but someone willing to repair and restore vehicles not currently in working condition and to generally promote their use in Rathess could likely negotiate a suitable agreement with her. If faced with Celestial Exalted, she will call upon other gods she knows to aid her. If faced with foes determined to steal from her, she can get the aid of a dozen vine runners (see p. 72). In addition, both Shining Flower (see p. 70) and two of the celestial lions (see pp. 31-32 and *Games of Divinity*, p. 33) who guard the tombs of the Celestial Exalted will support her for one battle.

THE THREE FAIR FOLK NOBLES

These three nobles consist of Vau-Chen, a female Fair Folk diplomat (see *Exalted*, p. 286), Poisonous Carnelian Blade, a female Fair Folk cataphract (see *Exalted*, pp. 286-288) and Venomous Dreams, a male noble who can control the forces of earth and wood. All three are highly ambitious and exceedingly adept manipulators. Although they are all inclined to work with and trust each other, Poisonous Carnelian Blade could be persuaded to betray the other two (who are lovers) for a sufficiently high price. Vau-Chen and Venomous Dreams are loyal to each other. However, like many of the Fair Folk, they would still betray each other to save their own life. This trio commands a force of 300 hobgoblins (see *Exalted*, p. 288). Many of these hobgoblins have dire enemies within the Goblin King's forces and so are utterly devoted to their three protectors.

THE TRIBE OF THE EASTERN TOWER

The largest enclave of stalkers that have slowly and painfully worked their way up to Essence 2 and some degree of civility inhabits the eastern tower. A handful have even attained Essence 3. Although they only number five dozen, these semi-savage creatures command an unusual amount of power because they have made deals with both Relza and Shining Flower. Relza regards this tower as her own protectorate, and the stalkers regularly sacrifice captured goblins to Shining Flower and the Unconquered Sun. In addition, they also have deals with several vine runners that have dominion over the industrial vines that provide pure water to the flying tower.



VENOMOUS DREAMS

Description: Venomous Dreams appears to be a beautiful living statue carved from black basalt that is almost completely covered with hundreds of thin, vividly green vines. When he talks, fights or feeds upon souls, these vines twist and move on their own. Venomous Dreams is the most inventively cruel of the trio, and he uses his knowledge of rare jungle plants to create exquisitely painful poisons that keep his human and stalker victims alive for a day or more. He feeds on Valor and Conviction and prefers to use torture to extract the emotions of the beings he feeds upon. He anoints his knives with paralytic poison so he can capture and torture his weaker victims. When faced with a powerful and deadly opponent, he uses his sword and simply drinks up the emotions released in the heat of combat.

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 7, Stamina 6, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 6, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Herbalism) 5, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics 3, Lore 3, Martial Arts 5, Medicine 4, Melee 5, Occult 3, Presence 5 (Causing Fear +2), Resistance 3, Survival 5, Socialize 3, Thrown 5

Powers:

Command Earth: 5 motes. Venomous Dreams can shape stone and metal by touch, just as he can also shape wood. The only limit on this power is that the outside doors and walls of all the intact buildings in Rathess are warded against this effect. He can also cause the earth within 30 yards of him to shake hard enough to cause even horses to stumble and panic. The player of anyone standing must succeed at a Dexterity + Athletics roll, or her character falls over. The player of anyone running makes this roll at +2 difficulty. Venomous Dreams can also touch the earth and feel travelers or invaders coming from miles

away (3 motes). In combat, he can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to his permanent Essence or make an earth-based attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice his permanent Essence. Such attacks can be both dodged and parried.

Command Wood: 5 motes. Venomous Dreams can shape wood by touch, rapidly molding it into complex and intricate shapes without tools. He can also animate any wooden object within a number of yards equal to his Essence x 10, causing it to move and bend to his command or to leap through the air as a missile. This power can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to his permanent Essence or make a wood-based attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice his permanent Essence. Such attacks can be both dodged and parried.

Glamour: 5 motes (see *Exalted*, p. 286).

Base Initiative: 12

Attack:

Fist: Speed 12 Accuracy 12 Damage 6B Defense 12

Faerie Knife: Speed 15 Accuracy 14 Damage 8L+ poison* Defense 12

Faerie Blade: Speed 14 Accuracy 15 Damage 12L Defense 15

* Cannibal flower poison: Difficulty to resist 3, Damage: 4B if the target resists, 8B if they don't, with a Penalty of -4 and a Duration of two hours

Dodge Pool: 11 **Soak:** 18L/21B (Faerie plate, 12L/12B)

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

Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 40

Other Notes: None

VAU-CHEN

Use the description of the "Fair Folk Diplomat" (see *Exalted*, p. 286)

POISONOUS CARNELIAN BLADE

Use the description of the "Fair Folk Cataphract" (see *Exalted*, pp. 286-288).

These savages are not innately hostile to humans like their animal kin. However, they have learned a bitter lesson about the Age of Sorrows — Exalts cannot be trusted. Eager Terrestrial explorers and Lunar hunters have killed several members of this tribe. Since no outsider yet knows that these stalkers are anything other than dangerous beasts, no one encountering this tribe will have any reason to suspect that they have not simply run into another group of cannibalistic reptile savages.

The stalkers are working hard to regain their lost knowledge. However, there are few of them, and they face

great obstacles. Members of this tribe are regularly killed or injured, and it takes more than a decade to forcibly train a captured savage stalker so that it begins to become intelligent and civilized. Mirror Snake, an exceptional stalker who spontaneously gained both Essence 3 and a degree of civility originally started this tribe. Unfortunately, she was killed several years ago, and the tribe has been barely holding its own since that time.

If the characters do nothing, this tribe will struggle on, unable to grow or expand its influence to any significant degree. However, with help, this tribe could grow to



be a formidable force and might, in time, retake Rathless from all outsiders. Since the tribe currently lacks a strong leader, a powerful Exalt could transform these semi-savage reptiles into a loyal and devoted band of followers. The semi-human servants of the leech gods (see p. 75) have captured and sacrificed several of this tribe's number. A Circle of Exalted who rescued one of these stalkers from those monstrosities or who aided an injured stalker who had escaped from the leech gods' lair would instantly earn the gratitude of the entire savage tribe.

These stalkers inhabit the eastern flying tower because the most civilized vaguely remember the importance of this structure and hope to learn to use the vehicles to aid their efforts to rediscover their civilization. With help, they could actually learn to use these aerial vessels. They would then be willing to allow loyal allies to use their vehicles. However, they are extremely protective of the artifacts of their glorious past and would not be willing to actually give any of these vessels to Exalted allies unless those allies provided them with significant help. Characters who choose to become the leaders of this tribe could use any of the artifacts in this tower as they please. However, if it ever became clear that they were aiding these stalkers solely so that they could steal the Dragon Kings' treasures, the stalkers would quickly turn on the characters.

THE CRASHED SKYSHIP

To the west of the partially ruined flying tower lies the remains of a crashed First Age skyship. With a hull of nearly unbreakable viridian glass, chased with orichalcum and moonsilver, this skyship was once a gleaming ovoid 80 yards long and 20 yards in diameter. The shining metal and glass decks once held enchanted machines that kept it aloft, as well as luxurious fittings and accommodations for more than 300 passengers. Today, the ship lies half buried in the moist earth near the flight tower. Small cracks in the glass have allowed vines and many small animals to invade the skyship, but so far, no one has been able to enter it to search for valuables. Entry into the skyship can only be accomplished in two ways:

- A character can either slip through one of the small holes or cracks in the vessel's hull. Since none of these cracks are larger than six inches wide, most characters will need to use Charms, sorcery or artifacts to enlarge these openings. One or more character's can attack one of the larger cracks in the hull and enlarge it. The hull's soak is 15L/20B, and the attackers must do at least 50 levels of damage to enlarge one of these cracks enough to allow a person to slip through. Lunar shapeshifters will need to assume Humble Mouse Shape to enter without first enlarging these cracks. Characters who can transform into shadow or some other extremely fine substance, such as wind or mist, can enter through the cracks with no problem.

• Alternately, character can use a Charm or spell to either teleport inside or pass through one of the vessel's locked doors. Any character who gets inside will be able to figure out the simple lock mechanism on the main door if his player can succeed at an Intelligence + Lore roll, difficulty 1. At this point, the door can be opened from the inside.

Once inside, the skyship is a dangerous mixture of ancient wonders and dangerous animal life. The interior is dim, with the only light coming through the nearly opaque glass and from the dying remnants of the glow stone that once lit the skyship's interior. The ship has seven levels, but the bottom two have completely filled with large quantities of soil and foul water. The remainder of the vessel is only barely more habitable — huge centipedes, poisonous tree frogs, voracious ants and deadly serpents all live inside the skyship, and vines fill much of the interior. The dwindling radiation from the ship's partially ruined engines attract animal life and encourage plant growth even in these dim surroundings.

Despite these trials, much can be gained from exploring this wreck. Solar Exalted with the correct spells and Craft Charms could conceivably clean out and fully repair the skyship. At this point, the characters would have a vastly powerful artifact with small but comfortable cabins capable of carrying up to 300 passengers and a cargo bay large enough for 50 horses and more than 10 tons of cargo. Although this vessel can only travel at speeds up to 60 miles per hour, it can travel both day and night.

Like many other First Age constructions, it is also incredibly durable. The skyship's hull is immune to normal damage, only enchanted weapons, Charms, sorcery or First Age artifacts can harm it. Damage against it is rolled, not automatic. Also, Charms and artifacts that increase or multiply damage to objects have no effect on the hull of this vessel. The vessel can be piloted by as few as two Exalts so long as both pilots have at least Sail •••.

Of course, even the Solar Exalted would find attempting to repair this skyship to be a difficult feat. It must be cleansed of vermin, ripped from the ground (a task requiring a group of characters to tie ropes around the vessel and then exert a Strength + Athletics total of 200 or more). After this, if the characters seem likely to have any chance of repairing the skyship, many of Rathess' other residents will take an interest in this project, as will any powerful sorcerer who hears of the project. Not only will Relza (see p. 69) attempt to claim at least partial ownership of the skyship, so will the Goblin King. Repairing and retaining possession of a functional First Age skyship is an epic task that could become the focus of an entire series. Between searching the ruins of the various flying towers for spare parts and repelling attacks by others who wish to steal the fruits of their labor, any Solar Exalted who succeeds in this task

will have earned this magnificent vessel. Characters who wish to repair this vessel will need Lore, Occult and Craft (Metalworking) at 6 or higher. The Exalt flying the vessel must commit 20 motes of Essence to attune to it. While the skyship could once fly with but a Manse • Hearthstone set into it, its Essence-gathering aerals are damaged, and now, it cannot fly without a Hearthstone of level 4 or 5 set into the control panel.

To maintain a skyship, a character must also have least Lore •••••, Craft (Metalworking) •••• and Occult ••••. For every 40 hours a skyship is in operation, a qualified character must spend 10 hours maintaining the skyship. This maintenance requires an array of specialized equipment that costs Resources •••• and is large enough to fill a trio of two-horse wagons or a very large workshop. This maintenance includes the repair and replacement of various small jade and metal components. These components can normally only be purchased in large cities. For every 40 hours of maintenance the skyship is in arrears, reduce the skyship's speed by 10 mph. If the vessels speed is reduced below 20 mph, it can no longer take off and must overhauled before it can again be used.

Normally, four Essence-gathering aerals power the skyship. Each of these antennae is a large, delicate structure of jade and fine steel. They have a soak of 3L/4B and take three health levels to damage and six health levels to destroy. They are each five feet long and as thick as a large man's wrist. When connected into the central socket that connects to each of the various devices by orichalcum-plated wires, one of these antennae can power all of the minor devices on board the vessel indefinitely. The vessel itself contained four separate Essence antennae, one to power the minor systems and the remaining three to help lift and propel the vessel. Today, only two of these antennae remain intact. Although an Exalt can regain up to 8 motes of Essence per hour by touching one of these antennae, they are large and unwieldy enough that they are only useful in fixed emplacements. Both of the intact Essence antennae are located in the back of the ship and are overgrown with pallid, slightly animate vegetation.

Less ambitious or powerful characters can also acquire many rewards from exploring the ruins of this vessel. The engines and controls of the skyship contain sufficient quantities of jade, orichalcum and moonsilver to allow characters to construct up to a dozen daiklaves or a half-dozen suits of medium or heavy armor from each of these three Magical Materials. In addition, the Essence-powered lights and pumps on board this vessel can be stripped off and used in other ships or dwellings. All of the pumps and lights together on the vessel can be powered by the insertion of any Hearthstone into the skyship's controls and the commitment of 5 motes of





Essence, so long as at least one Essence-gathering aerial is intact. If none of the aerials are functional and attached, the auxiliary systems can be activated by inserting a level 2 Hearthstone into the skyship's control panel, in addition to the level 4 or 5 Hearthstone needed to activate the skyship's flying ability.

THE UNDERWAYS

In the six octads of Rathless used by the land-dwelling Dragon Kings, the underways make up the bulk of the city. Although the Dragon Kings preferred to live up in the sunlight, in towers of basalt and quartz, they considered commerce, manufacturing and most other purely secular activities to be too profane to exist in the direct light of the Unconquered Sun. They placed the portions of Rathless devoted to these activities beneath the temples, arenas and dwellings that make up the surface of the city. The Dragon Kings were most active in morning and twilight — they found direct sunlight relaxing and the dimmer light of the underways far more conducive to the practical activities of daily life.

The underways of Rathless once housed all of the shops, the restaurants, the offices of bureaucrats, the clinics, the workshops, the schools and the factories that kept Rathless running. Recluses and those Dragon Kings who were so devoted to their work that they avoided the drowsy sunlight except to attend religious festivals inhabited portions of the underways. The Dragon King's savage young were kept in well-guarded underground pens until they were considered civilized enough to walk freely through the city. The upper levels of the underways were mostly devoted to shops and similar public areas, while the most important and the most secretive activities took place deep underground. As a result, to find the palaces with their coveted armories, the workshops of the crystal and plant workers and other places of great value, explorers must venture deep underground into the lowest levels of the underways.

Regardless of what level one is on, the underways are all fundamentally similar. They primarily consist of smooth stone corridors between 6 and 15 yards wide and 3 yards high, with doorways and large alcoves set on either side. The arched ceilings are set with enchanted crystals that produce light equal to early evening, and the floors are covered with an exceptionally durable short turquoise grass that keeps the floors clean. This grass only grows in areas where the crystal lights still shine.

Unlike human-made corridors, the underways wind sinuously through the earth in a series of gentle S-curves. As a result, even in places where the magical crystal lights still shine, it is impossible to see more than 50 yards down any corridor — their curving blocks out longer lines of sight. These corridors never branch or divide, but many lie parallel to each other, and occasionally, there

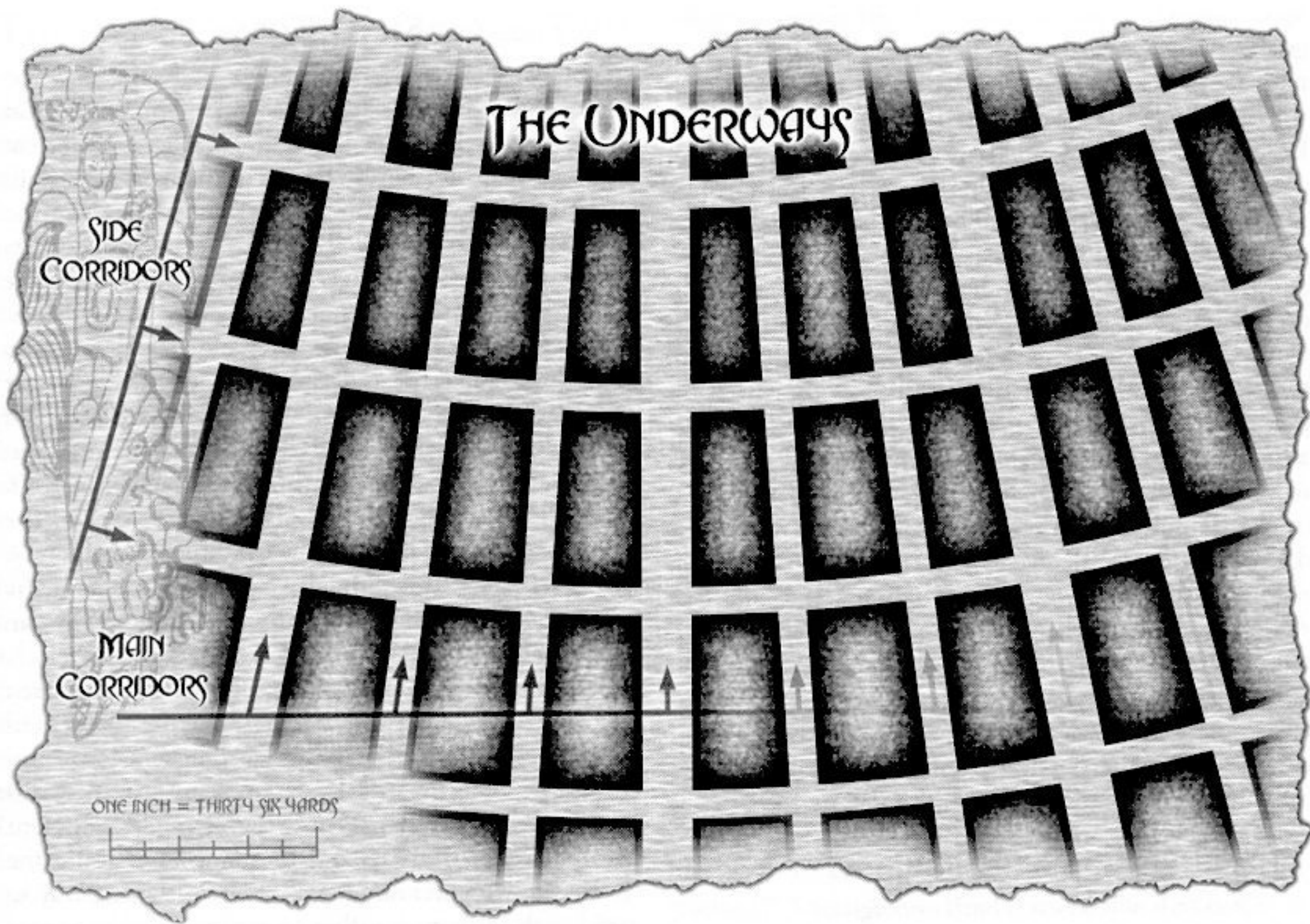
are semi-circular side corridors (between four and six yards wide) that connect various primary corridors together. In places, these parallel corridors emerge into large underground chambers that can be as much as 1,000 yards wide. These chambers served many purposes. Some were vast libraries, others places of instruction, courtrooms or huge public mud baths still filled with many dozens of steaming mud pools. However, many of these huge public areas were used for reptilian activities beyond the ken of humanity. Today, the underways are home to stalkers, goblins, hatra colonies, venomous snakes, giant wolf spiders, chaun (see *Beasts of the Wyld*, p. 30), strangler's serpents (see *Beasts of the Wyld*, p. 50) and giant colony spiders whose webs can fill an entire corridor.

Originally, the grass carpets in these corridors automatically cleaned them of all dirt. However, more than half the corridors are now bereft of all these protective enchantments. While some remain clean and in good repair despite their age, many others are now choked and overgrown with pale vines adapted to thrive on the dim light and the strange radiations of the Dragon Kings' many enchanted crystals. In regions where the various light crystals and other wonders are ruined or damaged, these radiations can become particularly intense, and the plants can become both animate and hungry. Here, the animals also become both larger and more aggressive. Thankfully, both the Dragon Kings and the goblins avoid such regions, so visitors do not have to contend with both these enemies and the twisted residents of these regions.

AIR DUCTS

Unlike the unwholesome air in most caves, many of the underways have air as fresh and pure as a spring meadow. Air ducts run along the center of every corridor. Although they only make a slight depression in the center of the corridor ceilings, inside these circular ducts are one and a half yards in diameter and are lined with rings of enchanted crystal every 50 yards. These crystal rings pump fresh air throughout the underways. Today, the air ducts still function in about half of the underways. Where they don't, the air is stale and smells of rotting plants and great age. Observant characters will keep an eye on the air ducts. Anyplace where they are obviously cracked or broken means that the air is likely somewhat stale. Every 25 yards, the air ducts open into yard-wide circular copper grates. Removing any of these copper grates and looking inside the air ducts will allow a character to both feel the air flow (if any) and to see the faint glow of the working crystals (make a Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 1 to notice either of these effects). The absence of either means that the local air is in doubt.

In the sections of the underways with stale air, the difficulty of all Endurance rolls are increased by one. In



the sections of the underways furthest from working air ducts, the air becomes particularly foul and characters will take one health level of drowning damage (see *Exalted*, p. 243) every 15 minutes. Rolling two or more successes on a reflexive Perception + Awareness roll will alert characters to the fact that they are breathing bad air well before they risk experiencing ill effects.

Some explorers have actually traveled the underways by crawling through the air ducts. Prying off the grates requires a Strength + Athletics total of 7 or higher or the use of tools and a successful Dexterity + Craft (Metalworking) roll (difficulty 1). If Craft (Metalworking) is used, the grate can be replaced if desired. Travel through the grates is often safer than walking through the corridors since stalkers, goblins and the other large inhabitants of the underways avoid the air ducts because they are too difficult to move in. However, it is impossible for a mortal or Exalt to crawl faster than four yards per turn in one of these corridors, and any physical actions taken in these corridors adds +2 to its difficulty. Normally, this is not a problem. However, sometimes, creatures travel through or even live in these ducts. Both poisonous snakes and giant wolf spiders can be found there, especially in those regions where the ducts do not function. Explorers who are attacked in the air ducts, especially from behind, are in quite a fix. Characters cannot use

shields in the ducts or dodge without a stunt, the difficulty of all attacks is increased by +2, and players of characters who wish to turn around must roll Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 4, for their characters to do so.

MAZE PLAZAS

The strangest of the large chambers found in the underways are large open spaces now known as maze plazas. There are six maze plazas in Rathess, explorers discovered one on the second level below the surface — five maze plazas on lower levels still await discovery. All six are hexagonal and 900 yards across with ceilings that are 20 yards high. Inside this space are a series of roofless, interconnected hexagonal rooms. Each hexagon is 20 yards across, and there are no corridors or passageways between them. Instead, each hexagon lacks between one and three walls. Visitors can easily wander through these openings, going from one hexagon to the next — getting lost is frighteningly easy in a maze plaza. In portions of the plaza, the paths through these rooms are complex and maze-like — in other sections, it is a simple matter to walk from one side of the plaza to the other. The walls themselves are always of black basalt that is two yards thick and ten yards high and flat on top. Some visitors to the known maze plaza walk along the tops of these walls. Many of the plaza's rooms are empty and deserted, but



approximately a quarter of the larger rooms contain gardens filled with exotic animals and plants, some from no place now known to Creation in the modern day.

Although all of the rooms in each maze plaza have large open doorways, few of the animals are willing leave their gardens unless carried out by someone else. Savants suspect that those animals that are able to leave their gardens may be interlopers that moved in later. Most animals and plants are harmless and beautiful, but some are large and deadly. All are nourished by some unknown method, but many of the carnivores are perfectly willing to attempt to sample living flesh if it is presented to them. Two maze plazas (including the known one) are lit as if in early twilight, a fact that provides no discomfort to the animals or plants. Two others are in perpetual bright sunlight, and the last two lie forever in utter darkness and are filled with beasts of the night and eldritch plants that grow in these lightless surroundings. A few rooms in each maze plaza contain bizarre and twisted animals and plants that could only have come from Wyld zones — many of these strange life forms are exceedingly deadly. No one knows how these creatures can survive outside of a Wyld zone, but there are thankfully no Wyld energies in any of the maze plazas.

THE TUBE-CAR SYSTEM

Over half of Rathless is built underground. This fact did not prevent the Dragon Kings from moving about easily in their subterranean precincts. Indeed, the Dragon Kings could probably move more freely through their underground quarters than they could through the surface regions because of the tube-car system. This system was a kind of underground transport that rocketed its riders along through a series of tubes that ran throughout the area beneath Rathless. Tube-car stations existed at regular intervals throughout the subterranean areas of the city, and an automated car could be called simply by scribing a few runes on a convenient control plaque.

The cars themselves were vaguely circular in shape and filled the entirety of the great tubes through which they hurtled. They were nevertheless roomy and comfortable, allowing up to a dozen Dragon Kings in armor to sit without difficulty. A plaque within each car controls its destination — but not its speed or path of transit. These elements were controlled by a remote system elsewhere in the underground portion of the city, which monitored the movements of all the cars in the underways and prevented them from colliding with one another. The cars moved very quickly, and most places within the subterranean areas of Rathless were reachable within a matter of minutes, if not seconds. Interestingly, there were no aboveground stations, and the cars did not travel outside the limits of the underground portion of Rathless.

