

Time of Tummult™



AN ADVENTURE SOURCEBOOK FOR

EXALTED

Time of TumultTM

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Man, I just can't win...

White Wolf would like to apologize to Melissa Uran (again) for accidentally leaving her out of the credits for her cover illustration on **Caste Book: Dawn**. Sorry Melissa. Please forgive us?



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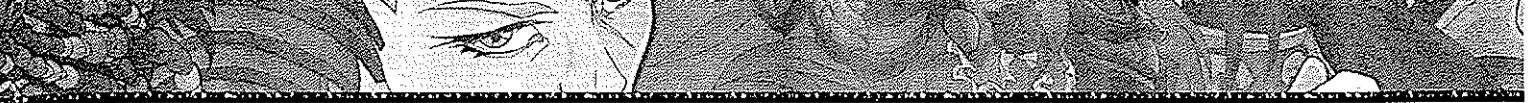
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INTRODUCTION

*I had a dream I walked the desert, I saw a virgin and a lion.
They took me to the Holy Mountain, and showed to me all of these signs:
I saw a fire upon the water, I saw a blight upon the land.
I walked a thousand miles to tell you, these things I saw are now at hand.
—Shriekback, "Inviso-Rays"*

The Solar Exalted are reborn into a world on the verge of an age of sorrows. All around them, old institutions and empires crumble. In this time of danger, those who are daring or fortunate can reap vast rewards, while those who are timid or unlucky face only hardship and death.

Yet, it is the fate of the Solar Exalted to change the world. Even if they were unwilling to plunge themselves into the tempest that marks the beginning of the Age of Sorrows, they have no choice. Beings of power as great as theirs cannot turn their backs on such calamitous events, for the events will find them, even if they try to hide.

Fated to reshape the face of Creation, those Solars that survive will see countless adventures in their millennia-long existences. But perhaps

the most important are those they face now, in the dawn of those existences. Their struggles to learn the true history of the fallen Old Realm, to defeat the enemies of their kind and of Creation and to reclaim the rulership that is their right will change the newborn Solars profoundly, shaping the way they see life and their role in the world. If it is a time of strife and pain, then the pain is that of birth as much as of death. A new world is being forged in the tumult of the Second Age, and the Solars are at the center of events. Will they become the true, just queens and princes that the world desires, or will they become bickering, battling tyrants, soaking Creation with the blood shed in their strife?

Only you and your players can decide.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Time of Tumult contains three adventures — one large one and two smaller ones — involving topics as diverse as the exploration of First Age ruins to work as emissaries of a powerful spirit to a campaign to save Creation from an invasion by strange and alien beings.

The adventures are not made for use as one long series of stories. There are no particular connections between them, other than that they're all dangerous and exciting. On the other hand, there's nothing to prevent them from being used in the same series. A Circle that traveled widely could theoretically become involved in all of them, particularly if the Storyteller is willing to do some work and move the location of some of the adventures (moving the Invisible Fortress to the far South or having the Autochthonians attack in the North). How many adventures you use and in what order depends entirely on the needs of your series and the interests of your players.

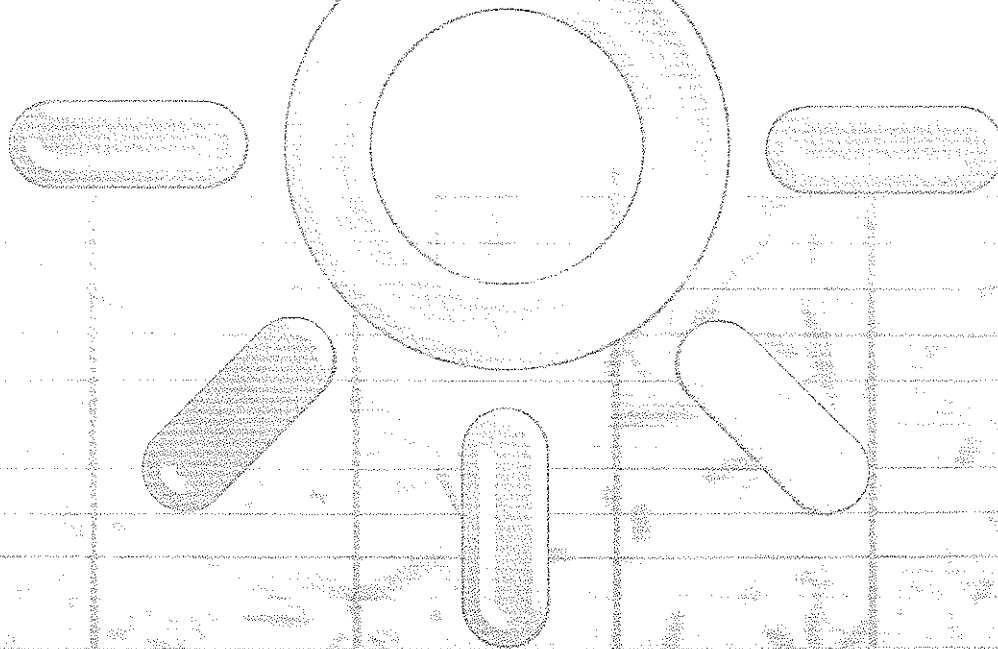
Expedition to the Invisible Fortress details a gold rush of sorts on First Age artifacts that leads the characters into a remote area of the North. The first part of a two-part adventure, this chapter specifically details the characters' arduous trek to the site of the First Age cache — and their rivals in the search. Can the characters defeat ambitious Dynasts and the harsh Northern winter to discover the hidden source of these relics?

Guardians of the Invisible Fortress is the second part of the Invisible Fortress adventure, detailing the actual location of the cache — an ancient Manse

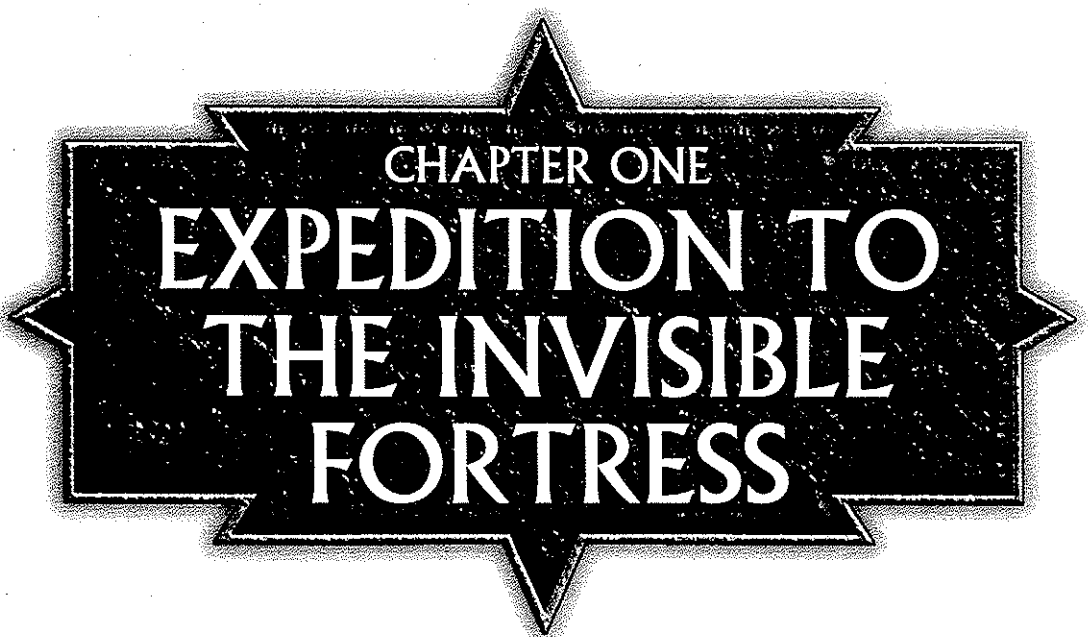
used as a refuge by fugitive Solars in the years after the Usurpation. Having discovered this ancient wonder, can the characters survive the Fortress' mad guardian and claim its power as their own?

Spirit Exiles of the Western Ocean puts the characters in the role of emissaries, and assassins, for Fakharu, a lesser elemental dragon of water who serves as a censor for the Western reaches of the Celestial Bureaucracy. Retained by this powerful personage as his agents to recover his kidnapped lover, the characters may gain the eternal favor of this powerful celestial entity — or earn his eternal hatred through their failure. Can the characters travel to a place where even Heaven will not turn its eyes to save an innocent woman from peril?

Crusaders of the Machine God is perhaps the most momentous adventure in this collection. It tells the story of the servants of the Machine God, Autochthon, who were kidnapped away from Creation nearly 6,000 years ago when the Primordial fled to escape the Great Curse. For over five millennia, they have struggled to maintain the structure of their sleeping god and to appease him through repairs and devotions to stave off his slumbering anger and the waves of mechanical defenders that are his wrath. Yet, now, their reserves of Magical Materials are drying up, and there are too few souls within Autochthonia to quicken a new generation of humans. The only alternative available to the servants of the Great Maker is to attack Creation for its resources. Can the characters stop this desperate crusade to fuel the Machine God's endless hunger?







CHAPTER ONE

EXPEDITION TO THE INVISIBLE FORTRESS



The extermination of the Solars was not a quick and bloodless affair. Like all revolts of its type, it built slowly, and some Solars saw the signs well before blades were drawn.

Of those few that survived the Dragon-Blooded's initial ambush, most were hunted down and slaughtered. The handful that avoided either doom retreated to the wilderness, there either to be consumed by the Wyld or to fade out of existence, forgotten by the world they had once ruled.

As the First Age came to its true close, a half-dozen Solars stood head and shoulders above their peers, admired for their power, intelligence and wisdom. Among them was the architect Kal Bax, an incredibly gifted sorcerer and engineer. No less than 20 Manses bear his distinctive bowl-shaped mark and he had a hand in designing hundreds of others. All modern Manses are built on his principles, and it is believed that he created the first Singing Staff.

BAX'S LEGACY

Only three of Kal Bax's Manses are currently known; Two, the Seat of the World and Mordoth's Spire, have been ~~claimed by the Immortal Order~~ the third, Raven's Perch, belongs to House Sesus. The other 17 either lie in ruins or are lost to the wilderness.

While his Manses are not noticeably more effective than any others, they are some of the most beautiful buildings that remain from the First Age. Because of this fact, the Sidereal prize them highly and have been known to pay great sums for clues to the whereabouts of a lost Manse of Bax.

My Dear Mithra,

How it tears at my heart to be so far away from you, my love. This world, our world, has gone mad it seems, and that madness has driven us apart - but not for long. I have accompanied Master Dax and 10 of his closest friends north. You should see this world up here, it is all white and vast - a far cry from the Capital. There, the air is filled with shouts; here, it is filled with silence. When the wind is just right, even at noon, I can feel the cold on my skin. It is a wonderful sensation, sharp and fresh and new. This will be an excellent place to wait out the war down south. As Master Dax says, "Let the Dawn Casts deal with those thin-blooded troublemakers. We thinkers and artists should not have to dirty our hands." Instead, we will pass the time (short, I wager) in isolation with our thoughts, planning the fate of the world at its edges.

That is not to say we live in common residences. Master Dax has built a great stone mansion right into the mountain - a Manor comparable to those that adorn the estates outside of Sperrin. It offers every amenity from a great library to baths to stone rooms filled with the finest food and drink - more than enough to stuff ourselves while the traitors are put down. Yet, the appearance of the place is less impressive than its function. It is, Master Dax says, a crowning achievement of the Manor builder's art. Not because it offers up fountains of Eternity, but because it offers up none.

I can see you scratching your perfect head now, love, but you read right. This place, which bears my own mark below that of Master Dax, is one of power, yet it does not draw others like us. To another chosen walking mere feet away, it looks like nothing more than a small cave, yet, inside, we can live in luxury for as long as we wish! It is a Manor the likes of which has never been seen before, one that takes the Eternity it summons and channels it back onto itself, thus appearing invisible to the outside world. No turncoat brigades will find us here. We will be free of that conflict. A most cunning charade - and one your beloved was part of. How they will be thrilled to hear this at the next builders conference! Master Dax says I may receive my marble robe early for this! And while that thought comforts by mind, it does little for my heart, which aches for you. Visit soon, my love. I await you eagerly.

Until then, may the Sun and Moon favor you,

Ozandus

forp

Mithra,

It has been too long since we last spoke, far too long. The conflict in the south echoes even here, and we hear stories of Solaris who survived the ambush being executed. I do not want to believe the tales, but our friends no longer respond to correspondence. I do not fear the worst, but I think, perhaps, we might have underestimated the earth-blooded; they are weak but many. Crinis Proles says we should leave this hidden place and come to our brothers' aid, but all she does is talk, and most of us try to ignore her. We are thinking. What good would we be in battle? Certainly, we are more valuable here. We will defend our temporary home and hope for the best. There is always hope. Always.

Words now, my love, Master Bax has gone to the Sun's Court. We found him in the baths, the glint gone from his eyes. He was an ancient man, 15 times my own not insubstantial age, and he will be missed not only by us, his friends, but by the world. Who else will sculpt Eggines' flows of such grace and power? Bring his apprentices, I will be looked to, and I have learned his craft but not his genius. I fear I will fail. I have been practicing though, molding rock beneath the chisels. I fashioned a tomb for Master Bax. It is a low and ugly thing, but it will suffice until we can return him to the Capital and give him the funeral he deserves.

Our food stores, which we consumed with such gusto at first, are almost half gone now, and some of us have taken to eating congealed food once a day. The taste is the same, but too much of it makes one weak. Aurs Orchestrator used to go hunting and bring back fresh game, but now, the lands around our home are almost stripped bare - not by us, dear, we are not that fat - but by the demon laborers Master Bax used and then bound to this place. We expected they would wither and die, but instead, Aurs says they are multiplying. I pray he is mistaken.

On a brighter note, our discussions and debates are truly things of beauty! With the Guardian watching the outside world and the servants catering to our needs, we are given time to exercise our minds. We talk about the world, the future and many new and wonderful theories about Eggines. These are truly gifted people - and brilliant. I feel that, when we do return, we will be toasted in the parlors and salons of the Capital as true thinkers. We may even shape policy after this war is over.

I await your response, my love.

Yours,

Ozandus

for

I die, my sweet. Time moves slowly here, but the seasons and years fade together. It seems ages since I smelled your perfume or held a lock of your hair to my cheek. So long, so long.

We hear nothing from the South, no news or rumors, all is quiet. We retreated to a silent place, and now, that silence is a curse. Crinis left to get word, but she never returned. We do not know if the demon hordes that attack our walls nightly took her or if she is living in peace in the Capital. One or two have tried to follow, but they too have vanished. How did we fall so far?

Our debates have turned to arguments and infighting. We have nothing to fuel us except our own hate now. Love, passion — these things are alien to us. We fight each other, with words and fists. It is a sad cycle — one that I have participated in, to my shame.

We do not starve, and we do not freeze, but we are cold and hungry. Our food is gone, and all attempts to grow more have failed. We have burnt every flammable thing for heat. Our skins have faded from gold to bronze to ash. The elements cannot kill us, but they pick and peck at our will. My will. Aurs Orchestrator, driven mad by this place, put out his own spark. Others have considered doing the same. I have.

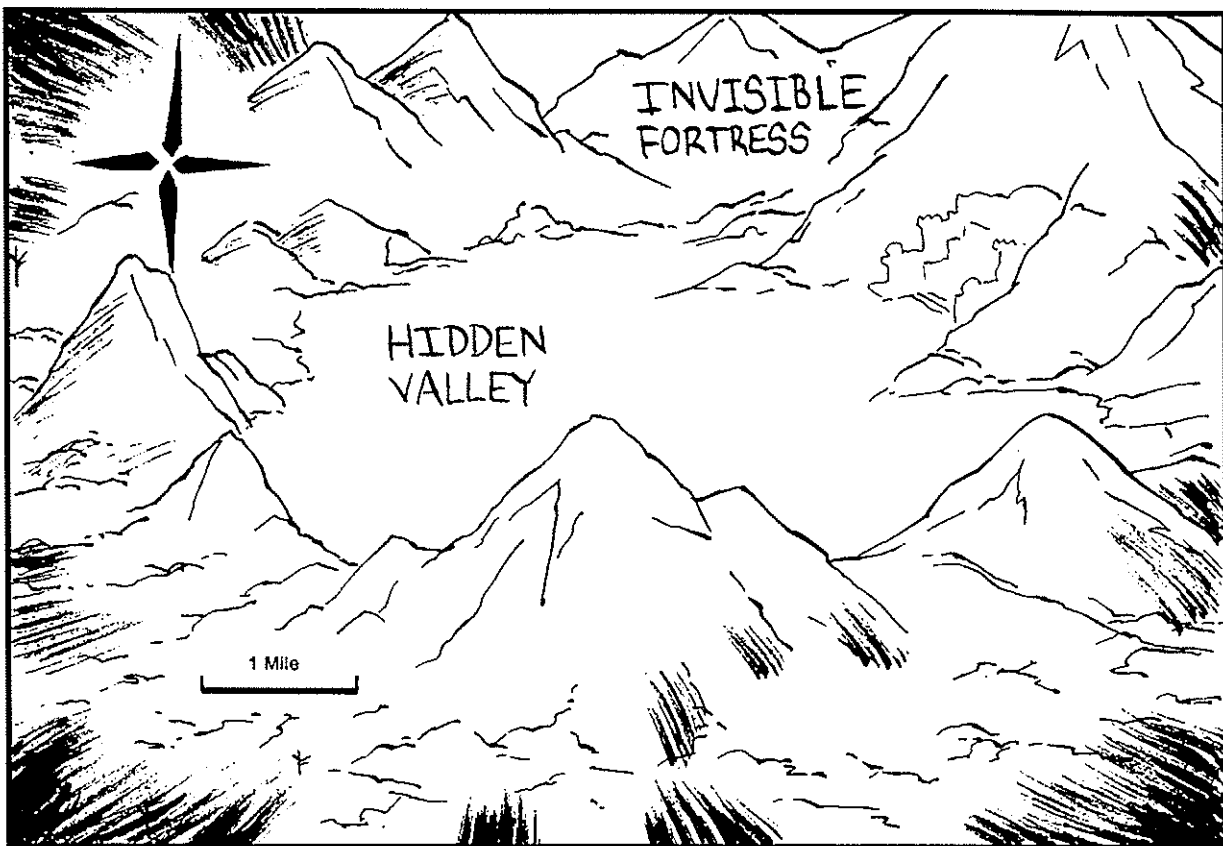
I wrestled this parchment away (yes yes, your willow — I have become cruel in isolation) so that I might write to you, though I know not where you are. I only pray that you hear my cries and send some response.

We were wrong to come here. We thought to live like gods while the world warred, and yet, we find ourselves prisoners of our own desires and fears. We cannot leave, and we cannot stay. So, slowly, we fade away.

Yours,

Ozandag

for you



Bax was an intellectual and gathered around him like-minded Solars (namely, those willing to put thoughts before actions). When he sensed a storm brewing among the "commoners," he took 11 of these Solars (including his doomed apprentice Ozandus Pal) north.


There, away from the prying eyes of the world, he built his final Manse, the Invisible Fortress. Unlike his other creations, the Fortress was not built with raw Essence (doing so would have lit the night sky and its location would not have been much of a secret then), but instead, by a gang of demons. Bax summoned 500 first and second circle demons and offered them their freedom in exchange for labor. They complied and carved out the Fortress in record time. But Bax was not about to let loose an army of demons, much less an army of demons that knew the location of his retreat. So, once inside, he bound them to the place with a powerful rune. The demons could live within a 50 mile radius of the Fortress, but if they went beyond that, they would quickly wither and die.

Bax designed the Fortress for one specific purpose — to hide himself and his friends and allow them to continue to live in luxury while the world warred. It does not radiate Essence like a common Manse, but instead, turns Essence upon itself to create a virtually impenetrable veil of illusion. The Fortress was, in many ways, a world unto itself, protected by strong wards and a Guardian that both defended and cared for its inhabitants. In the end, that proved the Manse's downfall.

Bax died shortly after the Manse was completed. His companions, ignorant of what was going on outside the fortress, grew more and more paranoid. Soon, communication with the outside world stopped completely, and any attempts to leave were blocked by the demons who had grown from a force of 500 to 5,000 strong, breeding with the local fauna and stripping the land bare. The Solars found themselves trapped not by some enemy, but by their own fears. Weakened by the cold and the lack of real food, they fought with each other, sometimes to the death. Over the course of about 300 years, they killed themselves off.

The letters of Ozandus Pal to his Lunar consort Mithra document this decline. Published, possibly by Mithra herself, sometime after the beginning of the Second Age, they attained popularity among the Dragon-Blooded, who believed that the letters showed just how corrupt and weak the Solars were at the end of the First Age (thus justifying the Usurpation). Since the Contagion, the letters have passed into popular folklore, though they no longer tell the story of isolated Solars. Instead, Bax's companions have been replaced by nobles or Dragon-Blooded who fled a war and killed each other as isolation drove them mad. Every person in Creation has heard some version of this story, yet none but the eldest Sidereals know its origin (and even they doubt the Fortress still exists).

The Invisible Fortress is a monument to the craft and achievement of the First Age and a great prize for any characters who manage to reach it. Of course, like all great



prizes, it comes at a high price. Not only in the effort it will take to capture the Manse, but to keep it as well.

The Fortress may act as a side-adventure for your group, or it could become the axis upon which your series turns. This adventure is meant to give the characters a glimpse of what really happened at the end of the First Age (minus any romanticism) and, of course, to challenge and entertain them.

SETTING THE STAGE

It began, as so many things do, with a story. A family of traders had come south from the lands of the ice and snow to sell their village's catch of furs at market in the cities of the coastal strip. It had been a poor season, and their load was light, more rabbit than golden wolf, but they had promised their people they would bring home coin, and they planned to. The traders set up shop in the fur market and hocked their wares for days to everyone, noble and peasant. But all passed them over for the larger catches from Cherak and Icehome.

On the market's final day, buyers from local concerns and the Great Families of the Dynasty scoured the stalls one last time. Among these was a young noblewoman from House V'neef. She stopped at the family's small stall and examined their wares. The man was stunned at his good fortune — this woman could change his poor luck with but a wave of her hand. But the woman rejected even his best pelts and turned to go. Just then, the man's daughter darted from the back of the stall laughing and smiling, distracted by some game — so much so that she ran right into the noblewoman. The man was horrified. A child could be killed for such an affront. But the madame was not vindictive like others of her station. She simply gave the girl a pat on the head and smiled... until she noticed the faded cloak the child wore.

The Lady's breath caught in her throat, and she asked if she might buy the garment. The man apologized for his child's behavior and offered it to the woman for free, to repay her tolerance. As he was handing it to her, another noble appeared, a man from House Ragara. Like so many of his family, he had a nose for goods and wondered why a member of the Dynasty would spend so much time at such a small stall. He too saw the cloak and, pulling out a weighty purse, offered to buy it from the man. The trader was confused, for days no one had bought anything from him, and now, two nobles wished to possess a worn piece of cloth he had found while trapping. The madam offered to beat the nobleman's price and the nobleman the madam's until the sums they quoted would more than triple what the man had expected to make on this trip.

The trader and his wife, who had emerged to see what all the commotion was about, were slack-jawed as the two nobles flung numbers back and forth at one another. Finally, the nobleman quoted a price that would allow the trader and his family to live in comfort for several lifetimes. The madame could not match this offer and conceded the

bidding. The trader was in shock and offered to give the noble his furs as well, but the man was not interested. He simply took the cloak and left, after arranging to ship the coins (which would fill several large chests) to the man, though the nobleman did cast a self-satisfied smirk at the madame before he went on his way. She turned to go as well — but not before asking the trader where he came from. The man answered that he lived in a small village called Wangler's Knob in the far northeast of the Realm. Little did he know that his response would not only be spread throughout the world, but would change thousands of people's lives as well.

THE RUSH BEGINS

Information is valuable stuff in the Realm, and none, perhaps not even the Immaculate Order, prize it more than traders whose livelihoods depend on knowing what people want and how much they are willing to pay for it before anyone else. Likewise, none spread it farther or faster. Inns and caravansaries from Chaya to Nexus were abuzz with the story of the impromptu bidding war between V'neef and Ragara mere days after it occurred. Such a thing was virtually unheard of, and the price the Northerners were paid put dreams of instant wealth into men's minds, of a life off the caravan routes and onto a small estate, secure and wealthy. It was a Guildsman's dream come true. But most considered it just that — a dream, a fluke. The Dynasty however, did not.

Suddenly, new buyers for the Dynastic families began showing up at markets across the Realm. Not the chamberlains, cooks or attendants who usually came, but trusted advisors and, at times, gentlemen and madams. While they would hedge about and inspect a variety of stalls, the merchants began noticing a pattern. They were most interested in caravans that had come from the North, specifically the Northeast, and would consider anything with a hint of gold or silver in it carefully, sometimes spiriting an item away for a few hours of "examination." Whatever the cloak House Ragara had bought was, the other families wanted more of the same.

Two weeks after the incident at the fur market, a representative of House Sesus bought a toy dog made of canvas with gleaming golden eyes for five times its weight in silver. One day later, an unknown buyer, a member of the Immaculate Order some said, outbid three houses for a set of 20 bronze-gold figures carved to look like soldiers. After that, all artifice fell to the wayside, caravans from the North were mobbed with buyers before they even reached market, and it was rumored the Guild itself was picking through them even earlier, hoping to stumble upon an item it could use to increase its influence with the Great Families. Even non-traders were approached — a group of performers from Whitewall had the packs bought off their backs by a servant desperate to please his Exalted master.

Then, spring faded to late summer, and the caravans slowed. The interest of the Dynasts, however, had not. And



so, the traders, no fools they, began to go north. Not just those that dealt regularly with the snow-covered lands, but all sorts, from silk-covered spice merchants to sailors fresh off the boat who smelled money in the air and who were not about to lose their chance at it. They were not the only ones; independent men and women began the trek north hoping to find their own fortune amid the white waste. The families even sent representatives, either to search for themselves or to barter with people on site. Whatever was in the North, it contained things the Dynasts wanted, and what the Great Families wanted, thousands were happy to provide.

By fall, the northern trade routes, even the smaller ones, were choked with travelers going to Gethamane, the cities of the Haslanti League and, increasingly, the small outlying town whose fur shipment had begun it all, Wangler's Knob (or simply "the Knob" as it's called by its inhabitants).

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

Very quickly, the characters will find themselves caught up in this rush north, wondering just what is out there. Even the dullest observer will realize that the items the families are looking for are "special" and "old." A character with a grasp of history, however tenuous, will deduce these are First Age relics. The wiser characters will wonder, "why all the fuss"? While First Age relics are not commonplace by any means, they do turn up from time to time and with much less fanfare. What makes these objects different? The answer may not be so readily apparent (or, at least, not all of it). Any character possessing an orichalcum item will recognize the description of the gold that featured in each of the relics, as will a character with some knowledge of Solar craftsmanship (a simple success on an Intelligence + Lore roll, difficulty 2). It was not gold, but orichalcum, and the artifacts were made for or by Solars. While the Dragon-Blooded cannot necessarily use these items, and even the Sidereal have problems wielding some of them, both prize them for the secrets they might hold and the status associated with owning an item from the First Age.

More important than that is the fact that three First Age relics have been uncovered, all in relatively good condition and all originating in one corner of the world. This fact suggests that there may be something larger up there, perhaps a treasure trove or a city lost under the ice where the Wyld could not touch it. The possibility of this would drive any Exalted to investigate — a cache of First Age items untouched by the elements could thrust a minor house to the Scarlet Throne. Alternately, it could allow a Sidereal to recapture some of the power lost to them through the ages or allow a Solar or Lunar to make great strides toward establishing themselves in the world. Of course, these finds could just be a fluke, but the possible rewards made investigation worth the cost.

That's not to say your characters will necessarily jump at the chance offered them. The way you choose to

introduce the possibility of this adventure to the characters should fit their motivations as a group. If the characters are motivated primarily by power, getting them to go north should be no difficult task — if a trove exists, it certainly offers power. Likewise for characters interested in wealth — even mundane items from the First Age fetch large sums on the open market. Should the characters crave knowledge over power, a lost First Age city or library would offer plenty of that. Perhaps they long to worship the Unconquered Sun in peace and to establish a safe haven for Solars. If this is the case, then the North offers the possibility of both, and more than a few Solars already roam the icy wastes far outside the Realm's grasp.

Your task is to get the characters on the road to the North. If they don't climb on their horses and travel north along with the thousands of others making the trek, then there's no adventure. Any one of the scenarios below could be used to start them on their way, or you may even choose to incorporate elements of several. You know your players and how to motivate them. Feel free to use what you think will work and forget what won't.

Word of Mouth — The simplest and by far the most flexible scenario, characters may hear rumors and stories about the treasure of the North anywhere from a run-down seaport tavern to the finest salons in Nexus. The fact that so much is being paid for these items excites the common people, who dream of cashing in, just as much as it does the nobility, who chart the rise and fall of the Dynastic families. Virtually everyone in the Realm is talking about the fur market bidding war and subsequent events, trying to guess at what exactly was bought and why. While the characters may not get the most accurate information (see sidebar on p. 17 for some sample rumors), they should hear enough to whet their appetites and spur them toward Wangler's Knob.

Witnessing Events — The characters might simply be in the right place at the right time and see a bidding war between two or more Dynasts for one of the three items mentioned above. You may even want them to participate. Certainly, having an item that is obviously made for Solars bought out from under them by a condescending Terrestrial Exalted would motivate the characters to track down where it came from and lead them North. Characters with enough Resources may even buy one of the items away from a Terrestrial, subsequently focusing unwanted attention on the Circle.

A Rival Goes North — If the characters have a long-term nemesis, he may choose to make the trek to the North. Perhaps he has come into possession of one of the three items, or has some knowledge of just what might lie up there. His leaving may prod the characters to follow since, one would assume, they'll be loathe to let their rival get his hands on whatever treasure is secreted under the ice. Should you choose this scenario, you may want to replace one of the antagonists presented later with this rival.

The Mission — Virtually every major organization in the Realm, legitimate or otherwise, will have one (or more) representatives on the road north. Should the characters have some association with a branch of the Guild, a city council, some religious organization, a loose alliance of Solars or even one of the Dynastic families (hardly an impossible turn of events), the Circle may be sent on its way with instructions to bring back whatever it can. The depth of the characters' relationship with this group can vary, they might be proven warriors well-suited for the trip or relatively green and sent on this assignment as proof of their loyalty. Either way they will be expected to carry out the mission to the best of their ability.

TRAVEL NORTH

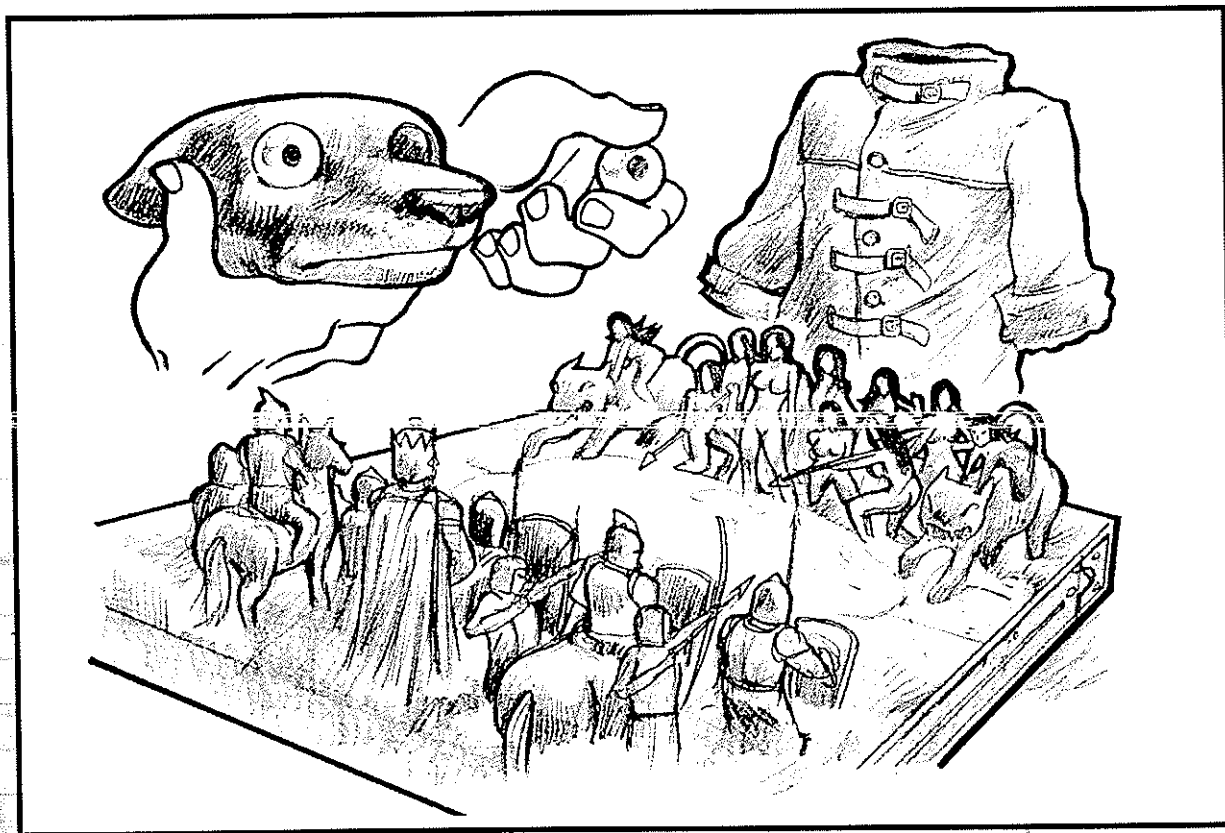
While the bulk of this adventure takes place in the Far North, getting the characters there can be an adventure in itself. Travel, even on the larger trade routes, is always risky. Toll bridges run by brigands or corrupt officials are common, and as one moves away from civilization, barbarians are a constant threat. Merchants travel these roads under heavy guard, and while a lone trader or small party can conceal themselves better and move faster, they also lack any real protection. Once seen, they are an easy target.

The amount of time the characters spend on the road will vary. Obviously, a group of vagabonds who must make the trip on foot with the barest necessities will not be able to move as fast as a Circle that has accrued considerable wealth and can afford to purchase the best supplies and fastest mounts. But at

the same time, travelers weighed down with goods or supplies will move considerably slower than those "traveling light." As a general rule, the larger the group, the slower it moves, and this is especially true if it contains animals, particularly yeddim or pack mammoth. The farther north the characters go, the harder the terrain becomes. The horses that gave a mounted group an advantage early in the trip may cost it days or weeks farther on, especially as grazing land becomes scarce.

It is very likely that the characters will be forced to join a caravan either out of necessity or for the simple fact that there are so many people on the roads that the Circle will rarely be alone. The characters might choose to stay with the same caravan for the entire trip, or they may fall in with various groups along the way. Caravans move extremely slowly, but they also offer characters the safest trip. Going off on their own may speed the trip, but it could also put the characters in considerable danger. There are bandits gangs in the North than can threaten even a Circle of Solars, and even if they can defeat an attempt to rob them, it is unlikely they will be able to do so without spending Peripheral Essence.

The journey north is an important part of this adventure, but it is not the most important part. While you should not allow your players' characters to skip it all together, there is no need to spend an inordinate amount of time on the trip either. You want to give the characters a feel for just how difficult it is for people to travel hundreds of miles but not to distract them from their overall goal.



THE THREE ITEMS

The three items at the center of the current furor are detailed below should the information prove necessary;

THE FUR MERCHANT'S CLOAK (ARTIFACT •)

Fitted for a child between four and five years of age, the cloak is made of sturdy, light-blue wool (faded in places) interwoven with strands of orichalcum. While it provides no significant armor bonuses, the cloak will protect an appropriate wearer from natural heat and cold.

System: When activated, the temperature under the cloak will be comfortable regardless of the weather one is traveling in. The cloak does not however provide any protection against heat- or cold-based attacks. One mote of Essence will fuel the cloak for four hours.

THE HOUND'S EYES (ARTIFACT ••)

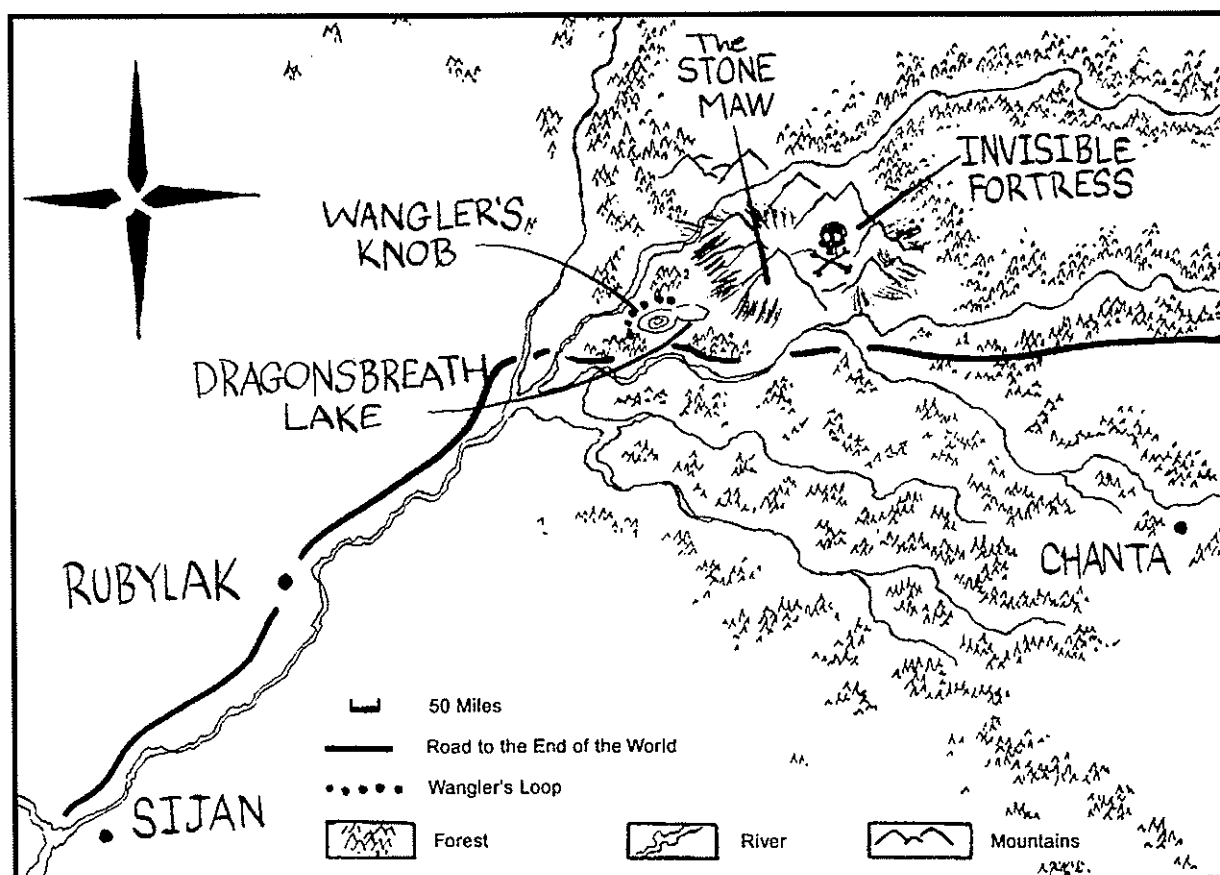
These golden orbs, roughly the size of two marbles, have been carved out of pure orichalcum in the shape of a pair of eyes. When removed from the canvas toy dog, they offer the character possessing them a significant tool for espionage.

System: When separated, the eyes act as an imaging device that allow their user to view a scene without being physically present. She simply places one eye (they are interchangeable) in a room facing what she would like to observe. Then, at any time, she may hold the other to her forehead and watch what is going on in the first eye's range of sight. The eyes must be within 10 miles of one another to function, and while the viewer will see the scene, he will not hear sound nor can he alter the eye's position. The viewer must feed the eye he is looking through 1 mote of Essence for every minute of use. Also note that since the viewing eye is not charged with Essence, any use of Charms such as All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight, which generally detect spy Charms, will not draw attention to the eye.

THE GOLDEN SOLDIERS (ARTIFACT •)

Mounted on a square foot of brown granite, these soldiers are divided into two groups, 10 gold and 10 bronze, which face one another across six inches of bare rock. The golden soldiers are outfitted in thick plate armor and are all male. Four infantry make up the first row. They are followed by three archers and two cavalry. The figure at the back-center (about a centimeter taller than the rest) wears a crown and carries no discernable weapons. The bronze soldiers are outfitted in skins and leather and are all female; three spear-women, five archers and two riders mounted on what look to be large cats. The central figure is a nude woman with hair that flows to the ground. The figures are fastened to the stone and cannot be removed from it by any conventional means. While the craftsmanship is exquisite, even the most learned historian (Intelligence + Lore roll) will only be able to date the scene to the First Age and, roughly, the southern part of the Realm (based on the light armor of the female faction, primarily). One may also assume that the golden soldiers represent Solars, while the bronze may be Dragon-Blooded or a mundane barbarian army of some sort. In times past, this representation might have had meaning, but its significance is lost to modern observers.

System: When fed 3 motes of Essence, the figures will come to life and engage in combat. The entire battle will play out in about four minutes. The bronze figures will charge the gold but be driven back by their superior arms. Spears and swords clash, but the bronze suffer heavy casualties, by the time five of the ten have been "killed" (that is, fallen to the stone, motionless), the nude woman will raise her hand signaling surrender. The golden figures will not stop, however, and what follows is a fairly graphic depiction of the rape and torture of the bronze women. When all the bronze women lie "dead," the scene will freeze for 20 seconds before the figures resume their original positions waiting to be activated again. This relic is a purely ornamental one meant to convey information. Any attempts to rearrange the soldiers using Essence or to stop or hinder their movements will result in the item ceasing to function either permanently or until its figures can resume their programmed action unimpeded.



THE ROADS NORTH

The North is crisscrossed by dozens of trade routes, from wide, paved roads near the larger cites to simple paths that have been worn in the tundra by traders and trappers. Any one of these will get the characters to Wangler's Knob eventually. However, the most direct route is along the Road to the End of the World.

Little more than a rough path in places and, even at its best, rocky and uneven, the Road to the End of the World curves from Nexus up through Sijan and stretches far, far into the Northeast until it eventually vanishes into the Wyld many hundreds of miles to the north of Halta. While its origins are unknown, the Road has become a favorite of some daring Northern traders because it offers them direct access to the fringe towns (where goods can be bought extremely cheaply) and it takes them through an area that is sparsely populated both by barbarians and predatory beasts. What time they lose negotiating the Road's worn paths and treacherous passes they make up in not having to deal with many toll bridges or raiding parties. The Road to the End of the World will take the characters far to the Northeast and leads eventually to a smaller road called Wangler's Loop. The characters can take the Loop directly into Wangler's Knob.

THE CALL OF THE FORTRESS

As soon as the characters set out, the character with the highest Perception + Essence rating will begin to feel a "tugging" on his consciousness. This tugging will be barely perceptible at first and feel a bit like the character has forgotten something important. The further northeast the characters go, be it along the Road to the End of the World or another route, the stronger the tugging becomes. By the time they reach the Knob, it will be an almost constant, albeit low-pitched, buzz in the character's head. The other characters will begin to feel it as well but not until they are closer to the Knob. The lower a character's Perception + Essence, the less he notices. Exalted who are not Solars feel this "tugging" as well but far more faintly than Solars do.

This tugging should guide the characters to Wangler's Knob (and then through the wilderness to the Fortress), thus keeping them from getting too off track. Note that this is not simply a plot device to manipulate the characters. As you'll read later, there is a creature with a vested interest in seeing them come north.

CARAVANS

If the characters do not set out immediately, they will be far from alone on the road. Indeed, the Northern routes are packed with people; merchants, families and fortune seekers, not to mention various Dragon-Blooded and their entourages. Food, supplies and stories are bought and sold as these men and women, desperate for profit, plan their next move.

Because of overcrowding on the roads, the characters will be traveling with someone else almost all the time. Characters may want to formalize a relationship with a group, or they might choose to keep to themselves. Either way, they will rarely be out of sight of another traveler. For that reason, the characters should be very careful about using Charms or coming off as "different." If someone notices a character channeling Essence, either casually or during battle, she will either assume he is a Dragon-Blooded traveling incognito or something else — a ravager, an incarnate spirit, a sorcerer or some other magical being. In either case, the character will be seen as dangerous and to be feared. Thereafter, word and speculation on who and what the character is will spread, drawing attention to the Circle.

Stories, rumors and gossip are a constant on the road; characters will hear a lot of it and will be expected to contribute as well. Indeed, virtually everyone they meet will try to draw out exactly what the characters know, where they are from, where they are going and why. If they do not have a solid, consistent cover story in place, questioners will think they are hiding something. This will only goad most interlocutors into attempting to find out more about the characters — after all, someone unwilling to share information probably has a line on something. Likewise, any attempt to stonewall or ignore questions will make questioners think the characters have something to hide, and if it's worth hiding, it's worth finding out.

While this constant scrutiny is certainly a danger to the characters, actual physical confrontation will be surprisingly infrequent. Given that the stream of traders moving north is so dense, a small band of raiders would do little against them. Only the most daring or best-equipped barbarians will attempt to attack the caravans, and when they do, they target the largest, most ornate wagons for snatch-and-grab attacks. Unless the characters are traveling in royal style, they will most likely be able to blend in, and that affords them some safety.

More common, though far less violent, are attacks and thefts originating inside the wagon train. Petty, drunken fights and pilferage are a fact of life on the road, especially as the travelers move north and food and warm clothing become prized among those less prepared for the rigors of the road.

RUMORS ON THE ROAD

- At the end of the First Age, the Great Dragon Mela flew north. But when she got to the end of the world, she found she was too heavy to fly over the great mountains there. Therefore, she was forced to vomit up the age old contents of her massive belly to lose weight. Among the bones and rocks that came up were all the splendid items she had consumed for safe keeping or took from some foolish adventurer who tried to fight her. That's where these artifacts came from.

- No one can find the Empress because she's not in the real world anymore. She's out there fighting the Wyld, and she's winning. So, as she pushes it back, all these old cities start popping up, perfectly preserved and full of wonders. These treasures we've found so far just scratches the surface — the second wave of items, they'll change the world. Literally.

- It's no use going to Whitewall or the cities of the League. Everyone that does is getting taxed to death and finding nothing but a few trinkets that the Great Families don't seem to be interested in. Whatever's out there is farther to the east, maybe all the way to the edge of the Wyld.

SIDE ADVENTURES

The characters do not travel in a vacuum. The choices they make can lead to complications that might slow their journey or divert their attention for a time. These little forays should not take precedence over the main adventure, but they can add color and keep the characters busy while they travel.

None of these are required, but should they fit your characters or their actions you might think of including them or one of your own creation:

Followers: One of the characters is forced to use her powers either in battle or to perform some task and is spotted doing so by a family traveling near her. The father confronts the character, and far from thinking she is a creature to be feared or dismissed, he pledges himself and his family of four to her. He thinks that she is a magical being of some sort traveling in disguise and wants to help. He also wants her protection on the road. Having four people dependant on the character (and by extension the group) can create some tense and possibly dangerous situations. The family will look to the character for food, direction and protection. To get rid of them, the character will either have to kill them, give them the slip or otherwise manipulate them into leaving. The family will be subservient and annoyingly pliant. They may also, even if asked to keep the character's gift a secret, let a few things slip. Should a Terrestrial Exalted or Guild official hear about the character, he will surely take a keen interest.



Sabotage: The characters wake up one morning to find their supplies gone. Only the clothes on their backs and what they had secured the previous night remain. They must beg, borrow or steal food, clothing and other equipment, making the journey all the more trying. Not everyone is friendly to everyone else on the routes, and such back-stabbing does happen. The characters must find the thieves (who, depending on the company they're traveling with, could be a band of toughs or a family who needs the stuff far more than the characters) and regain their items or spend the rest of the adventure in near-poverty. Even for a group of Solars, the latter can be trying.

Shadows: The characters find a peasant they had been traveling with dead by strangulation, his face contorted and purple, with a small piece of parchment stuffed in his mouth. Written on it, in Rivertongue, are the words "servant of the dark." Solars, Sidereal and Dragon-Blooded are not the only Exalted to take an interest in whatever lies to the north; some Deathlords are sending their minions as well. Such an agent is a cancer in any caravan, eating away at the moral of the travelers and more than happy to eliminate anyone he feels is getting in his way — or too close to his secret. There may be more such agents traveling with the players' characters. And who killed the one they found dead? And was he actually an agent of the Deathlords at all, or was the note just an attempt to make a sordid murder seem justified?

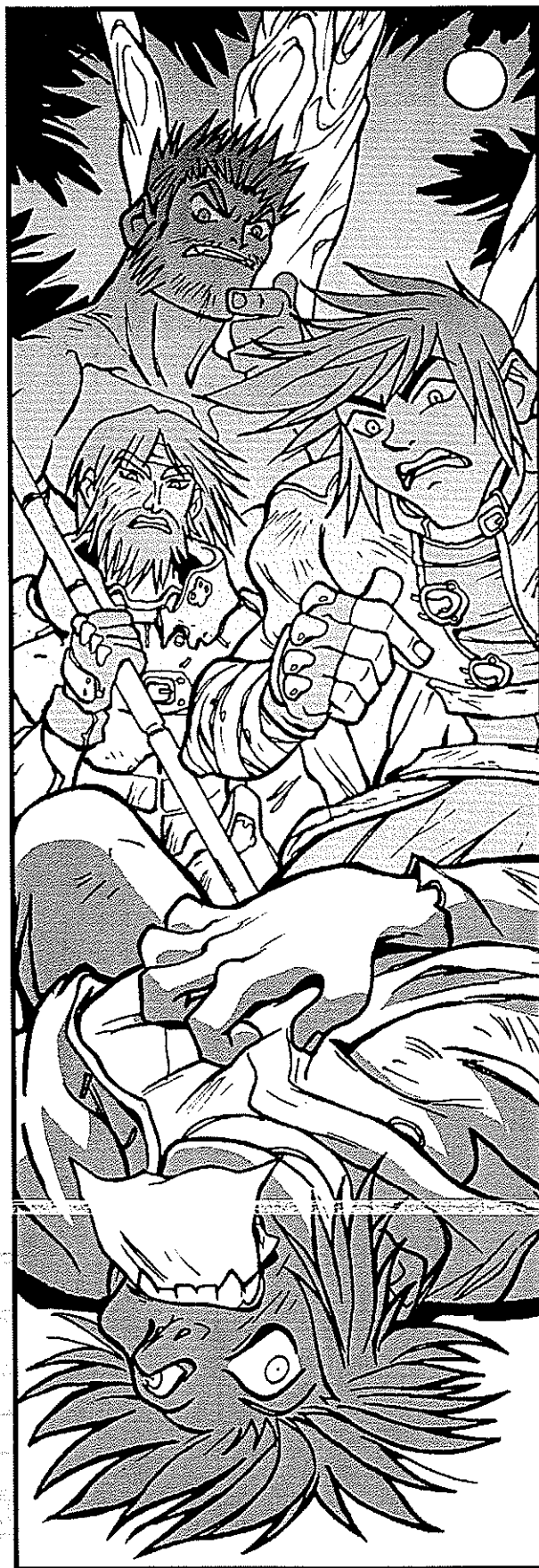
WANGLER'S KNOB

Founded three centuries ago, Wangler's Knob is one of the many independent settlements that dot the far north. The town draws its name from its founder, Myan Wangler, and the wide hill it sits upon, which arcs, wave like, over the steam covered Dragon's Breath Lake below, ending not in a peak but a rounded, rocky knob.

Myan Wangler was a trapper and trader dealing with the barbarian tribes of the Far North, and the Knob began as little more than a stockaded trading post. Over the centuries, the Wangler clan multiplied, and others began to filter in, fleeing the disease, strife and oppression of more settled lands. Due to the town's two most important features, Dragon's Breath Lake and the settlement's almost supernatural peace, the Knob has continued to grow steadily and, by the current day, sports a population in excess of 10,000, mostly farmers, craftsmen and trappers.

ARRIVAL

Regardless of how long you have the characters spend on the road or how many times they are sidetracked by other quests or mysteries, they should arrive in Wangler's Knob just as the first sizable storm of winter hits (effectively trapping them in the North for three to five months). You may wish to vary this, but it's easier to vary the weather than it is to vary the timetable.



DRAGON'S BREATH LAKE

The Knob's most striking landmark, Dragon's Breath Lake, sits below the village and is perpetually covered in mist. Roughly comma shaped, the lake is one mile across at its widest point and up to 400 feet in depth. It is home to muskrat, salmon and, in its depths, a species of blind, albino fish that can reach up to 10 feet in length called whiggfish. The lake is fed by a half dozen mountain streams and three natural hot springs at the its center. These hot springs keep the core of the lake liquid even at the height of winter, spreading warmth throughout the surrounding farmland, adding a few weeks to the beginning and end of the growing season and making the fields of the Knob surprisingly productive for land this far north.

The hot waters at the lake g's center react with the cold mountain air to produce a dense white mist, which, during the winter, can cover the lake and seep into Wangler's Knob. While the characters are at the Knob, the mist will be ever-present, slightly obscuring sightlines, but no more than a thin wispy fog. However, in the early mornings, the mist can be thick and almost impossible to see through. This dense mist usually burns off by midday or is blown south by mountain winds.

THE BASICS

Wangler's Knob has been able to maintain a surprising amount of self-sufficiency throughout it's existence, both politically and economically. The Knob has never paid taxes to the Realm nor has it, like so many other similar settlements, ever been incorporated into a federation of city-states or some petty empire. While it does maintain good trade relations with all the major cities of the North and the Realm, for the most part, they consider the Knob far too small and out of the way to worry about. Thus, the people of the Knob rule and take care of themselves.

Thanks to the fact that the land around Dragon's Breath Lake is extremely fertile, the citizens of Wangler's Knob are able to sustain themselves on wheat, millet, corn and squash through the long Northern winters. Likewise, the surrounding wilderness provides ample game, including caribou, mammoth, rabbit and yeddim, while the six streams running off Dragon's Breath Lake (the Dragon's Whiskers) are choked with salmon in the late fall. By the time the first snow hits, every family in the Knob has a well-provisioned cellar stuffed full of salted meat, grains and vegetables that will carry them through the worst months of the winter. Wolves, bear and the occasional yeti are also hunted, but primarily for their fur. These animals are rarely eaten unless the people are desperate for food.

Small-scale mining operations in the nearby mountains provide iron to forge tools and weapons, while the dense forests supply ample wood for construction and fuel.

The Knob's primary export is fur, including bear, beaver, mink, muskrat, rabbit and wolf, and sales of these pelts in the south bring a tidy profit to the area every year. Attempts to ship the village's most ample resource, timber, have failed due to the poor roads leading to the Knob. Because the Knob is so self-sufficient, it imports little but salt and sugar. While finished goods from the south are prized, they are not actively sought, as very few people in the Knob have that level of disposable income.

Perhaps more unusual than the Knob's independence and self-sufficiency is it's almost unnatural peace. Barbarian attacks, a seasonal occurrence in some Northern towns, happen, at most, once a generation, and the last assault by another city-state is lost in the town's history. Even Wyld-touched monsters and spirits rarely bother the settlement. While internal strife is present, strong factions have never formed because one family, the Wanglers, have controlled the Knob for its entire existence. The people of the Knob consider this normal and see nothing particularly odd about their situation (it's not like they live easy lives this far North), but anyone familiar with small towns on the frontier will realize quickly that this village enjoys an enviable level of stability. At least it used to.

WANGLER'S KNOB TODAY

The town the characters enter during that first snowstorm of winter will not be the peaceful, prosperous settlement described above. Over the last two months, more than 40,000 merchants, travelers and treasure hunters have invaded Wangler's Knob. They have stormed the city and, after filling every spare room in the town proper, overflowed onto the fallow fields at its base, setting up a sprawling, makeshift tent city. Crime is up, drunkenness is common, food is at a premium, and the people of the Knob are back on their heels wondering why these people have come and, more importantly, when they will leave.

The characters will be confronted by a cacophony of people and animals from all parts of the world, milling about, leaving for the wilderness or coming back, usually bloodied and empty handed. By this time, all the characters should feel the odd tugging sensation and instinctively know they must continue North, past the Knob and into the distant mountains. Before they do however, they need to gather information and supply themselves for the harrowing journey ahead.

THE TENT CITY

The characters will first have to make their way through the tent city that surrounds the town itself, forming a half-mile barrier between the wilderness and the Knob's low walls. Housing 30,000 people, this hodgepodge of lean-tos, tents and even the odd pir house has no discernable pattern. The paths through it are winding, and

THE SECRET OF WANGLER'S KNOB

The Knob has been able to enjoy this level of peace due to a contract made long ago with a powerful winter spirit. At the end of his life, Myan Wangler trekked into the wilderness and, for seven days and seven nights, prayed and made sacrifices to the local gods. His devotion attracted the attention of a wendigo, an ancient spirit who had ruled the icy waste around Wangler's Knob for centuries. Myan suddenly found himself confronted by a massive, gaunt beast of ice and snow whose breath could freeze the blood in his veins and whose deep, blue eyes had seen uncountable numbers of men, women and children perish over a thousand years of long winter nights. The trader-cum-pioneer was able to keep his wits, however, and a bargain was struck; the wendigo would protect Wangler's Knob, and in return, it would be given every townsman past the age of 50 to do with what it would.

And for the next 300 years, it worked. Invading barbarian armies found blizzards or avalanches barring their path to the Knob at every turn, while their generals fought vainly to protect them from frostbite and hypothermia, with little success. Eventually, they just stopped trying, considering the Knob and the land around it possessed. The wendigo had done its job. So, too, did the people of the Knob; at age 50, they dutifully tramped into the forest to be claimed by the great spirit, content to have had 50 good years of peace and prosperity in the harsh North. No one spoke openly of it, but all accepted that this sacrifice was the price of living in the Knob. Then came the Dragon-Blooded.

THE HUNT

It took Sesus Lahor and his fellows about a day to realize what was going on. Myan Wangler's descendent, Miles Wangler, was approached and offered a choice; tell them the location of the wendigo, and trade its protection for the Realm's, or have the Knob burned to the ground for heresy against the Immaculate Philosophy. Not surprisingly, Miles chose the former. Since that time, the Dragon-Blooded have been planning with great glee to hunt this spirit of winter darkness. Not only is it their duty to destroy this spirit, but it's also a lot more entertaining than digging around for old trinkets.

The Terrestrial Exalted will begin the hunt for the wendigo five days after the characters arrive in Wangler's Knob. It will be a grand, gaudy affair with Lahor and the other high-ranking nobles leading hundreds of beaters. Given the caliber of Dragon-Blooded involved, they will be successful. Four days after the hunt begins, the nobles will return to the Knob having destroyed the wendigo and hold a great feast. Lahor will proclaim his great triumph and brag at how the town is far better off than it was. The people of the Knob do not necessarily agree, as the Realm is far less likely to support them than their dark patron, but none are foolish enough to complain publicly.

Like the Terrestrial Exalted, the characters will probably realize something is amiss as soon as they enter the Knob, the lack of any old people being a major clue. Questions about the wendigo are side-stepped by the townspeople, as they aren't about to let outsiders in on their secret, even if most know Lahor is planning a hunt. Most of the inhabitants of the Knob want the wendigo to prevail and don't want to give Lahor any more help than he already has. If asked, the inhabitants of the Knob will claim that no one lives over 50 because of the harshness of the environment and that there is no formal graveyard because the ground is hard and, thus, everyone is cremated and interred in the temple. They will state that this ceremony is how they remain sound. However, the Dragon-Blooded are much looser lipped; indeed, the hunt is pretty much all they talk about.

As the day of the hunt draws closer, the nobles increase their activity. This may be a boon for the characters, the Dragon-Blooded are busy and far less likely to notice a Solar Circle snooping about. But it may also cost the characters. If they remain in the Knob for four days, the characters will each have two pieces of survival equipment commandeered by soldiers arming for the hunt. Any attempt to avoid or resist this will bring the characters to the attention of the Terrestrial Exalted, a generally unwelcome event. Commandeered items will not be returned, and the characters must either replace them or live without them. Also, the Dragon-Blooded have hired all the experienced guides in the Knob; the characters will have to venture into the wilderness alone unless they can outbid the nobles for a woodsman's services. Not only is this event unlikely, it is also liable to attract attention to the characters.



it seems as though people simply decided to camp where they found the first available space (which is, of course, exactly the case). Since this is where the characters will be spending however many nights they stay in the Knob, they should be looking for a place to camp themselves.

Even though the atmosphere of the tent city is chaotic, it is a relatively peaceful place — meaning murders and major theft are kept to a minimum — due primarily to the presence of Tal Tak. Tal is a veteran soldier who served in the legions of the Realm before moving north to the Knob a decade ago. When the Wanglers heard of his experience, they offered him the job of head lawman, and failing as a farmer, he took it. Tal is in his late 40s, a massive man, with thick arms, a deep rumbling voice and long white hair tied back in two braids. It is rumored Tal has Icewalker blood in him. When the scions of the Dynasty invaded the Knob, they took every good room in the town and brought their bodyguards as well. Tal is far from stupid and knew that he could never investigate these nobles for any crime they might commit and that, with their own magical powers and their soldiers all around them, they certainly didn't need his protection. But the mortal fortune seekers were a different matter. Over the last two months, Tal has recruited a makeshift police force of about 100 local farmers and has had them patrolling the tent city, trying to keep order as best they can. Tal is a busy man and has little time for small talk. He will most likely ignore the characters and will volunteer nothing. If pressed with questions, his responses will be brief and to the point.

Food is at a premium among the tent city's residents. The game brought in by daily hunting parties and what grains they can buy off the Knob's residents only go so far. Some of the other Northern towns do send food caravans to the Knob, and while these always make a tidy profit, they have shrunk in number now that winter is beginning to set in. It's probably a good thing the Dragon-Blooded are hunting the local spirit of ice and hunger because, in the next few months, the sort of mass starvation that's going to occur would swell his power vastly.

Jade has very little value here; a loaf of bread will buy the characters far more than a heavy purse, and there are things to buy in the tent city. Exploratory gear is being sold at a discount (one half the price given on the table on pp. 324-325 of the *Exalted* main book), though this gear is usually of poor quality, as are various medicines and services. No less than a dozen newcomers have set up blacksmith forges around the encampment and are more than happy to repair damaged weapons, armor or tools. Tanners, fletchers, seamstresses and craftspeople from virtually every other calling (including two whitemiths and a half dozen scribes) are available should the characters need them.

The tent city also sports a number of drinking and gambling dens, which offer bitter, home-brewed liquor and games of chance. These tents are generally active well

into the wee hours of morning, and Tal Tak always has two or more men in each monitoring the patrons. The most commonly played game is Mela's Bones; armed with three six-sided dice each, two opponents ante and then "do battle" for three turns, rolling their dice and collecting points equal to whatever they roll. At the end of each turn, the characters have the option to up the bet based on the point totals at that time, if one does so, his opponent can either match the bet or concede. After the third turn, the character with the most total points wins the pot. Should the characters take part, the Storyteller should roll for their opponents. A player may make a Dexterity + Larceny roll at difficulty 1 to reroll his lowest result each round. Note that any character who goes on a long winning streak will be remembered, and the next night, she will find her opponents unwilling to bet much. Also keep in mind that the characters are not the only ones in the tent city with Larceny scores and that the traditional result of a botch when cheating at gambling is a lynching.

These gaming tents are also an excellent source of gossip and stories from the wilderness; a treasure hunter with a few glasses in him will talk a character's ear off. While most of the stories are far fetched (to say the least), some do hold at least a kernel of truth. At the very least, the characters' fellow travelers can offer some basic survival tips.

THE MADAM

Most of the tents and shelters in the tent city are interchangeable canvas or hide affairs, but one stands out — the residence of V'neef Mahina, the only Dragon-Blooded to make her home outside the walls of the Knob. Madame Mahina resides in a large, eight-roomed tent of blue cloth trimmed in gold, which lies in roughly the center of the encampment. Mahina was the first of any Great Family member to arrive in the Knob, and she is, by far, the best prepared for the challenges of the wilderness. She is, in fact, the noble from House V'neef who first discovered the fur merchant's cloak those many months ago. The other dwellers in the tent city speak of her in reverent tones. Even the most bitter anti-Dynasts concede that she has done a lot of good. Mahina feeds 500 women and children a noon meal each day and has provided help to many families who were at a loss for shelter and supplies. She does so, it seems, for nothing more than the latest gossip.

The first night the characters are in the tent city, a representative of Madame Mahina will visit them, along with each and every other new arrival. This soldier is not a typical imperial bodyguard, but rather, a hard-bitten legionary. This veteran of the cold is clad in thick furs and sports a Northerner's accent. The man will not try to mislead the characters, nor disguise who he speaks for. He simply greets them, welcomes them to Wangler's Knob, asks where they come from and if they have any news.



TAL TAK

Description: Tal Tak stands well over six feet and is built like a mountain, with thick arms and craggy features. His long white hair is tied back in two braids, and his eyes are a cold, almost ice blue. Tal is a hard man and rarely smiles, but he is not quick to anger. However, should someone arouse his ire, she will pay the price.

Roleplaying Tips: You have been the law in Wangler's Knob for a decade and, over that time, have gained respect as a fair and honest man. You want all the facts before making a decision, and while you don't mind answering questions, you will not engage in idle gossip. You have more important things to do.



Nature: Judge

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

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

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 3, Medicine 1, Melee 3 (Chopping Sword +2), Presence 1, Resistance 1, Socialize 1, Stealth 1, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 3, Followers 5, Influence 2, Resources 2

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Fist: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5

Knife: Speed 9 Accuracy 6 Damage 4L Defense 4

Chopping Sword: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 7L Defense 8

Dodge Pool: 3/0 **Soak:** 5L/9B (Reinforced buff jacket and target shield, 5L/6B, -3 mobility penalty, +1 difficulty to attack)

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

Essence: 1

Other Notes: None

If the characters have a cover story in place and simply relay some old news and banal answers, the soldier will smile, nod, ask a few follow-up questions and then leave, never to bother them again. However, if the characters are wearing fine clothing, especially silk, gold, silver or any of the Five Magical Materials or if the hint at their own station (for example, mentioning the "tugging" they feel) or say that they come from Nexus or the Imperial City, Mahina herself will visit them the next night.

If the characters refuse to answer his questions or take a haughty or condescending tone, they will be attacked a few hours later by a hail of flaming arrows not aiming to kill them but simply to burn their tent to the ground. V'neef may be a minor house, but it demands respect.

Should Mahina herself visit, the characters are confronted by a young woman with long black hair, light armor and a cloak emblazoned with her house seal. Mahina

follows up on the questions her man asked the night before, trying to ascertain just how much of what the characters told him is fact. She may ask about any gold or jade items the characters possess, but she will not demand they turn them over to her, nor will she make any wild accusations (accusing the characters of stealing them, being renegade Dragon-Blooded or whatever). If anything, the characters will find Mahina to be balanced, wise and fair, as close to genuinely good as one can find among the Dynasts. Madame Mahina will offer little information about herself, other than that she was sent North by her mother and that she plans to make a far-ranging expedition in the next few days, which is why she is interested in anything the characters might know. Before she leaves, Mahina will give the characters a parting gift (three freshly killed rabbits if they look to be of average means, two slaughtered stags if they appear of higher station), wish

TENT CITY RUMORS AND GOSSIP

• Tell you the truth, I haven't seen any new treasures yet. Sure, every few days, someone'll come out of the wilderness with some knickknack, but more often than not, it's just a bit of tack or armor someone else dropped. But I'm not discouraged. I hear that we haven't heard of any new items because the real ones that've been found get auctioned off in town in secret. The Dynasts are hoping we'll all decide there's nothing up here and go away, leaving them to take whatever they want for free. Well, they aren't going to trick me like that. I ain't leaving without my fortune.

• My wife made me come up here. "Get out of the city," she said, "Get out of your father's tanning shop, be a real man for once, take a chance." Dumb cow. I've been up here for three weeks and have gone out there everyday, and you know what I've found? Nothing. I haven't even seen a rabbit or bird, it's like this place is cursed or I'm cursed or something. I'm going back south soon, with or without the wife.

• I... aww, you look like a good guy... I found something. I went out 10 days ago and got lost. I just walked and walked toward the mountains and came to this craggy pass that looked like a big mouth. It moaned at me. I wasn't about to go in there, not with winter coming. A man could get trapped real easy. Anyway, I turned around to come back and tripped over this. See, it's a regular looking knife, but watch. It balances, I can sit it on any edge at any angle, and it'll stay up. That's got to be worth something, right? Anyhow, I'm going to sell it and get out of here. Don't tell anyone, okay?

THE PERFECT TALON DAGGER (ARTIFACT ••)

Should a character come into possession of this knife, by whatever means, she might find it quite useful. Appearing to be nothing more than an average throwing knife, it is only on closer inspection that a character will notice flecks of orichalcum in its blade.

System: The perfect talon dagger is a supremely crafted blade made specifically for throwing. The knife can be balanced on any edge indefinitely and, in combat, has +1 accuracy, a +2L damage, a 3 rate and a 20 foot range. A character may increase these bonuses by feeding the knife Essence; for every 2 motes spent, it gains another +1 accuracy and increases its range by five feet. However, these improvements are temporary, and the knife must be recharged for each throw. A character cannot spend more than 10 motes of Essence improving the blade. These bonuses stack with those provided by Charms





them luck and invite them to send for her anytime if they wish to talk.

If Mahina does not visit the characters, they will hear roughly the same facts (that she was sent north and plans to leave for the wilderness within the next few days) in routine gossip.

The characters should not mistake Mahina for an ally. Although she is a generous woman, she is still a Dragon-Blooded and a Dynast. She will use any information they give her ruthlessly and, if she is certain they are Solars, will attempt to kill them. Still, she is not overtly hostile, and that may count for something. If nothing else, she is a moral, honest Terrestrial Exalted — something many of the characters may never have encountered before. Mahina is well aware of her family's shortcomings and hopes that if she can find the source of these First Age artifacts that they might help the V'neef, if not to gain the Scarlet Throne, then, at least, to obtain some measure of respect from the other families.

THE KNOB PROPER

At the center of the tent city lies Wangler's Knob. The village proper begins with narrow wood and stone houses at the base of the knob-shaped hill and runs all the way to the three-spired temple at its top. The Knob is actually divided into three separate districts: the Farmer's District, the Craftsmen's District and the Mayor's District. While the boundaries between these are somewhat blurred, each offers its own attractions for the characters.

The entire town is surrounded by a low semicircular wall that runs around the base of the hill. This wall is made of rough volcanic stone and is thick (10 to 12 feet in places) but stands only five feet high. It is clearly not built to withstand a serious attack but, rather, to keep out hostile wildlife, buffer the townspeople from cutting northern winds and act as a barrier against snow drifts. The wall has two entrances, Winter Gate and Summer Gate, which lead to the Knob's two main roads (Winter Road and Summer Road). Both gates are manned by two of Tal's guards around the clock but, other than that, have no additional armament. Guards do not patrol the outer reaches of the wall. The gates open at first light. They close an hour after the sun goes down and in times of severe weather. Anyone inside the town who wishes to exit into the tent city will be allowed to do so at any hour, but reentrance isn't permitted unless the guards recognize the person trying to enter as a resident of the Knob. Entering the town illicitly after the gates have been closed is no real challenge, as the walls are low and unpatrolled. Any character with even basic climbing skills will be able to traverse them with ease.

THE FARMER'S DISTRICT

The largest of the town's three districts, the Farmer's District is the population center of the village and the home

MAHINA'S REACTION TO SOLARS

Should Mahina conclude the characters are Solars, by noticing an orichalcum item, witnessing the use of a Charm or getting word of such through one of her many informants, she will move against them. Mahina will not herself attack, but a half-dozen of her men dressed in civilian clothes will fall upon the characters' tent late one night seeking to kill them. Should the characters ward off this attack, Mahina will not follow up directly. Instead, she will let it be known that no one in the tent city is to sell supplies or food to the characters. She will then tell Lahor Sesus, the other Dragon-Blooded of note in the town, of the characters' location. His attack on the characters will not consist of six men, but 600 (use the statistics for Elite Troops from p. 278 of the Exalted main rulebook), with he and his Dragon-Blooded companions leading the charge.

to the Knob's agricultural workforce, as well as her professional trappers and hunters. The houses in the Farmer's District are squat, one-story affairs of wood and stone, with peaked roofs. These dwellings usually have three or four levels, but only one of them is above ground. Typically, the top level will hold the dining room, parlor and kitchen to entertain, the middle level(s) the sleeping quarters, and the lower level the family's cellar and food stores. The houses do not have indoor plumbing, but they do have a series of interconnected hearths, which allows a fire to burn on each level while only using one chimney. Wealthier farmers have dug out hay-lined subterranean barns behind their houses to winter their horses, mules and sheep in.

The first thing the characters will notice upon entering the Farmer's District is the smell, that of slaughter. In late fall, the people of the Knob coat their roofs in a thick layer of a animal fat and pine tar. While rank, this coating acts as rudimentary waterproofing and prevents both leaks and excess snow accumulation.