THE TUBE-CAR SYSTEM TODAY

Like so many other elements of Rathless in the Second Age, the tube-car system works haphazardly, if at all. During the First Age, a rider would direct a tube car to its ultimate destination by inscribing a series of sigils in the High Holy Speech upon a glass pane set in the center of the forward wall of the car. Since very few people now know the High Holy Speech, let alone the specific instructions in that language to direct a car, anyone who enters one of these vehicles risks winding up in an unintended (or undesired) locale. Any character who wishes to use the system without mishap must first have a dot in Linguistics (High Holy Speech) and then his player must succeed at an Intelligence + Lore roll. The difficulty of the roll is 3 if the character knows the name and location of the place in Rathless to which he wishes to travel. It is difficulty 5 if he lacks one or the other piece of information. Without either, no one can direct a tube car successfully.

Similarly, some areas of the tube system have been damaged by collapses or blockages, making travel dangerous even under the best of circumstances. The ancient control mechanism still does its best to prevent collisions and other mishaps, but it is growing less efficient with each passing year, and the dangers of using the system grow greater and greater. The only sure way to avoid such mishaps is either to avoid using the system entirely or to learn to control the tube cars manually. To do so first requires a character to understand how the automated system works (as described in the previous paragraph). Then, his player can make a difficulty 3 Wits + Lore roll in order for the character to drive the tube car as he wishes. The difficulty increases to 5 if the character wishes to avoid an oncoming blockage or another car. Failure almost always results in the destruction of the car, as well as the death of most of its passengers. Anyone in the car takes 24L damage, soaked normally.

Despite all these potential problems, the system is still well used by the permanent inhabitants of Rathless. Filial Wisdom and his goblins have a better command of its niceties than many, aided as they are by Han-Tha's consciousness and memories. Consequently, the Goblin King and his minions sometimes surprise outsiders with their impressive ability to use the tube system, both for attack and getaways. Visitors can also use the system but with less success. Some explorers and tomb robbers have stumbled into areas inaccessible to the rest of the undercity and became stranded there, eventually dying from lack of food and water. This is probably the greatest danger posed by the tube cars — their unreliability. Every day, more and more of them break down and cease to function or do so only erratically, which is a positive bane to anyone attempting to use them to find their way safely through the subterranean portions of ruined Rathless.

THE LAIR OF THE LEECH GODS

When the Contagion came to Rathess, the humans and Exalts living there died in droves — their bloated bodies lay unburied in the streets. The only exceptions to this vast charnel house of death were a small group of humans who found a partial remedy to this plague — unfortunately, this remedy came with a terrible price. In both Rathess and Gethamane (see *Scavenger Sons*, pp. 10-11) some portions of the underways inadvertently touched a vast network of primeval caverns inhabited by bizarre and eldritch creatures that never see the light of day. In Rathess, the sun-worshiping Dragon Kings drove back the denizens of these dark realms and placed potent wards on the walls of their tunnels to prevent these creatures from ever gaining access to the surface.

During the terrible days of the Contagion, a few humans fled the surface and hid in the underways of the human quarter. The Contagion still slew them, until one scholar remembered stories of the deep caverns and believed that they could hide in these tunnels, far from those infected with this plague. Several sorcerers worked together to locate a cavern that was near the surface and to break their way into it. Here, they hid, safe from the Contagion. However, these caverns were already inhabited — when the Primordials first created the gods, they banished those creations that were too imperfect or dangerous deep underground where they lived in hidden caverns and used their strange magics on the creatures deep under the earth.

The most powerful of the banished spirits under Rathess were the leech gods (see pp. 71-72). These creatures, which originally resembled man-sized, chalk-white leeches, lived in a huge pool of fetid jet-black water very near the place where the desperate refugees broke through into their lightless realm. As the humans hid from the plague raging above them, the leech spirits used their Charms to invade these mortal's dreams and to possess their leaders. In less than a year, these unclean gods had the mortals completely under their thrall.

In the many centuries since the fall of the First Age, these spirits have bred with the humans and used their Charms to help the mortals adapt to their new home. As the leech gods learned of humanity, they ultimately began aping some of their manners and appearance. The underpeople who now worshiped them likewise came to resemble their foul masters, in part because of spending so many centuries living in the caverns, and in part because all of them now are at least distantly related to the leech gods. Today, the underpeople (see p. 75) are thriving, and a few years ago, they began to move a portion of their number up to the surface.

Within a century after first beginning to live underground, the underpeople began foraging on the surface.

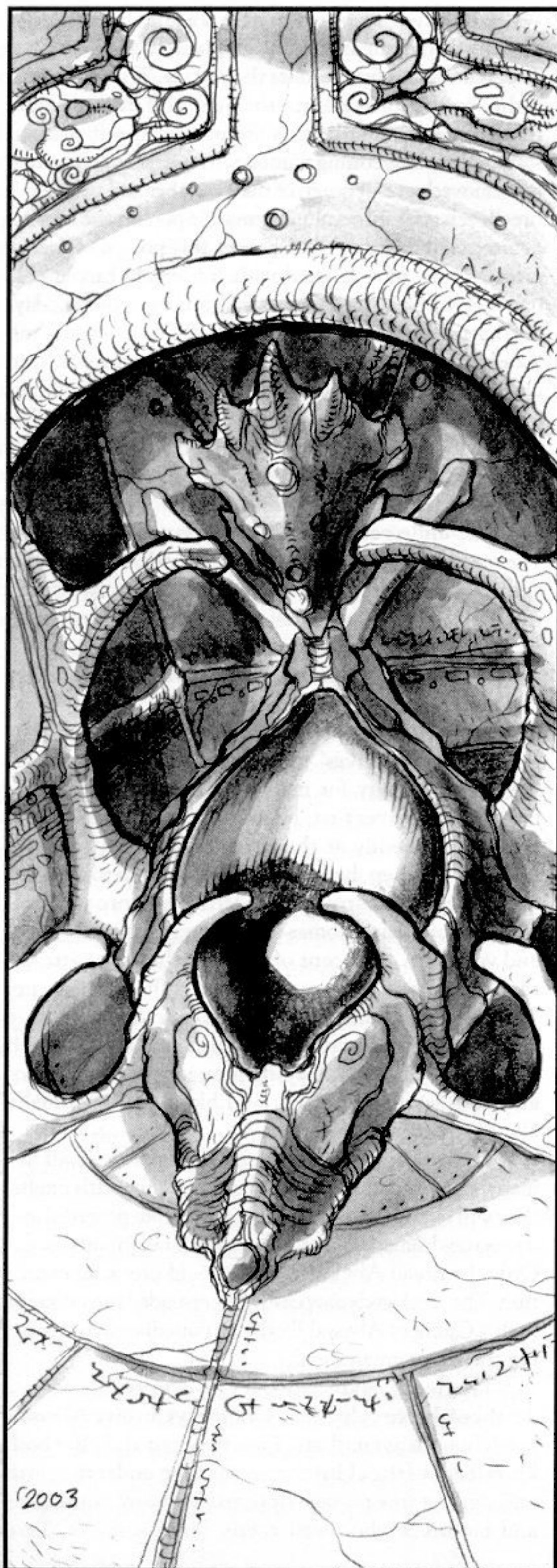
When the sunlight began to pain them, they only ventured forth at night or into the depths of the jungle, where direct sunlight never reaches the surface. They hunt and gather on the surface, since the fungi and strange plants that grow in the underways are no longer sufficient to sustain their burgeoning numbers. In the recent past, they have moved several dozen of their number and two of the nine leech gods into a circular marble pool in the human quarter. The building that houses this pool was once a great marble affair fronted with intricately carved columns. Here, First Age citizens swam and exercised. Today, portions of the walls have fallen in, and the surrounding area has been overrun with dense jungle. However, the chamber's roof is intact, and the building offers direct access to the underways that lead into their caverns. The leech gods hope to eventually inhabit all of the deep jungle's rivers and lakes and so gain dominion over a portion of the surface world.

The underpeople regularly capture prey for their vile masters — and greatly prefer both humans and stalkers. They drag captives to one of the two pools inhabited by the leech gods. Amidst the foul wet smells of blood and decay, they tie the captives to x-shaped wooden frames placed a few yards from the pool. Here, the underpeople make shallow cuts in the captives' bodies. They are experts in how to let blood without risking their captives' lives. Unless the leech spirits have gone hungry for many weeks, the underpeople feed upon captives first. High-ranking members of the tribe suck greedily at the captives' wounds, savoring their blood. Then, before the captives begin to weaken, the underpeople carry the wooden frames into the pool. The dark oily water comes to an average captive's waist, and very soon, the scent of blood in the water attracts the leech gods and their twisted leech hounds (see pp. 75-76). They all converge on the captives and slowly drain them dry. When captives are abundant, the leech gods may feed slowly, leaving the captives to linger for almost a day before horror and blood loss eventually claims their lives.

The underpeople and their leech gods hate all humans, and while they have little experience with Exalts, they will regard them as nothing more than powerful and dangerous human beings, at least until taught otherwise. Only the dread Abyssal Exalted could prove an exception. The leech gods may easily be persuaded into alliance with a Circle of Abyssal Exalted, immediately recognizing them as a greater evil.

The leech gods can offer two prizes to induce deathknights to help them. One, they can give Abyssals leech hounds as familiars. Two, they can also offer both knowledge of the eldritch caverns deep under the earth and sigils of free passage honored by many of the gods and monsters who dwell there. Since some of these





tunnels extend for hundreds or even thousands of miles, knowledge of these caves could be a great boon to deathknights who wish to travel unobserved through the mortal world.

THE VAULTS OF THE AGES

During the first days of the Great Contagion, many of the wisest and most powerful Dragon Kings realized that their people might well be doomed. Already, the outlying portions of Creation were being devoured by the Wyld, and their mortal frames were dying from the Contagion. To give their people a chance to rise again from savagery, the remaining Dragon Kings worked to create a dozen special chambers located throughout the city. In each, one or two of the most powerful Dragon Kings would rest in enchanted stasis until conditions had stabilized. Then, they would awaken and begin to teach and lead their people down the long road back to civilization. Unfortunately, although the sleeping reptiles were supposed to awaken after a century or two, something went wrong with their chambers, and none of them can now awaken without external aid. Currently, only six of these chambers remain intact—the others have been looted and their inhabitants killed and stripped of all valuables.

The remaining eight sleepers exist in stasis within six well-fortified chambers located deep in the city's underways. The doors and walls of these chambers have 20L/25B soak and require 60 health levels of damage to chop a hole large enough to crawl through. Also, the chambers are proof against all destructive Terrestrial Circle Sorcery as well as every Charm designed to open or bypass locks, except for those possessed by the Solar Exalted.

Some of the chambers will awaken the sleepers the instant that someone forces their way inside. Others require that someone deliberately awaken them. Anyone with Lore •••, Medicine •• and Occult •• can figure out how to safely awaken a sleeping Dragon King. Three or more successes on an Intelligence + Lore roll are required. Failure has no effect, but a botch kills the sleeping Dragon King. If this roll is successful or if the characters break into a chamber that automatically awakens the Dragon King, the inhabitant awakens within two turns. What the Dragon King does next will depend upon the attitudes of the characters. A mighty Dragon King from the days of the First Realm could be either a singularly impressive ally or a deadly foe. This benefit or danger is doubled if the characters open either of the two chambers holding a pair of Dragon Kings.

The ancient Dragon Kings are primarily interested in aiding their now-savage people. They will eventually find the tribe of semi-civilized stalkers in the east flying tower

(see pp. 42-44), but characters who inform them about the inhabitants of this tower or who introduce a newly awakened Dragon King to the members of this tribe will be regarded in the highest manner possible.

One serious potential problem with allying with the awakened Dragon Kings is the matter of language. All of these ancient beings know both their own speech and the tongue of the Old Realm. However, they know no other languages, and anyone who does not either know Old Realm or cannot communicate using some form of Charm or sorcery will have great difficulty working with the Dragon Kings. Also, while they regard the Solar Exalted as their natural allies, the Dragon Kings are aware of the excesses committed by the First Age Solars. These Dragon Kings will be hesitant but still positively inclined toward Solar Exalted. They greet other Celestial Exalted with interest but also with a small measure of distrust.

Unfortunately for Terrestrial visitors, the Dragon Kings see the Terrestrial Exalted as the heirs of the rebels who destroyed the First Age. Although Dragon-Blooded may manage to ingratiate themselves to the Dragon Kings, this trust will have to be earned. If the Dragon-Blooded openly aid the Dragon Kings, then there will be no actual hostility, but real trust will only come after the Dragon-Blooded have provided much aid to the Dragon Kings and the Dragon Kings are certain that their contact party is not part of an elaborate ruse. Also, any betrayal or mistakes by members of the Dragon-Blooded will be seen as far more serious than similar actions committed by any of the Celestial Exalted.

Abyssal Exalted will be a total mystery to the Dragon Kings. Such beings did not exist in the long-lost days of the First Age. Although darkness is abhorrent to the Dragon Kings and death is an unknown and alien mystery, a group of deathknights could potentially ally themselves with the Dragon Kings. Such an alliance will always be fairly distant — the Dragon Kings will never be comfortable in or even near a shadowland, and no Dragon King can ever become a ghost. However, as soon as they become aware of the political realities of the Age of Sorrows, the Dragon Kings will seek to switch their allegiance.

However, characters who show any loyalty or friendship to the Fair Folk will instantly gain the Dragon King's lasting distrust and, likely, their hatred. Surges of the Wyld, driven by conquering hordes of Fair Folk destroyed all of the other Dragon King cities. The sleeping Dragon Kings see the Fair Folk as nothing less than the implacable enemies of both life and civilization. No compromises with them are possible, and anyone who supports or aids the Fair Folk automatically becomes the sworn enemy of these Dragon Kings. The current rivalry between the stalkers of the eastern flying tower and the goblin hordes merely serves to reinforce this point. In any battle to take

control of Rathess, the sleepers will begin by ruthlessly attacking the goblins and other Fair Folk in the city.

If the characters work with the awakened Dragon King and the tribe of the eastern flying tower, they could restore the nucleus of the ancient Dragon King civilization in a decade. One of the first actions of the awakened Dragon Kings will be to awaken all of the other sleepers in the remaining chambers. These eight ancient and wise Dragon Kings could civilize many more of the mindless stalkers and help the members of the eastern tower tribe regain more of the lost knowledge and power.

If the characters are members of the Celestial Exalted, their prodigious efforts combined with the tireless aid of their Dragon King allies could easily reconquer Rathess in less than a year. Even if the characters are merely Terrestrial Exalted, helping to make Rathess once again the city of the Dragon Kings is still within their grasp, but the characters will mostly follow rather than lead. Characters who help with this effort will be guaranteed both sanctuary and an ever-increasing number of allies — the ancient Dragon Kings will labor to raise many of their savage kin up from the mud of ignorance.

Of course, many individuals in the Age of Sorrows would not see the reconquest of Rathess by the Dragon Kings as desirable. The Lunars Ma-Ha-Suchi and Raksi, Queen of Fangs, would both probably be discomfited by the presence of a resurgent Dragon King race in their territories. Most Terrestrial Exalted who are loyal to the Realm would be horrified by the idea of savage and inhuman reptiles loyal to the Unconquered Sun ruling an entire city. Also, if the characters attempt to steal from or thwart the efforts of the awakened Dragon Kings, the deadly reptiles' efforts simply mean that the characters now have another inhuman and dangerous foe. The Dragon Kings will not pursue enemies beyond the outskirts of Rathess unless those enemies have committed truly heinous acts such as murdering a sleeping Dragon King or destroying their artifacts. However, anyone who opposes the alliance of the reawakened Dragon Kings and their disciples from the eastern flying tower will find their time in Rathess to be fraught with conflict.

Regardless of the characters' attitudes toward the sleeping Dragon Kings, the chambers themselves are also of great interest. All of them contain between three and six • and •• artifacts made by the Dragon Kings and each contains at least one ••• or •••• artifact. Naturally, if the inhabitant awakens, he will want to claim his possessions. However, characters are free to loot the chamber of a sleeping Dragon King. The only danger is that, if the Dragon King later awakens (which sometimes happens hours or days after the tomb is first opened), he will deeply resent the theft of its prized possessions.

However, the structure of the chambers can also prove useful. The walls are decorated with elaborate





inscriptions about the entirety of Dragon King history and the history of the First Realm. Written in the Dragon Kings' jagged script, these histories are invaluable both to scholars of the First Age and to scavenger lords seeking new locations to loot. Characters will either need to learn the High Holy Speech (see p. 30 for guidelines on this) or convince one of the awakened Dragon Kings or one of the gods of Rathless to either translate this history or teach the character this ancient and alien tongue. Fortunately, all of the sleepers regard teaching an ally their tongue as a noble and enlightening task — anyone who remains on good terms with the Dragon Kings should have little trouble learning their language.

THE CULT OF HAN-THA

Although Rathless has been a pile of moldering stones for centuries, the former First City has not rested quietly. Hidden within miles of rubble and debris is the Cult of Han-Tha, the Ghoul King. The cult has been associated with Rathless since time immemorial, being older than almost any other, except those of the Unconquered Sun and Leeayta, of course. Consequently, anyone who wishes to understand the city and its history — both past and present — would be wise to learn the place of the Eater of the Dead and his followers.

THE ANCIENT CULT

Han-Tha first appeared during the war between the gods and the Primordials. In those days, he was an extremely minor deity who existed in the margins of Creation's spirit ecology. He did not become directly involved in the war, but waited in the shadows, looking for opportunities through which he might gain power and influence. The war produced many such opportunities, which Han-Tha seized with great alacrity. The Ghoul King possessed the ability to profit from the deaths of others. By consuming the bodies of the fallen, he could increase his own power. This was especially true when the bodies in question were those of the gods or (more often) the Primordials. In the process, Han-Tha transcended his humble origins, becoming something more than the scavenger god he once was.

Indeed, his consumption of slain Primordials may have affected the Eater of the Dead in other ways as well. After the banishment of the remaining Primordials, Han-Tha's demeanor and methods changed. He continued to exist on the fringes of Dragon King society, but he became bolder in his actions. Where once he could have been called a coward, Han-Tha was now almost courageous. He stepped out from the shadows and announced his presence to Creation — and gained followers.

It was in this respect that the Ghoul King had also changed. A very typical primitive god of the "wendigo"

type (see *Time of Tumult*, p. 20), he had previously operated on an almost instinctual level. All that mattered to him was feeding and gaining power. Anything else he pursued was a short-term campaign to achieve these two ends. After the destruction of the Primordials, however, Han-Tha, increased in intelligence, became a prophet of his creed. He preached a gospel of growth through decay and consumption. Han-Tha pointed at his own evolution in the wake of destruction as further evidence that new life arises out of death and came as close to practicing a millenarian cult as he could without inviting direct Celestial censure.

While the Ghoul King's teachings never proved popular, they held a definite appeal to those who saw themselves ill-served by the current state of affairs in Creation. Those Dragon Kings who longed for a better world, one where they would be on top, saw Han-Tha as a liberator and his doctrine as a guarantor of their eventual rise to power. The Eater of the Dead encouraged such beliefs in his followers, for he shared them. In his own mind, Han-Tha saw the end of the First Age as but a prelude to a new Age, one even more glorious than the First. Naturally, he would reign supreme over this new Golden Age, having cast down the gods and consumed them. It is lucky for Han-Tha this faith gained few adherents, for it is unlikely the Celestial Incarna would have looked favorably on his plans for them. But as a small god of a favored race, he was simply banished from Yu-Shan and ignored.

Throughout the history of Rathless, Han-Tha's cult attempted to incite political and military leaders to overthrow the status quo and pave the way for a newer and better world. Unfortunately, it never gained as much power as the Ghoul King had hoped — the cult's practice of necrophagy and other similar rites may have had something to do with its failure, as may the highly questionable claims of Han-Tha. It was only in later years, as Rathless and the Celestial Bureaucracy faltered, that Han-Tha's worship rose to any prominence.

The cult of the Eater of the Dead survived the fall of Rathless, perhaps unsurprisingly. Its members always believed that the collapse of the old order would pave the way for a newer and better future and so were relatively prepared when the civic order finally disintegrated after the Usurpation. When the Dragon-Blooded usurped the place of their Solar masters, the Ghoul King's servants rejoiced, seeing it as an omen of the new dawn that their god had predicted would occur. When Rathless itself suffered from its support for the Solars, it was viewed as yet more evidence that the ascendancy of the Ghoul King was nigh.

For the next seven centuries, Han-Tha's cult had a profound influence on what remained of Rathless' political order during the Shogunate. As the Contagion spread

throughout the city, killing most of the Dragon Kings and the humans who lived with them, the cult openly awaited an apotheosis that never came. The devotees of the cult feasted upon the dead and were made stronger for it, but Han-Tha was not catapulted to power by their prayers; most of his ghoulish servants died in the Contagion. There was no glorious new Age, with Han-Tha ruling over all. Death and decay brought nothing except more of the same. The cult dwindled down to a small group, made up primarily of goblins that Han-Tha bullied into his service in the days after the Contagion. So it remained for centuries, as Han-Tha railed against Heaven for denying his ultimate victory. It would have remained so even now had it not been for the arrival of a reborn Solar named Filial Wisdom, whom the Eater of the Dead saw as a sign that the true new Age was about to begin.

THE CONTEMPORARY CULT

The arrival of Filial Wisdom (see statistics on pp. 73-74) impelled Han-Tha in new direction. Once in possession of the Solar's body, the Ghoul King began to fill the Exalt's head with the teachings of his cult, which appealed greatly to the powerful Dawn Caste. Under Han-Tha's influence, Filial Wisdom developed his own interpretation of the cult's doctrines, sparking the most recent phase in its evolution.

Like Han-Tha himself, Filial Wisdom does not see the First Age as a Golden Age. Instead, he sees it as a decadent time, when mortals and Exalted alike did not live up to their fullest potential and fell victim to their own weaknesses in order to feed a new Age (and Han-Tha, its rightful god-emperor). The Great Curse was not simply a final malediction wrought by the Primordials, it was a revelation of an inner truth, namely that only when the world worshiped Han-Tha would a true state of enlightened harmony prevail.

Filial Wisdom's great innovation is he seeks to entice mortal humans to join the cult by preaching of the rule of Han-Tha as an ideal time — a doctrine he mostly stole from the Cult of the Illuminated. Filial Wisdom had contact with that cult before its usurpation by the Gold faction, and his own teachings are similar to that religious organization's. He is Han-Tha's shining avatar, and he and the Ghoul King will consume the trappings of a blighted Age and usher in a utopia, which Han-Tha shall naturally rule as supreme godhead.

Filial Wisdom now accepts the teachings of Han-Tha so wholeheartedly that the Ghoul King does not ride his body nearly so often as he once did. The corrupted Solar is now a willing thrall of the deity, who approves greatly of the plan to expand the cult. Unfortunately, the plan suffers from a number of problems. The first and most easily overcome is that the faith is ludicrous, but as a Solar Exalt, Filial Wisdom should have little trouble attracting follow-

ers. The more serious problem is that Rathess is remote and has limited access to the rest of Creation. That means the pool of mortal recruits is small, consisting primarily of captured members of expeditions into the ruins.

Currently, Filial Wisdom plans to coax more outsiders into the ruins by circulating new rumors of the riches that await within Rathess. He has already sent examples of Dragon King artifacts to the bazaars of Nexus and other metropoli. Filial Wisdom's troops also seized and enslaved a Guild convoy last year, and he's counting on more mortals coming into the ruins and the cult's clutches. Finally, a handful of "missionaries" have gone forth throughout the Southern and Eastern lands to spread the Ghoul King's teachings. If even a few mortals heed these words, Filial Wisdom and Han-Tha believe the cult will grow in size and power until the time is right to birth the new Age through violence and bloodshed.

Han-Tha has plans to deal with Filial Wisdom when the time comes. When the moment is right, Han-Tha will possess Filial Wisdom's body and will then offer him up as a sacrifice to his other minions, claiming that with the Solar's death the Second Age is symbolically consumed by the new Age. The Ghoul King then will abandon his servant's body shortly after his other followers start to consume it in order to escape the same death that awaits the Exalt. Filial Wisdom knows nothing of this plan, and the Ghoul King plans to keep it that way. Han-Tha knows that even a servant as faithful as this Exalt will eventually grow into a power too dangerous to hold in check. It is entirely possible that Han-Tha underestimates the Solar, and Filial Wisdom is already too powerful for this plan to work.

CULT MILITARY STATUS

The Cult of Han-Tha is, by far, the largest and most organized force in Rathess. It has approximately 1,300 members. About 700 of them are goblins who have been enslaved and inculcated with the dogma of the Eater of the Dead. In addition, there are 250 great goblins, who serve as shock troops and officers to the cult. The cult has about 50 stalkers that it has "initiated" into the cult by feeding them the meat of other immature Dragon Kings and by using primitive and brutal animal-training techniques to civilize them somewhat. The cult also possesses about 120 grave hounds (see *Creatures of the Wyld*, pp. 35-36). These creatures are used in mixed groups as hunting hounds and chain dogs because they are certainly not suitable for complex tasks. In addition, there are about 250 chaun (see *Creatures of the Wyld*, p. 30), feral tribesmen, beastmen and Fair Folk commoners of various sorts in the cult. In general, the goblins and great goblins form the fighting forces, while the rabble of half-men and abhuman mutants form the actual clergy. There are also approximately 40 survivors of the 130 captives





taken from the recently destroyed Guild expedition. All are either completely brainwashed or broken and insane from months of cannibalism and religious education in the ritual and catechism of a necrophagic cult led by a genuine dark god.

ORGANIZATION

Filial Wisdom is a conventional military thinker used to open-field fighting between steel-armed formations in the Second Age. He attempts to fight set-piece battles and to use complex plans even in jungle and urban terrain. He has a predilection for large unit maneuvers, and his troops rarely move in groups smaller than 25. Filial Wisdom is ignorant of magical warfare. While he does understand that he must fear attack by invisible assassins, he has no concept of area attacks that can scythe down hundreds or ranged fire so withering it can break a charge of fanatical infantry. He will learn quickly, but the first time he is confronted with something outside his paradigm of sword and arrow, he is liable to lose his nerve and quit the field to reorganize his forces.

Filial Wisdom keeps his standing forces arrayed along imperial lines, though there are more non-commissioned officers per formation than in an imperial legion, as goblins are lazy and unimaginative creatures requiring close management. He fields a highly orthodox three wings of about 250 fighters each—each contains approximately 220 goblins and 30 great goblin officers. If the cult is full mobilized, each wing will have approximately 50 natives and chaun attached as scouts and skirmishers. The 150 great goblins not used to command goblins are arrayed in six scales of 25 each. The 100 stalkers are deployed in 20 braces of hunting beasts. Each generally contains two “scaled acolytes” and three grave hounds, along with a great goblin handler and two goblin lackeys.

Two wings of goblins are generally deployed in the area immediately around the Pyramid. These troops are on fatigue duty, and most will be napping, hunting or torturing and terrorizing their fellows. Any alarm will rouse five per turn until the whole 500 are ready for action several minutes later. The remaining wing is generally patrolling the city.

PATROLS

In the wing on patrol duty, one talon actually patrols. This talon works the streets broken up into five scales of 25 troops, each assisted by two braces of stalkers. The remaining talon of 125 goblins and great goblins, with the other 10 braces of stalkers, waits nearby for the patrols to come into contact with enemies worth sounding an alarm for.

These patrols are mostly training exercises and an attempt to establish enough dominance over the city streets that the forces of the cult can move freely. The

patrols do not generally enter buildings, nor do they move silently or attempt to track trails. They simply crash their way through the streets, an open challenge to battle. If the 20 goblins and their great goblins officers cannot easily subdue those they encounter, they will sound an alarm, a sign for the talon laying in wait to hurry to their aid, and if necessary, they will signal for Filial Wisdom himself and a wing of troops from the Pyramid of the Sun to aid them.

It takes the goblins about four days to “patrol” an octad. The goblins do not patrol the water octad or the human octad, and counting days when there are no patrols, any given area can expect to see a patrol go by about every lunar month. Patrols are merciless and will hunt down and kill anything they come into contact with.

The six independent scales of great goblins form the cult’s shock troops. There are always two such scales on duty in the Pyramid of the Sun guarding the altar and treasury, and the two scales that guard Han-Tha when he is outside his sanctum are also normally stationed there. The remaining two scales are assigned to Filial Wisdom as his bodyguard. He keeps one scale within 50 yards of him at all times, and the other is generally broken up into five-goblin fangs and performing inspections of the cult’s forces. If Filial Wisdom has Tiger Warrior Training Technique, all the great goblins (officers and shock troops alike) will have been transformed into tiger warriors. If not, they are still elite troops.

Filial Wisdom fights without regard for casualties suffered by his forces. Against conventional enemies, he favors large-scale surprise assaults and ambushes. If fighting Exalted, he will attempt to grind them down by constantly keeping them under attack. He is willing to sacrifice up to a full wing of his forces to keep Exalts spending Essence, and only after his foes seem injured will he personally enter the fray. If his forces are beaten back, he and his troops will flee into the undertunnels, where they have strongpoints and supply caches.

Filial Wisdom will immediately attack any Dragon-Blooded he hears report of, as well as anyone who seems like they might be an agent of Heaven here to pry into Han-Tha’s cult. He may not attack Celestial Exalted if he thinks he may be able to negotiate, but more likely, he will have his troops avoid contact with any Celestial foes and lay back with his guards close around him in the Pyramid of the Sun, hoping they leave without confrontation. Of course, given the aggressive habits of his minions, it’s likely that his first news of Celestial Exalted in the city will be the sounds of battle as one of his patrols meets a gruesome end.

RITUAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CULT

Aside from the activities described above, the Cult of Han-Tha engages in three types of rituals in

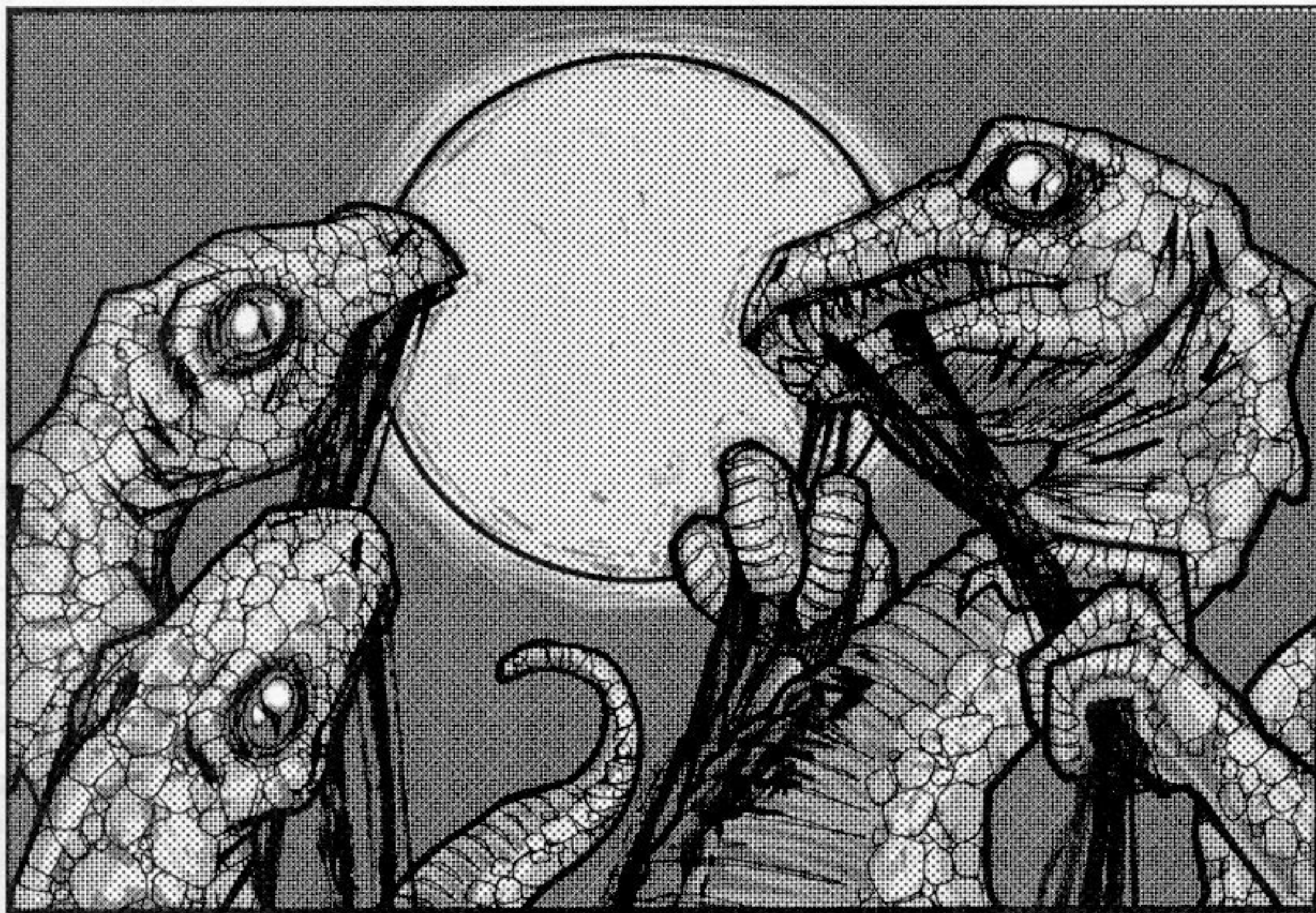
the service of their god. The first is “the Offering to the Master,” in which a dead captive is ceremonially prepared to become the meal of the Eater of the Dead. The cultists prefer that the captive be a personally powerful outsider, such as a Guild merchant lord or a Dragon-Blooded officer. Unfortunately, such prizes are rare. To obtain suitable offerings, the cult sometimes sends its members into the surrounding area to kidnap victims for their master’s appetites. The captive is killed with a fast-acting poison that leaves no scars on the body, which is then placed upon one of several large stone altars dedicated to the Ghoulish King. The Offering to the Master is performed on the night of every new moon.

The second ritual of import is “the Promise of Things to Come,” which is a communal ceremony similar in many respects to the Offering to the Master. A captive or captives (usually the latter, if possible) are ritually slain and then made a meal for many cult members, who eat the bodies with great relish. During the consumption of the corpses, they chant litanies to the Eater of the Dead and pray for the coming of the new Age when they shall be as their god and king. Occasionally, the Promise of Things to Come is accompanied by the use of Dark Paths of magic (see below) so as to strengthen one or more of the cultists in preparation for some great task. This is usually done before a battle against numerous enemies or before

Han-Tha’s minions are sent forth into Creation to spread his word.

The final significant ritual is “the Expansion of Self,” in which a single important cultist (never a goblin) is permitted to consume the brain of a recently deceased victim. This feast is accompanied by the use of Dark Path magic that grants the consumer a portion of the victim’s memories and intellectual abilities. Like the Promise of Things to Come, this ritual is usually performed before an important upcoming event, especially when a cultist is preparing to journey into the wider world. The memories so gained fade, of course, but they usually last long enough to give the cultist the ability to draw upon them while traveling to nearby cities or settlements, which aids them in their missions on behalf of Han-Tha.

The cult has many other rituals as well, nearly all of which involve the consumption of dead bodies and the belief that, in doing so, they are paving the way for their apotheosis into a higher form when the new Age dawns upon Creation. Among the goblins, these rituals are usually crude and literal-minded (such as the consumption of the eyes of fallen enemies in hopes of gaining insight into them), while Han-Tha’s human and stalker followers tend to employ somewhat more sophisticated versions of the same, often with magical accompaniment.



DARK PATHS

Had the Cult of Han-Tha simply preached the rebirth possible through death without backing it up with proof, it is unlikely it would ever have grown beyond its original following, even in the dying days of Rathless. Over the millennia, however, the cult has developed several tools to implement its doctrine, one of the most potent being the development of Dark Paths of Dragon King magic available to those who accepted the overlordship of the Eater of the Dead. These Paths emphasize the strength that comes through death and decay, as well the devotee's transcendence over them both. The sample Path that follows, the Glorious Decay Path, is but one of many such Dark Paths and the Storyteller is encouraged to create others.

All the usual rules for Dragon King Paths apply (see Chapter One, pp. 18-19), except that mortal humans may learn the first dot in the Path. Indeed, the cult encourages mortals to put their limited Essence to good use by learning the lowest level of a Path, since they can give them a distinct advantage over their unenlightened fellows. In addition, the possession of such knowledge is considered a foretaste of the apotheosis that is to come, when Han-Tha rules over all and his followers grow in power through their consumption of the dead.

THE GLORIOUS CONSUMPTION PATH

- **Life Through Death**

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

By consuming the dead flesh of an intelligent mortal being, the character is able to heal a number of health levels equal to his own Essence score. This does not allow for the healing of aggravated damage, nor does it allow the healing of others. One health level of flesh must be consumed for every health level regained.

- **Consume the Mind**

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: Permanent Essence in days

Type: Simple

The character must consume the brain of an intelligent being and expend 10 motes for this magic to work. Once having done so, the character gains all the memories of the being whose brain he has consumed. These memories are limited to details, not Abilities of any sort. Therefore, the consumer would know, for example, the names of the dead person's friends and family well enough to recognize them by sight, as well as significant details about them, but not how to ride a horse or use a bow if the consumer does not already know how to do so. The memory transfer is complete. There are no memories the consumer does not gain through this magic. The consumer remembers his own identity and memories as well, without the need for any precautions.

- **Consume the Body**

Cost: 3 motes per dot gained

Duration: Permanent Essence in days

Type: Simple

By consuming the dead flesh of any being, intelligent or otherwise, the character may increase his own Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina) by a number of dots not to exceed those of the being consumed. For example, if a follower of Han-Tha (Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4) ate the flesh of a person whose Attributes in life were (Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4), the follower could use this magic to increase his own Attributes to match those of the person consumed. The cost to do so is 3 motes of Essence per dot gained or, in this case, 9 motes (2 dots in Strength, 1 dot in Dexterity). The consumer may choose not to increase his Attributes as much as the magic would allow, but he may never increase it beyond that of the person whose body he consumes.

THE WYLD ZONE AND THE CITADEL OF KHRYAL

A Wyld zone that encompasses much of the furthest reaches of the Southeast begins few miles south of Rathless. Near Rathless, the Bordermarches are quite narrow, and after less than a day's ride, anyone brave enough to enter the Wyld enters the dangerous and strange realm of the Wyld's Middlemarches. In the Middlemarches near Rathless, the sky is filled with overly animate floating jungle plants, and the distinctions between plants and animals become largely

meaningless. A few tribes of Wyld barbarians enter the Bordermarches near Rathless to harvest rare and powerful plants found nowhere else. Even these stalwarts are always careful not to stray too far from the borders of Creation, lest they lose their songlines or end up devoured by one of the many beasts that inhabit the Middlemarches.

No civilized mortal and few Exalts would dare to enter this Wyld zone were it not for the persistent rumors of a fully intact and inhabited citadel of the Dragon Kings surrounded by the ever-changing near chaos of the Wyld's Middlemarches. So far, no Exalt has ever re-

turned from this fabled town. While rumors of its existence have been heard for more than a century, serious scholars and scavenger lords used to dismiss its existence as nothing more than dangerously hopeful rumor.

However, 30 years ago, a woman belonging to a Realm-sponsored artifact hunting expedition stumbled out of the Wyld and into the expedition's temporary encampment on the Southern edge of Rathess. Badly wounded and sick from an unknown fever, she drifted in and out of consciousness for several days and rambled on about a fragment of a fabulous city that she found in the Wyld. When she regained consciousness, she told a fragmentary tale of becoming lost in the Wyld and finding a small island of stability where one of the small outlying cities of the Dragon Kings remained not only untouched by the ages, but still inhabited by the Dragon Kings. She then died.

Since this time, several expeditions, including two that were equipped with potent talismans against the Wyld and one consisting solely of experienced Terrestrial Exalted, have followed her rough directions and attempted to discover the exact location of this lost city. All of these expeditions have returned empty handed, except for the Dragon-Blooded expedition, which went out more than a decade ago and failed to return. Two groups of Terrestrial Exalted fruitlessly searched the Bordermarches near Rathess for traces of the lost Dragon-Blooded, but did not dare to venture into the Middlemarches. Currently, both the Guild and the Realm are readying additional expeditions to search for the lost city, though the current political and economic climate may slow their efforts.

Unknown to any mortal or Exalt, the lost city actually exists, but it is both more and less than it seems. As several scholars have predicted from its approximate location, the lost city is actually the ancient Dragon King citadel of Khryal. Although the surrounding regions were devoured by the Wyld centuries ago, the powerful enchantments on this citadel, combined with some random trick of the Wyld has served to keep Khryal free from the twisting effects of the Wyld. However, the last true Dragon King living there died more than 600 years ago.

Although Khryal appears to be a thriving community of more than 200 Dragon Kings living and working as they did in the days of the First Age, in reality, it is a Dragon King citadel that has been invaded by shapechanging members of the Fair Folk who must ape the Dragon Kings forms and lives in order to usurp the powers of the citadel.

The Fair Folk are not used to either mortal or Exalted visitors, and are none too happy to see them. Having to interact with outsiders makes mimicking the Dragon Kings even more difficult. While they find the

emotions of mortals quite enjoyable, the Fair Folk are wary of drawing the wrath of any of the Exalted, especially members of the powerful Celestial Exalted.

Also, many of the Fair Folk have become so caught up in their roles as ancient and powerful Dragon Kings that they are reluctant to break character even if there is no reason not to. They maintain their illusory disguises with glamour sorcery. Because of the close proximity of both the Wyld and the citadel's reality engines (see below), these illusions are considerably more durable and convincing than ordinary Fair Folk glamour. The touch of cold iron does not cause the Fair Folk to revert to their true forms, and only beings whose Perception + Essence is 9 or higher can occasionally catch half-seen glimpses that some of the Dragon Kings have alternate forms. Even these individuals will not be able to clearly see through these illusions. When visitors come to Khryal, the Fair Folk will attempt to keep up their illusion to avoid trouble. Also, being revealed as what they are inside the city limits will cause the wonders of the city to go dormant for at least a month and could result in the defenses of this citadel turning against them.

Visitors who come to Khryal from Rathess will suddenly see all of that city's ruined grandeur gloriously resurrected. The crystal lights and water vines work perfectly, the streets are bustling with several hundred Dragon Kings dressed in all manner of exotic finery, and all of the buildings and their fittings are in immaculate condition. Any character that spends several days observing the residents of Khryal will be able to learn how to use all of the ordinary devices and enchantments found in Rathess. A scholar of the Dragon Kings could learn vast amounts about their ancient civilization simply by spending a week or two here.

THE REALITY ENGINES

The reason Khryal survived the influx of the Wyld is also why the Fair Folk are now occupying it. During the First Age, Khryal was equipped with powerful reality engines created by skilled Solar Exalted. These reality engines not only help keep the Wyld at bay, but also have a limited capability to stabilize and reshape portions of the Wyld.

When the Wyld swept over the regions around Khryal, the reality engines were temporarily overwhelmed. Although they were able to protect the citadel, the surrounding area became part of the Wyld's ever-changing Middlemarches. Unfortunately, the reality engines have continued to function. Because the few residents who had not died from the Contagion were not skilled in their use, there was no one to control and direct the reality engines. For centuries, the reality engines strove fruitlessly to transform the surrounding area back to its previous state. However, the engines





were not powerful enough to accomplish this prodigious task. All they could manage was causing the area surrounding Khryal to shift randomly between Creation and chaos, producing large-scale Wyld storms and causing no end of trouble for the residents of the Wyld. The Fair Folk eventually organized an expedition into the heart of these deadly Wyld storms and discovered Khryal. After lengthy exploration, the Fair Ones discovered that they could gain limited control of the reality engines by transforming themselves into magical duplicates of the Dragon Kings. For the last 200 years, Fair Folk have lived in Khryal, keeping the reality engines under control. Although few of the Fair Folk initially wished to live in Khryal and maintain the reality engines, the ones who have done so have found two benefits to living there.

Not only are the reality engines vastly powerful, but when they are properly controlled, they channel Essence in such a way that is highly enjoyable and even mildly intoxicating to the Fair Folk who live near them. In addition, the engines themselves offer the promise of great power to anyone who masters their secrets. Careful observation and limited experimentation has shown that these engines can both strengthen and weaken reality, transforming the Wyld into normal reality and normal reality into the Wyld. If an enchanter of the Fair Folk could learn how these engines work, it might be possible to build powerful devices that could deliberately expand the Wyld or that could temporarily, or perhaps even permanently, transform the heart of a mortal city into a Wyld zone. Such a weapon would give the Fair Folk a vast edge in their battle against Creation. Although none of their scholars or sorcerers have made any significant progress in learning to understand the reality engines, anyone who did would gain vast amounts of power and prestige.

CELESTIAL EXALTED AND THE REALITY ENGINES

If any of the Celestial Exalted visit Khryal, the Fair Folk who are working with the reality engines will attempt to gain their aid. These scholars hope that since members of the Celestial Exalted originally constructed the reality engines, perhaps they can learn to understand the principles behind them and will share these secrets with their new-found "Dragon King allies."

Although any of the Celestial Exalted can easily learn how to operate and control the reality engines far better than the Fair Folk, only members of the Solar Exalted stand any chance of ever being able to learn to duplicate them. Learning how to create a new reality engine would take decades of hard work and would only be possible for a character with Essence, Lore, Occult and a variety of obscure Crafts at 6 or higher. However, any Celestial Exalted who gained

control of the existing reality engines could use them to create profound effects.

One of the most useful possibilities involves using them to produce a field that causes all natives of the Wyld, including the Fair Folk, to be overcome with pain and fear. Any natives of the Wyld whose players fail to roll two or more successes on a Valor check must flee from Khryal and can come no closer than half a mile away until their players can succeed on a Valor roll. New Valor rolls may be made every six hours. If any of the Fair Folk appear in this city in their natural form, this function may automatically activate. In addition, while the reality engines cannot banish the Wyld for more than a radius of five miles around Khryal, they can link Khryal back to reality. This creates a narrow path of reality approximately half a mile wide and 25 miles long that links Khryal to the stable land near Rathless.

Characters who conquer Khryal can earn the undying gratitude of the awakened Dragon Kings of Rathless and the stalkers of the eastern flying tower if they can safely escort either group back to this wondrous example of the Dragon King's past glory. If the characters also use the reality engines or their own Charms to link Khryal back to the borders of reality, then either group of these Dragon Kings will promise almost any price for the citadel. Similarly, if the characters conquer Khryal and link it to the rest of reality and they have made enemies of these Dragon Kings, they will find the Dragon Kings proposing a truce to study the citadel. If this offer is refused, the Dragon Kings will stop at nothing to attempt to find a way to take Khryal away from their enemies.

THE TWO MOON FESTIVAL

Although the Fair Folk can easily hold a single stable form when they are within the bounds of the ordinary world, the reality engines are sufficiently powerful that even Fair Folk shrouded in glamour sorcery have difficulty holding the shape of one of the Dragon Kings for prolonged periods of time. To fool the enchantments still active within the citadel, the Fair Folk must periodically renew their shape.

This period of renewal is referred to as the Two Moon Festival because it must be held twice every lunar month. During this festival, all of the Fair Folk leave the city, drop their guise as Dragon Kings and spend a brief time in their ordinary forms. This festival lasts all night, and at the end of it, their witch queen works with several of the other powerful Fair Folk and renews the glamour sorcery that gives all of them the form of Dragon Kings. Although visitors can be enjoyable for a while, the Fair Folk of Khryal will endeavor to persuade any mortal or Exalt who comes to stay with them to leave before the next festival. If the visitors insist on staying, then the

Fair Folk have a number of choices. If the visitors are Terrestrial Exalted or mortals, the Fair Folk will either kill them in their sleep the night before the festival or will attempt to use powerful glamours to cause the visitors to leave well before the festival.

THE FATE OF THE DRAGON-BLOODED VISITORS

The group of six Dragon-Blooded who attempted to locate Khryal managed to find it. However, when they refused to leave shortly before the Two Moon Festival began, the Fair Folk killed five of them in their sleep. The Fair Folk only spared one, Tepet Valki, an Air-aspected scholar who they have mentally controlled to help them understand the reality engines. The Fair Folk will hide her from any visitors, but when she finds out that outsiders are in the city, she throws off most of the enchantments that bind her will and attempts to contact them. She asks for help even the visitors are Celestial Exalted, and if rescued, she becomes their devoted ally — she has survived beings far worse than the Anathema.

Celestial Exalted visitors present a far more difficult challenge. None of the Fair Folk who occupy this citadel can stand against even one experienced Celestial Exalt, and a group of experienced Celestial Exalted could possibly slay or drive off all of these Fair Folk if their deception was ever revealed. Should they face such visitors, the Fair Folk will endeavor to persuade them to leave before the festival. Failing that, they will inform their visitors that they must stay inside their quarters during the festival. Since one of the more common punishments for infractions of Dragon King law is being sacrificed to the Unconquered Sun by having one's heart removed from one's chest while it was still beating. All but the most arrogant characters will likely be willing to go along with this request, if only to humor the false Dragon Kings when they emphasize ominously that the Two Moons Festival is a sacred and holy rite that cannot be witnessed by outsiders.