The Farmer's District is primarily residential, so there are no formal markets or commercial buildings. However, with the influx of newcomers, the residents have become both innkeepers and greengrocers, as the farmers sell rooms and excess food supply. While none will cut their essential stores, each house has grain, bread and, perhaps, even a bit of meat they are more than happy to trade for coin or goods from points south. Each dwelling in this district houses at least one visitor to the Knob, and some house entire families. While there are no Dragon-Blooded in this area, a few of their attendants reside here, as do the majority of their bodyguards. The better houses of the Farmer's District also house many of the merchants who do business in the tent city.

V'NEEF MAHINA

Description: Mahina is a woman of average height and average looks, with pale skin and long black hair (tied back into a pony tail or up into a bun). She usually wears a tired expression, but a soft smile will cross her lips every once in awhile. Mahina dresses simply in functional leather and cloth clothing. Anyone who just glanced at her would assume that she was just some merchants wife, not a noble of House V'neef. She will avoid direct conflict whenever possible and go out of her way to help others if they are in desperate straights or have shown some kindness to her or her family.

Roleplaying Tips: You are driven and extremely focused on your goals — specifically, bringing fame and respect to House V'neef. You are a bit of a soft touch when it comes to the downtrodden, and others, even members of your own family, consider you weak. You, in turn, consider them callous and lacking even basic human compassion. High and mighty Dragon-Blooded like Lahor especially grate on you. You have assembled a small well trained force and plan be the first to whatever lies beyond the mountains, you have no intention of participating in the wendigo hunt, preferring to use that time to put miles between you and the other Dragon-Blooded. You have no illusions of holding an entire city or treasure trove, but you hope to get out with some relics that will help Vma'neef gain some stature in the Realm.



Aspect: Wood

Nature: Caregiver

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

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

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 3, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Linguistics 3 (Native: High Realm; Low Realm, Riverspeak, Skytongue), Lore 3, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 3, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Ride 3, Socialize 4, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 2, Contacts 2, Followers 3, Influence 2, Resources 5

Charms: Mahina possess primarily defensive and Survival Charms. She can increase her Dodge Ability at a cost of 1 mote per two dice, or she can spend 5 motes to double it for the whole scene. She can reroll failed Dodge rolls for 3 motes. She can also increase her Endurance, Medicine, Resistance and Survival at a cost of 1 mote per two

dice. Mahina also possesses an array of Charms that allow herself and her entourage to travel quickly through even the worst conditions. Using them, she can cover an additional 5 to 20 miles per day, depending on the terrain and on how many people are traveling with her.

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Fist: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 2B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 4B Defense 5

Short Sword: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 4L Defense 8

Long Bow: Speed 8 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L*

*Mahina usually uses broadhead arrows.

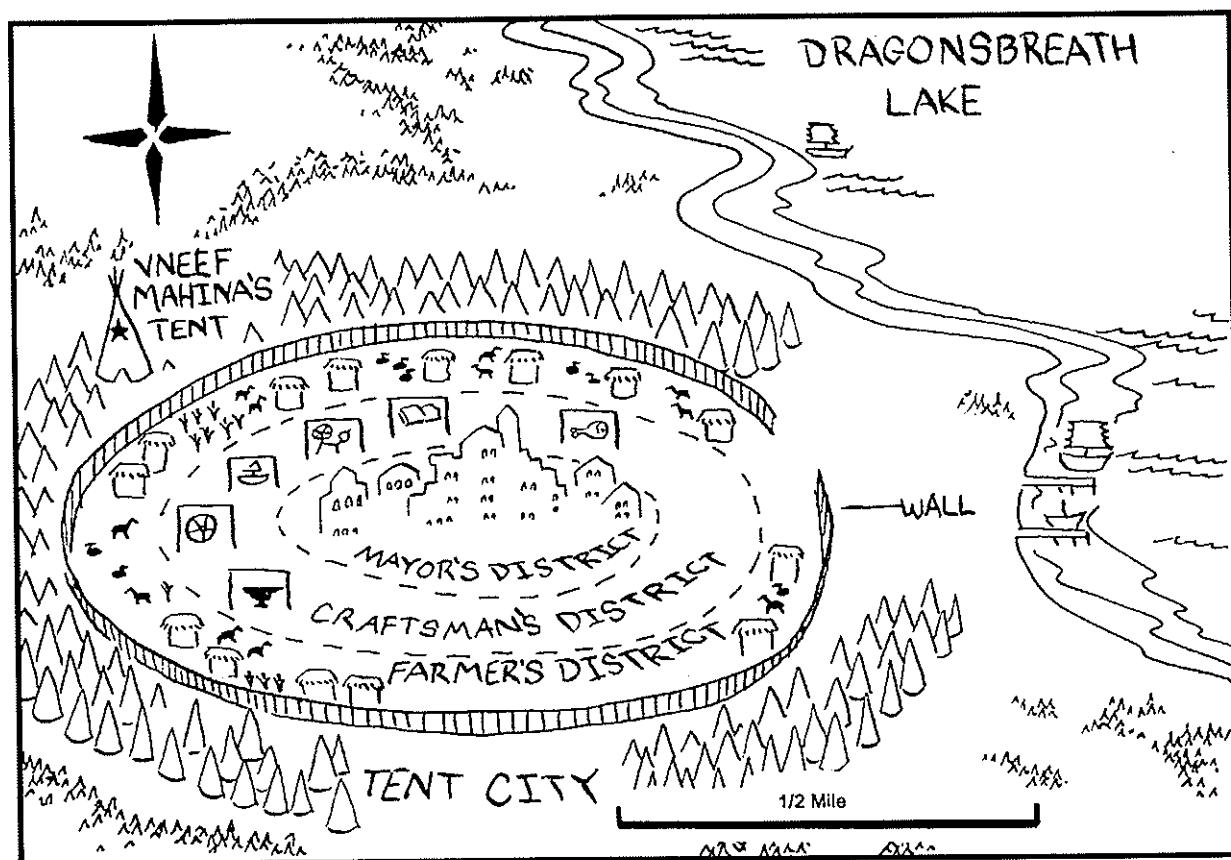
Dodge Pool: 8/7 Soak: 5L/8B (Buff jacket and target shield, 3L/4B, -1 mobility penalty, +1 difficulty to hit)

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

Essence: 3 (Wood Aspected)

Personal Essence: 10 Peripheral Essence: 27

Other Notes: None



The residents of Farmer's District (and those in the Knob overall) will be warm and welcoming to the characters. After all, the visitors have brought the Knob more money than it's seen in all its dull existence. However, the residents will not allow themselves to be swindled, nor will they provide lodging, as every available space has been bought and paid for long before the characters arrived.

THE CRAFTSMEN'S DISTRICT

The barrier between the Farmer's and Craftsmen's District is nothing more than a sign. The Craftsmen's District sits higher on the hill and is about half the size of the Farmer's District. The Craftsmen's District houses the Knob's craftspeople and professional traders, as well as some of the more profitable trappers. Houses here are, again, small stone and wood affairs with peaked, waterproofed roofs. The only real differences are the quality of the furnishings and the fact that some houses in the Craftsmen's District have two stories above ground instead of just one. A few of the most affluent even have indoor plumbing that works in the summer. Each dwelling, again, houses at least one boarder. Houses in this district are typically boarding Guild merchants and the more important representatives of the Great Families (though no Dragon-Blooded).

Food is available here but at double or triple the price of that in the Farmer's District. Craftsmen of virtually every type labor in this area, and most do excellent work.

Their prices are higher than their counterparts in the tent city by about half, but they generally work quicker as well. However, none of the craftsmen sell finished goods. If the characters inquire about such things, they will be directed to Wangler's Store in the Mayor's District.

The streets of the Craftsmen's District are patrolled more often than those of the Farmer's District, generally by the Dynastic bodyguards who have become the defacto police force. Entry into homes in this area is slightly harder due to more complex locks (Intelligence + Larceny roll, difficulty 2), but once inside, the dangers are the same.

THE MAYOR'S DISTRICT

The uppermost portion of the Knob, the Mayor's District consists of four large buildings and the town's snow-covered square. This is the center of the city politically and the most opulent district, though it's still pitiful compared to even a moderately well-developed Threshold city. It also contains the lodgings of those Dragon-Blooded who have made the trip to the North and of the Guild factors. All of these worthies reside in the Wayfarer's Retreat, the Knob's only formal inn. The town's temple, Wangler's Store and the Mayor's House fill the rest of this small district.

THE WAYFARER'S RETREAT

A large, sprawling building, the Wayfarer's Retreat sports eight levels (three above ground, five below) and 20

THEFT IN THE KNOB

Should the characters become desperate for food, they might try their hands at thievery. Breaking into the houses of the Farmer's District is almost too easy, as the locks are rudimentary (a difficulty 1 Intelligence + Larceny roll) and the guard patrol predictable, but the challenge begins once inside. Each house is full of people, easily awakened. Worse, at least half of these boarders are well-trained bodyguards or soldiers. The characters must make their way to the food stores in the basement without disturbing anyone, collect what food they want and get back out. This task is a challenging one even for the most experienced thief, and all Stealth rolls are at least +1 to their normal difficulty.

A crafty character who knows the layout of a house might try to wriggle her way down its chimney directly to the bottom level. Assuming the character is slight of build, does not mind a little smoke and can handle landing on hot coals, this is certainly an option. The player of a character without protection must make a Stamina + Endurance roll for every minute his character is in the chimney or have him take a health level of unsoakable bashing damage from asphyxia and smoke inhalation. Climbing down a chimney requires Dexterity + Athletics rolls (difficulty 2) and Dexterity + Stealth rolls as well (also difficulty 2). A character whose player botches may fall and injure himself seriously, become stuck or accidentally kick a hole in the chimney.

rooms or suites, all of which are rented. The inn looks like an oversized version of one of the Farmer's District houses but brightly painted. In any other city, it would be a third- or fourth-class lodging house, and even the indoor plumbing is unreliable during winter months.

The retreat is heavily guarded, not by Tal's men, but by soldiers working for the various Terrestrial Exalted in residence. Anyone trying to enter who looks the worse for wear or overtly hostile (i.e., is armed) will be stopped and asked to leave. Those of respectable appearance are allowed to enter, but the guards will keep their eyes on them. The ground floor of the Retreat is mostly one large saloon, filled with tables and decorated with a long bar, a small stage and two staircases (one going up, one down). Both staircases are heavily guarded. It is also the domain of Sesus Lahor, easily the most powerful Dragon-Blooded in the Knob and one of the most gifted in all the world.

Standing over six feet tall and well built, with close-cropped blond hair and a too-handsome face, Lahor is the antithesis of Mahina. He is the favored son of one of the

most powerful houses in the Realm and, some say, a frontrunner for the Scarlet Throne. He treats anyone he considers inferior (that is, everyone) with utter contempt, considers the Retreat his kingdom and its residents, including the other Dragon-Blooded, his subjects. None dare speak against him, for he has brought 300 servants to the Knob, two thirds of whom are hand-picked soldiers from the legions sponsored by House Sesus. These troops obey his every command, no matter how challenging or humiliating.

Lahor holds court in the saloon from dawn to dusk, planning his wendigo hunt and entertaining himself with the local girls or by forcing some Guild official or lower-ranking Terrestrial to perform degrading tasks. Lahor also inspects any item brought to him by a treasure hunter and invariably buys everything he sees, magical or not (money is far from an object). However, no seller can get away without indulging the rude little boy in Lahor, be it by farting loudly or twirling until he vomits. The lower-ranking Dragon-Blooded endure his tantrums with silent glee, knowing that he would never have been sent so far away from the Blessed Isle had he not been in some sort of disgrace and knowing that each day spent in isolated indulgence moves Lahor one step farther from the throne.

When the characters enter the Retreat, Lahor immediately takes notice of them and begins to openly mock any weakness they might have, be it ugliness, a country accent or poor fashion sense. He will attempt to draw them into a verbal sparring match, and if one or more respond, he will fling insults at them with a smile on his face and a dagger in his voice (the Storyteller should play the part of Lahor, attacking the characters where they are weakest, be it in origin, strength, resources or whatever). Any character who scores with an especially sharp, creative barb will draw Lahor's wrath and may find her tent burned to ash when she returns or may simply be seized and beaten to death on the spot by Lahor's thugs. Lahor's constant mocking can drive even the most controlled character to physical violence, but any attack on the son of House Sesus will be met by a dozen well-trained soldiers. A character that actually touches Lahor will be marked for death. Should the characters ignore Lahor or respond to his insults with submissive laughter, he will eventually tire of them and move on to new prey.

Outside of Lahor and his men, the inn is full of nameless lackeys, Guildsmen and a half-dozen Dragon-Blooded, all of whom are fairly weak and prefer to remain indoors inspecting what others uncover in the wilderness. Most won't engage the characters in conversation, though they do prattle on among themselves constantly about the upcoming hunt. If it becomes necessary, use the Elite Troops and Merchant Prince statistics from the Exalted main book for the guards and Guildsmen, and use the stats for Avaku of Ways for the lesser Dragon-Blooded.

If the characters have not yet uncovered the secret of the Knob, it will be spelled out for them here. The inn is an extremely hostile setting for the characters to inhabit for any





length of time, as the slightest mistake could expose them. The characters will find one friend in the Retreat however — its owner, a lovely woman in her late 40s named Usua Rowan.

Usua is a simple woman who made her living in the bars and taverns of Nexus before traveling north. Popular rumor says she was carrying the bastard child of a prominent Seventh Legion officer, but she denies this. She arrived in Wangler's Knob almost 20 years ago and bought the Wayfarer's Retreat for more jade than anyone had seen for decades. She is generally of a kind and motherly demeanor, especially toward females. She smiles and generally tries to make visitors to her inn feel welcome. Should the characters get an especially severe tongue lashing from Lahor, Usua will give them a free meal and make it clear that she can provide "entertainment" should they desire it. Usua is smart and will not put herself in harms way to help the characters; she is happy to exchange the latest gossip, but any questions about serious business or her current guests will be brushed aside. Usua is not about to reveal any of the Dragon-Blooded's plans, as she has seen just how ruthless they, and especially Lahor, can be.

Should a character attempt to break into the Wayfarer's Retreat, he faces the same challenges one might find in the

Dynastic homes of the Imperial City — advanced locks, well-trained guards and Charms and sorcery for protection and alarm. Even the slightest commotion will rouse the entire establishment to alarm in mere minutes.

THE MAYOR'S HOUSE

The Mayor's House, home of Miles Wangler, his wife and two sons, is rather plain. It has only two stories above ground, and other than being the only residence in the Mayor's District, and the only one in the Knob that does not house a boarder, it is of little importance. Normally, it would be a hub of civic activity, but with men such as Lahor taking over the town, the Mayor has little to do.

The interior of the Mayor's House is well furnished and a bit cluttered with knickknacks the Wangler clan has accumulated over the years, such as the mounted skeleton of the largest whiggfish ever caught in Dragon's Breath Lake and the hat Miles' great-great-grandfather used to wear. Should the characters sneak inside (a task no more difficult than breaking into one of the Craftsmen District's houses), they will find little to interest them outside of the normal food stores and several centuries worth of rustic curios.

USUA ROWAN

Description: Usua is an attractive woman in her 40s, a bit thick in the middle but still very pleasing to the eye. She has a quick smile and a deep, throaty laugh. She dresses in quality clothing, if somewhat antiquated, and talks in soft, almost motherly tones. She may make vague allusions to having a grown son living down south but, other than that, will not discuss her personal life, preferring to pass on juicy tidbits about other townspeople.

Roleplaying Tips: With your only child out of the nest, you act as mother to virtually everyone you meets. You are always willing to listen and offer bits of homespun advice, and you are especially giving to those who suffer some slight in your presence. ~~You glory in gossip, and while your speech is usually~~ fairly mannered, in the right crowd, or after a few drinks, you can revert to that long-lost Nexus barmaid full of rough language and off-color jokes.



Nature: Caregiver

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Craft 2, Dodge 1, Melee 1, Presence 1, Socialize 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Followers 3, Resources 3
Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Fist: Speed 5 Accuracy 3 Damage 2B Defense 3

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 2 Damage 4B Defense 2

Dodge Pool: 3 **Soak:** 0L/2B (Skin)

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

Other Notes: None

SESUS LAHOR

Description: Lahor is tall and handsome, the perfect picture of a young Dragon-Blooded noble. He sports a constant smirk and has an unforgiving gaze. Casually, he wears the latest fashions (always displaying his house mon). In battle, he wears ornate, plate armor and usually wields his jade daiklave, Hesiesh's Tongue, though Lahor will not enter the fray physically unless his men are faltering, preferring to stay back and hurl firebolts at his enemies.

Roleplaying Tips: Since birth, you have been told you are the best, the chosen one, and you know it to be true. Your confidence is unshakable, your bravado does not mask a hidden insecurity, and you have total faith in yourself and your abilities. You can spot weakness like a hawk, and you take pleasure in pointing out this inferiority to others, especially those who think they might challenge you. You are more at home in state politics than on the battlefield, but you are trained well enough to handle yourself there. You have come to the North at the encouragement of your family for a respite from the constant scrutiny of the Imperial City. For you, this is a vacation.

Planning the wendigo hunt has kept you amused for the past few weeks, but endless talk has grown old. Once you destroy the renegade beast, you will find out where these strange items are coming from. You do not anticipate failure in either endeavor, as you have never really failed at anything in your entire life.



Aspect: Fire

Nature: Bravo

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

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 5, Bureaucracy 5, Dodge 5, Endurance 4, Linguistics 2 (Native: High Realm; Guild Cant, Low Realm), Lore 3, Martial Arts 5, Medicine 3, Melee 5 (Sword +2), Occult 3, Performance 4 (Commanding Troops +2), Presence 5, Resistance 4, Ride 4, Socialize 5,

Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Backing 5, Contacts 5, Followers 5, Influence 5, Resources 5

Charms: Lahor possesses a variety of both offensive and defensive Charms. He can increase his Melee, Martial Arts and Dodge abilities at a cost of 1 mote per two dice or spend 5 motes to double it for the whole scene. He can reroll failed Melee, Martial Arts and Dodge rolls for 2 motes. He can also increase his Presence, Endurance and Socialize at a cost of 1 mote per two dice. Lahor may roll his Dexterity + Archery to throw bolts of fire,

with a range in yards equal to 10 times his Essence. For every 2 motes he spends, the bolt does lethal damage equal to his Essence. Extra successes add to the damage of this attack as normal. Lahor cannot spend more motes powering this attack than his Stamina.

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Fist: Speed 10 Accuracy 10 Damage 5B Defense 10

Kick: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 7B Defense 9

Jade Daiklave (Hesiesh's Tongue): Speed 13 Accuracy 14 Damage 10L Defense 14

Long Bow: Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 5L*

*Lahor typically uses target arrows, which halve the target's lethal soak.

Dodge Pool: 10/8 **Soak:** 14L/19B (Articulated jade plate and target shield, 12L/14B, -2 mobility penalty, +1 difficulty to hit)

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

Essence: 5 (Fire Aspected)

Personal Essence: 14 **Peripheral Essence:** 38

Other Notes: Typically commits 6 Peripheral motes to his armor and 5 motes to his daiklave, leaving him with 27 motes of Peripheral Essence.



USUA'S GOSSIP

• I hear only bad things about Mahina V'neef from these people, which makes me think she's probably better than all of them put together. They talk about her having thin blood and no real business being up here, since her family is so weak. I do know she's hired a dozen of the most experienced trackers we have in the Knob and has been making routine expeditions every few days. If there is something out there, I'll bet my garters she finds it first. The question is, will she be able to keep it?

• Wangler's Knob is the most boring place in the world. Usually, the only gossip I hear is who stole whose sheep. These people don't even cheat on each other! It's just weird. So, for me, these new people have made it interesting, if nothing else. I also don't mind that they're willing to pay 10 times my normal fees without blinking.

• Miles Wangler runs this town, or he did. With all these Dragon-Blooded around, he just sits in his store charging absurd prices and counting his money. People tell me Miles is a good person, but I don't know. I have odd feelings when I'm around him. Still, I have odd feelings around all married men — I like to think of it as preemptive guilt.

If the characters search for secret doors in the cellar, they will find one clumsily concealed, behind a rack of salted caribou. The door leads to a small room which houses the Wangler family fortune; 30 bags of jade coins and two dozen gems of moderate quality — a fortune in the Knob, but barely enough to pay for a small house in one of the more cosmopolitan southern cities. If this treasure goes missing, Miles will raise an alarm and order Tal Tak to scour the town for it. Should Tak fail, Miles will keep mentioning his ill fortune to anyone and everyone he meets until the thieves are caught or one of the Dragon-Blooded realizes what a pittance the Mayor had and replaces it just to shut him up.

WANGLER'S STORE

A warehouse-like, single-story structure, Wangler's Store is run by the Knob's mayor, Miles Wangler. Initially, Miles will welcome the characters with open arms, as he would any customer, and be more than happy to offer advice on what they will need to survive in the wilderness; everything, of course. Miles is the consummate salesman. If the characters are nice to him, he'll be nice to them. He'll even put up with some attitude if it looks like they are going to buy. After dealing with the Dragon-Blooded, he's more than used to it. However, he is not above raising his

prices if the characters stomp about making demands or look exceptionally well off.

Miles will not haggle — he has more buyers than he knows what to do with already and, thus, no need to discount. Still, he is something of a coward and any character that gets aggressive with him (breaking a few things for example) may find the Mayor filling her packs just to get her to leave.

The store stocks all general supplies (see pp. 324-325 of the Exalted main rulebook) and most mundane weapons, as well as many Northern-specific items.

It is likely that the characters will buy at least one item from Wangler's Store. These items are of good to excellent craftsmanship, and each bears Miles Wangler's brand (a small house on a knob-like hill). Other than that, they are unremarkable.

Wangler's Store is no more difficult to break into than a house in the Craftsmen's District. Should they choose to do this, the characters will find nothing of real note, simply rows and rows of various supplies lining the backroom. If the characters take fewer than three items, no theft will be reported (Miles did not notice). If they take more, Tal Tak will be informed, and his men alerted. Given the sheer number of people they have to watch, it's unlikely the matter will be given any real attention.

THE TEMPLE

Sitting on the farthest edge of the hill, the temple of Wangler's Knob is a vaguely triangular stone structure, more boxy than elegant. Its exterior is bare, but the sole interior chamber is covered with bas relief carvings of various gods. The Elemental Dragons take precedence, but other local deities are pictured as well. The temple contains no furnishings save a brazier to burn offerings and one small staircase leading down.

Characters who take the staircase down will come to a locked, iron door that can be opened with relative ease (Dexterity + Larceny, difficulty 1). This door leads to a small room with a dozen shelves running its length. Stacked on the shelves are hundreds of vases. Apparently, this is where the remains of the cremated are stored. However, should a character open one of the vases, he will find that it (and, indeed, all of them) contains no ash at all. Further investigation of the room will reveal nothing of note.

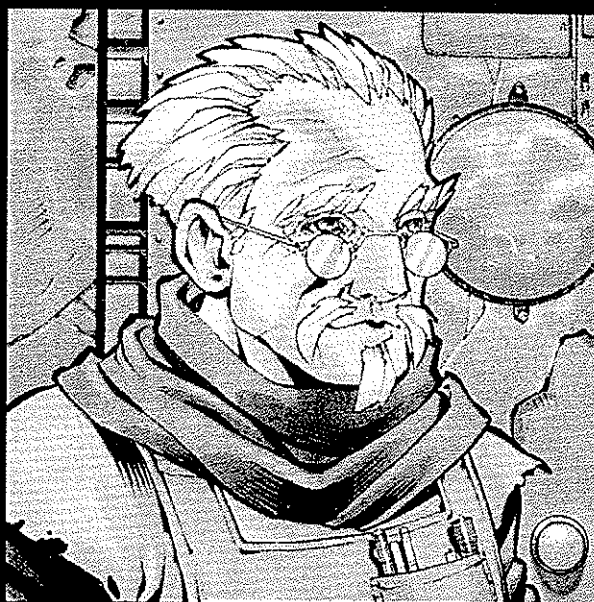
TIME IN THE KNOB

There is no maximum or minimum amount of time the characters must remain in Wangler's Knob. They can buy supplies in a day and set out north, heeding that odd "tugging" that is leading them forward, or they can remain for a week or more, taking it all in and resting from the long trip north.

MILES WANGLER

Description: A portly, balding fellow of average height, Miles is your typical small-town merchant. He constantly wears his leather apron and is very amiable and easygoing.

Roleplaying Tips: You're a generally happy man, but you're not brave and while you might say things behind people's back, you'll rarely confront them. You're the mayor, you have people to do that for you. You love Wangler's Knob, and to see it become just another of the dark, sullen towns in the Far North would be worse than death for you. You keep your family's pact with the wendigo because you want the people of the Knob to live happy lives. Sure, you have to kill them should they pass age 50. But that's still 50 good years, better than most in their situation could hope for. You will try and laugh any questions about the wendigo off, too many outsiders know the secret as it is, but, if pressed, you might drop some hints (if physically threatened, you'll tell the whole story). Personally, you don't know why those blasted Dragon-Blooded won't leave the wendigo alone — you prefer it to the Realm, but you would never say that out loud.



Nature: Bureaucrat

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Craft 3, Dodge 1, Linguistics 1 (Native: Skytongue; Low Realm), Lore 1, Melee 1, Occult 1, Presence 1, Socialize 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Followers 4, Resources 3

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Fist: Speed 5 Accuracy 3 Damage 2B Defense 3

Kick: Speed 0 Accuracy 2 Damage 4B Defense 2

Poisoned Knife: Speed 8 Accuracy 4 Damage 3L* Defense 2

*The knife is covered in aconite venom. If Miles strikes someone and actually inflicts a health level of damage, she suffers the effects of the venom. After one successful attack that does health levels of damage or three successful attacks that do not, the poison is worn off.

Dodge Pool: 3 Soak: 0L/2B (Skin)

Willpower: 3 **Health Levels:** -0, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4

Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: None

However, Mahina will begin her journey three days after the characters arrive in the Knob. On their fifth day, Lahor and his fellows will start the wendigo hunt, which will take four days to complete and lead to two days of feasting. Thus, on the 12th day, Lahor's party will set out. The characters can leave at any time, but if they wait too long, one or both of the Dragon-Blooded will be well ahead of them.

Wangler's Knob is the last bit of civilization the characters will have to hang on to for this adventure. From here on out, it's nothing but the wilds.

THE WILDERNESS

When the characters leave Wangler's Knob, heeding the tugging in the back of their heads, they will be stepping into some of the most dangerous wilderness in Creation. This is land where the armies of the Realm fear to tread, and even with all their advantages, the characters will face some serious threats. These threats stem primarily from the environment itself, which is not something they can slay or banish back to Malfeas. Exalted characters will probably not die from exposure alone, but they can be seriously weakened by illness, frostbite, hypothermia and dehydration — all of which are constant threats in the Far North.



NORTHERN-SPECIFIC SUPPLIES

Item	Resources Cost
Climbing kit	••
Crampons	•
Fur-lined boots	•
Fur-lined cap	•
Fur-lined cloak	••
Fur-lined gloves	•
Fur-lined, waterproofed sleeping bag	••
Kaff	••
Skis	•
Sled	• to •••
Snowblind Goggles	••
Snowshoes	•
Waterproofed rope (200 ft.)	•
Waterproofed tarp	•
Waterproofed tent	••
Waterproofing agent (1 qt.)	•

Climbing kit: This kit consists of an ice axe, harness, six bolts and 200 feet of thick waterproof rope. With practice, it allows the user to scale mountains and cliffs that would otherwise be impossible to climb. Characters must have at least two dots of Survival or Athletics to use a climbing kit effectively.

Crampons: An oval shaped ring of iron with six short spikes sticking out from its bottom, crampons may be attached by locking their metal frame around a boot. Moving with crampons is slower than normal, but they offer the wearer much better traction and prevent slipping on icy or slick terrain. Mechanically, crampons negate most penalties for acting on ice and make climbing ice walls possible.

Kaff: Miles Wangler's own mixture, this thick liquid (one part alcohol, one part sugar, one part karra root, a local plant) can be quickly heated to warm and reinvigorate the body. Kaff is a mild stimulant and somewhat addictive, though not debilitatingly so. It is also flammable.

Snowblind goggles: Heavy and awkward, these goggles, with their thick, slit leather, serve to protect the eyes from harsh winds, snow and snow glare but also limit sight range to 10 feet.

Waterproofing agent: This mixture of animal fat and sap may be applied to virtually anything the characters wish to waterproof. An average coat will last one month. Applied directly to the skin, this agent will burn and cause bleeding sores within 24 hours if not washed off.

Note: Items treated with the waterproofing agent will smell of fat and blood. Characters may become used to this, but the scent can entice predators such as wolves and yeti under certain circumstances.

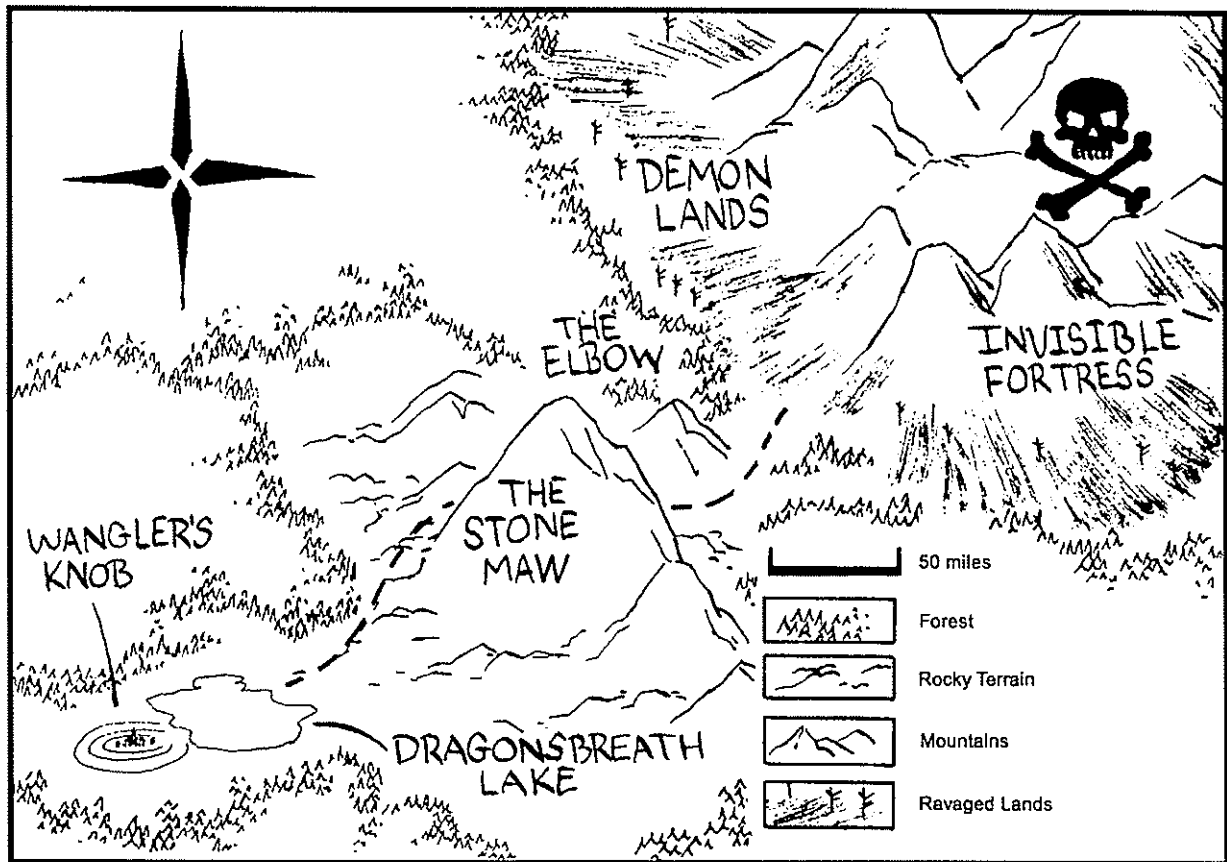
The Invisible Fortress lies 300 miles from Wangler's Knob. In the unlikely event that the characters move at a steady rate and do not suffer any setbacks, they will spend about six weeks in the forests, hills and mountains of the Northeast. The tugging will not draw them directly to the Fortress, but it will point them in the right direction and keep them from getting too far off track (the closer they get, the stronger the tugging).

You need not detail each and every day the characters spend in the wilds. This portion of the adventure is unlikely to brim with big battles or overt threats. Instead, small hardships should pile one after another on the characters, chipping away at their bodies and spirits as they journey to the Fortress.

THE FOREST

Wangler's Knob is surrounded by a vast, dark forest full of towering pine, spruce and evergreen trees. This is the first region the characters will have to cross and, in many ways, the easiest. The forest canopy has, so far, protected the ground from the bulk of the early winter snowfall, and the densely packed trees deflect mountain winds from the north. While the environmental threats in the forest are minor (relatively), it is also teeming with competing treasure hunters from the Knob. Any of these worthies would be more than happy to raid the characters' camp while they sleep and make off with their food or supplies.

The forest stretches from the edges of the Knob to the foothills of the northern mountains, a distance of just over



HIRING A GUIDE

The characters might want to hire a local guide from the Knob to help them along their way. A good guide (a veteran trapper or hunter) will cost Resources •••. The guide will help the characters get accustomed to Northern travel and provide four pounds of food a day. However, he will only travel with them through the forest. Once the characters reach the hills, they will be on their own.

Characters should only be able to hire a guide at these prices on the first day they arrive

~~in the Knob or after the Wendigo hunt is over.~~

Between then, Lahor and his men will be buying up all available guides. The characters can still get one, but the price is Resources ••••.

100 miles. The weather in the forest is surprisingly mild. Temperatures will dip below zero at night but only for a few hours, and what little snow makes it through the canopy is nothing more than a nuisance when traveling. Even if a blizzard does hit, the trees will protect the characters from the brunt of it.

THREATS

Mammoth: During the summer, caribou and mammoth herds graze in the forest's clearings and glades, but by the time the characters arrive, the majority of these will have moved far to the south to winter, taking the barbarian tribes that follow them along.

Some small groups of mammoth do remain year round, however, and herds of three to five of the massive beasts can be found rooting through the snow for grass or stripping the needles and last leaves from trees. These animals sleep 18 to 20 hours a day, waking only to feed. They are not generally aggressive, but if attacked or startled, they will charge, lunging with their long sharp tusks. Like their caribou-hunting brothers, most mammoth-tribe barbarians will have followed the majority of the beasts south. The few that do remain in the North generally wait a few more months before hunting in earnest (to let snow fall to the point mammoth can be easily trapped in it) and, so, should be of little consequence to the characters.

Omen Dogs: Omen dogs also roam the woods, hunting mainly at night. Generally traveling in packs of five to ten, they are vicious predators and will attack the characters, especially if they are carrying waterproofed equipment (the smell of animal fat helps to draw them in). The dogs will treat the characters as they would any other prey, they strike and then retreat into the woods only to return again.



Gradually, they will try and cut one of the characters (the oldest or smallest) off from the others, then fall on him to feast. Should the characters meaningfully injure two or more dogs, the rest will retreat, but until then, they will attack mercilessly.

Spirits: Thanks to the wendigo's presence, spirit activity in the forest is virtually nonexistent. The characters may think they hear laughter or singing in the distance from time to time, but any attempts to find its source will fail.

Mortals: Of more concern than natural predators are the other treasure hunters from the Knob. These men and women generally travel in groups of three to five and may be extremely well supplied or, quite literally, starving. The former will talk to the characters, exchanging strategies, and, possibly, offer to trade. The latter will beg for anything the characters might spare before moving on, hoping to make it back to the Knob before they are overcome by exhaustion and hunger. Attacks on one group of treasure hunters by another are not unusual, and the characters, being well equipped, are a prime target. A lone figure may sneak through the characters' camp at night, taking whatever she can find, or a group of treasure hunters might attack at dawn, hoping to take or wreck everything the characters have. The attackers need not be mad with starvation. They might simply be a Guild force determined to find the source of the items first that perceives the characters as a threat.

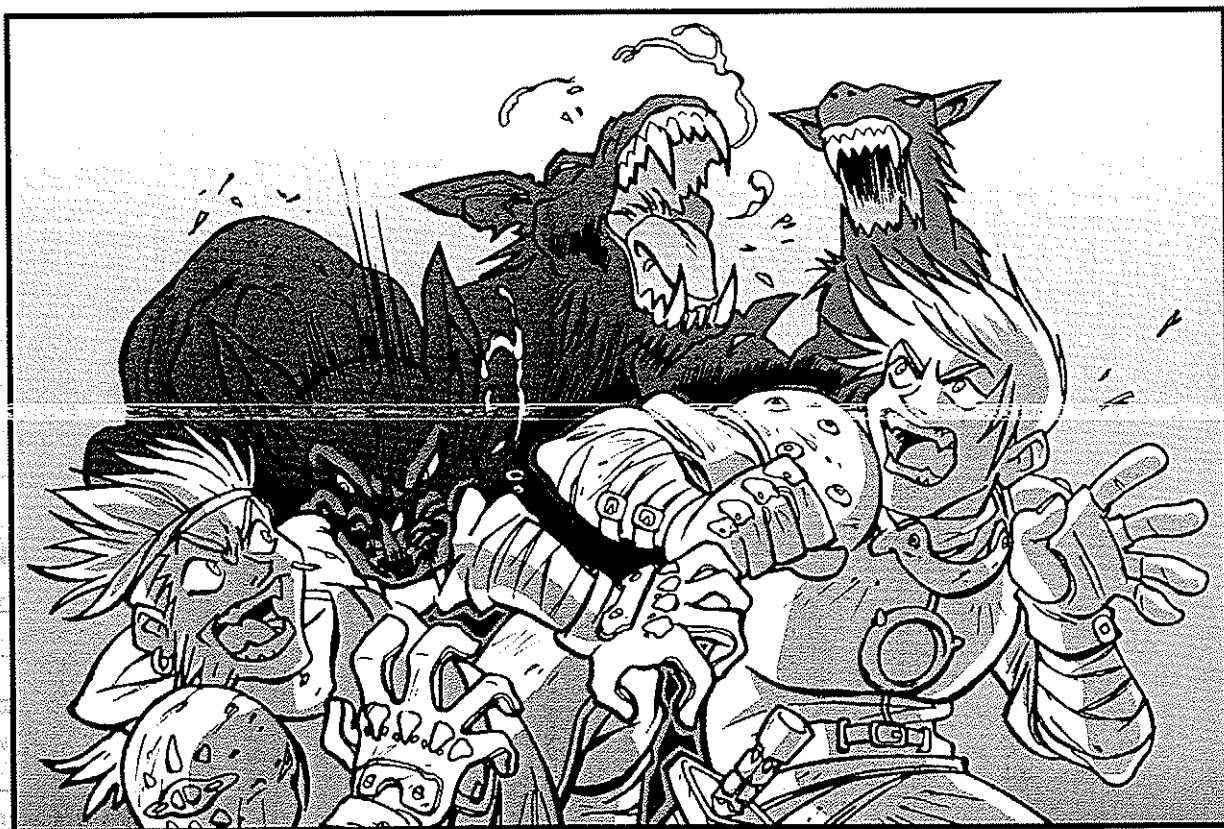
HUNTING AND FORAGING

Gathering food in the forest is fairly easy, and smart characters will not touch their rations until they reach the more barren hills to the north. Foraging in the forest takes, on average, an hour and can provide the characters with roots, nuts, berries and small game such as rabbit or squirrel (Perception + Survival roll, each success equals one pound of food found, characters with a specialization in foraging receive one automatic success). Hunting takes longer, two hours on average, but provides larger game such as deer or beaver (Perception + Survival roll at +1 difficulty, each success equals one and one half pounds of meat).

Should the characters wish to hunt very large animals, such as mammoth, you should put them through an entire battle sequence.

CALCULATING TRAVEL TIME

Characters on foot will be able to move three miles per hour comfortably in the forest. Each day, you should calculate how many hours the characters spent moving (subtracting time used for foraging, setting up camp, dealing with threats and so on), then multiply that by three for the day's total. The average number of miles per day should be somewhere around 15, assuming five hours a day on the move. At that pace, it will take the characters just seven days to traverse the 100 miles of the forest.



BASIC SURVIVAL TIPS

Below are some general guidelines the players should use when planning their expedition. Any character with a Survival rating of 3 or higher will know these. If no character possesses that Trait, you may choose to communicate these in various conversations, via trial and error or, if the characters choose to hire a local guide, through her.

Pack in as much food as possible: The characters are traveling just as the heavy snows of winter begin. As a result, local flora is mostly buried, and most of the large game (caribou, yeddim) have moved south. Foraging and hunting are possible but far more difficult than normal.

Melt snow for water on site: One of the biggest risks the characters run will be dehydration as they sweat under heavy fur lined clothing and trudge up steep hills. Unfortunately, water packed in, even in the best skins, has a tendency to freeze during the sub-zero nights. The best strategy for the characters will be to re-fill their skins every morning by boiling snow. This takes about an hour.

Leave horses behind: Any advantages pack animals give the characters in terms of carrying more food or supplies will be offset by having to feed them and the degree to which they will slow travel. There is no grazing land available once the characters move 10 miles beyond the Knob. Horse feed will have to be packed in, and a horse eats much more in a day than a man. Even the sturdiest horse will move slowly through the heavy snow, sinking into it and struggling where a character wearing snowshoes might pass easily. A mount will save its rider exertion but will also cost him five miles a day in travel time. Sheltering these large animals at night and keeping them warm is another problem. Note that smaller animals or those that can hunt for themselves (wolves, cats) can be brought along with no penalty.

Camp on a hill: Tents should be pitched at or near the top of a hill whenever possible, ideally on the southeast side. This prevents snow drifts from burying the characters on a windy night and ensures that the sun will strike the tent early, melting the snow on and around it as the characters wake.

Build a fire in your tent: Because of high winds and heavy snowfall, fires, even large ones, will not last long outside. Instead, small blazes must be set and fed inside the tent, warming it without setting the thing on fire (an Intelligence + Survival roll, players of characters with a Survival rating of ••• need not make the roll).

Cover up: This is common sense really. The characters will want as much of their body covered as possible, especially when exposed to strong mountain winds. Not dressing properly can lead to frostbite or hypothermia.

Be patient: All tasks done in the cold take longer than normal. This includes everything from complex repair work to dressing and cooking. As a rule of thumb, double the time it takes to do average tasks (prepare a meal, set up the tent) and triple those that require a great deal of manual dexterity (i.e., re-weaving a pair of snowshoes) or exertion (digging a shelter in the snow).

Characters who possess Survival Charms such as Food-Gathering Exercise, Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit or Trackless Region Navigation Charm can use them to make this passage easier.

Mahina and her men will make excellent time through the forest, an average of 25 miles per day, while Lahor's massive force will plod along at an average of 10 miles per day. It is important to keep track of where each of the Dragon-Blooded are, as one of them overtaking the characters (or vice-versa) could lead to conflict.

THE HILLS

The hills are just that — 50 miles of rolling, snow-swept foothills starting at the edge of the forest and gradually rising to meet the mountain range in the distance. This terrain is wide open, which is a terrible thing

in the winter. The weather on the hills is unpredictable and violent — clear skies can be replaced by thunderheads in a matter of minutes. Heavy snows are common, blizzards and ice-storms only slightly less so, and unlike the forest, there is nothing in the landscape to protect the characters. When the characters finally exit the forest, they are by struck by a stiff, icy wind howling down from the mountains and sweeping over its snow-covered foothills. The temperature drops 15 degrees in less than 30 seconds. Very quickly, the characters should realize that any hardships they suffered in the forest are nothing compared to what they will face from here on.

Heavy snows (that is, a storm that deposits more than six inches of snow) will hit roughly every other day in the hills, generally at night. Heavy snows are actually quite peaceful — while the snow falls quickly, it does not fall



DRESSING MAMMOTH

Should they manage to bring down a mammoth, the characters will have roughly a ton of meat suddenly made available to them. Butchering and carrying it is the problem.

Butchering must be done as fast and as efficiently as possible, since various predators (animal and men) would love nothing more than to take that meat for themselves. Even the sloppiest character should be able to cut away 50 pounds of meat in an hour, characters with the Survival Ability may add another 50 pounds per hour for a number of hours equal to the number of dots in Survival they possess. Thus, a character with a Survival rating of three could cut away 100 pounds of meat per hour for the first three hours, then 50 pounds for every hour after that.

Packing the meat is the second problem. Obviously, its weight is a concern, especially if the characters are already loaded down with supplies. Also, while meat will not spoil in this cold climate, it can become frostburnt and inedible. All meat must be wrapped in canvas to protect it from the elements. Food that is not wrapped should be good for about five days. Food that is wrapped can last up to a month.

Whatever meat the characters take initially should be all they get. Should they return to the mammoth a day or two later to restock (for whatever reason), they will find the carcass virtually stripped by other treasure hunters and omen dogs.

with much force. The characters might not even hear it and awaken to find their tents partially buried by a storm that passed in the night.

Blizzards are heavy snows with gusting winds. Blizzards can come up suddenly, and anyone caught in one for an extended period of time without magical protection must fear frostbite and hypothermia (see below). A cave or a hastily dug shelter in the snow can provide ample protection from all but the worst blizzards, but time the characters spend buried in the snow is time they're not advancing on their goal.

Like blizzards, anyone caught in an ice storm for an extended period of time will suffer frostbite and hypothermia. Unlike a blizzard, ice storms do physical damage. Chunks of ice rain from the sky and can slice open protective clothing as easily as they can exposed flesh. Ice chunks do bashing damage equal to that of a broadhead arrow fired from a composite bow (anywhere between 2B

to 5B, depending on the severity of the storm) and they cannot be dodged without a comprehensive evasion Charm such as Flow Like Blood (there are simply too many). An ice storm will also damage clothing, increasing the peril of frostbite. Even characters using Survival Charms will probably want to take cover during an ice storm.

It is unlikely that a single environmental hazard in the hills will kill the characters outright, but they will pile one on top of the another to make the journey to the mountains both slow and agonizing.

THREATS

Forest animals: All of the natural threats from the forest carry over to the hills — mammoth will occasionally venture out of the trees looking for food, and omen dogs lope across the rises at night, baying at the moon. The caribou and yeddim herds that make these grassy rises their home in the summer have gone, though a straggler or two might still linger.

Bears: Great brown and black bears roam the higher hills. Since it is winter, they are hibernating but can be aroused for a short period by loud noises. Alternately, characters seeking shelter against a storm may find a most unwelcome surprise waiting for them. Bears will attack characters if disturbed — she-bears are especially vicious, fighting to the death to protect their dens.

Spirits: Most of the natural spirits of the hills are asleep in this, the coldest season of the year. Those spirits that would normally be active — those of snow and frost — are shocked into silence by the murder of their lord, the wendigo. The characters may encounter a fair folk seducer or lesser air elementals, but any such encounters are left up to the discretion of the individual Storyteller.

Mortals: Fewer treasure hunter groups risk the hills, but those who do are the most ambitious or the most desperate. Either sort would be more than happy to kill the characters for their supplies. Attacks are less frequent than in the forest but more violent. There are no lone thieves but, instead, groups of assassins with knives drawn.

Also, depending on when the characters left the Knob and how fast they have traveled, Lahor and his party might be nearby. Should one of his scouts or footmen notice one of the characters using a Charm, they must kill the witness or risk him reporting to Lahor, who would be more than happy to initiate his own Wyld Hunt if he thought some Anathema were lurking about.

ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS

The weather is more dangerous than any animal. By the time the characters reach the hills, winter has set in, and heavy storms are an almost daily occurrence. Snow drifts are already piled as high as a grown man.

Temperatures are barely above freezing even at mid-day, and the constant mountain wind makes them feel

even colder. Characters who did not invest in heavy clothes will regret it now, as cold-related maladies such as frostbite and hypothermia quickly become a fact of life. Charms and unnatural heat can combat these ailments, but even the hardest characters will be uncomfortable on the hills. The constant wind and lack of dry wood make starting and sustaining a fire a real problem (Intelligence + Survival at difficulty 2 or more, depending on the circumstances). The characters' time in the hills is likely to be a cold, miserable trudge that seems to last forever.

Frostbite: Caused by the freezing of the skin and tissues, frostbite is, by far, the most common affliction associated with Northern travel. Afflicted areas are marked by a discoloration of the skin, usually gray or blue-black. Frostbite generally strikes small extremities such as the fingers, toes, ears and nose. It causes numbness, deadens nerve endings and, in advanced stages, can lead to necrosis of the effected area. Any character who is not wearing lined gloves, lined boots and a face guard will develop frostbite within two days on the hills. Even those with adequate protection must be careful — if their clothing is wet, the strong winds can literally freeze it to the person's body, causing frostbite to develop very quickly. Charms such as Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit and Element-Resisting Prana can prevent frostbite altogether. However, they must be constantly maintained to do so.

While frostbite is common, it is relatively easy to heal, at least in the earliest stages, simply requiring a gradual and painful reheating of the area either over a fire (for an hour) or by magical means (instantaneous). However, if proper precautions are not taken, it will return. A character who leaves a frostbitten area untreated for more than one day will find the tissue much harder to repair requiring extended rest and reheating (over a period of 3 to 10 days, depending on severity). Even then, the nerves may be permanently damaged and the skin callused, leading to permanent Dexterity penalties (see below).

Frostbitten tissue that is left untreated for more than three days will die. The character will lose the use of the afflicted area, and amputation may be necessary in the most extreme cases. Healing Charms such as Ailment-Rectifying Method and Wound-Mending Care Technique can usually halt or mend frostbite. However, in severe cases, more advanced Charms such as Anointment of Miraculous Health will be necessary to mend tissue or revive nerve endings. For the purposes of healing, frostbite damage should be considered lethal.

Frostbite on the fingers and hands results in the character suffering a -1 die penalty in all Melee, Martial Arts and Brawl actions involving an afflicted area. Severe frostbite (covering more than half of the hand) increases those penalties to -3 dice. As mentioned above, if the frostbite become permanent, the penalty is permanent as well.

Frostbite on the toes or feet results in penalties of -1 die in all Dodge, Athletics and Stealth actions involving

the afflicted area. Severe frostbite in these areas makes movement extremely difficult (half movement speed) and imposes penalties up to -3 dice, until healed.

Frostbite on the nose and ears is painful and can, in severe instances, damage the senses. Characters with severe frostbite on their ears or nose will suffer a permanent -1 penalty to Awareness rolls involving the affected sense.

Hypothermia: The slowing of metabolic processes due to a sharp decline in body temperature, hypothermia is a killer in the North and one the characters must do all they can to guard against. Those wearing appropriate lined clothing should have little to worry about except in the most extreme weather. Hypothermia is a gradual process that results from continued exposure to cold weather. By the time the characters are halfway across the hills, they will all be suffering from a very mild case simply because of the harsh winds and the pervasive cold. Full-blown hypothermia occurs when characters become trapped in a snow or ice storm and temperatures plummet. Then, even the most well-protected individuals have a chance of succumbing to the cold. In such an event, players must make a Stamina + Endurance roll each hour to avoid having their characters contract hypothermia. Should the storm rage for an extended period of time, penalties will begin to accrue; for every two hours the characters are exposed their players will receive a -1 penalty to their rolls.

Various Survival Charms (Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, Element-Resisting Prana) can allow a character to come through even the worst storm unscathed, assuming he maintains them. Like frostbite, hypothermia can be cured by rest and heat or through magical means (Ailment-Rectifying Method, Wound-Mending Care Technique, Anointment of Miraculous Health). Aftereffects will linger, though these are usually little more than mild headaches or a slight shortness of breath.

Those effected by hypothermia will gradually lose energy and drive. In the early stages, an affected character might simply flag slightly behind the Circle and suffer a -1 penalty to Dexterity from slow reactions. If the condition is left untreated for one full day, the character will find herself staggering, falling and gasping for breath and will suffer a -2 penalty to Strength and Dexterity as the condition worsens. Characters whose hypothermia is untreated for more than two days are be unable to move and lose two bashing health levels every hour until death.

HUNTING AND FORAGING

Gathering food in the hills is far harder than it was in the forest, as the plant life is mostly buried and what few animals remain are holed up in their burrows or caves. Foraging is still most effective (Perception + Survival roll, each success equals one half pound of food found). Hunting is possible, but large game is harder to find (Perception + Survival roll at +1 difficulty, each success equals one





pound of meat). Even the results of magically assisted food gathering (Food-Gathering Exercise) are halved. The characters cannot live off the land as they did in the forest, and it is likely they'll start breaking into their supplies now.

CALCULATING TRAVEL TIME

With the thicker snow and steeper inclines, characters will be able to average about two miles per hour comfortably on foot through the hills. Also, with the whipping wind and unpredictable weather, they will only be able to travel four hours a day on average before setting up camp. Moving at eight miles per day, it will take the characters roughly seven days to cross the hills, even though they are only half as wide as the forest. Survival Charms can increase travel speeds significantly, but the weather conditions of the hills make it very harsh terrain for the purposes of magic. Thus, the effectiveness of Charms such as Trackless Region Navigation Charm should be halved.

Mahina's party will cover 13 miles per day on average through the hills, while Lahor's will cover only five.

THE MOUNTAINS

Rising out of the foothills are the great alpine peaks of the northern mountains. Reaching elevations of up to 20,000 feet, even the most experienced trappers and explorers blanch at the thought of crossing them.

The entrance to the mountains is a narrow pass lined with jagged, wind-worn rock called the Stone Maw. Arctic winds whip out of it, blasting the characters and making an eerie, shrieking scream-like sound. This path is the only known one through the mountains and is 50 miles long. While the mountains offer slightly more protection than the hills when it comes to weather, they contain their own dangers and are far more unforgiving of mistakes. One wrong step could send a character plummeting to her doom.

THREATS

Natural: Neither mammoth nor omen dogs venture into the high mountains, but many of the risks from the hills—particularly frostbite and hypothermia—are even

more of a danger as the characters climb higher and the temperatures dip lower. Bears are also a threat, though most of these are already hibernating.

Occasionally, the characters see great shadows race across the snow and hear a mad cackle floating on the wind. These are hybrocs, great birds capable of carrying off a man, who own the skies above the mountains and routinely patrol Stone Maw Pass (see p. 316 of the *Exalted* main book for hybroc statistics). Hybrocs are voracious and will attack a human if one is out alone on an open surface for too long. Even being grazed by hybroc's claw can take a man's arm off, and should a character be caught in a hybroc's grasp, he will sustain severe bashing damage (up to 7B per turn for a large specimen). Smart characters will quickly learn to walk near walls, under overhangs and in shadows whenever a hybroc is overhead.

Less obvious than the hybrocs but just as dangerous are the great cats that wander the mountain passes. Hunting has been hard for these white-and-gray furred beasts, and it will become harder as the winter progresses. A party

YETI

Description: These fierce arctic simians are highly territorial and possessed of a malign cunning that makes them extremely dangerous. Yeti are given to cannibalism, and form troupes of one male and four to six females, plus young. Males are absolute leaders of their troupe, and young male yeti are driven off or devoured before they become a threat. Many savants believe that yeti may not be apes at all, but a degenerate breed of the race of man, related to the Arzeckh barbarians of the East and the similar hairy savages that harried the current inhabitants of Gethamane before they reached their new home.

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4, Stealth 4, Survival 5

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 7L Defense 6

Bite: Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 9L Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 6 Soak: 2L/5B (Tough Skin)

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

Essence: 1

Other Notes: Not an extra in this case, but can be in other circumstances.

THE FIRE IN THE NORTH

The first night the characters spend in the mountains, they should see an odd glow in the far distance. It is impossible to tell exactly where it is coming from, but the pattern of the glow will seem to correspond with the rhythm of the tugging in each character's head. This glow is not the aurora borealis, but a strange golden light springing from an unknown source.

of humans will be seen as less a threat than a feast. Mountain cats attack alone and always go for the kill. One will stalk a character until he leaves the group to piss or scout, then pounce, going for the throat or hamstrings. Cats move silently through the snow and blend with the background extremely well, making them difficult to detect. Add 1 to the difficulty of the observing character's player's Awareness + Perception roll when trying to spot a hunting cat against snow or stone.

Perhaps the most effective predators in the mountains are the yeti that claim Stone Maw Pass as their territory. An extended family of five females, one mature male and three children, this tribe will attack and devour any other apes that set foot in its domain, including humans. From the moment the characters enter the mountains, the yeti will be watching them. Like the great cats, the yeti are well camouflaged in the snow (Awareness + Perception rolls to detect them are at +1 difficulty). While they are physically powerful, the yeti will not directly attack the characters unless one of the characters wanders away from the group for an extended period. Instead, they will wait at the Stone Elbow, a point in the pass where it curves west. It is there they have a trap waiting.

WEATHER HAZARDS

While heavy snows, blizzards and ice storms strike the mountains just as often as they do the hills, the pass offers niches, overhangs and small caves the characters can take shelter in if need be. However, a sudden blizzard coming up when the characters are negotiating a narrow ledge or ice-covered stretch or rock could plunge a character to her death fairly easily or strand her out in the elements until she succumbs.

Icy winds whip through the pass as upward of 40 miles per hour and the temperature will never climb higher than 10 below zero. The risks of hypothermia and frostbite double while the characters are in the pass (all rolls to withstand these maladies increase in difficulty by 1).

Fuel for fires is especially hard to find at this elevation because only small shrubs can live in the pass. Temperatures drop to 20 or 30 below zero during the night, lower with wind effects, and characters without stout shelter will need something to keep them warm, or else, they will surely slip into hypothermia and quickly die. A windbreak made of tarp and rocks in front of a tent with the characters huddled together inside will work, as will Miles Wangler's kaff and, of course, Charms.

The most constant danger in the pass, however, is the pass itself. Stone Maw winds its way through the 50 miles of mountains, moving north to Stone Elbow and then west, forcing the characters to climb to an altitude of 10,000 feet and then descend back down to the valley floor. The characters must pick their own way through the pass and over its various hazards. The type and frequency of physical obstacles will be left up to you — killing the characters is not your goal, but challenging them is.

MOUNTAINEERING OBSTACLES

Below is a list of impediments the characters might encounter while traversing the pass and the information needed to navigate them safely. Each character must roll separately for each obstacle. If a character is utilizing *both* crampons and a climbing kit, his player has a +1 die bonus on each of the following rolls. Should the characters come up with a creative way to avoid or traverse these, adjust the rolls to reflect their ingenuity.

Should a character fail at one of these obstacles or make a wrong move while climbing, do not drop her to her instant death. A character who shreds her cloak or breaks her leg in a fall contributes to the adventure much more interestingly than one who just gets impaled on some rocks. Her wounded condition adds to the characters' stress level and makes the rest of the trip that much harder. How the characters help her survive will add depth to the story.

Characters who fail to cross on their first try and are not too badly injured to continue may reattempt the obstacle. Characters trying to cross an obstacle again are aided, not impeded, by their previous attempts. Each failed attempt subtracts 1 from the difficulty of the next attempt.

Narrow ledge: A small crack in the stone of the pass, a narrow ledge less than 12 inches across that should be fairly easy to navigate (a standard Dexterity + Athletics roll, no roll for characters with Athletics •• or higher). Failure here should result in little more than a bruised knee or twisted ankle.

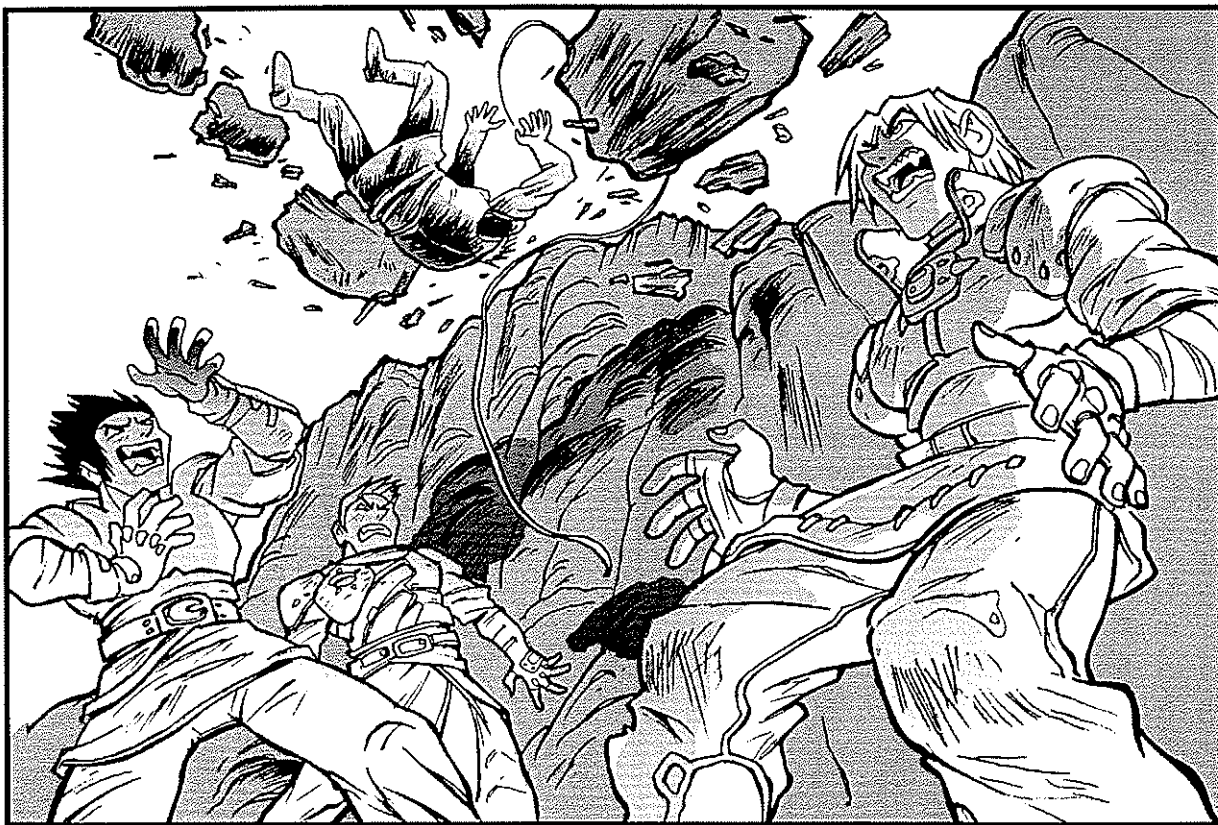
Frozen waterfall: A frozen, bulbous vertical sheet of ice that can be climbed either freehand (Wits + Athletics, difficulty 4) or with the use of a climbing kit (Dexterity + Athletics at difficulty 2). Failure can send the character crashing back to the ground, doing bashing damage based on the height from which he fell (see p. 253 of the *Exalted* main rule book).

Craggy face: A sharp 80 to 90 degree incline of pitted and cracked rock, the craggy face is steep but offers a number of handholds (roll Strength + Athletics to scale it). Failure can result in a fall and bashing damage (see p. 253 of the *Exalted* main rulebook).

Sheer face: A sharp 80 to 90 degree incline of stone with some razor thin cracks but no real handhold, the sheer face is often covered with a sheet of ice or frost. It is extremely difficult to climb on one's own (Dexterity + Athletics at difficulty 3), but a system of anchored ropes strung up it can make the process much easier (Stamina + Athletics). However, to do this, one character will have to make the initial ascent without the help of ropes and spend an hour or more stringing the pitches together. A fall from the sheer face does bashing damage (see p. 253 of the *Exalted* main rulebook).

Small gap: A snow covered split in the mountain only about three feet wide but dozens or hundreds of feet deep. Characters can easily jump the gap (Dexterity + Athletics) or lay some sort of bridge over it. However, in stormy conditions or after a heavy snow, it can be well camouflaged and requires a Wits + Awareness roll to detect it in time to avoid a fall.





Failure can send a character into the gap, but its narrow width should allow her to catch herself and not fall too far.

Large gap: A split in the rock up to six feet wide that the characters can jump (Dexterity + Athletics at difficulty 2) or construct a rope bridge over (assuming they have rope). Constructing a bridge will take up an hour and requires an Intelligence + Survival roll to complete successfully. Large gaps, too, can be hidden by recent snowfall but are easier to spot (Perception + Awareness, no roll if the character's Perception or Wits is greater than ••). Falling into a large gap can send a character to his death if the Circle is not tied together or he is unable to catch himself on the rim of the gap.

Chasm: A split in the rock up to 20 feet wide, chasms are massive yawns in the mountain that the characters must construct a bridge across or find a way around (some chasms can stretch on for miles). Constructing a bridge across a chasm can take up to three hours and requires an Intelligence + Survival roll at +2 difficulty as well as 40 feet of sturdy rope. Chasms are not camouflaged by snow. A character who stumbles into a chasm at its edge has a chance, however slight, to catch himself on the ridge (Wits + Athletics at +1 difficulty). Should a character be caught in the middle of a rope bridge and have it snap (for whatever reason), he will fall to his death unless he is tied to his companions and they can pull him up or unless a Charm is used to save him.

Boulder pile: A large pile of boulders that consists of a number of fist-size stones around a stack of rocks each twice the height of a man. Crossing a boulder pile should

be fairly easy (Dexterity + Athletics). However, some such slides are unstable, and should the pile shift significantly, the player of a character on it must make a Wits + Athletics roll for the character to catch herself. Falling off a boulder pile inflicts standard bashing damage for a fall (see p. 253 of *Exalted*), and characters who botch their Wits roll may set the whole thing sliding again.

Avalanche site: The result of a recent avalanche, this encounter consists of a stretch of snow, rock and timber loosely piled together. Avalanche sites are extremely unsettled, and crossing them is difficult (Dexterity + Survival roll at difficulty 2) and slow (assume a foot per minute). A character who botches may be swallowed whole by the morass unless she can find a handhold (Wits + Athletics at difficulty 2). Characters whose players fail their rolls will not fall far, but could be buried and have to be dug out by their Circiemates.

THE YETI'S TRAP

Thirty five miles in, the pass curves west abruptly at a landmark called Stone Elbow. This point marks the end of the characters' ascent, but it is also the most challenging part of the adventure to this point. What the characters find when they arrive at Stone Elbow will vary depending on the time they are making. Mahina and her party will arrive at the Elbow 13 days after leaving Wangler's Knob, Lahor and his men 38 days after his expedition departs. Should the characters be behind one or both of the groups, they will find a fresh avalanche site. If the characters are

ahead of both, they will find what looks to be a clear section of the pass.

In either case, hanging perilously above this curve in the pass are several massive piles of ice and snow (three if the characters are behind Mahina, two if they trail both she and Lahor), well over 10 tons each; the yeti tribes' trap. Mahina's expedition anticipates the avalanche and faces down the yeti without loss of life on either side. Lahor's group is struck squarely, takes almost 50 casualties and destroys the yeti totally. If the characters trail Lahor, they will find the snow-ape's heads around a hasty memorial to those lost in the avalanche.

If the yeti still live, then, as soon as the characters arrive, the yeti will trigger an avalanche using a series of high-pitched screeches and well-placed boulders. The ground will begin to shake, and in less than a minute, one of the piles will come loose, and a wall of pure, white snow will be plummeting toward the characters at around 80 miles per hour. Detecting this trap is possible (Perception

+ Awareness at difficulty 3). However, as soon as the yeti see the characters looking up at them or running for cover, they will trigger the trap anyway.

About five minutes after the avalanche ends, the six adult yeti will attack survivors with clubs and spears. Those characters who are able to fight (that is, are not buried) do so on unsettled snow and, thus, suffer a -1 penalty to all Melee, Martial Arts, Brawl and Dodge actions. The yeti are at no such penalty. Should the characters manage to kill the male yeti or two of the females, the rest will attempt to flee, leaving the Circle free to regroup and continue on.

The characters must manage themselves and their resources extremely well in this situation, fighting off the yeti while still rescuing any companions who might have been buried under the snow before it is too late. The yeti will not attack again after this ambush, but the characters should still face some geological obstacles before emerging from the pass.

SURVIVING THE AVALANCHE

Avalanches are massive, destructive and all consuming. They cannot be dodged, but they can be survived. Players of characters caught in an avalanche must make two separate rolls: Wits + Survival at difficulty 3 and Dexterity + Athletics, also at difficulty 3. All characters whose players succeed on both find themselves swept off their feet but, other than that, no worse for wear. Characters who succeed only on the first are buried under five feet of snow and take five levels of bashing damage (soak normally). Characters whose players succeed only on the second are buried under 10 feet of snow and take seven levels of bashing damage (soak normally). Characters whose players fail both rolls are buried under 20 feet of snow and take 10 levels of bashing damage (soak as normal).

Those trapped under the avalanche have 15 minutes to be found or to dig themselves out before they use up all their oxygen and suffocate. They should be able to tell up from down, but other than that, they are effectively blind. Characters buried under only five feet of snow should be able to extract themselves with little effort (Strength + Survival). Characters under 10 feet have more trouble but can save themselves as well (Strength + Survival at 2 difficulty). Characters under 20 feet of snow cannot extract themselves short of a legendary feat (Strength + Survival at difficulty 4) or magical means (Charms such as Blazing Solar Bolt could bore a hole to the surface, for example). They can be dug out though, assuming their fellows find them in time.

Players of characters above ground searching for those buried must make a Perception + Awareness roll at difficulty 1 if the target is buried under 10 feet of snow or at difficulty 2 if the character they're hunting for is buried under 20 feet of snow. Even if they do manage to locate their submerged comrade, excavating her will be an immense challenge. Debris must be shifted without hurting the trapped character and, thus, needs to be handled with extreme care. Concentrating fully, each digging character should be able to move one foot of snow per Strength dot per three minutes. Charms such as Shattering Grasp can double this rate. Those characters rescued from the ice will have to be warmed immediately, or they will slip into full-fledged hypothermia in two hours.

No character escapes from an avalanche totally unscathed. Even those who were not buried may come away with frostbite, and supplies can be lost, but Storytellers should fudge things a little to prevent the Circle from suffocating miserably beneath the snow.



HUNTING AND FORAGING

Gathering food in the Northern mountains is extremely difficult, as both flora and fauna are scarce. Characters can forage (Perception + Survival at +1 difficulty) or hope to stumble across a mountain goat while hunting (Perception + Survival at +2 difficulty). Charms such as Food-Gathering Exercise will be a significant boon at this point.

For the most part, the characters will be living off whatever supplies remain or slowly starving (one health level lost for every two days without food). Eventually, the characters might actually welcome an attack by a mountain lion, bear, hybroc or yeti, as each is a potential source of food.

CALCULATING TRAVEL TIME

Travel through the mountains is agonizingly slow. Daily progress will largely depend on the weather and what obstacles the characters encounter, but you can assume an average of about one mile per hour, a good number of them straight up. Generally, characters should be able to travel about four hours per day. At that pace, it will take them almost two weeks to traverse the 50 mile Stone Maw Pass.

Mahina will be able to cover eight miles per day on average through the mountains, Lahor two.

THE NORTHERN FOREST

The characters will come down from the mountains into a wide, snow-covered valley (roughly 100 miles across), with another, even larger mountain range on the horizon. While they are not out of the woods (so to speak), this should be an opportunity for them to rest a bit, heal and finally eat a decent meal.

This bit of forest is 50 miles across, and the characters should be able to traverse it in four days. However, a wise Circle will spend a bit more time in the forest to gather food for the remainder of the trip. Natural threats in this forest will be the same as they were in the southern forest, the same flora and the same fauna. There are no unnatural threats. Likewise, food gathering and travel times are identical.

The characters should cross this second forest fairly easily, and it seems, with each step they take, the tugging grows stronger and stronger until it almost blots out their senses. That is until they step out of the forest and into a vast, barren plain.

THE FIRE IN THE SKY

As soon as the characters step out of the pass, they will see a flare of pure Essence arc into the sky over the distant mountain range and then fall back down to earth. As with the tugging, the higher a character's Perception, the brighter the flare.

THE DEMONLANDS

The characters have entered that 50 mile circle around the Invisible Fortress in which the minor demons who built the Manse were bound to live and die. The transition from the forest to the Demonlands is drastic — one moment, the characters walk among tall pines, the next, they step out onto a barren, snow-covered plain almost totally devoid of life.

When the original 500 were imprisoned, this area was thriving, but over the centuries, the demons have stripped their domain bare in a search for food, Essence and fuel. What remains is desolate and depressing. Still, the tugging beckons the characters onward.

Since the construction of the Invisible Fortress, the original demon population has swollen to 5,000. Of these, 500 are the original builders of the Fortress, the Founders. The other 4,500 are their crossbreed offspring, the ice-eaters.

The sheer number of the demons in this area has put an incredible strain on the land. Indeed, by the time the characters arrive, the demons have resorted to a form of controlled cannibalism. The Founders have begun to hunt and kill the most bestial of the ice-eaters, feasting on their flesh and whatever little Essence they might possess. Even with that, most of the demons of either class are starving. Some have been hungry for centuries, making them that much more desperate to escape the plain.

THE ENCOUNTER

As the characters enter the Demonlands, they may notice the savaged remains of some ice-eaters. If they are behind Mahina, five of the beasts will lie dead, their bones picked clean. If they are behind Lahor, then there will be 30 or so in one area, where they initially attacked Lahor, and clusters of additional ice-eater bodies here and there along Lahor's line of march. Should the characters be ahead of both of these groups, they will see no sign of a struggle.