Since even impolite and overly curious characters will have no way of knowing exactly how powerful and

dangerous several hundred Dragon Kings can be, the Fair Folk will leave to perform the ritual and trust that the characters will not spy on them. Of course, they will attempt to use powers such as Beguile and Undetectable Lie to force all but the most powerful of the characters to stay inside. The Fair Folk will also set simple wards that will alert them if the characters leave their rooms. However, the nature of these wards is such that the Fair Folk must actually come back and check on them, so the Fair Folk will not know if they have been spied upon until after the festival is over.

If any of the characters do manage to sneak out and observe the ritual, they will see a truly surprising sight. Several hundred Dragon Kings will walk out of Khryal and into the Wyld. Here, seemingly immune to all of the dangers of the Wyld, they will transform from Dragon Kings to a host of several hundred Fair Folk of many different types and elements. The Fair Folk will then shape the Wyld to their whim or simply rest and relax for several hours, until they are called to gather near the outskirts of Khryal, where the leaders perform a powerful hour-long ritual that transforms them back into their Dragon King forms.

As soon as the Fair Folk learn that any of the characters have seen their true forms, they will either attack immediately (if they think they can overcome the characters), or they will negotiate and attempt to convince the characters to leave peacefully. Worried that the characters will return to conquer the citadel, the moment the characters leave Khryal, the Fair Folk will use the reality engine to create a vast and deadly Wyld storm around Khryal (probably destroying unprotected characters).

THE FAIR FOLK OF KHRYPAL

As in Rathess, the vast majority of the inhabitants of Khryal are goblins. Use the hobgoblin template in the main rulebook and (if available) the write-ups of the lion warrior (see *Scavenger Sons*, pp. 139-140) and the master woodworker (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 142). Approximately a dozen of these inhabitants are Fair Folk nobles. To represent the nobles, use an equal mixture of diplomats and cataphracto from the main rulebook, Venomous Dreams from this book (see p. 43) and the guardian noble (see *Scavenger Sons*, pp. 140-142).





CHAPTER THREE

STALKERS, GODS AND OTHER FOES



The ruins of Rathess teem with life, much of it hostile. There are plant constructs of the Dragon Kings, mutated creatures out of the Wyld basking in the radiance of the city's Manses and strange creatures brought to Rathess by the Dragon Kings in large enough numbers to breed. Storytellers should feel free to populate the ruins with any sort of hazardous beast from *Creatures of the Wyld* or their own imagination that could survive in the city's climate. The creatures that follow are the city's trademark or most commonly encountered inhabitants.

STALKER

Description: Although there used to be four varieties of Dragon Kings, today only two remain, the jungle-adapted variety that lives in Rathess, and a few of the aquatic saurians that used to inhabit the West and now reside in both Lake Therak near Rathess and in the great underground waterways found beneath some portions of the city.

The terrestrial stalkers range from two to two and a half yards tall and look somewhat like slender, long-armed tyrant lizards. These stalkers have long, beaked muzzles, large slit-pupiled eyes, slender muscular tails, powerful clawed legs, long muscular arms and dexterous four-fingered hands tipped with short claws. The stalkers are covered with brilliantly colored scales and have a thin

down of short, brightly colored feathers on their heads and in a ridge down their spines.

All but a few of the Dragon Kings in Rathess are nearly mindless creatures, savage stalkers driven by instinct. They are cunning predators, smarter than most apes and capable of using simple tools and rude language, making them far more dangerous than mere beasts. Unfortunately, they cannot be reasoned with and consider most other living creatures their prey.

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

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 1, Temperance 0, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3 (Hearing +2, Smell +2), Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Melee 2, Presence 1, Resistance 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (Tracking by scent +2), Thrown 3

Paths: Stalkers possess between two and four of the listed Paths at 1 dot (see pp. 18-19).

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Bite: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L Defense 4

Claw: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 5L Defense 6

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

Javelin: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L (Rate 2, Range 30)

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 4L/6B (Scaled skin, 3L/3B)



Willpower: 3 Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap
 Essence: 1 Essence Pool: 14
 Other Notes: None

AQUATIC STALKER

Description: In the warm, murky water of Lake Therak and deep under the city of Rathess lurk the even more savage and deadly aquatic stalkers. These bestial horrors look like a huge and terrible cross between humans and crocodiles. These three-yard-long monsters swim easily though the water using their wide crocodile-like tails. However, they can also come onto land, where they walk with the low, crouching gait of a creature adapted to life in both air and water. Unlike other aquatic reptiles, these creatures can breathe both water and air and can remain submerged indefinitely.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 1, Temperance 0, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3 (Hearing +2, Smell +2), Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Melee 2, Presence 1, Resistance 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (Track by Smell +2)

Paths: Aquatic stalkers possess 1 dot in two to four of the listed Paths.

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Bite: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 9L Defense 5

Claw: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L Defense 7

Short Spear: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 9L Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 8L/11B (Scaled skin, 5L/5B)

Willpower: 3 Health Levels: -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 1 Essence Pool: 1

Other Notes: None

SEMI-CIVILIZED STALKER

Description: The few dozen slightly older, fully sentient stalkers are somewhat more impressive than the mindlessly savage stalkers. The only large group of semi-civilized stalkers is a tribe of approximately five dozen who live in the eastern flying tower (see pp. 42-44). These stalkers are as cunning and intelligent as any mortal and are gifted with somewhat more powerful magics. Unlike their wordless savage brethren, these creatures all speak Old Realm and can be bargained with by anyone clever enough to realize that these beings are not near-mindless



savages. Unfortunately, since most explorers kill or flee from any stalkers they encountered, these creatures' interactions with explorers have so far not been positive.

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3 (Hearing +2, Smell +2), Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 1, Melee 3, Performance 1 (Religious Rituals +2), Presence 1, Resistance 1, Socialize 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (Tracking by Scent +2), Thrown 3

Paths: These stalkers possess between 1 and 2 dots in at least four of the listed Paths (see pp. 18-19). Most should have no more than a total of 8 dots.

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Bite: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L Defense 5

Claw: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L Defense 7

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

Javelin: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L (Rate 2, Range 30)

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 9L/9B (Scaled skin, 3L/3B, + partially cured hide breastplate, 4L/2B)

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

Essence: 2 or 3* **Essence Pool:** 24 or 28

* only a handful have attained Essence 3

Other Notes: None

ANCIENT DRAGON KING

Description: Eight of the wisest and most powerful Dragon Kings now lie in enchanted sleep in six sealed chambers buried underneath Rathess. These ancient worthies entered these chambers during the last days of Rathess, when the Contagion was destroying the very fabric of the Dragon Kings' civilization. The eight may awaken if anyone opens their sleeping chambers. None of these Dragon Kings know anything of the modern day, and their primary goal is to restore their people and their city to greatness. The Dragon Kings are likely to ally with anyone who sincerely wishes to aid them in this goal but will attempt to slay or drive off all who oppose them or who loot Rathess of its valuables. These Dragon Kings are all highly intelligent, and all speak both Old Realm and the tongue of the Dragon Kings.

Attributes: Strength 5(8*), Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

* With obsidian sheath

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

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 5, Awareness 4 (Hearing +2, Smell +2), Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 4, Endurance 2,

Investigation 3, Linguistics 1, Lore 5, Occult 4, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 3, Melee 4, Performance 5, Presence 5, Resistance 2, Socialize 4, Stealth 2, Survival 2 (Track by Smell +2), Thrown 3

Paths: These Dragon Kings possess many powerful abilities. They possess all of the powers of the sample Paths (see pp. 18-19). Also, by spending 3 motes of Essence, they can add their Essence score to their Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Perception or Soak score for a full scene. They can only enhance one of these Traits at a time. They can also spend 3 motes to activate a power identical to the anima powers of Air-, Earth-, Fire-, and Wood-aspected Dragon Bloods but can only use one such anima power at a time. These Dragon Kings can also automatically see all immaterial spirits and can spend 2 motes of Essence to be able to physically attack an immaterial spirit, demon or elemental for a scene.

Finally, the Dragon Kings possess the ability to control earth, fire and wood. They can spend 3 motes to make an attack with any of these elements with a dice pool of Dexterity + Athletics + Essence or Dexterity + Archery + Essence and a base damage equal to twice their permanent Essence. They can also spend 5 motes to cause any of the following effects. All of these effects persist for a scene:

- A flammable object within 20 yards may be made to ignite as if touched by a torch.
- Fires up to the size of bonfires can either be instantly snuffed out or caused to burn twice as hot and twice as fast.
- The Dragon King can shape stone and both living and dead wood within Essence yards with a thought.

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Bite: Speed 9 Accuracy 9 Damage 7L/10L* Defense 7

Claw: Speed 10 Accuracy 10 Damage 6L/9L* Defense 9

Crystal Warclub: Speed 13 Accuracy 12 Damage 15L/18L* Defense 9

Shock Gauntlet Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 9 Damage 13B/16B* Defense 9

Shock Gauntlet Shot: Speed 9 Accuracy 9** Damage 16L (Rate 1, Range 30***)

* Damage includes Strength bonus for obsidian sheath

** Costs 1 mote per shot

*** No range increments — 30 is maximum range

Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 15L/15B (Scaled skin, 3L/3B, + obsidian sheath, 10L/10B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 30*(46) **Committed Essence:** 16

* Includes commitment.

Other Notes: In addition to their weapons and armor, all of these Dragon Kings possesses talismans that subtract three successes from all attempts to directly probe, influence or control their thoughts or emotions and add 3 to their Essence only for the purposes of resisting such effects.



GODS

An ancient people whose greatest accomplishments predate the rise of the Exalted by thousands of years, the Dragon Kings had a long and close association with the immortal beings that existed around them. At its height, Rathess boasted numerous temples, chantries and monasteries, all of them dedicated to maintaining friendly relationships with the spirits revered there. In many cases, these relationships were intense and personal, a testimony to the regard in which the gods once held the Dragon Kings. Men looked on Rathess and its inhabitants with awe and envy, longing for the same closeness to the divine that the Dragon Kings enjoyed before the appearance of the Exalted. Once the Celestial Incarna chose new champions, they took less interest in the Dragon Kings, and the reptilian warriors soon devoted themselves with renewed vigor to their own local gods, such as glorious Leeayta and brutal Han-Tha.

So strong was the bond between the Dragon Kings and the gods they served that even the fall of Rathess could not weaken it. Though the Dragon Kings themselves are long since gone, their gods linger still. Forgotten by the rest of Creation, their connection to Rathess and the fortunes of the Dragon Kings remains. In some cases, these deities seek to reclaim their lost glory by finding new devotees — or even by restoring Rathess to its former power, under either the reborn Dragon Kings or outsiders chosen for the task. In other cases, these gods are filled with rage at the loss of their worldly influence, which effectively died along with the city of the Dragon Kings. Now, they seek revenge against those they judge responsible (rightly or wrongly) for their loss or against the world in general. These are the “ghosts of Rathess” of whom tales are told by travelers and explorers alike and which have contributed to the unwholesome reputation of the place.

In addition to detailing some of the most important and prominent spirits still associated with Rathess, this chapter provides rules for adjudicating the means by which these gods once dealt with the Dragon Kings (and may do so again) — possession.

SPIRIT POSSESSION

History records that the First Age was a time when mortals and gods lived in harmony. Yet, even then, few could match the ready comfort the Dragon Kings felt among the gods. The Dragon Kings made close interaction with spirits an integral part of their religious practices, believing that it ensured that they remained “connected” to the rhythms of the larger cosmos they inhabited. That is, Dragon King society did not see itself as somehow removed from the world in which it existed.

In Dragon King worship, instead of Exalting the Dragon Kings as the gods did for human beings, the spirits

of Rathess possessed, or “rode,” their Dragon King worshipers, granting them a portion of their godly power. Depending on the strength of the spirit and the strength of the host, the process of riding resulted in a hybrid being of varying characteristics. The ideal was, of course, a true fusion of the Dragon King and his spirit rider, but that was not always possible. If a spirit outstripped the power of its host, its personality and abilities would overwhelm those of the host, creating what was, in effect, a mere mortal puppet for the spirit possessor. Alternately, if the Dragon King himself was more impressive than his would-be possessor, he might retain more of his own personality and gain access to the spirit’s Charms as well.

Naturally, a great deal depended on the relationship between the personalities and personal power of the two entities involved. In addition, many spirits chose not to invest the totality of their power within a single mortal vessel. For a variety of reasons, spirits might decide to withhold some of their Essence from a host or, if they were powerful enough, might decide to divide their power between multiple hosts. Though the latter was unusual, it was not without precedent, especially when it came to very powerful spirits or gods.

IN THE FIRST AGE

The Dragon Kings looked on spirit possession as part of the natural order of things. Although they were occasionally appalled by the results of a given possession, they nevertheless did not regard the process with revulsion or fear. To be chosen as a vessel for a god, especially if it were a spirit with which one had a natural affinity, was a great honor and one that few Dragon Kings would refuse. Indeed, many Dragon Kings sought out such possession, doing great deeds in hopes of attracting the attention of a god looking for a mortal vessel.

Dragon Kings looked upon the possessed with awe and respect, calling them several names, the most common being *olchilik*, or “the Chosen,” a term later used by men to describe the Exalted. As one might expect, the Dragon Kings saw their Chosen in a light very much like that in which human beings saw the Exalted. The primary difference was that the people of Rathess did not look upon the Exalted as somehow different from themselves. They were not a higher caste as such (even though the possessed often enjoyed great privileges), and the possessed did not see themselves in that manner. Since the spirits could — and often did — withdraw their power from their hosts, it did not do well to look upon them as godlike or even semi-divine, despite their great powers. The Dragon Kings knew that their gods could ride anyone and that the reasons for being chosen were sometimes based on a god’s self-interest rather than that of his mortal vessel.

This is not to say that the *olchiliké* were not lords among the Dragon Kings, for that would be an understatement.



ment. Their Chosen took commanding roles in the society of Rathess, much as the Exalted did elsewhere in Creation. They were generals, scholars, sorcerers and leaders. They were rarer than the Terrestrial were among men, and they were often aloof from everyday society, owing to the dual nature of their origin, but they were still an integral part of Rathess during the First Age. The possessed often wielded powers far beyond those of the weakest Celestials but still far below those of the greatest among the god's new servants. The mightiest among the Dragon King Chosen were the pride of Rathess and attempted to prove that the Dragon Kings still had a role to play in Creation, even if the Incarna had taken greater interest in the Exalted. Even these violent reptiles were susceptible to wounded pride and battered egos.

Of course, not all Dragon Kings viewed spirit possession as natural and worthy of respect. Certain heretical sects among the Dragon Kings, such as the Ebon Curtain Society and the Trocha of Adamant, felt the sometimes arbitrary and aloof ways of the possessed were detrimental to Rathess. They looked with disdain, and more than a little fear, upon the Chosen. They remembered the havoc wrought by spirits who overwhelmed their vessels and Dragon Kings drunk with the power of a weak spirit. Though a minority, such sects opposed the Chosen and saw them as a danger to Rathess, one that might one day spell its doom. Perhaps they were right.

IN THE SECOND AGE

Few today save savants of divinity know of the Dragon Kings' relationship with the spirits of Rathess. Fewer still understand that the stories of Exalts among the Dragon Kings are the misremembered fragments of stories about the possessed. Because so little is known of Rathess and its culture, only the wisest and most ancient of Terrestrial Exalted know of the Chosen as something other than a synonym for Exalt. Naturally, the Immaculate Philosophy long ago suppressed any information about the *olchiliké* in the Realm (and even in many parts of the Threshold), making reliable details about them and their abilities difficult to come by in the Second Age.

RULES FOR POSSESSION

A spirit that has access to the Possession Charm (described on p. 291 of *Exalted*) may possess a target for the remainder of the scene. However, such possession is extremely limited and a far cry from the union of mortal and spirit that was a hallmark of the *olchiliké*. To achieve that level of possession requires the use of the more powerful Charms described below. The supplement *Games of Divinity* includes other Charms relating to spirit possession, which are more general in nature, one of which, Soul Rapt, is reprinted here. The new Charms presented here apply

specifically to the Dragon Kings and their gods and are not widely known outside of Rathess and its environs.

SOUL RAPT

Cost: 10 Motes, 2 Willpower

Duration: Indefinite

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Possession

As the Possession spirit Charm, roll the spirit's Manipulation + Conviction against the target's Willpower in a resisted action. If the spirit gains as many or more successes than the target has temporary Willpower, the initial possession succeeds. The possessing spirit must relinquish control of the victim's body at least once per week, though it isn't necessary to abandon the victim. If it wishes, the spirit may just make the attempt to regain control of the victim by repeating the initial possession roll. After each month of possession, the victim loses one point of Willpower permanently. If a spirit fails in its attempt to regain control of its victim, the spirit is expelled, and the victim cannot be possessed by that spirit again.

RIDE

Cost: 20 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Indefinite

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Possession

This Charm allows a spirit to possess someone indefinitely, riding them as if the host's body were its own and laying the groundwork for a true fusion of spirit and mortal form. In order for this Charm to work, the potential vessel must consent to the spirit's possessing him. Otherwise, it does not function and the spirit must rely on cruder Charms, such as Soul Rapt. The results of the Charm depend on the difference in the Essence of the host and the possessing spirit. If the spirit's Essence exceeds the host's by three or more, the host acquires the spirit's Traits (both Attributes and Abilities). If the host's Essence exceeds the spirit's by three or more, the spirit acquires the host's Traits. If the Essence of host and spirit are within two points of one another, a true fusion is achieved in which the combined entity has the average of the Traits of both halves, rounded up. The fusion also acquires the average of the spirit and the subject's temporary Essence after subtracting the 20 motes needed to trigger the Charm. If the being is an Exalt, add all temporary Essence together before determining the average — the result of a god synthesis with an Exalt has only Peripheral Essence. In addition, it has access to one of the





god's Charms per point of total permanent Essence. These Charms cannot include Dematerialize.

This Charm is exceedingly rare outside of Rathless, the surrounding regions and other backwaters. Gods and spirits hailing from regions close to the Realm generally avoid using it, out of fear that the Immaculates would notice and take offense. The Immaculate Philosophy's adherents consider use of this Charm a grave blasphemy and take harsh measures to suppress its continued use. If the host is slain, the spirit reforms in one-third the normal time, and the spirit will never lose its individual identity as a result. If the host is killed using Charms that have the effect of slaying a spirit forever (as with Ghost-Eating Technique) the spirit and the host's higher soul are both destroyed. Spirits using this Charm are not constantly drained the way those who simply create bodies for themselves out of Essence through the use of the Materialize Charm are.

HOLLOW OUT THE SOUL

Cost: 15 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Indefinite

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 4

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Ride

This Charm allows a spirit to utterly destroy the soul of a being it is riding, thereby creating a host lacking the ability to regain control. The spirit rider may then use the body as a host at will or vacate it, during which time it assumes a comatose state until either the spirit returns or the vessel is destroyed. To attempt to use this Charm, the spirit must be in contact with the target. Make an extended roll of Conviction + Essence against the target's Willpower + Essence, one roll per activation of the Charm. If the spirit accumulates successes equal to the target's Essence, he succeeds, destroying the victim's soul permanently. Failing at any point in this process casts out the spirit, who may never again attempt to use this Charm against the same would-be host.

A soulless body retains all its Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina), which the spirit may either use as they were before hollowing out the soul or augment with its own Attributes (if higher). However, its Mental and Social Attributes cease to exist. The body now uses its spirit rider's Attributes in these areas, as well all of its other characteristics (such as Willpower, Essence, Abilities, Charms, etc.). Such a body is indeed little more than an empty vessel, and the spirit primarily gains the ability to manifest in a particular physical form on a permanent basis — a valuable ability in some cases.

A body without a soul lasts only two weeks before it begins to show signs of physical corruption, becoming useless to the spirit after an additional week. This decay may be staved off by the commitment of 2 additional motes

of Essence per day, each infusion pushing back the start of the two-week period. All Essence spent activating the Charm remains committed until the host body decays.

SPIRITS OF RATHESS

The region in and around Rathess is particularly fecund with spirits. Many of them have existed in this area for eons, being strongly associated with particular geographical locales, while others arose only after the Dragon Kings came to power, attracted to their mighty civilization. During the First Age, their numbers were said to be “without end.”

Of course, times change. The fall of Rathess and the realm of the Dragon Kings adversely affected the spirit ecology of the region. Many spirits found themselves devoid of worshipers and servants for the first time in millennia and withered away to insignificance. Many more saw little reason to remain in the area and departed for greener pastures elsewhere in Creation. Even so, enough remained that the ruins of Rathess are well known in the Realm as a “haunted” locale in which the angry spirits of the Dragon Kings rage against their loss and the impotence that came with it. Not all of the spirits who remain in and around Rathess are hostile to mortals, but many are — all the more reason for the explorer to be wary.

HAN-THA, THE EATER OF THE DEAD

Description: The charnel spirit Han-Tha is a malevolent entity whose true origins are unknown to all but a few in the Second Age. The Eater of the Dead arose amid the battles between the Primordials and the gods, where his unpleasant appetites became a thing of legend. Han-Tha fought on neither side, preferring to sit on the sidelines and wait until one of the mighty combatants was felled by his enemies, whereupon the Ghoul King acted like the scavenger he was — and consumed the Essence of the slain spirit. Han-Tha gained power through the consumption of the Essence of others and soon taught his fanatical followers to do the same. Like him, they gained power from this foul act and revelled in its vileness.

In testament to his twisted nature, Han-Tha manifests physically as a hunch-backed creature with gray flesh, a sloping forehead and a ravenous maw. All these features attest to his cannibalistic tendencies, for which he was feared in the days of Rathess. However, his true spheres of influence are necrophagy and decay.

During the First Age, he haunted battlefields and tombs alike, devouring the bodies of the dead to his black heart's content — practices he encouraged in his mortal worshipers. Known as the Ghoul King and Master of Goblins, after his two most devoted races of servants, he was feared and despised by the Dragon Kings, who treated him largely as a pariah, an attitude for which he never forgave them.

Han-Tha rejoiced in the fall of Rathess, seeing it as an opportunity to “liberate” the Dragon Kings from their old ways and allow them to embrace his own perverse creed. The Eater of the Dead saw it as a chance to prove his might and to create a vast feast for himself and his followers. Now, the Ghoul King sees the fall of First City as a mixed blessing, and he acts to counterbalance its effects through the agency of Filial Wisdom, the Solar warrior he possesses and uses as his instrument in Creation. More information on Filial Wisdom, Han-Tha and their plans for Rathess can be found in Chapter Two: The City and Vicinity on pages 52-56.

Sanctum: Han-Tha's sanctum appears to be a great charnel house or ossuary, heaped with polished white bones in every corner and on every flat space. Here and there are great projects designed to cover the stony walls with bone paneling, but none of them are finished. Since the arrival of Filial Wisdom, Han-Tha slumbers often among the bones, but he rouses at least once a month to visit the city and receive offerings.



Nature: Conniver

Attributes: Strength 16, Dexterity 6, Stamina 12, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 5 (Claws +3), Dodge 5, Endurance 8, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Forest-Tongue, High Holy Speech) 2, Lore 1, Melee 5, Occult 3, Presence 4, Resistance 10, Stealth 5, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Artifacts 5, Command (Goblins) 5, Influence 2

Charms: All listed Charms

Cost To Materialize: 55

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Bite: Speed 12 Accuracy 13 Damage 25L Defense 12

Claw: Speed 15 Accuracy 16 Damage 20L Defense 13

Dodge Pool: 11 **Soak:** 24L/30B* (Nerveless gristly horror, 18L/18B)

* Han-Tha ignores attacks with a raw damage below 12L/15B

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

Essence: 7 **Essence Pool:** 109

Other Notes: Han-Tha's claws create large gaping wounds that cause anyone (including Exalted) to bleed profusely. The victim takes one level of lethal damage every third turn after being struck until his wounds are bandaged.

LEEAYTA, THE LIZARD QUEEN

Description: Leeayta is the Dragon King goddess of territorial conquest, who frequently manifests herself as a great four-legged lizard of prodigious strength, standing eight feet at the shoulder, with a mouth full of terrible fangs. In other instances, she appears as a proud and beautiful female Eastern Dragon King.

During the early days of Rathess, the Lizard Queen was well-regarded and was honored as a civic deity among the Dragon Kings. The size of their realm was seen as a testament to Leeayta's attentions. Numerous military regiments were raised in her name, and grand festivals culminating in the sacrifice of prisoners and booty were celebrated to ensure her continued good will. Among the ruins of Rathess are many temples to the Lizard Queen, and her image (that of a female Dragon King warrior) formed an integral part of much of the early art commissioned by the city's rulers.

As the realm of the Dragon Kings became secure and its enemies fewer, the Cult of Leeayta was displaced by others. Its temples became less well attended, and other



gods, often imported by the Exalted and their mortal servants, took their pride of place. Many Dragon King soldiers and generals retained their devotion to the Lizard Queen, rightly reckoning her as the source of the city's strength and power. In return, she frequently rode her most pious adherents, with an eye toward restoring her cult to a place of prominence in Rathess. These efforts rarely worked, and Leeayta remained an important, if lesser, deity of the First City throughout the final years of the First Age.

Then, the Contagion came to Rathess, as it had to every other corner of Creation. With the purge of the Solars and the suppression of godly worship, the Dragon Kings had nowhere else to turn for assistance and appealed to Leeayta to aid them as she had at the city's founding. Instead of aiding them as they had expected, she ignored their entreaties, for she could do little to stop the plague. Leeayta knew she was no savant and did not pretend to be. She was a conqueror — nothing more.

In the years since, Leeayta has brooded within the city's ruins. The Lizard Queen seeks the means to rebuild Rathess and bring its glory to Creation once more. Though reluctant to employ outsiders in this epic undertaking, she is nothing if not practical and understands that history is obviously about to wash over Rathess once again. She will soon have no choice but to ally herself with whoever she must if her ultimate goal is to succeed.

Sanctum: Leetya's sanctum is an ornately decorated museum to victory in battle, primarily featuring the triumphs of the Dragon Kings, but also dwelling on other major battles of the First Age. Leetya no longer has as many servants as she once did, and as a result, her sanctum has fallen into disrepair. While the parts she guides visitors through are pristine and well-maintained, those who wan-

der off the beaten track will find a maze of rusty swords, cobwebs and inscriptions to forgotten saurian victories. Leetya's sanctum can be accessed from a number of her temples in Rathess.

Nature: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 15, Dexterity 10, Stamina 12, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 2, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 6, Awareness 6, Brawl 6, Dodge 5, Endurance 6, Melee 5, Presence 5 (Physical Intimidation +2), Resistance 4, Stealth 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Artifact 2, Backing 3, Contacts 2, Followers 3, Influence 2, Manse 3, Resources 3

Charms: All listed Charms

Cost To Materialize: 70

Base Initiative: 16

Attack:

As Lizard:

Bite: Speed 16 Accuracy 15 Damage 18L Defense 15

Claw: Speed 19 Accuracy 18 Damage 16L Defense 13

As Mortal:

Punch: Speed 16 Accuracy 16 Damage 15B Defense 16

Kick: Speed 13 Accuracy 15 Damage 17B Defense 15

Great Sword (Dragon's Bite): Speed 20 Accuracy 18 Damage 24L Defense 18

Dodge Pool: 15 **Soak:** 21L/27B (Scale armor, 15L/15B)

Willpower: 10 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/-4/-4/-4/Incap

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 100

Other Notes: None

RELZA, SATRAP TO VANILETH, THE SHOGUN OF ARTIFICIAL FLIGHT

Description: Long ago, Vanileth was a powerful god who lived in the Celestial City of Yu-Shan. Flying vehicles of all sorts filled the air, and Vanileth had an aerial satrap in every major city of the world, including Rathess. Each of these satraps kept track of the activities of the various flying vehicles in her city. Since the First Age ended in chaos and disaster, flight has once again largely become the domain of birds and other animals. Vanileth and his satraps have fallen from both favor and notice. Vanileth is now half-mad and lives on an isolated mountaintop in the Far North (see *Games of Divinity*, pp. 27-28), and his satraps have been left to fend for themselves.

Relza, Vanileth's satrap in Rathess, decided after keeping Heaven's laws for many centuries that the recent influx of visitors into Rathess was an excellent reason to abandon her vows and take a more active role in this city. Today, she is interested in fostering the spread of artificial flight in Rathess. As a result, she considers both of the two intact flight towers to be her own private domains. She is perfectly

happy to have humans, Dragon Kings or even savage goblins living in these towers. She will talk to anyone who offers her sacrifices of rare birds or goods that are both beautiful and of worth to the individual making the sacrifice, and will provide help with any project involving the repair or creation of any mechanical or enchanted flying vehicle. However, she is also quite proud and is extremely intolerant of both fools and beggars — she will only offer to help those who have already made a serious effort to create or repair such a vehicle and need some additional assistance. She will also teach the spell *Conjuring the Azure Chariot* (see p. 89) to any Exalt who both provides several generous sacrifices (Resources ••••) of beautiful objects and who also aids her against those who would harm the flying towers' vehicles. Relza appears as an attractive woman covered all over with shining metallic blue feathers, with two great wings on her back. She has dexterous six-fingered hands, with sharp retractile claws that can tear and rend her foes.

She is currently worshiped by the semi-civilized stalkers living in the eastern flying tower, where she acts as their protector. She cares little for the stalkers but hopes that, in time, they may be able to recreate some of their lost wonders. However, she is exceedingly protective of both the flying towers and their contents. Anyone attempting to damage or destroy either of the flying towers will meet with strong opposition from her, and she will become almost insanely angry if anyone attempts to damage or destroy any of the flying vehicles in either tower. In addition to attacking invaders directly, she also controls two dozen birds of Vanileth (see *Games of Divinity* pp. 36-37). She sends these after anyone who threatens either of the two flying towers. If faced with powerful foes determined to steal from her, she can also call upon the aid of a dozen vine runners (see p. 72). She can also, for a single battle, enlist the aid of both *Shining Flower* (see p. 70-71) and two of the celestial lions (see *Games of Divinity* p. 33) who guard the tombs of the Celestial Exalted.

The goblins in the western flying tower and the stalkers in the eastern flying tower long ago learned that anyone who attempted to harm any of the vehicles would be slowly tortured by Relza and then impaled on the top of the tower's skyship mast and left to die slowly. The bodies would remain there until they rotted off. Fortunately, in the heat of the jungle, bodies rarely remained for more than two weeks. Relza could be a valuable ally for anyone interested in the technology of either the Dragon Kings or the First Realm, but she has no interest in any device or spell not directly connected to artificial flight, and she is a terrible foe to anyone who attacks one of the towers or damages any of her precious devices.

Sanctum: Relza's immaterial sanctum is a single large and ornate room filled with sculptures and paintings of Rathess and, especially, of all manner of flying vehicles. The interior is decorated all in white with furniture of jet-black basalt and with fixtures and furnishings of solid gold.



BIRD OF VANILETH

These small gods are mospid-sized clockwork birds made of silver and adamant.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 6, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 5, Endurance 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics 1, Lore 2, Occult 1, Resistance 2, Stealth 5

Backgrounds: Allies (Other Birds) 2, Mentor (Relza) 2

Suggested Charms: Essence Bite, Hoodwink, Materialize, Tracking

Cost To Dematerialize: 25

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Wing Razors: Speed 12 Accuracy 10 Damage 6L Defense 12

Dodge Pool: 10 **Soak:** 5L/9B (Adamant body, 4L/6B)

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

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 51

Other Notes: Each intact wing can be crafted into a razor-sharp unbreakable adamant knife that is Speed +4, Accuracy +1, Defense -1 and Damage +3L. Such knives are finely balanced for throwing as well and can be thrown with a Rate of 3 and a Range of 30.

This sanctum can be entered from the landing deck of either flying tower.

Nature: Architect

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

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Flying Machines) 5, Dodge 5, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Forest-Tongue, High Holy Speech) 2, Lore 3 (Flying Machines +3), Martial Arts 3, Occult 3 (Flying Machines +3), Presence 3, Socialize 2, Survival 3, Thrown 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Artifact 5 (Many Enchanted Flying Devices), Contacts 4, Followers (Clockwork Birds) 4, Resources 4

Charms: Affinity Elemental Control (Air), Creation of Perfection, Hoodwink, Inhuman Prowess, Landscape Travel, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Principle of Motion, Sense Domain, Weather Control, Words of Power
Cost To Materialize: 35

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Claw: Speed 16 Accuracy 13 Damage 16L Defense 12

Wing Buffet: Speed 20 Accuracy 15 Damage 12L Defense 15

Dodge Pool: 10 **Soak:** 14L/20B (Iron-hard feathers, 12L/15B)

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

Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 83

Other Notes: None

SHINING FLOWER, MISTRESS OF HEARTS

Description: Shining Flower was once one of the Unconquered Sun's most important assistants. Today, she has diminished in power but is still a formidable foe. Known by many in the First Age as the Bloody Goddess, she was the deity directly involved with the Dragon Kings sacrifices of hearts to the Unconquered Sun. Although she will accept hearts that are simply given to her, Shining Flower prefers to possess the priest who is performing the sacrifice, so that she can be the one who actually cuts out the heart. All proper Dragon King sacrificial rituals begin with the priest being possessed by Shining Flower. Although no one knows if this is true, she claims that the Unconquered Sun prefers hearts cut out by her own hand.

Today, Shining Flower is occasionally worshiped outside of Rathess, but elsewhere, few remember her role in heart sacrifice, and most know her only as the Mistress of Knives. In the East, both knife fighters and assassins sometimes honor her. The only way to truly earn her favor is to either cut out a living heart or to kill someone in her name using a single knife thrust to their heart.

Because sacrifices to her are now far rarer than they once were, she offers her greatest gift to anyone who will make such a sacrifice. As a reward for the sacrifice, she will possess the killer and transform him for a single scene into the greatest knife fighter in the world. The Wyld barbarians of the jungle outside Rathess regularly worship her, as do the stalkers of the eastern flying tower. These stalkers sacrifice any Fair Folk they capture in the prescribed manner.

Shining Flower does not care who is sacrificed, so long as the priest observes the proper rituals. She will accept or even take part in any sacrifice, although ones where the victim is willing are the best. However, ill-done sacrifices where the victim suffers or escapes or where the heart is damaged and must be hacked out in pieces enrage her. She has no patience for incompetent or unskilled priests and will strike any who performs particularly badly (player botches on the Dexterity + Performance roll to perform the sacrifice) with a curse. On occasion, she even possesses a priest who is performing a sacrifice particularly badly. When she does so, she sometimes decides that someone else would make a better sacrifice than the one chosen by

the priest. Occasionally, she even chooses the priest and observers see the priest cut his own heart from his body with great skill.

Shining Flower appears as a beautiful young woman with moonsilver hair and skin of living orichalcum.

Sanctum: Shining Flower's immaterial sanctum can be accessed through a false doorway located near the top of Pyramid of the Sun. She has a palatial suit of rooms decorated with images of the Celestial City of Yu-Shan and statues of the Unconquered Sun. She also has a truly vast collection of knives, including a host of orichalcum, moonsilver, starmetal and jade knives and daggers. In one small room, she also has a collection of perfectly preserved human hearts — all the finest that she has ever cut out. Each one beats slowly, even though it is sitting alone on an orichalcum dish. The door to this room is guarded by potent Celestial Circle Sorcery that will blast anyone attempting to enter it without permission with 25 health levels of lethal damage (armor protects normally).

Nature: Paragon

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6, Charisma 6, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 4, Linguistics 2, Lore 4, Melee 5 (Knives +3), Occult 3, Performance 5 (Religious Ceremonies +3), Presence 4, Socialize 2, Thrown 5 (Knives +3)

Backgrounds: Artifacts 5, Backing (Unconquered Sun) 2, Followers 4, Resources 4

Charms: Benefaction, Donning Spiritual Armor, Essence Bite, Imprecation, Inhuman Prowess, Instill Obedience, Largess, Malediction, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Memory Mirror, Memory Sponge, Possession, Principle of Motion, Sense Domain, Stoke the Flame

Cost To Materialize: 50

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Knife: Speed 17 Accuracy 17 Damage 14L Defense 15

Throwing Knife: Speed 11 Accuracy 17 Damage 16L (Rate 3, Range 40)

Dodge Pool: 10 **Soak:** 14L/20B (Orichalcum skin, 12L/15B)

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

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 98

Other Notes: None

LEECH GOD

The leech gods are foul gods who the Primordials banished deep under the earth. At the end of the First Age, during the Contagion, the desperate inhabitants of the human octad broke through the ancient barriers and gave the leech gods access to the surface. The several hundred underpeople (see p. 75) descended from these unfortunate humans now worship the leech gods. The leech gods are also protected by several dozen





leech hounds (see pp. 75-76). The leech gods hate the light and all life that they do not control. The leech gods of Rathless rarely leave their pools, but their underpeople regularly venture throughout most of Rathless' human quarter. The leech gods love recruiting and breaking the minds of weak-willed captives. Stronger captives become their food.

The leech gods look like giant chalk-white leeches between eight and ten feet long. Their contact with humanity has changed them — they now have vestigial human arms and faces that look twistedly human, except for the two long, thick tentacles near their gaping mouths.

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

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

Abilities: Athletics 2 (Climbing +2), Awareness 4 (In Darkness +2), Brawl 5 (Bite +3), Craft (Architecture) 3, Dodge 5, Investigation 2, Linguistics 2, Lore 3, Medicine 3, Occult 3, Presence 3 (Intimidation +3), Survival 3 (Tracking by Scent +2)

Backgrounds: Allies (Other Banished Spirits) 4, Cult (Underpeople) 2, Followers (Underpeople and Leech Hounds) 5, Resources 3

Suggested Charms: Affinity Elemental Control (Water), Confusion, Donning Spiritual Armor, Dreampeak, Essence Bite, Instill Obedience, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Travel, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Memory Sponge, Paralyze, Possession, Principle of Motion, Stoke the Flame, Sustenance

Cost To Materialize: 45

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Bite: Speed 12 Accuracy 12 (special) Damage 11L+ special* Defense none

Hold: Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage none Defense none

* See Other Notes for information on the leech god's bite attack

Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 16L/17B (Rubbery hide, 12L/9B)

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

Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 86

Other Notes: Leech gods attack by grabbing hold with their tentacles and wrapping their boneless bodies around their prey. At the beginning of the next turn after one has grabbed its prey, a leech god bites. This bite is treated as a clinch attack that does 11L of damage every turn after the first. Armor only protects against this damage until the total damage the leech god has done with its bite is greater than the armor's lethal soak. After this point, this attack ignores any armor not made from one of the Five Magical Materials — the barbed tongue of a leech god can bore through any non-magical armor. Their tongues can also

find openings in the finest armor — halve the protection provided by any magical armor after the first two attacks.

VINE RUNNER

Description: These minor wood elementals hold dominion over the vines, lianas and other parasitic jungle plants in and around Rathless. Most of these spirits simply observe their celestial duties. However, some of them now actively protect these plants from harm. Some of the vine runners who live in the jungle have developed a taste for warm-blooded prey and hunt mortal intruders who cut their way carelessly through the jungle, others have allied themselves with tribes of Wyld barbarians. The ones who live in Rathless are the spiritual representatives, and often the spiritual guardians, of the various industrial vines used by the Dragon Kings.

These small gods are positively inclined toward any stalkers who have regained even a portion of their civility — the spirits are aware that they owe their existence to these creatures. The stalkers in the eastern flying tower worship and honor their local vine runners, and in return, these vine runners help guard the flying tower. Some vine runners have formed partnerships and even friendships with some of the stalkers. Although most vine runners know a great deal about the uses of jungle plants, they tend to be capricious and will only reveal such information to close friends and those who agree to make offerings of fine wood carvings, rare plants and the blood of dangerous and unusual animals. Vine runners look like long-legged, slender, bright green tailless lizards the size of large dogs. Each of their four legs ends in an inhumanly long-fingered hand.

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 4 (Climbing +2), Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Craft (Herbalism) 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Linguistics 2, Lore 3 (Plant Lore +3), Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 2, Resistance 2, Socialize 2, Survival 4, Thrown 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Followers 4

Suggested Charms: Affinity Elemental Control (Wood), Creation of Perfection, Dematerialize, Donning Spiritual Armor, Essence Bite, Inhuman Prowess, Landscape Camouflage, Landscape Hide, Landscape Travel

Elemental Powers: Aegis, Mobility

Cost To Dematerialize: 21

Base Initiative: 9

Attacks:

Claw: Speed 10 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L Defense 6

Spear: Speed 13 Accuracy 10 Damage L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 8L/12B (Woody hide, 6L/6B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 63

Other Notes: None

ANIMALS, PLANTS AND OTHERS

Even before the fall of Rathess, the jungles of the Southeast were teeming with living things of all sorts, to which the Dragon Kings added their own unique experiments. In the centuries since the city's destruction, many new plants and animals have entered the area, as well as monstrosities from the Wyld and the shadowlands, since each of these otherworldly realms now possesses a small foothold in the ruins.

FILIAL WISDOM, THE GOBLIN KING

Description: Filial Wisdom was born some 170 years ago into a simple commoner family in the southern city of Paragon. His parents were merchants, and he grew up in the shadow of the Realm, with whom his native city was allied. He looked upon the Blessed Isle as a paradise on earth, the most perfect place in all of Creation. He dreamed of being one of the Terrestrial Exalted, whom he lionized as the greatest of all heroes, for they had saved the Realm from disaster by facing the threats posed first by the Anathema and then the Contagion and the Fair Folk.

It was only 140 years ago, when Filial Wisdom, accompanied his mother on a trip to the Blessed Isle, that he learned the truth about the Realm. It was no better than his home city in virtue or morality. In many ways, he felt it was much worse, for the Dragon-Blooded were not the peerless heroes he had believed them to be in his youth. Instead, they were no different than the Perfect or any other despot. They lorded their Exalted status over the peasants and protected the Realm from attack not in order to protect the people, but to preserve their overlordship.

This visit opened Filial Wisdom's eyes for the first time to realities he had never considered before. Perhaps appropriately, it was then that the Unconquered Sun declared him for his own, and the young man drew his Second Breath. Being Exalted while on the Blessed Isle quickly proved dangerous. While still uncertain of the mighty powers he wielded due to this godly blessing, he attracted the attention of a pair of Dragon-Blooded officers, who attempted to apprehend him. Filial Wisdom killed them and fled by boat with his mother, back to Paragon, to escape retribution.

Once home, Filial Wisdom knew he could not remain in the city. He bade good-bye to his family and set off to find a place for himself in the world. He traveled to the cities of the South — Chiaroscuro, Yane, Kirighast — and then beyond, all the while struggling with his newfound role as one of the Unconquered Sun's Chosen. For reasons



he could not explain, Filial Wisdom felt himself drawn to the Eastern forests. He had visions of a city there, which he sought out, despite the dangers.

Eventually, Filial Wisdom found the ruins of Rathess. When he gazed upon the Pyramid of the Sun for the first time, he discerned that a former bearer of his Exaltation had once lived, and died, within the city. He could not explain it fully, but he knew that he belonged in Rathess. It is probable that he is one of the two Solar Exalted who were slain in Rathess during the Usurpation. Such hold-outs were the ones who continued to reincarnate in the period between the Usurpation and the modern day, and Filial Wisdom's Exaltation considerably predates the return of large numbers of Solars.

It didn't take Han-Tha long to realize that Filial Wisdom provided the spirit with an excellent opportunity to rebuild his cult and his power in the world. He possessed the young Solar and whispered poisonous thoughts into his captive mind. In surprisingly short order, the Ghoul King convinced Filial Wisdom that the world was corrupt and decaying, awaiting a glorious rebirth — just as he himself had experienced.

Filial Wisdom embraced Han-Tha's lies and accepted them as truth. They squared so well with his own experiences on the Blessed Isle and in the South, where he had



seen countless examples of the sorry state of Creation, that he came to believe that the world desperately needed renewal. Such renewal could only come after the death of the present world, when the new order consumed the ruins of the old Age to feed its strength. The Solar decided to hasten that death through his own actions. He became the "Goblin King," a leader of Han-Tha's stunted and warped minions within Rathless, and he began to prepare for the end of the present Age and the magnificent arrival of the next.

Filial Wisdom has been living as the god-priest of his and Han-Tha's cult for some 109 years. He has developed tremendous martial prowess, but he has not thought to present himself to the area's tribes as a beneficent ruler worthy of following. As he has been taught by every example he has ever witnessed (the Perfect, the Dragon-Blooded and his own century of stewardship over the goblins and stalkers of the cult) that a leader must rule with an iron fist and keep his subjects in a constant state of terror; Filial Wisdom, in fact, has a lower Compassion than the Ghoul King, and the Ghoul King's possessions exert a restraining effect on the Exalt.

Nature: Visionary

Caste: Dawn

(The following are Filial Wisdom's Traits when Han-Tha is not using him as a vessel for his spirit)

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 6, Awareness 4, Brawl 5, Dodge 6, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Firetongue; Forest-Tongue, High Holy Speech, High Realm, Old Realm) 4, Lore 5, Martial Arts 5, Melee 6 (Daiklaves +3), Occult 5, Resistance 5, Ride 3, Socialize 4, Stealth 5, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Artifact 5, Backing 5, Followers 5, Influence 3, Manse 5, Mentor 5, Resources 5

Charms: All Solar Charms the Storyteller wishes to give him, provided they are based on Abilities he possesses. The same is true of Combos, although combat-oriented ones are probably the most appropriate.

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Orichalcum Grand Daiklave (Glory to Decay*): Speed 8 Accuracy 16 Damage 16L Defense 10

* Filial Wisdom renamed his sword. Formerly, this sword achieved some renown under its original name "Scarlet Dawn Daiklave."

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap*

* Filial Wisdom has purchased the Charm Ox-Body Technique (see Exalted, page 170) to the limit his Endurance allows.

Dodge Pool: 10/10* **Soak:** 15L/11B (Orichalcum reinforced breastplate, 12L/11B, -1 mobility penalty)

* Filial Wisdom usually employs the Charm Armored Scout's Invigoration (see Exalted, p. 170-171) when wearing armor.

Essence: 6

Personal Essence: 25 **Peripheral Essence:** 43* (63)

Committed Essence: 17

*With commitment

Other Notes: None

(The following are Filial Wisdom's Traits when Han-Tha is using him as a vessel for his spirit)

Attributes: Strength 11, Dexterity 6, Stamina 9, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 5 (Claws +2), Dodge 6, Endurance 7, Linguistics 3 (Native: Old Realm; Firetongue, Forest-Tongue, High Holy Speech), Lore 3, Martial Arts 3, Melee 6 (Daiklaves +2), Occult 4, Presence 2, Resistance 8, Ride 2, Socialize 2, Stealth 5, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Artifact 5, Backing 5, Followers 5, Influence 3, Manse 5, Mentor 5, Resources 5

Charms: All of Filial Wisdom's Charms and Combos and seven spirit Charms, which will certainly include Principal of Motion, Hurry Home, Portal, Landscape Travel and any spirit Charms that would help cover weaknesses in the Exalt's Charm choices.

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Grand Daiklave (Glory of Decay): Speed 8 Accuracy 16 Damage 22L Defense 14

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap*

Dodge Pool: 10/10* **Soak:** 16L/20B (Orichalcum reinforced breastplate, 12L/11B)

* Filial Wisdom usually employs the Charm Armored Scout's Invigoration (see Exalted, p. 170) when wearing armor.

Essence: 7

Peripheral Essence: 71* (88) **Committed Essence:** 17

* Minus commitment

Other Notes: None

CANNIBAL TRIBESMAN

Description: Although Rathless itself is free from semi-human tribes except for the horribly twisted underpeople (see p. 75), several tribes of Wyld-touched cannibals dwell in the vicinity of the city. Although there are unusual individuals in each tribe, most members of these tribes have similar Wyld mutations. Most have green skin, a thin coat of green fur and black eyes devoid of

whites or irises. A few have tails or claws, but most lack more extreme mutations.

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

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

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 1, Melee 3, Presence 1, Resistance 1, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Thrown 3

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

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

Blow Gun: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 2L + poison* (Rate 2, Range 50)

Javelin: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 5L (Rate 2, Range 30)

* Cannibal flower poison: Difficulty to resist 3, Damage: 4B if the target resists, 8B if he doesn't, with a Penalty of -4 and a Duration of 2 hours

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 2L/4B (Lightly furred skin, 1L/1B)

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

Other Notes: None

UNDERPERSON

Description: The underpeople are the offspring of humans who lived in Rathess during the end of the First Age and eldritch leech spirits from deep caverns below the city. The underpeople hate both sunlight and humanity and regularly drag human and stalker captives back to be sucked dry by their foul masters. Members of Han-Tha's cult are largely free from harassment, but even they do not walk the city alone at night. The underpeople are all hairless, chalk-white humans with eyes as black and featureless as pools of ink, and most can breathe water. They can eat normal food, but all prefer to drink blood.

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 2 (In Darkness +2), Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Presence 1 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (Tracking by Scent +2), Thrown 3

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Tiger Claws: Speed 1 Accuracy 4 Damage 4L Defense 4

Chopping Sword: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 6L Defense 5

Javelin: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 5L Rate 2, Range 30

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 1L/3B

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

Other Notes: Although the underpeople's mutations come from breeding with spirits rather than from the Wyld, Wyld mutations best model these changes. Almost all of the underpeople have the poxes Eye Color (black, without whites, can see normally in all non-magical darkness), Hair (none), Skin Color (chalk white) and Enhanced Smell and Hearing. Most also have the Gills affliction. They cannot bear the touch of the sun and take one level of lethal damage every hour they spend in direct sunlight. However, they can safely live above ground indoors and in the deep jungle, and the small colony of them based around the pool located in a particularly overgrown portion of Rathess' human octad are thriving. The underpeople are usually extras.