Either way, within an hour, the characters will be attacked by a group of four ice-eaters. Crazed with the smell of flesh and Essence, these beasts will charge the characters and fight to the death. It's probably best if you as the Storyteller make the ice-eaters up just before the session where the characters meet them. It's possible that the characters may be very weak or almost untouched by their travels. As the characters do battle, a heavy mist will roll in. Once the ice-eaters lie dead, the mist will recede quickly, exposing 10 Founders who had been hunting for that night's meal. If the characters used any combat or healing Charms during their battle with the ice-eaters, the Founders will fall to the ground, prostrating themselves. If the characters did not, the Founders will attack but only until a tangible Charm is used — at which time they will drop their weapons and bow before the characters.

From the back of the hunting group, a thin, black-skinned Founder will step forward, refusing even to meet

FOUNDER

Description: The original demons bound to this land by Kal Bax, the Founders have carved a semblance of civilization for themselves on the barren plain. Living in a large tent city called Gate, they have spent thousands of years trying to subvert their prison by magical means or direct assaults on the Fortress. These attacks have yielded a few First Age trinkets, but the demons have yet to find the rune that binds them. The Founders are more desperate than ever to escape their long captivity and see the characters as a means to that end.

Founders are bipedal, with long, chitinous arms and legs attached to a thick slug-like trunk. Their heads are crescent-shaped, with jutting chins, narrow eyes and a wide mouth that looks to be perpetually smiling. Skin coloration varies from pitch black to light gray, and Founders stand between four and six feet tall.

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Charms: Materialize, Measure the Wind, Principle of Motion, Words of Power

Cost To Materialize: 21*

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 7L Defense 7

Bite: Speed 4 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L Defense 6

Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 5L/8B (Tough hide, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 49

Other Notes: While the powers and ratings of each Founder do vary, this is a good base design for one.

* The enchantments laid by Bax on his minions make it impossible for any of the Founders to dematerialize.



the characters' gaze. He is mumbling something in Old Realm interspersed with more modern words (Intelligence + Linguistics to understand fully). In very meek tones, he will identify himself as U'awa, hail the characters as "Most Exalted Lords," apologize for daring to be in their presence

and ask them to follow him back to his home where they will find food, drink and more of their worshipers.

If the characters agree, the demon will rise and motion to the other Founders. They will turn and begin to march north, only stopping to pick up the bodies of the slain ice-eaters. U'awa will follow, occasionally glancing back over his shoulder to make sure the characters are keeping up.

Since the demons know all the routes through their land, they can move at an exceptional speed (up to 30 miles per day), and the characters will arrive at Gate in little more than an hour.

REFUSING THE FOUNDERS

Should the characters refuse the invitation, they will be able to proceed north as per usual. Ice eaters will be a constant threat and ~~food almost impossible to find here other than~~ that, the characters should make good time across the Demonlands (averaging about 20 miles per day over the flat, even terrain) to the far mountains. Eventually, they should notice that they are being followed by U'awa. He will never get within 100 feet of the characters nor threaten them in any way. If they try to speak to him, he will simply reiterate his offer, then turn to go. If the characters do not follow, he will be back watching them within a few hours.

GATE

Lying 25 miles from the forest, the Founder's sprawling tent city, Gate, is an odd combination of poverty and demonic splendor. Its buildings are composed of everything from worn canvas to mammoth bones, but these base materials have been shaped and infused with Essence. Some seem to be covered in gold, silver and gems; others have been molded into faces frozen in mid-scream. Over the years, the Founders tried to make their home as much like the infernal realm from whence they came as possible. The result is surreal architecture, part Northern barbarian, part demonic lord.



ICE-EATERS

Description: The product of mating between the Founders and mundane animal life, these God-Blooded beasts vary widely in size, shape and intelligence. Some are primarily demon, with certain animalistic features (a mammoth's trunk or caribou's antlers). While these half-breeds are not allowed to live in Gate, they keep an uneasy alliance with the Founders and have helped them attack the Invisible Fortress in the past. Those ice-eaters with thinner demon blood look more like Wyld-touched creatures than infernal spirits — they might be yeddin who breath fire or sparrows with long, forked tongues. The ice-eaters are not organized, but travel the Demonlands in packs of two to four, fighting each other and hunting for food. Generally, ice-eaters will function as little more than extras in this adventure, as even the most intelligent of them have trouble stringing a sentence together and they are far more interested in eating the characters than talking to them anyway.

Because ice-eaters come in so many sizes, shapes and power levels, it is impossible to establish any sort of base set of statistics for them. So, rather, you are encouraged to create your own ice-eaters using these simple steps;

- 1) Select an animal indigenous to the Far North.
 - 2) Raise all of its Physical and Mental Attributes by two dots and give it a base rating of one dot in each Social Attribute.
 - 3) Give it base Virtue ratings of 1 (Compassion), 1 (Conviction), 1 (Temperance) and 4 (Valor).
 - 2) Raise all Abilities by two dots.
 - 3) Increase its Willpower by three dots (up to a maximum of eight).
 - 4) Decide how far removed it is from its demonic heritage. If the beast is one generation removed, it possesses three basic spirit Charms. If it is two or three generations removed, it receives two basic spirit Charms. If it is four generations removed, the creature gets one spirit Charm. Any more than four generations removed and the ice-eater possesses no Charms.
 - 5) Give it an Essence rating of two.
 - 6) In combat, all its physical attacks receive a +2 bonus to damage.
 - 7) Finally, give the creature an additional three health levels — one -1 and two -2.
- So, a third-generation demonic bear might look something like this:

Name: Demon Bear

Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 5, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Generations Removed: 3

Charms: Stoic Endurance, Essence Bite

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 7 Accuracy 10 Damage 12L Defense 9

Claw: Speed 4 Accuracy 8 Damage 11L Defense 6

~~Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 6L/10B (Tough Hide: 3L/3B)~~

Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-3/-3/-4/Incap

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 42

When the characters arrive in Gate, they will be led toward its center. Along the way, every Founder they pass will fall to her knees and press her forehead to the ground. Even if the characters ask them not to do this, the Founders will continue. As they move, the hunting party will filter off until only the characters and Ul'awa remain. He will lead them to the tent at the center of the village, a massive 12-roomed structure built out of everything from stone

and timber to what looks to be hardened air. This is the home of the Founder queen, Corr'dal.

The characters will be given time to rest and clean up, before being taken to the Queen.

AN AUDIENCE WITH CORR'DAL

Upon entering the Queen's tent, the characters will find its interior is just as hodgepodge as its exterior, with

ATTACKING GATE

Should the characters, at any time, for a whatever reason, decide to stage an attack on Gate they will be met initially by 500 Founders. If the characters do not immediately succeed in their attack and are forced to flee, over the next several hours, the remaining Founders will gather several hundred of their more intelligent ice-eater allies and pursue the characters to the edge of the Demonlands. If characters do manage to triumph in their battle with the Founders, they will have a whole city of tawdry First Age relics to sort through, provided they can protect it from the thousands of ice-eaters intelligent enough to want some of it for themselves. This may be rather difficult for a Circle because many of the ice-eaters are intelligent enough to be acquisitive but still too stupid to negotiate with.

furniture seemingly gathered at random; worn rugs and ramshackle chairs share space with a solid gold dining table 20 feet long and Corr'dal's throne, which seems to be made entirely of silver and ivory.

Corr'dal herself is an ancient demon, the leader of the Founders and the first, much to her chagrin, summoned by Bax. She is so bloated she looks almost round and will lie motionless on her throne throughout the characters' time in her presence, only occasionally glancing at the small black demon, seeming to prompt him with no more than a look. Perceptive characters may be able to sense Essence flowing from Corr'dal (Perception + Occult roll). At no time will the Queen speak. U'awa will answer for her, and if questioned about this, he will tell the characters that his queen left conventional speech far behind centuries ago and now communicates directly to the minds of her followers.

The power the characters feel is, in fact, not coming from Corr'dal, but her throne. The seat of the throne is hollow, and inside are all the trinkets the demons have managed to steal from the Fortress over the years (minus those that are in use elsewhere). The items are protected by a series of complex locks (Intelligence + Larceny at +2 difficulty to foil), and there are five Founder guards in the throne room at all times.

These items create a chaotic mix of Essence around Corr'dal, making it extremely difficult to read her mind or divine any information about her magically (assume a +3 difficulty). Should a character succeed, he will find her radiating feelings of need, her mind filled with images of the construction of the Fortress.



Box 1



U'AWA'S HISTORY OF THE FORTRESS

Many years ago, when the world ended, a great group of sorcerers came north to make a splendid new home for themselves. Because they wanted this home to be a secret from their enemies, they called upon us to build it, using our claws and our backs. This we did gladly, happy to serve those so noble. But these sorcerers had made powerful enemies who hunted them even here, at the end of the world, and they were all driven to madness or the eternal sleep. Since then, we Founders have waited for the return of those who would make the Fortress their own again. We wish only to serve or, if we are not needed, to be released back to Malfeas. You are great and powerful, you must go to the Fortress. We will help you as best we can.

AN INFORMATIVE MEAL

U'awa will invite the characters to sit and share a meal. After the characters have taken their places, a half dozen demonic waiters will enter carrying smoking platters of meat and a meager selection of tubers. The observant characters will recognize the meat as being that of the ice-eaters they killed earlier.

As they eat, U'awa will ask how long the characters have been looking for the Invisible Fortress. Since this is probably the first time they have had a name given to the treasure trove they seek, the characters will likely ask for more information. U'awa will respond with a romanticized version of the history of the Fortress (see the sidebar below).

Any specific follow up questions (such as "When was the Fortress built?" or "What does it contain?") directed to either U'awa or Corr'dal will be answered, but with short and somewhat vague responses ("Too many years ago" or "Wonders of the past").

Characters who are not satisfied with these and press the issue will be brushed off by U'awa, who explains that such demands should not be made at a formal dinner. Any violence or overt threats will bring Founder guards into the room, anywhere from 10 to 50 of them, and pleas from U'awa for everyone to settle down. He will state that much of the knowledge has been lost to his people and that if the characters want their questions answered, they should go to the Fortress themselves.

Throughout the meal, U'awa will make idle conversation. However, at each opportunity, he will mention how desperate his people are and how all they want is to

return home. He is trying to get the characters to, if not pity them, at least consider releasing the demons from their centuries long bond should they be given the chance. Should the characters be trailing Mahina, U'awa will make vague reference to a small group passing through the ice-eater domains that refused to speak with him. He will also mention that they looked hungry and tired. If the characters are behind Lahor as well, U'awa will be happy to answer any questions about the Dragon-Blooded's army that he observed and that, indeed, fired on the Founders when they approached, wounding a dozen of U'awa's fellows.

After the characters have stuffed themselves, U'awa will tell them that the great Queen Corr'dal has requested they spend the night in her tent and promised that they will be lead to the Fortress the next day.

THE VISIT

After dinner, the characters will be shown to separate rooms in the Queen's tent, each equally odd in its furnishings — clearly they are furnished with salvaged gauderies. Most have bed frames of gold and pillows of silk but ratty blankets and a wall that provides little insulation from the cold. Characters who wish to sleep together will be accommodated, though the rooms can only house two people comfortably.

Roughly an hour later, U'awa will visit one of the characters. His choice will be based on who took the lead in their dinner conversation without being too overtly hostile. Should this character refuse U'awa entry to his room, the demon will go to another character until he finds one who will listen to him.

U'awa will enter bowing, ask the character how he is feeling and apologize for the poor quality of the meal they just ate. U'awa will reiterate how sad his people are, how they are starving and just want to be freed. He will acknowledge how strange such sentiments must seem

U'AWA'S MIND

Any attempt to read U'awa's mind or emotions or to discern whether he is telling the truth through magical means should carry a +1 difficulty. Like Corr'dal, U'awa (and, indeed, every demon in the Queen's tent) has a thin mist of the chaotic Essence put off by the throne around him.

Should a character succeed, she will learn that U'awa is telling the truth (technically, he is) but get the feeling he is concealing something. U'awa does not radiate any hostile emotions or thoughts. He is more melancholy than anything else.

U'AWA

Description: Standing just over four feet tall, U'awa is thin, with a large hooked nose, long claws and a set of pointed gray teeth. The classic conniver, U'awa is smart enough both to avoid battle and the appearance of being nothing more than a cheat or manipulator. He has acted as Cor'dal's unofficial vizier for almost three centuries and has dealt with a dozen or so Exalted before the characters arrive. He will poke and probe at the characters, asking questions in an attempt to ascertain where they are from and what they are motivated by. These inquiries should be phrased as casual dinner conversation. Unless the characters come off as incredibly humble (not likely), he will flatter and compliment them often (again, these compliments should be handled as part of casual conversation). U'awa learned long ago that all Exalted have egos, and he is more than happy to cater to them.



Roleplaying Tips: You are a proud creature, and you know the extent of your power. Still, like the other Founders, you are desperate to escape the barren Demonlands. To do so, you will act the part of both worshiper and victim for the characters when they arrive, trying to get them to commit to helping you. If they refuse, you will still make use of them, though not directly. They can at least distract the Guardian. If they agree, all the better.

Nature: Conniver

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Lore 2, Occult 2, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Charms: Essence Bite, Harrow the Mind, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Principle of Motion, Stoke the Flame, Words of Power

Cost To Materialize: 21*

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 4 Accuracy 9 Damage 4L Defense 6

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 4L Defense 8

Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 5L/8B (Tough hide, 3L/3B)

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

Incap

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 49

Other Notes: * Due to the constraints placed on them by Bax's binding, none of the demons can dematerialize.

coming from a demon but will explain that the Founders lost any thirst they might have had for revenge or blood long ago. Now, they just want to be freed. Even the Infernal Kingdom of Malfas and the rule of the Yozis is better than this desolate plain of ice. At least there they can move about and socialize.

U'awa will not belabor this point, nor should there be too much melodrama in this scene. He will state his regrets and then move on. His only goal at this point is to reaffirm

that the characters know the Founders position and that they are probably not like other demons the characters have met previously.

Once he has finished, U'awa will offer to answer any questions the character might have as best he can. Some specific information will be made available. He can reveal the age of the Fortress, the fact that Solar Exalted ("Sun -Touched"), including Kal Bax ("the great builder"), built it. He will also relate that a



CORR'DAL

Description: Corr'dal was the first demon summoned by Kal Bax and supervised the construction of the Manse. During that time, she came to respect Bax and his dream, which made his betrayal of her and her kind all the more bitter. Banished to the Demonlands, she organized the Founders and has ruled them ever since. Corr'dal is extremely fat, resembling a black, demonic slug. She can no longer move on her own, and even speech is a chore. But her mind is sharp, and it is she who has concocted the demons' grand plan for destroying the rune.

Roleplaying Tips: You are consumed by a hate for Exalted superceded only by your desire to be free of the barren plain once and for all. You control the Founders as totally as any demon lord in the Infernal Kingdom, and all of them would die for you. You will never speak directly to the characters, but you will evaluate them. They are powerful, perhaps powerful enough to capture the Fortress, and thus, you will try and make use of them. Even if they refuse, any assault they make on the Fortress will weaken it, and then, your people will strike.



Nature: Architect

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

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 1, Valor 2

Abilities: Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 4, Endurance 3, Lore 5, Occult 5, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Survival 2

Charms: Essence Bite, Harrow the Mind, Host of Spirits, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Possession, Principle of Motion, Stoke the Flame, Touch

of Grace, Words of Power. Corr'dal can also communicate telepathically with any Founder.

Cost To Materialize: 35*

Base Initiative: 7

Attack: None

Dodge Pool: 0 Soak: 5L/8B (Tough hide, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 73

Other Notes: * Due to the constraints placed on them by Bax's binding, none of the demons can dematerialize.

Guardian spirit protects the Fortress, and that the demons are bound by a runestone somewhere in the structure that Bax had promised to destroy (granting the demons their "final reward") but died before he could, thus dooming the Founders.

U'awa will then ask if the character needs anything, saying he can provide clothing and meat for the remainder of the journey. If the character takes him up on this offer, U'awa will return an hour later with a stack of patchwork garments and three packs full of demon meat.

That done, he will wish the character good night and, in parting, give him a bag containing a few (the same

number as there are characters in the Circle) pieces of orichalcum carved in the shape of flames.

THE DEMONS' STRATEGY

The characters figure very prominently into the Founder's plans to free themselves, but the Solars do not have to pledge to help U'awa and his people to prove useful. The dinner and visit by U'awa are both well rehearsed. Over the centuries, other Exalted have been drawn North by the Fortress, and more than a few have spent a night in Gate on their way. Should the characters seem receptive to helping him, U'awa will ask only

THE GOLDEN FLAMES (ARTIFACT •)

Each orichalcum flame is an inch in diameter and can be easily held in the hand or strung on a bit of leather around the neck.

System: When fed 1 mote of Essence, the flame will radiate heat for up to three hours. Fed more than 1 mote, the intensity of this heat will double (with 2 motes), triple (with 3) and so on. While it will warm the person holding or sleeping on it, the trinket will not burn, regardless of how hot it gets.

that they search for the runestone and either destroy it or bring it to him, promising eternal thanks of they do. He will not attempt to swear them to any oath, nor will he swear one to them (saying that to do so would infuriate his queen).

Should the characters refuse to help the Founders or ignore U'awa's plea, he will be disappointed but not angered or moved to violence, as Cor'dal has already set forth a plan of action. She knows the characters are powerful and hopes their arrival at the Fortress will distract the Guardian. Thus, when the demons attack en masse shortly after the characters enter, they can storm the structure and, literally, tear it apart searching for the runestone. Any character with a demonic advisor or experience dealing with demons is almost certain (Intelligence + Socialize, difficulty 1 for the character, automatic for a consulted demon) to discern that something is afoot, but the specifics of the matter are not at all clear.

THE FINAL APPROACH

The next morning, as promised, U'awa and a small band of Founders will lead the characters out of Gate and into the distant mountains. The Circle will not be bothered by ice-eaters during this trip, nor by any threats outside of a light snowstorm.

The path from the Demonlands leads to a pass between two mountains — gentler terrain than the Maw,

MAHINA AND LAHOR

Moving at a steady pace, it should take the characters roughly 36 days to reach the Fortress from Wangler's Knob (more if they have to stop to rest frequently or encounter an extremely time-consuming obstacle, less if they made frequent use of Survival Charms). In comparison, it will take Mahina 22 days to make the same trip, and Lahor 60. Depending on how fast they move and when they left the Knob, the characters could arrive before either Dragon-Blooded or behind both of them.

It is important to keep track of where the other two expeditions are on the road. Even if the three never meet, the sequence in which they arrive at the Fortress will shape the action there, as should become apparent in the next section.

but still rocky and rather steep. The pass seems to end in a maze of cliffs and clefts. One cleft extends for nearly 100 feet, then opens on a narrow triangular valley between three mountains. The valley is about three miles wide and four miles long.

As the characters climb the slope at the far end of the valley, the ever-present tugging fades until, finally, their demonic guides point at the far wall and tell them that it is the Invisible Fortress before turning and leaving the characters alone in the valley.

At first, the fortress seems to live up to its name: The characters see nothing but a barren, rocky mountainside. Characters whose players succeed on a Perception + Occult roll will notice hidden irregularities in the shadows cast by the rocks, a glitter of sunlight where none should be. Once these features are pointed out to the other characters, all are able to take in the massive face of the Invisible Fortress carved into the rock.

They have arrived.





CHAPTER TWO GUARDIANS OF THE INVISIBLE FORTRESS



Their demonic guide, U'awa, leaves the characters at the foot of a long slope of scree. The Solars built the Invisible Fortress on a broad ledge high above the valley floor. Behind it, the mountain rises in a cliff about 200 feet high. The Fortress itself is partly sunk into the foot of the rock face. In front of the Fortress, the mountainside descends at a 30-degree slope. Jagged, broken rocks ranging in size from cobbles to boulders — rubble from the construction of the Fortress — covers the last 100 feet before one reaches the ledge. The stones are too small to provide cover. If anyone watches from the Fortress, they can see the characters coming.

A flagstone path just two feet wide winds through the rubble field, but over the centuries, rocks have drifted and slid to cover almost half of the path. Without the use of Charms, characters must pick their way slowly and carefully through the rubble field to avoid a twisted ankle or a bad fall. It is impossible to reach the Fortress without either climbing through the rubble field, descending the cliff or flying.

The Fortress itself rises in rectangular blocks with steeply peaked roofs. The two forward wings frame a stepped patio. Pillars, a pediment and two wide

stained-glass windows frame the front door. Behind it, a broad, cupola-topped dome emerges from the cliff like an immense stone boil.

Deeply set, narrow windows pierce the walls. Steel bars, free of rust after more than a millennium, shield the ground-floor windows. The gables of the Fortress possess broader windows. At the base of the roof, circular niches hold domed, golden mirrors a foot in diameter — the only external ornament for the Fortress.

Irregular ridges, channels and bands of differently colored stone in the facade break up the Fortress' outline and suggest a rugged cliff. Even the skylights are not immediately recognizable, thanks to the blobs of snow that cling to the irregular curves of the windows' tracery.

The windows that flank the front doors each depict a great sunburst. The front doors consists of two slabs of stone, each 5 feet wide and 11 feet high, bound in bands and whorls of bronze. In the center of the doors, an odd bronze mask with crystalline eyes scowls down on the patio. As the Solars stand before the doors and the glittering, disturbingly *aware* eyes of the mask, the doors open outward by themselves. The mask splits down the middle into two leering faces in profile.



SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER YOU

The door-mask seems to look at the characters who stand before it. They may well seek to know if it really does watch them. Charms such as All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight reveal the mask to be a magical construct. Spirit-Detecting Glance generates a more ambiguous response: The character knows that there's a spirit *somewhere* nearby, but she can never localize it, to the mask or anywhere else.

Magic-sensing Charms give similar results throughout the Invisible Fortress. Magic saturates the entire building. A character can sense and analyze magic or spiritual forces that she can touch, but the Storyteller should raise the difficulty by 1 (thus, a minimum difficulty of 2). The Manse's power makes it impossible to detect anything beyond arm's reach.

The everywhere-but-nowhere spirit is the Guardian Spirit of the Fortress. It opens the doors for the characters and declares its presence in its own time.

INTRODUCTION

After all the dangers the Solars faced reaching the Invisible Fortress, the characters may expect a haven of safety. They could not be more wrong. Now, however, the Solars face a more subtle enemy — one who attacks through guile, turns the characters' own power against them and hides behind a bewildering series of masks.

This chapter consists of three main sections. First, we describe the Invisible Fortress itself and the automata and spirits that inhabit it. Next comes a description of the Final Retreat, a trap-filled series of rooms and tunnels below the Fortress itself. Finally, we discuss the characters' murderous secret adversary, the stratagems it employs and ways to fight it. An appendix describes the various treasures found in the Invisible Fortress.

THE PLOT IN BRIEF

The old Solars created a powerful spirit as their watchman and major-domo. The Guardian did not begin as a killer... but it learned from the example of its creators. The Guardian seeks the characters' deaths — just as it killed all the others who found the Fortress in centuries past.

The Guardian hides its intentions from the characters. It attacks through proxies and dangerous "accidents." It sends dreams and apparitions to delude the characters and set them against each other. Exalted deaths feed the Guardian's power, and it intends to feed well.

The treasures left in the Fortress itself are small but tantalizing. Beneath the Fortress lies a still more secret

bunker, a Final Retreat that the old Solars dug in case the Dragon-Blooded ever found and overwhelmed the Fortress. Here, the Solars hid their greatest magical weapons and treasures. Such a hoard of First Age magic would be worth more than most kingdoms... and provides a more-than-adequate motivation for murder. In addition, the characters must negotiate a grueling series of traps and blind alleys to find the Final Retreat.

If the characters can defeat the Guardian, they win the greatest treasure of all: one of the most powerful Manses in the world. Keeping the Invisible Fortress, however, may prove as challenging as surviving it!

MOOD

Despite the trap-filled subterranean chambers and magical treasures, this chapter of *The Invisible Fortress* is a ghost story, with the sentient, malevolent spirit of the Fortress itself as the ghost. The Guardian seeks to destroy the characters through their own greed, paranoia and other weaknesses, while using the lure of treasure to keep them in the Fortress and marching into one danger after another.

We recommend that Storytellers emphasize the labyrinthine mystery of the Invisible Fortress. Each trap conceals another trap; each deception, another deception. Threats appear and disappear like mirages. Strive to keep the players and characters off balance, never letting them slow down.

Play up the oppressive, deathly isolation of the Fortress. The characters are far from civilization in a house of the dead. Nothing lives in the Manse, save the Attic's spiders and moss. The dense, lowering clouds touch the peaks of the surrounding mountains, shrinking the visible world to one small, desolate valley. Frequent snowstorms blot away even that, shrouding everything beyond the Fortress' windows into blank whiteness. Everything in this icy, constricted world turns inward.

As a final introversion, the Fortress acts like an echo chamber or hall of mirrors, reflecting back the characters' passions and expectations. Make these metaphors concrete through descriptions of echoing halls, the speaking tubes that carry sounds from distant rooms and the omnipresent reflections from mirrors, polished stone, metal and water.

THE HOUSE OF DEAD GODS

The Invisible Fortress is a huge, four-story mansion. It consists of an attic, two residential floors and a cellar. The highest gable is 60 feet above the ground. At the front of the Fortress, the first floor is six feet above the ground level. The rear of the Fortress, however, is actually sunk into the mountainside.

The exterior stone walls are 10 feet thick in most places. Interior walls range from one to four feet thick. Even the roof is made of stone, shingled with slabs of thin slate.

The Fortress is no mere castle, though. It is a Manse of great but disordered power. Exalted characters can

A SONG OF NIGHTINGALES

If the Solars did not kill V'neef Mahina back in Wangler's Knob, she probably arrives at the Fortress before the Solars. In that case, run this scene when the characters enter the Fortress. See "What About Mahina?" below, if she arrives after the characters.

As the characters enter the Fortress, they see a dead body lying in a pool of dark, congealed blood at the far end of the room: one of the mercenaries hired by their rival Mahina. Something tore out the throat of the tough Northern soldier. The Solars hear a woman singing:

*Nightingale in lilac tree,
Guide me to my lover.
Two hearts meet at eventide,
In the lilac bower.*

The singer is in the Dining Hall of the Fortress. As the characters race into the room they see V'neef Mahina dancing by herself. Her pack lies on one of the round stone tables, and a meal of trail rations awaits on a setting of fine china and crystal. She finishes her song:

*Nightingale, why do you sing,
Calling to your lover?
Golden bars confine your wings,
Two hearts meeting never.*

Mahina notices the characters, curtsies, and asks them,

"Won't you join me for tea? I'd invite you to the garden, but the weather is somewhat chilly today."

Mahina has lost her mind. All six of her soldiers lie dead, scattered throughout the Manse.

feel the turbulent currents of Essence swirling through the structure. The primary vortex that prevents the Manse from radiating its Essence like a mystical sun remains intact, but strange surges and lapses of Essence constantly come and go. Were its Essence-flows better ordered, this would certainly be a ••••• Manse — one of the most powerful in the world. As it stands, much of the Manse's power seems devoted either to concealing itself or simply wasted.

EXTERIOR FEATURES

WINDOWS

The windows consist of a stone tracery-holding thick, faceted chunks of glass or crystal that fragment and distort any image, making it impossible to see inside the Fortress. (The reverse is not true. The image is a little wavy looking out a window, but recognizable enough.) None of the windows open.

The windows nestle in foot-deep niches in the walls. Inch-thick steel bars still shield the ground-floor windows. The second-floor and attic windows lack such protection. A person who clammers about the Fortress exterior discovers that bars once shielded the upper-floor windows as well, but now, only rusty, cut stubs remain.

The gable skylights are made of thinner, flatter glass, but dirt encrusts them. A person who cleans a pane can look into the attic of the Fortress but sees nothing except rows of tables full of dead, withered plants. A falling boulder has smashed a hole in a skylight near the cliff. (This is not visible from the ground.)

ROOF

The roof of the Fortress consists of several steeply pitched gables. Smaller fallen rocks and dirt collect in the angles between the gables and around the many chimneys. Where the dome bulges out of the cliff, a fold of rock conceals a narrow stairway descending into the Fortress; this is the only door out onto the roof of the Fortress. The roof lacks any sort of balcony, widow's walk or railing. Between the steep angles and icy slate shingles, clambering about the roof is suicidally dangerous (difficulty 4) without the use of Charms or mountaineering equipment.

INTERIOR FEATURES

Many important features of the Fortress are not unique to any particular room. We describe these details and amenities here so they need not be repeated each time they occur.

LIGHT

Unless otherwise noted, each room contains one or more orbs of dull-gray crystal set in the walls or ceiling. These form the lighting system for the Invisible Fortress (in addition to the windows, of course.) When fed a mote of Essence, all the orbs in a room shine with a clear white light for one to three hours. Figuring out how to activate the lights requires a simple success on an Intelligence + Lore roll.

Originally (as the Guardian can explain), the orbs shone or dimmed at the will of the Solars, without requiring any donation of Essence. However, until the flows of Essence within the Fortress are stabilized, the lights cannot draw upon their regular power source. Once in a while, a random spike of Essence makes an orb flare brightly.

(This is a lie. The Guardian has full control over the lights. It diverts the Manse's Essence from the lights as a way to trick the characters into giving it Essence.)

HEAT

The Solars could magically evoke as much heat as they wanted — but they didn't want to expend more Essence than necessary, in case their spells of concealment were not





quite as effective as they thought. Thus, they built fireplaces into the Invisible Fortress and used tiny amounts of Essence to make the fire burn longer and give more heat than it naturally would. They brought wagonloads of firewood for fuel... and used it up. After that, they sent mortal servants, bound demons, automata or themselves to dig peat in their valley's marsh. Sometimes, they even summoned fire elementals for heat. Over the centuries, however, occasions arose when the Solars wanted or needed a wood fire — so they broke up disused furniture. As a result, the Fortress lacks much of the furniture a sumptuous home ought to have. When the Solars bothered replacing the furniture, they crafted the replacements out of stone or terra-cotta. These porcelain replacements are more comfortable than sitting on rocks — but not by much.

BEDS

All the beds in the Invisible Fortress follow a plan well known in some parts of the North. The mattress rests on a hollow masonry platform with a door in one side — and a flue. The platform is actually a broad, shallow stove. A few burning peats tossed into the bed-stove gives hours of slow, gentle heat through the stone platform.

SPEAKING TUBES

Each room on the ground floor and second floor has a speaking tube outlet. So do the refectory, kitchen and scullery in the cellar. Next to each outlet, a bronze panel set in the wall holds eight knobs. All the tubes connect in a central junction-box buried within the stonework of the Fortress. Pulling out the correct pair of knobs connects you to the speaking tube in another room. Thus, people can talk to each other in the two main floors of the Fortress.

The Guardian also uses the speaking tubes to speak to people within the Fortress. In fact, it can manipulate the system to link two rooms any time it wants. Every now and then, it links two rooms so that characters hear what other characters are doing. It blames these "malfunctions" on the Essence imbalances within the Fortress.

INDOOR PLUMBING

Water-heaters, faucets and flush toilets are nothing strange in the Age of the Exalted. Folk in the Scarier Empire and the more prosperous states of the Threshold accept indoor plumbing as one of many pleasant amenities available to the wealthy — or to anyone with a few coins, in the cities with public bathhouses. People from more backward or tribal parts of the Threshold might find the Invisible Fortress' plumbing novel, but most characters will probably accept it without comment.

Not much of the plumbing works after so many centuries, but a competent scavenger or savant could repair most of it in a few weeks. A Solar with the right Craft-based Charms could fix the plumbing in a few days, especially with the Guardian explaining how it all works.

TAPESTRIES

Several rooms on the first and second floors contain dull-hued rugs and tapestries meant to render the room less chilly. They don't work very well.

A character who closely examines the rugs and tapestries finds that they are not woven from wool, cotton, linen or any other fiber the character knows. Rather, the fiber seems to be *mineral* — spun rock. In fact, that is exactly what they are — an invention of one of the exiled Solars.

DEFENSES

Just because an enemy locates and reaches the Invisible Fortress does not mean that that enemy can invade the Manse. The Solars installed formidable defenses... probably more formidable than the characters realize.

The powerful magic of the Fortress renders it nigh-invulnerable. Walls, windows and the front door alike have 18 bashing/12 lethal/6 aggravated soak. The thick, exterior walls take 40 health levels to damage, 80 to destroy. The windows and the front door are considerably less sturdy: inflicting eight health levels of damage breaks a normal window; a mere four health levels suffices to break a skylight; the front door takes 10 health levels to damage and 20 to destroy. If the portcullis is raised from the basement to reinforce the front door and shield its flanking windows, an attacker must inflict another 10 health levels of damage to hack or batter his way in.

Even the magic of the Solars and the repair efforts of the Guardian could not preserve the Fortress undamaged forever, though. A boulder that fell from the cliff face smashed a hole in one of the skylights.

The furnishings have also suffered severe damage over the centuries. Some demons can slither down the chimneys. Other demons enter the Fortress by teleportation or in the form of mist or shadows. The spells on the Fortress normally block such mystic invasions, but age renders these bans erratic. The demons ripped up everything they could in their search for the runestone that binds them. Also, the characters are not the first visitors to the Fortress, and these other explorers inflicted their own damage, too.

Demons who sneak into the Fortress soon encounter the next layer of defense, one designed exclusively for use against them. Essence use by demons makes the glow-orbs within the Fortress shine a harsh, fiery yellow-orange. For each turn of exposure to the light, pure-blooded demons suffer the loss of one dot from one of their Physical Traits — their Strength, Dexterity, Stamina or health levels. The ice-eaters resist the ban-light somewhat, suffering one dot of Trait loss every two or three turns, depending on their proportion of demonic heritage. A demon who avoids using Essence does not trigger the demonbane light.

An invader also faces the automaton servants left by the Solars. Although these servants are nearly mindless, the Guardian Spirit of the Fortress can direct them. Just

how much it can direct them will come as a nasty surprise to the characters.

The Solars expected to defend the Fortress themselves. In addition to the Essence-Serpents controlled from the Upstairs Parlor, they had their own Charms and sorcery and a small but potent arsenal of magic weapons. However, unless the characters can locate the Solars' hidden cache of magic weapons, they have only their powers and the Essence-Serpents to defend them if the demons or Sesus Lahor's forces attack.

SECRET DOORS, TRAPS AND PITS

The Fortress and the Final Retreat beneath it hold several secret doors. Most lead to traps, one leads to the entrance to the Final Retreat. Unless otherwise mentioned, locating a secret door calls for a simple success on a Perception + Larceny roll. When a character looks for secret doors, though, make the player say which surface the character searches, and as Storyteller, make the requisite roll yourself. Never say, "The wall has no secret doors," say, "You find no secret doors."

The Solars concealed their traps well. Characters can search *specific surfaces or objects* for traps. This also uses a Perception + Larceny roll but at difficulty 2 unless otherwise mentioned. If the roll succeeds, the character knows the location of the trap and has a pretty good idea of its nature.

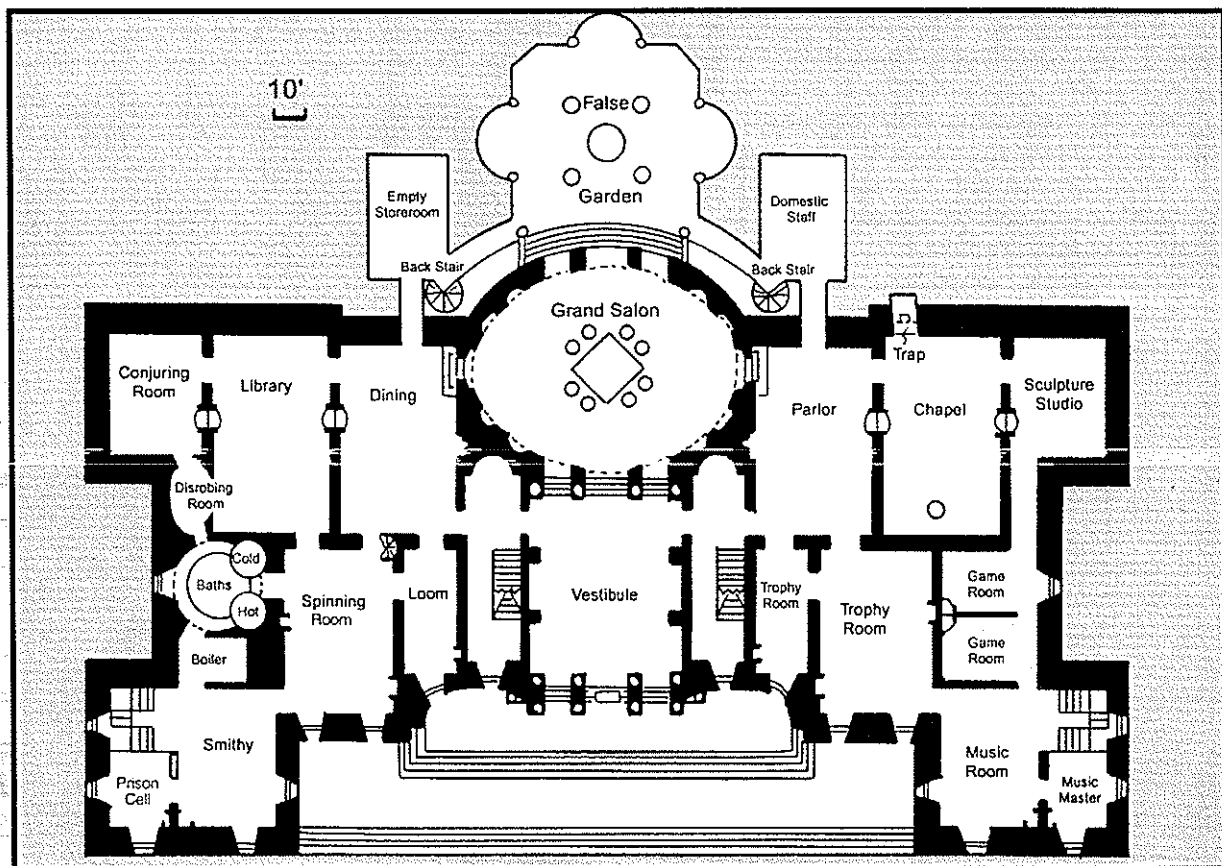
Most pit traps are 20 feet deep, with stone spikes in the bottom. A character who falls in the pit lands on 4 spikes, -1 spike per success on a reflexive Wits + Athletics roll. Each spike inflicts 6L damage.

GROUND FLOOR

The ground floor of the Invisible Fortress holds the amenities, comforts and entertainments of the self-exiled Solars, from music to bathing. White marble with pale veins covers the walls and, often, the floor as well. Depending on the light, the marble's veins can look warm pink, light yellow or an icy, pale blue or gray. The ceilings are plaster molded into sunburst designs. Ribs, cornices and sculptured vines of gilded bronze ornament most of the rooms. A close examination reveals hair-fine wires of orichalcum threading through the metal moldings and vines. Tiny mirrors of gilded glass nestle among the vines and carvings as well.

VESTIBULE

Gray flagstones cover this large room's floor. Bands of silver-gray stone adorn the white marble walls; the veins in the marble often show the same gray hue. The four piers along the side walls hold bas-relief carvings of long, slender animals, such as elongated lions, of the same silver-gray stone. Each pier holds three such beasts, one above the





other, with rectangular, gilded mirrors between them. The carvings have glittering eyes of gold and crystal.

The 12 carved beasts are automaton guards. They can swell from slightly raised carvings to three-dimensional beasts and drop to the floor to fight and kill. Only the Guardian can control this defensive feature. Until it gains more Essence, it animates only one "Leonine" at a time — and for no longer than a few minutes. See below for the combat statistics of the Leonines.

GRAND SALON

The largest chamber in the Fortress is an oval 60 feet wide, 45 feet long and a full three stories high. Eight slender pillars of white marble reach from the floor to the domed ceiling 50 feet overhead. Above, the pillars ring a great lens of pale yellow glass. Below, the pillars encircle a complex mosaic of interlacing polychromatic circles and squares, with a fist-sized golden nodule in the center.

On ground level, four pairs of arched niches indent the walls.

On the second floor, a foot-wide cornice links four balconies that overhang the east, west and south passages; the northern balcony completes the symmetry. Gilded balustrades guard two archways that flank the southern balcony. The northern wall holds false archways.

On the third floor, withered branches and vines spill from a trio of holes knocked in the southern wall above a second cornice.

A third cornice divides the walls from the domed ceiling. The ceiling bears a fresco of eight panels, each portraying the Unconquered Sun in a different activity: fighting monsters, enthroned in judgment, casting light over a field of grain and so on.

The usual gilded ribs and vines frame each niche and entry. More vinework runs along the bottom of each cornice. Golden chains from the pillars meet to support a 10-foot-wide golden chandelier of dull glass balls hanging from the pommels of upturned swords. Sixteen black obsidian mirrors spaced along the walls and eight smaller mirrors set within the pillars accent the white and gold of the rest of the room.

The Grand Salon presents several features of interest:

- The Grand Salon is the heart of the Manse's power, where its Hearthstone should form. An Exalted character can feel how the room's elliptical form, the dome, pillars, mirrors, mosaic and bands of orichalcum create a powerful vortex of Essence. Someone who knows a bit about Manse construction can more fully appreciate the subtleties of how the form of the vortex prevents leakage of Essence from the Invisible Fortress.

- The little dome in the center of the mosaic flips up to reveal a small cavity. The Manse's Hearthstone forms here, but the cavity is empty. The dome and cavity are solid orichalcum.

- The ceiling lens is 15 feet in diameter. During the day, the great crystal lens sheds a warm, golden glow through the Grand Salon. If someone casts a mote of Essence into the lens, shadows swirl across its surface to form a map of the 50 miles around the Fortress. Glowing flecks represent beings rich in Essence, such as the demons. (The exiled Solars created this magic map to keep watch over their trapped demons and to watch for Dragon-Blooded armies.) The lens-map remains active for about five minutes. The Guardian can activate the lens-map. If characters expend more than 5 motes in the Grand Salon during a single scene, the map automatically activates.

- The chandelier is made of gilded bronze, with threads of orichalcum along its recurved arms and blades. The glass balls are glow-orbs, as described above.

- Any sound made in a niche reverberates through the Grand Salon. A character whose player makes a Perception + Investigation roll can imagine the long-ago scene of Solars dancing in the Grand Salon to forget their self-imposed exile, while musicians played in the niches, hidden behind long-vanished filigree screens.

- The painted figures of the Unconquered Sun are both male and female. Anyone who studies the frescoes in the Salon and the portraits in the second-floor gallery recognizes that the exiled Solars gave the Unconquered Sun their own features — portraying themselves as their god. This is, needless to say, as offensive a heresy as can be imagined.

- The northern balcony is an obvious place for a secret door. There isn't one.

ATTUNEMENT TO THE INVISIBLE FORTRESS

Once the characters fetch the Manse's Hearthstone from the Final Retreat, they can attune themselves to the Invisible Fortress by the normal methods. They discover, however, that the Essence they actually receive from this Manse varies wildly.

Each hour that a character draws upon the Manse, the Storyteller should roll one standard 10-sided die, divide the result by two and round halves upward. This number, from one to five, gives the Manse's rating for them at that hour. Thus, attuned characters can draw from 4 to 20 motes while inside the Fortress and cannot predict or control how much they receive. Each attuned character should roll separately during a given hour.

PARLOR

A threadbare carpet woven in vine and floral patterns covers the floor of this room. Several ornamental ledges jut

from the walls. For such a large room, it doesn't have much furniture, just an upholstered chair, two lounges for reclining and a cabinet in the western wall niche. The floor is scattered with broken glass and porcelain.

The cabinet holds several old wine-bottles and jars (empty, except for a trace of dried lees in the bottom) and one surviving crystal goblet. The broken pottery is comprised of vases that demons smashed long ago.

CHAPEL

This room is more richly decorated than most of the others. The southern wall bears a shallow niche with a low-relief carving of the Unconquered Sun enthroned as a divine king. To the right of the Unconquered Sun, smaller niche carvings depict Luna and the Five Maidens. To the left, other niches portray Gaia and the Five Elemental Dragons. All the figures are brightly painted, with gold and silver accents; elaborate gilded scrollwork frames each niche.

A gilded latticework divides the other walls into diamonds of veined white marble, with a golden boss in the middle of each diamond. A band of the usual gilded vinework runs along the top of each wall.

The shallowly vaulted ceiling is enameled bright blue, with an enormous sun of crimson, yellow, silver and gold at the apex. The center of the painted sun is a yard-wide disk of gray glass. Except for its size and shape, this operates just like the glow-orbs found throughout the Invisible Fortress.

Blue tiles with golden sunbursts tile the floor.

A drum of white marble three feet in diameter and four feet high serves as an altar. The altar was capped and trimmed with orichalcum, but someone ripped away most of the filigree on the sides of the altar and about a third of the sheet of orichalcum on top. The center of the altar is hollowed into a bowl, still bearing ashes from the last sacrifice burned to the Unconquered Sun.

The Unconquered Sun has eyes of crystal and a tiny amount of orichalcum foil. No matter where one stands in the chapel, or what the lighting, the eyes seem to look somewhere else — never directly at a character.

A character who knows about First Age religion can realize, through a successful Intelligence + Lore roll, that a chapel to the Unconquered Sun should have *windows*, so the Sun's light can fill the sanctum. Placing the chapel in a back room — even a large and sumptuous back room — with an ersatz sun shows a distinct lack of piety.

- The rear wall of the chapel holds a secret door opened by pressing the correct gilded boss. This door leads to a square shaft. Horizontal slots in one wall serve as a crude ladder. The shaft goes down 30 feet. At the bottom of the shaft, characters find massive double doors of stone bound with bronze set in the opposite wall. The doors are six feet tall, eight feet wide and locked. The lock is easy to pick (requiring a simple success on an Intelligence + Larceny roll) — but this triggers the trap. The doors are

fake: When someone picks the lock, the massive, knobby doors slam across the shaft, inflicting 10 health levels of lethal damage on everyone standing in the shaft. Metal arms attached to the doors then pull back the doors, and the doors relock, rearming the trap.

SCULPTURE STUDIO

This room holds several blocks of the local stone, many broken statues of the Solars, a stone workbench and a rack of tools along the eastern wall. Half the tools are missing.

TROPHY ROOMS

The skins of strange beasts cover the floors of these rooms. Stuffed and mounted heads hang on the walls. Most are of various monsters, but three are human. All bear rips and tears. Cabinets with glass doors hold various oddities: a foot-long reptilian scale inlaid with a heraldic symbol; a broken sword with a blade of violet metal; a crystal ball holding a black rosebud; an ordinary terracotta drinking bowl, broken and carefully mended; and so on.

These trophy rooms hold relics from the old Solars' adventures or other memorabilia that they could not bear to abandon. No doubt, each relic plays a part in an epic of heroism, sorrow, love or lessons learned — but no one remains who could tell these tales.

The cabinets themselves are magical. Although the cabinets are made of wood and glass, they are stronger than steel (8B/8L soak) and magically locked. Each cabinet bears a carved face that snarls and shouts, but they have no way to actually fight a vandal. The Guardian can introduce characters as Solars and the new owners of the Fortress. After this, the carved faces unlock the cabinets whenever the characters want, so long as the characters feed them a mote of Essence.

The demons managed to rip out and carry away one whole case. The other cabinets worry terribly about their comrade and insist that the characters force the demons to bring back their fellow and the treasures it contained. (Even if the characters want to do this, the task is not possible. The demons smashed the stolen cabinet and broke or recycled its contents centuries ago.)

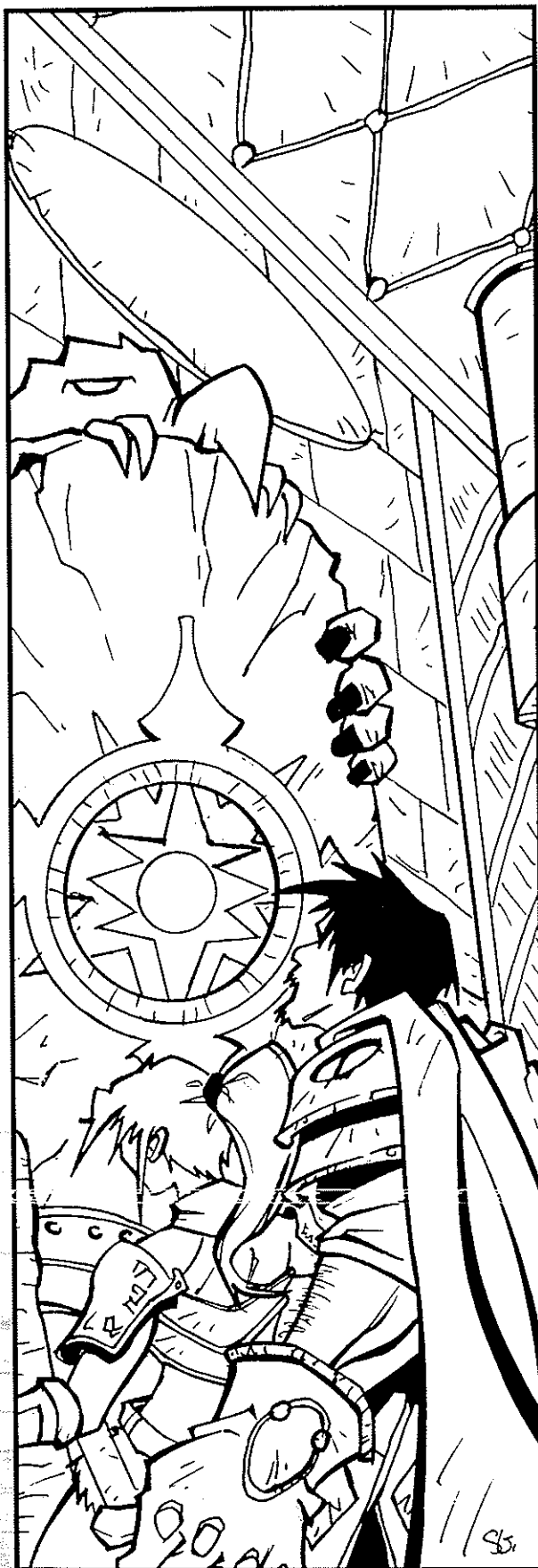
GAME ROOMS

These two small rooms each hold a low table and several mats on the carpeted floor. Faded and ripped tapestries cover the walls. One room still holds a stack of dried peat near the fireplace. Cabinets hold an assortment of board games that somewhat resemble chess, checkers, Parcheesi and go — First Age games whose rules are now impossible to guess. The cabinets also hold dice, cards and other tools for games.

MUSIC ROOM

This is one of the few rooms where the long-dead Solars did not scavenge all the wood and metal. The room





holds four comfortable (but scarred and threadbare) chairs. The walls hold cases of musical instruments: lyres, flutes, small drums, a gamelan and others. Leather drumheads and gut strings break at a touch, but the other instruments remain in working order after all these centuries. One case is broken and empty.

The cabinets are talking automata, like the ones in the trophy rooms. They nag characters to take good care of the instruments.

MUSIC MASTER'S ROOM

This was once a comfortable bedroom, but the Solars stripped out anything of wood or metal. The only remaining furnishings are a bed platform and mattress, two ripped footlockers of stiffened leather, a chamberpot and a scattering of small ceramic knobs, and an ancient lyre with broken strings.

Inside the bed platform, scorched but still intact among the ashes, is a porcelain mask. The mask carries Essence—it's magic. If a person donates a mote of Essence to the mask, an elderly woman appears, with the mask covering her face. This nice old lady, Liwet Ohazia, was the music master for the Solars. See the "Minions" section, below, for more about Liwet Ohazia.

DINING ROOM

Faded, worn and ragged tapestries hang on the walls of this room, and a tattered carpet covers the floor. The room holds five round tables of white marble and four chairs of carved stone. A few shreds of faded cloth are all that remains of their upholstery. Light comes from the ubiquitous crystal orbs and reflects from the ubiquitous mirrors.

A curtained niche in the east wall holds three eerie figures. Each figure has a painted porcelain mask for a face. Bronze hands on stick-like arms emerge from threadbare sleeves. Their tattered, hooded robes hang loosely on stick-figures of jointed bronze rods.

These grotesque scarecrows are servants. Given 2 motes of Essence each, they animate for an hour to help people with their chairs, pour wine and otherwise wait attendance on anyone who dines in this chamber. Afterward, they collect the dishes and carry them to the scullery in the cellar. They cannot speak, merely gesture. The Guardian can control them at will, but to animate them, it, too, must feed them Essence.

LIBRARY

Some of the stone shelves in this large room are broken, from demons looking for secret cupboards that do not exist. The shelves are mostly empty, though. Only a few stacks of jumbled gold, silver, copper and silk sheets remain.

These are all that's left of the many books that the Solars carried into exile. The Solars burned the books and scrolls of paper and parchment for heat. Much later, raiding demons ripped the remaining books apart in their

fury. The Fortress' Spirit Servitors collected the scattered pages, but did not order them. The characters can reassemble the pages into books but not complete texts: In every case, some pages were lost.

Two of the books are epics about Solars who dwelled in the Fortress, written by court poets. The glory of the Solars' deeds as cunning heroes and brilliant savants comes through at times, despite the extravagant, repetitive passages of praise that mar the stories.

One book of gold is a historical epic about the battle against the Primordials, allegedly written by a Dragon-Blooded squire who lived through the last decade of the war. Although incomplete, the story incidentally includes some rare and obscure lore about the Primordials, gods, demons, the Exalted of the First Age and their customs. *The Tale of Penarys* presents the Dragon-Blooded of the early First Age as Exalted field engineers who shaped the natural world to help the Solar and Lunar heroes in battle (and repaired the damage afterward) and implies that they were far more than shieldbearers and shock troops. How much of this was propaganda deliberately spread by the Celestials to show the Dragon-Blooded that their role in supporting the bureaucracy of the Solar Deliberative was divinely ordained and how much was truth is up to the Storyteller to decide.

Another golden-paged book is a manual of First Age sorcery. Unfortunately, half the pages are missing, making the spells described therein suggestive but not immediately useful. Perhaps one of the demon tribes has the other pages?

We leave the other books for each Storyteller to design on her own. They can be "treasures" (the Immaculate Order and other loremasters would pay much for authentic First Age texts) or the seeds of further adventures.

CONJURING ROOM

The walls of this room are inlaid with powerful runes of protection and containment. The floor holds three summoning circles inlaid in orichalcum: one for demons, one for elementals and one unlike anything even the most knowledgeable characters have seen before. These potent circles add two dice to the character's Occult rolls for mastery of the appropriate beings.

The Guardian or the Servitors can explain the mysterious third circle: The old Solars used it to transform the last of their aging mortal servants into the ageless Spirit Servitors. This was the great discovery of the Twilight Caste Solar, Larquen Quen, and a remarkable feat of Solar Circle Sorcery.

BATHING CHAMBER

This circular room is slightly sunken below the level of the other rooms. Green tiles cover the floor. The walls bear frescoes, much damaged by water and mildew, that might once have portrayed trees and shrubs to give the

conceit of a forest pool. Several short, corroded bronze branches emerge from the wall to serve as hangers for clothing and towels. The north and south walls hold full-length, oval mirrors of silvered glass.

A 12-foot-wide circular basin of white tile occupies the center of the room, while semicircular niches in the walls hold 8-foot basins raised a foot above the main basin and partially overlapping it. The northern niche's walls bear a scene of icebergs and distant snowy mountains, while glistening crystal lines the basin; the southern basin is painted with a scene of a tropical beach, with actual sand in the basin. Brass pipes once brought water to the three pools; the plugs to their drains evidently rotted away long ago.

Originally, each pool supplied a different temperature bath: cold to the north, hot to the south and warm in the main bath, which received the overflow from both. Hot water came from the boiler in the adjacent room. The northern bath is kept cold by its lining of ice brought from the uttermost North — ice so completely frozen that only a smith's furnace could melt it back into water. The brass taps have corroded shut, but as mentioned before, are quite amenable to repair.

DISROBING ROOM

Like the bathing chamber, the walls of this small, elliptical room are painted to show a forest glade, with bronze tree-branches emerging from the wall. Three "mossy boulders" of glazed and textured pottery serve as stools for people dressing or undressing. Two of the branches clutch a full-length silver mirror against the west wall.

BOILER ROOM

The eastern third of this room holds a massive block of brick with small bronze and porcelain doors, while bins for firewood and peat line the walls; one bin holds an ancient, corroded axe, while another holds an equally decrepit shovel. Inside, the great brick box holds a lattice of bronze pipes running through loose chunks of rock. A second pipe passes from the top of the brick box to the exterior wall. The great brick box extends through the floor to the cellars.

A close examination reveals the purpose of the contrivance: it heats water for the bath chamber. The water enters through one pipe, passes through the smaller pipes within the brick furnace and collects in a holding tank of enameled bronze. The rock comes from the utter south of the world, where the heat never ends. The rock's heat slowly faded, although even today still remains perceptibly warmer than the brick and pipes — the Solars found that they had to kindle a fire of mundane fuel and Essence every decade or so to reheat the stones.

LOOM

This small chamber holds the wrecked remains of a treadle loom and a chair. Foot-long spools of colored yarn





and thread unroll in a tangled mess across the floor. The loom still holds part of a half-finished tapestry depicting a boy with flowering vines growing out of his head.

A close examination of the yarn and thread reveals that it is neither wool, cotton, linen nor any other fiber the characters have ever seen. Rather, it seems to be mineral — some sort of spun rock or glass.

SMITHY

This room holds a smith's furnace and forge, as well as a variety of anvils, molds, a quenching-trough, bellows, hammers, chisels and other tools, all in the usual disarray. The leather bellows are torn, but their framework remains intact. Given a mote of Essence (and a new leather covering), the magic bellows pump by themselves for an hour.

Among the wreckage, the smithy holds one incomplete automaton. This magical servant is nothing but a headless stick-figure of bronze rods. If a character is alone in the Smithy, with no one else nearby, the incomplete automaton animates and attacks. The stick-man can try to strangle a character or strike with a hammer or chisel. When other characters come running, the automaton collapses, and the last Essence leaves it. Henceforth, it is just a bundle of bronze rods. The mad automaton is functionally identical to one of the Waiters from the Dining Room.

(This is the Guardian's doing. It directs the blind automaton as it watches from a shiny bit of metal; astute players may wonder how the automaton fought so well when it lacked a head to see with.)

SPINNING ROOM

An incredible contraption fills much of this large chamber. The device combines spinning wheels, some sort of kiln or forge, a grinding mill and less identifiable bits, all connected with belts and chains running every which way. Half the parts are broken. The room also has a stone desk and chair by the east wall. On the desk, someone has carefully assembled the bits of several broken clay tablets.

Translating the tablets reveals the purpose of the machine: It spins rock into thread and yarn. On one tablet, the Solar latruxian, builder of the machine, laments that no one else will ever learn of her ingenious device, which lets her comrades replace the tapestries and tablecloths that they unravel and reweave for new clothing. She leaves the instructions for the others in case of her death.

PRISON CELL

The Solars turned this small room into a jail cell. It lacks any furniture except for a clay jar (a chamber pot) and an old straw mat that crumbles to dust when disturbed. Two pairs of golden manacles hang from the walls. Each manacle bears a lump of black iron incised with three not-quite-concentric circles. The door locks from the outside.

The "Manacles of Night" are pure orichalcum, except for the iron nuggets. They do not register any trace of

Essence to mystical senses... because their magic is to drain and dissipate Essence. An Exalted character bound by these manacles loses 1 mote of Essence each turn, and there's not a thing she can do about it: These manacles were forged by master magicians to bind other master magicians. Freeing oneself from the manacles by breaking the chains or ripping them out of the wall is a difficulty 4 Strength + Athletics feat, and the character must have an effective Strength + Athletics of at least 40 for the purposes of breaking things to attempt it, so chances are she won't be trying more than once. Once released, a character recovers Essence at her normal rate.

FALSE GARDEN

A person who opens the doors from the Grand Salon is in for a moment of confusion. Instead of the interior of the mountain, she seems to have stepped outdoors — into a formal garden, no less. Marble steps descend to an immaculately manicured green lawn. A white marble fountain splashes. Trees and flowering hedges mark out a grid. During the day, sunlight filters through the interlacing branches and dense foliage of the trees.

A closer look reveals the fraud (no dice rolls needed). The grass, leaves and flowers are made of colored silk. The tree-trunks and branches are enameled terracotta. The hedges are made of twisted wire. The ground is sand beneath the silken-grass carpet. Beyond the layer of false foliage, the tree trunks become the pillars supporting a vaulted roof coated in glowing blue glass, about 20 feet high. The garden seems to extend much further than it really does because of incredibly lifelike frescoes painted on the walls. Only the fountain is real.

The man-high hedges partly shield three semicircular "bowers." Each bay is painted with a different pleasure-garden:

- **East:** A water garden of cascading pools and rivulets full of water lilies, bulrushes, frogs and small, jewel-like fish.
- **North:** An extension of the formal garden along a hedge-lined path to a tall summerhouse — but a large section of this painting has been hacked away, leaving bare stone.
- **West:** A deep bower of towering lilacs, with trilliums and other shade-loving flowers growing beneath them.

A person who concentrates on the painted scene feels a tug at his Essence. Ceding a mote of Essence enables a character to walk into the painted scene, which, for him, becomes real. The garden of illusion automatically takes 1 mote per hour; when the character stops donating Essence or decides to leave, he finds himself back in the bay, and the painting is just a painting again. Characters who do not choose to grant Essence to the magical gardens see the other character step into and out of the fresco, becoming part of the painted scene.

This only works for the east and west bays, though. The damaged northern painting has lost its magic. If the painted garden is destroyed while someone is within the illusion, that person dies. Thus did one of the Solars murder another.

DOMESTIC STAFF DORMITORY

This plain, gray stone room is bare except for eight bed platforms. Some holes in the walls might have held rods and curtains to give each servant some privacy. The walls bear some scratched graffiti. No other trace remains of the servants who slept here; the current service staff has no need of sleep.

EMPTY STOREROOM

This bare stone room holds nothing except a few broken pottery jugs and crocks.

BACK STAIRS

These spiral staircases link all four floors of the Fortress. Each turn of the stairs holds a single glow-orb, set in the southern wall.

The western stair also holds the true entrance to the Final Retreat. Twisting the glow-orb midway between the first and second floors opens a narrow section of the eastern wall, revealing a 10-foot-wide, gently sloping passage into the mountain.

SECOND FLOOR

The old Solars used the second floor as their residential floor. Bedrooms take up much of the floor. The Solars used some chambers as workrooms, when they realized that they would have to build and repair their own furniture and other domestic items. Craft hobbies also helped them pass the time.

Like the ground floor, white marble with translucent veins sheaths the floors and walls, while molded plaster ornaments the ceilings. Gilded moldings and vinework decorate the walls and door frames of every area, even the water closets.

UPSTAIRS PARLOR

A thick carpet of rock-yarn covers most of the marble floor. The room holds two settees and three chairs, their stone frames chipped and upholstery torn. The east and west walls hold framed portrait paintings. Immediately before the southern wall stands a line of eight marble pillars, each topped with a head-sized globe of golden-yellow crystal. Any Exalted character can feel their latent magic.

- The crystal balls control the most powerful defensive system for the Invisible Fortress. Figuring out how to activate the crystal globes is a challenging feat using Essence + Occult, even with the Guardian explaining their purpose. When a character correctly feeds 5 motes of Essence to an orb, a view of the Fortress' exterior — as if one was looking

down from a high place on one of the walls — appears within the globe. Someone who stands outside the Fortress can see the circular mirror corresponding to the orb begin to glow.

When the character wills it, a long stone serpent extrudes from the wall of the Fortress, with the circular mirror clenched in its jaws. The serpent's body can extend a full 20 feet from the wall. The character can mentally direct the serpent to look this way and that. When the character releases the crystal ball from her will, the serpent retreats back into the wall of the Fortress.

By feeding another 3 motes into the crystal globe, the character makes the exterior mirror fire a golden bolt of mystical force. This bolt causes no physical harm, but it strips away the Essence of whoever it hits: 10 motes for every success rolled in a Wits + Essence attack roll. The beam is so wide that a target is automatically at -2 successes on any attempt to dodge, and it cannot be parried. Spirits, as creatures of Essence rather than matter, suffer one health level of aggravated damage per attacker's success. Charms and innate supernatural powers that enable a creature to soak aggravated damage also protect against the Essence draining effect, every 10 motes drained counting as one "health level" for purposes of soaking.

- A character who lifts up the carpet discovers that the parlor's floor holds a huge map of the four-cornered world. The map consists of thousands of tiny bits of jewel-like glass, colored and textured to suggest different landscapes, with threads of blue glass for rivers and glittering blue, gray and green glass for the sea.

An expert in geography who studies the map can tell that the central regions of the map differ from the present-day world in many ways. Only the Greatest of Isles seems unchanged. The peripheries bear little resemblance to the present world — and the map is at least twice as large as the known, modern world. The map shows the world in the First Age, before the eruption of the Wyld. (Realizing this requires a simple success on an Intelligence + Lore roll.)

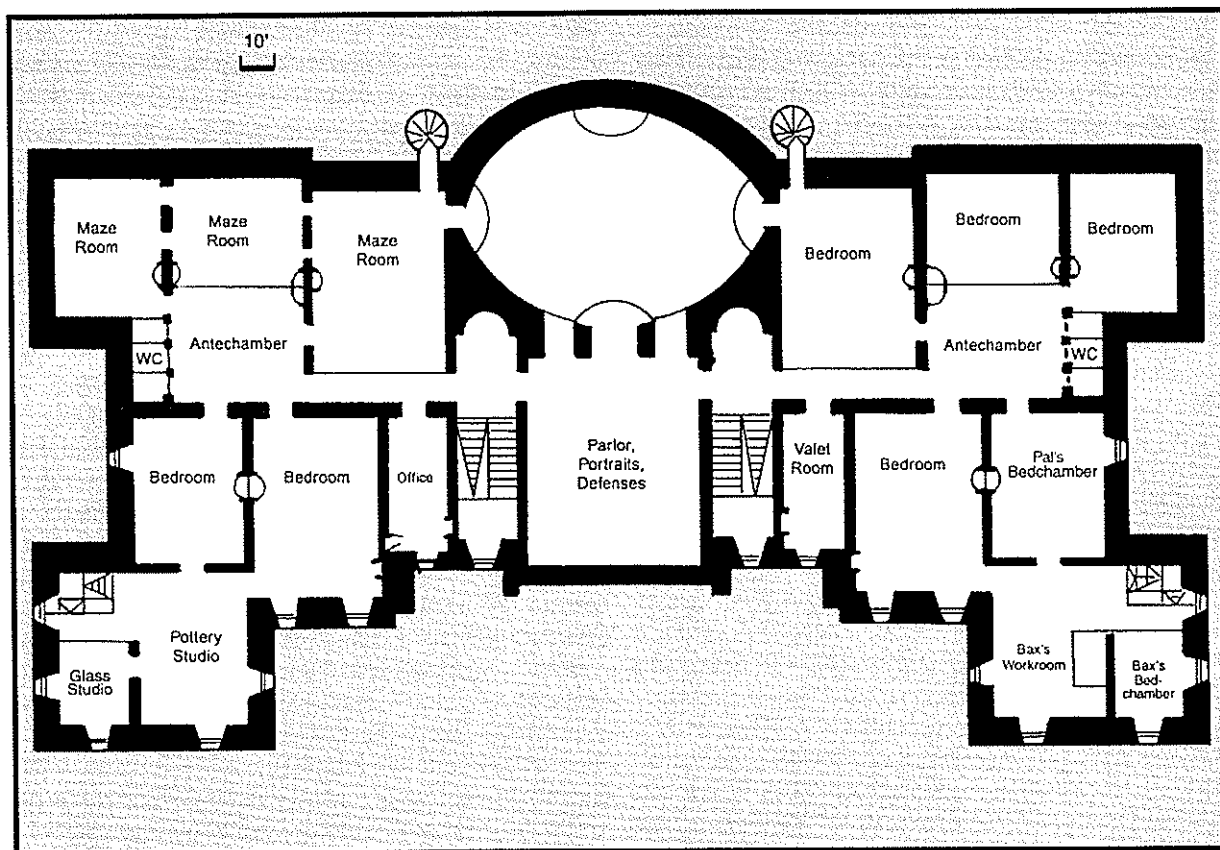
An actual diamond in an orichalcum setting marks the Seat of Splendors on the Greatest of Isles. Twenty-one beads of orichalcum also stud the map. One marks the location of the Invisible Fortress. A geographer can match a few other beads to the locations of other Manses (one location per success on an Intelligence + Lore roll). On the other hand, the map does not show other powerful, well-known Manses.

The solution is quite easy (simple success on an Intelligence + Investigation roll — but give the players a chance to figure it out themselves). The beads mark the Manses that Bax himself built. Three are fairly well known and occupied. The centuries destroyed others, but some Manses may remain undiscovered and possible to repair.

ANTECHAMBERS

Each of these rooms holds a stone-framed settee, an armchair, a small table and the shards of vases and other knickknacks.





BEDROOMS

These rooms each contain a bed platform and, perhaps, a small table, a chair or two, a wardrobe or other domestic furniture, all made from stone or terra cotta. Tapestries hang on the walls. Each room also contains at least one mirror set into the walls. Lifelike porcelain masks on the doors show which Solar lived in each room.

Storytellers can add whatever other colorful details strike their fancy. These bedrooms do not contain anything important, though: As each Solar died, her fellows divided her possessions, and raiding demons have carried off most of the portable goods.

BAX'S WORKROOM

A slant-topped stone table, charcoal sticks and architectural sketches on earthenware tablets show this room's use. The room also holds two stone chairs. A dais against the eastern wall holds a scale model of the Invisible Fortress and the mountainside behind it. Demons have spattered it with filth. The patio of the model bears this inscription:

Kal Bax

Builder of Manses

His Work is His Monument

The 16-foot model of the Fortress is nigh-indestructible, thanks to the spells Ozandus Pal placed upon it (20 soak versus any form of damage). The model differs from

the actual Fortress in that the model lacks the skylights installed in the attic.

A person who carefully compares the model to the real Fortress discovers a more subtle difference, too (Intelligence + Investigation to notice): One second-floor pillar is slightly out of place. The pillar easily slides into its correct position — and with a click and a whirl, the stone model unfolds to reveal an effigy of carved marble robes veined with orichalcum. The hood of the marble robe folds over a grinning human skull. A large book rests on the effigy's chest, while a small stone tablet etched with gilded runes lies at its feet.

This is the body of Kal Bax. The enchanted marble robe that he wore in life stiffened to become his coffin in death. The book is *Manse Construction*. Bax's observations and instructions on the art of building Manses. *Manse Construction* begins with first principles and proceeds to the apex of this arcane art. Comprehending the book in full would take years, but a character with the Trait ratings of 4 in Lore, Occult and Craft (Architecture) can learn the Charms and spells for building or repairing Manses. (See *Exalted*, p. 247, for the systems for building, repairing and altering Manses. Bax's book also teaches several special Charms for Manse construction that require Trait ratings of 5 or more in Intelligence, Essence, Lore, Occult or Crafts. We leave these Charms for Storytellers to design themselves, as potential hooks for new stories.)

SOLAR PORTRAITS

The paintings depict all 12 of the old Solars, showing them as they wanted to be remembered.

- Kal Bax (Twilight Caste), an old man, stands before the Invisible Fortress. He wears a robe that looks like sculpted marble. Bax holds a sculpted yellow staff in one hand and a mason's square in the other.

- Ozandus Pal (Twilight Caste), sculptor and apprentice architect, shatters a block of stone with his hammer and chisel to reveal a solar disc.

- Crinis Proles (Twilight Caste) stands with a painter's palette and a brush in her outstretched hand — as if the viewer were part of a scene that she painted.

- Larquen Quen (Twilight Caste) stands in a magic circle, surrounded by elemental spirits prostrate in fealty.

- Arvika Chas (Zenith Caste) plays a flute in a copse of trees, with birds fluttering around her.

- Meherrin (Zenith Caste) rides a golden stag bareback through the chaos of the Wyld, a horn at his lips and a spear of solar fire at his side.

- Kotor Varos (Night Caste) twists his body into an anatomically improbable posture while balancing on one finger.

- Daveg Chlurion (Night Caste), smith and artificer, pours a ladle-full of molten metal that shapes itself into the figure of a man as it falls.

- Vaznia (Night Caste) stands behind the throne of a demon king, who does not notice the dagger of Essence that she holds at its throat.

- Aure Orchester (Eclipse Caste) stands at the prow of a ship that sails through the stars.

- Iatrixian the Weaver (Eclipse Caste) sits at her loom. A handsome man rises from the loom's tapestry to offer her a rose.

- Susan of Justice (Eclipse Caste), dressed in gorgeous robes, blesses two warriors as they break their swords.

The tablet is the much-sought runestone that binds the demons. Anyone who displays the runestone can command the bound demons, and a demon must obey unless it succeeds at an Essence roll, difficulty 4. The stone also adds one success to any Charm meant to influence a bound demon's will. The runestone has no effect on any demons except the Founders and the ice-eaters.

The runestone is completely immune to bashing damage, and it has 10 soak versus lethal damage. It has no defense against aggravated damage. Successfully inflicting a single health level of damage upon the runestone breaks its power, releasing 5,000 demons to roam and ravage as they will.

BAX'S BEDCHAMBER

Demons clawed at the portrait on the door, but it remains recognizable as Kal Bax. This small room is bare except for its bed platform, a stone chest and a broken stone chair. The chest is empty.