LEECH HOUND

Description: Leech hounds are the prized pets of the leech gods. These horrors look like gray translucent leeches the size of large dogs. Their only limbs are a pair of thick strong tentacles near their ever-hungry mouths. Leech hounds may move as swiftly as a running man. They can move along walls and ceiling as easily as a mortal can walk along the floor, and they can squeeze through any hole no smaller in diameter than a woman's fist.

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 2 (Climbing +3), Awareness 3 (In Darkness +3), Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Endurance 2, Presence 1 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 2, Stealth 5, Survival 2 (Tracking by Scent +3)

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Bite: Speed 9 Accuracy 10 Damage 6L+ special* Defense none

Hold: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage hold Defense none

* See Other Notes for information in the leech hound's bite attack.

Dodge Pool: 7 **Soak:** 7L/10B (Rubbery hide, 5L/5B)

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

Essence: 1

Other Notes: Leech hounds attack by grabbing hold with their short tentacles and wrapping their deadly boneless bodies around their prey. At the beginning of the next turn after one has grabbed its prey, a leech hound bites. This bite is treated as a clinch attack that does 6L of damage every turn after the first. Armor only protects against this damage until the total damage the leech hound has done with its bite is greater than the armor's lethal soak. After



this point, this attack ignores any armor not made from one of the Five Magical Materials — the barbed tongue of a leech hound can bore through any lesser armor. Leech hounds count as •••• familiars. If an Abyssal Exalted takes one as a familiar, the blood the creature drinks can also be used to nourish the deathknight, removing the need for the deathknight to hunt for its own sustenance. Leech hounds are often extras.

BLADE VINE

Description: Blade vines are an example of Dragon King vegetative technology. Created as a defense mechanism for military encampments and garrisons, blade vines are unable to distinguish between friend and foe. The plant was designed to grow as ground cover, and seeds escaped into the wild, where they flourished. In the centuries since the fall of Rathess, blade vines have found their way into the city from the jungle, where they can be found both on the surface and in subterranean locales.

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

Virtues: Not applicable. Never fails Valor rolls, never succeeds at any other rolls.

Abilities: Brawl 2 (Enveloping +2)

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Blade Vine: Speed 3 Accuracy 3 Damage 5L Defense 2

Dodge Pool: 1 **Soak:** 6L/7B (Natural, 5L/5B)

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

Other Notes: Blade vines can attack up to three different targets at once without splitting their dice pools.

GOBLIN

Description: Goblins of Rathess are derived from a breed of warrior faerie used in the region of Rathess where the Fair Folk attacked. Many were left behind in the retreat from Creation, and unofficered formations flocked to Rathess for shelter and because it was an assigned objective. Goblins are short and stunted, with mottled skin and needle-sharp teeth.

Goblins have very little in the way of native intelligence, but they are cunning. It is easy to underestimate their abilities, especially when they travel in large numbers. Han-Tha considers them insignificant creatures and does not hesitate to sacrifice them in pursuit of higher goals, a practice Filial Wisdom, the so-called Goblin King, has continued. For their part, the goblins are content with this situation, for they perceive it to be the natural order. Use the statistics for hobgoblins on page 288 of the main *Exalted* book, but most goblins will also know the first dot of Han-Tha's Glorious Corruption Path.

GREAT GOBLIN

Description: The great goblins are tall, horned, humanoid fae that can sometimes be found among hordes of lesser goblins, acting as sergeants. Standing over 12 feet tall and dressed in the salvaged fragments of Dragon King armor, they are a terrible sight to behold. Like lesser goblins, they revel in destruction and serve their master, Han-Tha, and his lieutenant, Filial Wisdom, without question. Great goblins differ from their lesser brethren in that their Fair Folk masters increased the great goblins' stature, hardened their flesh and set mighty horns on their oversized heads. These warriors act as bodyguards for Han-Tha and Filial Wisdom and as officers and shock troops.

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Stamina 10, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 1, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 1, Brawl 4, Endurance 2, Investigation 2, Melee 4, Resistance 2, Survival 2

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Claw: Speed 12 Accuracy 9 Damage 9L Defense 8

Gore: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 12L Defense 6

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 8B Defense 8

Axe: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 16L Defense 8

Dodge Pool: 3 **Soak:** 13L/16B (Tough hide, 3L/3B, + fragments of armor equal to a reinforced buff jacket, 5L/6B, -2 mobility penalty)

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

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 30

Other Notes: Because of their relative rarity, great goblins are almost never extras. Like lesser goblins, they sometimes possess the ability to wield glamour or to shapechange into jungle cats.

RAPTOR CAT

Description: The jungle surrounding Rathess is filled with all manner of strange reptilian beasts, as far below the Dragon Kings in power and sophistication as apes are below human beings — perhaps more so. Despite this, several of these beasts are sufficiently dangerous as to warrant mention. Chief among these is the so-called raptor cat, a large reptile that bears almost no resemblance to a feline in appearance. Approximately eight feet long from nose to tail, this four-legged creature is covered with dark-green scales in an unusual striped pattern that provides camouflage in the jungle. The creature's legs end in wickedly clawed feet, and its large mouth is likewise filled with terrible teeth. The raptor cat's jaws have the ability to unhinge from the skull in order to bite — and consume whole — creatures only slightly less large than itself.

The raptor cat gets its name from its nimbleness and its fondness for lying in wait in trees and other high places. Like a tiger, this reptile attacks only when it has the element of surprise, striking from above and using its terrible teeth and claws to kill its prey in a single blow. Few creatures within the jungle can compare to the raptor cat's viciousness. Though essentially mindless, the creature shows a capacity for cruelty, sometimes toying with its prey before finally killing it. This has only added to its terrible reputation among those who travel the Eastern jungles.

In Rathess, raptor cats are found mostly in those areas of the ruins that have been overrun by the encroaching jungle. They are never found underground or in areas where grave hounds are present. The reptiles fear the unwholesome creatures and avoid them (along with the rest of Han-Tha's cult) whenever possible. The citizens of many Southern cities will pay vast sums of money for anyone who can capture and tame one of these creatures, considering raptor cats exotic pets.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 1, Wits 5

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Bite: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 7L Defense 6

Claw: Speed 12 Accuracy 11 Damage 4L Defense 8

Dodge Pool: 9 Soak: 6L/9B (Scaly hide, 3L/3B)

Willpower: 7 Health Levels: -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Other Notes: None

SLITHERER

Description: The slitherer is one of the strangest creatures to exist among the ruins of Rathess. It owes its origin to a failed experiment in the underways of the city shortly after the Contagion struck. A Dragon King scientist was toying with an alchemical process he hoped could counteract the effects of the terrible plague that was sweeping Rathess. Using a sample of the disease, he attempted to magically suspend it within a protoplasmic matrix, so that he could better study it. Instead, the interaction of the disease, the protoplasm

and the magic created a phenomenal accident — and the slitherer was born.

Looking like nothing so much as a roiling pile of gray-green jelly, the slitherer is nevertheless a deadly creature. Its lack of a skeleton (or indeed any solid parts) means that it can easily squeeze through the tiniest cracks and crevices. Only perfectly sealed environments are safe from the slitherer. Though not intelligent, the creature shows an uncanny awareness of its surroundings. Unless distracted by another target or destroyed, the slitherer pursues its prey relentlessly. The creature is surprisingly difficult to kill, which has only added to its reputation as one of the preeminent horrors of the ruins.

Although explorers sometimes speak of the slitherer as if it were a singular entity, it is not. Over the centuries, the original creature has split itself into innumerable smaller versions of itself, each one capable of the actions of its "parent." It is rare to encounter more than one slitherer at a time, but no visitor to Rathess should delude himself into thinking that the destruction of one of these things is an assurance that another one won't appear before he escapes the ruins.

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

Virtues: Not applicable. Never fails Valor rolls, never succeeds at any other rolls.

Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 4

Base Initiative: 1

Attack:

Disease Touch: Speed 1 Accuracy 2 Damage 8L* Defense 2

* Any character that suffers damage from the slitherer's attack has been exposed to a disease whose statistics are very similar to bubonic plague (see Exalted, p. 321). His player must make a Stamina + Resistance roll to avoid having his character contract the disease, and if it is contracted, the character suffers the effects described under the description of the disease, just as if it had been contracted naturally.

Dodge Pool: 1 Soak: 5L/7B (Protoplasm, 4L/4B)

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

Other Notes: The slitherer is one of the most-feared creatures in Rathess, and all inhabitants generally immediately flee at one's approach.





CHAPTER FOUR REWARDS OF RATHLESS



The reasons for entering and exploring Rathless may be many, but one predominates: the lust for power. For centuries, Rathless was the capital of the Dragon Kings and the seat of their domain. Even as a ruin, the city remains a source of incredible power and untold riches, a treasure trove for those willing to brave its dangers and overcome its obstacles. It should come as no surprise that groups as diverse as the Realm, the Guild, the Lunars and the Fair Folk have ventured into the crumbling setting — even if many did not return. The potential power to be had within is simply too great an enticement, however dangerous Rathless may be.

This chapter describes some of the most interesting, unusual and powerful wonders that may be found within the ruins of Rathless. With a few exceptions, that “may” is an important word to bear in mind. Some of the items that follow are very powerful or have connections to elements within the setting that could forever alter a series. While this is very much in keeping with *Exalted*’s philosophy of giving the characters access to powers and abilities that allow them to affect the world in profound ways, the Storyteller should nevertheless consider whether a particular wonder is acceptable for use in his series. It’s much easier to say that an object is forever broken or not present than to try to patch your series back together after you give the players the wrong artifact.

DRAGON KING TECHNOLOGY

In addition to the magic of their 10 Paths of magical knowledge, their *olchiliké*, their exquisite masonry and other arts, the Dragon Kings also developed two elaborate technologies. The first was based on the creation and breeding of various enchanted and semi-magical plants, while the second involved using gemstones and various Magical Materials to create items of power. Unlike human enchantments, the second type of items resembled jewelry and decorative items instead of tools, weapons or other such pragmatic objects. The Dragon Kings’ close connection to the Unconquered Sun also allows them to attune to orichalcum artifacts, provided they can afford the attunement cost. Because of this, a few of the more civilized stalkers now wear orichalcum bracers or wield dire lances.

VEGETATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Using both the powers of the Growing Wood Path and the innate magics of many of the plants found in the Far East, the Dragon Kings created a large number of living plants that could be used as both tools and enchanted weapons. These plants were most often part of their dwellings. Some of the lianas that still cover the buildings and temples of Rathless carry fresh water and



purify waste water. Others protect dwellings or even clean up refuse. Today, many of these plants grow wild in Rathess. Only a few savants suspect any of these plants to have practical uses.

However, anyone who either spends many months studying these plants or learns their secrets by reading ancient records or by talking to a god or one of the ancient Dragon Kings could gain access to many of these wonders. Unfortunately, there are definite limits to the usefulness of these plants. Although there were similar plants in the other Dragon King cities, the plants around Rathess will grow only in the warm humid climes of the Southeast. In addition, while some of the most common plants require no special care, most of the more complex plants are as dependent upon Essence as they are upon water and air. These plants can thrive far from sunlight, and even if they are given adequate light, they still require Essence to perform their desired functions. The vast Manse of the Pyramid of the Sun provides the Essence for all of these many plants. If a character wished to use these same plants in his own Manse or city, he would need to build it in the Southeast — and in the geomantic style of the Dragon Kings.

EVERYDAY VEGETATIVE ITEMS

The most commonly seen examples of this vegetable technology that still function are:

- Lianas that carry fresh and waste water. These wrist- to thigh-thick plants normally grow down into or away from carved stone basins.
- Delicate-looking but exceedingly tough turquoise carpet grass. It is extremely soft to lie and walk on, and it absorbs and digests dirt and spills. This grass keeps the floors clean in even the most ruined portions of the underways and keeps the living towers clean and fragrant.
- Living furniture that reshapes itself to the comfort of anyone who uses it. There are stories that some of these couches and chairs enfold and devour anyone who is foolish enough to fall asleep upon them, but these stories are thankfully untrue except in Wyld- or Essence-twisted examples.

SAMPLES OF VEGETATIVE TECHNOLOGY

The plants created by the Dragon Kings are extremely durable, and many of them survive in dormant form or as seeds in crypts and sealed rooms throughout Rathess. Most dormant plants require soil and regular watering to germinate. Plants that bond with the wearer require contact with the wearers' bare skin to activate. Seeds can be germinated the normal way, or they can be caused to grow far more rapidly by infusing them with several motes of Essence (the amount varies with the

type of plant). Committing Essence to dormant plants will also cause them to become healthy and active again.

BOOT GRAFTS (ARTIFACT •)

Boot grafts look like amorphous masses of fibrous tissue covered in tiny spines. When placed near the feet of an upright living creature, the masses expand to cover them, writhing up to the creature's ankles before stopping. The tissue thickens and hardens, creating what look like bark-like "boots," complete with large spines where there would normally be toes. They can be worn as ordinary boots, providing the user solid support for the feet, as well as excellent warmth in cold conditions and aeration in hot conditions. More importantly, boot grafts noticeably improve the wearer's ability to climb sheer surfaces. The wearer gains a +2 bonus to his dice pool for all Athletics checks involving climbing or mounting an incline.

Boot grafts are photosynthetic and survive as long as they are exposed to bright sunlight for at least four hours a day. If found in the underground portions of Rathess, boot grafts will be in a dormant state, having hardened into a pancake-like object made of light tree bark. To reactivate them requires the expenditure of 1 mote of Essence, followed by four hours of exposure to direct sunlight.

BREATHING PLANT (ARTIFACT •)

This small and exceedingly leafy vine is typically found rooted in a pot designed for easy transport. Anyone can uproot the vine and wrap it around the neck of a living being no larger than a war horse. The plant grows tendrils into the wearer's neck and allows him to breathe water. This plant allows the wearer to breathe both fresh and salt water but does not allow breathing in poisoned or extremely stagnant bodies of water.

Breathing vines are somewhat delicate and must be returned to their pots periodically to remain intact. After approximately three hours of use, a breathing vine slowly loses its vibrant green color and turns yellow. When it is fully yellowed, it withdraws the tendrils from the wearer's neck and goes dormant. It must then be placed back in its pot for at least 12 hours before it can be used again.

GREEN EYES (ARTIFACT •)

These translucent cylindrical objects are actually tiny plants, like many pieces of Dragon King equipment. If placed onto the eyes of a living creature, they spread out very thinly, covering the entire eye in short order. For 6 hours after allowing the plants to cover his eyes, the wearer is effectively blinded. During this time, the buds are acclimating themselves to the peculiarities of their wearer and adapting their structure to provide him the maximum benefit. After this adaptation period

has passed, the plants turn clear from the inside, but appear a dark green in color from the outside, making the wearer's entire eyeball a deep jade green. The plants grant the wearer clarity of vision that enables him to see details 100 yards distant without difficulty, as well as adding one automatic success to any Awareness rolls. These benefits do not add to those granted by Awareness Charms, but neither do they interfere with those that grant benefits greater than those afforded by the green eyes.

Green eyes are usually found in small globular containers throughout Rathess. They require 1 mote of Essence per day from their wearer to operate. Otherwise, they revert to an inert state and fall from the wearer's eyes.

GREEN IRON DUST (ARTIFACT •)

The so-called "green iron" is actually the pollen from the *hraas'kaztha* plant that grows in the swamps around Rathess. The plant is known for its pungent, almost ferrous, smell and the strength of its leaves, which are sharp enough to cut through flesh if not handled properly. The plant's pollen is similarly odiferous and hard. Herbalists in Rathess long ago discovered that the pollen could be ground to a fine powder and ingested, granting remarkable strength, although at the cost of mental acuity in the short term. Though not widely used by Dragon King soldiers, green iron dust was popular with Dragon King gladiators, thugs and cultists throughout the First Age. Now, it is largely unknown in Creation.

Ingesting green iron dust adds a dot to Strength and Stamina for a period of one scene, as well as to the Brawl, Endurance, Dodge, Melee and Resistance Abilities, at the cost of 1 dot in Wits. The loss of the dot in Wits does not affect initiative. After use, the character suffers intense mental and physical exhaustion, which causes the loss of 1 dot in Strength, Dexterity and Wits for one hour. In this case, the Wits loss affects initiative as well.

If a character knows the secret of green iron dust, her player can make a Perception + Survival roll at difficulty 3 in order for the character to gather the plant. Gathering the pollen takes a full day, a number of doses will be gathered equal to the number of successes on the roll.

Typically, green iron dust is found in containers of 100 doses. Fewer doses will naturally have a lower Artifact value, at the discretion of the Storyteller.

KNIFE SPORES (ARTIFACT •)

Knife spores are tiny ambulatory plants native to the subterranean regions surrounding Rathess. Almost imperceptible to the unaided eye, the spores are characterized by their flat body shape and the sharp filaments that cover their surface. The Dragon Kings considered knife

spores pests for the most part, but certain warrior cults within their society viewed them with greater respect. These cultists saw the spores as servants of the goddess Leeayta. Indeed, these cults looked upon the minuscule plants as gifts from their mistress, which they incorporated into their martial-arts techniques.

If a living creature allows a colony of knife spores to infest his body (at the cost of one lethal health level per day), the spores will enhance his combat capability. When used under combat conditions, which is to say, given momentum through punches and kicks, the surfaces can inflict considerable damage. An infested character gains the ability to inflict lethal rather than bashing damage with his blows. Unfortunately, extended use of knife spores in combat kills them. After 10 successful blows while wearing them, the spores die in large enough numbers as to be ineffectual.

Knife spores still exist in Rathess today, but few know of their usefulness, unless they have read tomes associated with the cult of Leeayta. Even then, collecting the spores is a difficult endeavor, requiring the discovery of a sufficiently large conglomeration of the spores (Storyteller's discretion) and the commitment of a mote of Essence to "herd" them on to the character's skin.

SWORDSTICK (ARTIFACT •)

This deadly weapon consists of a long, flat, club of semi-living wood. Along either side, arrayed just like the teeth in the jaws of a sawfish, a row of iron-hard thorns as long as a woman's palm transform this club into an extremely deadly weapon. Swordsticks are the ultimate expression of one of the Dragon Kings' oldest weapons. The first swordsticks were simply branches of ironthorn wood cut to an appropriate length. However, the Dragon King's vegetative technology allowed them to grow low bushes that produced a cluster of three or four swordsticks every two years. Unfortunately, all efforts to grow the bushes outside of Rathess have failed.

When empowered with 4 motes of committed Essence, a swordstick comes to life. At this point, the thorns ooze a sap that causes all wounds to be exceptionally painful, and the club-like blade bends itself to the user's will, aiding him in his attacks.

Speed	Acc.	Damage	Defense	Minimums
+2	+1	+5L*	+1	S•••

* In addition to the damage cause by the swordstick, the thorn's sap causes a painful burning. Characters wounded by a swordstick increase their wound penalties by +1 for the rest of the scene. A target can only suffer this penalty once per scene.



VINE KLAVE (ARTIFACT •)

This peculiar-looking weapon measures five feet long, with a handle approximately two feet long and a blade approximately three feet in length. When active, the weapon bears a resemblance to a short daiklave. Its construction, however, is nothing like any other examples of those mighty weapons. Instead, the vine klave lives up to its name. The haft is a gnarly woody shaft, and the blade is a vine specially bred to be as tough as fine steel. When the weapon is inactive, the weapon's fibrous blade becomes flexible and coils along the length of the haft. On the underside of this part, there are what look like small, sharp spines. If placed against the flesh of a living thing, these thorns extend and coil around the wielder's arm and dig into it, causing a short, piercing pain and unsoakably draining two health levels, which cannot be recovered until the weapon is detached. With the klave so attached, the wearer may wield it as a weapon with the following statistics:

Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Minimums
+3	+2	+5L	+0	S•

The vine klave has the advantage of functioning as part of the wearer's body for as long as he wears it. Conse-

quently, he cannot be disarmed or drop his weapon. Likewise, while the wearer has a limited grip (+1 difficulty on all rolls involving the physical dexterity of that hand), the length of the vine klave prevents the wearer from picking other things up while wielding the weapon. The vine klave was a popular weapon among Dragon Kings who served the god Han-Tha. Spirits associated with that dread god often possessed these warriors. Anyone who uses one of these weapons in the Second Age of Man likewise runs the risk of attracting the attention of spirits once associated with their use.

HEALING ORCHID (ARTIFACT ••)

While humans made use of the potent healing properties of the blue and purple life flowers (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 33), the Dragon Kings created the rare and potent healing orchid. This plant is designed to grow on living flesh and can be used by Dragon Kings, mortal humans and Exalts. Dragon Kings and Exalts must commit 4 motes of Essence to keep this plant healthy. However, mortal humans must instead eat three times as much food as normal whenever this plant is active.

Normally planted on the arm of the wearer, this plant is a finger-thick vine that encircles the wearer's arm, bearing several dozen thumb-sized leaves and half a dozen small emerald-green flowers. This plant allows the wearer to heal far faster than normal. Exalts

wearing this flower heal one level of bashing damage per hour or one level of lethal damage every three hours. This flower also allows Exalts or Dragon Kings to roll two additional dice to resist poison, disease or infection. UnExalted humans and Dragon Kings who wear this wear flower must have a Stamina of at least 4 to support the plant, but it allows them to resist infection and to heal both bashing and lethal damage as speedily as an Exalt's normal healing rate. So long as the wearer is alive, the plant will survive and function normally, although it will lose its flowers in extremely cold climates.

MIMIC SKIN (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Mimic skin is an impressive product of Dragon King alchemy used by scouts and assassins of the First Age. It is a viscous globule of transparent fleshy material held within a small, cylindrical orichalcum container. The infusion of 3 motes of Essence brings the globule to "life," causing it to expand in size and spill out of its container. The character who expended the Essence may then move closer to the expanding mass and allow it to "crawl" over him. Within seconds, the transparent material will completely cover a normal-sized person from head to foot. Because it is transparent, the person can still see. The same is true of all other senses. He can likewise breathe, even though the material has also covered the mouth and nose of the character who now "wears" it.

While wearing it, the material mimics its surroundings, creating an effective camouflage. Anyone attempting to see a character wearing an active mimic skin suffers a four-dice penalty to his player's Perception + Awareness rolls, provided the wearer stays perfectly still. If the wearer is moving, the penalty is reduced to two dice. Mimic skin stays active for a period of three days after being infused with Essence, after which it must regenerate its substantial matrix within its container for three more days before it can be activated again.

SHOCK GAUNTLET (ARTIFACT ●●●)

The shock gauntlet is a large gauntlet covered in what appear to be metallic leaves. Unlike more traditional gauntlets, the shock gauntlet covers almost the entire arm of the wearer, going almost to his shoulder. Shock gauntlets were used by Dragon King troops before the fall of Rathess, especially those associated with the worship of Leeayta. Even so, they were never very widespread, since their construction was expensive and, in the hands of an untalented soldier, could be quite disruptive to typical battle formations.

The usefulness of the shock gauntlet is that it is a ranged melee weapon, as contradictory as that seems. The wearer expends 1 mote of Essence and punches in

the direction of his intended target, his player making a normal Brawl or Martial Arts roll, just like an ordinary unarmed attack. The target can be as far as 30 yards away from the wearer. If the attack roll is successful, the gauntlet transmits the strength of the wearer's punch to the target, who suffers damage exactly as if he had been hit with a normal unarmed attack. The shock gauntlet also enhances the targets punches, making them far deadlier than they otherwise would be.

The shock gauntlet has the following statistics:

RANGED USE

Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
+0	16L*	1	30**

HAND-TO-HAND USE

Speed	Acc.	Damage	Defense	Minimums
+0	+0	Str + 8B	+0	S•

* The character must spend 1 mote per ranged attack made.

** This is the weapon's maximum range. It offers no range increments.

THORN THROWER (ARTIFACT ●●●)

This unusual weapon consists of a thin flexible branch four feet long that holds many large thorns near one end. The user must commit 6 motes of Essence to use this weapon. The user can then cause the thorn thrower to curl up into a six inch coil that can be easily and safely carried on a belt. To use this weapon, the wearer normally flicks it like a whip at a target. Several of the large, sharp thorns fly off of the end and strike the target. These thorns are coated with an azure sap that promotes blood loss. In addition to throwing thorns, the user can also use this weapon like a short whip or chain to strike nearby opponents.