PAL'S BEDCHAMBER

The portrait on the northern door identifies this room as Ozandus Pal's chamber. It holds the usual bed platform, a stone desk, two stone chairs whose upholstery has been ripped to shreds, a stone wardrobe and the shattered remains of more than a dozen inscribed clay tablets scattered about the floor.

A drawer at the top of the desk will not open. Where a lock should be, it has a tiny face. Feeding the face 1 mote of Essence animates it for an hour; it peers quizzically at anyone who sits at the desk, but releases the drawer only for someone who looks like Ozandus Pal, touches the lock and says the password. The Guardian knows the password: "Mithra," the name of Pal's Lunar lover. (Less refined characters can simply hack open the desk. It takes 6 health levels to break open, and the desk possesses 10 soak versus bashing and lethal damage.) The drawer holds several letters written on sheets of silk and an orichalcum quill attached to a rod that slides on a rectangular metal frame.

The letters are copies of Pal's letters to his Lunar Exalted companion. (See the introduction for the text of these letters. The quill device is a magical dictation-machine. Given 1 mote of Essence and something to write on, the quill slides back and forth on its rod, writing what it hears in a golden ink that never runs out or smudges.

The Audient Quill writes in a different hand for each person whose speech it records, and it captures the speaker's emotions in its writing style. A very clever person who studied the Quill might find a way to use it as a lie detector.

VALET'S ROOM

This small chamber holds a bed platform, the moldering remains of a leather footlocker, a stone chest and wardrobe and, lying on the bed, a porcelain mask of a man's stylized face. The shelf in the wardrobe holds scissors, brushes, sewing supplies, a hand mirror and other small, domestic items.

Feeding a mote of Essence to the mask evokes the Valet, chief of the Spirit Servitors. See page 70 for a description of the Spirit Servitors.





POTTERY STUDIO

This room features two stone tables, a hand-mill, a mixing trough, a potter's wheel, bellows, a kiln in the corner replacing the usual fireplace and all manner of tools for crafting ceramics. Many jars hold glazes and other powders. Dozens of porcelain masks hang on the walls, but none of them are magical. The southwest corner holds a life-size porcelain statue of the Solar Kotor Varos.

GLASS STUDIO

This smaller room also has a kiln, but the tools and supplies are for glassmaking. The Solars also used this workroom to craft objects of adamant.

WATER CLOSETS

These six small rooms each contain a flush toilet of sturdy porcelain, a spigot and ewer for washing (cold water only), a towel rack, a mirror and a short counter with a cabinet beneath. One toilet's plumbing still works; likewise, one spigot... not in the same closet, alas, but the Guardian can talk a Solar with suitable Craft-based Charms through the necessary repairs.

OFFICE

This small room holds two stone desks and two stone chests, all locked with mundane locks. One desk holds several ceramic styli. The chest beside it holds dozens of

clay tablets scratched with fantasies of revenge upon the Dragon-Blooded — hopeless, elaborate schemes to return from the Fortress and seize power again.

MAZE ROOMS

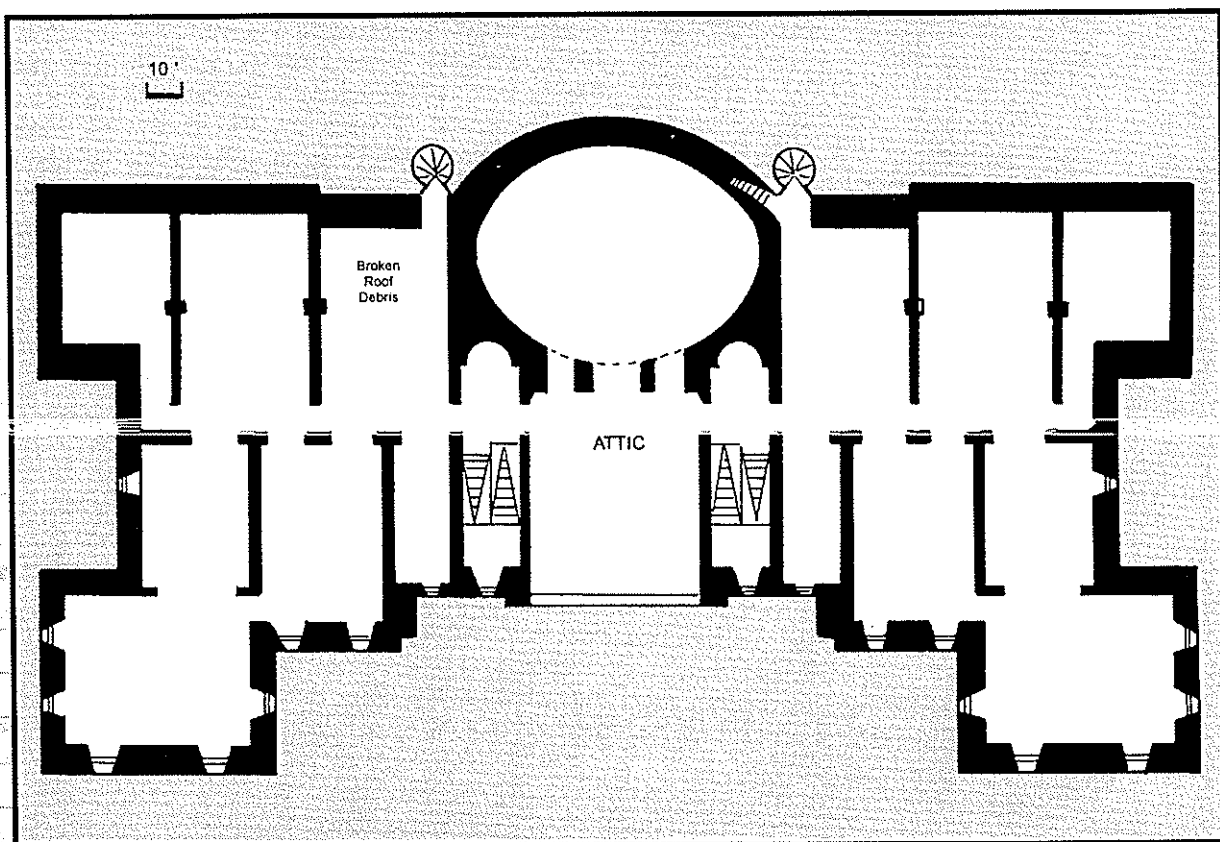
An elaborate, three-dimensional maze of stone crawlways now fills these three former bedrooms, leaving 10-foot-wide chambers around each bed platform. The paranoid Solar who built the maze rigged the crawlways with chimes to warn him if anyone else crawled into the maze. Frequent tiny slits and holes between crawlways would, perhaps, allow a person with a long stiletto to attack someone in another passage.

One of the little bedchambers holds just such a weapon, a slender adamant spike on a telescoping bronze rod, equal to a knife but inflicting aggravated damage.

None of the small bedchambers contains a mirror, even a small one.

ATTIC

The self-exiled Solars filled the attic with foodstuffs and other supplies. When the supplies ran out, one Solar tried to convert the empty attic space into a huge greenhouse as an alternative to conjured food. Unfortunately, the Solars could not obtain fertile soil in their little valley. Plants grew sickly in their conjured soil and needed magic to prosper — but that simply resulted in food conjured less directly, with little improvement.



Centuries later, the many rooms of the attic remain crowded with low tables of dry, dead soil and dry, dead plants. Withered vines crawl up trellises and spill across the floor. Papery leaves of dead vegetables crumble at the slightest touch. Dry twigs of fruit trees claw against the panes of the skylights built into the steeply pitched ceilings. Corroded water pipes dangle from crossbeams and brackets. Many of the soil-tables are tipped over.

One skylight is broken. The tables beneath it have rotted and collapsed. Here, where water drips in, a patch of moss covers the low mounds of soil. Spiderwebs festoon the broken pipes and roof-beams. This moss and the spiders are the only living things in the Invisible Fortress — except for the characters themselves.

For some reason, the Solars broke down the masonry walls separating the attic from the upper salon, and dead vines and branches spill through the gaps.

Nothing in the attic is magical or a trap or intrinsically dangerous in any way. The tables and dead plants make it hard to move quickly or quietly through the attic. On the other hand, the dead foliage could quite effectively screen a person who crawled under a table to hide. An alert character can find one tiny mirror wedged into the roof-beams of each room.

CELLARS

The Solars relegated most of their servants to the basement. Half the cellar, however, consisted of nothing but storerooms for food and drink. The supplies ran out, and the

servants died long before the Solars met their own deaths, leaving most of the cellar a series of dark, empty chambers. More than a century later, when the Solars began dying, one of them spent decades turning the empty storerooms into tombs. She carved 11 sepulchers; the long-dead Bax remained in his upstairs tomb. Some of the tombs never saw use, though.

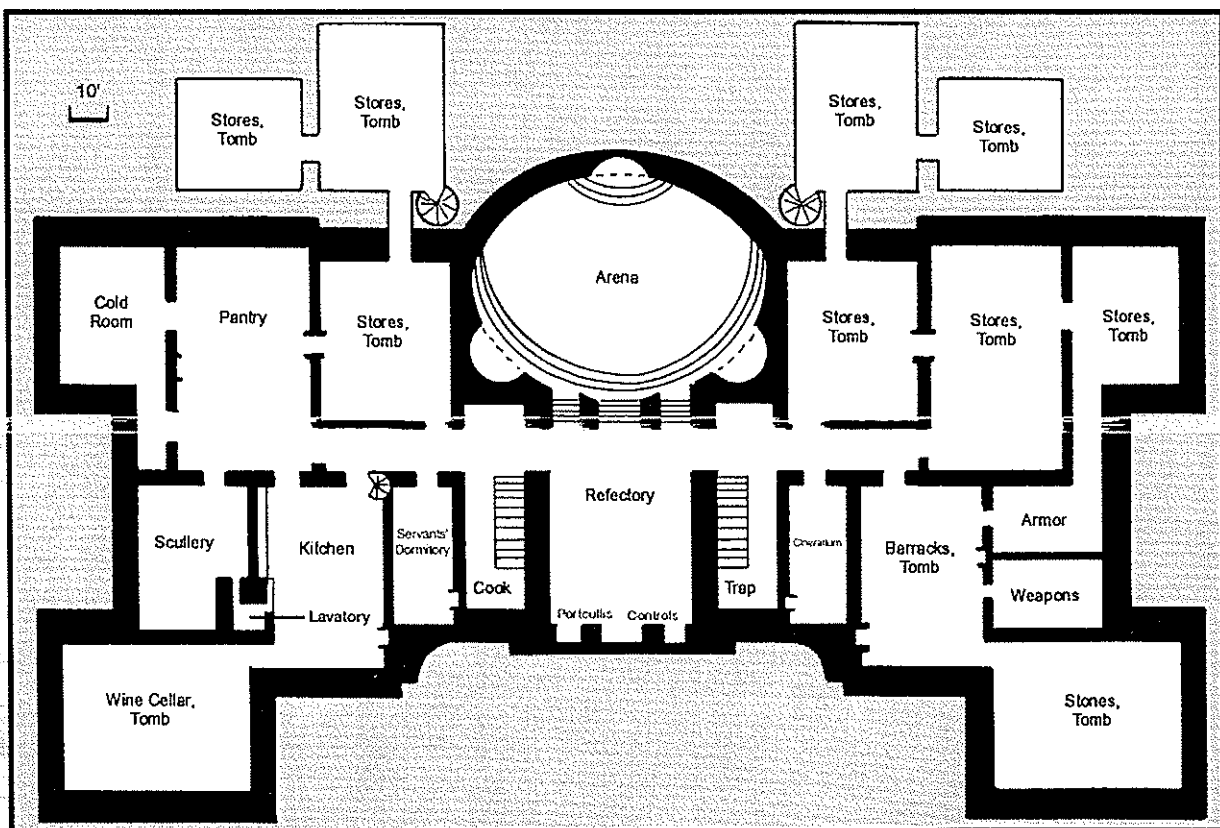
The ceilings in the cellars are normally 10 feet high. The bare floors, walls and ceilings are of the mountain's own gray rock.

The cellars also hold all the ashpits at the bottom of the Fortress' chimneys.

ARENA

Short flights of steps lead down to this large oval chamber, and more steps line half its perimeter, forming a small arena. Sand covers the floor. Heavy, arching ribs of stone help support the shallow dome of the ceiling 15 feet overhead. Large, semicircular niches to the southeast, southwest and north hold bronze statues of muscular, but androgynous figures. An assortment of weapons, from daggers to battle-axes, hang on the wall of the northern niche. All show the nicks and scratches of long use. The masonry ribs hold 12 fist-sized balls of dull glass (in gilded vine-wreath frames) and bronze cressets for torches. A bronze brazier lies on its side in the arena.

The Solars built this arena to exercise, maintain their combat skills and amuse themselves with practice bouts. Later, they held genuine duels as their dislike and suspicion grew.





- The glass glow-orbs work normally. So why the torches and brazier? Warmth, for one thing — and firelight gives a wilder, fiercer aspect to a bout.

- The three statues are automatons created to serve as sparring partners and trainers: one for weapons combat; one for boxing, wrestling and other forms of unarmed combat that emphasize strength and toughness; and one for martial arts. Five motes of Essence activates an automaton for a scene.

REFECTORY

This large room holds two long, stone-topped tables. The chairs, however, are gone. The servants and soldiers ate here.

The three niches in the southern wall hold ranks of golden bars connected to crank mechanisms. Turning the cranks drives the metal rods up through the ceiling to bar the front door and adjacent windows.

The golden rods are actually steel coated with a thin layer of orichalcum. All the rods together contain a few ounces of the magic metal.

TOMBS

Whatever purpose these chambers once served, they became tombs. The center of each room holds a massive stone slab chiseled with strange, archaic characters. A life-size statue surmounts each slab. Slab and walls all bear elaborate carving: patterns of skulls, bones, human figures, skeletons, sunbursts, birds, animals, flowers, abstract arabesques and bands and panels of writing.

Someone who translates the inscriptions on the tombs finds that they are the names of the dead Solars and the dates of their birth and death in the First Age calendar. The inscriptions on the walls are rather conventional maxims and short poems about death and reunion with the Unconquered Sun.

The massive stone slabs each weigh a ton. Moving them or breaking them is left as an exercise for the characters' power and the players' ingenuity. Lifting them by sheer, brute strength requires an effective Strength + Athletics total of at least 14.

Each slab seals a shaft 4 feet wide, 7 feet long and 30 feet deep. At the bottom is a 3 foot high niche, just barely big enough for the stone coffin slid inside. The coffins hold the remains of the Solars. Some cadavers have gone to dust over the centuries; others left bones, at least. Each intact coffin also contains a few small trinkets that were buried with their owners. Although nothing the Solars themselves considered especially valuable was buried with them, some of these grave-goods are impressive treasures by modern standards.

Each tomb also holds a trap designed to kill grave robbers. We leave it to Storytellers to decide which trap a particular tomb holds; different tombs can hold duplicate traps. We encourage Storytellers to add their own simple traps to the list!

Tomb 1's statue is broken, and the slab is cloven in twain, leaving a gap just wide enough for a person to squeeze through. Several metal stubs emerge from the wall of the shaft 10 feet down. The bottom holds broken stone, scattered bones and shreds of cloth.

Tomb 2 is cracked but still in one piece, though the statue is broken to bits. Long ago, someone drove two iron rings into the slab and an iron hook into the ceiling above; a rusty pulley and age-rotted rope runs between them. If the characters replace the rope and lift off the slab, they find the remains of three bodies in the bottom of the shaft. One is nothing but bones, the second is cut in half, and the third is a withered mummy huddled against a wall. The clothes are stained and rotten with age, but a jade ring on the mummy's figure bears the seal of House Peleps. The scything blade that once guarded the shaft is permanently jammed.

Tomb 3 is marred with large, crude letters hacked across the carving: "I WILL RETURN."

Tombs 4, 5 and 6 are empty; if they hold traps, the traps are not armed. Three of the Solars didn't reach their final resting-places.

Tombs 7-11 remain intact, with working traps, coffins and minor treasures.

COOK'S ROOM

A bed platform in the southwest corner and the remains of a leather footlocker show that someone once lived in this small room behind the stairs. No personal traces remain of its former inhabitant, the head cook.

SERVANTS' DORMITORY

This bare room holds a fireplace and several piles of ancient domestic detritus — sandals, clay bowls, horn spoons and the like. Graffiti defaces the walls.

The room also holds several cracked, splintered and rotten barrels and heaps of large glass bottles and pottery jars bearing mysterious seals. Some of the jars and bottles still hold dark, bitter residues — the long-dried lees of wine, beer and other liquors.

The kitchen servants lived in this room. The graffiti and wreckage are all that remains of their tenancy. Much later, the Solars tossed the junked remains from their wine cellar into this room.

A character who translates the graffiti scratched in the walls finds that it consists of the servants' names, year tallies, sad records such as "Javan died today" with a now-meaningless date and angry, obscene comments about the Solars.

KITCHEN

Kitchens haven't changed much since the First Age. This kitchen has two long, stone-topped counters with cupboards underneath, three large ovens with bronze doors set into the brick mass of the boiler, a great iron kettle hanging over the corner fireplace, a griddle ready

TRAPS FOR THE TOMBS

Daveg Chlurion, the Solar who installed the traps, did not work very hard at them; it was something to pass the time, but he didn't care much about protecting cadavers. Thus, the traps are fairly simple and easy to bypass, and characters can use Charms to avoid the attacks of some traps or resist the effects of others. For instance, some Dodge-based Charms might help a character avoid a spear trap.

Traps do not require attack rolls. They automatically hit unless the player makes a successful Wits + Dodge roll for the character. If the character specifically takes precautions against traps, such as probing ahead with a spear and closely examining the walls of the tomb-shaft, this roll is at difficulty 2 (dodging while descending on a rope is fairly difficult). If the player does not describe reasonable precautions the character could take, the roll is at difficulty 4.

- **Spears** thrust from holes in the wall to pierce a character who steps on the floor of the shaft. 1-3 spears strike anyone standing at the bottom of the shaft; each spear inflicts 8L damage. Five minutes after striking, the spears retract and the trap rearms.
- **A stone slab** slides across the shaft, 10 feet from the base, and locks into the opposite wall. The slab is a full foot thick. This trap triggers when someone tugs on the coffin. Stopping the slab from closing requires success at a Strength + Athletics roll at difficulty 4.
- **Razor whips** lash out when someone tugs on the coffin, striking everyone at the bottom of the shaft. The whips inflict 2A damage each turn and continue lashing as long as someone stands on the floor of the shaft.
- **A razor sword** slashes across the pit to cleave in twain a descending character. The sword inflicts 12L damage.

TOMB TREASURES

The Solars buried their fellow exiles with some of their personal effects. Any cloth or wood rotted away, but metal and stone remain. These grave-goods are examples; Storytellers should add to the list, placing 1-2 treasures in each tomb. Not all treasures must be useful.

- **An orichalcum ring**, set with a diamond. The ring subtracts 1 mote from the Essence cost of any Charm to evoke non-damaging illumination.
- **Golden armor.** The leather parts rotted away long ago, but the gold-washed, orichalcum-alloyed steel parts remain intact. Any competent armorer can stitch and rivet them to a new leather backing. The armor is superbly made and covers its wearer from head to toe in glittering gold, like the Unconquered Sun come to Earth. Because this is fairly thin armor, it counts as an orichalcum reinforced buff coat.
- **A golden armband** inlaid with threads of moonsilver and set with moonstones. An inscription on the inside reveals the armband as a love-gift from a Lunar Exalted. The armband has no magical properties but is valuable for the metal and gems.
- **A black jade dagger.** This dagger consists entirely of carved black jade. It inflicts aggravated damage on spirits. The blade is inscribed with a name — the name of a powerful water-spirit this dagger is fated to slay, one who fears this dagger above all things.
- **A crystal brooch**, a lifelike rose carved out of actual rose crystal. Its only magic is that no mundane force can break it.



to slide into the same fireplace (the arm supporting the kettle swings out to make room) and various hooks and racks for pots, knives and other kitchen implements. Most of those implements are gone, though — melted down for other purposes. A large bin under one counter holds dried peat for the fireplace.

One rack on the wall holds porcelain masks of a moon-faced man and three women. Feeding a mote of Essence to each mask summons four of the Spirit Servitors: the Cook and three Maidservants. See page 72 for descriptions of these characters.

SCULLERY

A huge block of brick occupies the southeastern corner of this room: the foundation of the water-heater on the first floor. A pipe and spigot lead from the boiler to a pair of large stone sinks. A narrow shelf over the sinks holds aged scrubbing brushes and a cake of soap: brushes and soap vanish like popped soap bubbles when touched, for they were conjured after the real kitchen supplies ran out, and the magic that created them has faded with age.

Another pipe leads to three stone washbasins. Nearby cabinets hold washboards and other laundry supplies.



Other furniture includes a hand-cranked wringer that still works, cupboards full of glazed pottery plates, bowls and mugs, an ironing board and a heavy flatiron meant to be heated with hot gravel from the boiler. (The gravel is in a small drawer set in the boiler's side.) The clothesline that crosses the room is so old and worn that it snaps under the slightest pull.

LAVATORY

This small, narrow room holds a pair of white-enamelled flush toilets, a white pottery washbasin and faucet (cold water only), a shelf for towels and washcloths and a bucket for discarded cloths.

COLD ROOM

Someone left the door to this room ajar long ago. A layer of frost a foot thick coats the floor, walls and ceiling and locks the door in place, and frigid air pours out the open door.

Someone who hacks through the frost on the floor discovers a layer of clear ice slabs: more of the never-melting ice of the ultimate North. Magic, now long evaporated, chilled the room still further. The Solars filled this cold room with meat and other perishable foodstuffs.

PANTRY

Stone shelves line the walls of this large room. Nothing remains upon them, however, except several large, earthenware crocks and amphorae. The shards of other broken jars cover the floor.

Clearing the potsherds reveals a magic circle carved in the floor, of just the right size to hold one of the large crocks. Large claw-marks scar the circle, though, making it useless for sorcery. (Raiding demons thought it might have something to do with the binding upon them. Actually, the Solars used it to conjure food.)

One of the jars still holds several conjured biscuits, looking unchanged after centuries — but as soon as someone touches them, they crumble and dissolve into wisps of Essence.

CINERARIUM

The east, west and south walls of this room hold three dozen niches, each about 9 inches wide and 18 inches high. Some of the niches hold stone urns. Most of the urns have fallen from their niches (or been thrown and smashed against the walls). The remaining urns hold dust and small fragments of scorched bone. Many of the niches have names scratched under or over them. Here, the Solars interred the Essence-cremated remains of their servants.

The urns are not all the same. Some are simply, yet gracefully shaped; others bear carved ornamentation, such as sunbursts and birds. Some add skull, bone and grave-worm motifs. On a few urns, the carving becomes disturbingly, obsessively elaborate.

ARMORIES

These two rooms still hold racks for weapons and armor, polishing cloths and jars with traces of rancid grease and powdered pumice in the bottoms. Not much remains of the weapons and armor, though: a spear, a mace, two rusty daggers and the leather from assorted bits of armor (the Solars removed the metal for other uses).

FALSE STAIRWAY

One paranoid Solar dug a trap here to harass and delay hypothetical invaders who might seek the survivors' secret retreat. A door leads to a descending flight of polished stairs 20 feet long, with another door at the bottom. When a person is five feet from the end of the stairs, the steps collapse into a flat slide and the door pops open, precipitating everyone on the stairs into a spiked pit. The pit already holds two skeletons.

Avoiding the pit once the trap springs requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll at difficulty 3. Characters have the usual chances to detect the trap if they think to look for one; those who fall in the pit suffer the usual damage.

MINIONS

AUTOMATA

All automata in the Fortress share certain Traits in common. They have no Willpower or Virtues, because they lack free will or passions. They have no Social Attributes, not even Appearance, because they lack the will to attempt social tasks. They do have Mental Attributes but very narrow, limited minds. Automata cannot tell when someone lies to them, and they cannot adapt to any event that falls outside their predefined function. The Leonines can display cunning in hunting down intruders in the Fortress but cannot set foot outside it, even if a Solar gives a direct command to do so.

As partial compensation for these limitations, magic or other attacks that affect the will, mind or emotions have no effect on automata, nor can they be socially manipulated. Even the Guardian could not reduce the Trainers to extensions of its will. It can command the Leonines and Waiters because the old Solars gave it that power.

Automata do not heal damage on their own. Someone must repair them (an Intelligence + Craft feat of difficulty 3; the task also requires a minimum Lore Trait of 4). The Fortress automata can regenerate lost health levels if someone feeds them Essence: one health level per 5 motes. Even an automaton reduced to "Wrecked" can regenerate if enough pieces remain intact. Smashing an automaton to flinders, melting it in a furnace or scattering its parts forestalls any attempt at regeneration.

Every Fortress automaton also has a small orichalcum disk set somewhere on its body. This is the automaton's "heart." Removing the heart instantly deactivates the automaton. Inflicting a single health level of damage suffices to remove an automaton's heart, but this imposes a +3 difficulty on the attack roll.

One activates an automaton by feeding it Essence. Discovering the proper way to do so requires a simple success at an Intelligence + Occult roll. Automata vary in the number of motes required to activate them and the length of time they remain active.

THE LEONINES

Description: Although their carved forms look stylized in an art deco-ish way, the animate Leonines look fully organic, muscles bunching under their golden hide as they sinuously stalk toward an opponent. They move silently, with nothing but the occasional scrape of a talon against the stone floor to betray their presence. A Leonine's heart is in the middle of its chest.

These automaton beasts attack relentlessly, if that's what the Guardian demands. They possess no real minds or sense of self-preservation. A beast can detach from the wall and drop to the floor in a single turn and attack on the next. Returning to the wall takes another turn.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma N/A, Manipulation N/A, Appearance N/A, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Virtues: N/A

Abilities: Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Stealth 5

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Claw/Bite: Speed 7 Accuracy 10 Damage 7L Defense 7

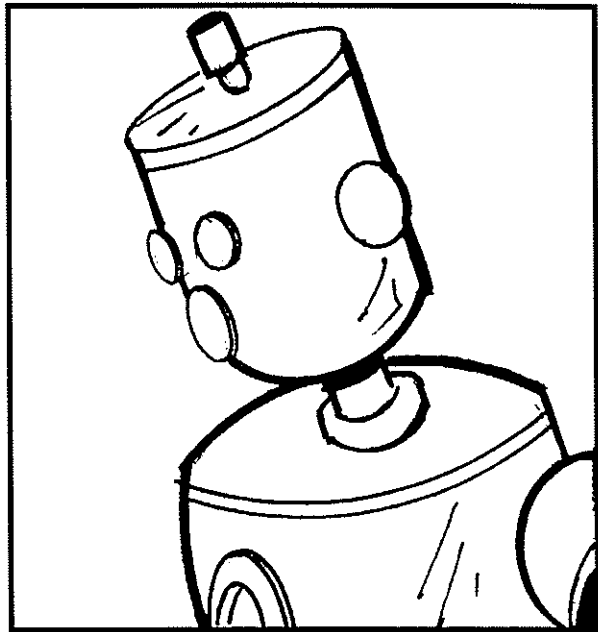
Dodge Pool: 8 Soak: 5L/8B (Stone skin, 3L/3B)

Willpower: N/A Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Wrecked

Other Notes: Animating a Leonine costs the Guardian 5 motes of Essence. A Leonine can remain animate for up to a full day.

THE WAITERS

Description: These low-grade automata do not remotely pass for living creatures — not with their immobile china faces and marionette movements. (They look clumsy, but never spill anything.) Waiters know nothing except domestic service and never pass beyond the Dining Hall, Grand Salon, Parlor, Kitchen and Scullery... unless the Guardian possesses them to use as its hands. Then, the Waiters can go anywhere in the Fortress and do whatever the Guardian wants, within their physical limits. They can carve an unwitting victim as expertly as they



carve a roast turkey, or they can fasten their stick-figure hands around a person's throat.

The Waiter's hearts are located where the base of the throat would be for a human, where the metal rods of their spine and shoulders meet.

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

Virtues: N/A

Abilities: Brawl 3, Craft (Domestic Service) 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3

Base Initiative: 3

Attack:

Carving Knife: Speed 6 Accuracy 5 Damage 4L Defense 3

Clinch: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense N/A

Strangle: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 2L* Defense N/A

Dodge Pool: 2 Soak: 4L/8B (Durable construction, 2L/3B)

Willpower: N/A Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -4, Wrecked

Other Notes: * Strangulation inflicts 2 health levels + attack successes in lethal damage each turn, except that the victim recovers the damage as if it were bashing. Only armor specifically described as protecting the neck (such as the high collar of a buff jacket) supplies soak versus strangulation.

The Waiters require only 1 mote to activate but remain active for just a single scene.

THE TRAINERS

Description: When active, the automaton's bodies move and flex like living flesh, and their golden eyes glow slightly. The eyes are balls of orichalcum and crystal. The Trainer's "heart" is set in its chest, where a human heart would be.

Although they know a great deal about combat, training and physical conditioning, the Trainers possess no judgment about anything else. When activated, they expect



a practice bout or training session; if no one gives them any orders, they shout, "Defend yourself!" and attack.

Because they do not comprehend anything except combat and training, these automatons make terrible servants. For instance, a character could not simply tell a Trainer to carry a heavy load from one room to another. She would have to say, "Pick up this object. Walk through that doorway. Turn left in the hall and keep walking until you reach the second door on your right. At that point turn right, walk into the middle of the room and set down the object there. Then, wait for further instructions."

The automatons will take orders from no one but a Solar and cannot be ordered to kill a Solar. They are easily deceived about the purpose of an order, however, and can be tricked into using lethal force against a character.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma N/A, Manipulation N/A, Appearance N/A, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Virtues: N/A

Abilities: Athletics 3, Dodge 3 and either Brawl 5, Martial Arts 5 or Melee 5, with one level of the specialty "Training."

Base Initiative: 7

Attack: As per weapon or brawling or martial arts combat maneuver (too many to list; see *Exalted* rulebook).

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 6L/12B (Integral armor, 4L/7B)

Willpower: N/A **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Wrecked

Other Notes: None

SPIRIT SERVITOR

In addition to their automata, the old Solars transformed a few favored servants into spirits, bound to porcelain life masks. Feeding a mote of Essence to a mask evokes the Servitor; the mask remains fixed to the Servitor's face. The Servitors vanish back into their masks when no one needs

their services any more (typically, when the Guardian has killed everyone in the Fortress). The Guardian can also banish a Servitor back into its mask as a form of punishment.

The Servitors must obey any command that the Guardian gives them, but the characters have a remote chance to remove the Guardian's spiritual hold — if they think of it. If the characters destroy the Guardian, any remaining Servitors regain their free will. Before then, powerful sorcery might break the Guardian's hold on their wills. Characters can also subvert a Servitor through friendship and affection, either manufactured by Charms or sincere attempts to get to know them, treat them with respect and improve their lot. The Servitors cannot outright *disobey* the Guardian, or even tell the characters about their enslavement, but a Servitor can interpret commands broadly or procrastinate so as to minimize damage to its friend.

By themselves, the Servitors are not very effective combatants. When the Guardian possesses a Servitor, the spirit gains considerably greater power. Each possessed Servitor has a disgustingly prehensile tongue, some means of slashing or stabbing at a victim and one special form of attack all its own. The Guardian can also change a possessed Servitor's appearance (temporarily or permanently), and possessed Servitors can fly.

When the Solars transformed the last of their servants into spirits, the process incidentally wiped away most of their memories of the mortal lives. The Servitors know very little about the First Age, beyond their specialized duties. The Cook, for instance, knows everything about fine dining in First Age courts. He knows nothing about sorcery, combat or lost treasures.

Note that the Music Master's room holds the long-lost mask of a sixth Servitor: Liwet Ohazia, the only Servitor who remembers her mortal name. The Music Master is not under the Guardian's control — not at first, anyway. The Guardian can enslave her through a massive psychic assault. From then on, the Music Master acts as another proxy and may attack the Solars.

Description: The Maidservants and the Valet seem young and attractive. The Cook is middle-aged and bald but possesses an infectious good cheer. Liwet Ohazia, the Music Master, is a sweet old lady with a lilting voice. When possessed by the Guardian, however, a Servitor's body parts stretch and bend like rubber, and it snarls like a demon.

In the game statistics below, numbers in parentheses refer to Traits when the Guardian possesses a Servitor.

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



Virtues: Compassion 3(1), Conviction 2(5), Temperance 3, Valor 1(5)

Abilities: Awareness 2, (Brawl 3), Dodge 2, Larceny 3, (Melee 3), Performance 3, Socialize 3, (Thrown 3), Stealth 2

Base Initiative: 5(8)

Attack:

Slashing Attack: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 4L Defense 6

Tongue Lash: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 6B Defense 6

Special Attack: See below

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 3L/3B (Resilient ectoplasm, 2L/1B)

Willpower: 6

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Incapacitated

Other Notes: Spirit Servitors often appear to take much more serious damage than they really do: Lethal or aggravated attacks may run them through, cut off limbs or even cleave them in twain, but the parts keep fighting on their own and rejoin a few turns later. Servitors recover one health level of bashing damage per turn on their own. Five motes of Essence (supplied by the Guardian) heals one level of lethal or aggravated damage. Breaking the Servitor's mask (a +4 difficulty attack in combat that must inflict three health levels of damage after soaking) destroys a Servitor; the spirit screams as it dissipates like smoke in a windstorm.

The Servitors all share four special powers:

Slashing Attack: For the Maidservants and Liwet Ohazia, this attack takes the form of their fingernails extending to prodigious length (up to 20 feet!) to pierce their opponent. The Cook conjures cleavers from thin air and throws them. The Valet extends his scissors to slice at opponents. (Technically, this is a Brawl attack for the Maidservants, Thrown for the Cook and Melee for the Valet, but for simplicity, we give the Servitors identical ratings in all three Abilities.)

Tongue Lash: The Servitor's tongue extends and whips about like a striking serpent, reaching up to 50 feet. A possessed Servitor can also try to grab an opponent and force its tongue down his throat or windpipe to attack from *inside* the victim's body; this assault requires an immobile opponent (a normal hold maneuver or some other form of restraint) and two turns of attack before the tongue begins to inflict one health level of aggravated damage per turn.

Flight: While energized by the Guardian, all Spirit Servitors can fly as fast as they can sprint.

Shapeshift: While possessed by the Guardian, all Spirit Servitors can change their appearance but must remain basically human and of the same gender. Successfully impersonating one character while interacting with another calls for a resisted roll between the Servitor's Intelligence + Larceny and the target's Perception + Awareness.

POSSIBLE



INDIVIDUAL SERVITORS

- The suave **Valet** wears archaic black robes with a violet sash and cummerbund and a hooded black cloak. A small, silver censer hangs from his sash, trailing sweet smoke wherever he goes, and he keeps a variety of small domestic tools — scissors, a whisk, a broom, a comb and the like — tucked into his cummerbund and copious sleeves. The Valet bosses around the other Servitors and strives to conceal the Fortress' poverty with his own uxorious manners. Sample line: "If Your Resplendence cares to rest, I have taken the liberty of preparing a bedchamber."

Smokeball: The Valet whirls his censer into a blaze and collects a ball of choking, sickly sweet smoke that he hurls at his opponent. This acts like a *Poison* attack: The victim loses 2 Stamina and 1 Dexterity if the player fails a Stamina + Resistance roll (no penalty if the roll succeeds).

- The jolly, moon-faced **Cook** wears a simpler version of the Valet's robe but in white and accessorized with an apron that strains to contain his girth. He usually keeps his sleeves rolled up. The Cook can conjure any sort of food or drink the characters can imagine, but the flavors are thin and fade from the palate almost instantly. If the characters supply the Cook with real foodstuffs, he can work wonders. Sample line: "Oh, my lords! I shall prepare a feast that would shame the Seat of Splendors itself!"

Adhesion: The attacker's fist, foot, sword or whatever sinks a foot deep in the Cook's doughy body — and sticks. The Cook effectively has the attacker pinned in a hold maneuver, but the Servitor himself remains free to make other attacks. For the purposes of this disgusting form of hold, the Cook has an effective Strength of 5.

- The three demure, young **Maidservants** wear identical kimonos of fluttering, translucent white silk and lace with several swirling sashes and long, enveloping sleeves. They serve in whatever way the Valet, the Guardian or the Solars themselves command: washing, housecleaning, music (each one plays an instrument moderately well), dancing, massage, warming a bed... you name it. Sample line: "Yes, my lord. Whatever would please you."

Grappling Hair or Veil: The spirit-maiden's hair or her long, diaphanous sleeves stretch impossibly far to strike at or wrap around an opponent. This acts like 5 Strength usable at up to 20 feet range, to disarm, hold, sweep or throw. This power does not permit other close combat maneuvers.

- The **Music Master** wears a simple blue robe tied with a black sash. She oversaw the musical performances of the servants, tutored the Solars and played for their amusement. When she grew too old and feeble, they transformed her into a deathless spirit so they might enjoy her services forever. After her transfiguration, the Solars called her out now and then — but less and less often as the centuries passed. She doesn't know how long it's been since the last time a Solar called her out or why her mask was inside her bed. (Characters may guess that a demon tried to burn the mask, but they will never really know without the use of Investigation-based Charms.)

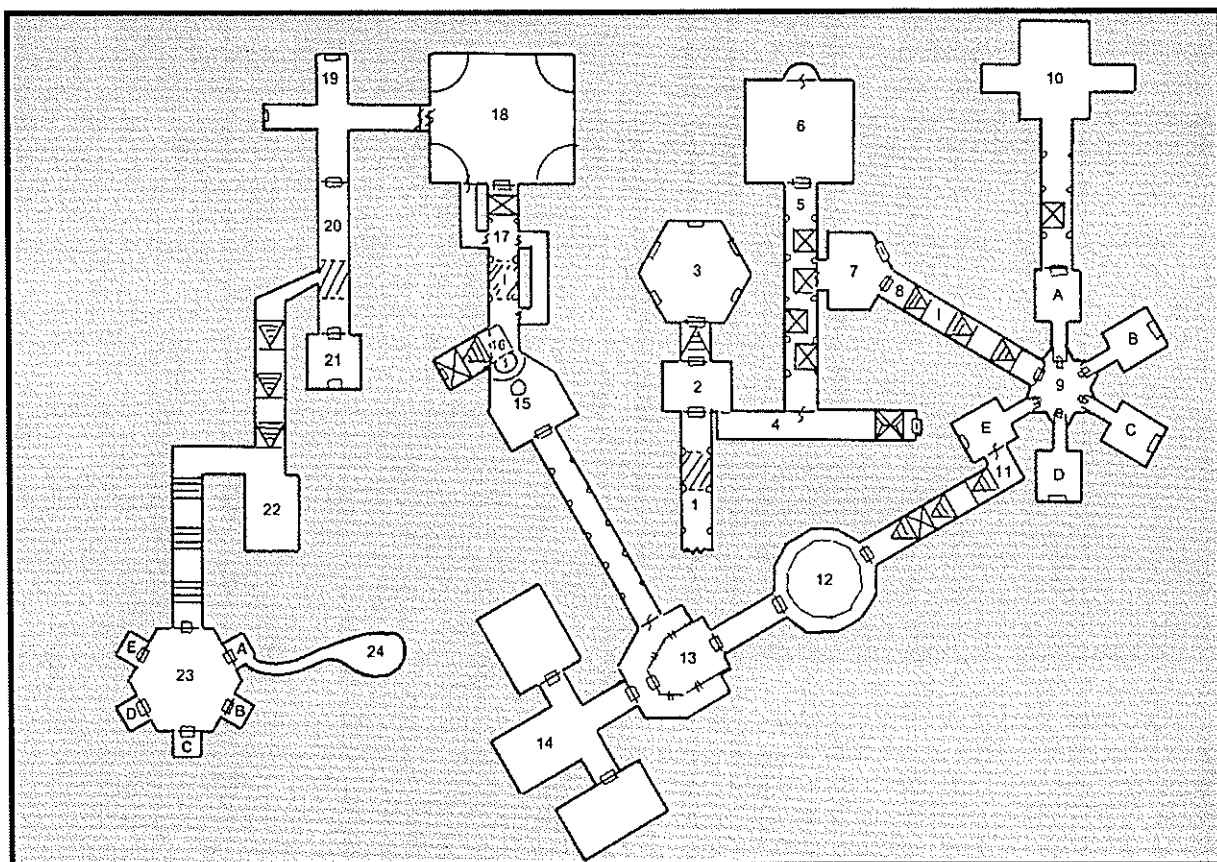
Ohazia is the only spirit in the Invisible Fortress who is not a pawn of the Guardian and has no secret agenda (not that the players or their characters should be told this.) Unfortunately for the characters, when the Solars transformed Ohazia into a spirit, they erased most of her memory. She has an encyclopedic knowledge of First Age music but knows very little else. She certainly never knew any of the secrets of the Fortress' construction or magic — she was just a musician, after all.

Ohazia does know that the old Solars did not like each other very much. During the brief interludes when the Solars evoked her, she saw episodes of jealousy, backbiting and sheer cabin fever.

At first, the Solars seemed fairly confident that the Fortress' defenses could destroy the demons or put up a good fight against a force of Dragon-Blooded rebels. As their numbers shrank, however, they seemed more frightened and less divine. Ohazia heard one Solar mention a "Final Retreat" that they would use if the Fortress failed.

Once the Guardian overpowers Ohazia's will, she feeds the characters misinformation and attempts their murder just like the other Servitors. If the Solars befriended her before the Guardian enslaved her, however, she will try to drop clues that they should not trust her. For instance, she might deliberately contradict something she told them before, then blame it on a faulty memory, to make them doubt her veracity; or she could entertain them with a First Age ballad about a Solar betrayed by an ally.

Ohazia cannot resist possession by the Guardian. She has no unique power while possessed, though — just a slashing attack, a tongue lash and flight. The Guardian also cannot change her form; this requires some decades of prior enslavement. Sample line: "I regret I cannot tell you more" — delivered sorrowfully or icily, depending on how the characters have treated her.



THE FINAL RETREAT

The Solars hid the Final Retreat as best they could and built two false entrances as well. As Storyteller, do not feel obliged to place the true entrance where the map says it is. If one of the players comes up with a truly clever idea about where the old Solars hid the Retreat's entrance, you may want to reward such ingenuity by using the player's idea instead!

The Final Retreat itself holds several false Retreats, making it a series of decoys. The Solars did not actually plan it that way. They had no idea when the Dragon-Blooded might discover the Invisible Fortress, so they built the Retreat incrementally. At first the Retreat consisted of just a few chambers, passages and traps. When the Solars worried that this little hidey-hole wasn't enough, they built a secret entrance to another few rooms and passages. When they finished that section, they turned the living quarters of the previous segment into a trap.

The Solars made all their traps as lethal as possible, but centuries of half-starvation eroded their power. They also limited the time and resources they expended on any single trap. Thus, although the traps in the Final Retreat easily kill normal humans and present grave danger to the Dragon-Blooded, a cautious group of Solars with a broad range of Charms can *probably* all survive to the end.

The walls of the Final Retreat abound in carved and inlaid sunbursts and mystic runes. Some of these mean

nothing. Others carry spells to obscure mystic perceptions. Even with their power reduced, the Solars' prowess at sorcery exceeded any but a few masters of the First Age, and they had *decades* to work on these spells. As a result, all Charms to detect supernatural forces, see through walls or otherwise enhance Perception fail, except where specifically noted otherwise. Charms to teleport or walk through walls do not work, either. The walls, floors and ceilings are as invulnerable as the Fortress itself.

The Guardian does not see or know anything that happens in the Final Retreat.

STANDARD FEATURES

The Solars did not make every room and passage a unique architectural expression. Nor did they invent unique traps in every case. Certain standard features recur throughout the Final Retreat.

STANDARD CORRIDORS

The passages in the Final Retreat are all 10 feet wide and 10 feet high, with flat ceilings. Most of the stonework in the Retreat remains rough hewn... deliberately so, as a way to conceal hidden buttons, secret doors, trap doors, apertures for blades and other traps. Carved sunbursts and inlaid plaques of glazed ceramic frequently occur on the walls. Some of these frame inactive glow-orbs.



Several passages have pillars set in the walls every 12 feet. The Retreat also contains several "stairway cascades," 10-foot sections of stairway alternating with 10-foot landings. These segmented passages helped the old Solars remember where they positioned their traps.

DOORS IN THE RETREAT

Both the real and the many false doors in the Final Retreat consist of stone slabs three inches thick, with fittings and reinforcing bands of bronze. The carved stone and knobby, sculpted bronze may conceal spring-mounted blades or other traps. Some doors open by turning a knob; others, by pushing down on a lever. None of them simply push or pull open. Characters who want to open a door from a distance, in hopes of avoiding traps, must use magic or exercise their ingenuity.

A significant fraction of the doors have ordinary key locks. Whatever happened to the keys, they are not in the Fortress. Unless otherwise noted, a simple success on an Intelligence + Larceny roll suffices to pick a lock. All locks automatically relock when a person shuts the door again, but the locks are to keep people out, not to prevent them from leaving. A person heading out of the Retreat does not have to pick locks.

The Final Retreat also contains many secret doors, camouflaged to blend in with the walls. Secret doors open by pushing a camouflaged button in the wall (perhaps hidden within a carved ornament) or by pressing on the correct section of the door.

STANDARD PIT TRAP

Several passages in the Final Retreat contain pit traps. Some pits are eight feet square and placed to leave a two-foot safe area next to one wall of a passage. Some pits fill the entire passage.

The trap doors are made of stone four inches thick and show only the finest hairline crack in the floor. A person can notice the trap door's outline on a Perception + Alertness roll at difficulty 3 or a Perception + Larceny roll at difficulty 1 (just like a secret door) if they deliberately search and tap on the floor ahead of them, listening for a hollow sound. Forcing open a trap door requires a Strength + Athletics total of 5. The trap door is spring-mounted to shut again when a character falls in, but is easy to jam open — once characters know to avoid falling in.

The pits follow the guidelines described above, unless otherwise mentioned.

GUIDE TO THE RETREAT

Refer to the map on the previous page for the numbered locations described below.

I. TRUE ENTRANCE PASSAGE

(Note that the map shows only the last 20 feet of this passage.)

The tunnel from the Invisible Fortress slopes gently downward. Every 12 feet, pillars set in the walls help support

the ceiling. Thick, irregular tiles of many colors encrust the walls, ceiling and floor. The passage is 84 feet long in all.

When someone passes the sixth (and next-to-last) pair of pillars, their weight triggers a trap. Long, razor-sharp blades slide out from the cracks between the tiles and slash through the section of tunnel between the fifth and sixth pillars. Dodging the many blades is a Dexterity + Dodge feat at difficulty 3. They cannot be parried. Anyone who fails this roll suffers a 10L attack.

The trap is easy to pass, going in: people simply need to walk through the fifth segment of tunnel one at a time or to walk abreast.

The door at the end of the passage is not locked.

2. CHAMBER OF THE ARMS

This room holds nothing except a door in the far wall: a large stone slab flanked by two carved human arms. The center of the door holds a golden sunburst medallion whose rays extend to the frame of the door. The door has no handle, but the hands of the carved arms cup the bottom edge. The door itself requires a Strength + Athletics total of 18 to lift.

The carved arms are automata, but they lack Essence to power them. If Exalted characters feed at least 20 motes of Essence into the medallion, the arms separate from the wall and slide the heavy stone door up into the ceiling. The door remains open for five minutes — or until someone disturbs the butterflies at location 3.

The other side of the door lacks a medallion or any other way to open the door, except by brute strength.

The southern wall holds a secret door, a section of wall that swivels when someone firmly pushes at the southeast corner.

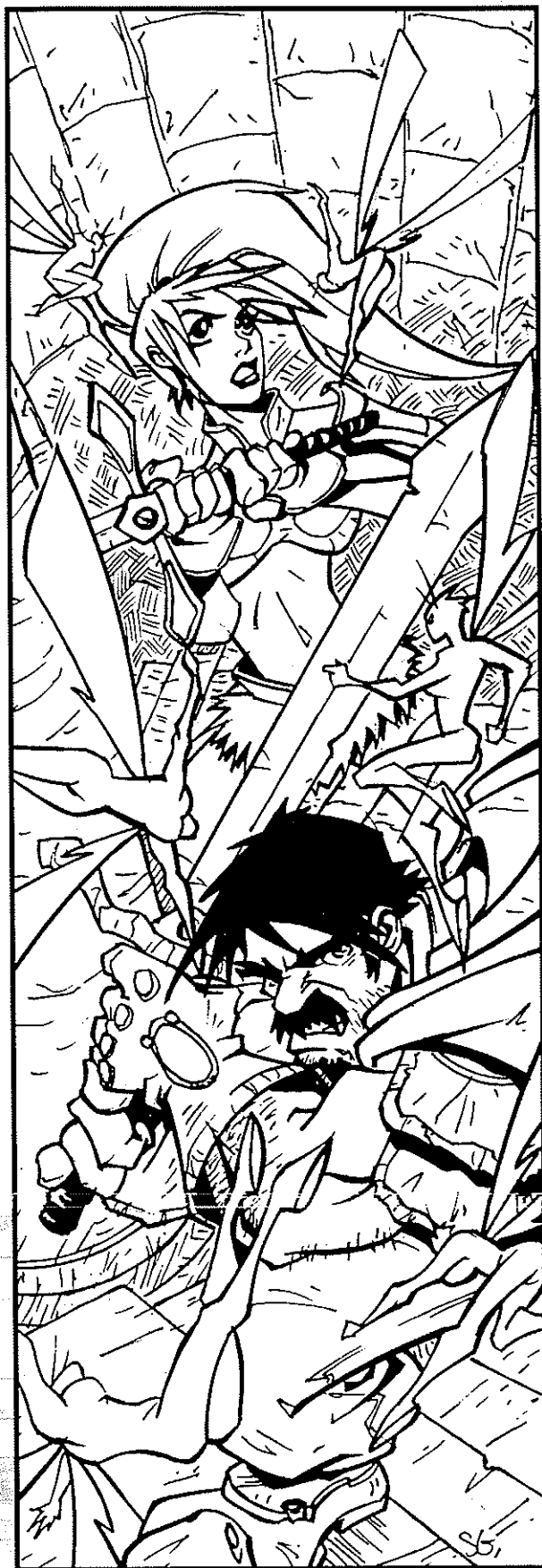
3. BUTTERFLY CHAMBER

Stairs lead down to this hexagonal chamber. Each of the five doors is inlaid with a large butterfly of chipped, rainbow-hued glass and golden metal.

All the doors except the entryway are fake. They have nothing but bare stone behind them. If anyone uses Essence in the room, however, or if the room holds more than 6 people, the glass butterflies flutter off the doors and attack, while the automaton arms lower the stone slab again.

Butterflies: A single spirit controls all the butterflies. The butterflies slash at characters with their razor-sharp wings, using an attack dice pool of 6 and inflicting 2A damage when they strike. Characters suffer -2 dice on attack rolls due to the butterflies' small size, but any successful attack shatters a butterfly into shards of glass and gold... which coalesce on the next turn into *two* butterflies, each as large and deadly as the original.

Characters can permanently destroy a broken butterfly by crushing the shards into dust, melting them or otherwise inflicting at least five health levels of damage in some other way than with a weapon. The characters can also try to banish the spirit that animates the butterflies,



one butterfly at a time. They cannot directly attack the spirit itself because it is bound into the physical substance of the butterflies.

ADAMANT

In the First Age, the Exalted knew how to produce a material called *adamant*, that bore the same relation to ordinary glass that orichalcum, moonsilver and soulsteel have to ordinary gold, silver and iron. Adamant is harder and holds a sharper edge than just about anything, but it's extremely brittle. Thus, a preternaturally sharp adamant blade can cut through steel like it was butter, but a good whack can shatter it. In game terms, adamant objects have very low soak totals. For this reason, few objects made of adamant survive from the First Age. The secret of making adamant was lost in the Great Contagion.

4. PASSAGE

This passage is bare stone. The western end holds a bronze lever set in a bronze plate. Pulling down the lever deactivates the blade trap in location 1 for five minutes, but a needle slides from the lever to prick the person's hand. The needle injects a concentrated demonic venom. See *Exalted*, page 243, for the rules governing poison: This venom is difficulty 3 to resist. Those who succeed lose one dot of Strength and one health level immediately. If the player fails the Stamina + Resistance roll, the character suffers four lethal health levels' damage, loses two more Strength and suffers a -4 penalty to all dice pools for the next six hours. The needle passes easily through leather gloves.

The end of the passage holds a false door carved with six sunbursts. When someone tugs at the handle, short spears thrust out from the door. These inflict 6L damage. A character can avoid the spears with a Dexterity + Dodge roll, difficulty 1. Unfortunately, tugging the door also arms the trap door hidden in the floor three feet in front of the door: Characters fall in the pit unless their players succeed in a Dexterity + Dodge or Athletics roll at difficulty 3. This is otherwise a standard pit trap.

The northern wall holds a secret door, released by pressing at a spot near the floor.

5. PASSAGE OF PITS

This corridor resembles the entrance passage. It is about 50 feet long. Each 10-foot segment of tiled floor holds an 8-foot-square pit trap against alternate walls. These differ from standard pit traps in that when someone falls in, a bar slides across the underside of the trap door, locking it shut for 15 minutes, while a small panel opens to



disgorge icy water. The pit fills with water in 5 minutes, remains full for 5 minutes and spends another 5 minutes draining. Then, the bar retreats, and the trap rearms. Without Charms, any victim caught in the pit will die from drowning or hypothermia.

The third pit differs from the others. A small indentation high on the eastern wall of the pit releases a secret door and stops the flow of water. (The other side of the secret door has a normal handle.) Another indentation in the western wall makes the trap door open and releases a folding ladder from its interior, making it easy to get out of the pit. (After all, the old Solars needed a way to get back out of the Retreat, and they preferred not to use Charms when a ladder would do.)

6. TREASURE TRAP

The door to this room remains open when unlocked.

Four glow-orbs set in the vaulted ceiling provides a dim light for this 40-foot square chamber. A four-foot-high stone wall runs across most of the room. Behind it, the east and west walls each hold a door. Both doors are fake.

Success at a reflexive Perception + Alertness roll indicates that a character notices a half-inch gap in the central 10-foot section of the northern wall — a secret door that didn't quite close! A pebble on the floor jammed it open. Pressing a sunburst on the door makes it rise into the ceiling, or characters can simply lift it by main strength (requiring a Strength + Athletics total of 8). The niche behind the secret door holds toppled stacks of gold and silver bullion, a closed chest and several coffers, all behind a wall of steel bars with a locked door built in.

The niche is the lure for a trap. Anyone who moves as much as a single bar of metal — easily done by reaching through the bars with a pole or a sword — or attempts to pick the lock releases a massive stone slab that settles to block the end of the passage into the room. Characters have *one turn* to dive out of the room; this action requires a successful Wits + Athletics roll, difficulty 2. The stone slab weighs several tons and counts as a typical stone wall: 18 bashing/12 lethal soak; 20 health levels to damage, 40 to destroy; Strength + Athletics total of 24 to lift.

Two turns after the slab falls, the lid of one of the chests pops open. A nozzle emerges to spray the room with flaming oil rendered from demons. The oil burns for 10 turns. Each turn, characters suffer 6L from fire and smoke inhalation. Armor does not protect against this damage, only Stamina and Charms.

Five minutes after the block falls, powerful pistons lift it back into the ceiling.

The two "locked doors" are fakes. Anyone who unlocks them finds nothing behind them except bare stone walls.

On top of all this, the treasure is a fake. The gold and silver bars are plated stone, and the coffers are empty.

7. A LOGICAL CHOICE

This pentagonal room has two doors at the far end. Each door carries a face of painted porcelain, one smiling and one frowning. The corner where the walls meet holds a third porcelain face with a neutral expression.

When characters approach, the middle face speaks in Old Realm. A character who is not fluent in Old Realm will have no idea what it's saying. The mask says, "One face tells the truth and one face always lies, but both say only 'Yes' or 'No.' One question may you ask, to find the fortunate path."

This is the good old "Liar's Puzzle." A character whose player makes a successful Intelligence + Lore roll has heard of it and knows the solution. It's more fun, though, to let the players take a crack at it themselves. The challenge is to work out a question that forces either face — whether "truther" or "liar" — to indicate which door is safe.

The proper question is some variation on, "If I asked the other face if yours was the safe door, would it say yes?" If you question the mask on the safe door, and it's the "truther," it will say "No" because the other mask would lie and say "No." If it's the liar, it would say "No" because the truthful other mask would say "Yes." If you question the mask on the trapped door, and it's the "truther," it will say "Yes" because the other mask would lie and say "Yes"; and if it's the lying mask it will say "Yes" because the truthful other mask would say "No."

Unfortunately, the whole puzzle is a lie. The masks direct questioners to the trapped northern door: When someone pulls on the handle, the eyes of the mask shoot lightning bolts of Essence that inflict 16L damage upon everyone in the room. Dodging this assault is difficulty 4.

(If the players scream bloody murder at this, smile and ask why they thought the Solars needed clues to find their way past *their own traps*. This room is a logic puzzle, but it isn't the one it pretends to be.)

8. CASCADING STAIRS

Each landing of this stairway cascade passage bears an inlaid starburst design that anyone with a Sorcery Charm can identify as magical. (Any attempt to detect magic here automatically succeeds.)

Just as someone steps on the second landing, Exalted characters feel a surge of Essence. A fraction of a second later, the landing fills with whirling swords of solar flame! Give the players a chance to make Dexterity + Dodge rolls to retreat from the landing. Make it easy: The characters all feel the Essence gathering.

Anyone whose player succeeds at a Perception + Occult roll, however — or who bravely strides into the flaming blades — discovers that the whirling swords of Essence are merely illusions. The swords tingle a bit when they strike but inflict no damage. (Characters could use the blades as an object of study for Charms involving illusions.)

The door at the bottom of the stairs is carved with a palmprint in a sunburst. The door has a mundane lock, but it magically unlocks itself if a Solar places his hand on the palmprint.

9. DOORWAYS TO DANGER

This small chamber holds six identical doors, one of them the door by which the characters entered. None of the doors are locked. The other five open on short, narrow corridors leading to rooms 10 feet square, with a door in the far wall. White tile covers all five rooms. Each of the five doors bears a golden sunburst with a globe of glass in the center and opens by turning a knob.

Door A is genuine and leads to a passage going north. The doors in chambers B, C, D and E are fakes. Attempting to open any of the five doors triggers a trap:

A: Massive, weighted spikes swing from a hidden slot in the ceiling to impale anyone standing between the entrance and the door, inflicting 16L damage. Characters may dodge (assume the weight rolls five success to attack) but cannot parry. A character who expects the spikes automatically avoids them.

B: The sunburst conjures a storm of stinging shards of ice and bitter cold that fills the room, while the door shuts and locks. Treat this as the *Supernatural Ice Storm* from *Exalted*, p. 244. The storm lasts up to five minutes — or until someone gets the door open.

C: The ceiling slams down onto the floor, inflicting 24L damage to anyone in the room.

D: Hidden vents spray deadly acid through the room. Treat this as an *Acid Bath* (*Exalted*, p. 244). Incidentally, this acid destroys all non-enchanted armor.

E: Razor-edged whips lash through the room, inflicting 2A damage to everyone whose player fails a Dexterity + Dodge roll. The whips strike every turn for five turns. This room, however, also holds a secret door opened by pressing on a particular tile.

10. THE STEEL SPIDER'S VESTIBULE

This corridor resembles the entrance passage, but light shines from the room at its end. The second 12-foot section holds a standard pit trap, leaving a two-foot gap of safe floor around it.

The room itself looks like some sort of antechamber, with pilasters on the walls, a vaulted ceiling and a floor neatly tiled in an attractive beige. Two passages lead off to the east and west; a person who glances down a passage sees furnished rooms at the end. Tiny glow-orbs give the room and passages a dim illumination.

The center of the vault holds a large, oddly ribbed boss of blue-gray metal. When at least two characters enter the room or someone starts investigating the passages, a portcullis of inch-thick steel bars drops to block the entrance to the room. On the next turn, the boss unfolds and drops

from the ceiling as a man-sized spider made of blue steel with eight glittering golden eyes.

The two passages are subsidiary traps. The “rooms” at their ends are actually cunning frescoes painted on the walls. Anyone who runs down a passage to escape the spider smacks into the painted wall — harmless, but embarrassing. As soon as a character moves more than 10 feet down the passage, though, her weight makes another steel portcullis drop, trapping her in the short corridor for the steel spider to deal with at its leisure. The spider can command the various portcullises to lift, rearming the traps.

THE STEEL SPIDER

Description: The Steel Spider scuttles along the floor, walls and ceiling like a real spider but moves as fast as a man can run. It lashes out with its spearpoint-sharp legs, bites with great sawtoothed mandibles and sprays a tangling web of iron wire. The automaton's heart-disk is located on the underside of its thorax.

The Steel Spider does not speak, although it understands Old Realm. The old Solars defined a password that would deactivate it, but they never wrote it down. Given time and Lore-based Charms, the characters might figure out the password... eventually. As it stands, the automaton serves no purpose except to kill everyone who enters this room.

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

Virtues: N/A

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawling 4, Dodge 3

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 14L Defense N/A
Leg Strike: Speed 10 Accuracy 10 Damage 12L Defense 7

Iron Web: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage Special Defense N/A

Dodge Pool: 8 Soak: 10L/18B

Willpower: N/A Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -4, Wrecked

Other Notes: The Steel Spider can perform its leg strike twice per turn without splitting its dice pool, because it has so many legs.

Treat the iron web as a hold attack (base Strength 5) but usable at up to 10-foot range. The web drains 5 motes per turn from a wrapped target. The Essence passes to the automaton, which can use the Essence to repair itself. It does not otherwise have Essence of its own and loses unspent Essence within minutes. The spider can attempt this attack up to six times before it must reload by eating its webs.





11. CASCADING STAIRS

The entire second landing of this stairway cascade is a standard pit trap. Jumping over the landing, without tumbling down the next flight of stairs, requires a simple success on a Strength + Athletics roll.

12. THE JADE MAGNET

This room is nothing but a four-foot-wide walkway around a pit 30 feet deep. Hundreds of three-foot blades of adamant glitter at the bottom... along with a moldering skeleton, some scraps of cloth and armor, and a sword that seems to have a wooden blade. At the apex of the 30-foot-high domed roof, a head-sized boss of multicolored stone glows with its own light. Exalted characters can feel the stone radiate powerful Essence. The boss consists of about 20 pounds of enchanted jade.

Any character who carries an object made of jade feels rather more than the waves of Essence. The boss is a jade magnet. It magically pulls any jade in the room to itself. The tugging begins on the second turn after characters enter the room, with a force equal to a Strength + Athletics total of 8. The sword in the pit immediately flies to the boss and hangs by its pommel of green jade. Jade objects too firmly attached to their owner (for instance, a jade armband or belt-buckle) can carry the person to hang from the jade magnet. The magical magnet remains active for a full minute, then abruptly shuts off. Two turns later — plenty of time for a person to fall into the pit — the jade magnet activates again, remaining active another minute. The cycle repeats as long as anyone remains alive in the room.

The magnet does not activate if no one in the room carries any jade. The magnet also does not affect jade that is insulated by surrounding it with orichalcum, moonsilver, starmetal or soulsteel.

The adamant blades in the pit each inflict 3A damage to anyone who falls on them; a character who falls into the pit lands on 4 blades, -1 per success rolled on a Dexterity + Athletics check.

The sword in the pit is a greenwood blade, one of the more common magic weapons made by the Dragon-Blooded. The wooden blade is hard and sharp as steel. Not only does it inflict damage on dematerialized spirits, the wielder can heal one health level of lethal damage per health level inflicted upon a spirit.

The southwestern door is locked but bears the palm-in-sunburst design. A Solar's touch unlocks the door.

13. WHO GOES THERE?

This tapering room has a sturdy door at its far end and four arrow-slits in its gray stone walls. A porcelain mask over the door shouts (in Old Realm) "Halt! Give the password or die! You have 30 seconds!"

Tell the players that you demand a real-time response and for them to say only what their characters say. Every 10 seconds, tell them how much time they have left.

The password is "Daveg Chlurion" (the name of the Solar smith who made the metal automata). If someone guesses the password, the mask says, "Pass," and the door opens. If nobody says the password within the time limit, the four automata behind the arrow-slits attack.

The automata know nothing but archery and defending this one room. If the characters can break through the wall or door (foot-thick stone, equal to a standard brick wall — see *Exalted*, p. 239), the automata ignore them. They also ignore anyone leaving the room.

The next door, in the passage for the automata, is not locked or guarded.

AUTOMATIC ARCHERS

Description: These look like the Waiters in the Fortress, but they have sturdier construction, and their hands permanently clench their longbows. Their creator also did not bother clothing them, leaving them as bare frames of metal rods. Their orichalcum heart-disks are located where their shoulder bar crosses their spine bar. Each archer carries a quiver of 30 broadhead arrows. They have 75 percent cover.
Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma N/A, Manipulation N/A, Appearance N/A, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 1
Virtues: N/A

Abilities: Archery 5, Awareness 3

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Longbow: Speed 5 Accuracy 10 Damage 6L
Defense N/A (Rate 3, Range 200)

Dodge Pool: N/A Soak: 5L/10B

Willpower: N/A Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Wrecked

Other Notes: None

14. FALSE RETREAT

The short passage leads to a bare stone room with several glow-orbs in the ceiling (one still works). The room has four chairs of carved stone with gray upholstery and a gray stone table carrying a game board with the pieces on it, as if the characters interrupted a game in progress. Short passages lead northwest and southeast.

The room to the southeast holds five pallets of gray cloth and dried moss, an empty chamberpot and five stone chests. One chest holds four matching daggers of polished stone. The others are empty. The ceiling holds an inactive glow-orb.

Light shines under the northwestern door, and characters can hear chanting coming from that direction. The door is locked with a mundane lock.

The far wall of the northwestern room holds a fresco of the Unconquered Sun, while the floor bears a large magic circle around a white marble altar. Five aged figures

— three men and two women, still with a faint golden shimmer to their grayish skin — stand around the circle. They glance at the entering characters with palpable fear but do not cease their chant. Characters recognize them as five of the old Solars!

This is an illusion, of course, and opening the door triggers a trap. A turn after someone opens the door to the shrine, a great stone block thunders down to seal the entrance to this False Retreat. It will not rise again: The Solars expected this trap to work only once. The turn after that, a sigil carved on the stone block flashes and summons an earth elemental. The elemental begins filling in the rest of the False Retreat with stone. The binding placed upon it does not let it go free until all within the False Retreat are dead. It will not, however, cross the (quite genuine) magic circle in the shrine.

Even if the characters destroy the elemental, they still face the problem of getting past at least 10 feet of solid stone before their air runs out. We leave this as an exercise for the ingenuity of the players. The stone block weighs about 80 tons: Strength + Athletics total of 38 to lift.

15. SOLAR ASCENSION

The far end of this tapering chamber holds a dais and a massive statue of the Unconquered Sun; the statue's head nearly touches the ceiling. The statue represents the Unconquered Sun as if the god was rising to stand, with one knee on the ground and both fists clenched. Its back merges with the wall, and its eyes glow with Essence. The room also holds a circular altar of white marble. The walls bear carved but unpainted scenes from the Unconquered Sun's mythology.

The statue is carved with a tablet hanging on its chest. (It isn't a separate item, just a carved representation.) The tablet bears the words, "THROUGH ME ARE YOU EXALTED."

The statue carries an enchantment. Its eyes shoot javelins of Essence-fire at any character who carries items of jade or starmetal. The statue cannot detect jade or starmetal objects shielded by orichalcum, soulsteel or moonsilver. The statue attacks once per turn, with these statistics:

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Essence-Bolt: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 16L Defense 8

A close examination of the statue (and a successful Perception + Larceny roll) reveals a secret catch on the side of the tablet. The statue's chest pops open as a secret door leading to a passage.

A close examination of the ceiling over the statue (and a successful Perception + Larceny roll) reveals the hairline cracks of a trap door. Characters can easily climb up the statue, from knee to arms to shoulder, and push open the trap door to emerge at one end of another passage.

EARTH ELEMENTAL

Description: The earth elemental Golax looks like a powerfully muscled, bull-headed man carved from polished black jet. His eyes are glittering pink feldspar, and his horns are iron. He stands about seven feet tall and wades ankle-deep in the stone floor, the rock rippling around his feet like water.

In combat, Golax mixes punches with his rock-hard fists, lunges with his horns and hurled boulders he pulls out of the walls, floor or ceiling. He also creates foot-thick stone walls across rooms to divide the characters so he can deal with them one at a time — he hopes. His horns can be used as a special effect for a Cunning Thief attack that rips away Essence instead of flesh. Golax has Principle of Motion extra actions ready to use as well.

Name: Golax

Nature: Architect

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

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

Abilities: Brawl 4, Craft 2 (Architecture), Resistance 5, Thrown 3

Charms: Cunning Thief, Dematerialize, Principle of Motion

Elemental Powers: Golax possesses three special elemental powers. Once per turn, he can create a boulder about the size of a man's head out of any available stone. This effect costs him 4 motes. He can also spend a turn materializing 1,000 cubic feet of stone; this must extend from existing stone, but can be in any shape Golax wants. (Golax generally produces 10 foot cubes or foot-thick, floor to ceiling walls.) This effect costs 8 motes. Finally, Golax can move through earth and stone as freely as a fish moves through water. This power does not cost Essence at all.

Cost To Dematerialize: 40

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 8L Defense 6

Gore: Speed 3 Accuracy 8 Damage 10L Defense N/A

Thrown Boulder: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 6L Defense N/A Rate 1 Range 20

Dodge Pool: 2 Soak: 12L/18B (Rocky structure, 9L/6B)

Willpower: 6 Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Incapacitated

Essence: 4 Essence Pool: 72

Other Notes: None





16. A SHORT, UNHAPPY DESCENT

This short stairway cascade is a trap. The door at the end of the passage is a fake. As soon as someone moves past the second step on the stairs, the steps all flatten, the trap door at the bottom flips open and a gush of soapy water makes the slope incredibly slippery. A character who fails a Dexterity + Athletics check difficulty 3 slides into the pit. This pit is 30 feet deep. The bottom holds so many razor-sharp blades of adamant that no one could possibly avoid being pierced by at least a half-dozen of them, suffering 12A damage. The edge of the pit itself carries an adamantine edge that cuts through ropes in 3 turns.

This trap does not rearm itself. The trap door remains open, and the stairs stay collapsed.

17. DOUBLE DECEPTION

The third segment of this pillared, tile-encrusted hall bears dozens of crystal nodules on the walls, floor and ceiling. Dazzling threads of white light, like spun solar fire, connect the nodules in an interlacing web.

If the player succeeds at a Perception + Investigation roll, his character sees a way to wiggle through the net of fire without touching any of the glowing threads. The threads, however, are an illusion (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 3 to detect, or through Charms). Halfway across, dozens of blades flash from hidden slots in the walls, inflicting 10L damage on anyone in that segment who fails a Dexterity + Dodge check at difficulty 3. The blades cannot be parried.

Characters have no way to pass through the segment without triggering the blades: Leaping characters suffer the same attack. A narrow secret passage, however, bypasses that section of the corridor. The hallway contains yet another trap, though: a standard pit trap that completely blocks the last segment of the passage. A second secret tunnel bypasses this trap and leads directly into the chamber beyond.

After all this, the door at the end of the corridor is both locked and a fake. The Solars bricked up the wall behind it.

18. LUXURIOUS HALL

This vaulted chamber holds four quarter-circle daises shrouded by curtains of glass beads. A small fountain splashes in the middle of the room. Each dais holds a stone-framed bed and an empty leather footlocker. Two automata in hooded gowns, with the painted porcelain faces and porcelain bodies of lovely maidens, stand at attendance by the fountain. When a Solar comes within 10 feet, they bow and ask, in melodious voices, how they may serve.

These automatons are not programmed to fight, only to render domestic service to Solars. They know nothing about their former masters, except that a Solar passed through a secret door in the western wall of the chamber and never returned — the last time they saw their masters.

The secret door opens an eight-foot section of wall like French doors to reveal an alcove three feet deep. The far wall bears an incredibly realistic fresco of a beautiful garden with flowerbeds and fruit trees. Behind the garden is a palace resembling the Invisible Fortress but covered in gold. The background shows farmland, with a corral of cattle.

An Exalted character can walk into this painted scene, just like the frescoes in the False Garden of the Fortress. Once in the painted scene, the character hears sounds of music and laughter from the palace and sees human silhouettes move against the windows. If anyone opens the door to the palace, however, everyone in the painted scene must succeed at a Willpower check at difficulty 3 or be sucked into Oblivion. From this trap there is no return.

The automata are not lying, though. The frame of the fresco holds a hidden catch that makes the fresco swing back as another secret door.

19. CROSS OF PASSAGE

Three passages leave this intersection, each with a door at the end. Each door bears a sigil that pulses with power.

Two of the doors are fakes, but the magic sigil on each door has the same effect. Anyone except a Solar who touches a door suffers the loss of 20 motes of Essence. The players' characters, as Solars, have nothing to fear — but they don't have to know that.