THROWN USE

Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
+3	8L*	2	20

HAND-TO-HAND USE

Speed	Acc.	Damage	Defense	Minimums
+4	+2	+6L*	+3	D●●●

* Like a target arrow, this attack is armor piercing. Halve the target's armor soak, natural soak is counted normally. Anyone wounded by this weapon loses one health level every 10 turns due to bleeding, and all attempts to stop this bleeding are at +1 difficulty.



Characters must invest 6 motes to activate the thorn thrower, and 1 additional mote for each ranged thorn attack the character makes.

DRAGON KING CRYSTAL TECHNOLOGY

The Dragon Kings also learned how to make use of the properties of the Five Magical Materials and the magics found in the many types of exotic crystals native to the Southeast. Fashioning these items into jewelry and other ornaments, the Dragon Kings created a host of devices that were both beautiful and useful. These same crystals were also carved into larger and more elaborate sculptures that performed a host of useful functions throughout the city. Powered by small amounts of Essence they draw from the surrounding environment, these structures perform a variety of functions. They provide heat to baths and mud pools, illuminate private rooms and large public spaces with a brilliant yellow-green light and allow the doors of various buildings to be opened with a gesture or a word.

EVERYDAY CRYSTAL ITEMS

The most commonly seen examples of this crystal technology that still function are:

- Large chandelier-like lights whose intensity can be turned up and down by making specific gestures on a small crystal panel set in a wall.

- Self-heating crystal panels that can be controlled by touching an inset gemstone. These can be found warming mud pools, lounging couches or entire rooms in the underways.

- Locks that are locked or unlocked by means of small crystal rings. It is +3 difficulty for characters to pick these locks unless the character obtains a set of the octagonal crystal lockpicks used by Dragon King criminals. With these tools, crystal locks can be picked with a normal Dexterity + Larceny roll.

- Rings of crystals set in the air ducts ubiquitous in the underways. These crystals pump fresh air down into the underways.

- Small light panels that illuminate corridors, the intensity of these lights normally cannot be adjusted.

- Large doors that open or close when specific gestures are made.

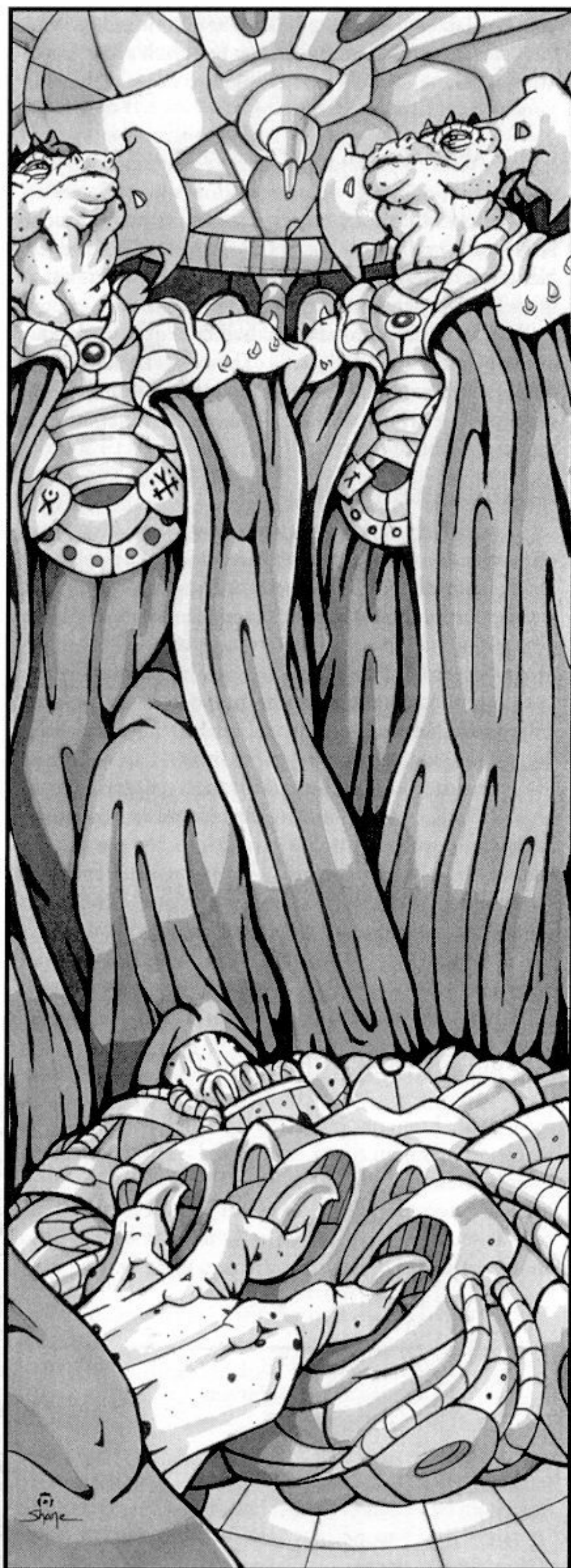
- Brilliantly colored rings that unlock any door they are magically keyed to.

- Lift tubes. These circular tubes are three yards in diameter and are the primary way the inhabitants of Rathless traveled between the different floors and levels of their city. These tubes function as elevators and have open doorways at every level of a building. An intricately patterned horizontal crystal disk floats inside these tubes. Dragon Kings controlled these disks by tapping out codes on the slightly raised central portion of the disc with their dexterous toe claws. Humans and Exalts must normally bend over and tap out these codes with their hands, and if they can't read the script of the Dragon Kings, they will arrive at a random floor until they learn the Dragon Kings' complex numerals.

- Large transparent faceted pillars mounted on the flat roofs of many of the Dragon King towers. Activated by touching an inset gemstone, the pillar creates a dome of energy over the roof that keeps off wind and rain and, at night, provides light equivalent to sunset. Although this dome keeps out all forms of inclement weather, it has no armor value and provides no protection against any attack not based solely on wind.

SUN CRYSTAL (ARTIFACT •)

These small, regularly shaped crystals occur naturally in Southern lands, where they are often found underground or on the surface as the result of volcanic eruptions. Sorcerers of the First Age, both Dragon King and Exalted, learned how to infuse them with small amounts of power in order to use them for illumination. With the expenditure of 1 mote of Essence, a character can ignite a sun crystal, causing it to glow brightly and clearly for 1,001 days before the mote is consumed. The



crystal sheds enough light to illuminate an area 90 feet in diameter. With the expenditure of an additional mote of Essence, the character may increase the light's radius to 150 feet. Expending any more Essence will overload the crystal, which will shatter in an impressive (though harmless) pyrotechnic display.

Unsurprisingly, sun crystals proved very popular during the First Age, especially in underground cities and other areas where natural light was scarce. The sorcerers of that time learned how to yoke several sun crystals together in a bank in order to create large sources of artificial illumination and how to feed them with accumulators that harnessed the ambient Essence flows and to command the banks to turn them on and off at will. Examples of these banks, most inactive, still exist within the underground levels of Rathess and unyoked sun crystals are even more common, many of which are still capable of accepting Essence.

BRACER OF CRYSTAL BOLTS (ARTIFACT ••)

This large bracer is made of a single piece of clear rock crystal set with orichalcum inlays. This weapon holds two bolts also made of enchanted rock crystal. With a thought, the wearer can fire these bolts. By spending 1 mote of Essence, the character can then draw the bolts back to the weapon (they actually fly to the weapon).

If either of the bolts is damaged or broken, it will repair itself within a few hours, less for minor damage. This weapon can be used equally well by Dragon Kings and Exalts. Committing 4 motes of Essence activates the bracer, causes it to resize to fit the wearer and allows the wearer to fire it. It can then only be removed by the wearer or upon her death. This bracer has a setting for a single Hearthstone. Bracers of crystal bolts use the Thrown Ability to attack, and Thrown Charms can apply to attacks made with them.

Name	Acc.	Damage	Rate	Range
Bracer of Crystal Bolts	+2	6L*	2	100

* Like a target arrow, the bolts are armor piercing. Halve the target's armor soak, but apply natural soak normally.

FIRE CLAW (ARTIFACT ••)

This unusual and deadly item is made in the form of a fancy orichalcum bracelet set with a large red stone. It fits perfectly on the wrist of one of the Dragon Kings and is not uncomfortable when worn by an Exalt. Whenever the wearer expends 2 motes of Essence, a curving blade of golden sunfire springs forth from the bracelet and arcs in front of the wearer's hand (this is



a diceless reflexive action). Looking like a cross between a narrow-bladed scimitar and a great and deadly claw, this weapon was favored by many Dragon King cult members. The claw endures for one full scene, and so long as the wearer expends 2 motes every scene, it can be made to exist indefinitely. The claw is designed so that it is impossible for the wearer's hand to be injured by the claw curving above it. A wearer must commit 5 motes of Essence to use this item. This item contains a setting for a single Hearthstone. The fire claw is wielded with the Melee Ability, and it cannot be used as a claw-type weapon for the purposes of Tiger Style or Lunar natural fighting techniques.

RING OF IMAGES (ARTIFACT ••)

This jade ring is set with a small amber-colored stone. It allows the wearer to project small illusions of anything she can imagine up to a number of yards away equal to her permanent Essence. These illusions can be no larger than a large house cat and are solely visible and auditory illusions — they have no scent and are completely intangible. The wearer can only create a single illusion at a time and it costs 1 mote every 15 minutes to sustain such an illusion. Creating the illusion requires a normal action; moving and directing it are reflexive actions.

CRYSTAL OF PROTECTION (ARTIFACT •••)

This item is a fist-sized crystal statue of a tyrant lizard or other dangerous reptile. When it is placed on a solid surface and the user expends 7 motes of Essence, it produces a hemispheric dome of softly glowing sunfire. This dome is four yards in diameter and two high and provides light equal to late twilight. This dome also keeps wind, rain and cold from affecting anyone inside. In addition, anyone from outside of the dome that attempts to enter takes 5L damage from Essence burns. Armor does not protect against these burns, only the character's natural soak. This dome provides protection against ranged attacks equal to 75 percent cover (subtract three from the successes of any ranged attack targeted at anyone inside the dome). However, the dome provides no protection against hand-to-hand attacks. The dome lasts until anyone inside attempts to leave it or until a full day passes. As soon as either happens, the

dome collapses and cannot be used again until the crystal has been exposed to sunlight for at least half a day. Users often tie these crystals to their saddles or wear them as large pendants.

CRYSTAL WARCLUB (ARTIFACT •••)

When not in use, this weapon looks like a flattened angular club of smoky quartz, set with a single row of bright ruby crystals on both of the two blade-like edges. However, when the club is activated by spending 2 motes of Essence, a triangular blade of glowing energy issues from each of these crystals. These glowing blades remain for the next full scene. The crystal warclub was one of the Dragon Kings most savage and lethal weapons. Anyone who wields this club must also commit 6 motes of Essence to it.

RING OF DISGUISE (ARTIFACT •••)

This item is an orichalcum ring set with a transparent violet stone that shines with an inner opalescence. It can resize itself to fit any mortal or Dragon King hand if the wearer commits 4 mote of Essence to attune the ring. This ring allows the wearer to project intangible illusions around herself. The only limit is that each illusion projected requires the expenditure of 8 motes of Essence. This illusion lasts for a scene and can be continued of the wearer simply spends another 8 motes of Essence.

This ring can create an illusion of any person, Dragon King or other human-shaped and sized creature around the wearer. This illusion can look like anyone the wearer chooses and is familiar with, but it is merely a visual illusion. The wearer smells and sounds the same as always, and anyone touching the wearer will instantly recognize that something is wrong if the wearer feels too different from the image being projected (such as a Dragon King disguising herself as a human).

GLOBE OF TRANSPORT (ARTIFACT ••••)

Rathess was located far from the lands inhabited by mortal humans and their Exalted leaders. As a result, the Dragon Kings enchanted special crystals to enable them to easily visit far-off lands. The smallest and most common of these crystal vehicles is the globe of transport. When not in use, this item is a solid sphere of violet crystal the size of a large orange with

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Minimums
Fire Claw	+2 (+3*)	+2 (+3*)	+5L	+1 (+2*)	S••, D•••
Crystal Warclub	+3 (+4**)	+2 (+3**)	+9L (+10L**)	+0	S•••, D•••

* Add one to the weapon's Speed, Accuracy and Defense if it is worn by a Dragon King or one of the Solar Exalted.
 ** Use the second set of numbers if this weapon is wielded by one of the Dragon Kings or one of the Solar Exalted.

a setting for a single Hearthstone. In this form, it can be carried around as easily as any other small item. However, if the user places a Hearthstone of at least level 2 in the setting and spends 7 motes of Essence, this sphere transforms itself into a wondrous vehicle. The sphere expands into a thin-walled hollow globe nearly three yards in diameter. This globe expands around the individual supplying the Essence, and once it has fully expanded, this individual (as well as up to two other people she is touching) is inside the globe — the globe can carry a maximum of 800 pounds, but overloading can burn one out very quickly. This globe can be used to transport up to three humans or Dragon Kings, but it is not large enough to transport larger creatures such as horses. The walls of this globe are fairly fragile, providing only 3L/3B of armor for the occupants. However, any cracks, holes or other damage will repair themselves in seconds.

The individual who initially supplied the transport globe with Essence is the one who controls it. The controller can either direct the globe to go to any place he has visited before whose location he is aware of, or he can tell the globe to travel in a particular direction. The Essence supplied to the globe powers it for one journey, regardless of whether the globe transports the rider 10 yards or 10,000 miles. This vehicle travel at up to 100 miles per hour and will immediately land on the first safe, solid surface if for some reason it becomes impossible to reach its destination.

Because their exterior is solid and without holes, it is difficult for anyone riding in one of these globes to launch any form of attack with either weapons, Charms or sorcery at anyone outside of the globe. Assume the globe's 3L/3B soak protects targets outside the globe from attacks launched by those inside the globe. Whenever the globe lands, it deactivates and transform itself back into a small violet ball. When the transport globe deactivates, everyone and everything inside of it is deposited outside of it completely unharmed. While the globe is in use, the Hearthstone in the setting provides no other benefit to the owner.

LIZARD TAIL REGROWTH SPHERE

(ARTIFACT ••••)

The capacity for the regeneration of limbs, tails and even organs is well known as a hallmark of many species of lizards and other reptiles. While the Dragon Kings did not possess such remarkable abilities naturally, their science was able to achieve similar results. The regenerator, as the lizard tail regrowth sphere is commonly called in the Second Age, is a wonder of Dragon King medicine. This device looks like a glittering green globe, laced with red stripes of a jewel-like material and full of a warm,

translucent green slime. Those placed within it experience a remarkable regeneration, even to the point of restoring lost or amputated limbs.

Proper use of a regrowth sphere requires at least 1 dot in Medicine for ordinary purposes and 3 dots to regenerate a limb. While inside the sphere, the patient's wounds heal at 20 times the normal rate, whether they are lethal or bashing. Consequently, this device is especially valuable to the Exalted, whose natural recovery abilities already far outstrip those of ordinary men. The sphere also regrows lost limbs and appendages, as if the character were under the effects of the Bodily Regeneration Prana (see *Exalted*, p. 191). The regrowth of small appendages takes (10 - the character's Stamina) days, minimum 1. The regrowth of limbs takes (21 - the character's Stamina days), minimum 3. Characters in the regenerator need not eat or drink and spend most of their time in a gentle analgesic doze (+2 difficulty to everything, and the character's player must make a Willpower roll for the character to awaken enough to act at all). A regenerator cannot restore life to a dead character.

Regenerators use a tube of herbal and alchemical reagents to form their herbal emulsion. One such tube must be used each time the sphere is activated. These can be prepared by any savant with a Lore and Survival of at least •••• each who has free access to the herbs of the area around Rathless and 48 man-hours to gather them. Additional components must be bought at a great city or manufactured in a alchemical works and, in either case, cost Resources ••••. Anyone willing to prepare the herbs and the other chemicals on contract would charge Resources •••• and probably believe they were involved in some sort of illicit sweet cordial manufacture.

The technician activating the sphere must commit 10 motes to its operation while the patient is within it. The tubes of herbs and chemicals are one-use items. After healing a single person, they cease to function, and another tube must be inserted. For this reason, the tubes are often stockpiled, though most of both the regenerators and the healing preparation were stolen long ago.

OBSIDIAN SHEATH (ARTIFACT ••••)

This remarkable type of armor looks like a lightweight suit of articulated plate made from a glassy yet flexible black stone, similar in appearance to obsidian, hence the name of the item. The armor is trimmed with orichalcum. It provides the orichalcum Magical Material bonus when attuned by a Solar or Dragon King, and Dragon Kings need only spend the normal number of motes to attune to it. When worn by a living creature who expends 6 motes of Essence to attune to it, the armor bonds with its user, acting like



a second skin and providing excellent protection against most forms of attack. The obsidian sheath has the following characteristics:

Soak (L/B)	Mobility Penalty	Fatigue
8/8	-0	1

In addition, if the character's Strength is not already 8, the armor increase's the wearer's Strength to 8. If it is already 8 or greater, the armor increases the character's Strength by +2 instead.

This armor has the advantage of being both quite tough and very maneuverable. A warrior wearing an obsidian sheath need not worry about either limiting his mobility or tiring himself in combat. The elite troops of the Dragon Kings wore this armor into battle, which is why it is so rare in the Second Age, and most surviving examples of it have ended up in the arsenals of various powers. An obsidian sheath is associated with service to the Unconquered Sun, and those who wear it have a greater than average chance of drawing the attention of spirits likewise in his service.

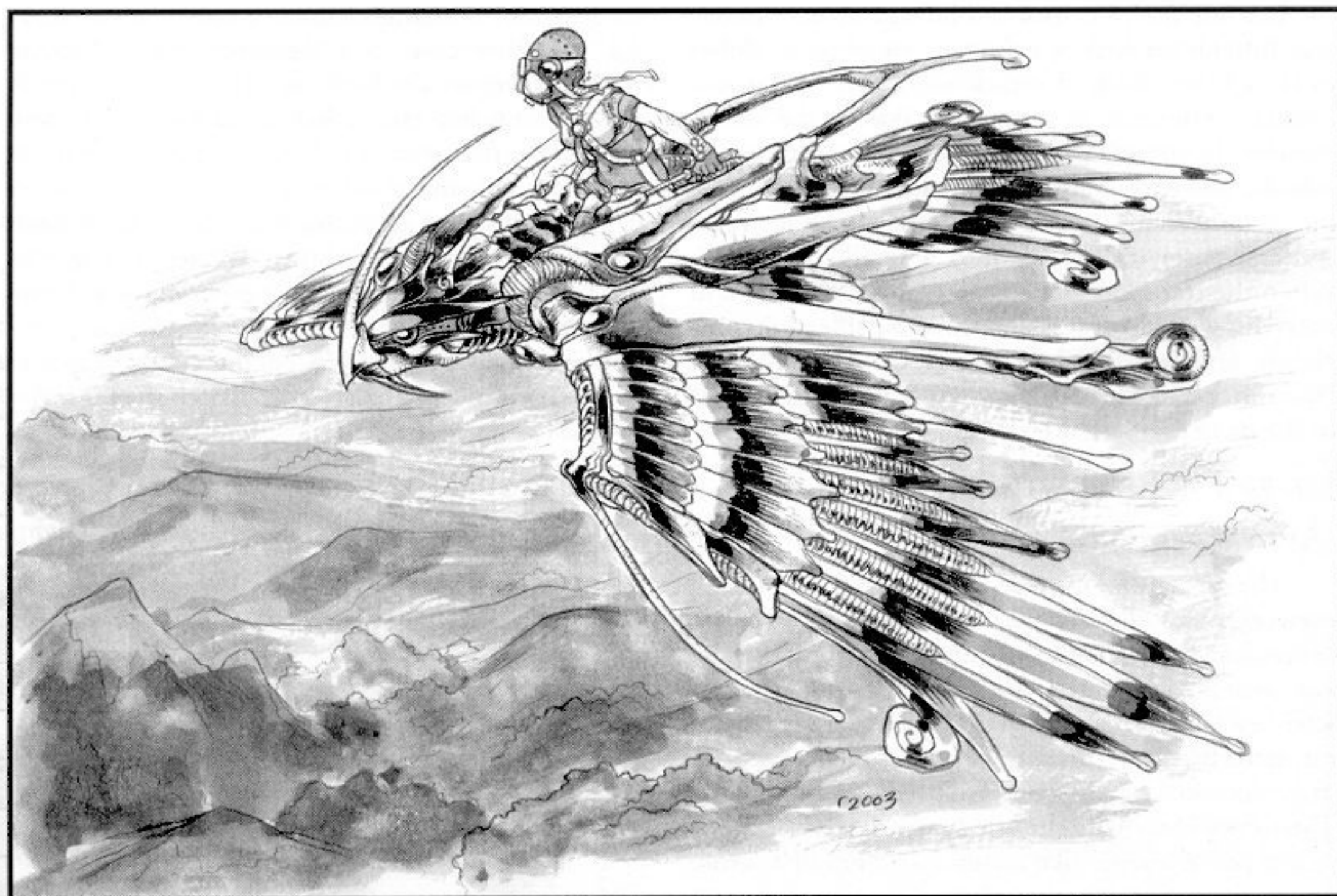
HUMAN ARTIFACTS AND MAGICS

Many mortals and Exalts also lived in Rathless and many of their artifacts remain behind.

WARBIRD (ARTIFACT ••••)

Legends tell of the Old Realm's renowned air cavalry. While many stories talk of troops who could fly without aid, some had to rely upon flying mounts. Because Rathless was located far from human settlements, warbirds and other flying vehicles were one of the most common means Exalts used to visit it. Today, around three dozen of these mechanical flying steeds survive. The Realm has 11 of these prized vehicles, eight are used by Exalted heroes of the Threshold, the Northern god Vanileth has six, and most of the remainder are carefully stored in the two intact flying towers of Rathless.

Most warbirds are the size of a large war horse, with a wingspan of a dozen yards. Warbirds are exquisitely built, with each feather and joint perfectly mimicking those of a living bird. Most known warbirds are made in the form of hawks, eagles or owls, but there are also several raitons and at least one bat. All of these vehicles are made from a variety of magical metals with bright gemstone eyes. The metals are all colored vivid blues, greens, reds, blacks and purples. Warbirds are all highly visible and were meant to inspire fear and awe in those they were used to attack. Warbirds are controlled with a combination of leg movements, weight shifting, built in reins and verbal commands. Dexterity + Ride is used as the dice pool.



Speed +3	Accuracy* +3	Damage 10L (15L**)	Defense* +1
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* The attack and defense roll are based on the user's Ride Ability.

** By diving at high speed toward a target, the warbird can do 15L damage. However, this attack is made at difficulty 2, and the warbird must spend a full turn flying back up before being able to repeat this attack.

Each warbird can carry up to two passengers. Both ride on small saddles built into the artifact's back. These saddles incorporate several sturdy straps that prevent riders from falling off. Strapping into a saddle requires three full turns, but none but the most foolhardy riders will take off without first strapping in. Players of riders who aren't strapped in must make a Strength + Ride roll to avoid having their characters fall off when the warbird first takes to the air. If the warbird is flying in a storm or making a sharp turn, players of unsecured riders must make another such roll, at difficulty 3. Any whose rolls fail fall to their death. Warbirds are constructed so that all riders are protected by the equivalent of 75 percent hard cover (-3 vs. ranged, -1 vs. hand-to-hand) against attacks coming from below and by the equivalent of a target shield (-1 vs. all attacks) against all other attacks. Also, when flying normally, all attacks on the warbird or one of its riders are at an additional +2 difficulty due to the difficulty of hitting such a rapidly moving target.

Warbirds normally fly at 120 miles per hour in ordinary flight or 100 yards per turn in combat. They have 10 health levels, and their metal skin provides them with 10L/15B soak. Losing four health levels causes the warbird's speed to drop by half and increases the difficulty of all Ride rolls by +1. If the warbird loses eight health levels, it must land immediately, but it can still do so safely. If it loses all 10 health levels, it immediately crashes. Anyone who has at least Lore •••, Craft (Metalworking) •• and Occult •• can attempt to repair a damaged warbird. However, each health level requires a separate roll and one full day of work. All such Craft rolls are made at difficulty 3. Attempts to repair crashed and nonfunctional warbirds are at difficulty 5.

Characters must place a Hearthstone of at least level 2 into a warbird to awaken and control it. Awakening a warbird requires only a single turn. Most Exalted keep their warbirds inactive when not using them. When inactive, a warbird appears to be an immobile metal statue. When activated, the warbird moves exactly like a giant living bird or bat but requires no food or other nourishment. Riders can employ all manner of ranged weapons while riding warbirds. However, the total dice pool used for a ranged attack cannot exceed the rider's Dexterity + Ride dice pool. Warbirds designed to resemble raptors can also attack with their claws. Warbirds

that are not modeled on raptors or owls cannot attack in this fashion.