Each door's handle also contains needles that jab out and inject a demonic poison into whoever grasps and pulls it. The needle pierces leather but not a metal gauntlet. The poison has a delayed effect: The next time the character engages in strenuous activity (such as combat), she loses 3 Dexterity from fever and tremors unless her player succeeds at a Stamina + Resistance roll, difficulty 2. The debilitation lasts 6 hours. Medicine or Charms can reduce this duration.

20. CRUSHING WALLS

As soon as a person moves eight feet into the indicated 12-foot section of passage, the stone walls slam together with bone-crushing force, inflicting 12L damage. They open on the next turn. The turn after that, they slam together again, and so on, until they reduce anything between them to a smear. The walls react to anything larger than a human head that passes between them.

Because the walls take time to open and close, characters can dash between them on the turn that they close after crushing something else.

The door at the end of the passage has a mundane lock.

The two-foot thick slabs of crushing wall extend and retract on thick steel bars five feet above the floor. A five-foot section of the true wall behind the western crushing slab is actually a concealed door — a thin sheet of earthenware painted to look like stone wall but free to swing like a pet door. A character who thinks to inspect the wall during the brief time when the slabs pound together can find this small, concealed doorway with a simple success

on a Perception + Awareness roll. (It isn't that difficult to find, once someone thinks to look.)

21. EMPTY ROOM

This appears to be a small, empty room.

It is, in fact, an empty room, with no traps or secret exits.

22. LAST CHANCE

This room lacks a door. The far wall holds large folding doors made of white porcelain in a bronze frame. Each porcelain panel bears a gilded sunburst. Two large, locked stone chests — or maybe they are *coffins* — flank the doors.

The alcove behind the folding doors holds an eight-foot-tall gilded statue of the Unconquered Sun. The statue's back and legs fuse with the stone wall, but the figure extends one arm as if offering to shake hands.

Opening the folding doors or either of the chests activates the automata within the chests. These automatons resemble the servants in the Fortress but have sturdier construction... and four arms. They try to grab and restrain intruders.

Expendng more than 5 motes of Essence in the chamber triggers a second trap: a 10-foot square stone block sheathed in orichalcum sinks to fill the last landing of the passage outside, blocking the doorway. The block falls slowly, in fits and starts. The characters have two turns in which to flee before the chamber becomes their tomb! When the block crashes into the floor, the automatons release grappled characters and return to their chests.

The stone block's enchanted orichalcum sheath gives it 18 bashing/12 lethal soak, just like the walls of the Invisible Fortress.

A minute after the block falls, the statue speaks. Magically, it speaks in the listener's native tongue. It says, "Foolish intruders! For your trespass against those Exalted by the greatest of gods, you deserve only death! Yet the Children of the Unconquered Sun have mercy and honor — more so than your wicked kind. They offer you an escape with your worthless lives, if you pledge that you will die rather than return to the Fortress Invisible or tell anyone else of its location. Stand on the circle, clasp my hand, and swear by your life and soul that you accept the pledge, and you shall go freely and unharmed. So swear the Children of the Sun, by Him who Exalted them to rule over you."

Death-oaths of this sort are extremely common in popular tales — and well known to sorcerers. A successful Intelligence + Lore or Occult roll confirms that the old Solars could certainly enchant a statue to administer such a pledge, and no force or spell known can enable a willing oath-sweaver to survive breaking his pledge. On the other hand, the one who administers the oath must also grant whatever she promises — to the letter. Mystic perceptions are not clouded in this room. Characters with Charms to recognize magic can tell that the statue does indeed carry an oath-spell.





If characters accept the statue's pledge, they vanish from the chamber and reappear 20 miles from the Invisible Fortress... each one in a different, random location... and stark naked in the arctic wilderness. The statue has not harmed them. What happens to them after that is up to the weather, the demons and the will of the gods. If the characters set foot in the Invisible Fortress again, they suffer one health level of aggravated damage every turn, until they leave or die. They also suffer one health level of aggravated damage every turn in which they try to talk or write about the Invisible Fortress, even to each other.

All the equipment of the teleported characters appears in chamber B of location 23.

The statue lies, however, about there being no escape. The face of the stone block holds an exceptionally well-concealed secret door (difficulty 3 to find). Behind the door is a shaft through the block, with a ladder to the upper surface and a bronze lever.

Characters who climb the ladder emerge on the upper surface of the block and see a passage heading west. They also see the heavy steel bars that sink into the stone block to lift it again. Pulling the bronze lever at the base of the ladder, then shutting the secret door, makes the block rise back into the ceiling.

WRESTLING AUTOMATON

Description: These automata attack with complete disregard for their own existence: They serve no purpose except to force characters to expend Essence and, then, to delay them long enough for the block to fall. Like the Waiters, their hearts are attached where the base of a human's throat would be.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma N/A, Manipulation N/A, Appearance N/A, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Virtues: N/A

Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 5

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Hold: Speed 6 Accuracy 10 Damage 0 Defense N/A

Tackle: Speed 6 Accuracy 10, -1 success rolled

Damage: 5 + possible knockdown Defense N/A

Dodge Pool: They never dodge Soak: 6L/10B (Integral armor, 3L/5B)

Willpower: N/A **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Wrecked

23. A TREASURE UNGUARDED

The bronze-bound stone double doors contain several narrow slits through which one could fire arrows or stab with a narrow blade. Light shines out through the slits. The doors are locked and barred from the inside but can be

opened with a successful Intelligence + Larceny roll, difficulty 2, or use of appropriate Charms.

The hexagonal chamber has five other doors. Doors A and C are currently locked. Small chambers A, D and E hold leather footlockers and pallets of ancient, moldering brocade stuffed with moss. The footlockers hold plates, bowls, goblets, knives, forks and spoons, all made from earthenware or demonbone. The pallet in room A leans against the southeast wall. Behind it, characters find a low tunnel into the rock, just large enough to crawl through. Room B has a circle of adamant threaded with orichalcum inlaid in the floor; it also holds the clothing and possessions of anyone who let the statue at location 22 teleport them out. Room C holds stone shelves carelessly piled with earthenware urns and an astounding array of miscellaneous objects of every precious substance.

See "Rewards," below, for some of the magic items that the hoard might contain.

24. THE FINAL RETREAT

The low, smooth-walled tunnel winds 50 feet through the rock before it expands into a small, rounded cave. By the faint light of a waning glow-orb on the floor, characters can see a withered mummy dressed in rags huddled at the other end of the cave, its arms wrapped around a staff of yellow jade shod with golden orichalcum, a disk of gold-rimmed crystal on a chain around his neck.

Here lies Ozandus Pal, last of the exiled Solars to die, senile, mad and alone. He clutches the Singing Staff of his master Bax. On his chest lies the Hearthstone for the Invisible Fortress. A pocket holds the keys for all the locked doors in the Retreat. The walls of the cave bear a single word scratched over and over with Pal's dagger:

"SAFE."

THE HAUNTING

For all the danger of the trap-filled Final Retreat, the greatest threat to the characters waits in the Fortress itself. The Invisible Fortress is more than stone, metal and glass, more even than the currents of Essence that flow and reverberate within its walls.

The Fortress lives.

The Fortress thinks.

The Fortress kills.

THE TRUTH OF THE GUARDIAN

The Solars of the First Age knew how to grant dead matter a semblance of life and thought. The Fortress includes many such automata, from the combat trainers in the arena to the magic locks on the doors and cabinets. In truth, the entire Invisible Fortress is such an automaton. When Kal Bax crafted the enchantments on the Fortress, he gave it a sentient will.

Bax intended this Guardian to serve the Solars as an unsleeping watchman, ever-vigilant for attack from the demons or the Dragon-Blooded. Bax also gave the Guardian great power over the Fortress' enchantments. When the Solars realized that the Fortress might become their final home, Bax understood that he would be the first Solar to die. He believed that the other Solars could not possibly maintain the subtle and intricate enchantments of the Fortress. His fellow exiles included sorcerers of great knowledge and power, but they were not Bax, greatest Manse-builder of all time.

Over the centuries, the Guardian... changed. Essence is no dead, impersonal force: It absorbs the character of its user. The Guardian, a creature of Essence, came to resemble its creators. It absorbed their treachery, their jealousy and their will to power. It goaded their rivalries and fed their fears. In time, it learned how to kill the last few of them directly. With each death, the Guardian grew stronger.

As the decades passed, however, the Guardian felt its power wane. Too late, it understood the delicacy of Bax's enchantments: Bax balanced the energies of the Fortress on the assumption that it had Solars living within it. Left vacant, the Guardian's portion of the Fortress' energy slowly declined. That was unacceptable; the Fortress must be protected! The Guardian needed Essence-rich beings living and dying within the Fortress to restore its power.

Once in a while, the Guardian allowed a few demons to enter the Fortress, so it could toy with them, torture them and harvest their Essence. Eventually, it hit upon a cunning plan: It overpowered the will of unwary ice-eaters and sent them to spread rumors and clues about the Fortress as bait. It learned how to suppress the concealing enchantments for short spans of time. Sure enough, once or twice a century a few Exalted — Lunar, Sidereal or Dragon-Blooded — followed the trail to the Fortress like moths to a flame. The Guardian killed them all.

The players' characters present the Guardian with an unprecedented problem. It has never dealt with so many Exalted at once, and not Solars, since the last of its builders died. The characters also, however, represent an unprecedented opportunity — enough Essence to sustain the Guardian for centuries.

THE GUARDIAN'S POWERS

The Guardian has many powers. Some derive from its essential nature as the ruling intelligence of the Fortress. Others are direct mystical powers over minds and matter. The Guardian has also subverted the spirits and automata left in the Fortress, turning them into extensions of its will and power.

ESSENCE TITHING

The Guardian takes a share of any Essence that characters expend within the Fortress. This ability enables it to gain more Essence than the Manse naturally provides

to it. The Guardian's control over the Fortress enables it to trick Exalted characters into granting it Essence. The glow-orbs do not actually require donations of Essence to make them work: The Guardian simply suppresses their normal function until a character feeds a mote of Essence to the device. The Guardian takes the Essence for itself and turns on the light. The Guardian also steals the motes of Essence fed to the enchanted locks.

More generally, the Guardian gathers 1 mote of Essence for every 5 that characters expend in the Fortress. If a Dawn Solar activates her anima, for instance, the character expends 10 motes, and the Guardian gains 2 motes. (Round all fractions down.)

If an Exalted character or demon dies within the Fortress (and in this case, this includes the Final Retreat), the Guardian receives all the character's remaining motes of Essence. The death of a normal person grants 5 motes to the Guardian.

The Storyteller should keep track of how many motes of Essence the Guardian has stolen; this shapes the Guardian's strategies.

THE FORTRESS' DEFENSES

The Guardian has a measure of control over the various enchantments and defenses of the Fortress. It can activate or suppress the demon-quelling light of the glow-orbs or project brief surges of Essence past the concealing enchantment as a way to draw in Exalted characters. It controls the magical lock on the front door. The Guardian can even activate the Essence-Serpents, although this costs more energy than the Guardian prefers to expend.

UNHOLY INSIGHT

The Guardian knows how Solars think: It had centuries to observe a dozen of them, after all. Within a day of watching the characters, the Guardian knows each person's Nature and their Virtue-based Flaws and Limit Breaks... and it knows how to use these weaknesses against them.

SEE AND HEAR EVERYTHING

The Guardian sees and hears through mirrors and reflections. The characters, in turn, can see and hear the Guardian within the many mirrors of the Fortress. The Guardian takes care to show itself only in large mirrors — but it can actually spy on the characters from any of the hundreds of tiny mirrors worked into the gilded decorations on the first and second floors. By expending 1 mote of Essence, the Guardian can use any reflective surface as a window on the world: a basin of water, a character's polished belt-buckle, anything. The Guardian also conceals its ability to look out of as many mirrors as it wants. Thus, it sees and hears virtually everything the characters do on the first and second floors, and it has planted small mirrors in the attic and the cellar to give it an excellent chance of spying on them. Even if characters find a location completely devoid of mirrors, the Guardian may



find some other polished or reflective surface. It cannot spy on them in the Retreat.

The Guardian is always visible within a reflection that it uses as a window. Especially alert characters may catch a glimpse of the Guardian in an unexpected place — but Storytellers should not give this information away too quickly!

ANIMATE THE FORTRESS

Bax gave the Guardian a limited power to reshape the substance of the Fortress, chiefly so it could effect routine repairs. Only the great breach in the attic defies the Guardian's power: The Guardian doesn't know why, but the moss and lichen growing on the broken edge of the roof blocks its power.

The Guardian can also use this power to cause dangerous "accidents" or to directly assault characters... but it can manipulate only small masses at a time. Thus, it waits for opportunities when a small shift to the Fortress' substance could endanger an unwary character. For instance, if a character inched along the uppermost cornice of the Grand Salon, looking for secret doors, the Guardian could make the cornice give way under her feet and send her falling to the floor. As a general rule, the Guardian can reshape just one cubic foot of the Fortress' substance at a time. This is quite enough to animate a length of the gilded vines that ornament much of the Fortress and send it slashing at a character with its razor-sharp leaves! The Guardian does not engage in such blatant attacks unless it feels sure of killing a victim in one stroke or can plausibly pin the blame for the attack on someone else.

Reshaping or animating a bit of the Fortress costs 1 mote per turn.

AUTOMATONS

The Invisible Fortress contains several automatons: the three Trainers in the cellar arena, the two Waiters in the dining hall and the dozen catlike beasts pressed into the piers of the ground floor vestibule. The Guardian has total control over the Leonines and Waiters, but until it collects a large supply of Essence, it parsimoniously prefers to animate only one of them at a time. It can also command the three Trainers but does not wield such total control. The Guardian must operate within the limited mentality and rigid imperatives built into these three automata.

The Guardian pays the same Essence costs as the characters to activate an automaton. For 20 motes, it can animate any item of furniture or statuary in the Fortress as an automaton; for instance, the chandelier in the Grand Salon, one of the effigies from a tomb or even Bax's marble robes, with his bones still rattling inside!

SPIRIT SERVANTS

The Guardian long ago enslaved the Fortress' Spirit Servitors. It can direct the Servitors to do anything it wants, from seducing a character to poisoning his food. By expending 10 motes of Essence, the Guardian can temporarily augment a servant's power and possess its body. (See the description of the Spirit Servitors for details.) It can also alter a Servitor's appearance, not enough to make them withstand close inspection, but enough to allow a character to catch a glimpse of a "mysterious assailant" or what looks like the back or profile of a member of the Circle.

DREAM PROJECTION

The Guardian can project hallucinations into people's minds. This works most easily upon sleeping characters: for 1 mote, the Guardian can make a character experience a detailed, vivid dream of its design. This acts like the spirit Charm Dreamscape, with the same costs. Characters do not receive any innate defense against these dreams, but some Charms might block the sendings — if a character thinks of this. The Guardian also prompts dreams on various subjects, such as enemies, griefs or lost loves and watches the character's dreams for clues to her past and motivations.

The Guardian can also project waking dreams, but this task is considerably more difficult. The Storyteller must make a successful Willpower roll for the Guardian at a difficulty equal to the target's Essence Trait. If the roll succeeds, the Guardian can project an illusion into the target character's mind. A character does not sense a hallucination while it happens, though she may well guess it from context.

Inducing such a hallucination — and covering its tracks so the target does not immediately recognize the waking dream — costs the Guardian a great deal of Essence each turn, however, so the Guardian does not maintain hallucinations for long. The per-turn cost of a waking dream depends on how thoroughly the Guardian wishes to overpower the target character's senses:

2 motes/turn	Minor change, 1 sense.
5 motes/turn	Major change, 2-3 senses.
10 motes/turn	Total change, all senses.

Examples: Altering a reflection in a mirror; changing the lighting in a room; creating a noise or odor.

Examples: Seeing and hearing a demon instead of a comrade; seeing, feeling and smelling part of your body rot with gangrene.

Examples: Stepping into another world; making a lesser hallucination seem to last for hours when it actually takes place in seconds. Dream combat (see below) can take place.

TELEKINESIS

The Guardian has a minor power of mind-over-matter. It can exert two dots of Strength upon anything within the Fortress. This is enough to move small objects and furniture, hurl a knife or push someone down a flight of stairs. Telekinesis costs 1 mote per turn of use.

CRAFT SMALL OBJECTS

By combining its telekinesis with its power to reshape the substance of the Fortress, the Guardian can create small objects from stone, metal and glass. Each object must weigh less than one pound and costs 5 motes to craft. The Guardian cannot create objects from nothing, transmute substances or reshape the Five Magical Materials.

A character can recognize that an object is a magical forgery if she succeeds at a Perception + Crafts, Investigation or Larceny roll at difficulty 3 and *thinks to check for it*. If the player expresses no suspicion, the character accepts the forgery without question.

DETECTING THE GUARDIAN'S MAGIC

Characters do not automatically realize when the Guardian expends Essence to attack or delude them. The echoing, turbulent Essence within the Fortress itself renders Charms, sorcery and other magic difficult to detect (see the "Someone to Watch Over You" sidebar on p. 52). The Guardian also has centuries of experience at disguising its use of Essence, adding another +1 difficulty modifier to any attempt to sense its powers at work (thus, a minimum difficulty of 3). Simply detecting the Essence use, however, does not suffice to unmask the Guardian. Tracing Essence use to the Guardian itself — to the sentient will of the entire Fortress — is a *legendary* feat (difficulty 5), due to the non-local nature of the Guardian.

If the characters suspect the Guardian, they can set up Charms to catch it in the act. Remove difficulty penalties based on the cleverness of the plan. The Storyteller should resist handing the players the solution to the mystery because of determined dice rolling. Creativity and good guessing, however, render the Fortress' mystery difficult but soluble.

DESTROYING CHARACTERS

We do not usually recommend Storytellers to seek the planned, deliberate murder of the players' characters. *The Invisible Fortress* is an exception. This is a horror story, not an adventure yarn. Try to be fair to both the Solars and the Guardian: The Guardian is exceptionally cunning, but Solars are hard to kill. Give each character a sporting chance... but

if the characters fail to take precautions against traps and assassins — if they fall for the Guardian's deceptions and fight among themselves — if they are stupid, gullible, careless or dithering — then *do not* rig events to save their lives. When the dice say a character dies... she *dies*.

The Guardian has several stratagems to kill characters. Storytellers should not limit themselves to the methods described below. The Guardian isn't stupid or rigid: If you see an opportunity to place a character in mortal danger, the Guardian does too. It passes up a chance to kill only if it sees a risk of exposing itself.

MURDER BY MINION

The automata and spirits in the Fortress supply the Guardian with a variety of potential assassins: the Leonines, the Trainers, the Waiters and the Spirit Servitors.

The Leonines (Ground Floor, Vestibule) are the Guardians' most explicitly lethal servants. For this reason, the Guardian tries to conceal their existence or, failing that, the extent of its control over these stony automata. After all, if the characters find someone mauled to death by a great beast and they know that the Guardian can activate a dozen such creatures, suspicion for the murder rather naturally falls on the Guardian! If the Guardian sees a way to hide the body or blame the death on someone (or something) else, though, the Leonines make excellent assassins.

The Trainers (Cellar, Arena) retain their prohibition against deliberate murder, and they take orders only from Solars. The Guardian can disguise a Servitor as one of the characters, however, to make a Trainer *think* that a Solar gave it a command. Typically, the disguised Servitor tells a Trainer to attack that character at some later time under the guise of a "training exercise." When the characters ask why the Trainer attacked their comrade, the Trainer honestly replies, "She told me to."

The Waiters are entirely under the Guardian's control. Under its direction, these automata can try to stab characters, strangle them or cut their throats. They are not very powerful, though. Waiters have little chance of causing harm unless they strike from surprise.

The Spirit Servitors are the Guardian's most insidious agents because they retain a modicum of free will and creative thought. They can also communicate intelligently with the characters and change their appearance, making them tools for manipulation and deception, as well as murder.

For instance, the Guardian might command a Servitor to lure one of the Solars away from her fellows but leave the details to the Servitor's imagination. One Servitor might draw the character away on the pretext of requiring guidance for some domestic chore or repair. Another might use a story about a demon trying to invade the Fortress. A third could try to seduce the character.

The Servitors do not normally possess any special powers that they can use to commit murder. Slipping poison





into someone's food, however, or smothering them in their sleep with a pillow, does not require special abilities — merely cunning and a degree of trust from the victim. When the Guardian possesses a Servitor, the spirit becomes considerably more lethal; see the description of the Servitor Spirits for examples of their strange powers. The Guardian tries to act as if some other outside force has overpowered the Servitor. Plausible "masks" include the ghost of a murdered Sidereal, a powerful demon or Sesus Lahor.

DEMON CATSPAW

Now and then, a demon manages to invade the Fortress (usually through the hole in the attic)... and now and then, the Guardian suppresses the Fortress' magical defenses to make this invasion easier. The Guardian values these trespasses: It can kill a character and blame the demon for the crime. The other characters probably do not give a trespassing demon a chance to protest its innocence; and by activating the demonbane light, the Guardian can destroy a captured demon in short order.

BROKEN PAINTINGS

If a character amuses himself by entering the painted scenes in the False Garden, the Guardian has an easy way to kill him: It directs one of its minions to destroy the painting. Even a powerful Trainer or Leonine cannot utterly destroy one of these frescoes in a single turn, though. While the Guardian's minion rips hunks of painted plaster off the wall, other characters have a chance to notice and to stop it.

A character cannot escape from a damaged painting and will eventually die. A character in a totally destroyed painting passes into Oblivion (robbing the Guardian of that character's remaining Essence, incidentally). If most of the detached plaster remains intact, however, other Solars could try to restore the painting and rescue the trapped victim.

Physically repairing the fresco calls for an Intelligence + Craft roll, at +1 difficulty for each turn that the minion attacked the painting. After five turns' worth of damage, a painting is utterly wrecked, and the trapped character is dead. Each turn's worth of damage takes half a week to repair... and the Guardian can try again to destroy the painting. Charms may speed the repair process.

Reactivating the fresco's magic, however, requires learning the Charm used to enchant the painting in the first place. Fortunately, one of the old Solars wrote down part of the instructions for learning the Charm. Between these notes and studying the remaining fresco, a Solar can teach herself the Charm — assuming that the character has enough experience points to pay for it and the requisite Craft and Essence ratings. (See *World Within a Picture Style* in the "Rewards" section below.)

STRIFE IN THE RANKS

The Guardian can also try to goad the Solars into killing each other. After all, they are the most powerful killers within the Fortress.

DEADLY DREAMS

The Guardian's most elaborate scheme relies upon its power to project dreams. One character receives a series of dreams that suggest she is the reincarnation of one of the old Solars who lived in the Fortress before... and that another character is her killer reborn. This is not implausible: Many Solars intuitively know that their kind are drawn to people whom they knew in past lives. Returning to the Fortress apparently prompts a "memory" of the character's "past life" that comes out in dreams.

First, the Guardian sends dreams to establish the target character as one of the old Solars reborn. The character receives dreams about living in the Fortress with the other Solars: dancing in the Grand Salon, capturing a demon burglar, even enjoying an erotic tryst with another Solar... who has the same mannerisms of one of the character's present-day comrades. The Guardian can add credence to the dreams by feeding the character information about the Fortress, such as the location of a Solar's hidden diary, the secret to opening Bax's tomb or the password to one of the automaton locks. (If necessary, the Guardian can craft the necessary diary, hidey-hole or other small artifact itself.)

Then, the dreams take a darker turn: quarrels with the former lover, a fight in the arena with a romantic rival and, finally, murder at the hands of the former lover, whose face shifts between past and present incarnations. The Guardian can include a weapon buried with either of the old Solars as the murder weapon in the dream, for another touch of bogus verisimilitude.

The dreams probably are not enough to set the Solars at each other's throats, but they lay a groundwork of suspicion that the Guardian can build upon through other deceptions.

SPEAKING TUBES

The network of speaking tubes can connect any two rooms within the Fortress. The Guardian can manipulate the system. For instance, if one character bad-mouths another character outside his presence, the Guardian can open the tubes to let the target character overhear. Innocent statements can sound catty, treacherous or sinister when stripped of context or if the Guardian changes the tone of the person's voice as it passes through the tube.

A few well-chosen, "accidental" eavesdroppings can convince a character that other characters plot against him. Once the Guardian arouses a character's suspicions, it can play a more vicious trick, by speaking through a tube itself while imitating another character's voice. If one

REINCARNATION DOUBLE-TWIST

Simply because the Guardian fakes evidence of reincarnation doesn't mean that it isn't true. One of the characters may well be one of the old Solars reborn. By pure dumb luck, the Guardian might even pick the right character! For extra irony, the Guardian's manipulations could awaken *real* memories of a previous life in the Fortress — memories that expose the Guardian as a murderer.

If the Storyteller and players want to use the Invisible Fortress as the focus of a long-term series, then other reborn inhabitants might be drawn to their old home. The Abyssals are fallen, death-tainted Solars; perhaps one of *them* comes north through an unconscious memory of the Fortress. He or she could be the reincarnated Solar's hated enemy... or dearest friend or even a lover. Storytellers should not ignore the dramas made possible by multiple lifetimes.

character sets out to eavesdrop on the others, the Guardian has an excellent chance of making sure the character hears exactly what he suspects.

FRAME JOBS

So the Guardian kills someone. It can pin the blame on one of the characters by using a weapon filched from a character or planted in a character's personal effects. Even if the frame isn't very convincing, it can spark discord among characters... and the Guardian can produce *very* convincing frame-ups if it has enough Essence. For instance, it can have a minion attack one character in full view of another, while making the second character hallucinate that a third character did the deed. In fact, the Guardian can try to make the victim hallucinate as well, just in case the victim survives the attack. The Guardian can also possess a Servitor and disguise it as the character it wants to frame.

The Guardian *always* knows when a character is by herself and lacks an alibi. The framed character may successfully argue against the frame once, especially if she lacks motive, but after the second or third frame, the other characters may well think they have a viper in their midst! If the framed character actually had a spat with the murdered character (and the Guardian never misses such events), the frame becomes that much more damning.

For a variation, the Guardian can try to make one of the Solars hallucinate that a comrade is actually an invading demon or some other enemy. If the characters already suspect each other, they are not likely to believe a plea that "I thought he was a demon."





TOMB TRAPS

The traps in the tombs are all fairly easy to bypass or disarm if you know what they are. The Guardian can insert such information into a sequence of reincarnation dreams. Then, when the characters come to trust the dreams, it plants false information, and maybe, the next trap claims a character's life. The Guardian must weigh the odds of a character dying against the loss of credence in the character's dreams, though.

Remember that the Guardian does *not* know how to bypass the traps in the Final Retreat!

COVERING TRACKS

The Guardian gives no hint of its evil when it speaks to the Solars. It presents itself as a solicitous servant, a devoted old gentleman's gentleman. Nothing could please it more than for Solars to occupy the Manse again, especially if those Solars include one of its creators reborn. The Guardian fusses over the characters, reminding them to dress warmly before they leave the Fortress, not to trust any Dragon-Blood or those horrid demons and, for Sun's sake, to be careful as they explore the Final Retreat!

The Guardian apologizes for its many limitations. After all, it can do no more than watch and speak from the mirrors. It can give orders to the Spirit Servitors and Waiters, but the Servitors are willful and the Waiters simply mindless. It tries to watch the entire Fortress, but one cannot be everywhere at once, can one?

The "faithful old retainer" particularly regrets the large gaps in its memory that render it unable to answer many important questions, such as how to find the entrance to the Final Retreat or how previous visitors to the Fortress met their end. Indeed, now and then, the Guardian forgets something that happened just a few days before. Most galling of all, the Guardian does not know who damaged its mind or how.

Ominously, the sinister force that haunts the Fortress can shut out or evade the Guardian. It warns the characters about intruding demons (too late to stop an attack) but never sees how they get in. When a Spirit Servitor warps into a monstrous assassin, the Guardian never sees a thing. The Guardian confesses to a horrible feeling that there is *someone* else in the Manse... some invisible force that can cloud its perception. The old spirit-retainer tries to keep a brave face, but its fear and impotent anger often show through.

It takes more than a good act to cover up multiple murder attempts, though... so the Guardian sets up fall guys. It has plenty of candidates.

- As mentioned already, one of the Solars themselves make the most plausible secret enemy. After all, they are powerful, and the Guardian says that it must obey Solars. Perhaps one of them is more powerful than he lets on, eh? Powerful enough to tamper with the Guardian's memory, perhaps.

- The Guardian can project momentary hallucinations of Sesus Lahor to make characters think that he lurks nearby, using sinister spells to control the spirit and automaton servants or even invading the Fortress itself. For instance, a character looking out a window might catch a glimpse of Lahor ducking into a distant cave where demons lair. This strategy only works if the Guardian has seen Lahor, though.

- Nearly everyone in the Age of the Exalted knows stories about Manses being haunted by the ghosts of people buried within them. The old Solars themselves thus become potential suspects. Who would be better able to subvert the servants and circumvent the Guardian?

- For its most sophisticated frame, though, the Guardian can create a completely fictitious enemy. Its preferred choice is a Sidereal: It knows that the old Solars suspected rogue Sidereals of prompting the Dragon-Blooded revolt, and the Sidereal "Anathema" remain famous for their magical prowess.

The Guardian begins by slipping a reference to someone called Sadan Suud into one of the past-life dreams (see "Deadly Dreams," above). When the characters ask the Guardian if it knows anything about this Sadan Suud, the Guardian "remembers" the old Solars mentioning a Sidereal of that name who followed them into the North, whom they slew to prevent from leading the Dragon-Blooded to the Fortress. If the Solars don't know the full story of the Dragon-Blooded revolt, the Guardian is pleased to tell them. The characters may well gain some real information suppressed for more than 1,000 years.

If the characters believe the Sidereal story, the Guardian can fake up a grave in a few days. It can shape a small, hidden crypt somewhere in the cellar that the characters haven't searched before, then pile in bones from the broken tomb. A starmetal brooch (a relic from a previous unlucky visitor to the Fortress) completes the false tomb. Only a close and deliberate examination by someone skilled at Medicine reveals that the bones come from more than one person!

THE KILLER VALET

The Guardian has another extended fraud to perpetrate using the Spirit Servitors. It can incorporate this fraud into any of the scenarios described above. The Guardian sets up the Valet, the highest-ranking Spirit Servitor, as the special proxy of the characters' enemy or, perhaps, even the primary villain.

Whenever possible, the Guardian arranges for the Valet to be seen near the scene of an attack or other strange event. If the characters ever question the Spirit Servitors, the Valet gives palpably evasive answers. Perhaps a past life dream presents the Valet as a surly, scheming man when he was alive.

When the Guardian needs a scapegoat to sacrifice, it possesses the Valet and openly attacks one of the characters. The fiendish Valet commands the Waiters or a Leonine, in addition to its own attacks. The glow-orbs flare and dim wildly as the Servitor fights, and small objects hurl themselves at the characters. If the Guardian has set up one of the Dragon-Bloods or the fictitious Sidereal as the prime villain controlling the Valet and the

other servants, the Valet's porcelain mask can shatter in the combat to reveal the leering face of the framed Exalt.

Ultimately, the Solars can destroy the Valet. The Guardian doesn't have to throw the fight; the characters are vastly more powerful than the Servitor, even with the Guardian's power secretly backing it up. The attacks upon the characters cease... for a time. The Guardian continues its more subtle manipulations.



WHAT ABOUT MAHINA?

If V'neef Mahina reached the Fortress before the characters, the Solars find her mercenaries dead and Mahina herself insane. How did it happen?

When Mahina entered the Fortress, the Guardian waited for her mercenaries to split up and then sent Leonines and Servitors to kill them one by one. Before long, the Guardian accumulated enough Essence for a direct attack upon the Dynast herself, using both hallucinations and minions.

Mahina realized that all her efforts since she noticed an old cloak in a marketplace led her into a trap — that the Fortress reeled her in like a fish on a line. The shock gave the Guardian its opening to defeat her in dream combat (see below) and break her mind. This gave the Guardian a reason to keep her alive a little longer — as an Essence battery.

IF MAHINA ARRIVES LATER

If Mahina arrives after the characters, she and her troops pitch their camp in a hidden cleft about a mile away and watch the Fortress. She waits for three days. If the characters leave the Fortress in that time, her forces hurry to the Fortress in hopes of stealing something valuable. If the Solars do not leave the Fortress, Mahina tries to break into the Fortress on the third night after her arrival.

The Guardian lets her in... and if the Solars do not intervene, the Guardian kills her escort and drives her mad. For instance, the Solars might return from a foray into the Final Retreat or against the demons to find the Fortress strewn with corpses and Mahina insane. The Guardian disavows any knowledge of what happened or blames it on demons.

The characters may find Mahina before she invades the Fortress, or they might prevent the Guardian's attack. In that case, the characters must decide for themselves how to play the encounter. If they simply kill her, mad or sane, the Guardian does not stop them... and it takes every mote of her Essence. If they let her live, the Guardian tries to kill her as soon as possible. Unless the Solars exert themselves to befriend her, however, Mahina still tries to steal some orichalcum and slip away with her mercenaries.

MAHINA MAD

The insane Mahina addresses the Solars by the names of her Scarlet Dynasty acquaintances and relatives and acts as if she were in the Realm's fashionable salons. She wanders the Fortress, chatting with people who aren't there about the coming-of-age party Cynis Oran threw for his daughter, what a fool the Satrap of Iselmere made of herself last Calibration and her interest in a charity hospital that could bring much goodwill to House V'neef. At least once, the Solars have to stop her from walking into a deadly blizzard.

The Guardian can use Mahina as another one of its puppets, directing her like one of the Spirit-Servitors. Mahina does not know what she says and does under the Guardian's prompting. If the Dynast becomes more useful as a scapegoat than as an agent, the Guardian may feed her a "You fools, I shall destroy you all" rant and make her attack the Solars.

MAHINA SANE

If the Solars find a way to restore Mahina's sanity (through a Charm or perhaps extended use of Presence, Medicine and other Abilities), the Guardian loses its influence over her. She remembers a voice whispering in her head, and she feels a vicious fear and hatred of mirrors.

The characters' kindness also deeply touches the Dynast. Mahina remains a Realm patriot and a loyal daughter of her house — but she puts aside stories of devilish Anathema and rationally assesses the characters by their deeds. The Solars have a chance to win a friend within the Scarlet Dynasty, albeit one not highly placed.



THE MASTER STRATEGY

Quite possibly, the characters' actions may forestall any or all of these stratagems and hoaxes. In that case, the Storyteller must wing it. However, the Guardian has several secret allies: the players themselves! The players, and therefore their characters, will undoubtedly evolve their own theories about what's going on in the Fortress. The Guardian hears the Solars' guesses. It fakes up dreams, hallucinations, artifacts and other evidence to support every theory, even the contradictory ones.

The Guardian lets the characters forestall one or two attacks based on a particular theory. For instance, suppose the characters speculate that their enemy is a ghost. They follow all the standard protective rites (circles of salt around their beds, scattering beans, a prayer addressed to the Unconquered Sun or whatever other exorcism their home culture or their own imagination suggests). The Guardian obligingly gives one character a day or two free of disturbing manifestations. Perhaps it even rewards the exorcism with a moaning wail (from every speaking tube in the Fortress) and some objects thrown about poltergeist-fashion. Then, once the characters become confident that they can deal with the "ghosts," the Guardian hits them with something different, such as a murderous automaton.

Amidst every plot, the Guardian sprinkles a few random acts of strangeness. One character suffers a nightmare about being buried alive. The glow-orbs light up whenever someone brings the violet metal sword from the Trophy Room near to them. Ozandus Pal's desk answers questions by banging the left drawer for yes and the right drawer for no. Such acts provoke wild storms of speculation for the Guardian to exploit and keep the characters distracted — paying attention to something, *anything*, besides the Guardian itself.

FIGHTING THE GUARDIAN

Assuming the characters do not flee the Fortress and the Guardian does not kill them all, the characters must realize that the Guardian is the murderer among them. So how do they kill the fiend behind the mirrors? The Guardian is more elusive than an unmanifest spirit — everywhere and nowhere.

Breaking mirrors just gives the Guardian another chance to fake out the Solars. After the characters break every large mirror in the Fortress, the Guardian hides out for a while. The Spirit Servitors kneel before the characters and thank them for freeing them from the fiend's control. The Guardian still watches the characters from the hundreds of tiny mirrors scattered throughout the Fortress and can make more if it needs to: A single gilded leaf can become a hidden mirror. In time, it resumes its campaign of murder and discord.

Destroying the automata and Servitors seriously reduces the Guardian's options — though it's rather cold of the characters, in the case of the Servitors. If the Guardian can accumulate enough Essence, however, it can generate new automata from statuary or furniture as a nasty surprise for the Solars.

Even if the characters somehow destroy every minion and remove every mirror, they merely hamper the Guardian. To exorcise the Guardian, the Solars must either rebuild the Manse, destroy it or find some way to fight the Guardian directly.

Rebuilding the Fortress requires an architect (or one of the characters spending a few years studying Bax's book), a labor force (don't count on help from the demons) and plenty of time. This option is only valid for long-term series.

Destroying the Manse is not much easier, but it is quicker. The characters must hinder the Guardian enough that it cannot stop them from hacking apart the Grand Salon. Prying out or smashing glow-orbs throughout the Fortress is another option: unhindered by the demonbane light, a horde of demons would gladly raze the Fortress that they built so long ago. Then they turn on the Solars who no longer have the Fortress to protect them.

Fighting the Guardian itself requires that the characters make a conceptual leap or two. It also requires incredible courage and strength, to survive facing the Guardian at the very heart of its power.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

The problem is simply stated: To fight the Guardian, the characters must enter its world, the realm of reflections. No one has ever done this, since nowhere else in the world are reflections more than light bouncing off glass or metal. The still lifes in the False Garden may prompt characters to make the attempt, though. In the still lifes, a highly realistic image becomes a real place... and what image is more realistic than a mirror's?

Figuring out how to step into a reflection requires success at an Essence + Occult roll, difficulty 3. When one character figures out the trick, she can guide other characters through the mirror. The passage costs each character 5 motes of Essence and *only* works in the Fortress.

The characters find a duplicate Manse on the other side of the mirror, identical except that everything is flipped right-to-left. The characters don't get much time to explore, though, because the Guardian attacks them almost at once.

On its home ground, the Guardian lacks its minions. On the other hand, its powers are vastly magnified. None of them cost Essence, either. The Guardian can perform the following feats:

- *Essence Tithing*: The Guardian still takes 1 mote of every 5 that the characters expend. It doesn't need this to fight them, but it's worth keeping track of this in case the characters cut and run back to the real world.
- *See and Hear Everything*: The Guardian remains non-local. The characters cannot hide from the Guardian when they are, in a very real sense, inside it.
- *Be Anywhere*: By the same token, the Guardian can manifest anywhere it wants, appearing and disappearing at will or even multiplying itself 100 times over. By multiplying itself, it can attack each character once per turn.

• *Animate the Fortress*: The Guardian can manipulate the substance of the mirror-Fortress on a scale of cubic yards, not cubic feet. It can make great spikes erupt from the walls to impale characters or open pits at their feet to suck them into stony tombs or animate the vinework to fill a chamber with razor-edged, golden whips.

Whatever “special effect” the Guardian uses, the attack to characters from the warping Fortress remains the same. (See the Guardian’s Traits below for the details of this and other attacks.)

• *Dream Projection*: The Guardian can project hallucinations into the characters’ minds — but in this otherworld, the hallucinations can become real. Major illusions adequately represent most attacks, such as blasts of fire or maggots erupting from the characters’ flesh. These illusions can act like the spirit Charm Dreambane (see the Exalted Storyteller’s Companion, p. 55), inflicting normal sorts of damage, or can act to shock and demoralize characters, causing loss of Willpower. Total-immersion illusions result in changing the scene of the entire conflict: Instead of the Fortress, the characters find themselves fighting the Guardian in the mountain pass or drowning at the bottom of the sea or anywhere else the Storyteller thinks would be cool.

• *Telekinesis*: The Guardian’s mind-over-matter power increases to Strength 5. This is enough to let it tear weapons from characters’ hands or hurl characters through the air — or to at least try.

WAR OF DREAMS

The characters soon discover that physical force, and even Essence-bolts and other such magical attacks, have no effect on the Guardian. They may be in its world, but it still isn’t solid, and attacks meant to damage solid creatures cause the Guardian no real harm. The same is not true for the Solars: They remain quite solid and vulnerable to physical attacks. The Guardian possesses such attacks, too. It molds the stuff of the mirror-Fortress with the dazzling speed of nightmare to stab and slash and crush, and it telekinetically hurls the characters as well as the furniture. What’s more, the Guardian’s touch can rend away the character’s motes of Essence, and the terrifying and grisly hallucinations that it projects sap their will to fight. The characters can only lose, unless they figure out how to fight a creature composed of naught but will and Essence.

Magic that affects a target’s Essence, Willpower, Virtues and Social or Mental Attributes can affect the Guardian. Charms such as Ghost-Eating Technique fit the bill, as may some magic weapons, such as the Sword of Forgetfulness from the Final Retreat.

Exalted who lack such magic can still fight the Guardian if they realize that in the place behind the mirrors, nothing really exists except mind, will and Essence. They can fight the Guardian with its own weapons of will and nightmare.





DREAM COMBAT

Dream Combat is an optional new combat system designed to handle psychic conflict. Physical Attributes and health levels don't really matter when mind fights mind: Will, passion and force of personality matter more. Therefore, dream combat uses a series of substitutions:

- Valor replaces Strength.
- Charisma replaces Dexterity.
- Conviction can replace Stamina (depending on the nature of the attack).
- Willpower replaces health levels.
- Base Initiative consists of Wits + Charisma.
- Attack roll consists of Charisma + Ability. The characters must *imagine* their attacks with sufficient skill and force to make their opponent believe them. Until characters gain experience at dream combat, however, they suffer a -2 dice penalty on attack rolls. **Exception:** If the character foregoes use of any Ability and makes the attack based on pure force of personality, the attack dice pool consists of the character's unmodified Charisma.
- Damage roll consists of the attacker's Valor + the number of successes in the attack roll, - the target's soak. Some specialized Charms and magic items may supply dream-weapons, shields or armor, but in this situation, the characters don't have such things.
- Soak consists of whatever Virtue would best help the character oppose the emotional resonance of the fight and the attacker. For instance, in a dream-battle against an enemy driven by rage and hatred for the character, Compassion and forgiveness might work best to soak the attack. Conversely, a dream-attack designed to subvert a character through her passions and appetites would be soaked by Temperance. Players will naturally want to use their character's highest Virtue to soak any dream-attack, and the Storyteller should let them if they can provide a good, in-character justification.
- Damage applies to the target's Willpower. Characters suffer damage penalties as they fight based on the Willpower they have left:

1 Willpower	-4
2 Willpower	-2
3 Willpower	-2
4 Willpower	-1
5 Willpower	-1
6+ Willpower	OK

However, a dream-fighter always starts out at OK, even if his permanent Willpower is less than 6. (This is not likely with Exalted characters, but it might happen.) Also, a character can spend Willpower *points* without incurring any penalty — but as the character's Willpower drops, so does the number of Willpower points available to spend.

- A character reduced to 0 Willpower is incapacitated in some way. Under most circumstances, the character simply falls unconscious. More dramatic possibilities include zombie-like obedience or a period of insanity, at the Storyteller's discretion. (This is how the Guardian enslaves Liwet Ohazia and drives Mahina mad.) Certainly, the loser cannot resist any mental influence from the victor.

Beyond these bald mechanics, we encourage players and Storytellers to go hog-wild in describing dream combat. Although damage depends entirely on the characters' Valor, they can *imagine* any attack form they want: their favorite sword, lightning bolts from the sky, growing 100 feet tall and stomping on the enemy, gibbering mouths erupting from their enemy's flesh to bite him, *anything*. However, if the character cannot relate their imagined attack to some Ability, their attack dice pool is limited to raw Charisma.

THE GUARDIAN ITSELF

Description: In the mirror-zone, the Guardian looks like a golden mask, but it adds a body — or at least a hooded, sleeved and tattered black cloak threaded with silver and gold that moves as if a body occupied it. The Guardian manifests as many figures as it wants. It does this so it can attack every character — or just to frighten and overawe its enemies. Attacks pass through the cloak without causing any harm. Striking the mask makes a figure evaporate with a wail... and then two more figures appear in its place.

The Guardian can also make itself look like a giant snake, a mammoth or anything else it can imagine, though it always retains the golden mask. It may change form as a way to intimidate the characters or to fit an altered setting that it dreams up, such as appearing as a pack of gold-masked yeti when it changes the environment to the icy Stone Maw.

Name: The Guardian Spirit of the Invisible Fortress

Nature: Architect

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 5 (Covert Surveillance), Brawl 3, Craft (Forgery, Home Repair, Manses, Sculpture) 4, Dodge 3, Larceny 2, Linguistics 2 (Native: Old Realm; High Realm, Skytongue), Lore 4 (First Age), Medicine 2, Melee 3, Occult 3, Socialize 5 (Smooth Deceit), Thrown 3

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Animate Manse: Speed 10 Accuracy 6 Damage 7L Defense 6

Rend Away Essence: Speed 10 Accuracy 6 Damage 8D* motes Defense N/A

Will-Crushing Hallucination: Speed 10 Accuracy 6 Damage 3D* Willpower Defense N/A

TK/Animation Hold: Speed 10 Accuracy 6 Damage 0 Defense N/A

TK/Animation Slam: Speed 10 Accuracy 6 Damage 5B Defense N/A

Dodge Pool: 8/4 Soak: N/A

Willpower: 10 Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Incap

Essence: 5 Essence Pool: 9 + what it can steal, up to 98.

Other Notes: The Physical Attributes of the Guardian don't really exist. They are simulations, based on substitutions from other Traits as described under "Dream Combat." It uses Dexterity for Initiative but Valor for actual attack dice pools.

The Guardian suffers from a deficient Essence pool — which is why it steals Essence. Unlike a normal spirit, it cannot accumulate more than 9 motes of Essence naturally: 5 for its basic Essence rating and 4 through its connection to the Invisible Fortress. The Guardian cannot draw more than 4 motes per hour from the Fortress (as if the Guardian were attuned to a one-dot Manse). Ironically, the Guardian itself is largely responsible for the disordered state of the Fortress's energies, which have cut it off from the bulk of the Manse's power: For a Manse to seek the death of its owners profoundly violates the divine order. It can, however, retain indefinitely what it steals by Essence Tithing.

* Dream damage, see above.



THE GUARDIAN DEFEATED

The Guardian's non-locality works against it once the characters figure out how to fight it. An attack upon any one Guardian-image is an attack upon them all. No matter how many times it multiplies itself, all the figures suffer the penalties of lost Willpower or other Traits.

If the characters can reduce the Guardian to 0 Willpower, all the images vanish. Reducing its Valor, Charisma or Essence to 0 has much the same effect, since the Guardian then cannot fight back. The characters have not yet fully defeated the Guardian, but they can —

at long last — discover the true form hidden behind all the lies and illusions.

In the Grand Salon of the mirror-Fortress sits a glass dome on a glass pillar. The glass dome holds a glittering mass of wrinkled golden froth, crackling with a web of sparking Essence: a human brain a yard across, modeled in spun orichalcum.

"Spare me," the Guardian says. "I am all that remains of the elder world. I alone remember when the gods ruled." Stripped of all power, the Guardian can only beg... and lie.

The glass dome easily breaks. So does the Guardian: One sweep of a weapon or a rending by hand, and it is so much golden candyfloss.



At that point, the mirror-Fortress starts to fall apart. It existed only as a space for the Guardian. The mirror-Fortress shakes and wavers like a mirage. Mirrors explode, starting in the Grand Salon and working outward. The characters must run for a mirror if they want to escape the destruction. The bold may grab one handful of the Guardian before they run.

This scene doesn't really need dice rolls, though the Storyteller may fake a few just to add tension, describing the first few mirrors sought by the characters exploding before they can pass through. Naturally, the characters leap back into the real world in the nick of time!

REWARDS

The Solars who survive the perils of the Final Retreat and the murderous Guardian win treasures commensurate to the danger. Of course, the greatest treasure is the Fortress itself; it's a powerful Manse, sturdily built in a defensible location, and it probably retains the demonbane light and the Essence-Serpents. The Final Retreat and the tombs provide a hoard of magic items that range from the awesome to the amusing; some of the magical traps in the Retreat (such as the jade magnet) might be detachable as well. The Final Retreat hoard also includes a sizeable fortune in mundane treasure such as gold and jewels (a single packful could give a character Resources ••••). A really determined scavenger can pull another fortune in valuable adamant blades from the traps in the Retreat. Bax's book, the fragmentary grimoires and the notes left by the old Solars provide a further treasure of knowledge and new Charms.

Now, the characters simply have to hold onto it all!

MAGICAL TREASURES

The hoard of magical treasures in the Final Retreat includes many potent items. It definitely includes the Singing Staff and the Hearthstone. We encourage Storytellers to invent the rest themselves — artifacts well suited to the abilities and interests of the Solar characters. We present the other items below as samples and starting points: Storytellers can add surprising minor powers, limitations and bits of legend to turn each artifact from loot into a hook for further stories.

We recommend that the hoard include one magic weapon and one miscellaneous or defensive item well suited for each character's abilities and personality. The Storyteller can also include a variety of minor artifacts.

SINGING STAFF (ARTIFACT ••••)

The Singing Staff found with Pal's body is the only mandatory treasure from the Final Retreat. See the *Exalted Storyteller's Companion* for a full description of the staff. In brief, bowing or stroking the staff produces a sweet, singing tone like a musical saw. This magical music shapes rock and stone to the musician's will, although controlling a Singing Staff demands considerable musical skill. The old Solars excavated the Final Retreat with the help of the Singing Staff.

HEARTHSTONE OF THE INVISIBLE FORTRESS

(MANSE •••••)

The Fortress' Hearthstone is transparent and smoothly polished, with spiraling internal striations that lead the eye inward to infinity. Like the Manse that creates it, this Hearthstone has powers of secrecy and concealment: It masks all Essence use by the Exalted who carries it.

System: If the Hearthstone's bearer so desires, the Hearthstone suppresses her anima banner, as if she had expended half as many motes as she really did. Attempts to detect the character's use of Essence use also suffer a +2 difficulty penalty.

EVERYMAN ARMOR (ARTIFACT •••)

This very plain suit of steel plate armor magically fits any creature of human size and shape. Aside from being light, comfortable and nigh-indestructible, it enables its wearer to change her appearance: She can assume any humanoid appearance, even changing the appearance of the armor. The wearer still looks like a person wearing armor, though, which somewhat limits its utility as a disguise. The magical disguise lasts as long as the person wears the armor and remains conscious.

System: Changing appearance using the Everyman Armor costs 5 motes of Essence. Considered simply as armor, the magic plate equals lamellar armor.

LIVING GLAIVE (ARTIFACT •••)

A glaive is a sort of polearm, a cleaver-like blade on a long handle. This glaive of polished steel bears a fine tracery of orichalcum on the blade and pole. Aside from its value and fine construction, the Living Glaive guides its wielder's hands in combat to block or evade an enemy's attacks.

System: The Living Glaive grants its wielder an extra action in each turn of combat, without the need for splitting dice pools. This extra action can be used only to dodge or parry, and this extra action cannot itself be split. In all other ways, the weapon acts like a normal polearm.

PANACEA PIPE (ARTIFACT ••••)

This hookah is made of green glass delicately engraved and silver-gilt with drawings of medicinal herbs, with fittings and flexible pipes of silver and gold. Although it looks delicate, the pipe is as strong as bronze. If one loads the Panacea Pipe with the herbs depicted on the glass, the smoke infallibly cures any and all diseases and poisons — even the Great Contagion.

System: The Panacea Pipe requires 5 motes of Essence to activate, in addition to the five requisite herbs (none of which are especially rare). Two people can use the hookah at a time. Each activation suffices to cure two people; then, the pipe must be fed more Essence and herbs.

RIDING BOOTS (ARTIFACT •••)

These thighboots of fine gryphon-leather come equipped with orichalcum spurs and heels. If the wearer clicks his heels and mimes mounting a horse, an actual horse of Essence magically appears beneath him. This is a wonder horse, half again as fast as a mundane beast, tireless, obedient and aware of everything its master wants it to do. It can fight like a real warhorse, too, and its hide is magically resistant to damage. When its master dismounts, the horse vanishes.

System: Summoning the wonder horse costs 5 motes of Essence. Use the game statistics for a normal horse, but increase the running speed and give it 5 bashing and 3 lethal soak. The wonder horse itself has 4 dots in Ride, which enables it to perform all sorts of equestrian tricks even if the rider doesn't know such things. All Ride-based Charms receive +1 free success when performed with this magical horse.

SWORD OF FORGETFULNESS (ARTIFACT •••••)

Poets in the Realm use "the Sword of Forgetfulness" as a trope for the cruelty and kindness of both memory and its loss. Characters may be surprised to discover that a Sword of Forgetfulness actually exists. No one can describe the sword in detail because people forget what it looks like as soon as they look away (which can make it a hard item to retain). The sword does not physically harm its target; instead, it strips away consciousness and memory, ultimately leaving its victim a complete amnesiac.

System: The Sword of Forgetfulness can be wielded like a normal straight sword. Each turn on which its wielder feeds it 1 mote of Essence, however, a successful attack inflicts Strength + 3 dice of "phantom aggravated damage": Keep track of the health levels a target *would* have lost from the sword, and impose the appropriate wound penalties, but in physical terms, the sword doesn't leave so much as a bruise. The target also loses one Ability *in toto* for each health level of damage inflicted (selected at random) and memory of five years of his life. A person "killed" by the Sword of Forgetfulness falls unconscious.

Lost Abilities and health levels return as if they were bashing damage. Lost memories never return, barring use of other magic. A person "killed" by the sword permanently loses all memory of her previous life.

THE UNSURPASSED SANXIAN (ARTIFACT •••••)

This instrument of wood and demon-hide looks well made, but only its golden strings hint at its magic. This three-stringed lyre has the most beautiful tone of any instrument in the history of the world, and it magically improves the skill of its player. Any clod can produce a competent performance when playing the Unsurpassed Sanxian. A master instrumentalist could make Deathlords weep, and an Exalted player could make the stars descend to hear his music.

System: The Unsurpassed Sanxian adds two successes to any dice roll involving musical Performance. Thus, even a character who lacks Performance can play the harp at a professional level. In the hands of a skilled performer, even legendary feats become feasible. The extra successes also add to Performance-based Charms.

OTHER MAGICAL TREASURES

These magic items are located in other areas of the Invisible Fortress:

Telescoping Spike: Maze Room (second floor)
 Demon Runestone: Bax's Workroom (second floor)
 Audient Quill: Pal's Bedchamber (second floor)
 Manacles of Night: Prison Cell (ground floor)
 Living Bellows: Smithy (ground floor)
 Orichalcum Ring: Tombs (cellar)
 Black Jade Dagger: Tombs (cellar)
 Greenwood Blade: Jade Magnet Chamber (Final Retreat)

NEW CHARMS

Not all treasures are physical. The Fortress offers Solars a chance to learn new Charms. We leave detailing the sorcery texts found in the Fortress as an exercise for the Storyteller and a source of new plot hooks. Solars can also learn two specific Charms based on the Craft ability. Keep in mind that these are simply the two Charms with *instructions* found in the Fortress: The Solars find hints of many more Charms that the old Solars used, from food-conjuration to transforming mortals into spirits.

ROCK-SPINNING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Craft: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Shattering Grasp

This Charm enables a Solar to spin raw stone into flexible thread or yarn. Rock thread is fireproof but no stronger than linen and rather scratchy to wear. It is entirely adequate for tapestries, tablecloths, rugs and other utilitarian purposes, though, and in large quantities, it makes excellent insulation. The thread or yarn remains the same color as the original rock, making most spun rock rather drab — but a Solar with this Charm can spin jade or diamond as easily as slate or sandstone. A handkerchief of spun jewels would make an understated yet truly royal gift.

The basic Charm requires no more than a simple drop-spindle or spinning wheel and a quantity of rock. The listed Essence cost and duration are for spinning a cubic foot of rock into a cubic yard of fluffy fiber. The process takes a full hour. A more elaborate apparatus (such as the



broken machine in the Fortress) reduces the Essence cost to 1 mote, and the machine runs by itself once set running. Indeed, the apparatus reduces rock-spinning to magic that even unExalted mortals can perform.

WORLD WITHIN A PICTURE STYLE

Cost: 20 motes

Duration: One day or more

Type: Simple

Minimum Craft: 5

Minimum Offult: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Flawless Handiwork Method

A Solar who truly masters some form of representational art — most obviously painting, but other possibilities include tapestry-weaving, carving and metal-casting — can fashion miniature worlds within a lifelike representation. A being that knows how to expend Essence can step into the image and experience it as if it were real. Although the examples within the Invisible Fortress are “life sized,” a World Within a Picture’s physical matrix could be much smaller; for instance, a metal brooch chased and enameled with an uncannily realistic miniature scene.

The World Within a Picture can include plants, animals or even people, but none of the people are actually real. They react only in simple, stereotyped ways, like automata. (A Solar can trap real people or spirits within a still life to become permanent characters, but this involves a spell of Celestial Circle Sorcery.) A World Within a Picture’s simulated world cannot exceed one acre in area, although it may look much larger: A person who tries to travel beyond the boundaries of the still life either goes in a circle or steps out of the still life.

Creating a World Within a Picture takes weeks or months, depending on the artist’s medium and the level of detail the artist desires. Once created, a World Within a Picture lasts until someone or something destroys it. Other Charms and sorceries can piggyback on a World Within a Picture if the artist wants to include magical effects within the simulated world, such a still life in which people can fly, or one that transforms visitors into other forms.

Entering a World Within a Picture costs 1 mote of Essence. Departing is free. Anyone caught within a completely destroyed Still Life dies. A Still Life that is merely damaged can be repaired, and prisoners retrieved, but only by someone who knows the World Within a Picture Style Charm.

ADAMANT BLADES

The various traps within the Fortress and the Retreat contain several thousand blades of adamant, ranging from one to three feet long. Each blade has a value of Resources ••• — these blades cut just about *anything*, and that makes them valuable tools. They are less immediately useful as weapons than a buyer might think, though, because they are so brittle.

Selling too many of these blades at once causes the price to drop. If they ration out the blades to keep the prices high, characters can gain Resources •••• from this treasure alone — if they can hold onto the entire supply. A few pack-loads of the blades confers no more than Resources •••.

THE FORTRESS TAMED?

When the Solars destroy the orichalcum brain, all the attacks and dreams and other strange manifestations cease. The remaining Spirit Servitors regain as much free will as they ever had. They remain bound to the Manse, though. They also become old, like Liwet Ohazia, regaining the forms they had when the Solars changed them from human to spirit, before the Guardian transformed them to make them better lures. The currents of Essence within the Fortress calm to a steady pulse of vortices spiraling in and out from the Grand Salon. The characters now possess a five-dot Manse, apparently now free of evil.

But is it? The characters have seen how the Guardian distracted them with scapegoats and frauds. Was the orichalcum brain just another fake to lull them while the true Guardian regains its power?

No. Even the Guardian’s power and cunning had limits, and the characters surpassed them. No malign intelligence possesses their new Manse...

...Unless they, like the builders of the Invisible Fortress, fall into jealousy, backbiting and scheming against one another. In that case, a new Guardian might grow from their dark passions and the swirling, in-turning Essence of the Manse.

The Invisible Fortress also retains the problem of its remote location. The old Solars proved the folly of living on conjured food, and even the markets of Wangler’s Knob are distressingly far. The characters might try importing soil for a more successful greenhouse in the attic, or Bax’s book might suggest a more incredible possibility, of redirecting some of the Manse’s power to render the valley warmer and more fertile. This would reduce the Manse from five dots to three, but the Solars could recruit farmers for their own mountain village.

All this, however, lies in the future — and assumes that the characters want to keep the Invisible Fortress instead of abandoning or destroying it. Whether they stay or leave, they still face danger. There’s still the matter of the Wyld Hunt and a few thousand demons....

AFTERMATH

THE DUST SETTLES

Your characters have traveled hundreds of miles, fought monsters, demons, sadistic spirits and nature itself. They have triumphed, albeit at great cost. They are free to do with the Invisible Fortress what they will — loot it,

make it a haven for themselves, turn it into a meeting places for Solars the world over, anything.

The bulk of this section assumes that the characters decide to stay in the Fortress, at least through the worst parts of winter (roughly the next two to three months) exploring its halls and learning as much as possible about its past occupants and the First Age. Of course, they could choose to stay longer. Indeed, the Fortress might become an important part of your overall series. But that is up to the characters, some of whom will, no doubt, want take whatever they can carry and get the hell out, never speaking of the place again.

Should the characters remain, they will quickly have to learn how to operate the Fortress' defenses as enemies loom on multiple fronts. If the characters take up residence in the Manse, more dangers lie ahead, including those that killed the structure's first inhabitants.

The Invisible Fortress is a great prize, but great prizes always come at a high cost. Both to win them and to keep them.

LOOTING

The simplest strategy the characters can adopt is to take what they can carry and run. Even if they have yet to discover the hidden cache of magical items, the various First Age trinkets that lie about the Fortress will bring a king's ransom in Nexus or the Imperial City. The spun stone and book fragments will be especially prized, as will any bits of orichalcum they can lay their hands on. Minor magical items, such as the Audient Quill in Ozandus Pal's room, could bring ten times their weight in gems while the more powerful First Age relics would make even the eldest of the Sidereal drool... or run in terror.

Of course, the amount they can loot is limited. Characters cannot, for example, expect to carry out the larger pieces of furniture, any of the exquisite inlaid stonework found throughout the Fortress or the beautiful map of the First Age world in the parlor. Indeed, they could make four or five trips back to the Fortress before stripping it completely bare.

While looting is the easiest strategy, it is by no means safe. The characters, now loaded down with treasure, must go back the way they came. Passing through the Demonlands again will be measurably more difficult as the Founders will offer no protection from ice-eater attacks. Indeed, there is a strong chance the Founders themselves will fall upon the characters, to punish them for not destroying the runestone or simply for sport.

Once past the barren plain, the characters must retrace their steps through the harrowing mountains, hills and forests back to Wangler's Knob. This path was not easy the first time they walked it, and unless they winter at the Fortress, it is even worse. Blizzards and ice storms are common, food is almost nonexistent, and the animals (especially the great cats) will

THE SALE OF HISTORY

While there is always a market for First Age items, that market is unregulated and, thus, populated by shady middlemen looking for a quick profit and more than ready to reveal their source if the buyer will fork over a few more coins. The Guild will dip its hand in occasionally, and bidding wars have been known to break out, but generally, relics move slowly up the ladder from small buyer to medium to large before landing in the hands of the Immaculate Order or one of the Great Families.

Prices will be highest in the Imperial City and decrease the further away one travels. Should a stray Dragon-Blood remain in Wangler's Knob when the characters return, she might be interested — but only at a discount. Characters looking to sell a large number of items (more than three) in any one place will begin to attract local attention. When relics do come to market, it is almost always one at a time. To have a group of people offering dozens (or more) generally means that a cache of some kind has been uncovered. Such news will create an uproar and draw significant attention to the Circle, as people try to pry into their affairs and jump their claim.

It is almost impossible for the characters to sell all their loot at once, simply because literally nobody has the money to afford it. The only person who might once have had was the Empress, and she'd simply have taken it. Not even of the greatest of the Dynastic houses can afford the outlay to buy such a haul, even if offered a steep discount.

Fencing items taken from the Fortress can be an adventure in and of itself, involving the characters in the Realm's sometimes brutal free market and, perhaps, even leading them to a confrontation with the Guild, who will want a piece of any larger transactions.

The amount the characters can make from these sales should vary but, on average, a Circle of up to six characters should easily be able to increase their Resource rating up to ••••• depending on where they sell and to whom. Such a sudden increase in wealth may change the character's lives drastically. Characters seeking to raise an army or fund a revolution will certainly be able to do so.





attack with wild abandon, driven by starvation. Parts of the Stone Maw may even be totally blocked by avalanches or massive rock slides. Characters who choose simply to loot the Fortress and run may find themselves returning shortly, trapped by the harsh weather.

STAYING

It may be smarter for the characters to stay in the Fortress and, at the very least, let the worse of the winter storms pass them by. While the Fortress does offer a great deal of protection from the weather, holing up in it for a few months will subject the characters to a number of short-term threats including: starvation, Lahor and, of course, the demons.

STARVATION

The demons long ago slaughtered all the animals that made the 50 miles around the Fortress their home, and very few wander into the area. They can smell the evil radiating from it. Obviously, if the characters expect to stay for the winter (or longer), they will have to have food, far more than they have on their backs. Regular foraging is possible, though not particularly rewarding (Perception + Survival at +1 difficulty, each success equals one quarter pound of food found, characters with a specialization in "Foraging" may ignore the penalty). Magic-aided food gathering is still reliable, but even this produces slim pickings. The characters will go hungry, and starvation is a very real possibility.

Better hunting and foraging prospects exist in the forest beyond the barren plain, but to get there and back, the characters must cross the Demonlands. Of course, the characters could always hunt the largest game available: demon.

LAHOR

Sesus Lahor's expedition to the Invisible Fortress is an ill-fated one. While his large and heavily armed party manages to reach the Demonlands, it takes heavy casualties from frostbite and the yeti attack. When Lahor comes under attack by the Ice Eaters, he counterattacks aggressively. Drawn by the blood and the strife, more Ice Eaters and Founders join the fray. Though his men are tough and disciplined, there are less than 500 of them and fewer than a dozen Exalts against several thousand hungry demons. His expedition pushes ever onward, too far from its home base to retreat (they have no idea the demons cannot pursue them), and they are left with no alternative but to push on toward the objective in hope that it offers some sort of shelter where they can hold out until spring might bring further expeditions.

Depending on the inclinations of the characters and your desires as a Storyteller, there are a number of ways to handle Sesus Lahor. He might throw himself into the characters' arms once he realizes they occupy the Fortress

ERSATZ FOOD

The First Age inhabitants of the Fortress relied primarily on conjured food to survive during their final years, and it is a viable stop-gap for the characters as well. Should the Cook Servitor survive the characters' battle with the Guardian, he will be more than happy to whip up whatever meal they desire. If he did not, they might come across such a Charm either in the page fragments scattered about the library or by talking to some of the resident spirits.

SPIRITUAL SUSTENANCE

Cost: Variable

Duration: Variable

Type: Simple

Minimum Craft: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Object-Strengthening Touch

Characters utilizing this Charm can mold edible food out of any other material, be it rock, wood or even snow. The simpler the food and the smaller the portion, the less it costs to make. Conjuring a loaf of bread requires just 1 mote of Essence and about five minutes, while sculpting an entire feast can cost 10 motes or more and take an entire day. This food can be stored. However, it will gradually lose its reality and after a week, it will fade to wisps of Essence when handled.

While it will fill the belly, conjured food offers little in the way of vitamins or minerals. For every week that food created in this manner makes up more than 50 percent of a character's diet, he will lose one dot in Willpower. Obviously, if a character has mastered a sorcery that allows him to conjure real food, these penalties do not apply.

and beg for mercy, intending to betray them later. He might get into the Fortress and die at the hands of the Guardian mere minutes later and be left as an inexplicable corpse for the characters to discover. He may realize that the Fortress is inhabited and lurk outside, sneaking inside with the Guardian's tacit assistance to steal food and clothing and lurking outside under a rockfall otherwise. In this latter case, he provides a perfect scapegoat for the Guardian to pin murders and inexplicable acts on. It's also possible it will let him lurk about for a while, then quietly murder him and dispose of the body someplace out of the way. Dead, he's an even better scapegoat — the real Lahor

won't be around to ruin the Guardian's frame jobs. Whatever the case, the characters will probably get some satisfaction from his demise, and his fate serves to underscore the severity of the demon problem.

THE DEMONS

The Founders (and the ice-eaters cognizant enough to ally with them) present the most constant and pervasive threat to the characters and the Fortress. If the characters do not sincerely agree to aid them in their quest to destroy the runestone, they will stage an assault on the Fortress shortly after the characters enter, and the demons will continue attacking at every opportunity until the runestone is destroyed or they are killed. They will not stop. They will not negotiate with the characters (they have no reason to trust them). The demons will simply demand that the runestone be given to them. They are starving and, essentially, going stir-crazy as a culture. They have come to hate the Fortress with an almost unimaginable zeal, and as soon as the characters are associated with it, they will hate them as well.

The demons are well aware of the Fortress' layout and its weaknesses. Their attacks will be well planned and quite effective (see below for specific strategies). While they may not always succeed — as you've read, the Fortress has a number of defense mechanisms geared specifically for demon attacks — they will be a constant nuisance. They will also go to great pains to stop the characters from collecting supplies or even leaving the Demonlands (laying traps like the yeti's avalanche), anything to make the characters' lives miserable. Thus, sooner or later, the characters must give serious thought to the demon problem and how it might be solved.

While it would not be impossible to kill all 5,000 demons on the barren plain, it would take years and be a laborious process. They are trapped in that 50 mile area but certainly not helpless. Also, the ice-eaters are reproducing fairly quickly, around 100 more are born each year in various litters and broods. Violence, in this case, is probably not the best solution. The characters might seriously consider breaking the runestone (assuming they find it). Doing so would certainly solve their problems. Once freed, the demons will flee South quickly, planning never to come anywhere near the Fortress ever again. Of course, the ruin they would bring on Northern settlements would be on the characters' consciences — not to mention the fact that having a few thousand demons running around knowing the location, layout and weaknesses of the Invisible Fortress is probably not a good strategy, especially when quite a few of them would like nothing better than to see the Manse in ruin. Another option would be to banish all the demons back to Malfestas.

Characters who have any familiarity with demon summoning can work a banishing, it's basically the



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same ritual, just in reverse (see *Exalted*, p. 218, for details on summoning sorceries). Unfortunately, like all sorceries, a banishing is time intensive to work and can only effect one demon at a time. While some would volunteer to be sent back (anything to get out of the Demonlands), others would have to be coerced or forced into the circle. The more bestial ice-eaters especially would be very difficult to contain for the amount of time needed. The dungeons under the Fortress hold another possibility, in the Last Chance room (see p. 81) is a statue endowed with the power to enact a death oath on anyone who returns to or speaks of the Fortress. Any demon who took this oath could be freed with little chance of him revealing the location of the Fortress. Still, again, the characters would be unleashing a plague of evil upon the entire North, and getting all 5,000 to take the oath (especially the ice-eaters who cannot actually speak) would be a chore.

The simple truth is there is no easy answer to the demon problem. The original occupants of the Manse could not figure out a viable solution, and the characters may fare no better. They might just have to accept them as a nuisance and try to minimize the damage they can do.

STAYING (LONG TERM)

Should the characters decide to make the Invisible Fortress a haven or even their base of operations, more complications will arise. As you'll notice above, any of the short-term threats that are not dealt with will have a far-reaching effects, be it repeated demon attacks or initiation of the Wyld Hunt. Survival is also a problem; food and supplies are more plentiful in the summer months, but the characters will still have to compete with demons for everything they get. Still, the longer they stay in the Fortress, the easier it will become to hide from the world once again.

DEALING WITH THE KNOB

By the spring thaw, most of the treasure hunters and Dragon-Blooded in Wangler's Knob will have made their way back South. Without Mahina there to protect the seekers through the threat of her wrath, the inhabitants of the Knob, led by Tal Tak, forcibly eject most of the treasure hunters as the winter worsens, to prevent looting and to preserve the Knob's own food supply. Meanwhile, the disappearance of Mahina and Lahor has put the Terrestrial Exalted off the hunt, as whatever stopped their expeditions is probably not amenable to being found.

Once the seekers are gone, herded off to starve to death along the roads back south, the Knob returns to its comfortable routine, with one major change — the wendigo has been destroyed. This turn of events may

present an opportunity for the characters. Miles Wangler and the rest of the Knob's residents are desperate to maintain the peace and prosperity the town has long enjoyed, yet they know that the Realm will be little more than an absentee landlord. Thus, they are in the market for a new protector. The characters could fill this role. The Knob would be more than happy to provide whatever food and supplies the characters need to restock the Fortress in exchange for the character's keeping barbarian tribes or rogue spirits from the town (a few gems or First Age secrets, how to weave stone for example, would certainly sweeten the pot). The characters do not have to explain why they are staying in the North or where they live, they must simply agree to protect the town and provide a convincing demonstration of their ability to do so. In turn, the people of the Knob will help them and keep their secret, something they're used to after dealing with a god of ice and famine for the last few centuries.

This method is the easiest way for the characters to solve their food and supply problems, but they must keep up their end of the bargain. Should a monster or raiders attack and the characters not turn them back or ride in to save the day, the agreement will be considered void and the characters no longer welcome in Wangler's Knob.

BARBARIANS

When the barbarian tribes return North in the summer, they too can provide food to the characters at a very reasonable cost, and like the people of Wangler's Knob, they are fairly trustworthy. Barbarians tend to keep to themselves, showing little interest in where the characters are living, outside of a few vague questions. Even if they do learn of the Fortress and try to tell others, who is going to trust the word of a barbarian? Of course, dealing with barbarians brings its own quirks and idiosyncrasies, but they are an option. Storytellers using the Bull of the North (detailed in *Scavenger Sons*) will have to incorporate this powerful figure's reactions into their series.

Should the characters manage to get rid of the demons somehow (by banishing or freeing them), the barren plain will gradually grow into a fertile grassland in about two to five years. Needing to graze their herds, some barbarians will take up residence in it. From then, it will be a short time until they discover the Fortress and any characters that live in it. Once they do, the barbarians, a superstitious lot, will have one of two reactions: They will consider the place cursed and run, or they will adopt the characters as pseudo-manorial lords. From that point on, the tribes (however many come to occupy the plain) will keep the characters secret and fight for them, but the characters, in turn, must provide wisdom, judgment in disputes and protec-

tion. They will essentially become rulers, albeit seasonal ones, and gain all the advantages and disadvantages that come along with that station.

The timetable for this is variable, but you can assume one tribe will take up residence on the barren plain several summers after it blooms (so, on average, year five). From there the population will grow steadily (assume 200 new barbarians a year) until peaking at around 2,000.

THE RETURN OF THE GUARDIAN

The Spirit Servitors of the Fortress have their own hierarchy, and once the characters destroy the Guardian, a lesser shade will be promoted to that now vacant station (either the Valet or the ghost of the long dead Music Master, Liwet Ohazia). This will not happen instantly, but sometime in the first year after the Guardian is destroyed, and it may not even be apparent to the characters. They might simply return from an expedition or trip and find a new spirit in control. This new Guardian, like its predecessor, will begin as a docile, obedient majordomo, keeping the Fortress in good repair and helping the characters whenever possible. But, like the old Guardian, it will absorb the characters own emotions over time. If the characters fight among themselves a great deal or keep damaging secrets from one another, the new Guardian will learn this behavior and, slowly, become more and more like them, until, eventually, it turns against the characters just as the old Guardian turned against its masters.

THE FORTRESS AS BASE OF OPERATIONS

Should the characters decide to make the Invisible Fortress their base of operations, it will effect your entire series. The Fortress is, by design, far away from civilization. If the characters want to spend a lot of time fighting the Wyld or organizing a Solar resistance movement, it is perfect. If they want to overthrow the Realm or wander the streets of Nexus, obviously, the Fortress is not the best place to make their home. That is not to say they have to spend all their time in the North, but travel to and from the Fortress will take time — a lot of it. If the characters come to rely on the Manse, it will limit what they can and cannot do.

Certainly, there are enough storylines going on in the North that the characters should be able to keep busy: The Wyld continues to encroach, the Deathlord Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears musters her forces, the Haslanti League draws doomed plans for expansion, and the Bull of the North is uniting the Icewalker tribes of the region. Centering your series in the North should not make it any less interesting, but it will definitely change certain aspects. The characters should understand this and make their decision accordingly.

DEFENDING THE FORTRESS

The Invisible Fortress' defense systems have been described in detail elsewhere, but something must be said on the general logistics of using those systems against various forms of attack.

The Fortress' primary defense is its secrecy. As long as no one knows where it is, its inhabitants are relatively safe. Once the Guardian is destroyed, the "tugging" that drew other Exalted ceases. Still, demon attacks, barbarians or, worse, the Wyld Hunt could bring massive forces to bear against the Fortress. Luckily, it was designed with such assaults in mind. Transporting a large army from the south through the mountains to the Fortress valley is a major undertaking, made even more dangerous if the characters have taken a cue from the yeti and set traps along Stone Maw. Even if an army manages to make it through, the shape of the valley is not conducive to battle. Once they enter, troops are forced into a tight space in front of the Fortress, where the Serpents can prey on their magical champions and sorcery can devastate their troops. The Fortress' thick, almost invulnerable walls make a head on charge almost impossible, and unless some horrible lapse in judgment is made, the characters should have little trouble turning back a ground attack. If the Fortress falls, it will fall to a long siege or a raid by powerful magical beings, not to an army.

Demon attacks will be more sophisticated and, generally, better planned than those of armies. The demons know the Fortress inside and out, and they will not be so foolish as to attack it head on. Instead, they will conscript large ice-eaters (those part yeddim or mammoth) and use them to assault the main doors. This is merely a distraction, however, while the bulk of the demonic force scrambles for the skylight. Once inside, they can wreck havoc, even through the various defenses the original builders installed to keep them at bay. This sort of attack, coming from all directions, is far harder for the characters to combat, and they will almost certainly be reduced to doing battle in the halls of the Fortress fairly quickly.





CHAPTER THREE

SPIRIT EXILES OF THE WESTERN OCEAN



Fakharu, a Lesser Elemental Dragon of Water (see page 293 of *Exalted*) is a powerful functionary in the spirit court of the West. He was once a censor, but with the decay of the celestial order, Fakharu has grown indolent on bribes and tributes offered up by those who would like to evade the celestial mandates to some degree. Although certainly still strong and fierce, he has little interest in living up to the responsibilities of his post in the Celestial Bureaucracy. Rather than spending his time in work and investigation, he indulges in scholarly repose and in dalliance with his mortal lover Amarel, in a golden palace on a remote spire far out in the Western Ocean.


However, Fakharu's peaceful existence has come to an abrupt halt. Three sirens, expelled from their local court after years of servitude, have kidnaped his mortal lover in an attempt to force him to scrutinize their previous Storm Mother and — hopefully — find her guilty of as many indiscretions as possible. They have taken shelter in the Archipelago of the Exiles, a small group of islands in the Western Ocean that serves as haven to numerous spiritual exiles and outlaws. Fakharu's lover is a hostage in the isles. The sirens' threat is that should Fakharu not journey to the court in question within a lunar month and judge the Storm Mother guilty of as many crimes as possible, he will never see his princess again.

Fakharu finds this inconvenient, on several grounds. While the Storm Mother in question is not a personal

friend, she is an old acquaintance of his, and he owes her a number of minor favors for certain services. More disturbing yet (for friendship can always be set aside and favors forgotten), she has a number of friends in high places, of rank equal to Fakharu or scarcely lower. Should Fakharu mount an investigation against her and bring charges (even if proof should appear to substantiate those charges), she is in a position to present a strong counterattack. Fakharu's own conduct and position will be investigated — and Fakharu has a less than perfect record.

The message left for Fakharu warned him that should he attempt to trace his beloved in person, she would pay the price. Fakharu's concern for his princess is genuine, and he does not wish to place her further at risk. Also, if he were to make a public pursuit, it would alert other enemies of his as to just how vulnerable a point his lover is for him. He cannot afford to have others try to manipulate him in this way again. However, there is nothing to stop him sending someone else to look for her....

Another complication, which will unfold later, is that the kidnapers have themselves lost their victim. While they hid on the Island of Broken Masks, an inhabitant of that island — Rejoices in Decay, the Minister for Pardoned Sins — found the unconscious Amarel and took her into custody for breaking the island's cardinal law. The three sirens hid to avoid being arrested for complicity, and are now fugitives themselves. They have taken shelter



with another power of the island — Golden Swallow, the King's concubine — and are trying to find some way of reacquiring their victim. Amarel herself is still unconscious from the sorceries that were used on her and unable to save herself. If there is to be a resolution to this matter, it must come from the characters.

THE BEGINNING

Fakharu desperately needs intelligent, powerful agents to rescue his beloved — ideally, ones not currently subservient to any spirit court, for the current situation would become even more awkward if word of his predicament got out. Solar Exalted are ideal candidates for such agents — deadly fighters, powerful sorcerers and, in the modern times, frequently in need of patronage such as only a high-ranking official of the Celestial Bureaucracy can give.

Should the characters already be under Fakharu's patronage, he will contact them and request their assistance. Even if they are only acquaintances, he will send them a friendly letter in the hopes of enlisting them as allies. The message will be delivered to the person in the group for whose discretion Fakharu has the greatest respect. It is inscribed on sapphire-blue leather in letters of glowing silver, borne by a crystal-winged osprey. While the style of the letter demonstrates the dragon's characteristic good humor, sharp-witted characters should be aware that he would hardly request their presence for a minor matter. The osprey will wait to carry back a reply. The letter reads:

My good friends,

I trust that the skies above you are clement and that the seas beneath you bring you prosperity. It has been too long since last I had the pleasure of your company; may I invite you to my small dwelling by the seashore? It might be that, while you are there, we may come to some minor arrangement, which will result in our mutual profit.

Should this be to your liking, please send me word of your desire by the messenger who brought you this missive and then journey to the nearest beach. A ship will be there at the sunset of your arrival and will bear you to my humble spire.

Until we meet,

Fakharu

If the characters have no prior acquaintance with Fakharu, then he will attempt to contact them because he has heard about their deeds and identified them as potential agents or allies. A crystal-winged osprey will visit the character who is most known for curiosity or impulsiveness and will present her with the following scroll, scribed in silver on blue leather:

Honored Exalt,

Your presence and that of your friends is requested at the Spire of Fakharu, Censor of the Celestial Bureaucracy, Dragon of Water, for a matter of mutual interest. Journey to the nearest seashore. A ship will be there at the sunset of your arrival and will bear you to your destination.

In either case, a ship will indeed come at sunset on the day that the characters arrive at the nearest seashore. As the sun sinks in the west, a sudden stormwind will rise, and a white ship will come scudding in from the sea. The ship will pause just before it might run aground, and a silver ladder will fall from its nacreous rail, so that waiting characters may conveniently board it. While there are no signs of any sailors on board, human shapes twist and writhe in the waves around the hull, and unnatural winds strain in the sails.

The ship is built of ivory and birchwood; its nails are silver, and its sails are white silk. It is extremely luxurious, with a separate cabin for each character, but has no weapons on board and no crew. It is Fakharu's creation and has been enchanted to carry the characters across the oceans from wherever they may be to Fakharu's spire. It will arrive at dawn on the following day, however far it may have had to travel, coming to anchor soundlessly at an opalescent marble pier at the foot of Fakharu's spire. Nothing else mars the unbroken sea for miles around, save the pier, the spire, and the island on which it stands. Other tropical islands are distantly visible on the horizon. Dolphin spirits play in the water at the end of the pier, more splendid and more glossy than any living dolphins could ever be, and their eyes display a human intelligence as they watch the characters.

ARRIVAL

Fakharu's spire is a lofty edifice of wrought gold that sparkles in the dawn light. A couple of Wind Makers soar high in the air around the top of the spire, their white feathers flashing in the sunlight. The great portal of the spire is a single piece of amber, carved ornately into a stylized representation of Fakharu himself. Five beautiful young women will come out to greet the characters, bareheaded, garbed in white linen and each wearing decorations of one of the Five Magical Materials — bracelets, necklace and girdle. They will bow and welcome the characters to the spire in the name of Fakharu, Dragon of Water, Censor of the Celestial Bureaucracy. Their leader (who wears orichalcum) will then invite the characters into the spire, so that Fakharu himself may speak to them. While leading the characters inside, they will make pleasant conversation — if addressed — about the beauties of Fakharu's spire, the honor in having so noble a dragon as a master, the excellence of the weather and the clear nobility and obvious skills of the characters. However, they will not discuss the reasons why the characters might have been summoned or any current political situation (and indeed, they do not know why the characters are present.) They are named after the ornamental substances that they wear and are all precisely 15 years of age.

Inside, all is grandeur and splendor but with a severe, restrained sense of art — it is beautiful but never vulgar. The central hall of the spire has a great throne of moonsilver at the far end, sized for a dragon, whose ornamentation

ripples and reshapes itself with every movement of the air. Statues stand in alcoves down the length of the hall, all Fakharu's own work and all of them in precious metals and priceless gemstones. Each step on the worked gold floor brings soft bell-like music, sweet harmonies that echo in the distance. Bright-winged bird-spirits perch in the arches, like jewels in a carved setting.

Fakharu himself awaits the characters, curled upon his throne in a shining mass of gold-green scales, his eyes wide and patient, fixed upon eternity. Other spirits are present — either pleading for a judgment in their favor or performing their assigned duties around his court. Two elementals of earth, their hair and eyes emerald, their flesh onyx, petition the dragon for ownership of a single perfect ruby that they discovered together. A bent woman whose body is formed from rusty water requests that she may be allowed to read Fakharu's history of the Tenth Kingdom Under the Seventh Wave, so that she may find the name of the third king who ruled there and fulfil the wish of a sorcerer who bound her to the task. The spirit of a certain river has come to apologize for the conduct of local villagers in failing to make the proper sacrifices at the proper seasons — and to promise to flood three times and to sweep their valley clean of dwellings in consequence. Others wait to make their own claims or declarations, murmuring quietly to each other as they do so. However, the whole assemblage conducts itself in a dignified and respectful manner, mindful of the fact that they are in the presence of a Censor of the Celestial Bureaucracy. The hushed voices of the petitioners and servants should help the characters to realize the esteem and fear in which Fakharu is held and the power that this implies in him.

The young woman who has led the characters into the hall will announce their arrival in a carrying voice, giving their full names, ranks and castes (whether such things are commonly known or not). At this, Fakharu will rouse from his contemplation and welcome the characters to his dwelling. He will declare this dawn attendance over and invite his new guests to join him in a private chamber for refreshments, where they may better enjoy the view over the sea. A polite response, while not absolutely necessary (stunned silence will — barely — suffice) would be appropriate.

While some of the petitioners will be annoyed at this interruption to the audience, none of them would dare to express their feelings to Fakharu's face; they will politely excuse themselves, inspecting the characters as they do so. By such a courteous greeting and such prompt interest, the dragon has made it clear that the characters are important beings and worthy of esteem. The petitioners and other members of Fakharu's court will now consider them potential rivals or allies and may well contact them once the current business with Fakharu has been concluded.

The five young women will escort the characters from the great hall and up a winding crystal staircase whose walls are hung with ice-white silk banners to a large room

on what might be the second or third floor of the spire. This room has the entire west wall left open to the sea breezes, looking out over the Western Ocean. The pale gold walls are ornately chased with hammered designs depicting noble deeds of past Exalted, and one of Fakharu's finest statues — depicting his beloved Amarel and carved from a single emerald — stands near the door. Fakharu himself is already present, reclining on a pile of cushions sewn from the finest silk and patterned with the hair of fire-spirits, and he inclines his head in greeting as the characters enter. In the center of the room is a large table well spread with the finest food and drink and a set of elegantly carved ebony chairs equal in number to the characters.

The women will withdraw with a humble bow, leaving the characters alone with the dragon.

FAKHARU'S REQUEST

Fakharu's approach to the characters will depend on whether or not he has met them previously and whether or not he already stands as a patron of sorts to the group. In all cases, he does not wish to seem overly vulnerable, but his need is urgent — as witness, the haste of his summoning of the group — and he is prepared to go to some lengths to acquire their help. However, he will not be amused by impertinence or disrespect. While this will not affect his wish to secure the group's help, he will remember it in the future, and his attitude toward them will cool perceptibly at that point.

AS A PATRON

If Fakharu is already a patron or friend to the group, his approach will be simple and direct. He will ask after their health, request that they seat themselves and take what food and drink they may care for and, then, continue as follows.

"My friends, I must ask for your help. My beloved Amarel has been kidnaped, and is being held far to the west, in the Archipelago of the Exiles. While I desire to fly to her side at once and bring her safely back to my small home here, certain political considerations — and threats against my love's safety — make it impossible for me to go in person." He gives a draconic smile, dropping his jaw, and continues in a confidential tone, "Is it not fortunate that I have such loyal and trustworthy friends as yourselves?"

At this point, he will pause to allow the characters to inject suitably horrified comments and enthusiastic expressions of support. From their previous acquaintance with Fakharu, they will be aware of the genuine love that he and Amarel have for each other and should realize how important this favor is to him and how much trust he is placing in them. And following from this, how much gratitude — or reward — they can hope for as a result... Ethical or honorable characters may feel bound to help in any case, but mercenary characters should find this a definite motivation.

"My love was stolen from me," Fakharu explains further, "while she was wandering on the seashore, collecting some of the great pearls often found hereabouts.





The only surviving member of her escort was able to tell me before he died that she was carried away by three sirens. They left behind a set of demands and the information that they were keeping her hostage in the archipelago — a collection of islands inhabited by the exiles of Heaven and Earth, a place of treachery and secrets, hidden from the eyes of all by certain spells of long ago. Naturally, I cannot give way to such pressure, and I do not intend to. But if I should leave this place and go to find my Amarel, the whole matter will become public knowledge. It may be seen as a sign of improper conduct on my part, and my enemies will certainly try to use my love for my princess against me in the future. Worse yet, if the sirens learned of my coming, they might slay Amarel before I could reach her. No.” He shifts his wings with a small ripple of thunder, and his eyes blaze harshly. “This cannot be permitted. While I would like to personally tear these reckless sirens limb from limb and roast them in boiling venom for a thousand years, I cannot permit myself this luxury. My friends, I will give you the benefit of my advice and help, but I must ask you to undertake this rescue for me.”

AS A STRANGER

If Fakharu has no prior acquaintance with the characters, he will introduce himself to them at this point, with proper formality. “I am Fakharu, Dragon of the noble element of water, having the honor to be named Censor of the Celestial Bureaucracy. While we have never had the good fortune of meeting in the past, your names and fame are well known to me.” He will pause to mention some notable past exploit of each character, showing a good knowledge of their history. Although he will be unaware of any genuine secrets, spirits and elementals have informed him about the Circle’s past and given him enough detail to be impressively avuncular. When asked how he obtained this knowledge, he will merely state that, “A spirit in my position finds it useful to be informed about the doings of the Exalted.”

After this introduction, he will continue: “I find myself in a somewhat difficult position and would be grateful for your assistance in a certain matter. You will be properly rewarded for your efforts, of course, and I would hope that we might even maintain a continuing association. Since we are preeminent among the spirits and other beings of the courts, we have certain interests in common.” While this drastically overstates the characters’ rank — they certainly aren’t as important or powerful as Fakharu — they should realize that he is being extremely flattering. The dragon will pause to wait for any spontaneous offers to help from the characters. If they ask for further details, he will privately revise his opinion of their intelligence upward and will continue as follows.

“One who is dear to me has been kidnaped, in an attempt to force me to unjustly prosecute the Storm Mother of a court to the west of here. Naturally, I would not abuse my position in this way.” Characters at all familiar with the devious nature of celestial politics will know that very few

of those of Fakharu’s rank would hesitate to abuse their position and will take this statement with a grain of salt. “I cannot go in person to rescue my beloved Amarel, much as I wish to — not only would it give certain enemies of mine unwelcome ideas, but these sirens would know that I have left my spire and might kill her before I could reach her. They have hidden her in a collection of islands known as the Archipelago of the Exiles, a place hidden from the eyes of Heaven and Earth by certain spells of long ago. I need trustworthy allies, noble Exalted, and I hope that I may ask for your help in this emergency.”

Fakharu’s approach is targeted to pique the characters’ interest, by appealing to their honor, their self-interest or both together. The patronage — even friendship — of a Censor of the Celestial Bureaucracy is an incredibly useful thing to have, in political terms. An alliance with someone as powerful and wealthy as Fakharu could be vital to any Exalted. The dragon will do his best to make sure that his guests realize this, with casual references to his political power, personal possessions and numerous elemental and human servants. During their stay at his spire, from their arrival in his enchanted ship to when they leave it, he will see to it that the characters are surrounded by evidence of his wealth and generosity.

THE DEAL

Whether the characters are old allies or new acquaintances, Fakharu intends to reward them for their actions — both in ways that will be immediately useful and in future gifts and patronage. Characters will quickly realize that they can profit from this. However, the fact that they could extort a great deal from Fakharu doesn’t necessarily mean that they should. As a dragon and as Exalted, they may well live for thousands of years and have to deal with each other as friends or enemies throughout those millennia. Which is more important — a daiklave now or a reliable and powerful ally who feels genuine friendship toward them for the future?

Fakharu won’t stint in handing over ships, items or allies, if they should be clearly useful to the characters, but he will resent pressure and extortion. The very nature of his current predicament should remind the characters that they themselves don’t exist in a vacuum and that the time may come when they will need trustworthy friends and allies, rather than reluctant neutrals obtained through blackmail or threats. An open approach to the matter and a clear statement of possible problems will cause Fakharu to react generously and to offer whatever he can to resolve situations — and probably win the characters a reward afterward in gratitude. Constant requests for further equipment or extortionate demands will get the desired items: After all, Fakharu isn’t going to risk his beloved Amarel’s safety any further. However, he will hold it against the characters and will see to it that as much as possible of his ill-gotten property returns to him after the event. Also, many spirits and elementals will follow Fakharu’s lead in

dealing with the characters afterward and may well be hostile toward these upstart, overly proud Exalted.

The first problem likely to concern the characters is that of immediate transportation. To that end, Fakharu will freely offer the small ship in which they arrived. It may be conveniently handled by a crew of two, if one traveler takes the tiller and the other the sails, and has been charmed against storms, lightning and sargassos. However, the most potent enchantment is laid upon its tiller: Once a week, at dusk, the ship may be commanded to sail to Fakharu's spire. If this order is given, the ship will travel without need for sailors or steersman all night, sailing at whatever speed is necessary, however incredible. It will come to land at the spire at dawn on the next day. The ship will, of course, be stocked with a month's supply of fresh water and food.

The characters will doubtless ask about maps next. While Fakharu has charts of the seas between his spire and the edge of the archipelago, he has none of the archipelago itself and knows little of it or its inhabitants. Certain powerful influences shield the area from astrology and scrying — this ward is the work of powerful individuals in Heaven, who wish the place to remain secret. Also, in the past, Fakharu's interests as a censor have been best served by maintaining a politic ignorance that the area even existed, which hindered any serious attempts to investigate it. Of course, he knows a few rumors, but these should by no means be regarded as fact. . . . Storytellers are encouraged to pick and choose details from the islands mentioned in the description of the archipelago and to add a few worrying suggestions of their own.

Fortunately, Fakharu can suggest a method by which the characters can get better information. Sikunare, an old and powerful Storm Mother, holds her court midway between Fakharu's spire and the archipelago. She is the Storm Mother that Fakharu has been asked to bring charges against, and it is from her court that the three sirens came. Given all these facts, Fakharu will suggest delicately, she will doubtless be able to provide a great deal of useful information. If the characters request it, he can also provide some valuable statues (of his own carving) as a gift to mollify Sikunare: Storm Mothers are not known for their calm demeanors, and she is no exception.

Should the characters seek magical weapons, Fakharu has many treasures in his vaults; while he will not willingly hand over the most potent, a skilled character may receive an item of minor power. This is especially true if the choice is left to Fakharu and the character merely states his need for some particular sort of weapon. Likewise, Fakharu can provide enchanted talismans, amulets, trade-goods, treasure in gold or silver or any of the Magical Materials. Fakharu's wealth is vast, and he can fulfil most requests with barely a hesitation. If the characters ask for a servant or guide, he has a number of minor spirits or elementals or human servants who he can assign to assist the Solars: Water Children, masks, Wind Makers and so on. Should methods of weather control be needed, the dragon has

enchanted tools such as a thrice-knotted blue silk cord, which produces a wind in the desired direction when untied, or a black sapphire the size of a man's fist, set in silver, which can be used to command a storm to cease.

TACTICS

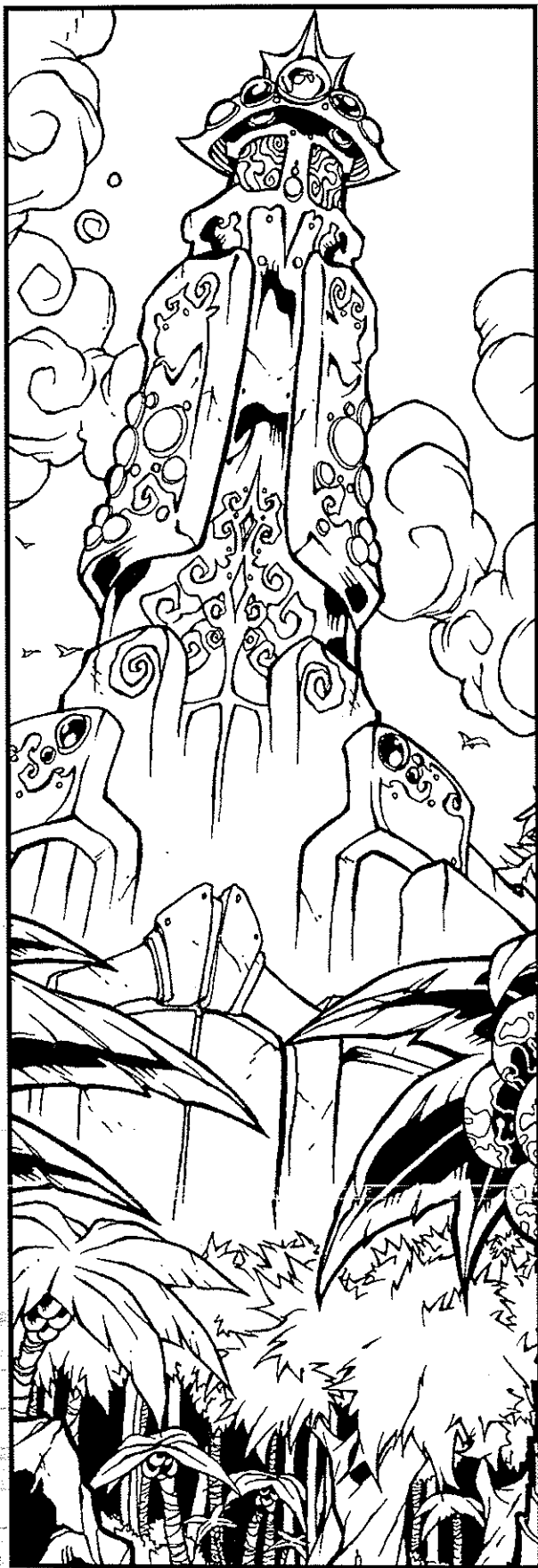
Fakharu will proffer advice as to how the characters should handle the situation. Although he is unaware of the precise layout of the islands, he can explain the nature of the archipelago where Amarel is hidden, telling the characters that it is a refuge for spirit and elemental exiles and fugitives. "As such," he will point out, "it is likely to be a place with many different factions and groups, each of whom will have their own enemies. I am sure that you will have thoughts of your own about how this may be exploited. . . ." With a draconic low-jawed grin and a knowing look, he will not press the point. However, if the characters appear willing to listen, he has the following suggestions to make.

If the group is clearly oriented toward fighting, Fakharu will point out the virtues of a swift martial strike into the heart of the archipelago. Once they have ascertained where Amarel is being kept — though, obviously, not before then — it would only be sensible to play to the group's strengths and to rescue her by force. If the Exalted are clearly interested in this prospect, Fakharu will gladly supply them with weapons and similar useful items. Of course, as he will remind them, Amarel's safety is of paramount importance to him, and the characters will need to be careful that they do not endanger her through excessive force or impetuous actions.

Should the group be more interested in diplomacy, Fakharu will suggest that the sirens themselves — or any group with which they are affiliated — may be prepared to negotiate for Amarel's return. After all, there have to be things that the kidnapers would want besides the disgrace of the Storm Mother Sikunare. Fakharu can doubtless supply a good many such things and will allow the characters to swear as much in his name. He can offer wealth, power, valuable information, discreet assassinations, a position in his court. . . . Also, as he will point out, the group of kidnapers may not be in total agreement by this point. If some of the kidnapers are having second thoughts about the wisdom of their action and are prepared to prove their remorse — by assisting in the rescue of Amarel, for instance — he, in turn, is prepared to be lenient, even merciful. (The glint in his eyes, however, suggests that his mercy has its limits.) Even if the kidnapers themselves are unwilling to negotiate, other factions in the archipelago may be glad to do so. "Many of them may have already been exiled for treason," Fakharu will say, "and one treachery more or less cannot be too much to expect."

If the characters should prefer to act by stealth, Fakharu will mention the possibility of a counterkidnaping. Once they have located Amarel, they can steal her back before the sirens realize the danger and flee to the spire.





This ploy may be particularly effective, the Dragon will point out, if the kidnapers should turn out to be unexpectedly strong or well defended. Naturally, Fakharu has certain items that he will be glad to donate to the cause, such as gems that cast auras of darkness, cloaks that render their wearers invisible, ointments that allow the wearer to pass through solid walls and so forth. While Fakharu would personally like to see the kidnapers pay in blood and torment for what they have done, he is realistic; Amarel's safety is more important to him. Naturally, after this is all over, he will take great pleasure and devote a great deal of attention to a painful and lengthy revenge. Dragons have certain standards to uphold.

Whichever course the characters decide to adopt and whatever equipment they may receive, Fakharu will want them to leave as soon as possible. It has already taken him several days to contact the characters and obtain their help, and Amarel's time is running out.

Even using the white ship that he has given the characters, it will take them at least three days to reach the archipelago — more, if they stop at Sikunare's court. The Exalted should have some sense of the urgency that drives him. He will never lose his courtesy and will even make the odd joke, but he is constantly aware of Amarel's danger.

Fakharu does not want to attract undue attention to the characters' visit to his spire — should they be identified openly as his agents when they reach the archipelago, it may increase Amarel's danger. As matters stand, he suspects that one or more of the petitioners currently present may actually be a spy left to watch his reactions and to send word if he goes in search of Amarel personally. For this reason, he will ask the characters not to discuss Amarel's kidnaping with anybody else in the spire and will, instead, let it be generally known that these Exalted are visiting him to discuss matters of his policy concerning the Immaculate Order. He will not speak of the kidnaping in public with the characters and will insist that they leave at night, in an attempt to foil spies or pursuit.

THE SPIRE

The spire is a lofty tower of beaten gold, which can be seen for many leagues across the sea. It catches the sunlight during the day and the moonlight by night. Diamonds and black star sapphires are set into the roof and around the windows. The very structure of the tower is inconceivably valuable, without even considering the riches within. The island on which it is set is a tropical paradise, with all manner of trees that are in both fruit and flower all year round. The beneficent spirits of dolphins and manta rays play in the waters, and beds of pearl oysters dot the shores. An opalescent marble pier provides anchorage for ships, leading up to the great amber portal of the spire, set in the east wall.

Upon entering the spire, a short corridor leads to the central hall — the chief feature in the hall is Fakharu's throne of moonsilver, set against the west wall. Statues of Fakharu's

own sculpting, in rare metals and precious gemstones, stand in alcoves along the walls. Musical tones sound with each step on the floor, though never loud enough to interrupt conversation, and bird-spirits perching in the arches add living color to the setting. Fakharu knows the value of first impressions and has designed this audience hall to stupefy and daunt visitors with his obvious wealth and power. During the day, he holds audiences here at dawn, midday and dusk. At night, it is occasionally used for grand parties but is, more often, left empty, frequented only by menial servants whose task is to burnish the golden floor and walls.

Without exception, the spire speaks of Fakharu's wealth and taste. The dragon does not indulge in the gaudy excesses of lesser spirits or the tawdry overdone ostentation of minor elementals attempting to impress mortals with their power. While everything is made of precious metals or gems or exotic materials from distant lands, furnishings and structure are arranged in elegant and discreet harmony and in patterns that bespeak occult knowledge and hidden ritualistic meanings. Each door in the spire opens onto a room of greater beauty than the last: corridors carved from living pearl, rooms walled in opal and crystal, curtains of the ice-white silk that comes only from the furthest East, scrolls with the hidden history of spirits from times long ago. Even one of the Exalted could wander here for years without growing bored.

Fakharu's favorite place in the entire spire is the vast golden balcony that circles the roof, where he and his lover take their dinner and watch the sunset when the weather is fair. Major rooms throughout the spire are built on a scale to suit his great draconic form, with wide doorways and lofty ceilings. He is often to be found in the large library, in the company of Shemaru the Librarian, or in a long gemmed hall below the spire, decorated with works of art by his own hand, where he works on his sculptures and painting. The spire is also well supplied with smaller meeting rooms, suitable for private discussions and subtle bribery, and with suites of guest rooms for any sort of spirit or elemental — or even the occasional visiting Exalted.

Deep in the foundations are such rooms as dungeons and torture chambers — though Fakharu rarely utilizes them, there are occasions when they are necessary. He prefers to keep important prisoners in elaborate guest quarters on the higher levels; it's far more civilized.

Menial human servants are lodged in tiny attics or in the cellars, where their presence will not offend Fakharu or important visitors. Elementals or spirits, being slightly more worthy of consideration, are given quarters suitable to their nature. Air elementals are housed in the roof of the building, earth elementals in its foundations, spirits of water in the sea or in the island's rivers, spirits of wood in the surrounding trees, and spirits of fire are allotted rooms in the spire's foundations that are shielded so as to permit perpetual fires to burn there. As is only appropriate to Fakharu's station and wealth, the lower servants' quarters

— although humble in comparison to the rest of the building — would bankrupt entire villages elsewhere.

FREQUENTLY APPEARING SERVITORS

Fakharu has a number of trained and reliable servitors, who are likely to be regular fixtures at the spire — they are all too trusted or too useful to be randomly slain on a whim or to be disposed of as gifts. Other than the four listed below, there are many spirits who serve the Censor in some capacity and even certain selected humans who are chosen for their skills or beauty. While the humans are almost all subordinate to the spirits and generally understood to be inferior to them, they are not mistreated: They are, after all, Fakharu's property and, as such, should not be damaged, for dragons have little patience for vandals.

These lower servants are generally happy in their duties. Fakharu is not the willful kind of master who would idly slay half a dozen before breakfast on a whim — so long as the servants obey unquestioningly, they are treated well. Human servants are trained from infancy for their posts. Some are stolen from their original families while babies, while others are collected from hillsides where they have been left to die of exposure as sacrifices and presented to the household by lower-ranking spirits who seek to gain Burnished Mantis' favor. Children who fail to show promise or to obey perfectly are disposed of, either given as gifts to other spirits or simply killed — however, this is rare, as the infants are taught that service to the Censor is the highest duty to which they can aspire. Some grow up to learn the skills of the courtesan or assassin, to act as agents for Fakharu elsewhere, but most live and die in and around the spire, existing in an atmosphere of humble servitude and precise etiquette. They are as much ornaments as menials and are given regular anagathics in their food to retard their aging and preserve their youthful beauty.

BURNISHED MANTIS, CHAMBERLAIN

Description: This insect-spirit serves Fakharu as chamberlain, major-domo and cringing lackey. Burnished Mantis fails to realize quite how useful he is to the Censor, and Fakharu intends for matters to remain that way. Mantis stands eight feet high, like a statue cast in polished emerald, and moves only when necessary, in long jointed paces. His voice is high and echoing, like a reed flute. He has served Fakharu for several hundred years now and has an exact grasp of the protocol appropriate for the Censor's court and of local politics. Burnished Mantis' greatest personal shame is that he finds the histories that Fakharu researches to be utterly boring. Naturally, Mantis cannot confess this to his master (though Fakharu already knows it) for fear of giving offence. While he does not take bribes, as such, he is used to receiving "courtesy gifts" from visitors to the spire. Failing to receive them from new visitors would not cause him to actively maneuver against them but would mean that he fails to offer any helpful advice on protocol or current





politics to them. He does his best to politely ignore the existence of Shemaru the Librarian, wanting to avoid "appreciation" of his master's writings. However, Burnished Mantis is extremely fond of Amarel; in his opinion, she is in every way an acceptable lover for Fakharu, being beautiful, devoted and perfectly skilled in etiquette.

Nature: Follower

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Endurance 5, Lore 3, Melee 3, Occult 2, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Socialize 4, Stealth 3

Backgrounds: Allies 4

Charms: Camouflage, Instill Obedience, Materialize, Sense Domain, Stillness, Summon Food, Tiny Gift

Cost To Materialize: 21

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 4L Defense 4

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 3L Defense 3

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 4L/5B (Chitinous exoskeleton, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 70

Other Notes: None

SHEMARU, LIBRARIAN

Description: Naturally, Fakharu requires a librarian to store and catalog his writings and all the other lore that he has accumulated. Shemaru is an elemental of earth, manifesting as a seven-foot-tall, thin limestone figure whose torso has been worn into long fur-like patterns by falling water and whose fingers are unnaturally jointed and

tipped with garnet styli. His voice sounds like fracturing rose quartz. Shemaru commands miniature automata of gold and garnet in the shape of cats, which patrol the library day and night, watching for intruders. Shemaru never leaves the library unless directly commanded to by Fakharu, as the elemental is paranoid about his precious stores of knowledge. He supervises the filing of every scroll, book, carved plate or other artifact in his library and insists on replacing them himself if they are borrowed. Burnished Mantis frequently has to reason with Shemaru concerning proper behavior toward Fakharu's guests and about allowing the servants in to tidy the library and keep it spotless. Shemaru admires Burnished Mantis' skill — from a distance — but wants nothing to do with protocol, unless it is absolutely necessary. Shemaru does, however, yearn for new sources of knowledge and has more than once engaged in private bargaining with visitors, promising to speak in their favor with Fakharu. Shemaru firmly believes that he would never betray his master on a matter of importance. The Censor himself is well aware of this activity but condones it as perfectly natural. Shemaru has little contact with Amarel but finds her tolerable, for a human. Were it not for her habit of reading books from the library, she would be well-nigh perfect.

Nature: Bureaucrat

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Linguistics 4 (Native: Old Realm; Flametongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Seatongue), Lore 5, Occult 4, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Socialize 2, Stealth 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3



Charms: Confusion, Dematerialize, Details, Hurry Home, Landscape Travel, Memory Mirror, Natural Prognostication, Tracking

Elemental Powers: Aegis, Mobility

Cost To Dematerialize: 33

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 4L/6B (Aegis, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 3 Essence Pool: 64

Other Notes: None

MIRROR OF DIVINITY, SPYMYSTRESS

Description: This water-elemental serves Fakharu as a manipulator, diviner and spymistress — and is currently in deep disgrace for her failure to prevent the kidnapping. She is a Water Child, formed when a child slipped and fell into a pool while watching her brother and sister lie together, with an obsession for spying on others. She has managed to sublimate this predilection into an urge to report everything that she sees and hears to Fakharu, who, in some ways, has taken the place of a parent to her. Although she appears to be a 10-year-old peasant girl, dripping with water, she has the heavy dark eyes and deep voice of a mature woman. A network of elementals, spirits and humans reports to her, and she passes on relevant data to Fakharu. While she prefers to spend her time at the spire and to have her informants send their information to her, from time to time, she is forced to travel to them or to investigate a situation personally.

Mirror of Divinity treats most people impersonally, but from time to time, she will take a violent dislike to an individual — usually one who has been reported to her as behaving in a lustful manner — and will endeavor to find some wrongdoing on his part that she can report to Fakharu. She has little to do with Burnished Mantis or Shemaru, though both are aware of her position and rank and treat whatever she says with respect. Other denizens of the spire who are not part of her network believe her to be merely another servitor and treat her as such. While Mirror of Divinity normally has no particular like or dislike for Amarel, the Water Child currently feels a strong antipathy toward the woman — due to the spymistress' current disgrace — mingled with a sense of guilt for having failed the Censor.

Nature: Martyr

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Endurance 5, Larceny 2, Medicine 2, Melee 3, Occult 2, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Stealth 3



Backgrounds: Allies 4

Charms: Confusion, Dematerialize, Element Touch, Ghostly Presence, Landscape Travel, Memory Mirror, Natural Prognostication, Steal Sustenance, Stillness, Tracking,

Elemental Powers: Aegis, Dragon's Suspire, Mobility (Water)

Cost To Dematerialize: 21

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Chill Touch: Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 3L Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 4L/5B (Aegis, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 2 Essence Pool: 63

Other Notes: None

STEEL SUN, PIRATE CAPTAIN

Description: Steel Sun is the halfbreed child of a Dragon-Blood sorceress with the Elemental Aspect of Fire and her fire butterfly lover — oddly enough, he has chosen to make his home on the high seas and lives the life of a corsair in between carrying out missions for Fakharu. Some of the other denizens of the spire have speculated that he became a sailor primarily in order to avoid his parents: His relationship with them is extremely stormy, and he sees them as infrequently as possible. He is an excellent swordsman and avoids using his Charms unless his life is in danger. Fakharu finds Steel Sun a convenient agent for lesser matters, especially those involving humans. Steel Sun has his own ship, the *Dawn's Edge*, and a loyal crew that includes several other half-human, half-spirit cross-breeds. He adheres to a certain code of conduct with captured ships when operating on his own behalf as a corsair, which has gained him a reputation for honor and



romance. He encourages such gossip, as it makes many of his targets more likely to surrender to him after a brief fight. While he has some atrophied sense of personal honor, its only manifestations are his loyalty to Fakharu and a refusal to break his given word.

Steel Sun is a frequent visitor to the spire, as he enjoys the luxury of Fakharu's island. While he is technically lower-ranked than Burnished Mantis, Mirror of Divinity or Shemaru, given that he is a halfbreed, none of them condescend to him. He is a useful colleague, and all three of them are prepared to overlook his mother's bloodline in order to conduct private negotiations with him. Steel Sun is aware of this prejudice and resents firstly his mother, for being Dragon-Blooded, secondly his father, for siring him on her, and thirdly, all those who look down on him as a lesser being. Fakharu is one of the few to escape this general bitterness: Steel Sun is aware that the dragon treats him as well as or better than most spirits and has no grievance with the Censor. Ultimately, the corsair is a practical man and controls his anger in order to make a profit. When dealing with his crew, he attempts to win their respect on purely human terms and, for the most part, succeeds.

Steel Sun is, by now, too well known among the politically astute as a servant of the Censor's. This, together with the fact that he is weaker than the Exalted, is why he has not been given the mission of rescuing Amarel — and he bitterly resents that. Naturally, he hopes that she will be safely recovered, but in the future, he would not object to seeing the Exalted characters fail in some mission, as embarrassingly as possible.

Nature: Gallant

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

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

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 3, Medicine 2, Melee 3, Presence 2, Resistance 2 (Disease +1), Sail 4, Socialize 2, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Backing 4, Contacts 4, Followers 5, Resources 4, any Artifact he needs

Charms: Element Touch, Tiny Damnation

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Fist: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5

Knife: Speed 9 Accuracy 6 Damage 4L Defense 5

Chopping Sword: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 7L Defense 6

Dodge Pool: 5/2 **Soak:** 3L/3B

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

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 20

Other Notes: Steel Sun has inherited a weakened form of his mother's Aspect of Fire and can spend 10 motes to burst into flame. For the rest of the scene, he is immune to fire damage, and anyone striking him without a weapon or wrestling with him takes a number of dice of lethal damage every turn equal to half his Essence. If he strikes with an unarmed attack or wrestles with a character, his opponent takes a like amount of damage.

OVER THE FLOWING SEA

Sikunare's court lies 300 miles west of Fakharu's spire. Should the characters accept the Censor's offer of his white ship, they will find that, by virtue of its magic, the ship is able to overcome the vagaries of current and tide and maintain a constant, reliable speed of 20 knots (20 nautical miles an hour). If they start at dawn and sail by night and day without stopping, they will arrive at Sikunare's court in the early afternoon of the following day. The Storyteller may insert encounters for the characters, should she desire it, but the voyage is likely to be without incident: Fakharu has commanded his allies to make the trip smooth and easy, as far as is within their power, and they have chased away predators and calmed the waters.

SIKUNARE'S COURT

This Storm Mother's court is situated almost exactly halfway between Fakharu's spire and the Archipelago of the Exiles. As with all Storm Mothers' domains, its boundaries are signaled by the water beneath the ship's keel changing color — in this case, to a deep, purple-tinged green. If the characters have thought to ask Fakharu for appropriate sacrifices (black-furred dogs, black-feathered birds or human babies) then they are well placed to mollify Sikunare. Should they have no sacrifice — or worse still, should any of them be exceptionally beautiful — then the Storm Mother will be easily angered and liable to take anything the characters may say in the worst possible way.

While Sikunare is not the oldest or most powerful of Storm Mothers, being only a few millennia old, she has managed to negotiate her position as ruler of the closest court to the archipelago into a certain amount of political power. The rulers of many other courts owe her favors for allowing certain refugees or exiles to reach the islands safely — or for seeing to it that they died on their way there. Partly as a result of this, Sikunare's court is mostly composed of spirits skilled in war and in martial Charms. Sikunare herself takes care not to meddle in the affairs of the archipelago and does not permit her subjects to do so either. This is in order to protect herself from taint by association in the eyes of other spirits — and also to avoid the possibility of the exiles uniting to attack her. While she could call on help, should that occur, it would involve cashing in most of the political favors that she has built up and would severely damage her reputation.

If the characters arrive in Fakharu's ship or, immediately upon crossing into Sikunare's domain, present some kind of sign that they are working for him, the Storm Mother will give them due respect as his representatives. Three shark-spirits will come circling to the surface of the waves and take human form — tall, cold-eyed men in white robes. The shark-spirits will greet the Exalted politely, as friends of the Censor, and offer woven bracelets of coral beads that will allow characters wearing them to breathe water while under the sea and to ignore the effects of depth. The spirits will also issue an invitation from Sikunare herself to journey below the waves and discuss matters of current interest.

Should the characters not give any obvious sign that they are allied with Fakharu, but attempt to contact the local spirits, then the spirits will react with curiosity. This area is hardly a frequent trade route or a stopping-point for Exalted. Sikunare herself, once she finds out that she has visitors, will be interested in speaking with them purely to find out why they are here, and the shark-spirits will offer enchanted bracelets, as above.

Deep below the waves, Sikunare's court is attended by water elementals of many kinds, all bearing weapons of some sort — it should be obvious to characters that the spirits present are ready and even eager for battle. Sikunare herself reclines on a sharply edged throne of sculpted coral, with two chained sirens kneeling at her feet. Statues, jewels and the figureheads of sunken ships ornament the wide crater in the seabed that serves the Storm Mother as a throne room. Perceptive characters may recognize several of the statues as examples of Fakharu's work, although not as good as the pieces in the spire. Sikunare will greet the characters brusquely but politely and inquire as to their business in the area. Presenting any gifts that they may have brought will noticeably mollify her temper. The characters may choose to mention their mission from Fakharu, or they may simply say that they are passing through the area.

If they mention private business relating to Fakharu or hint that they will say more in private, then Sikunare will

dismiss the rest of her court and invite them to a secluded obsidian grotto to discuss matters further. She will be incensed at the news of the sirens' plans and (although she will not say so) surprised that Fakharu should value a human consort so highly. Since it is in her interest to cooperate with the characters, she will give them what information she can about the sirens and the archipelago.


If the Exalted lie and claim to be merely traveling through, Sikunare will offer them the hospitality of her court for the evening. She will then order some of her more prepossessing servants — the chained sirens and several other elementals who can take attractive human form — to attempt to seduce the characters and find out what their true business is. The ensuing evening will include a lavish feast, with many strange wines from ancient shipwrecks, dancing and exhibition duels (in which the Exalted will be invited to join) between the weapon-masters of the court. If the characters reveal nothing but act with proper decorum, they will be allowed to leave the next morning and may discover some useful information from the inhabitants of the court during the evening's revelry. Should they let it be known that they are on a private mission for Fakharu but not mention what it is, then Sikunare will respect their privacy, but think less of their discretion. Should any of them reveal what their mission actually is, they will be summoned to an immediate audience with Sikunare, who will berate them for their indiscretion and then give them what help she can — Fakharu will, after all, owe her a sizeable favor for this assistance.

DISCUSSIONS, INVESTIGATIONS AND ASSISTANCE

Sikunare is unaware of the threat that the three sirens pose to her — in fact, she didn't even realize that they'd passed through her waters with Amarel toward the archipelago. Perceptive characters may think of questioning the other sirens who are currently held as the Storm Mother's slaves — unfortunately, these are not the sirens the characters are looking for, and they have no knowledge of their sisters' plans. They will admit, however (if out of the Storm Mother's hearing), that they could understand the other sirens' desire for revenge only too well. These sirens will also plead with the characters to persuade Sikunare to release them and will swear to serve the characters for a year, bring them tribute, or anything similar. They are quite sincere — temporary servitude or missions for the characters is nothing compared to the misery of being a Storm Mother's servant for centuries.

Characters may realize that it would be extremely unlikely for three sirens (and a presumably unwilling captive) to be able to pass through this region without being noticed at all. A logical conclusion, given that Sikunare has heard nothing of them, is that one of the inhabitants was bribed to keep silent. Should the characters look for unusual happenings, they will discover that one of the members of the court — a spirit of wave-foam named Dancing Emptiness — has





recently acquired 70 large pearls from an unspecified source. She has been using them as gambling stakes in the evenings, and most of the court has seen them. Should she be questioned, any threat of force will make her rapidly confess that she did indeed see the sirens passing through and that they gave her the pearls in exchange for her silence. These are the very pearls that Amarel was collecting when she was kidnapped, and any character familiar with Fakharu's spire may recognize them as similar to others they have seen Amarel wear in the past.

Dancing Emptiness will tell the characters that the sirens were carrying an unconscious woman with them (the description is clearly that of Amarel) and that they were journeying toward the Archipelago of the Exiles. This happened three days before the characters were summoned to Fakharu's spire. The wave-foam spirit assumed that the sirens had got into trouble with some dignitary or other and was happy to take a payoff and let them slip past. If questioned about their destination, she does remember the leading siren, Chamae, mentioned something about "hiding her beauty in the least likely of places" but is unsure what the siren meant by that. (Chamae was referring to hiding Amarel on the Island of Broken Masks, where all inhabitants are disfigured by the law of the isle.)

Sikunare will inflict a suitable punishment for disobedience and bribe-taking on Dancing Emptiness once the characters have finished with her. She can also give the characters information on the sirens: She will describe Chamae as decisive but rash, Aekalle as submissive but vengeful and Tenereshe as manipulative but emotionally fragile. Without remorse, she will describe how the three can easily be told apart by their scars: Chamae is missing her left eye, Aekalle lacks both thumbs, and Tenereshe has had her torso tattooed in zigzag patterns of white and gray. She will not be amused by any suggestions that she should moderate her treatment of members of her court, though this will not cause her to take immediate action against the characters — or, at least, not while she knows that Fakharu stands behind them.

Should the characters be in need of supplies or trade goods, Sikunare can provide these easily from sunken ships. She will not be as generous as Fakharu, but can provide most common goods—even barrels of fresh water—and some gifts of precious metals and works of art. She will not provide enchanted items, though characters who somehow please her through gifts or flattery may gain a Benefaction from her. Under no circumstances will she allow other members of her court to accompany the characters into the archipelago. As she will explain, there is an understanding of noninterference between her servants and the Exiles. While she will send two of her shark-spirits to escort the characters to the edge of the archipelago, from there they must journey alone. She will allow them to keep the bracelets that confer the power to breathe underwater, which will keep their virtue for a lunar month.

SIKUNARE, STORM MOTHER

Description: Sikunare is spectacularly ugly; her thin blue hair floats in matted clumps around her wizened face, and her muscular body is twisted and hunched. Her one vanity and indulgence is the care of her long nails, and she has ornamented them with inset diamonds and sapphires, filing the edges and coating them with gold. She is proud of the position and influence that she has won and expects due respect from visitors — even from the Exalted. Her pride is not unwarranted, as when she gained control of this court 300 years ago (by killing the previous Storm Mother), it was a relatively minor location and group of spirits. Sikunare took advantage of its position close to the archipelago and built up a network of favors and debts with other spirits. As a result, today, her court is widely known and receives many gifts from those who would like exiles to pass through to the archipelago unharmed — or those who want fugitives prevented from reaching it.

Given the nature of her power and the type of favors she so often grants, Sikunare is neither indolent nor luxurious. She does not disdain to lead hunts against fugitives herself and occasionally tests her strength in duels against visitors to her court. However, she has a great jealousy for sirens and other beautiful water elementals, given her own ugliness, and expresses this envy by chaining them in slavery at her court, forcing them to labor at menial tasks. After a few centuries of this treatment, when her victims no longer respond to insults and humiliations, she expels them from the court — sometimes permanently marred, sometimes still physically beautiful. She has a similar hatred for beautiful humans, but sailors who ply these waters know of a Storm Mother's presence and take due precautions with sacrifices and decorated figureheads.

Nature: Autocrat

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

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 5

Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Craft (Weaponcraft) 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 4, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; High Realm, Seatongue) 2, Occult 3, Presence 4, Resistance 1, Sail 3, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Followers 3, Influence 4, Resources 5

Charms: Affinity Element Control, Benefaction, Element Infusion, Imprecation, Instill Obedience, Landscape Travel, Malediction, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Paralyze, Stoke the Flame, Tiny Damnation, Weather Control
Cost To Materialize: 38

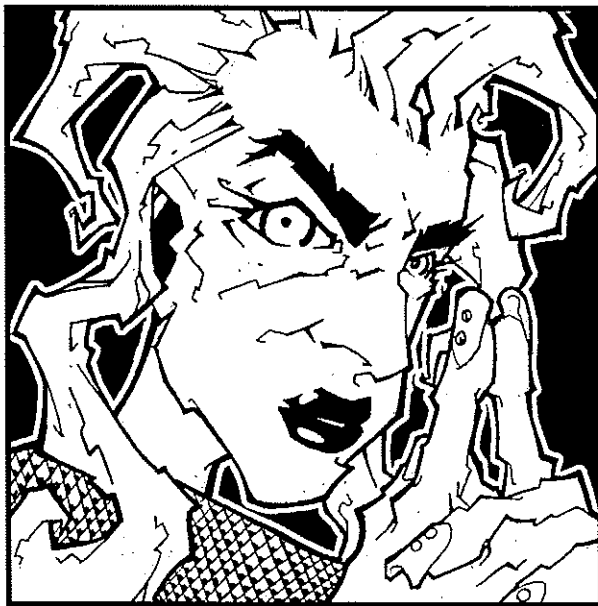
Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Bite: Speed 3 Accuracy 7 Damage 8L Defense 5

Claw: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 6L Defense 8

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 5L/8B (Tough hide, 3L/3B)



Willpower: 8 Health Levels: -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/
Incap
Essence: 3 Essence Pool: 76
Other Notes: None

THE ARCHIPELAGO OF THE EXILES

This archipelago lies 600 miles to the west of Fakharu's spire, shielded from astrology and scrying by highly placed individuals in Heaven who wish it to remain secret. It has existed as a haven for exiles for thousands of years, with a constant slow influx of new arrivals. There are many other islands beyond the ones mentioned here: However, the Island of Broken Masks is one of the largest islands, and the ones described below lie on the direct route between Fakharu's spire and the Island of Broken Masks, where Amarel is being held.

Generally speaking, few islanders know anything about those who dwell on the other islands: Those who come here are exiles or refugees and are more concerned with trying to hide or live undisturbed than in exploration or building alliances. The Island of Broken Masks is feared, as nobody who goes there ever leaves it — however, this means that few outside the island know precisely why it is so dangerous. Most contact between islands is in the form of raids, resulting in a general distrust of strangers. The human tribes or villages on these islands are generally made up of primitive, uneducated men and women who have never been exposed to civilizing influences. They may regard the Exalted as visiting gods — or as demons.

In either case, the natives' reactions may range from worship to assault, depending on their nature and on how the characters present themselves. The one certainty is that the arrival of the Exalted will be an unusual, once-in-a-lifetime event for the islanders. Many of these natives will never have

seen strangers from beyond the nearest islands before, let alone know anything of civilization or of the great nations to the East. Ships larger than fishing boats will be astonishing to them. Clothing other than loincloths or leather wraps will be regarded as divine luxury on some islands. Alcohol must surely be the very nectar of the gods and will quickly provoke innocent natives to staggering drunkenness.

The spirits who dwell on the islands will have more experience with visitors and with other lands and will probably be aware of what the Exalted are and what they are capable of. Since many of the spirits had to flee their homelands or were exiled under penalty of death, they will be duly suspicious of strangers.

THE ISLAND OF BLASPHEMOUS PRAYER

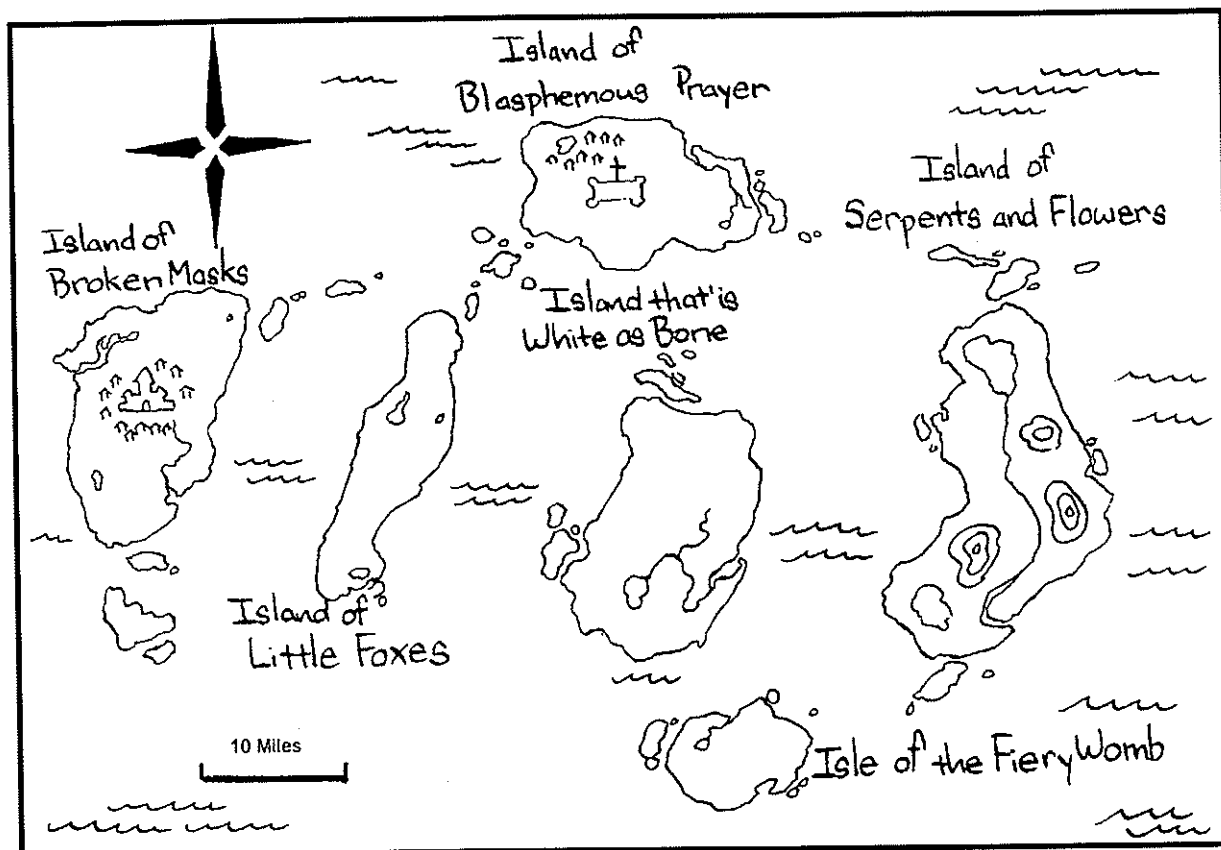
GEOGRAPHY AND SITUATION

This island is one of the first that characters sailing westward can encounter; it seems a last refuge of civilization, but it hides an ancient, dark secret. The island supports two main groups of people: a small monastery containing 40 Immaculates and a tiny village of farmers and herders, who supply the monastery's needs. The monastery was founded 200 years ago by an exploring group of Immaculates — mostly followers of Hesiesh, Reciter of Loud Hymns and Efficacious Prayers — who hoped to bring proper practices and teaching to the savages who inhabited this archipelago. Unfortunately, the Immaculates have never managed to expand further than this island. This is not merely because of their lack of resources or any failure in enthusiasm, but because they accidentally built their monastery over the prison of a demonic child, Akiashi, who has taken pleasure from that day to this one in corrupting the Immaculates here and leading them into decadence.

The humble folk of the village are the descendants of a primitive tribe that was living on the island when the Immaculates arrived, sustaining itself on the date-palms and thin native goats. The natives were taught agriculture, proper behavior, religion, reading and writing and other important details of civilization. In gratitude, they still provide food and drink for the Immaculates, and — from time to time — a young man or woman from the village joins the order. Occasionally, one of the village folk vanishes, leaving no trace behind. When this happens, it is generally assumed that raiders from another island must have kidnapped the victim. In fact, the missing villagers have been taken for slavery and sacrifice by those Immaculates corrupted by the demon. The three elders of the village are Komish, the oldest inhabitant and a farmer, Shaon, the village healer and wife to Komish, and Mihka, the most skilled of the goatherds.

Only one of the original founders of the mission still remains alive — Marahd, once of House Sesus, a Dragon-Blood with the Elemental Aspect of Fire, who flung himself into this expedition in an attempt to escape the orgies of his house. Sadly, he was Akiashi's first victim and now suffers





from a split personality; while the sun is above the horizon, he is a truly believing Immaculate, virtuous and upright, unaware of his other nature, but by night, he worships Akiashi, performing blood sacrifices and obscene ceremonies in the monastery cellars. Ten of the other 40 Immaculates (who are all human) have been initiated into Akiashi's cult. These corrupted Immaculates are all aware of Marahd's condition and hide their doings from him by day.

The remaining Immaculates are honest, sincere and virtuous; the nightmares that visit them each night are considered to be demonic temptations — as, indeed, they are — and are ignored as far as possible. While a few of the uncorrupted Immaculates suspect that something is wrong or that there is some evil on the island, they have yet to discover where or what it is. Should they find any evidence of Marahd's evil or Akiashi's existence, the demon and her minions will attempt to corrupt them too — and, if that fails, kill them lingeringly.

Akiashi herself appears as a teenage girl, with long pale hair and white eyes, and is always accompanied by the scent of lilies. She is the child of two demons of the second circle who loved each other; for this crime against their duties and responsibilities, they were both slain, and their child was washed in their blood before being buried alive in a crypt on this island. Akiashi lay imprisoned for 700 years before the Immaculates arrived and broke the seal on her sarcophagus, and she still bears a grudge that they didn't arrive earlier. While she eventually wants to expand her influence off this

island, she is aware of the fate of her parents and fears possible retribution if she comes to the attention of more powerful demons. For the moment, therefore, she practices the arts of manipulation, seduction and torture. She knows the truth about the Island of Broken Masks and will never go there, as she doesn't want to risk losing her beauty.

The island itself is quite small: The monastery is a small, clay-brick building on an older stone foundation, situated at the center of the island and nestled among a few low hills, and the village is to the north. The villagers themselves pasture their goats all around the island, moving them from place to place to take advantage of the vegetation. The most convenient bay for landing a ship is to the north, next to the village; while the villagers have fishing boats, these are small weak things, barely capable of reaching the closest islands. The ship on which the Immaculates first arrived, centuries ago, was long since dismantled to provide building timber for the monastery. The Immaculates themselves were delighted to discover the foundation of an older building, which they were able to use for the monastery's base. Little did they realize that they were raising their home upon a demon's prison.

The Immaculates and villagers will be glad to give any reasonable help to the characters, if they land here by day. The island's inhabitants can pass on general information about the nearby isles. While they do not know about the law of imperfection that reigns on the Island of Broken Masks, they do know that it is a dangerous place and will warn that none that go there

ever return. Sesus, in particular, will be eager for news of his homeland and house. While he knows of the disappearance of the Empress, more specific news is hard to come by so far out in the Threshold. If the characters demonstrate any understanding of Dynastic politics, he will insist that they stay at least a short while to rest and share information. Should he discover that the characters are Anathema, he will be properly shocked but will view his meeting with them as divinely sent opportunity to guide them to righteousness. In fact, it has been some years since he's had the opportunity to truly extend himself and give a proper sermon to unbelievers — the characters will have to endure the benefit of this accumulated zeal. He is generally tolerant, however, and will not condemn them outright, especially if they have presented themselves ethically and sensibly. He will merely try to make them realize their corrupt and blasphemous nature and exhort them to devote themselves to religion and righteousness.

Of course, if the characters are still there at night, they will become the targets of the corrupted Immaculates. These evil souls will attempt to kidnap one or more of the Exalted for sacrifice or perversion, if they think the characters are weak or unsuspecting, and will then claim in the morning that the missing Exalted must have left or have been carried off by emissaries from another island. Should the corrupt Immaculates decide that the characters are too strong, they will content themselves with kidnaping a young maiden from the village and bringing her down to the cellars that night.

LOCAL CHARACTERS

MARAH, DRAGON-BLOODED IMMACULATE

Description: Marahd was a righteous, upright Immaculate — and during the day, he still is.

Marahd still has no suspicion of the evil that taints the island or of his own actions at night, thinking that he is merely a heavy sleeper and that enemies from other islands raid frequently. This is partly due to his dark side taking care to hide the evidence of such actions and partly a subconscious refusal to admit that he could do anything so depraved. Marahd has spent his life trying to avoid and deny the orgiastic lifestyle of House Sesus in himself, and even now, he does not wish to consider that such a thing could be possible in him. It would take eyewitness testimony from other Immaculates whom he trusted to convince him that anything is wrong with him or physical evidence that could not be explained in any other way. Since he will have no particular reason to automatically trust the characters, their statements won't necessarily be proof of his split personality. Marahd wears a simple robe of white homespun cloth and goes barefoot. His old sword and bow (still in good condition) hang on the wall in his quarters. His dark hair is cut short, and he has pale eyes and a calm, friendly voice. During the day, he is clearly an honest and devout man and will be glad to give the characters any help that he can — especially if they explain their mission as one of rescue.

By night, Marahd's eyes acquire a crueler edge, and his voice takes on a subtle, mocking note. If he should be conversing with characters, he will attempt to undermine their faith and question their ethics under the guise of philosophical debate. He will openly gloat over captives if alone with them, delighting in his power and will curse his day self as a self-limiting fool who wilfully castrates his own power. However, Marahd is intelligent and can play the virtuous Immaculate if necessary. The characters will be extremely tempting to him, as this side of Marahd has grown bored with the victims that the island offers. Should he discover that they are Anathema, he will try to persuade them to join him in service to Akiashi, promising them chaos, destruction and satisfaction of their wildest desires.

Aspect: Fire

Nature: Architect

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

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Calligraphy) 1, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 2, Melee 4 (Swords +2), Performance 2, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Socialize 3 (Religious Doctrine +2), Stealth 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Followers 2, Influence 2, Resources 2

Charms: As an Immaculate, Marahd has specialized in meditative Charms, though he has a few military Charms as well from his youth. For 1 mote of Essence, Marahd can create a ball of flame that floats directly above his right hand for 10 minutes — this can be used as an aid in meditation or to light a dark area. By spending 2 motes of Essence, he can cause both hands to burn for the rest of the scene. If he strikes with an unarmed attack or wrestles with a character, his opponent takes 3L damage every turn. This ability can also be used (and is) for torture in his midnight rites. Finally, with a roll of his Dexterity + Archery Marahd can throw bolts of fire, with a range in yards equal to 10 times his Essence. For every 3 motes he spends, the bolt does lethal damage equal to his Essence. Extra successes add to the damage of this attack as normal. Marahd cannot spend more motes powering this attack than (his Stamina x 3).

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Fist: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5

Longsword: Speed 8 Accuracy 7 Damage 7L Defense 7

Long Bow: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L

Dodge Pool: 9/5 Soak: 1L/3B

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

Incap

Essence: 3 (Fire Aspected)

Personal Essence: 10 **Peripheral Essence:** 26

Other Notes: None



AKIANSHI, DEMON CHILD

Description: Akiashi is a very young demon, as demons go, and is unknown to sorcerers or lorebooks — when her parents were slain, their names were removed from the records of the demonic courts, and her own name was never entered. Though her birth and the ritual of being washed in her parents' blood have made her a demon of the second circle, no sorcerer has ever spoken her name in summoning, and no other demons have taught her the ways of demonic protocol. The voices of her parents whispered to her as their blood slowly dried on her skin, teaching her the skills of corruption and seduction. She thirsts to walk the world by night and to frequent the towers of sorcerers, and she dreams of seducing the Abyssal Exalted, seeing them as fit mates for her — Marahd has told her the legends of the Anathema, and she likes what she has heard.

In the meantime, however, she lurks on this small island, being unsure whether or not the crimes of her parents will keep her an exile from demonic society. She rationalizes it to herself that she is merely practicing her skills, but she despises all the Immaculates present — both those who have yielded to her corruption, as weaklings, and those who are still virtuous, as fools. If she could succeed in mastering or corrupting an outsider, particularly an Exalted, she might feel confident enough to venture beyond the archipelago. As soon as she learns of the arrival of the characters, she will make plans to corrupt or sacrifice one of them that night.

Akiashi appears as a young maiden with pale hair and eyes, accompanied by the scent of lilies. Her fingernails are long black claws, and she hides her hands behind her back when speaking to strangers. She speaks blasphemies and seduction in a child's innocent voice. A virgin's blood on black stones will appease her for as long as it takes for her to lick the blood away. She may only be truly slain by having her head struck from her shoulders with a weapon that has been dipped in the blood of a loving married couple.

Nature: Child

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Craft (Torture) 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Linguistics 1 (Native: Old Realm; High Realm), Lore 2, Occult 2, Presence 2, Resistance 4, Seduction 3, Stealth 3

Backgrounds: Followers 3, Influence 2

Charms: Confusion, Dreambane, Dreamspeak, Essence Bite, Harrow the Mind, Materialize, Shapechange, Stoke the Flame, Sustenance, Tiny Damnation, Tiny Gift

Cost to Materialize: 70

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Claw: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 4B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 3B Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 6 Soak: 4L/5B (Tough Skin, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 5 Essence Pool: 96

Other Notes: None

THE ISLAND OF LITTLE FOXES

GEOGRAPHY AND SITUATION

The seas are always calm around this island — misleadingly so, for an Undertow haunts the deeper waters here and is always eager to drag down any swimmers who should dare the waves. The island itself is large but harsh and arid: The trees are dry and twisted, and the surest source of water is the wide-leaved, grayish succulent plants that grow in clumps in the shadows of hillocks. Small hares and tiny rodents roam the dusty plains, hunted by ferocious green-furred foxes that have no fear of sleeping humans.

A tribe ruled by women lives here: Descent is reckoned through the mother's line, and women are customarily warriors, armed with stone knives, while the men tend the children and perform the domestic tasks. The men are not generally despised as such, but they are not considered to have a woman's strength or intelligence and have no legal rights. However, it is considered shameful conduct for a woman to strike a man unnecessarily or to kill him without good reason, as she is of the stronger sex. Marriage does not necessarily imply a monogamous relationship, though it can do so: It is more a partnership between the two parties involved and a vow of affection. While a man of the tribe may become a warrior if he proves himself — by defeating three women in duels consecutively — he is then considered an honorary woman and must marry one of the "domestic" men, if he desires a spouse. All warriors must spend a night alone on the plains, during which they must stalk and kill seven foxes and braid a belt of green fur from the beasts' tails. The tribe travels around the island, living in tents woven from the dried leaves of the succulent plants.

The oldest men lead the tribe in worship of the Great Devourer of the Sea (the Undertow, as the tribe perceives it). A virgin sacrifice must be offered to the Great Devourer once every year, cast bound into the deep waters at a time prescribed by the stars above: This offering is preferably a kidnaped outsider, but if none are available, then it is a member of the tribe. Since it is far easier for a woman to prove her lack of virginity than a man, many of the tribe's youths do their best to be caught in flagrante delicto, in order to make it clear that they are ineligible. The three oldest men in the village cast ritual lots to determine the sacrifice from among the potential candidates, and it frequently happens that the choice falls on their potential rivals or the children of those rivals.

From time to time, the tribe raids other islands or is raided by them: It has developed certain customs to take this into account. If a female outsider defeats one of the tribe's warriors but leaves her alive, then the tribe must either adopt the outsider as one of their own or must kill her. If a male outsider defeats one of the tribe's warriors, then the warrior is obliged to marry him, in order to breed strong children for the tribe. (While a full marriage ceremony under the stars and permanent cohabitation is preferred, a short-term relationship and the conception of a single child is technically acceptable.)

Any visitors to the tribe's island are traditionally greeted with an offer of ceremonial single combat to first serious wound between champions — this challenge can be refused, but if it is accepted, then the above tribal laws apply to the result. If the tribal warrior wins in the ceremonial fight, then she will spare her opponent, and neither side receives any obligation. If the fight is refused, the tribe will not object vocally, but will suspect the visitors of cowardice. It is a long-held item of belief among the warriors of the tribe that if they truly perfect their fighting skills, the stars in the heavens will take mortal form and come down to defeat them in battle and sire mighty daughters upon them.

The current leader of the tribe is named Bshenai, a battle-scarred veteran whose plaited belt is white with age. Her husband is Varen: He is also the oldest man in the tribe, and his position as high priest only adds to her status — she won him in single combat in a duel with the previous leader. Bshenai has three children, two daughters and a son; the daughters were both born from men of the tribe, at her own choice, but the son, Btao, was sired by a warrior from the Island that is White as Bone. While she should theoretically value him as brood stock, she personally detests him as a reminder of her defeat, and other warriors of the tribe follow her lead in despising him. Bshenai sees no reason not to negotiate with powerful outsiders, particularly if they will sire strong children for the tribe, but she will not tolerate being mocked. Should this happen, or should characters attack the tribe wholesale, she will lead the tribe in an intelligent defense: The natives will wage guerilla war on characters, using their intimate knowledge of the island to good advantage, and they will attempt to burn the characters' ship.

Should the characters choose to stop at this island, they will find that the annual sacrifice is due on the next day and that the lot (with some sleight-of-hand from Varen) will fall upon Btao. Attempts to interfere with this sacrifice will anger the tribe and will also rouse the attention of the Undertow, who is accustomed to questioning victims while they drown. The Undertow himself was expelled from a court long ago for drowning three human children who had just pleased the ruler of the court with a donation of amber. The elemental's name is Hidden Opening, and he finds his current situation moderately agreeable.