To maintain a warbird, a character must also have least Lore •••, Craft (Metalworking) •• and Occult ••. For every 20 hours a warbird is in operation, a qualified character must spend one hour maintaining the warbird. Every 10 turns of combat adds an hour to maintenance. The maintenance requires an array of specialized equipment that costs Resources ••• and is large enough to fill a one-horse wagon or a small workshop. This maintenance includes the repair and replacement of various small jade and metal components. These components can normally only be purchased in large cities. For every 20 hours of maintenance the warbird is in arrears, subtract one die from all Ride rolls, and reduce the warbird's speed by 10 miles per hour (or 10 yards per turn). If the warbird's speed is reduced below 40 miles per hour (or 40 yards per turn), it can no longer take off and must be given maintenance before it can again be used. Repair materials cost Resources ••• per hour of flight.

Warbirds normally attack at a speed of 50 yards per turn, but when making high-speed dives, they can move at up to 150 yards per turn. Characters on a warbird can only be attacked in hand-to-hand combat on the initiative count during which they attack unless the character attacking them has a weapon with a significant range (at least 100 yards).

TERRESTRIAL CIRCLE SORCERY

CONJURING THE AZURE CHARIOT

Cost: 15 Motes

In the early days of the First Realm, many among the Exalted were envious of the exotic and beautiful transport globes used by the Dragon Kings. Since none of the Exalted could duplicate the Dragon Kings' wondrous crystal artifacts, several members of the proud Eclipse Caste commissioned the Twilight Exalt Liquid Fire to create a spell that allowed the caster to travel in a similar manner. Although less useful than the Dragon Kings' globes of transport, the spell proved exceedingly popular with many of the more aristocratic and refined Exalts. This spell summons a brilliant blue sphere eight feet in diameter around the caster. This sphere is solid on the





inside and protects everyone within from extremes of weather and temperature (including complete immunity to attacks that are essentially harnessed storm effects, such as showers of ice, terrible winds and bolts of electricity). Able to hold a number of human-sized occupants equal to the caster's Essence (maximum weight of 200 pounds per point of Essence), this shimmering vessel flies at 80 miles per hour. However, it can only be used for transport from one location to another. Immediately after the spell is cast, the caster must specify a destination. This destination can be anything from a location that the caster has visited before to instructions to simply fly due West. The sphere rises several hundred feet into the air and flies at top speed till it reaches this destination — or until the caster instructs it to land.

The globe created by this spell cannot hover. Although the sphere slows down as it reaches its destination, the fact that the sphere is solid on the inside and that it is totally insubstantial to any solid objects coming in from the outside means that it is of very little use as a platform for aerial attacks. No one inside can shoot out of the sphere, but arrows and other ranged weapons can easily strike anyone inside. The sphere vanishes the instant it touches the ground, but the occupants cannot leave it until that point. This spell can only be cast during daylight hours, and if the sphere has not reached its destination before the sun sets, the sphere will slow down and allow the caster to determine exactly where it lands a few minutes before night falls. Copies of this spell can be found in a book owned by Relza, the local satrap of artificial flight (see pp. 69-70).

OTHER REWARDS

While the ruins of Rathless are indeed a treasure trove of artifacts and wonders, the First City holds several other significant rewards for those who brave its dangers. This section describes three of the most significant, providing not only rules, but also advice on how these rewards might affect an **Exalted** series in the long term.

MANSES OF THE CITY

The geomancy of Rathless has been systematically manipulated to produce a large number of Manses within the city itself, but there are no longer any such holy spots in the areas immediately surrounding the city.

- **The Pyramid of the Sun is a level 5 Solar Manse.** The Hearthstone is a gem of Solar leadership. The character gains one die in all Presence, Performance and Bureaucracy pools when attempting to lead or govern nations or organizations. In addition, when the character directly leads a body of troops, the troops all gain a +1 bonus to their dice pools in combat and cannot fail Valor

rolls. This effect continues only so long as the Solar is personally leading the troops.

- **The Pyramid of the Rising Sun is a level 4 Solar Manse.** The Hearthstone is a gem of youth. While the character is wearing it, he will always look young and beautiful, even if physically decrepit. The character bearing this Hearthstone has a minimum Appearance of 3 as a result. The Pyramid of the Rising Sun also contains a gate to Yu-Shan, which Filial Wisdom has made no attempt to obstruct.

Sidereals occasionally use the Rathless gate, but the location is not particularly convenient, so the gate is used mainly by Celestial officials. Han-Tha keeps a low profile whenever there are any Celestial deities about; he was frequently under censure or investigation during the First Age, and he has no desire to attract Heaven's anger until he's ready to deal with it.

- **The Pyramid of the Setting Sun is a level 4 Solar Manse.** The Hearthstone is the Stone of the Golden Bier. The character is immediately aware of all corpses, ghosts and shadowlands within one mile and can see and attack dematerialized spirits. The character cannot detect Abyssal Exalted.

All three of these Manses are controlled by Filial Wisdom, and he keeps their three Hearthstones set into his grand daiklave.

Rathless also has five other Manses, four of which stand aboveground, one of which lies below ground in the underways.

- **The Great Observatory is a level 4 Sidereal Manse.** The Great Observatory produces no Hearthstone. All its Essence is channeled into the Orrery of Arainthu's operation. Currently, two members of the Gold faction are attuned to the Manse, but they have not visited it in many years.

- **Beneath the city lies a level 4 Fire Manse, the Central Hearth.** There, a great Essence flux resonates forever around a huge crystal, broadcasting immense amounts of power, power that helps the air pumps in the underways, the lift tubes, the tube-car system, the city's crystal locks and many other of the city's wonders. The Hearthstone is called the Superintendent's Stone, and its bearer can open most public crystal locks, shut down or activate power to any tube car, vent duct pump ring, public light, lift tube or other fixed crystal or vegetable city utility. The stone can only cut off the flow of Essence or turn it on; it cannot repair or refit broken or worn out wonders. Likewise, it cannot shut down the city's Essence broadcast or affect items that do not depend on the city for power (for example, the locks on high-quality apartment villas or those that the Dragon Kings used to secure personal belongings).

The Superintendent's Stone is lost somewhere in the ruins, a legendary treasure. Some say it can never be

reclaimed, for only the Superintendent's Stone can unlock the doors to the Central Hearth. Certainly no expedition so far has been able to enter this Manse.

- **The Temple of Leetya is a level 4 Wood Manse.** The Hearthstone is a gem of green's breath, which allows the Lizard Queen to roll her Willpower one per day as a reflexive action and regain 3 motes per success. Leetya carries the Hearthstone on her person.

- **The central necropolis is a level 3 Solar Manse,** which all three celestial lions are attuned to. The Hearthstone was taken by the Sidereals during the Usurpation and used to help power the defenses of Pleasant Clouds and Albaio tombs. The Storyteller should decide what sort of stone it is based on what type of terrible deathtrap he wants it to power.

- **The lair of the leech gods is a level 2 Water Manse.** The bathhouse was originally constructed by the Deliberative as retreat for Terrestrials during periods of ritual cleanliness when only Dragon Kings and Celestial Exalted were permitted within the temples to the Sun. It produces a gem of acclimation (see *The Book of Three Circles*, p. 114) that makes a character bearing it comfortable in extremely hot or cold temperatures. Temperature does not modify the frequency of the bearer's fatigue rolls. Environmental damage suffered from heat or cold exposure is reduced by 2L.

LIBRARIES OF LOST KNOWLEDGE

At its height, Rathess was home to several important institutions of learning, both foreign and domestic in origin. The Dragon Kings were renowned for their erudition as well as their ferocity, and their capital attracted savants from all over Creation. The Academy of Auspicious Plume (see pp. 33-34) is but one example of this tradition of scholarship. The ruins today contain many reminders of the once-great universities of Rathess, the most significant of which are their libraries and caches of books. Looters and earlier explorers have made off with their fair share of these caches, laying the foundations of lesser colleges in places such as Larjyn, Lookshy and Nexus, among others. Yet, there remain sites yet unfound, filled with all manner of ancient lore and occult knowledge, just waiting to be brought into the light of the Second Age.

The lost libraries of Rathess may hold as little or as much valuable information as the Storyteller desires. Many of the books contain useful snippets of knowledge that could, for example, be of use to a Circle looking to track down the location of a mysterious First Age city or the name of an ancient sorcerer. Such knowledge serves basically as a story hook and should therefore not be dismissed out of hand. Many other books provide knowledge that might grant automatic successes in research-oriented tasks, such as the proper ritual to

summon a demon or to bind a spirit. It is also possible that Rathess may once have held one or more of the occult tomes described in *The Book of Three Circles*, making it easier for the Storyteller to introduce them into his series.

Finally, the lost libraries of Rathess contain a handful of their own unique volumes, two of which are described below. Both are written in the High Holy Speech of the Dragon Kings, and anyone who lacks knowledge of that tongue is unable to grasp their meaning. In addition, one of them is an example of Dragon King technology and requires an even great understanding of the old ways to peruse its contents. Both, however, are quite useful and offer many opportunities for Storytellers wishing to add further complexity to their series.

THE ENCHIRIDION OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

(ARTIFACT ••)

Author: Auspicious Plume

Description: Despite its grandiloquent title, *The Enchiridion* is in fact a short work. Created through the use of supernatural scrivenery, *The Enchiridion* includes far more information than its pages should be able to contain. Much like an almanac or a large dictionary, the book describes a wide variety of topics, from history to geography to theology, in an extremely curt and to-the-point fashion. What the book lacks in depth (and that is considerable), it makes up for in being an excellent primer to many topics relating to the First Age. Anyone who wishes to know, for example, the population of Rathess in the time of Auspicious Plume could find that information in the pages of *The Enchiridion*. The book abounds with such trivial information, being devoted to raw facts rather than anything like true understanding.

Game Effects: *The Enchiridion of All Knowledge* adds +3 to the Lore of any character using it to discover facts about the First Age, but only if the matter is superficial. It provides no bonus to the sort of material that could not be found in an almanac or dictionary. *The Enchiridion* was copied frequently but composed only once. It dates from the mid First Age and paints a generally cheerful image of a First Age whose greatest wonders are in the process of being completed.

GLORY TO THE GHOUL KING (ARTIFACT •)

Author: Unknown

Description: This book is in fact not a book at all — at least by human standards. It is another example of the Dragon King crystal technology, this time put to use to protect the contents of this blasphemous "tome." Looking like a thin square of black stony material, *Glory to the Ghoul King* has a glass plate on one side. When infused with 3 motes of Essence, the plate lights up, displaying sigils in the High Holy Speech whose meaning is unclear





even to native speakers of the language. Assuming one can fathom the hidden meaning of these sigils, the "book" can be read in scrolling text that appears on the glass pane. *Glory to the Ghoul King* is a religious text dedicated to the worship of Han-Tha, the Eater of the Dead. Its graphic descriptions of the rites and ceremonies of this spirit, including necrophagy, are quite loathsome, but they nevertheless provide many insights into his dark cult and its purposes.

Game Effects: To read this text, the character must first know how to read the High Holy Speech. Then, his player must first make a difficulty 3 Perception + Lore roll for the character to understand the esoteric jargon in which the book is written. If successful, the character learns all the basic details of Han-Tha's worship, as described on pages 52-56. Because this tome was written before the fall of Rathless, it obviously contains no information about the current status of his cult amidst the ruins.

THE ORRERY OF ARAINTHU

The Orrery of Araithu (described on pp. 35-37) was one of the crowning achievements of Rathless and a source of jealousy among even the Sidereal Exalted, who coveted its usefulness is wresting the future from the stars. Of course, knowing the future and changing it are two very different things. Despite the powers of the orrery, the Dragon Kings were unable to escape the effects of the Contagion, which consumed Rathless and Shakanzer as surely as it did the cities of other beings under Heaven. Since then, the orrery has lain in disrepair, unused by even the few remaining inhabitants of the First City.

Nevertheless, the fame of the Orrery of Araithu remains. The uncanny accuracy of astrological predictions based on its data is legendary among those who still study the lore of the stars and planets. It is for this reason that both Filial Wisdom and the failed Dragon-Blooded expeditions into Rathless were so interested in the clockwork device. If it could be rebuilt and made operational, it is possible that a skilled user could read fate better than any other being in Creation. Such knowledge would be an immense advantage in the uncertainty of the Second Age.

TO READ THE FUTURE

The description of the orrery already includes guidelines for repairing it. Once made operational again, the device provides data to aid in astrological readings. Astrology is discussed on page 251 of *Exalted* and provides the basic rules necessary to use it. To provide sufficient data to make a possible prediction, the Orrery of Araithu must be continually operational for a period equal to one-fifth the time into the future the astrologer

wishes to look. Thus, to get data sufficient for a reading one year in the future requires the orrery to be continually working for a period of one season. Since the data provided by the device is simply the movement and positions of the planets and stars rather than anything more specific, a skilled astrologer can make multiple readings during the same time, so long as the operation of the orrery is not interrupted. Up to five astrologers can use the orrery at once, and each can maintain readings for a number of questions equal to that character's Intelligence + Essence. Each question must be a single provable query or fact in relation to a single instant in time. For example, an astrologer could learn the location of an object at a given time in the future or if someone will be alive or dead at a given moment.

Once an astrologer has the data, he must then attempt to comprehend it. To do so requires a difficulty 3 Perception + Occult roll. The analysis takes five full days of work, never more and never less and if they fail to analyze the data, it is lost. (Extra successes on the comprehension roll are added to the dice pool for the player's astrology roll.) The character then makes the prediction. This is a standard astrology roll (Intelligence + Occult), with the number of successes determining the accuracy of the prediction.

The number of successes determines the accuracy of the prediction. One success means the fact will be true so long as magical beings do not intervene in it. Three successes means that the fact will be true even if beings below Essence 5 take part. Five successes predicts a truth that is compelling to history despite the meddling of gods, elementals, demons and Exalted. Only the power of the Yozi fetiches, Deathlords and Malfeans can upset such predictions, for the laws of destiny and the tapestry of the Maidens do not bind those beings.

THE FIRST CITY REBORN

In the First Age, Rathless could respectfully lay claim to the title of First City. More ancient than anything in the Old Realm and filled with the wonders of an alien race, Rathless was commanded equal parts envy and awe. With the reappearance of the Solar Exalted, Rathless once again stirs in the jungle. Many Chosen of the Unconquered Sun will find themselves drawn to its ruins, as have many other Exalted, as evidenced by the Dragon-Blooded's interest in them. It is perhaps inevitable that someone will eventually succeed in claiming Rathless as his own. What he chooses to do with it — and the consequences for the world — are treated in the following sections.

IMPEDIMENTS TO RULE

Anyone who would claim Rathless for himself must contend with numerous obstacles. The first is the

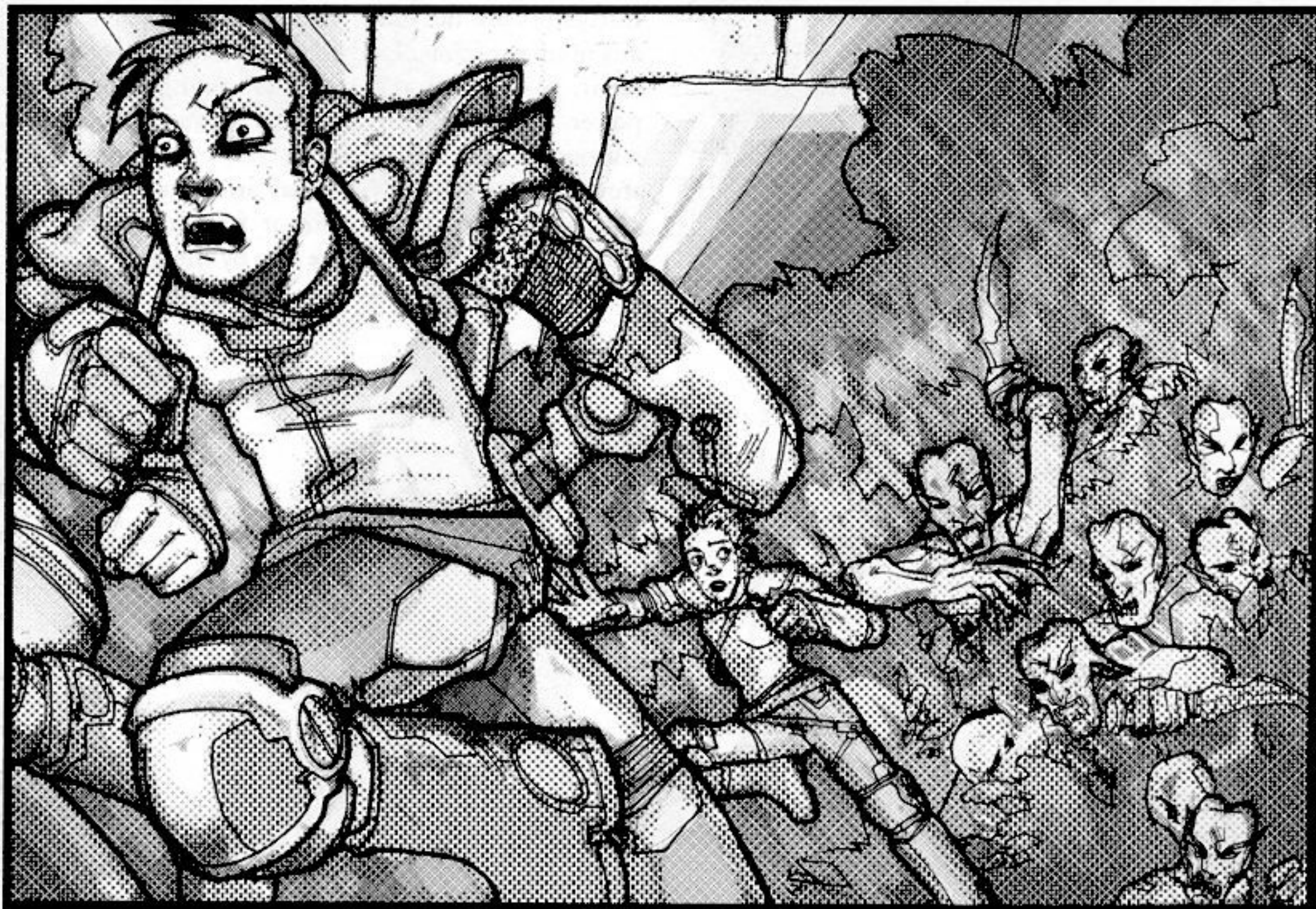
dangerous nature of the ruins themselves. Overgrown with jungle plants and wildlife, Rathless is in poor shape. Most of its buildings have suffered from climatic effects, as well as (perhaps more importantly) their having been left unused for centuries. In addition, unpleasant creatures of all sorts have made homes for themselves, both above and below the ground. The power systems that once kept the city humming are no more, their Essence drained away and the magical devices that aided their function destroyed or looted. The process of repairing any of these systems would take great effort and even greater time. The same holds true for the buildings of Rathless, many of which are just as dependent on Essence to operate properly.

More pressing than the environmental conditions are the intelligent inhabitants of the ruins. Han-Tha's cult, led by Filial Wisdom, has its own eyes fixed on reclaiming Rathless for the glory of the Ghoulish King. The Goblin King and his minions work unceasingly to repair the most important buildings of the city, so as to use it as the capital of a mighty necrophagous empire that they hope will one day pour out of the jungle and into the wider world. In all likelihood, Han-Tha and his Solar minion will instead soon become victims or pawns of Ma-Ha-Suchi, Raksi or the Mask of Winters. However, Filial Wisdom has shown himself a brilliant tactician, and neither he nor the god are afraid to take on even

powerful foes — Filial Wisdom and his servants had little trouble destroying the most recent Dragon-Blooded expedition into Rathless. It may be that they will indeed manage to secure a favorable position for themselves in the magical order of the Southeast.

The Fair Folk are another challenge to be overcome. They occupy Khryal and are attempting to seize control of its reality engines. They fear the Celestial Exalted and worry that that Ma-Ha-Suchi, Green Frowning Bear, Arilak or Raksi will sweep down and destroy their toehold in Rathless. For that reason, they prefer to avoid direct confrontation if possible, preferring subtlety and guile. They hope to trick the Exalted into aiding them before their ruse can be discovered.

The last impediments to rule of Rathless are the Dragon Kings themselves. Whether as stalkers or in their civilized form, the Dragon Kings view themselves as the rightful rulers of the city. Stalkers are inimical to all outsiders and instinctually attack anyone who "doesn't belong" in the First City, which is to say all non-Dragon Kings. The civilized Dragon Kings are too few in number to mount a credible defense of the city against a large or well-armed force intent on taking it. They hate the Terrestrial Exalted and the Fair Folk and will wage a guerrilla war if necessary to eject them from Rathless. The civilized Dragon Kings view the Solars as potential allies and will generally aid them if they can, especially if they





believe doing so will restore Rathess to its greatness. Of course, even civilized Dragon Kings take a dim view of greedy Solar conquerors and will do what they can to undermine the rule of any would-be tyrant that decides to snatch Rathess from them.

THE LONG ROAD

The restoration of Rathess will take more than defeating its inhabitants and repairing its buildings. It needs inhabitants too, not to mention an infrastructure to provide food, water and the other necessities of life. Establishing any of these will take some time, and doing them at all without powerful magical aid or the assistance of nearby nations will be difficult. At its height, Rathess had a population of millions. Since the Contagion, no city could ever boast so many inhabitants. Obviously, the city cannot be directly repopulated, so some parts of the ruins will remain uninhabited. Characters seeking to reclaim the city will need to find a way to defend its vast expanse while inhabiting only a tiny corner of the metropolis.

The Dragon Kings can of great assistance to anyone who wishes to rebuild Rathess. The sleepers can civilize young Dragon Kings and have an excellent understanding of the city's systems and structure. With access to the sort of power that Exalts wield, they could accelerate their own breeding cycle and quickly repopulate the city. This process would still take years, but it is probably simpler than coaxing thousands of humans to leave their homes and enter the jungle to restore the First City.

FAME AND FORTUNE

The restoration of Rathess will have profound consequences. First of all, it is a statement by the characters who refound the city that they are willing to take their place in the world beside other heroes with political ambitions. That's a mighty statement, and one likely to draw an alliance of powerful beings

together to protect the status quo. The First City once represented the height of First Age power and learning. To have it arise from its ashes would send a signal that some Solar is hoisting the banners of ancient glory. If the Dragon Kings are involved in the rebirth of Rathess, the matter will be even more disturbing. Characters using powerful sorcery to raise and civilize large numbers of Dragon Kings are raising an army of supernatural warriors, even if their intentions are wholly peaceful. Further, the Terrestrials know that the Dragon Kings see them as usurpers who illicitly slew their betters, the Solars, and stole rulership of the Realm from them.

However, characters who raise the city up may also find allies as well as enemies. There are any number of ambitious political underdogs in Creation willing to side with up-and-coming heroes or naïve to the limits of Solar power and eager to associate themselves with what they regard as an inevitable victory. Characters ruling Rathess could easily organize an alliance with the Confederation of Rivers or the Bull of the North or with Southeastern powers such as the Mask of Winters, Ma-Ha-Suchi or Arilak.

Finally, a reborn Rathess would probably serve as a magnet for other Solar Exalted. Considering the historical friendship between the Dragon Kings and the Solars, this is probably an unavoidable result of any attempts to resurrect the city. Even if the primary instigators are not Solar Exalted, they should expect any number of Solar Exalted to pop in and check on the affair, possibly in preparation for an attempt to seize power. Even if the rulers can somehow accommodate curious Solars, their presence may cause unexpected troubles in the city. These may arise from personality clashes between the Solars or from the actions of magical beings drawn to the city by their attachments to the various heroes within.

RUINS OF RATHLESS



Ruins of the Dragon Kings

They teem with terrible predatory lizards, poisonous plants and goblins. Yet, men come to the ruins of Rathess, the last, great city of the Dragon Kings, to hunt among its tumbled towers for trinkets of power. This is the fallen capital of a race of god-lizards who were old when man was young. To those who can uncover its secrets, Rathess is both a fortress and a treasure trove. To those who cannot, it is a tomb.

Relics of the Time Before Man

Ruins of Rathess contains information about the crumbling capital of the Dragon Kings and the hazards that travelers to that forbidden city face, from the deadly jungle to Han-Tha, the Ghoul King. **Ruins of Rathess** is both an adventure reference for Storytellers and a setting resource for players. Rathess is a deadly place, its menace offset only by the vast rewards that await those who survive it. Can even the Exalted dare these jungle ruins?

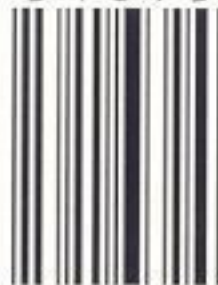


ISBN 1-58846-666-3 WW8824 US \$16.95



1588 466662

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