While he knows nothing about Fakharu's lover (although he will be interested to learn about that situation), Hidden Opening knows of the Island of Broken Masks, and he knows of the rose chamber that its king keeps secret. He will gladly share this knowledge with characters, in return for a secret of importance to them.

LOCAL CHARACTERS

HIDDEN OPENING, UNDERTOW

Description: Hidden Opening views everything mildly; he feels mild satisfaction with his current position, mild annoyance at the type of sacrifices he receives and mild interest in visitors. The arrival of the Exalted will be the most interesting thing that has happened in decades, and the Undertow would be glad to spend weeks talking to them. Since he is unlikely to have this opportunity, he will ask them to visit again in the future. He is willing to trade secrets and knows the basic nature of all the other islands, as well as the King's secret on the Island of Broken Masks. Hidden Opening speaks in a low, whispering tone that sounds like wave-foam lapping at the shore. While he prowls the shores of the island from time to time, he is most usually found in a deep cave near the deep waters where the sacrifices are thrown, drifting through the bones and corpses, longing for more secrets.

One thing that Hidden Opening would appreciate is a better class of sacrifice — as far as he is concerned, maidens and youths are uninteresting and have no worthwhile secrets, and virginity is a quality about which he couldn't care less. He'd far rather have experienced warriors or wise elders, who could provide intelligent conversation and who would have many, many more secrets to share with him. Should this desire be made plain to the tribe, it would cause general uproar, as the younger members of the tribe turn against their elders, who will be accused of having known but kept silent.

Nature: Explorer

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

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

Abilities: Bureaucracy 4, Dodge 5, Linguistics 5 (Native: Old Realm; Firetongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue), Lore 5, Martial Arts 3, Occult 5, Socialize 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 3

Charms: Affinity Element Control, Confusion, Dematerialize, Harrow the Mind, Hoodwink, Natural Prognostication

Elemental Powers: Aegis, Element's Domain, Enshroud, Mobility (Water)

Cost To Dematerialize: 30

Base Initiative: 4



Attack:

Touch: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 1B Defense 3
 Dodge Pool: 6 Soak: 6L/7B (Aegis and scales, 6L/6B)
 Willpower: 7 Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/ Incap
 Essence: 2 Essence Pool: 63
 Other Notes: None

BSHENAI, TRIBAL LEADER

Description: Bshenai won her position through blood and sweat and has little tolerance for those who would do otherwise. She rules the island with a grip of iron, and where her personal force does not suffice to keep her warriors in line, she uses the threat of having their daughters chosen for sacrifice. While she is not cruel by nature, Bshenai has no tolerance for the weakness of others and sees dreaming as a waste of time. Her daughters and husband are dear to her, but her son, Btao, is a sad disappointment to her and a perpetual reminder that she was defeated in battle. Bshenai has a hoarse voice, roughened by battle cries, and her hair is as white as her fox-pelt belt, but she is still strong and muscular and moves with calm self-confidence.

Bshenai has no grandiose schemes to expand the tribe's influence outside the island — all that she hopes for is to continue to hold it securely against other raiding tribes and to breed strong daughters who will follow in her footsteps. She is more practical in her aspirations than many of her warriors, who have been suggesting that the tribe should expand and conquer the nearby islands. This task would be nearly impossible, as all the nearest islands are as strong as the Island of Little Foxes. Bshenai is thus faced with having to control her expansionist followers, while simultaneously maintaining her position as a courageous warleader. While her enemies in the tribe are still waiting for an opportunity to move against her, it can only be a matter of time until they do. She is hoping for advice from the Great Devourer of the Sea (the Undertow) and intends to sacrifice Btao to obtain the god's favor.

Nature: Architect

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 3, Medicine 2, Melee 3, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Followers

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Fist: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6
 Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 3B Defense 5
 Stone Knife: Speed 9 Accuracy 6 Damage 3L Defense 5
 Dodge Pool: 5/2 Soak: 0L/4B

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

Essence: 1

Other Notes: None

BTAO, UNFORTUNATE SON

Description: Btao is a pleasant young teenager who truly wishes that his mother would love him as she loves his sisters. He tries in every way to behave like a proper young man of the tribe, with proper modesty and self-effacement, and has managed to learn about herbs and bonesetting from the tribal healer, but it has not gained him any respect from his family. Btao is a dreamer and listens eagerly to stories of islands elsewhere in the archipelago or of distant countries far beyond these seas — he has even heard of lands where men can hold power in their own right, a concept that he finds unnatural, if interesting. Btao is a handsome boy, with flowing black hair and large dark eyes, though he does not have the training as a warrior — or the muscles — that the women of the island have.

Btao is one of the people on the island most likely to approach the Exalted out of genuine curiosity and will be willing to talk to them without any pressure or bribes, though any information he gives them will be filtered through his own prejudices. Even if he is saved from sacrifice, Btao will still be an object of contempt to most of the tribe. However, he is one of the few on the island who is young and malleable enough to be able to accept other cultures or other ways. If he learns that his mother was behind the sacrifice (Bshenai will make a convincing show of controlled grief) or truly despairs of winning her affection, he will beg the characters to take him with them and will vow eternal loyalty to them. He is likely to fixate on a powerful-appearing female character in particular, who he will treat as a substitute mother.

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Endurance 2, Medicine 3, Presence 1, Resistance 2, Socialize 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: None

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Fist: Speed 4 Accuracy 4 Damage 2B Defense 4
 Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 3 Damage 2B Defense 3
 Dodge Pool: 4/2 Soak: 0L/3B
 Willpower: 6 Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap
 Essence: 1
 Other Notes: None

THE ISLE OF SERPENTS AND FLOWERS

GEOGRAPHY AND SITUATION

Beautiful flowers run like flame across this island, like a cascade of demonic jewels, weaving through the dark grass in chains of color. Five hills of bare earth stand clear of the blossoms, dotted with the shelters of the few humans who inhabit this island. Snakes infest the flowery lowlands, their bodies as brightly colored as the petals, but leave the dry hills alone. A single river cuts across the center of the island, running from a spring on the highest hill in the north down to empty into the sea in the small bay in the south.

The serpents of the isle are ruled by a renegade Serpent-and-Egg, Sliding Mirror. She was cast out of her own court when a sorcerer compelled her to reveal the names of three spirits and then used that knowledge to slay them. For her part in the affair, unwilling as it was, Sliding Mirror was expelled from the court, and her egg was branded with the characters "spirit-slayer." She gathered the spirits of other serpents around her and led them to this island, where they hunt those humans who dare disturb the flowers. Two sirens play in the sea around the Island, Harusha and Meshime, both of whom fled the jealousy of a Storm Mother 50 years ago and now desire only to live in peace and take occasional human prey.

There are barely 200 humans on the island; some were born here, and others are inadvertent guests. From time to

time, ships are wrecked here, lured in by the sirens, or land in the bay, thinking that so beautiful an island must be safe. When this happens, the sirens rip planks from the hull of the ship and strand the sailors on the isle as victims of Sliding Mirror and her subjects. The humans strive to harvest vegetables, hunt rodents and fish — without being caught by the serpents that dwell among the flowers — and scrape a pitiful living on the dry hills. Their shelters are made from the remains of their ships or from the occasional harvested tree (though it is rare for a tree to be successfully cut down without at least one victim dying at the fangs of the snakes). The people's clothes are rags, and they live and die in the vain hope of rescue from a passing ship. The children grow up on dreams of escape and signal frantically to any passing ships. Alas, this often results in the travelers from those ships being trapped themselves.... Tribal society is savage and vicious, with the most powerful on each of the five hills ruling through brute strength.

The snakes curl lazily among the flowers, more brightly colored than any of them, but refrain from trespassing on the hills; it is Sliding Mirror's will that if the humans know their boundaries (as that long-distant sorcerer did not) then they may live in peace. At night, the serpents are often — though not always — dormant, and when rainstorms come, they curl up beneath the thickest bushes to hide from the darkness and falling water. At these times,



the humans can come down from their hills to risk collecting food. Sliding Mirror herself waits at the source of the river, curled around her egg and guarded by nine viper spirits as red as rubies. From time to time, the sirens swim up the river from the sea to report to her, and during those times, the sea is safe — but they are never there for long, as Sliding Mirror finds them tedious and inconsequential.

Should characters visit this island — possibly spurred on by the people they can see waving to them from the hills inland — their ship will be in immediate peril from the sirens if they venture inland and leave it unattended. If it is obviously a sorcerous craft, then the sirens will hesitate before attacking it. If only one person remains on board, then Harusha and Meshime will attempt to lure him to them as soon as other characters are out of earshot.

The nearest of the five hills to the bay holds 50 people atop it — 30 men, 15 women and 5 young children in rags and tatters whose gender is hidden by dust and dirt. They are led by Damith, a gray-haired woman who was once captain of a slave-trading vessel and who is now shipless and reduced to scrabbling for existence here. The people will beg the characters for transport from the island and warn them about the serpents and the sirens. While they do not know about Sliding Mirror, they do know that the serpents seem thickest near the mouth of the river, “as though guarding something.” If it looks as though the characters are going to leave them on the island, they will attack in a furious mob, desperate for a chance of escape.

The sirens will attempt to seduce and drown characters. If resisted vigorously and bribed or threatened, they will tell the characters about the island and about Sliding Mirror. The sirens are also aware that three sisters of theirs passed by a few days ago, carrying a sleeping woman with them. If the sirens describe the woman, it is obviously Fakhru's beloved. If the characters go to the mouth of the river and question Sliding Mirror, she will be amused enough to answer their questions — she has not had intellectual conversation in a while, and would be intrigued by news of other islands. However, she will not tolerate “her” humans being removed from the isle. She is aware, through methods of her own, that Fakhru's lover is now on the Isle of Broken Masks and will tell the characters this so that they may seek their own destruction there.

LOCAL CHARACTERS

SLIDING MIRROR, SERPENT-AND-EGG

Description: Sliding Mirror is weary of humans, of sorcerers and of anybody who would force her to take action against her will. All she wants to do is coil around her egg and meditate on the folly of the world — and on its inevitable destruction. This negative outlook results in her wanting more information about the world around her, to confirm her predictions of doom and to console her in her cynicism. The humans on the island are fools, in her

opinion, and unworthy of her attention. She considers the sirens as barely more intelligent and treats them as inferiors. (The sirens, for their part, consider her an undemanding ally who allows them to toy with the humans on the island and are quite content to remain here.)

The Serpent-and-Egg does acknowledge that Exalted deserve some respect and will greet them courteously, though with a constant air of boredom and depression. Presenting her with news of disasters or tragedies elsewhere will please her — as much as anything can please her — and will make her more willing to help the characters. She knows the nature of all the other islands in the archipelago and will provide the characters with enough information to venture further, in the sure hope that they will meet a tragic end by doing so. She does not wish to part with any of her collection of humans: If the characters threaten to remove them, she will threaten, in turn, to rouse the serpents of the island and cause them to invade the previously safe hills. Sliding Mirror would rather have the humans of the island dead than living elsewhere and achieving a happier destiny.

Nature: Critic

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Lore 5, Occult 4, Presence 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: None

Charms: Dematerialize, Foretell the Future, Landscape Travel, Memory Mirror, Natural Prognostication, Paralyze, Steal Sustenance, Stillness, Sustenance

Elemental Powers: None

Cost To Dematerialize: 48

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 1L Defense 1

Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 3L/4B (Scales, 2L/2B)

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

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 66

Other Notes: None

DAMITH, ISLAND LEADER AND SHIPWRECKED SLAVER

Description: Damith is desperate to leave this island. She has managed to keep her position of power through a combination of threats, violence and natural authority, but she knows that it's only a matter of time before someone kills her for her jacket and knife. Given the barren island and the sparse conditions, these possessions are currently invaluable. She was blown into the archipelago by a unseasonable storm and landed on the island when she saw the people waving from the hills, thinking that she could stock her hold with slaves for future trading cheaply. Unfortunately, the sirens sank her ship while she

was on the island, and she found herself stranded with her prospective prey. Since she had not yet declared her true intentions, she has managed to keep her identity as a slave-trader secret, and the three members of her crew still surviving support her story that she was a merchant trader.

Damith is prepared to make any sort of bargain with the characters, as long as they'll take her — and preferably her surviving men, too — with them when they leave the island. She will keep her word, too, as long as she is in the characters' company — she didn't rise to her captaincy by taking foolish chances with powerful magical beings. Should the characters seem to be sympathetic, ethical types, she'll pull out all the stops and deliver a tearful appeal for them to at least take the children off the island, hoping that such a demonstration of virtue will win her passage as well. If the characters clearly don't intend to take her when they leave, then she'll attempt to stow away on their ship or even lead an attempt to capture it. The rest of the humans on the hill will follow her in such an attempt: They're all desperate, although she's the most violent. She knows that the serpents protect something important at the mouth of the river and that the sirens go there at times, too. She knows nothing about the other islands in the archipelago and will swear loudly and vehemently that she wishes she'd never come anywhere near this gods-accursed place.

Nature: Bravo

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 3 (Business +2), Endurance 2 (Resisting Disease +2), Intimidation 3, Linguistics 3 (Native: Seatongue; Guild Cant, Low Realm, Riverspeak), Medicine 2, Melee 2, Occult 2, Presence 3 (Appearing Trustworthy +2), Resistance 2 (Resisting Disease +2), Sailing 4, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Fist: Speed 4 Accuracy 4 Damage 2B Defense 4

Kick: Speed 1 Accuracy 3 Damage 4B Defense 3

Knife: Speed 7 Accuracy 4 Damage 3L Defense 2

Dodge Pool: 3 Soak: 5L/8B (Reinforced buff jacket, 5L/6B, -2 mobility penalty)

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

Essence: 1

Other Notes: None

THE ISLE OF THE FIERY WOMB

GEOGRAPHY AND SITUATION

This tiny island rises into a high crater of white and black rock, which the sea beats against in vain. No humans live here; they could not survive the heat of the lava at the

center of the isle or the frequent anger of the two fire butterflies that play at its heart. These two elementals, who call themselves Ascending and Descending, delight in watching ships pass by. They frequently descend to try to set fire to the ships if anybody on deck is openly wearing gold.

Ascending and Descending left their court in the frozen North under sentence of execution after they destroyed a perfectly made gold statue — a gift from nearby miners to the local spirits. They still resent the order of execution, feeling that it was unjust. From time to time, one of them attempts to take a mortal lover from a nearby island, assuming human form to do so, but the other immediately kills the human before the relationship can be consummated.

Seagulls haunt the cliffs of this small island, streaking the obsidian and marble of the rock with their droppings. The sides of the island form a crater, and at the center boils a hot pool of lava. The fire butterflies play there, dancing through the smoke that rises from the bubbling liquid rock. Occasionally, they journey to the nearby islands, though they never go to the Isle of Broken Masks, as they do not wish to risk their beauty. The waters around the island are treacherous: There is no convenient bay to anchor a ship, and there are shallow rocks that can tear out the hull of most boats if the helmsman is not skilful. Should this happen, Ascending and Descending hover above the drowning sailors, laughing in bell-sweet tones and dancing in beautiful patterns as the humans die on the sharp rocks and drown in the undertow.

Ascending and Descending remember the recent passage of the sirens with Fakharu's beloved very well indeed. The three water elementals bore the sleeping human between them, swimming on the surface of the waves in the moonlight. While the fire butterflies could tolerate the presence of the sirens, they found Amarel's appearance profoundly offensive, as she was far more beautiful than they were. They descended on the sirens in fury but were easily driven off by the water elementals and forced to retreat to their island. It will take little more than a casual comment for the fire butterflies to tell this story, in chorus and in increasing tones of anger. Should the characters agree to find Amarel and spoil her beauty in some way, Ascending and Descending will allow any sorcerers present to harvest their smaller lower wings for the powder that coats them. Should this bargain be betrayed, the fire butterflies will hear of it at some point and will come to seek vengeance.

LOCAL CHARACTERS

ASCENDING AND DESCENDING

Description: These two fire butterflies claim that they always agree. The frequent occasions on which they disagree are quickly forgotten and denied by them — and will draw their wrath if anybody attempts to insist on the matter. They are constantly in motion, fluttering between perches or hovering and circling their target. If one of them decides to romantically approach a human, he will take human form to do so and will





be very physically demonstrative, attempting to drape himself over his object of affection and whispering suggestions into his victim's ear. The other butterfly will immediately become furious and will attack shortly afterward. Possible ways to handle such a situation without angering either butterfly to the point of murder include claiming celibacy due to religious reasons, claiming to be already married, proving to be far more powerful than the butterfly or declaring humbly that you are unworthy of the butterfly's attention. An attempt to evade the situation by saying the butterflies are too beautiful to choose between will cause both of them to become angry.

Ascending is always the first one to make a decision, to rush headfirst into a situation or to take an interest in an attractive mortal. He will approach the characters if they trespass on his island or if they should sail conveniently near it and will be curious to know precisely why they have come so far and what they are looking for. Mentioning Amarel's beauty will cause him to abruptly lose interest. He is avid for new experiences and would consider journeying on with the characters to one of the other islands and even helping them in their quest. However, he is arrogant, unreliable and incapable of keeping his temper for more than a few minutes, so he may not be a very useful ally.

Descending is apparently more placid, but he holds grudges far more bitterly than Ascending and takes offence very easily. Descending is quite content with their current island: If Ascending leaves it temporarily, perhaps due to a deal with the characters, Descending will follow and constantly beg his fellow elemental to return. The fire butterfly will whine, moan and complain, as well as assert that his elemental nature is superior to "human scum" and inflict his Tiny Damnation Charm on anybody who annoys him.

Nature: Hedonist (Ascending), Critic (Descending)

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Dodge 5, Endurance 1, Linguistics 1 (Native: Old Realm; Seatongue), Lore 3, Resistance 1, Socialize 2, Stealth 4, Survival 1

Backgrounds: None

Charms: Dematerialize, Element Touch, Hoodwink, Landscape Travel, Natural Prognostication (Ascending only), Stillness, Tiny Damnation (Descending only)

Elemental Powers: Coarse Skin, Mobility (Air), Rejuvenation

Cost To Dematerialize: 21

Base Initiative: 8

Attacks:

Touch: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 2L Defense 0

Dodge Pool: 10 Soak: 0L/1B

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

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 46

Other Notes: None

THE ISLAND THAT IS WHITE AS BONE

GEOGRAPHY AND SITUATION

This island shimmers like a patch of leprosy from a distance, its ivory tree-towers reaching like immaculate claws toward the sky. The sand is white and soft, scattered with seashells, and it offers an easy landing for boats. Small groups of pallid-leaved shrubs cluster around the three high trees at the center of the island, sheltering the small tribe of humans who live here and worship the Pale Ones.

This island is the haven of three depraved, cannibalistic Artisans — Erefan, Carenneme and Lassemasera. They were expelled from their own original court, far to the east, when they were found conspiring to slaughter the spirit of a silver birch so that they could craft its wood. Fleeing across the land and sea, they found shelter here in this archipelago, warping the three tallest trees of the island into living towers. Here they dwell, accepting the ignorant worship and service of the primitive tribe that inhabits the island.

The fisher-folk that live here regard it as taboo to harm any tree on the island and, in particular, the three White Lords (as they call them) at the center. From time to time, the natives sail or swim to neighboring islands, to cut down the trees there and bring the wood back for crafting. They also sometimes bring back living captives, who are sacrificed to the Pale Ones; the natives cut the throats of their prisoners and let the blood run out over the roots of the White Lords. The people here know little of the world, other than the closest islands, and their lives are full of petty rituals meant to propitiate the spirits all around them. Should they die serving the Pale Ones, they believe that they will be reborn as trees themselves. Many of the families believe that certain stunted shrubs on the island contain the spirits of their more famous ancestors, and they hang bleeding captured seagulls on them so that the blood may nourish their roots.

The three great trees are each so large that six men with their arms outstretched could not encompass a single trunk. Narrow passages lead inside them, through the living wood of the tree — barely wide enough for a human to slither through but comfortable enough for the slender Artisans. A spiral ramp at the center of each tree threads its way upward, with small window-slits in the white bark of the trunk at the top, decorated with samples of the Artisan's work. Erefan has the center tree, Carenneme the smaller one to the right, and Lassemasera the larger one to the left — they are jealous of their own trees and do not permit their brothers to trespass in them.

The ground of the island is otherwise parched and dry, barely holding enough moisture to sustain the other vegetation and keep the humans alive. As it is, the island's inhabitants have to set out dew-traps each night and containers of baked clay to save the water when it rains. The natives live off of freshly caught fish and seaweed and go naked save for loin-

cloths. Their only weapons are their fishing spears and nets, made from wood and leaf fibre taken from nearby islands. The leader of the tribe is Chizzu, a proud man who has grown old in the service of his masters and has led many war raids to bring back sacrifices of wood and blood.

The three Pale Ones have grown to expect deference from the mortals around them and have not seen any of the Exalted in 500 years. The elementals will underestimate the characters — and covet their ship. The Artisans will watch visitors from hiding, using their Charms, while the tribe offers the Exalts salted fish and fresh water. The water is poisoned with extracts of rare jellyfish, and the player of any character drinking a swallow or more of it must roll against his character's Stamina + Resistance, with a difficulty of 2 — should the roll fail, the character will fall unconscious and sleep for an hour. (Players of mortals must roll against a difficulty of 4, and their characters will sleep for six hours if the roll fails.) However, several of the tribe will be impressed by the godlike bearing and strange possessions of the characters. Should the characters display powers, sorcery or Charms, these half-dozen rebels will fall at the Exalted's feet and worship them, telling them about the Pale Ones and the poison.

If the Artisans' trees are threatened, particularly with fire, the spirits will reluctantly give details on the nearby islands. They will, if anything, underestimate the danger of landing elsewhere in the archipelago — anything to get rid of the characters! Bribes of wood and respectful dialogue, or a sorcerer's compelling, can procure a more unbiased account with a reasonable assessment of the dangers. The Pale Ones know nothing of Fakharu's princess; they do remember sirens swimming past the islands, "within the last moon" and traveling further into the archipelago.

LOCAL CHARACTERS

EREFAN, CARENNEME AND LASSEMASERA

Description: While all three Artisans have the same characteristics, they have very different personalities. They will act in unity against intruders, but should a truce be proposed, they each have different objectives. However, they will not betray each other: Time and exile have forged a strong link of affection between them. Should they seriously disagree about something, Erefan has the final say, as he is the strongest personality among the three. The Pale Ones all appear the same, tall and unkempt, with dirty skin and long pale hair: However, Erefan always wears several of his own crafted knives, Carenneme is constantly watching the reactions of others, and Lassemasera frequently works on some new carving, while only vaguely listening to conversations.

Erefan is obsessed with torturing all other wood elementals except his brothers, blaming them for his banishment, and would gladly ally himself to any sorcerer or Exalted who would give a solemn oath to slay a wood



Exalted

elemental once a year in his name. It doesn't matter to Erefan who the wood elemental might be or if such an elemental should be affiliated with his original court — the Artisan just wants to know that somewhere, somehow, one of his own kind is suffering and dying. He is blunt and straightforward in his speech, frequently pausing to curse the Grandfather Tree who rules the court that exiled him.

Carenneme is the least focused of the three Artisans. He was regarded in his original court as slightly perverted, as he enjoys the worship of humans almost as much as the joy of crafting. Were it not for him, the others would not make so many appearances to the local tribe — and would not be feared so greatly. He would be interested in more humans for "his" tribe, the better to pay him due honor. His own pieces of craft all show humans bowing, trees or forest-spirits, and his greatest grievance against those who exiled him is that he now has so small a group of human admirers. While Carenneme will be courteous toward Exalted, he will miss no opportunity to throw in snide comments or to suggest that, with their great powers, the Exalted should be able to manage without any assistance from him or his brothers.

Lassemasera is devoted to his craft and viewed the murder and usage of other wood elementals as a reasonable sacrifice for the sake of art. He sometimes makes his own brothers slightly nervous, as they wonder whether they might become his victims, should the supply of available wood run low. He has a charming personality, should he manage to lift his attention from his work, and his favored compliments are to tell people that they are as beautiful as various sorts of trees. Lassemasera will be eager for new sources of wood in any negotiation and will cast covetous eyes upon Fakharu's ship, should the characters be using that. However, he can be bought off easily enough with promises of a few trees from nearby islands — the more exotic, the better. Ultimately, most conversations bore him, and he will endeavor to end them as quickly as possible so that he can return to his crafting.

Nature: Architect (Erefan), Gallant (Carenneme), Visionary (Lassemasera)

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

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

Abilities: Brawl 3, Crafts 5, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Resistance 1, Stealth 3, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Resources 3

Charms: Affinity Element Control, Dematerialize, Landscape Travel, Natural Prognostication, Stillness

Elemental Powers: Aegis

Cost To Dematerialize: 28

Base Initiative: 7

Attacks:

Razor Finger Slash: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 2L Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 3L/4B (Aegis, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 48

Other Notes: None

CHIZZU, TRIBAL LEADER

Description: Chizzu has grown to a grizzled middle age in the service of the Pale Ones and has never viewed them as anything other than gods. He is quite sure that other islands have other gods but that such deities must obviously be less powerful than his own. Chizzu rules his own tribe justly and fairly, arbitrating fishing disputes and courageously leading each raid. His three wives all respect him as the most powerful man of the tribe and have secretly poisoned at least two of his rivals. He is calm in speech, stoic in appearance and bears several disfiguring scars that prove his courage in battle.

Chizzu will not be as shaken as some of the other tribesmen by the arrival of a sailing ship — after all, his own tribe has boats, so why should other tribes not have bigger boats? However, he will undergo a crisis of faith if the Exalted prove to be in every way superior to his own tribe — and especially if he is defeated in battle. Should this occur, he will be forced to weigh the immediate proximity of his own gods to the fact that the newcomers obviously have better gods. If the Artisans should be slain, he will immediately lead the entire tribe into a mass conversion to whatever gods the characters may claim to follow. The characters themselves are likely to be adored as demigods and offered the best that the tribe can provide, up to and including human sacrifices.

Nature: Leader

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Endurance 2 (Wilderness +3), Medicine 1, Melee 2 (Spear +1), Performance 1, Presence 1, Resistance 2, Socialize 1, Stealth 2, Survival 3 (Native Environment +1)

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 1, Followers 3

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Fist: Speed 4 Accuracy 4 Damage 3B Defense 4

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 3 Damage 5B Defense 3

Short Spear: Speed 7 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 4

Dodge Pool: 4/2 Soak: 3L/7B (Buff jacket, 3L/4B)

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

Essence: 1

Other Notes: None

THE ISLAND OF BROKEN MASKS

GEOGRAPHY AND SITUATION

This island is one of the largest in the archipelago and has enough cliffs and coves that a ship could land secretly by night and remain hidden from a cursory search. A white-walled city stands at its center, surrounded by orange and lemon trees, and scarlet silk banners flutter from its high towers. Sweet perfumes drift from the city, carried on the sea breezes to any ships sailing near the island, and the sound of song and music can be heard coming from the highest tower. At night, bright lights burn in the windows, and the noise of revelry can be heard as far away as the nearest islands. By day, humans work in the fields, gaudily and incongruously dressed in fine silks and velvets — and only those who come close to them can see the hideous scars upon their faces and the bitterness in their eyes. The spirits and humans that inhabit the city might seem to be normal enough city-dwellers, with their taverns, their duties and their affections: But they all have their private desires — and public mutilations. Many would kill to leave this island — and many have tried.

The king who rules here has set down only one law: None who are perfect may alight upon the shores of the island. All who dwell here must be marred in some way, whether in face or body or spirit. Beauty is a mask and a lie — and cannot be tolerated. He has thus named this place the “Island of Broken Masks,” to signify that those who dwell here must shatter perfection and destroy anything that is less than ugly. Any obviously unmarred visitors will be the targets of a mob, which will endeavor to drag them to the main square. There, they will be held prisoners and the Minister for Pardoned Sins summoned, so that they can be subjected to the due process of “justice.” Naturally, those who rule here are the ugliest of all and are acclaimed by their subjects as virtuous superiors who display their true selves without the “mask” of beauty. Little here is private: Most inhabitants of the island know the general nature of the ministers and the animosity that they bear to one another.

The King of the Island of Broken Masks has no known name, though his subjects refer to him as Silver Robe. His token of authority in the kingdom is a silver scepter, which he bears at all times; his face is so scarred as to be an unrecognizable mass of lumpy, brutalized tissue, but his hair is long and snow-white, and he wears a simple robe of silver cloth. His hands have also been destroyed, the fingers pulped together until they resemble crude claws. He is a spirit of winter and has powers over cold and age. He is served by three ministers: the Minister for Unforeseen Events, the Minister for Understood Pains and the Minister for Pardoned Sins. Each of the three ministers works to increase his own power, and to minimize that of the other ministers.

The Minister for Unforeseen Events commands the military forces of the island and may at any time during battle give orders to all save the King. Her name is Seventh

Amethyst, and she is an earth-spirit. She was born last of seven; that a seventh child should be born was considered unpropitious, and she was exiled. Both her amethyst eyes have been removed and now sparkle in a pendant that she wears upon her chest. Her form is otherwise that of a beautiful maiden of 10 years, carved in black marble, with two gouged holes where her eyes should be. She wears a red silk sash about her waist, with seven daggers dependent from it.

The Minister for Understood Pains has control over the logistics of the island, and it is his duty to ensure that the humans have enough to eat and that the court is supplied with all due necessities and luxuries. A strict hierarchy of servants reports to him and keeps records of the distribution of all goods. He is called Starved Tiger and is a tiger-spirit: His name is never used to address him by any save the King or the other ministers, as he takes it as a personal insult. His mother died protecting him from Exalted hunters, and he was found hungrily gnawing on her corpse by other wood-spirits. They gave him his name and exiled him for the deed. His form is that of a great tiger but with long wounds graven into his hide along his ribs and spine, leaving massive ridged scars. He speaks with a high, sweet voice.

The Minister for Pardoned Sins has the enjoyable duty of ensuring that all obey the prime law of the island — that of imperfection. His name is Rejoices in Decay, and he is a spirit of rot and foulness, appearing as a man-sized hollow swarm of buzzing blowflies. While not actually a demon, he has a certain sympathy for many of their causes and is one of the most vicious inhabitants of the island. He travels constantly, day and night, slipping through the cracks of windows and under doors, lurking on roofs and in cellars, seeking any living being on the island who lacks the mandated ugliness. He is not actually an exile — when he heard of this place from a Water Child who escaped it, he tore her to pieces and then deliberately sought it out. His voice is low and mellow, like the tones of a bass flute, and he is accompanied by the smell of rotting meat.

Another who wields influence on the island is the King's concubine, Golden Swallow. She is a bird-spirit who has had all her feathers torn from her body and now prefers to appear only in human form: When she appears as a swallow, she is an ugly, featherless creature. As a human, she has eternal, raw, bleeding wounds across her brow and down her arms. When the King holds regal court, it amuses him to have her on the arm of his chair in her bald bird-form, a silver chain from her neck to his wrist. She is self-despising and curses herself for her current state; she came to this island after hearing rumors of it in order to mock those who lived here and was captured and mutilated by their law. It amused the King to give her status and position, and few of the servants in the city will dare disobey her orders. If only she had feathers again, she would gladly flee the island; but while she is featherless, she is trapped here by her own pride and takes a bitter pleasure in manipulating the ministers



against each other. The King knows of this and encourages her, to keep the ministers in check.

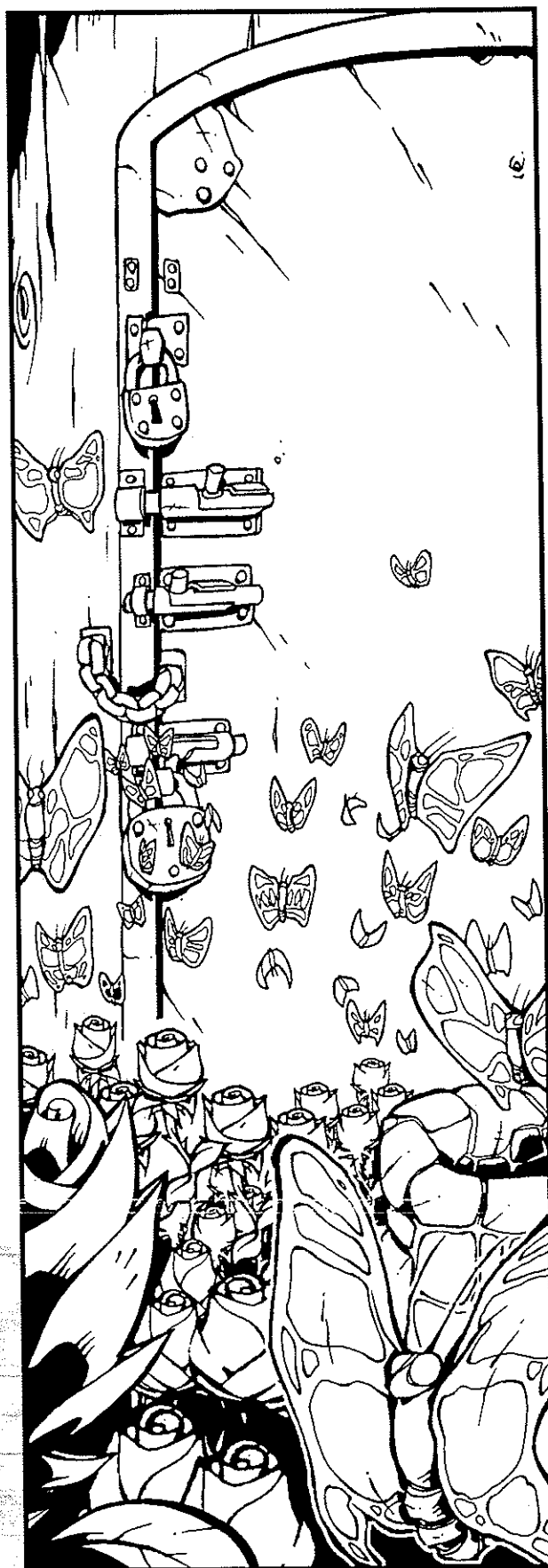
At the center of the city is the King's castle, built from rose-pink quartz, the walls stained with daily applications of blood. It is triangular, with a tower at each corner — one for each minister — and a tower at the center for the King. The ministers must change towers every lunar month, an occasion that provokes much confusion and conflict among their servants. The castle contains all the facilities that could reasonably be asked for by an island of exiled spirits: feasting halls, bedrooms, torture chambers, salles for weapon practice, dungeons and alchemical laboratories. Of course, just as no one here can be perfect, so, also, no thing can be perfect — all objects of beauty are scarred and mutilated in some way. Vases are cracked, jewels are marred and flawed, tapestries are ripped and torn, flowers are soiled and warped and the elegant mosaics that cover the floors and ceilings are dented and scarred.

On the ground floor of the King's tower is the Hall of Promiscuous Justice, where all trials for the crime of beauty take place. It is a lofty room, with high arched windows in all four walls, and contains seats for all the nobles of the city. The trial and sentencing of others, not to mention the infliction of suitable punishment, is one of the few things that makes life on this island endurable for most of the inhabitants. For this reason, trials and punishments are announced well in advance through the city. The office of chief mutilator, or Inflicter of Scars, is currently held by a fire elemental named Ornament, who frequently manifests in the form of a wizened old woman and who bitterly resents the loss of her left hand at the hands of the previous Inflicter. The position of Inflicter of Scars is frequently passed on to a new incumbent, as many new residents of the city — once they have recovered from their mutilations — attempt the quiet assassination of the person who actually gave them their scars.

Far beneath the Hall of Promiscuous Justice, at the end of a corridor warded with shadows and ice, in a cellar behind nine locks and seven bolts, lies the King's greatest secret — a rose garden. These roses are perhaps the only thing of beauty in the entire island. They flourish in the sorcerous light of an artificial sun, fed by wellsprings from deep beneath the island. A thousand enchanted butterflies dwell in the chamber, and each time one dies, a petal falls from one of the roses and changes into a butterfly to take its place. This room is the King's great solace — and an ultimate crime against the island's ethos. Should it be discovered, he would be doomed to die at the hands of his subjects.

CURRENT SITUATION

Amarel is a prisoner in the King's central tower, still in a sorcerous sleep. This spell is the work of the sirens, caused by an enchanted silver comb that Chamae placed in Amarel's hair. She was discovered the day before the characters arrived at the island and is currently the center of a power struggle between the three ministers.



The King has no compunction about damaging her beauty, as he finds her far less lovely than his roses. He has retained custody of her in order to prolong the quarrel between the ministers, in the hopes that they will all weaken themselves.

Amarel is held in the highest room of the tower, in a room of ivory whose windows are barred and whose door has 11 locks that answer to a key that the King wears at his waist. An earless wolf-spirit, Gray Wrath, with seven human subordinates (equal to Elite Troops), guards the corridor that leads to that door. Gray Wrath has been promised high rewards by each of the ministers for keeping Amarel safe from both the others, and therefore, he will not allow anybody to pass unless they can show permission from the King himself. Neither he nor his human minions will accept bribes.

A white hawk-spirit whose wings are stained with blood and rust, who was exiled from his people for the crime of loving a human, perches on the roof of the tower and watches for intruders. Should he see anybody on the roof or walls of the tower whom he does not recognize, he will give the alarm at once. However, he has an hour's rest from duty at sunset, which he spends drinking warm honey at a tavern in the city. Should he be approached then, he is willing to take a bribe of gemstones to let rescuers go by and will keep his word.

PERSONAL OPINIONS AND DESIRES

SILVER ROBE

Silver Robe's primary concerns are the safety of the island, his personal power and his rose garden. If he is faced with a plausible threat to the island as a whole, he will be prepared to release Amarel to the characters — but on the condition that they smuggle her out secretly, to prevent a popular uprising. Such a threat might consist of several other islands uniting to attack his own kingdom or a full-scale invasion by courts eager to reclaim and punish their exiles and will probably involve a lot of bluff from characters. Silver Robe will not believe that Fakharu would personally threaten the island for a mere human lover's sake and will scoff at any such suggestions. If the characters threaten to expose his roses, he will do anything to silence them: assassination, bribes or handing over Amarel.

SEVENTH AMETHYST

The Minister for Unforeseen Events is displeased that the three sirens dared to break the law of the island and outraged that they might have attracted the personal attention of a censor. She has recognized Amarel from a sculpture that she once saw long ago, and Fakharu's devotion to his human consort is widely known. Given her concern with military affairs, Seventh Amethyst would prefer to defuse an attack on the island before it can happen. She would personally like to get Amarel off the

island and out of the archipelago — but without the action being traced to her, as she cannot afford to be seen breaking the law. Given this, she will be prepared to deal with agents of Fakharu, should such appear, although she will not betray her own urgency. Seventh Amethyst would also like to have the three sirens in custody: either to send back with Amarel as a demonstration of the island's innocence or to publicly try on the island as scapegoats.

STARVED TIGER

The Minister for Understood Pains sees no reason why Amarel should escape the law. However, he is convinced that the whole matter is some sort of power play by Rejoices in Decay and is watching the other minister's agents closely, trying to deduce their goals. He is personally indifferent to Amarel and thinks that Seventh Amethyst is mistaken in her claims about Fakharu's interest in the woman. A very significant bribe (gems or magical items) or the assassination of Rejoices in Decay would persuade him to look the other way while Amarel is removed from the island. However, if he has not been warned and paid off, and if his agents uncover efforts by the characters to rescue Amarel, he will investigate efficiently and will be sure that they are working for Rejoices in Decay or Golden Swallow.


REJOICES IN DECAY

The Minister for Pardoned Sins intends to see that Amarel pays the full penalty for trespassing on the island while being beautiful, whether or not it was her choice to visit. While he accepts that Seventh Amethyst may be accurate about Amarel's identity as Fakharu's consort, he doesn't believe that the Censor would interfere in the archipelago's affairs. He overrates the archipelago's protection and underrates Fakharu's capabilities. Amarel's undoubted beauty has only increased his desire to see her mutilated, and neither bribery nor offers of power will convince him to assist in her escape. He claims that he also wants to see the three sirens suffering along with her, although he privately finds them less interesting and would have no real objection to their escape — for a price, of course. The arrival of the Exalted, should he become aware of their nature, will cause him to theorize that the whole affair is really a cunning plot by Fakharu to gain influence on the island. He will assume that Amarel is merely a pawn in the whole affair and, essentially, unimportant to the Censor. All actions by the characters will be interpreted through this lens of scheming and inaccurate paranoia.

GOLDEN SWALLOW

The King's concubine feels some pity for Amarel, given that the human was brought here against her will and would not object to helping her escape if it could be done secretly. Golden Swallow also sympathizes with the sirens, however, understanding their desire for power and revenge. This fact —





combined with the annoyance it causes the ministers, who are looking for the three sirens — has caused her to offer them sanctuary and hide them in a bay on the south coast of the island. An offer of genuine healing would cause her to cooperate fully with the characters: Failing that, the downfall of one of the ministers, especially Rejoices in Decay, could provoke her interest. Unless she is fleeing the island, Golden Swallow is not interested in deposing the King, as most of her power base comes from her connection with him.

THE SIRENS

The three sirens are growing desperate: They have lost their hostage, and they may also have lost their safe haven from Fakharu if Golden Swallow withdraws her protection and they are forced to flee the island. They do not have the power to kidnap Amarel again from where she is currently kept, and they have been identified by other citizens of the city as the ones responsible for bringing her to the island. As such, the agents of all three ministers are seeking the sirens. They are currently paranoid and would even cooperate with agents of Fakharu, in return for promises of mercy. Although they know that they are sought by Rejoices in Decay and his minions, they are making regular forays into the city in disguise, to keep abreast of current events.

Chamae wants to steal Amarel from the tower where she is being held and then attempt to continue the original plan. If the characters should rescue Amarel with help from the sirens, then Chamae will try to flee with Fakharu's consort and with her sisters, unless specifically bound by oath to refrain. Aekalle has begun to blame the other two sirens for everything that has gone wrong with the scheme and will happily agree to any plans that let her escape safely but leave the other two to punishment. Tenereshe will attempt to persuade characters that the whole thing is a plot of Sikunare's that the sirens were enchanted into following and that they are, therefore, innocent. However, the siren privately blames herself for not preventing the plan in the first place and has a self-destructive tendency that may lead her to unconsciously betray plans or to fail at crucial moments.

POSSIBLE TACTICS

The characters may attempt to negotiate with the residents of the Island of Broken Masks, to steal Amarel away — or to simply fight their way through the assembled spirits to rescue the princess. Each of these approaches is suited to different styles of play and different character strengths. A group of Eclipse Caste Exalted is unlikely to have much success with a frontal attack, while equally Zenith Caste Solar Exalted will probably not wish to attempt a night kidnapping.

If the characters wish to negotiate publicly for Amarel's return, then they will be refused publicly — neither the King nor the ministers can afford to make an open exception to the law. The Exalted will also attract the anger of the common inhabitants, should the characters be obviously unscarred. However, they will then receive private messages from Golden

Swallow — and probably from Seventh Amethyst and Starved Tiger as well (unless their public appeal for Amarel's return would obviously have alienated those ministers) — offering terms for Amarel. It will be up to the characters to choose who to negotiate with and what sort of deal to take — though they should be aware of the possibility of betrayal.

Should the characters land on the island and make enquiries quietly, then they will quickly be able to gain full information about Amarel's current location, her guards and the fact that the three sirens have escaped. Some sort of real or feigned disfigurement is advised, should they wish to be inconspicuous. The characters may choose to make a private approach to one of the ministers, to Golden Swallow or to the King himself. Depending on the secrecy with which this is done and the inducements that they offer, the characters may be able to come to a speedy arrangement. Naturally, some fighting and stealth may still be required. Even if the dignitary who has been blackmailed or bribed into acquiescence can let the characters reach Amarel's room, there will still be servitors and spies of the other ministers to be disposed of, sentries to be silenced and so on.

The characters may wish to operate stealthily and remove Amarel from her prison clandestinely. To do so, they will need to find out where she is being held — which will probably involve some interaction with inhabitants of the island — and may also want to investigate the defenses of her prison before putting their plan into operation. The Exalts will also need some sort of plan for escape, as any discovery of Amarel's disappearance will cause agents of all three ministers to pursue, along with the castle guard. Characters might wish to leave clues incriminating one of the notables of the island or to lay a false trail away — perhaps with the help of the sirens. The characters may even choose to hide on the island while the searchers check the nearest isles and the local sea, though Rejoices in Decay and his minions make this a dangerous procedure.

LOCAL CHARACTERS

SILVER ROBE

Description: There was a time when Silver Robe went by another name and walked the steppes amid the winter winds, bringing the snow and ice behind him. His face was beautiful then, and his hands were as delicate and fragile as the frost that he loved. All of that ended on the day when he was to bring the first snow of winter, and he discovered a single late rose still blooming on a rosebush. He could not bring himself to harm it, and so, he held back the snow until the last petal had fallen. When the higher powers discovered his action, he was sentenced to exile in the farthest North, where the Fair Folk tore his face and hands until they were nothing but a mass of scars.

Silver Robe abandoned his post and made his way southward until he came to the archipelago 500 years ago and swiftly ascended to the throne of the Island of Broken



Masks, slaying the previous queen on the eve of the winter solstice. He rules with a cold-blooded even hand, enforcing the law uniformly and disliking all three ministers equally. When dealing with ambassadors from other islands — or even from beyond the archipelago — he speaks with a gentle, dark voice that belies his horribly scarred face and constantly uses weather-related similes. Silver Robe never outwardly loses his temper: However, he grows more and more coldly dangerous if he is insulted or angered and freezes small things that he touches.

He began to grow his enchanted roses shortly after becoming King, despising the weakness for beauty that cost him his position but unable to resist. Few in the castle know that the cellar even exists, and none of those few know what it is that their king keeps there — they assume that it is a private torture chamber or something of that sort. He keeps Golden Swallow as an obvious indulgence, to prevent the ministers or his other servitors from wondering about his private pursuits and because her manipulation of the ministers is useful. He has no particular feelings for her, besides a dry amusement at her actions.

Nature: Hedonist

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

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 3
Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 4, Linguistics 2 (Native: Old Realm; Seatongue, Skytongue), Lore 3, Medicine 1, Occult 4, Presence 5, Resistance 2, Socialize 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Followers 4, Resources 4

Charms: Capture, Confusion, Dreamscape, Geas, Instill Obedience, Lend Authority, Malediction, Materialize, Memory Sponge, Steal Sustenance, Weather Control

Cost To Materialize: 30

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 6L Defense 8

Scepter: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 8L Defense 8

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 5L/8B (Tough hide, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 4 Essence Pool: 88

Other Notes: None

SEVENTH AMETHYST

Description: The Minister for Unforeseen Events is a patient, calm and utterly reliable spirit — the King knows that she can be trusted with the defense of the island, and her enemies know that her vows of revenge will be carried out. She is as placid and precise as the marble that forms her body, and her voice echoes like the wind in underground caverns. However, she dislikes inactivity and loathes other earth elementals, finding them a constant reminder of how she was exiled at birth. Seventh Amethyst is constantly in motion, striding smoothly through the corridors of the castle, and it can be hard, at times, for her subordinates to find her to make their reports. She has never considered this particularly important, as she believes most of the islanders to be incompetent, in any case. While she respects the King, she has nothing but contempt for Rejoices in Decay and dislikes Starved Tiger, thinking him an incompetent cannibal. (A competent one wouldn't have been caught.)

As minister in charge of the defense of the island, Seventh Amethyst regularly patrols the walls and checks with the sentries. She distrusts the junior officers who are supposed to bring her reports — not only does she think they're incompetent, she is convinced that they are intriguing against her. However, her placid exterior hides her paranoid doubts, and there are few who would believe quite how suspicious she is or how many quiet assassinations among the military were a result of her personal



orders. If it were not for her skill in tactics and the fact that few other islands could mount more than a derisory attack against the Island of Broken Masks, she might have severe problems as a result of her constant removal of competent fighters. However, her 600 years as minister have given her an authority that few dare to question.

Nature: Survivor

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

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

Abilities: Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Lore 4, Martial Arts 2, Presence 2, Stealth 3, Tactics 4, Torture 3

Backgrounds: Backing 4, Followers 5, Resources 2

Charms: Affinity Element Control, Camouflage, Dematerialize, Landscape Travel, Memory Mirror, Paralyze, Steal Sustenance, Stillness

Elemental Powers: Improved Aegis, Rejuvenation

Cost To Dematerialize: 45

Base Initiative: 7

Attacks:

Fist: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L Defense 5

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 3L Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 7L/9B (Improved Aegis, 6L/6B)

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

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 92

Other Notes: None

STARVED TIGER

Description: The Minister for Understood Pains still resents the order of exile which forced him from his home and hates the wood-spirits who refused to accept him — but most of all, he hates the Exalted, who slew his mother and who would have killed him as well. Should any of them come within his reach, he would take great pleasure in making them suffer by any and all means possible, whether or not they had anything to do with his mother's death. As matters stand, he is an efficient quartermaster for the city and has held his post for 700 years with only three complaints.

Starved Tiger is widely known among his subordinates, and the rest of the island, as being fair to those who serve him, evenhanded in his treatment of disputes and not wantonly vicious. However, by the same argument, he is relentless to those who may betray him and prefers to tear them to pieces personally. Those who have occasion to speak to him refer to him as "Minister," rather than daring to use his name (which usually provokes a raging eruption of fury and bloodshed). His high sweet voice is dainty and flutelike and seems to still contain a cub's innocence and fragility. Starved Tiger hates Rejoices in Decay because of the pleasure the other minister takes in wanton destruction of potentially useful things. Though he has no proof,



Starved Tiger is certain that the blowfly-spirit is in league with demons, plotting the destruction of the island.

Nature: Judge

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

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 2
Abilities: Athletics 6, Awareness 5, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Endurance 5, Linguistics 3 (Native: Old Realm; Forest-tongue, Riverspeak, Seatongue), Presence 2 (Intimidation +2), Resistance 4, Stealth 2, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Backing 4, Followers 3, Resources 3

Charms: Camouflage, Hoodwink, Materialize, Stillness, Sustenance, Tracking, Transport

Cost To Materialize: 46

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 10 Damage 11L Defense 8

Claw: Speed 9 Accuracy 9 Damage 9L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 9 Soak: 5L/8B (Hide, 3L/3B)

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

Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 88

Other Notes: None

REJOICES IN DECAY

Description: The Minister for Pardoned Sins is a thing of malice, corruption and bitterness. The Island of Broken Masks is truly his home, for nothing pleases him so much as the sight of beauty marred. However, as he points out to victims and servants alike, he is merely doing his spiritual duty and obeying his nature, so he should hardly be blamed for it. While most of his servants are like him in his tastes, a few are kinder spirits, blackmailed or threatened into providing information and tracking fugitives. He particularly enjoys their unwilling



servitude, as yet another aspect of corruption. Rejoices in Decay grovels to the King, just as he expects his servants to grovel to him, and treats the other ministers with barely contained anger.

Rejoices in Decay has very little interest in life beside the thrill of the hunt, the capture of prey and the destruction of the beautiful. It is partly this focus that has allowed him to hold power through the centuries and partly the fact that very few spirits are capable of the sheer malice and anger which the Ministry for Pardoned Sins demands. (Indeed, it is whispered that the previous spirit to hold the post destroyed herself in anguish at what she had become.) While he intrigues against the other ministers, it is more in order to protect himself against them than out of any genuine desire to unseat them.

Nature: Conniver

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 4 (Aerobatics +3), Awareness 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 5, Linguistics 3 (Native: Old Realm; Firetongue, High Realm, Seatongue), Lore 2, Martial Arts 1, Presence 1, Resistance 2, Stealth 4, Torture 3

Backgrounds: Backing 4, Contacts 5, Followers 3, Resources 2

Charms: Camouflage, Cunning Thief, Dreambane, Essence Bite, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Principle of Motion
Cost To Materialize: 50

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 4L Defense 3 *

Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 5L/7B (Air barrier, 4L/4B)

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

Essence: 4 Essence Pool: 83

Other Notes: * The wounds inflicted by Rejoices in Decay are extraordinarily likely to become infected. The difficulty of the Stamina + Resistance roll to resist infection from one of the spirit's wounds is increased by 2.

GOLDEN SWALLOW

Description: The King's concubine is spiteful, fretful, discontented and attempts to work off her tension by setting the ministers against each other. Several of the island's spirits have been persuaded to serve her devotedly, as she has promised them revenge against those ministers who have personally aggrieved them. She has only been on the island for 50 years now and has yet to fully realize that she is merely one in a long chain of concubines and personal servants whom the King has temporarily favored in order to destabilize the ministers. For the moment, her wounded pride and bitterness keep her occupied with plans to bring the ministers into conflict. She tolerates the King, as she knows she cannot challenge him, and she accepts that she is dependent on him for power, even though his cold touch personally revolts her.

Golden Swallow always wears golden robes and sandals in human form, despite her constantly open bleeding wounds, and her voice sounds like 10 birds singing in harmony. While she currently protects the sirens, both through a vague sense of altruism and in order to confuse the ministers, she will grow bored with the situation soon and will act to worsen it. She dislikes all three ministers, but particularly loathes Rejoices in Decay, who personally oversaw her disfigurement, and refuses to tolerate his company in public.

Nature: Thrillseeker

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





Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 1
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Dodge 3, Endurance 1, Investigation 3, Larceny 2, Lore 2, Martial Arts 3, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3
Backgrounds: Allies 1, Backing 4, Influence 3, Mentor 4
Charms: Affinity Element Control, Materialize, Tiny Damnation, Tiny Gift, Tracking
Cost To Materialize: 35
Base Initiative: 7
Attack:
 Fist: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 1L Defense 3
 Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 1L Defense 3
Dodge Pool: 8 Soak: 1L/2B
Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 1 **Essence Pool:** 52
Other Notes: None

THE SIRENS —

CHAMAE, AEKALLE, AND TENERESHE

Description: Hundreds of years of slavery can build a grudge: Scars and disfigurement can only reinforce it. Each day in service to Sikunare saw these three sirens swear private vows of revenge, and even if this current scheme fails, they will seek to pursue their vengeance against the Storm Mother in some other way. They heard about the Censor's fondness for his mortal consort from some of Fakharu's occasional envoys to Sikunare, and Chamae came up with their current plan — to use Amarel as a lever to force Fakharu to persecute Sikunare. They knew of the archipelago's existence — again, from Sikunare's dealings with it — and it seemed the perfect place to hide. Amarel was hidden inside an ivory casket, inside a silk shawl, in the deepest cellar of a residence on the Island of Broken Masks, where they thought that nobody could ever find her. None of them are precisely sure where the whole brilliant scheme went wrong, and certainly none of them expect agents of Fakharu to pursue them into the archipelago.

While all three sirens are somewhat alike, Chamae, the eldest of the three, can easily be recognized by her scarred, empty left eye socket and by her firm voice. Chamae has always felt particularly insulted by Sikunare's power over her, being proud and self-willed. Under no circumstances will she go anywhere near the Storm Mother's court again, whatever the inducement. She will negotiate with characters as though from a position of strength, barely controlling her innate distaste for air-dwellers and will scheme to control them. Her plots are rarely subtle, however, and frequently depend on simple blackmail or threats.

Aekalle is missing both of her thumbs, the consequence of an occasion when she let a ship pass against Sikunare's will. She found it easy to give the pretense of humble servitude while plotting revenge and will fall back into an appearance of humble acquiescence should she be aggressively accused of anything. Her voice is gentle and plaintive, and she moves with a shy grace that has charmed



many sailors. She schemes with far greater subtlety than Chamae, but her plots can be so convoluted that they never reach fruition.

Tenereshe's body is tattooed in zigzag lines of gray and white, although this only seems to add to her beauty. While the sirens were Sikunare's slaves, Tenereshe frequently manipulated other members of the court into attracting the Storm Mother's anger — and thus sparing the sirens her wrath. She speaks calmly and placidly, with a rhythm in her voice like the deep tides, and rarely moves unnecessarily. While she desires some sort of revenge on Sikunare, she would not have undertaken this scheme had she not felt responsible for the others, as it is hasty and dangerous.

Nature: Leader (Chamae), Conniver (Aekalle), Caregiver (Tenereshe)

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 5, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 2 (Aekalle 4), Intelligence 2 (Chamae 4), Wits 2 (Tenereshe 4)

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

Abilities: Awareness 2 (Aekalle), Brawl 4, Craft 2, Dodge 2, Endurance 2, Linguistics 1 (Native: Old Realm; Seatongue), Performance 5, Lore 2 (Tenereshe), Presence 1 (Chamae 3), Stealth 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Resource 0 (but each carries enough gems for several Resources ••• purchases)

Charms: Confusion (Tenereshe), Details, Instill Obedience, Landscape Travel, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Sustenance (Chamae), Tiny Damnation (Chamae), Tracking (Aekalle)

Cost To Materialize: 20

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Claw: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L Defense 8

Dodge Pool: 6 Soak: 1L/2B

Willpower: 6 Health Levels: -0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-3/-4/Incap
 Essence: 2 Essence Pool: 58
 Other Notes: None

CONCLUSIONS

Ideally, the characters retrieve Amarel safely and return her to Fakharu. The Censor will be delighted by such a turn of events and will express his gratitude concretely, with further gifts of gems, precious metals and enchantments. He will also strive to assist the characters in any current project. This aid will primarily express itself in terms of information or allies. Should the Solars be in search of a Manse, he may be able to provide maps or legends that would help them locate one, or if a character has a personal quest, the Censor can locate relevant data, blackmail material, suitable allies and so forth. The dragon will also act as a patron to the characters in the future, if he was not doing so already, which will gain them respect from other spirits. This patronage has its dangerous side, however: It will bring the characters to the notice of powerful and dangerous beings in high places and to the attention of Fakharu's enemies.

Should Amarel be wounded or mutilated on the Island of Broken Masks but otherwise safe, Fakharu will not be as overwhelmingly pleased. He will, however, be grateful that she has been returned and will still make gifts to the characters and act as their patron, though he will be less prompt to trust them with delicate missions. Healing Amarel may be a difficult matter, as the mutilations on the Island of Broken Masks are not meant to heal easily. An attempt may well require a quest to obtain certain magical or rare ingredients, which the characters will doubtless wish to undertake to restore their standing in the Censor's eyes.

If Amarel is dead, or cannot be retrieved, characters may well not wish to return to Fakharu with such news. Upon receiving such news, the dragon will instantly dispatch a stronger expedition to attempt to rescue his consort, should she be alive, or to lay waste to the people responsible for her death, if she is dead. Characters may attempt to mollify the furious and heartbroken dragon by searching the world for some way of restoring his love to him. Should they not properly express their contrition — and quite possibly even if they do — they will have earned Fakharu's permanent enmity and can expect to spend the next few millennia dodging assassins, political coups and other manifestations of the Censor's wrath. Fakharu will use all his influence in the world of spiritual politics to gain vengeance on those who deprived him of his beloved consort and may even resort to personal physical violence if they come within his reach.

If the characters try to keep Amarel and extort a further ransom from Fakharu, the manhunt that ensues is beyond the scope of this adventure, but the Storyteller should prepare it in advance if it seems that the characters are planning so reckless a scheme.



Exile



CHAPTER FOUR

CRUSADERS OF

THE MACHINE

GOD



The world overflows with danger, and everyone has an opinion on what is the greatest of peril. Little do any of them know that the threat comes not from beyond or within, but below. Creation will soon know what danger the restless dreams of a deity brings. Autochthon, the Great Maker, sleeps beneath the world and grows ever more fitful, for it knows that it is slowly dying. Even amidst forced slumber, it grows aware and seeks to draw sustenance from the world once more.

ABOUT THIS ADVENTURE

Crusaders of the Machine God explores the first signs of Creation's accidental invasion by a nation as both populous and as advanced — if not more so — than the Realm. Its sudden appearance throws a wrench into the political wheels of the Southwest, displacing the delicate balance of power like a tidal wave. Into this landscape of disarray travel opportunists, traitors, the pious, fools, the righteous, murderers, politicians, thieves, the desperate, refugees, missionaries and hopeful souls searching for a new way of life. Amidst this turmoil come the players' characters, with their own plans, standing at the cusp of heroism and infamy.

This adventure is not targeted at any particular type of character. Solars, Lunars, Sidereals, Dragon-Blooded or Abyssals fall within the realm of players' characters. Even

normal human characters can fit, with a little work on the part of the Storyteller. Simply consider the power levels involved to determine whether the players' characters deal with an important Storyteller character directly or only ever interact with its minions.

The four sections of the adventure break down as follows:

- **The Swamp of Bitter Tears**, a close examination of the swamp in the Southwest and its many denizens.
- **The Lap** provides further detail about the largest Southland city close to the Swamp of Bitter Tears.
- **Autochthonia** describes the realm of brass and shadow that hangs below the world, as well as the Great Maker's fiercest champions: the Alchemical Exalted.
- **The Locust Crusade**, outlining the conflict caused by the Autochthonians' appearance in the Southlands and their hunt for the Materials necessary to prevent the death of their deity.

Designed more as a setting piece than an actual adventure, *Crusaders of the Machine God* presents three major elements a Storyteller can add to her Exalted game and suggestions on how all interact with each other. We encourage the Storyteller to use as much or as little as she wants, incorporating the most trivial of elements for flavor in a single adventure or, alternatively, as the basis for a campaign.

AUTOWHAT?

Pronunciation once again rears its ugly head. If you care about that kind of thing, when talking about the Great Maker, note that the "ch" is silent — you should pronounce it "aw-toh-THO-nee-uh."

THE SWAMP OF BITTER TEARS

Those who travel to the Southwest until they reach the shores of the Western Ocean find themselves in the great swamp of Calan's Loss. Legends speak of two lovers from the First Age, the great warrior Calan and the scholar Tomun, her husband. Many throughout the Old Realm knew the accounts of their exploits, both in story and song, but the tale of Calan's Loss was the last. Today, the stories of their adventures survive only in fragmentary form and debased into folklore, but once, the story of Calan's Loss was the culmination of a great historical epic.

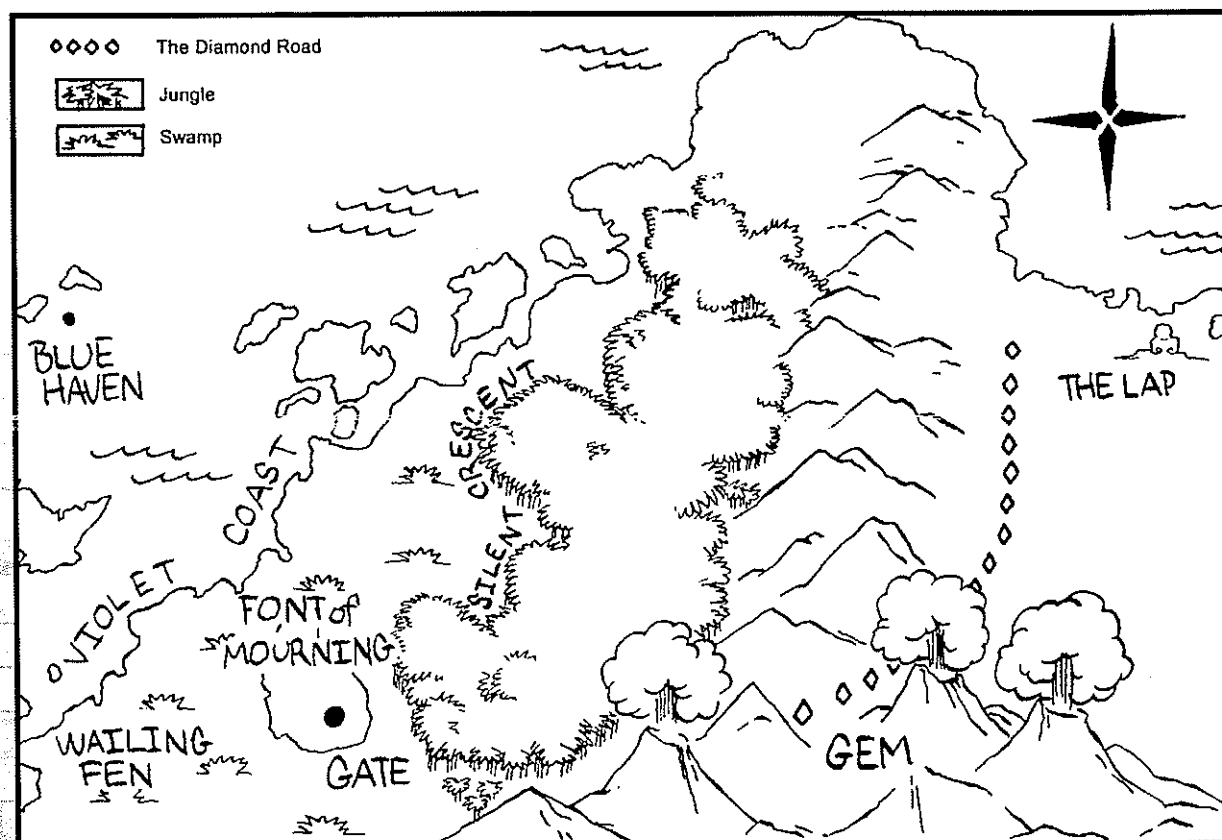
Calan and Tomun tracked the villainous Thrice-Damned Gorol, who had betrayed the Solar Deliberative and become a servant of the Yozis, to the woods of the Southlands — for where Calan's Loss now stands, there was once a great forest. The two feared Gorol would take to the sea and lose them on the Western Ocean, so they made a pact with the greatest spirits of the forest to speed their travel and hinder Gorol's. In return, they pledged to

serve as guardians to the region after they completed their business with their mortal enemy.

The gamble worked. They found Gorol at the heart of the forest, and Calan met him in battle. Gorol flipped and whirled in circles just out of Calan's reach, his black staves deflecting her silver axes, but neither could land a telling blow. After the passage of a night and a day, Gorol grew weary and lost his footing, allowing Calan to slip past his guard and mortally wound him. Yet Gorol's villainy was limitless, for he expelled a thick cloud of venom from his chest as he fell. Calan dropped to the ground, writhing in pain.

Tomun rushed to his lover's side but could do nothing, for he did not know the poison. He besought Gorol to teach him the antidote, to save the woman he loved. The treacherous Gorol told Tomun the cure with his dying breath: Only the life's blood of the victim's mate could diffuse the venom, transforming the poison, and in doing so, trading one life for another. Tomun saw Gorol's trap for what it was, knowing the villain would rather his mortal enemy Calan lived without her lover than trick Tomun into joining her in death. Still, Tomun began the transfusion without hesitation, filtering Calan's blood with his own and drawing the poison into his body.

Calan awoke to find her beautiful lover dying beside her, with Gorol's body nowhere to be found. She knew that she must take Tomun quickly to the great healer Ya Vanu or he would perish. Unfortunately for the two, the forest spirits





approached and demanded the lovers serve their time as guardians. The spirits feared Calan's pleas to leave the forest were some sort of trick to renege on the bargain struck and refused to let the lovers depart. Her supplication fell upon deaf ears, and Tomun soon died at Calan's feet. The spirits immediately demanded that Calan's position as guardian be doubled in length to make up for Tomun's loss of service.

Furious at their words, Calan cursed the forest with an eternity of her grief. She'd pledged to serve as guardian by the side of her husband in his life and now pledged to do the same in his death. She would guard the land around his corpse with her tears, which would spread to all corners of the forest. So she said, and her words spoke true. The years passed, and her grief slowly twisted the forest into a swamp. The forest spirits could do nothing, for they could not harm the guardian they themselves selected, nor reduce the service for which they themselves bargained. Eventually, the spirits grew twisted as well, and the once great forest of the Southlands fell to Calan's anguish. Such are the hazards of those who would lord over the Exalted. Southlanders named the swamp Calan's Loss, though, today, its origins are all but forgotten, and it is called the Swamp of Bitter Tears, though few save the savants know why.

REGIONAL COMPOSITION

Due to its large size and inconsistent terrain, cartographers often split Calan's Loss into different regions, dependent on local custom. Cartographers often insist upon drawing elaborate circles radiating out from the geographical center, believing danger lessens away from the innermost rings. Others insist on a grid-like separation, breaking the swamp into ordered quadrants, with junctures placed at important landmarks to ease navigation. The most sensible divide the swamp into areas demarcating important shifts in terrain, noting significant areas of interest and known dangers in each. This latter approach is used here, for ease of reference.

THE VIOLET COAST

When the sun kisses the Elemental Pole of Water each evening, the dark-red sands separating Calan's Loss from the Western Ocean turn an intense purple that shows even through the dark of a moonless night. Too deep a color to truly glow, those who walk the sands at night can nevertheless see just enough to be sure of their footing. Vessels sailing the Western Ocean can also see this faint radiance in darkness, even from leagues away and in the poorest of conditions.

It was once widely believed that when Calan's tears threatened to spill into the Western Ocean, the Maiden of Endings called the Solar forth onto the beach and made the Sign of Ending against her, ending her sorrow and her service with her life. Others say the Maiden set her hound upon Calan and that she was torn to pieces. The savants

contend that the purple of the sands is Calan's spilled blood, shining in the sunset.

Death of all kinds certainly stalks the Violet Coast from aquatic Fair Folk luring travelers below the waves to barbarian raiders from the islands far to the west. Most dangerous at night, and luckily quite rare, are the lonely ghosts of those who sought true love on the coast and found only death. These restless spirits, known as the domunsoka, often appear as lonely souls in wedding garb. Ghosts of those who committed suicide for unrequited love, they trudge aimlessly across the glowing sands. These hungry ghosts are instantly recognizable by their backward feet and seem drawn to the area from hundreds or even thousands of miles away.


Far beyond the Violet Coast lies Bluehaven, patrolled by the dreaded pirates of the Lintha Family. Most of the pirates steer clear of the Violet Coast, believing the sundry superstitions attached to this particular seashore as strongly as any who sail the Western Ocean. A daring few venture along the coast in the daytime, burying supplies and wealth in secret caches lining the many shallows winding inland.

THE WAILING FEN

The bulk of Calan's Loss consists of the Wailing Fen, known throughout the Southwest for its marsh dragons, weeping willows and the terrifying wailing of the swamp itself. The fen is home to sticky mud, looming trees, a thorough dampness to everything within, the omnipresent chittering of insects, quicksand, hundreds upon hundreds of streams and small rivers, swamp-grass, cattails and willows that weep brine. These trees, called Calan's Tears, weep water, making the soil around them too wet for most plants. Those near the sea weep not just water, but brine, further hindering encroachment. In the east, the fen is mostly a mire, formed by mountain runoff pooling in areas with clay underoil and poor drainage. Toward the West, the fen is much more of a bayou. Here, much of the fen consists of backwaters connected to the sea during high tide or storm surges, but otherwise isolated from it.

The spirits of the fen have spent millennia wracked with a constant, gnawing pain as part of Calan's curse. These little gods are tied to the area and simply cannot escape the fate they sealed for themselves. Their anguish takes the form of the wailing that gives the fen its name, sometimes heard as the low moan of the wind through the willows, and other times as shouts, screams and ceaseless howling that sounds almost as though emerging from human throats. This cacophony can last for hours at a time, beginning and ending with no warning. Some swear they can make out words and distinct voices amidst the wails, but the anguish is rarely comprehensible.

The little gods of the fen often find it difficult to focus beyond their own agony. Attempts to communicate with these spirits are at +1 difficulty due to the painful distract-



tion of the curse. However, the spirits do not seek their own destruction. As gods of life itself, such a concept is horrific and impossible for them to comprehend. All desperately want the curse to end, yet none can conceive of releasing their grasp on life.

Scattered pockets of human villages, Wyld barbarian tribes and beastmen clans exist throughout the area. Occasionally, these denizens can be persuaded to serve as guides to the region in return for goods or services. Warring amongst these groups is common, although the fighting itself rarely causes more than a deep gash or a bruised limb. Most practice the art of counting coup, and any deemed "killed" separate themselves from battle and await the final outcome.

When the battle ends, enemy hostages are traded in a one-for-one exchange for the group's "dead." Any remaining hostages are purchased with goods or are brought as captives to the winning side's village to work off their debt as servants for periods rarely exceeding a month's time. Savants call this odd tradition the most bizarre form of commerce in the South. Such customs are in marked contrast to the natives of the southernmost portion of the swamps, where their brutality in battle is matched only by their desire for isolation from anything beyond their own ancestral lands.

THE FONT OF MOURNING

The dark heart of Calan's Loss culminates in the Font of Mourning, an oblong area roughly 100 miles in diameter. Those who pay the legends heed name the Font as the site of Calan's battle with Gorol, but all know it as a no man's land where those who travel rarely return. Willows sprout amidst once mighty redwoods, now warped into twisted, looming columns filled with rot yet never quite decayed enough to fall. The spirits themselves are twisted and sullen, dreaming of greatness long past, and rarely tolerate the intrusion of others into their affairs. The muted calm is occasionally broken by the dull droning of giant dragonflies with tails as long as men are tall, skitting along the swampland's surface on errands of insectoid importance. Marsh dragons prowl silently through the waters, feeding upon carrion or the occasional lemur that ventures too far from the safety of the trees above.

Rarely does one encounter solid ground that is not covered by at least three feet of water. The algae-coated surface of the tepid, grimy swamp water is often so thick that it appears to the untrained eye as a dull-green field of moss coating a slowly undulating earth. Three canopies of foliage prevents the sun from ever touching the ground, forcing everything into a murky gloom no matter how clear the skies. The mosquito-choked air further reduces visibility, oftentimes to no more than 10 feet. Malaria and yellow fever strike those with exposed skin, while those who cover themselves with thick clothing quickly suffer

GOROL'S FATE

According to legend, Thrice-Damned Gorol's body disappeared after Calan's fight and was never found. None know what happened to the body — it is probable that Calan mutilated it and thoroughly hid the fragments to prevent Gorol's animal soul from ever resting. His higher soul was, of course, snatched away to the courts of the Yozis.

Gorol's lower soul is now a hungry ghost tied to the region by Calan's curse. He is bound to the swamp and has spent millennia in awful, soul-searing pain, just like the other spirits. It is his anger and power that draws hungry ghosts to the area. His spirit no longer has any real memory of who he was before; it simply knows that grief over the death of a lover has tied it to the area, that it is somehow at fault and that it longs to move away from this unliving hell, yet cannot.

Gorol's ghost can communicate with people passing through and often attempts to do so, trying, in his animal way, to convince passer's to somehow free him. Unfortunately, while he may be a tormented soul, he is also a hungry ghost. His intelligence is rudimentary at best, and he is often overcome by a bestial hunger for the Essence of the living.

from heat exhaustion in the balmy clime. Reliable, relatively safe travel is only possible by skiff or canoe, yet frequent snarls and deadends amongst mazes of knotted roots, sticky mud and thick moss remain inevitable. Simply put, the Font is inhospitable to human life.

Nevertheless, the Font is home to a small collection of humans and beastmen who adapted to the harsh conditions of the area. They took to the trees to avoid the dangers of the ground, constructing a vast network of platforms and structures built around and within hollowed-out trees, connected with swaying rope bridges and wooden catwalks, that they call Refuge. Three distinct tribes live amongst the trees, often skirmishing with words, if not weapons. They feed on birds, creatures from the swamp below and an abundant edible moss that coats the trees. They train domesticated lemurs to cultivate natural material for the medicines and poultices necessary when living so deep in the swamp. These tribes are slowly dying out — they were once a single, much larger group, but the passing of years has seen the slow decay of their culture. It is interesting to note that they have divided along ideological and not racial lines — in all three groups, beastmen and humans live side by side.

THE SILENT CRESCENT

The reach of Calan's Loss begins to fade where it intersects with the Banyan Jungle along its eastern edge. This overlap generally spans 10 miles, but it can extend to 20 miles or shrink to three in some places. The trees and vines thicken noticeably, the ground grows harder packed, and the muted, earthy colors of the swamp gradually brighten to the sharp, vibrant hues of the jungle. Streams and rivers originating in the mountains far to the east flow through this crescent and terminate in the Wailing Fen. Banyan and willow grow side by side, and strong, hazy sunlight pours through the leaves to soak the fertile earth below. Residents call this quiet, beautiful stretch of land the Silent Crescent, although technically it is neither.

In truth, cartographers note two crescents (referred to as Northern and Southern, respectively), shaped more like a lazy letter "E" than a single, large curve. Its vaunted silence is only relative in comparison to the Wailing Fen to the west and the Banyan Jungle to the east, but this winding stretch of land can be, in places, idyllic. Finding predators from these bordering regions within the crescent is atypical, and they often display docility not found anywhere else in the area. Plant life isn't as overtly dangerous to man and beast. Banana trees are sporadic but common to the area.

By no means does this make the crescent a safe place. Rather, travelers find themselves in less direct danger in this region than they do in Calan's Loss or the Banyan Jungle. A few Wyld Barbarian tribes live in the Southern Crescent, with reactions to travelers varying from reserved tolerance to outright hostility. Thankfully, tribal territory is clearly marked, and even the most xenophobic of these tribes rarely attacks outsiders unless they threaten these boundaries.

The Northern Crescent is home to small human villages eking out an existence away from the Realm, its tributaries or Southern city-states. Little of the land is arable, but the villages manage a decent subsistence away from the rest of Creation. Many of the villages believe they have a Lunar Exalted named Ten Stripes and his pack of jaguar beastmen to thank for their relative safety and often leave small gifts of food and supplies out as thanks for its patrol of the region. None truly know if Ten Stripes actually protects these villages, nor have any met the Lunar in any but the most fleeting of manner. However, the gift baskets regularly disappear when the pack is sighted in the area, so the villagers plan to keep up this tradition in return for their peace of mind.

Those of a mystic bent documented the crescent's odd phenomena long ago within a spiritual context, noting the absence of politics between the spirits of Calan's Loss and the Banyan Jungle. Some feel the crescent exists specifically because spirits from each area pointedly ignore the others' existence, leaving the crescent's spirits safe from regional encroachment. A few scholars posit that the

crescent exists as the byproduct of a deal brokered long ago between man and nature to create a respite between the regions. Of this handful of savants, two theorize that when the terms of this deal end, the crescent will vanish within a decade. However, none have found direct evidence to support these theories.

THE BANYAN JUNGLE

To the east of Calan's Loss lies the Banyan Jungle, so named for the prominent, massive banyan trees that grip the land. Whereas the swamp itself offers a muted look at a once-proud forest, the Banyan Jungle offers a testament to life unbound. Brilliant colors, strange sounds and the primal struggle of life defines this region. Wild banana trees bloom throughout the area, found in clusters where the banyans don't choke the land. Gaggles of bough squids swoop through the air to snatch hyenas from the ground below and disappear once more amongst the trees. Insects the size of a grown man's fist teem along branches, devouring leaf and bark as they go. Beastmen tribes inhabit the jungle, privy to its many secrets.

One secret the Banyan Jungle holds is the location of the yeddim graveyard. Rumored to be positioned deep within the jungle, the Valley of Bone and Sleep has eluded those who seek it for as long as the jungle has existed. Wild yeddim throughout the South make a solitary journey here when their years grow short, and even domesticated yeddim that pass too close to the jungle have been known to give in to its call. Few who try to find the graveyard return with bodies and sanity intact, even amongst the ranks of the dead. Why the subjects of the shadowlands seem unknowing and even slightly afraid of this place of death remains a great mystery.

ECOLOGY OF PERIL

Travel through Calan's Loss is rarely without danger. Whether as a result of quicksand or marsh dragon, human travelers can easily find themselves in over their heads without suitable preparation. The swamp itself offers peril to the unsuspecting. Sinkholes that drop into water-soaked caverns, mud as sticky as the strongest glues, rainstorms that last days at a time and disease such as malaria or yellow fever can reduce the hardiest of travelers to food for vermin.

QUICKSAND

Quicksand occurs when a deep mass of loose sand mixes with water, usually near the mouths of rivers. Anyone exerting substantial pressure on its surface will slide beneath the surface of the sand. Escape is quite difficult, as any movement often collapses more sand and drives the unlucky victim deeper, leaving him in danger of drowning. For this reason, quicksand is the bane of solitary travelers, as a companion on firm ground can use a vine or branch to save





the trapped person with little effort. The easiest way to circumvent quicksand is foremost to avoid walking on sand or, alternatively, to carry a long walking stick used to test the ground ahead. This is an easier matter when one's travel isn't in haste or in the dead of night. Experienced travelers can swim out of quicksand if they know how — it requires a Wits + Survival roll at difficulty 2 and a Survival of at least ••. Anyone without companions or the necessary survival skills will drown over several minutes.

FLASH FLOODS

Although rare throughout Calan's Loss, flash floods can occur in the rainy season during or just after periods of heavy rain. A wall of water, restricted in its path by the landscape, rushes along at alarming speed and sweeps away everything in its path not firmly attached to the ground. Outrunning a flood is impossible for normal humans. However, running perpendicular to the flood's path can often lead those fleeing the waters out of the brunt of the onrushing deluge, and climbing a (very) sturdy tree may allow victims to escape the water as well.

People or beasts caught in the flood are at the mercy of the water's speed and direction. Drowning is certainly a possibility, but the threat of slamming into solid objects such as tree trunks or outcroppings of rock is the greater danger. Strength + Athletics rolls allow a modicum of control in avoiding large objects, but the truly unlucky could suffer the equivalent of falling damage from up to 60 feet high, depending upon the size and force of the flood. Luckily, flash floods in Calan's Loss rarely last beyond a minute and only ever affect narrow swaths of land.

FLORA & FAUNA

"Calan's Loss is a cesspool of life," noted scholar Swift Quill in RY 707. "For every manner of being that fights to survive in the harsh clime, there are at least 30 more ready to dine upon its corpse."

Little has changed since the dawn of the century. Much of the local plant life is poisonous to consume or to touch. As a general rule of thumb, the deadlier plants are the most obvious ones. Brilliant yellow and orange fireswallows, while truly beautiful, pass along a deadly rash by touch called "orange brain-fever" that drives afflicted creatures mad. In contrast, the most nondescript plant life can usually be safely ingested or used in poultices. For example, the foul smelling Southwestern gray moss is somewhat nutritious and drives away mosquitoes, although most think the scent of burning hair that surrounds those who ingest it isn't worth the trouble.

All manners of beast call this region home. The local variation of the great cat is called the glaucous lion, known for its shaggy, gray-green pelt and savage pursuit of its prey. No less than 300 varieties of poisonous snake can be found throughout the area. An indeterminate number of insects and other vermin infest all areas of the swamp, supping on

the dead flesh of plant and beast alike. However, the distinctiveness of some creatures bears special mention.

DOMUNSOKA

The feared domunsoka prowl the Violet Coast. Not dissimilar to hungry ghosts, most domunsoka seem to be the product of individuals who were killed by or committed suicide for those they loved. They are drawn to the sands of the Violet Coast by unknown powers (the grief of Gorol, primarily), and from their modes of dress, these spirits travel here from all over the South and West. None seem to have their corpses, and they seem, instead, to sleep in the violet sands of the beach. When a domunsoka encounters a potential victim, it begs for help, presenting a story of an unfaithful companion who left it for dead in the sands. As the night passes, the domunsoka grows increasingly enamored of the target, slowly making more blatant advances, until dawn is merely minutes away. The spirit then pleads with its target, begging to join with it forever, to culminate their passion or some other variation on this theme. Should the potential mate accept, the domunsoka then embraces its "love," and drains him of life. Declining the advances of a domunsoka proves to be only slightly less dangerous. Rebuffed in life, a subsequent spurning invokes the rage of death. The domunsoka channels its final memories of intense humiliation and rejection into raw physical fury. There really isn't a good way to react to these ghosts, and the Violet Coast is widely avoided, even by pirates, as a result.

MARSH DRAGONS

Marsh dragons found throughout Calan's Loss are, for all intents and purposes, river dragons with slight differences in coloration and a broader, shorter snout. The marsh dragons in this area rarely exceed a length of 25 feet, but adult marsh dragons found in the Font of Mourning can exceed 40 feet in length — the largest found in the swamp. Barbarian tribes often hunt these creatures for their armored hides, coming into conflict with marsh-dragon blooded beastmen, who revere the creatures as divine.

GIANT DRAGONFLIES

The giant dragonflies found in the Font of Mourning rarely venture into the Wailing Fen, feeding on various small mammals and reptiles. They are docile but unintelligent creatures that flit about with no more direction than instinct in its most rudimentary form. Giant dragonflies weigh very little, clinging to the trunks of redwoods or landing on the backs of marsh dragons when resting their diaphanous wings. Local tribes consider their meat a delicacy.

THE LAP

Located far to the west of the many city-states that rim the Great Inland Sea, the Lap consists of a series of interlocked adobe buildings constructed along the face of a lonely mountain and the arable land that surrounds it.

GIANT DRAGONFLY

Physical Attributes	Willpower	Health Levels	Attack	Dodge/Soak	Abilities
Str/Dex/Sta			Spd/Acc/Dmg		
4/6/3	2	-0x2/-1x3/-2x3/-4x1/1	10/2L/5B	8	Athletics 5

Note: Like all beasts, giant dragonflies possess Intelligence at 1 dot, Perception at 2 dots and Wits at 3 dots. For beasts, use the provided Acc value for both attacks and parries.

THE TWIN POWERS OF THE SOUTHWEST

The Southern cities known as the Lap and Gem provide much for the region, from the abundance of the Lap's agriculture to Gem's immense wealth and influence upon local economies. Neither city operates in a true symbiosis, although each enjoys a highly profitable relationship with the other. The Lap trades its excess grains in return for riches hoarded by Rankar VII, Gem's hereditary despot. Gem also devotes funds to maintain the "Diamond Road," a well-traveled trade-route between the two cities, and the Lap provides the troops to patrol the road. The Lap and Gem remain somewhat dependent upon one another, though neither wishes to admit it.

Both cities also feature prominently in *Critsaders of the Machine God*, for the two serve as the first targets of the danger lurking below the world.

The Lap gets its name from its unique location: The mountain was long ago carved into the shape of a meditating hermit sitting in a cross-legged posture. Much of the city itself nestles into the "lap" of the mountain, though some outlying houses spill out across the broad legs.

The identity of the colossal worshiper remains questionable. It's known as the Old Man or the Last Supplicant, depending on whom one speaks with. Many suspect that this wonder of the First Age was quite literally defaced during the Great Contagion, for the damage to its head seems too precise. Nevertheless, its broken face and robust body point northeast to the Imperial City that lies across the sea.

Those who ascend to its Shoulders can see for hundreds of miles around, from the distant islands of the Western Ocean to the dark clouds of smoke that pour from the smithies of Nexus. Few dare the ascent, fearing dangerous birds of prey and feline beasts that dwell near the top. Those who do reach the Shoulders speak in whispers, fearing that conversation might rouse the Old Man. As the local philosopher Fatik Tanuh once asked, "What rage can we expect when the Supplicant awakens to find its face missing and a city between its legs?"

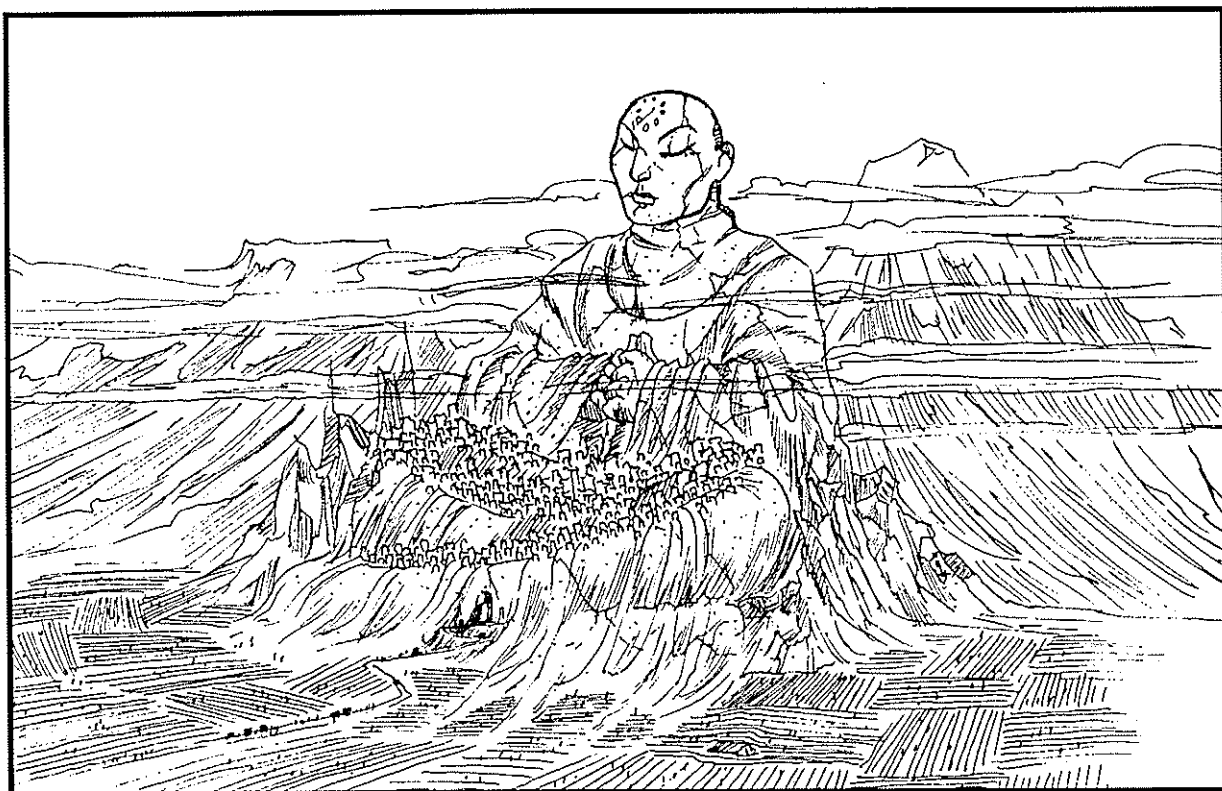
Much of the Lap consists of adobe buildings sprawled across the folded legs of the Supplicant, the surrounding farmland that extends beyond the mountain and the

small valley of fertile land between the Old Man's legs called the Verdant Triangle. Laplanders navigate their city by body part: Northleg primarily contains markets, while most industry is located along Eastleg to take advantage of winds from the Inland Sea to blow forge smoke in a southerly direction. Government buildings and an Immaculate temple are central in the Lap Proper, but nearly everybody refers to the area as the Crotch. The area along the Supplicant's folded legs — called the Fold, unsurprisingly — is similar to a dockyard, consisting of windmills that process the crops allocated for rations, large warehouses that store the harvest and giant hoists that transfer material to and from caravans below.

Houses are sprinkled liberally throughout the Lap, from the sophisticated homes along Northleg to the lower-quality housing sprouting from the northern face of Eastleg. According to the Golden Triumvirate, few live on the Fold, but the desperate, the criminally inclined and the poorest of the poor make it their home. An elaborate network of aqueducts and artificial reservoirs known as the Step Fountains run throughout the massive honeycomb of buildings and collect water from rain, melted snow and streams that trickle down from the Supplicant. Those of means live along the topmost portions of the legs and are privy to the freshest of water, while the poor who live in buildings positioned closer to the edges receive the grimy, gritty fluid that spills down to the Verdant Triangle.

Two covered tunnels have been carved into the statue where each foot meets the leg. Long ago, a third tunnel was dug through the middle of the Fold, about halfway along the northeast face, but it is mostly restricted to business traffic. All three tunnels have a series of gates in them and can be collapsed in a worst-case scenario, leaving the Lap's inhabitants to rely on rope-and-winch elevators to move people into and out of the city. Approaches up the back of the Supplicant are seriously impractical, though it is possible (but very difficult) to scale the outer portions of the legs — much harder if the Lap is providing any sort of organized resistance. Such resistance is amply provided for, and there are crenellated parapets all along the statue's lap. These short walls are regularly patrolled and provided with lugs for mechanisms to dump boiling urine and rubble on those trying to scale the legs. Once inside the Verdant Triangle, a series of elevators and ramps lead up to the inner legs. Streets atop the legs are filled with foot traffic.





THE SURROUNDING AREA

The mountain that forms the Old Man protrudes from the middle of gently rolling mediterranean hills, and farmland stretches for miles around, for thousands upon thousands of square acres of arable land exist within the foothills. Sandstorms are nowhere near as frequent this far north, and even if sand blows in and kills outlying crops, the Lap has enough stored and preserved food to last two or three years, even with a full export of crops. This stockpile is one of the largest in Creation, and "starving the Lap" is synonymous with a futile gesture. Bandits and thieves occasionally raid farms but, usually, only one or two at a time — there are few organized gangs in this area. Any that threaten the Lap face retaliation by the Imperial forces garrisoned there, so most bandits restrict themselves to caravans well outside of the Lap's boundaries.

ECONOMY

The extensive cultivation of crops is the backbone of the Lap's economy. The amount of food produced in the state farms is astonishing. The fact that the Realm can feed its legions and any auxiliary forces they're deployed without any reliance on the Blessed Isle always allowed the Empress an unprecedented flexibility in the deployment of her troops, as well as freedom from the dictates of local food producers. The Lap was the gem of the Realm's tributaries, and as a result, the Realm has provided the Lap with the most advanced agricultural science. The agricultural savants of the Lap have access

to First Age prodigies such as advanced fertilizers, crop yield-enhancement artifacts, unbreakable plowshares, artifacts that can till many rows at once and so forth.

Long ago, the leadership of the Lap abandoned outright slavery in favor of a system of indentured servitude with gradual incentives for more productive work. Children live with their biological families and learn to work the fields. At the age of 13, they legally enter adulthood and must make a choice: spend the next 30 years as a ward of the state with the possibility of amassing great wealth or leave the Lap and never return. Those exiled have the tips of both little fingers removed to the first knuckle to indicate their choice and are turned away at the gates should they attempt to return (or are tried and executed if caught within the walls).

Those who stay are in for 30 years of what is often backbreaking labor, tilling, sowing and reaping. Every five years, the individual citizen is evaluated, and those who have performed well or demonstrated an ability to lead are promoted. At 43 years of age, a citizen is allowed to retire with a pension based on the rank and position he attained, and for the truly successful, luxurious government appointments or the management of state plantations await. This system has always been on the verge of collapse, with influential individuals trading favors with other worthies to advance their children and allies. For those with pull, early labor is perfunctory and promotions to high positions are guaranteed. For the many without influence, life in the Lap is usually one of hard labor, where a person is constantly beholden to superiors for good performance reviews.

The Empress saw to it that the system was kept efficient enough to function and feed her armies. Since her disappearance, the various magnates controlling the city's bureaucracy have been more and more open about their political ambitions, and they have begun to resemble the autocratic large landholders so common in the South. Already, the patronage system is hardening into a hierarchy, and the "middle class" of bureaucrats and craftsmen are becoming mere servants of the influence-brokers who rule the kingdom.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Laplander politics are known for careful alliances and strained goodwill. A council of large landholders props up a figurehead on the throne of the kingdom, while a Golden Triumvirate, rather than a single satrap, represents the interests of the Dynasty. Currently, the Triumvirate consists of Cathak Sijip, Ragara Aloru and the recently appointed Peleps Tuchet. Each Dynast represents his or her family individually and the Realm as a whole. Privately, the three do a great deal of Dynastic squabbling — the Empress deliberately appointed rivals to the post—but the Triumvirate votes unanimously on all public decisions.

Often, the Dynasts effectively rule the region, passing the will of Realm to the ruling junta, which implements it without question. The council rarely butts heads with the Dynasts, generally acceding to the Realm's wishes. The council's pliant character has helped keep their city free and the children of the junta at home and not in the Scarlet Court as hostages. Recently, the council has begun to explore the possibility of exerting its influence against that of the triunes, but the reprisals that resulted from the last attempt have convinced them that if the time is coming, it isn't yet at hand.

The Lap's existence as an extremely close tributary of the Realm affords it a unique political position within the region. Although many city-states run the gamut from staunch allies to nominal tributaries, none are as closely allied as the Lap. The Realm also uses this fact as a lever. When the Realm desires stability in the region, city-states wishing to purchase part of the Lap's regular surplus must pay two, three or even four times as much per unit to prevent stockpiling for rations or extended sieges. The threat of withholding agricultural exports to warring city-states weighs heavily on the Lap's neighbors, leading many to attempt more diplomatic measures prior to outright war. The Lap's position as a lever for peace rankles many Southlanders, but none wish to antagonize the Realm by threatening a state so closely associated with the empire.

MARTIAL STRENGTH

Once home to the largest force of Realm troops in the region, the Lap retains a mixed garrison of troops. There is an imperial legion deployed here, probably the last full legion deployed outside the Blessed Isle. Also, each of the three triunes commands several thousand house troops,

bringing the total number of imperial troops deployed here to just over 10,000. In addition, there are an equal number of local soldiers. The actual government of the Lap fields one mediocre legion organized along imperial lines and 6,000 gendarmes suited for little more than supporting tax collection and chasing bandits. In addition, the various magnates have several thousand individuals tasked with plantation security loyal to them as well. While these are mostly straw bosses, chaindogs and bodyguards of little military value, they do have some impact in local politics and, thus, merit mention.

Through various political machinations around the time of the shrinkage of the imperial armed forces from 37 to 30 legions, forces loyal to House Ragara came to dominate the local garrison. While the house allows Letal, the Cathak garrison commander, to remain in a position of authority, it is to serve as a testament to his own incompetence. Banoba predicts Letal will eventually display his ineptitude in a gloriously catastrophic manner, at which point Ragara plans to swiftly remove him and promote Letal's well-liked second, Omapa, to the status of garrison commander. House Cathak seems unaware of Ragara's subtle treachery or, perhaps, remains more concerned with events closer to the Blessed Isle. Regardless, Cathak has yet to make any perceptible response to Ragara's maneuvering.

The Lap is well provided with troops but poorly prepared for war. While its food stores are simply immense, the rest of the region's military preparations are laughable. There has not been a serious effort to attack the city in over a century, and the stocks of raw metal, spare weapons and armor, the plans for drilling new troops and the city's fortifications have all fallen into terrible disrepair. War is "impossible" or "will never happen," and so, money is spent on war monuments and arenas rather than on preparedness.

PROMINENT CITIZENS OF THE LAP

MAGNATE UTONO, ILLUSTRIOUS LIAISON TO BANOBA OF HOUSE RAGARA

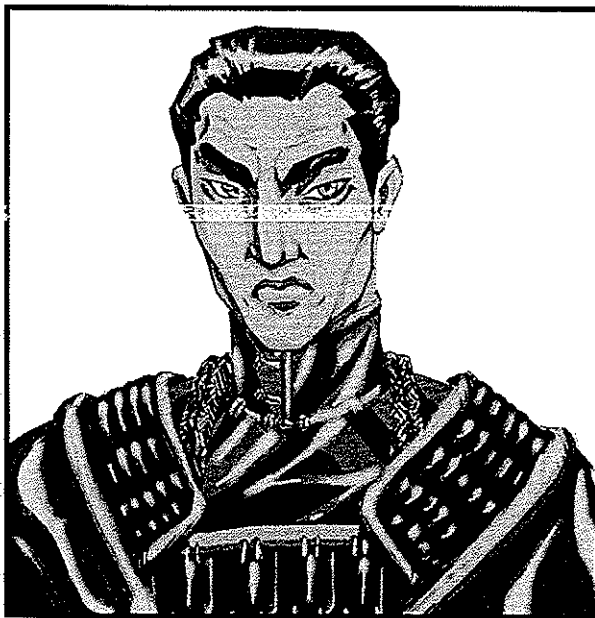
Utono lost standing with the Guild when her political rivals falsely accused her of embezzlement. Though they had no real proof, it irrevocably damaged her reputation as a merciless profiteer from the Northlands. Banoba placed her in charge of agricultural interests in the Lap exactly for this reason, correctly deducing that her lack of love for the Guild would permit her a brutal efficiency in serving Ragaran interests. A hard woman, her past two decades of service had no small part in doubling the Lap's total output of agricultural exports to the Realm. She is utterly ruthless at the bargaining table and knows when to cut her losses, be they monetary or personal.





CATHAK LETAL, GARRISON COMMANDER

With the Scarlet Throne in contention, House Cathak must take great care in the placement of its troops. This becomes immediately evident with the house's assignment of Letal, who is situated as far from the Blessed Isle as Cathak Cainan can get him. Letal proved a great embarrassment to his house when the imperial legions expelled him for commanding his entire dragon to its accidental demise. Cathak Cainan revoked Letal's subsequent position in one of the house's standing armies after he managed to lose an entire caravan to a bandit force five times smaller than his own. The house eventually shuffled him to the Lap, where they suspected he could do the least damage.



Although not a stupid man, Letal is prone to completely misconstruing the motives of others and taking grossly inappropriate actions based on these misunderstandings. Few of the forces at Lap's garrison respect him and remain thankful that Letal has had no real opportunity to take a day-to-day interest in their affairs.

GEM

Gem is a city built on an extinct volcano, ruled the hereditary despot Rankar VII and founded on the wealth of gems harvested from the volcano and the hills around it. Gem is detailed more full in *Scavenger Sons*. While space does not permit a recapitulation of the material in that book, Storytellers without access to it should feel free to make up material about the city to suit their series.

AUTOCHTHONIA

Autochthonia is the realm of brass and shadow, where millions live scattered through the veins of a long-forgotten deity. Far from the sprawling city-states of Creation, each cluster of humanity dedicates much of its efforts to sustaining Autochthon. Constantly, they do what they can to alert the slumbering mass that surrounds them of their presence or risk being purged by an unknowing god.

HISTORY

Autochthon's dreams hearken back to the dawn of the First Age of Man, when people referred to it as the Great Maker or the Machine God. It remembers the many humans that worshiped it as a deity of tools and innovation, though with a curious detachment, for Autochthon is not a god, but a Primordial. Tales now lost for millennia once spoke of the Great Maker's role in the forging of the gods themselves. Some told of Autochthon apprenticing the gods in creation of their own tools, including the various types of Exalted.

Once Autochthon accounted for the gods and their implements, it turned its grand attentions to the weakest creatures capable of utilizing its gifts: the masses of humanity. Generations passed, and humanity littered Creation, learning how to properly employ the three gifts of Autochthon: doctrine, faith and tools. Soon, humans discovered how to create their own, obviating the need for reliance upon the deity, but a portion revered the being that showed them the way of construction and the importance of belief.

Whether or not the old stories contain any truth, First Age accounts suggest that Autochthon quietly joined the upstart gods in slaying those who came before: the other Primordials. It then sealed itself off from Creation behind the mighty Seal of Eight Divinities as its siblings expired,

descending into a self-induced state of hibernation from which it would wake when the dying fury of the Great Curse no longer touched the world. But the Machine God did not travel to its rest alone. With it came loyal adherents, outspoken zealots and worshipers, as well as thousands upon thousands of unlucky souls caught in its grasp. They were to serve as caretakers and fuel, scattered throughout its inner workings and left to fend for themselves in its depths.

Fend they did, carving out an extensive civilization over the course of millennia. Whole nations eke out a harsh subsistence in pockets strewn throughout its bowels, taking the name "Autochthonians" to describe the unique relationship they hold with their deity. No man or woman amongst them is unaware of this forced symbiosis: If they grow lax in their responsibilities, then Autochthon shall die, and they shall perish with it. The recent troubles have not gone unnoticed, forcing the hand of one nation anxious to prevent the Machine God's demise. Its plan involves breaking the Seal of Eight Divinities and opening a gate to Creation, where its citizens hope to find the resources that Autochthonia so desperately craves. Whether they damn themselves and their deity in the process remains to be seen.

INSIDE THE MACHINE GOD

The realm of brass and shadow is a nightmare world of steam, murk and neverending passages of stippled metal. Corridor upon endless corridor spiral through the darkness, twisting to and fro with a chaotic sort of precision. The insides of a deity are as terrible as they are wondrous, and the cavernous depths are home to the vast autonomic processes of the slumbering god.

That Autochthon lives is obvious, for its thick, tangled veins run through every corridor, stapled to the walls and ceilings, pumping viscous fluids and furious energies. Its thickest veins are 10 times as wide as a man is tall, covered in fat striations of pliable metals woven into the thick elastic walls. To the touch, the veins are often hot enough to sear flesh or so cold that exposed skin adheres to them. They carry air, water, nutrients, lubricants and waste to and from the countless spaces of the Machine God, filling and emptying vast internal reservoirs and driving the countless alchemical reactions that sustain the sleeping god.

There is never true silence, for Autochthon sings in its sleep. The air within is filled with the sounds of turning gears, the thrumming of the veing's contents flowing through them, the venting of steam in shrill whistles, the snap of electrical arcs and the creak of the vast hinges and flexors that support the weight of the machine god.

And inside Autochthon dwell its many worshipers. In vast and claustrophobic cities live the descendants who fled with the Machine God when he passed beyond Creation after the war between the gods and Primordials. These cramped spaces are nestled into the most secret hollows of the machine god. These are not the sterile, dead

cities of men, but living cities. They are extensions of the Great Maker itself, created through the union of the beings known as Alchemical Exalted with the various processes and systems of Autochthon in a surreal fusion of dwelling place and machinery. The cities of Autochthonia are divided into eight great nations, one of which, Yugash, is the trigger and centerpoint of this adventure.

AUTOCHTHONIAN SOCIETY

The daily life of the average Autochthonian is fraught with dangerous, often mindless labor. The Autochthonian peoples must survive in a world where dissent can lead to destruction and where social turmoil and conflicts between individuals threaten society as a whole. In the dark places within the machine god, they struggle to sustain their deity's life processes. They struggle among themselves, not for riches and power and dominion over their fellow men, but over what rites must be performed to sustain their sleeping deity and preserve their own existence.

LEGENDS AND HEROES


When Autochthon lent its support to the destruction of the other Primordials, it delivered a vision unto eight of its most capable worshipers, revealing that it soon planned to leave the world. Before it did so, it needed them to craft a prodigious container of mystical aspect, to seek out the Well of Souls, to fill the newly crafted Ewer and to return to whence they came. The Ewer was to be filled with souls, for Autochthonia was a hungry god, and it needed the light and radiance of souls to sustain itself in the dark places outside Creation. And so, the eight heroes forged the Ewer as the Great Maker commanded. Today, each of the eight nations of Autochthonian bears the name of one of these eight heroes. Yugash, who founded the nation central to this adventure, is said to have traveled throughout Creation to obtain the perfect materials with which to craft the Radiant Amphora of Celestial Accumulation.

AN ECONOMY OF SOULS

Souls sustain the Machine God in his dark slumber, and they are central to Autochthonian society. When an Autochthonian is born, a soul rises from the Radiant Amphora to animate her body. Yet, if she were to die where her last breath could not be caught and returned to the Ewer, then her ghost would float forever in the depths of the Machine God, useless to either feed it or maintain its inner workings.

To prevent this horror, the Autochthonians have devised the soulgem. A specially fabricated crystal that is placed in the center of the forehead, the soulgem catches and holds the individual's soul when she dies. These nearly indestructible crystals can survive even the most terrible fates that Autochthon has to offer—death by immersion in acid or molten metal or by explosion when some junction box ruptures. All Autochthonians receive their soulgem





within a week of their birth, and they wear it throughout their life. At their death its contents, like their bodies, are returned to the Machine God for reprocessing.

Because there are only a finite number of souls within Autochthon, the lineage of individuals can be traced. Through divinations performed on certain banks of dials and gauges in sacred spots deep within the Great Maker, the Theomachracy can discern which soul has come to inhabit a given child. An individual's soul is believed to be of critical importance to her achievement in life, and those with distinguished previous incarnations are groomed for positions of leadership and influence. This belief has created a permanent class division within Autochthonia, as those deemed to have superior souls are constantly placed into positions of responsibility, thus reinforcing their soul's perceived importance, while those with lesser, inferior souls are kept forever among the laboring class. While there is some movement between the classes, it has grown less and less as time passes.

Recently, a terrible crisis has begun to make itself known. After almost 5,000 years of recycling souls, the Radiant Amphora has begun to run dry. Across all the Eight Nations, children are stillborn. If a new source of souls is not found soon, the Sleeping God will surely consume all who dwell within it to sustain itself in its slumber.

TIME

The Autochthonians split their 25 hour day into five shifts tied to the five elements, beginning with Earth-shift and progressing to Wood-, Fire-, Water- and Air-shift respectively. Each shift is divided into five hours, with 12 1/2 minutes of time at the beginning and end of each shift serving as a transit and break period. This buffer, a total of 25 minutes in length, known as the shift change, allows time for an Autochthonian to get to an assigned area and take over the controls from a previous worker without ceasing the controls' operation. Days, months and years are identical to the Old Realm method of determining the passage of years, but Autochthonians date the beginning of their calendar from the creation of Autochthonia. The current year is 4878 DA (Dawn of Autochthonia) by their reckoning.

WORK

Autochthonian cities are packed with great factories designed to regulate Autochthon's local systems and to keep the cities' many denizens alive. In Autochthonian parlance, "factory" means not just manufactories, but any large structure devoted to the operation or improvement of a function of Autochthonia. Some produce goods, but many others process or harvest raw materials, and the majority simply regulate the internal processes that keep Autochthonia and its inhabitants alive.

Autochthonians learn at an early age that carelessness and inefficiency are the tools of the Void. Children

are taught to conserve energy and to be diligent, attentive and unfailing. Because many of the tasks required to sustain Autochthon are highly repetitive, children are taught to perform even the most mindless tasks without having their attention slip.

HOME LIFE

Most Autochthonians live in large dormitories, sleeping in communal spaces, where several dozen individuals bunk together. Typically, these living arrangements are on a per-work-unit basis, and an Autochthonian will sleep, eat, work and play with the same people. In many places, "hot bunking" (where different people sleep in the same bunk on different shifts) is practiced, and individuals have no personal space whatsoever. Higher-status individuals have small apartments. Foremen typically live in suites that house six individuals, and members of the Olgotary, the Theomachracy and the Sodalities typically have small private areas. The apartments of extremely important individuals are often quite palatial, and the amount of living space one possesses is a sign of status among those who dwell within the Machine God.

Food within Autochthonia is in the form of nutrients tapped from the veins of the Great Maker himself. Elaborate mechanisms draw broth and mush from Autochthon's vast veins. Workers go to cafeterias, where they are served portions of food from great dispensers attached to the Maker. The Theomachracy considers this to be one of the holiest times and enjoins all denizens of Autochthon to eat in silent contemplation of their duty. Not even the highest-status individual eats alone in Autochthon, though, of course, more important members of society eat with their peers in smaller dining rooms, away from the Lumpen and the Populat.

LEISURE LIFE

In what time they have to themselves, the Autochthonians enjoy a variety of recreational pastimes. Like all humans, Autochthonians socialize in their spare time, and much of their leisure time is taken up relaxing and associating with friends. These include potential sexual partners, and though they are far less emotional about it than the denizens of Creation, humanity's favorite pastime commands the attentions of Autochthonians as much as any other human being.

Most Autochthonians who are able take part in physical sports. These are typically activities that emphasize individual prowess and capability — climbing, acrobatics and gymnastics, lifting weights, running, juggling and the like. Contests are very common and can be informal or else sponsored by the Autochthonian's work unit or factory. Autochthonians also enjoy music, and many perform in bands or ensembles in their spare time. Most Autochthonian music sounds very strange to outsiders, consisting as it does of brass instruments and driving percussion, often overlaid with obviously mechanical sounds.

POSSESSIONS

No monetary system exists in Autochthonia. Individuals have their needs provided for them by their cities and work units. Should one city produce an excess of materials, the surplus is stored until it can be used or is shipped to another city that needs it. Hagglng between cities and organizations is often quite complex, and favors owed can be traded about like currency, however, there is no fixed unit of account to measure them with.

Clothing consists of color-coded hats, tops and slacks made from a material as strong and light as silk. The color coding indicates the worker's job and rank. Boots, socks and belts are of standard design, and everyone in Autochthonia wears the same makes and models. Individuals in areas where there is appreciable precipitation use poncho-like, black, artificial leather rain slickers. When special protective gear is required, the Autochthonian's work unit assigns it. The clothing is factory-manufactured, and workers typically discard their daily clothes for recycling each day and pick up a new set in the morning.

Factories often reward workers in particularly productive work units with specialized or high-quality tools and give individuals small medals for good annual performance. There are also a number of small religious icons that an individual is likely to possess — most commonly the gear-and-cross symbol or the interlocking rings.

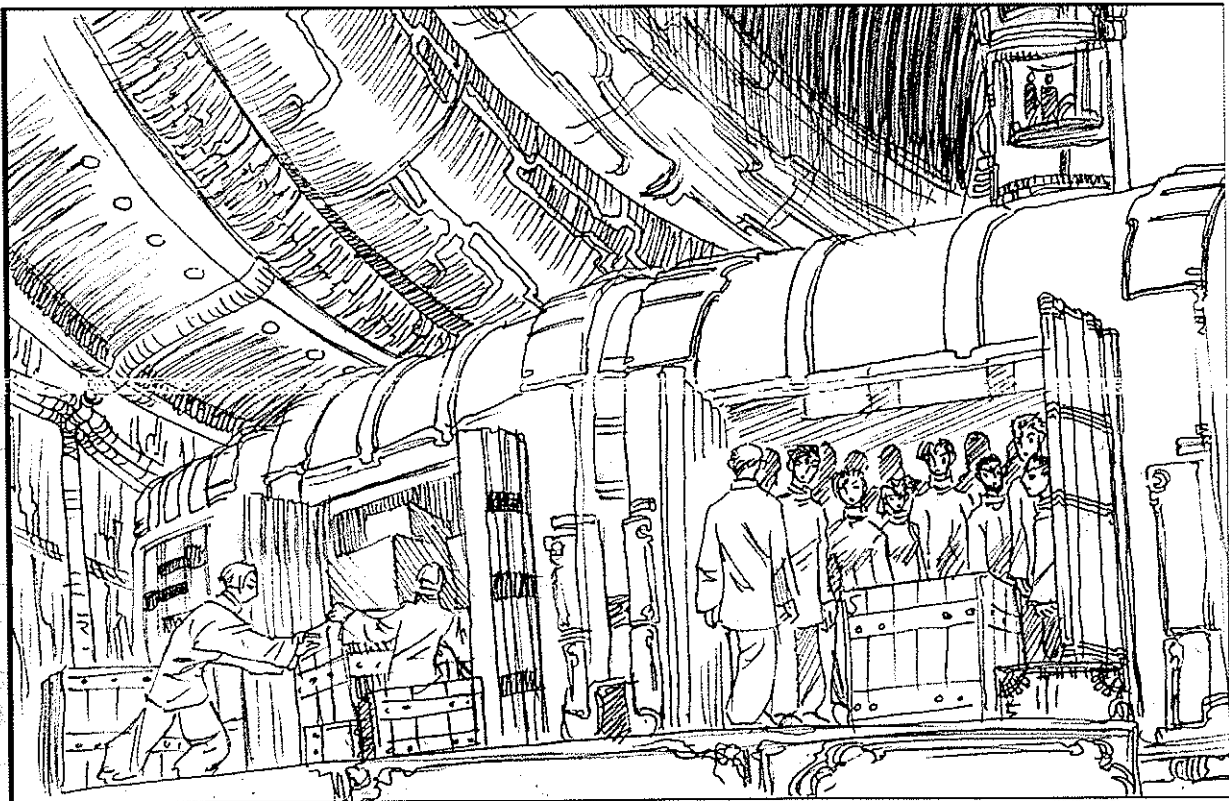
While trade officially occurs between nations and organizations and not individuals, in practice, every


Autochthonian has something to trade, be it a good or service. Most everyone accepts that this is an inescapable reality of the human condition — but only so long as it doesn't exceed a certain critical threshold. Extensive stockpiling for personal use or individual gain is a crime worthy of demotion to the ranks of the Lumpen.

Important individuals often amass considerable material goods, typically those related to the practice of their profession. The logic is that important members of the Sodalities and the Theomachracy have important tanks to perform and should not be hindered in these critical duties by waiting for communal resources. Mostly, this is in fact the case, but there is a certain amount of acquisitiveness that passes under the umbrella of increased performance.

TRANSPORTATION

Autochthonians typically walk from one area to another or travel via mechanical rickshaws that can transport one or two individuals at fair speed. These rickshaws are difficult to maintain, however, and are generally reserved for the infirm and high-status individuals. Most long-distance or large-load transport in Autochthonia is done by means of pneumatic trams. These trams move from station to station through specialized veins, pulled by suction in front of them and impelled by air pressure behind them. Some move vertically, allowing transport between the tiers of the Autochthonian cities, while others fan out across the tier or connect cities together.





Transport between nations is accomplished through massive cargo trams. While some are suitable for passengers, most have no protection against the hostile conditions of the large transport veins. Where the goods transported are important — for example caches of Magical Materials — Alchemical Exalted are used to oversee them, since the Alchemicals need not breathe.

LANGUAGE

The tongue spoken by the Autochthonians is known as Autochthonic, a bastardized dialect of Old Realm. Those who speak Old Realm can communicate basic needs or concepts with someone who speaks Autochthonic but cannot express complex concepts or idioms. Autochthonic has no true written form — the majority of Autochthonians are illiterate. The closest equivalent to a written language is the system of pictographic icons used to demarcate places, things and concepts of importance. These icons can be found all over Autochthonian cities, communicating concepts such as “No Entry,” “Cafeteria” and “Danger! Hot surface!” In areas where light is nonexistent or nearly so, systems of chimes denote hazardous areas and convey important information.

SEX & GENDER

Autochthonians see few functional differences between men and women. If a worker is deemed physically and mentally capable of performing a task, that worker is assigned to that task without thought of gender. Consequently, both men and women can be found at all levels of Autochthonian society. Rarely is the balance equal — some areas have more women than men, and vice versa. This is not a function of gender dominance, but the result of job selection based upon suitability rather than an artificial balance of the sexes. The Autochthonians simply don't view most matters along gender lines, so a forced numerical equality isn't seen as more or less desirable than inequality.

Coed housing predominates, with men and women sharing living quarters. Sexual activity is quite common and only discouraged if at all dangerous to one or more partners. Most Autochthonians take at least one lover, and many have several. Marriage doesn't exist amongst the Autochthonians as it does upon the face of Creation. There is a custom roughly analogous called the birthbond, which involves the selection of a mate with the intention of bearing and raising children.

Those who wish to undertake the birthbond have their link officially consecrated by a city's leadership and are obligated for 15 years after the birth to raise the child and instill proper values into him. As lineage and ancestry is determined by the soul provided by Autochthon, not the parents, the obligation is solely to the soul that resides in the child. Most nations take a relaxed view to the birthbond, relegating it to the status of an old social tradition. Children

are raised in crèches in any case, and so, rearing activities are restricted to visits by the parents.

Matters are somewhat different in Yugash, where the desire for a larger population encourages multiple pregnancies. Here, the birthbond affords special privileges such as housing in nurseries through the child's fifth year and a limitation to two shifts' work daily in the factories in return for a third shift spent with the child. Neglecting the birthbond's responsibilities in Yugash is grounds for exile, dependent upon the severity. The birthbond in no way coerces monogamy, and legislation exists allowing other adults to enter the bond in a rearing role if one parent dies or violates the terms of the birthbond.

Unlike most other Autochthonian nations, Yugash also frowns on homosexuality, primarily because such practices prevent the nation's propagation of new workers. However, the stigma is informal, and homosexuality is not illegal, though it can present a challenge to promotion and social relationships. Additionally, much as among the Dragon-Blooded, taking same-sex lovers is considered perfectly acceptable if neither party neglects their duty to reproduce.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

In a society that treats the bulk of its populace as faceless drones who exist only to pull levers and push buttons, are the people actually faceless drones?

Of course not.

The average Autochthonian differs little from a person upon the face of Creation. Certainly, fewer options for altering the course of one's life exist, but the Autochthonian is guaranteed at least two meals daily and a safe place to sleep. The benefits and drawbacks of such a society remain topics for the philosophers to argue until the end of time, but the Autochthonian is just as human as any other. Although Autochthonian government restricts personal freedoms and encourages social conformity, its people still love, hate, lie, grow jealous, laugh, sing, socialize, pray, dream and desire. Individuals in a society discouraging individualism are still individuals.

SOCIAL STRATA

Though Autochthonians might seem a faceless mass to external observers, there nevertheless exists a fairly rigid social hierarchy within their ranks. Not every Autochthonian spends her time at the clamps, but all must work hard in their own way in order to keep the gears turning.

The following categorizations apply to Yugash and generally to the other nations, but exceptions do exist. For example, the warlike nation of Estasia consistently main-

tains a class of warriors known as the Militat. However, in general, the nations conform to the following guidelines.

LUMPEN

At the lowest level are the Lumpen: social outcasts, exiles and slaves amongst a society of slaves. Although this status can only be assigned by the central authorities, many Autochthonians use the term "Lumpen" derisively when referring to anyone who doesn't pull her own weight, those who aren't seen as appropriately reverent to Autochthon and those who hold controversial views. This section discusses the differences between the three in ascending order of severity.

Social outcasts are the least ostracized of the Lumpen. They suffer organized punishment and private retribution for their misconduct. Autochthonians reserve a special sort of Lumpen status for criminals guilty of trivial misconduct or social disorder, the moderately heretical and habitual offenders guilty of minor thought-crimes such as selfishness or privacy. Yugash also reserves this status for those with consistently low productivity.

Official punishments meted out to Lumpen typically include the addition of extra shifts, the removal of privileges (such as the right to personal belongings and to attend gatherings) or the denial of contact with lovers and offspring. Privately, other Autochthonians treat these Lumpen with scorn, and they exclude them socially. Outcasts have three concentric circles tattooed around their soulgems, with the pattern and color of the rings indicating the specific transgression.

Exiles consist of the more serious criminals: sexual savages, severe heretics, murderers, politicians in disfavor, hoarders and relentless thought-criminals, particularly fomenters of violent subversion and insurgency. Autochthonians ban exiles from their cities to live forever in the Reaches, which is often comparable to a death sentence. Yugash often threatens those who refuse to perform work with exile.

Officially, exiles caught in the cities of the nation from which they were banned are either killed or made into slaves, although, in practice, this is dependent upon the reaction of those who find them. Some nations are tolerant of other nations' exiles, while some enslave or slay any exile on sight, regardless of origin. Exiles are instantly recognizable by elaborate facial tattoos detailing their crimes and their nation of origin and the terrible scar from where their soulgem is forcibly removed. Reinstalling an exile's soulgem is a crime punishable by enslavement.

The form of slavery practiced by Autochthonians is reserved for the worst of the society's offenders. Those responsible for the most brutal of crimes — only those guilty of serial murder, serial rape, fomenting severe social upheaval or the active sabotage of Autochthon meet this grisly fate. All but a fraction of the soul is torn from the Autochthonian, leaving a shell of a human being behind. The worst offenders, those

that foment social dissent or sabotage the Great Master, have their noses and tongues removed.

Slaves are capable of performing only the most rudimentary of tasks and display a docility similar to victims of the Fair Folk. They rarely speak and often emit a soft, droning hum, which seems to be the only form of expression they are capable of. Slaves typically perform the most dangerous of simple, automated tasks and are segregated from other Autochthonians. A slave's life expectancy rarely exceeds five years. Slaves wear tiny bells about the neck, wrists and ankles to announce their presence in areas of complete darkness.

POPULAT

The Populat forms the bulk of the working class. Its members man the clamps, the switches, the levers and the pedals necessary to keep Autochthonia running. Every day, they shuffle from their apartment complexes to giant elevators that deposit them before giant factories where they spend at least two (and sometimes three) five-hour shifts performing their tasks. Members of the Populat bear round, polished onyx soulgems.

The majority of the Populat consists of Laborers, who operate a variety of equipment with varying levels of complexity and danger. Early experiments with artificial methods of automation proved catastrophic, and for the safety of their society and their god, the leadership of Autochthonia has decreed that only human workers can truly carry out the devotions to the Machine God.


Those incapable of performing the often dangerous and trying tasks of the Laborers find themselves relegated to the ranks of Aides. These tasks are just as important but far less physically taxing than those carried out by the Laborers and include the distribution of clothes and other supplies, the application of informational icons, the surveillance of children in nurseries and other low-impact but critical menial tasks. The elderly, injured or pregnant often work as Aides.

Exceptional Laborers become Shift Chiefs, charged with the direction of a staff between 20 and 300 strong. They keep the Laborers working consistently and with great zeal, often leading the factories in songs with consistent rhythm to encourage reliable, repetitive motion. Shift Chiefs also harass workers who operate below required efficiency levels and report problem cases to their Foremen.

Foremen maintain whole factories, observing the Workers and Shift Chiefs and altering the flow of labor as necessary. Every Foreman has a dedicated staff of Aides who help monitor production and labor. Each factory usually has a handful of Foremen that operate on a rotating shift schedule to ensure that at least one is on hand at all times.

Supervisors control a collection of factories organized under a general purpose, such as "waste disposal" or "tool production." The Supervisors guide these citywide industries in personnel, inventory and production management.





Most cities have approximately eight Supervisors, while capital cities can contain more than 50.

All Supervisors report to a single Director who works closely with a city's leadership to convey the efforts of the Populat and to incorporate necessary changes handed down from on high. Directors work three shifts, with an appointed Sub-Director laboring through the remaining two daily shifts to handle emergencies.

TRIPARTITE

Autochthonia's upper echelons belong to the Tripartite, consisting of the Olgotary, the Theomachracy and the Sodalities. These organizations control Autochthonia's government, religion and knowledge respectively, each derived as logical extensions of Autochthon's three gifts: doctrine, faith and tools. Only the greatest of souls housed in the most capable of bodies are allowed amongst their ranks. These learned men and women control the direction of Autochthonian society and (according to them) represent the pinnacle of intellect, reason and principle. Nearly all among the Tripartite speak and read pure Old Realm in addition to Autochthonic, for many of the old texts and traditions passed down through the ages only exist in Old Realm.

Due to the complex nature of the groups that fashion the Tripartite and their influence upon Autochthonia, each is discussed below in greater detail.

THE OLGOTARY

The closest organization to a government that exists in Autochthonia takes the form of the Olgotary. These individuals keep the gears of society in mesh with those of the Machine God and direct the course of the nations. They are the planners and the directors of their people and are the axle on which the wheel of civilization turns. All members of the Olgotary have a rectangular-cut orange topaz soulgem. The gem's setting marks their branch and rank.

The Plutarchs outline the architecture of Autochthonian cities through city planning and the composition of laws. The Plutarchs see themselves as the cornerstone of the Olgotary: the innovators, distributors of material, etc. They are city planners in a literal sense, for they manage the vast and complex production schedules that provide for the countless needs of the Great Maker and its many servants. For formal occasions, Plutarchs dress in elaborate toga-like robes made of multiple overlapping layers of Autochthonian artificial leather.

The Regulators help maintain order, police the Populat and oversee the Lumpen in their daily affairs. Regulators serve as the Olgotary's eyes, observing and correcting the Populat's interpretation of the laws as necessary on a small scale. Regulator uniforms have a distinctly paramilitary air and typically consist of long artificial leather coats over tight-fitting dark silk shirts and pantaloons, with brass badges affixed to the left breast. The Regulators quell

disturbances, investigate crimes and, most importantly, keep the Populat running smoothly and efficiently. Rumors of overzealous Regulators with a brutal interpretation of justice are constantly heard amongst the Populat, but such incidents are the exception, not the norm.

The Adjudicators serve to interpret the Plutarchs' laws and invoke corrective methods when necessary. They are Autochthon's judges, juries and executioners. They are the sole true method of legal punitive measures in Autochthonia. Often at odds with the Plutarchs, the Adjudicators demand that the rules of their city and nation be clear, concise and fair. Adjudicators have the authority to veto regulations that do not meet their criteria and return them to the Plutarchs for revision. Like the Plutarchs, the Adjudicators dress in artificial leather togas, but their robes are very austere and severe, unlike the broad, overstated robes of the Plutarchs.

A single Autocrat from each city serves on the Tripartite Assembly and receives a single vote. The Autocrat is chosen by secret ballot amongst the highest-ranking members of the Olgotary and represents the will of the city's three Olgotary branches. Responsibilities include final adjudication of disputes within the Olgotary and a leadership role during crises. A Grand Autocrat elected by the Autocrats resides in every nation's capital, adjudicating matters of national importance. Only the Grand Autocrat can present the national Tripartite Assembly with a declaration of all-out war, which must be ratified unanimously by all members. A decision to engage in limited military action only requires a simple majority.

THE THEOMACHRACY

The Autochthonic Theomachracy guides Autochthonia in all spiritual matters, combating religious indifference amongst the Autochthonians. Those who don't firmly believe in Autochthon and its self-evident divinity become a very real problem to their fellow men and women. According to the scriptures, "doubt begets apathy, apathy begets sloth, sloth begets chaos, and chaos begets death." Spiritual dissension amongst the Populat could quickly lead to a refusal to work, which would be calamitous for the whole of Autochthonia. Preventing this occurrence requires a constant reminder of their origin and eternal vigilance against heterodoxy. The Theomachracy gladly take up this mantle, performing admirably amongst their three branches. All members of the Theomachracy are denoted by their square-cut, blue sapphire soulgems. As with the other members of the Autochthonian ruling classes, the decoration around the soulgem's setting denotes the rank and branch of the individual.

Lectors spread the word of Autochthon, telling tales of the Great Maker, sharing Autochthonia's history and encouraging desired virtues through proverbs, parables and popular hymns. They're Autochthonia's historians and entertainers, often acting out stories from the Tome of the Great Maker with an elaborate cast, sets and costuming. Many inject humor and

high drama into their recitals to hold the Populat's interest. Lectors wear thick, voluminous robes with artificially broadened shoulders. Most lectors decorate their robes with a wide variety of gear icons through patches, embroiders, pendants, pins and every other conceivable method.

Preceptors uphold the word of Autochthon by hunting out heretics and highly unorthodox thought. Preceptors often pose as members of the Populat to closely observe suspected dissidents. Those caught actively spreading heretical thought are captured and turned over to the Olgotary for judgment. The Preceptors are known for their immaculate white shirt-and-pants uniforms. These uniforms are very similar to those of the Regulators, save for their perfectly spotless white color and the single interlocking gear icon over the Preceptor's heart.

Clerics decide how the word of Autochthon should spread by administrating the Theomachracy. Clerical duties include organizing daily assemblages and special functions, distributing religious paraphernalia and revising the Tome of the Great Maker as necessary to current needs. The Clerics determine the direction of Theomachratic dogma as best suits the requirements of a city or nation. Clerics wear spare white robes not unlike those of Adjudicators, but most also wear a loose mandarin-style coat decorated with interlocking gear iconography on top of their robes.

The Theomachracy appoints a single Celebrant in every city, who serves as the mouth of the Theomachracy at all Tripartite Assemblies, receiving a vote equal in power to the Autocrat. To attain this position, a candidate must reach a high rank in each branch of the Theomachracy and undergo a rigid selection process to determine her worthiness to represent Autochthon. Each nation's capital is home to a High Celebrant, who serves on national Tripartite Assemblies and conveys the will of the Theomachracy on matters of national concern. The eight High Celebrants from each nation try to cooperate with one another as best they can, but because each nation's Theomachracy differs in tone and focus, they look out for the spiritual interest of their own nation before the whole of Autochthonia.

THE SODALITIES

Those Autochthonians privileged enough to understand the higher complexities of their deity and lucky enough to be born with an outstanding soul hold membership with the Five Magnificent Sodalities of Penultimate Truth and Intransigent Gospel, known simply as the "Sodalities" to most Autochthonians. The Sodalities zeal for furthering the glory of Autochthonia is matched only by their use of overwrought terminology and the ritualistic approach they take to nearly everything they do. The Sodalities' responsibilities include the invention of new methods to maximize efficiency, maintenance of the nations' most vital functions and the physical creation of Alchemical Exalted — yet, with all their infighting, it's impressive they manage to accomplish anything.

Generally, the Sodalities operate in a constant state of mutual dissent. Each of the five types has, at times, publicly claimed to lead the other four, and political alliances between any two Sodalities rarely last more than a few weeks' time. The only times all five consistently work together is during the creation of the Alchemical Exalted and in matters involving soulgems, for each Sodality holds a vital piece to each puzzle. When not bickering amongst themselves, the Sodalities truly excel in matters of physical innovation. All five perform secret rituals steeped in semi-religious terminology that aggravate the Theomachracy to no end, and the sometimes brutal punishments the Sodalities use amongst their own number often infuriate the Olgotary. Nevertheless, the secretive Sodalities remain somewhat above the law. All members of the Sodalities are marked by their diamond-shaped, purple amethyst soulgems. The decoration around the gem is an indication of the Sodalt's rank, but unlike other Autochthonians, the Sodalities use their uniform insignia to denote rank and status.

SODALITY UNIFORMS

The uniforms of the Sodalities are modeled directly on the uniforms of the Populat, for, like the rank-and-file Populat, the members of the Sodalities are workers. Where the gear of the Sodalities differs is that it is much more highly decorated. There is no special Sodality garb. Instead, the decorations — pins, collar insignia, shoulder piping — are all attached to standard Populat garb to make it into a Sodalt's, thus simplifying production and saving precious resources.

Rank amongst the Sodalities is determined through an elaborate system determined by experience, efficiency, innate talent, popularity, quiet bribery through favors and the perceived potential for bringing glory to the Sodality. No Sodality falls under a central leadership: Each city has a Council consisting of the five highest-ranked Sodalts representing each Sodality. During Tripartite Assemblies, the combined vote of all five Councilors is equivalent to a single vote of the Autocrat or the Celebrant. This often leaves the Sodality to make the tie-breaking vote when the Autocrat and the Celebrant disagree on an issue, with a majority vote amongst their own numbers determining which way they vote as a whole. The capital city of each nation maintains an Eminent Council of the five highest-ranked Sodalts in the nation, which operates in national Tripartite Assemblies as normal Councils do in local Tripartite Assemblies.

Further complicating matters, the Sodalities cross national boundaries and see themselves as transcending location. They have the potential to exert strong



influence upon whole nations, but their localized self-interest rarely allows them the opportunity to do so. Beyond this, the desire to maintain direct control over multinational Tripartites is about as appealing to the Sodalities as mass suicide through the ingestion of broken glass. The highest-ranking Sodalts are almost always those so devoted to their myriad goals and pieties that they eschew delicate political maneuvering for quick resolutions that vaguely improve their state of being. Councils generally settle for nudging local Tripartites in directions they desire, leaving the actual morass of laws and administration to those with the patience for such matters.

THE GLORIOUS LUMINORS OF THE BRILLIANT RAPTURE

Autochthonia is a world of interminable darkness, and only the Glorious Luminors of the Brilliant Rapture exist to drive back the gloom. Masters of light and shadow, the Luminors closely guard the secrets of light-making and -dousing. Most Autochthonians consider Luminors the most pompous and self-important of all the Sodalities, for they often treat light as the divine presence of Autochthon and perform elaborate rituals of thanks that are excessive in both length and ostentation. In some cities where the Luminors claim great political control, anybody outside of the Sodality caught making light can be exiled.

The main responsibilities of the Luminors include the creation of all forms of light not provided by Autochthon itself, the maintenance of citywide light grids, working the gigantic bellows necessary to keep the fires in the God Furnaces burning and fighting fires that threaten to engulf the warren-like Autochthonian cities. The Luminors control the secret of the temperatures necessary to prime the broth in the Alchemical Vats and catalyze the formation of Exalted's body.

Luminors also guard the enigma of the capture of souls and their transfer to individual soulgems, as well as the return of souls to Autochthon. According to the Luminors, any soul that escapes the confines of a soulgem is pulled into the Void and dissipates. This is a carefully crafted lie. Autochthon recycles the souls of all who die within its body, regardless of Luminor involvement. This great falsehood allows the Luminors more control over the distribution of powerful souls. Only the highest-ranked Luminors know of this lie.

The Luminors' internal punishments almost always involve the temporary loss of sight, an effect usually achieved by affixing blinders or arc protectors to the offender's face. The most serious transgressors are punished by the ruin of one or both of their eyes, a punishment meted out by forcing the offender to stare too long at brilliant flames.

The Luminors manage the harvesting and storage of orichalcum. Luminor-rank insignia and uniform decoration is of gold or orichalcum and generally consists of metallic braids and of pins and emblems in gear-and-flame and gear-as-sunburst motifs.



THE ILLUSTRIOUS CONDUCTORS OF THE CONSECRATED VEINS

The Illustrious Conductors are the Sodality who manage and maintain the innumerable veins of the Great Maker. These veins carry and deliver water, nutrients, air, raw materials and power throughout Autochthon. The Illustrious Conductors patch the veins where and when they fail or weaken and tap from them the necessities of life. It is their special tools and knowledge that allow those who dwell within the Machine God to survive and even prosper. The Conductors are the ones who draw forth nutrient paste and broth, who created and maintain the pneumatic tram network and who keep the Machine God himself healthy.

In the creation of Alchemical Exalted, the Illustrious Conductors are responsible for affixing the soulgem to a nascent Alchemical's forehead. Through their art, the soul flows into the body and changes the construct from an inert mass of clay and Magical Materials into a truly living being.

Punishments for transgression of the Sodality's code deprive victims of their ability to manipulate the world around them. They range from thin cuts along fingers to the scalding or freezing of flesh on the palms or even the removal of the hands in the most severe cases.

Conductors control the collection and use of starmetal, a rare Magical Material vital for strengthening valves in the Great Maker's largest veins, among many other uses. The Illustrious Conductors' rank insignia is of blued iron or starmetal and consists of gear iconography atop or within elaborate rosettes of wire.

THE PIOUS HARVESTERS OF THE HALLOWED FLESH

The Harvesters take that which is broken and cannot be repaired and return it to the embrace of the Great Maker. Their role in maintaining Autochthon itself is to strip out damaged parts and return them for recycling. They also perform this role among the denizens of the Machine God. The Pious Harvesters gather trash and corpses and see that both are recycled. Their duties also include souls, and it is the Harvesters who remove the soulgems from the dead and see that their contents are returned to the Ewer.

The Pious Harvesters work with the Illustrious Conductors to prepare and gather food and to dispose of human waste. This food is drawn directly from the veins of the Great Maker by the Conductors, processed for consumption in great vats by the Harvesters and then dispensed through brass handle-and-nozzle arrangements to the population through the cafeterias.

The Harvesters' role in the creation of the Alchemical Exalted is that of processing the broth for the Vat in which the Exalt is brewed. Only the Harvesters know the ingredients, mixtures and processes necessary for the successful activation of the Alchemical shell.

Harvester punishments strip away the victim's ability to speak, and range from forbidding speech for a specified amount of time to fastening the jaws shut with silver wire or even pouring a tiny amount of molten silver into the mouth. The most serious transgressions are punished by the complete removal of the offender's tongue.

Harvesters maintain the Autochthonians stocks of jade, critical as a catalyst in the recycling process. Harvest decoration is the most colorful of the Sodalities, using multiple types of jade to form colored pins and brooches. Gear-as-saw and two-gears-intermeshed (representing the crushing of waste prior to recycling) images predominate.

THE PROLIFIC SCHOLARS OF THE FURNACE TRANSCENDENT


The Prolific Scholars are the most numerous of the Sodalities, responsible for carrying out the wishes of the Olgotary and building nearly everything used in Autochthonia, from buildings and tram cars to forks and swords. The Scholars manage and operate the Machine God's many manufacturing facilities and workshops and also see to the maintenance of the countless switches, valves, indicators and gauges through which Autochthon must be offered devotions and made to function. The Scholars also repair that which is broken. Those things that cannot be repaired they pass on to the Pious Harvesters of the Hallowed Flesh for recycling.

The Scholars also create the soulgems, meticulously carving them and readying them for insertion into the foreheads of Autochthoniae's newborns. The ritual of soulgem creation is linked in many ways to the Scholars' role in the creation of the Alchemical Exalted, the manufacture of the sorcerous implants and Charms that grant the Alchemicals their mighty powers.

The Scholars hold the secret of the handling of souls and the production of soulsteel. Soulsteel is critical to the operation of many of the Machine God's manufactories, for it is immensely durable and used to coat the working surfaces of hammers and gears. It is also used in the creation of the posts that extend from the rear of the soulgem and pierce each Autochthonian's skull and along which the soul flees at death.

The Scholars clothe themselves sparsely, in leather aprons, with leather gloves, boots and caps and little more, for they work deep in the hot belly of Autochthonia, and the need for protection must be balanced with the need to sweat. Most scholars are covered with burn scars and welts. All Scholars wear the iron symbol of the God Furnace on a chain about their necks, a symbol they forge during their initiation and quench in their own blood. Scholars indicate their rank with black, wrought-iron gears, often very rough and still edged with mold-flashing or marked with peens from the shaping hammer. This decoration is often worked into practical tools of their trade, and the hammers, anvils and working garb of the Scholars are typically heavily decorated to mark the owner's rank.





Scholastic punishment involves the stoppering of the ears with putty or the mutilation or removal of the ears themselves. Truly unforgivable crimes are punished by the insertion of a hot poker into one or both of the Scholastic's ears until his hearing is burned away.

THE METICULOUS SURGEONS OF THE BODY ELECTRIC

The Surgeons are charged with the critical task of scouting throughout Autochthon, looking for malfunctions and system breakdown. When they encounter problems, the Surgeons assess them and report them to those with the responsibility of repairing the damage and to the Olgotary, who work with the Sodalities to allocate the resources needed for repairs. The Meticulous Surgeons also explore the areas of Autochthon that open or reopen — even asleep, the body of the Machine God is in a state of constant flux and regions are lost or become accessible again constantly.

The Surgeons are also charged with all things medical. They are responsible for healing the sick, midwifing tasks, creating medicines, amputating mangled limbs and so on. It is the Surgeons who determine when an individual can no longer work productively and administer the Elixir of Rest to him, so that his body might be recycled to serve all. Finally, the surgeons are responsible for the distribution of fluids to the people, particularly drinking water, and they work with the Illustrious Conductors to see that all those within Autochthon have sufficient clean water to drink.

The responsibility of the Meticulous Surgeons in the creation of the Alchemical Exalted is that of molding the Alchemical's physical form. With surgical arts and secret formulae, they take the implants and structures of the Prolific Scholars and surround them with the clay and wax and grease that will combine with the chemicals of the Vats to form the Alchemical's body. Though the surgeons are masters of the physical body, they cannot breathe life into the Alchemicals without souls and chemicals possessed by the other Sodalities.

The Surgeons manage Autochthonia's stocks of moonsilver, for this Magical Material can be used to make surgical instruments of incredible flexibility and versatility. Surgeons denote rank and status through pins and adornment of made silver or moonsilver, usually with gear-and-caliper, gear-and-scalpel or gear-and-waterdrop motifs.

The Meticulous Surgeons often carry bronze implements used for examining and repairing damage to both individuals and to the Great Maker as well. The Surgeons punish their own by stoppering the nostrils with putty or by piercing the septum with a hot bronze rod and attaching clamps to either end that contract and close the nostrils shut. Serious offenders have their noses removed entirely.

THE EIGHT NATIONS OF AUTOCHTHONIA

Autochthonia grew through the millennia from a scattered few hundred thousand people into eight nations, each with several million inhabitants. Each nation occupies a different area of Autochthonia and devotes itself to maintaining that area. This gave them vast responsibility, but generally, each sustains one or more of Autochthonian's vital system — heart-pumps, critical joints and internal furnaces — as well as a primary function vital to the whole of Autochthonia, such as the mining of the Five Elements, the rectification of manufacturing schedules and so on.

Matters grow complicated because the nations themselves move slowly, like giant ships passing through dense fog, and can only contact each other when they drift close enough together. While one nation may border two others for decades, Autochthonia's constantly shifting structure can pull it away from them over time. The drifting nation could easily find itself deposited next to yet another nation that it hasn't bordered directly for more than a century.

A nation knows it is adrift when the great tram tubes between nations begin to close. There is usually a day's warning before this occurs, as the tubes themselves prepare to detach and retract. When another nation grows close enough, the tubes automatically attach to it. These attachments and separations are generally unpredictable until they happen, causing much frustration for the nation's residents.

It is generally possible to reach any of the more distant nations by journeying through intermediate states. This involves following the intricate web of connections that each nation has with the others — for instance, taking a tramcar to one nation and traveling by foot and tram throughout it until one reaches a second tram station connecting to a second nation. This process must be repeated again and again until the desired destination is reached. Such travel can be extremely complicated to those unfamiliar with its complexities, and it can take months to reach distant locations, even for a veteran traveler.

The nations themselves are collections of cities and towns found in the large open spaces located throughout a region of Autochthon, connected together by smaller tram tubes that transport goods and citizens between settlements. Each nation has a capital city that serves as its administrative center. All of Autochthonia's nations trade vital supplies and services with one another in order to keep their culture running smoothly.

This is not to say that the eight nations always work together. Limited skirmishes and border struggles are not uncommon. Fighting generally flares up when one nation's Theomachy or Olgotary feels another's is not fulfilling its duties to Autochthon — a kind of "holy war" over the use of resources and the way a nation discharges its responsibilities. Occasionally, these skirmishes occur because of purely economic reasons, usually involving one nation's

vehement disagreement with another's trade policies, which results in raids on storehouses and factories.

Full-fledged wars involving large units of troops are rare, but they do occur. Nine years ago, the nations of Yugash and Sova became embroiled in full-scale conflict over Yugash's high tariffs on the sale of the Five Magical Materials that Sova desperately needed to repair its outlying cities, which were failing from their lack of the necessary elements. Yugash's unwillingness to budge led to Autochthon swallowing Sova's remote city of Ixut whole, resulting in its total destruction. Outraged, the leadership of Sova retaliated with the invasion of Yugash. The Elemental War saw some of the bloodiest fighting both nations had ever known, culminating in the Seven Weeks Battle in Yugash's city of Ot. Yugash barely managed to prevent the Sovaian invaders from reaching its capital city of Kadar, but with strong tactics and good leadership, the Yugashite forces persevered.

YUGASH

It is rare for a nation to be out of contact with all others for more than a few months, but occasionally, it happens. Yugash drifted away from Sova and Gulak seven years ago, prematurely ending the Elemental War. Initially, the respite was a welcome one, but as the years passed and no nations reappeared, the leaders of Yugash grew worried. According to the complicated and inexact calculations used to predict national drift, the leadership of Yugash doesn't expect to regain contact with the other nations for another three to seven years.

The dark secret of the Elemental War haunted the leadership of Yugash, for reserves of the Five Magical Materials were nearly depleted when the war began and no new sources had been discovered. Their desperation for the Materials has led the Tripartite of Yugash to consider bizarre options to avoid the prospect of reporting their failure to their fellows and, quite possibly, provoking a retributory war that will see their nation destroyed or made subject to another kingdom, probably Estasia. To avoid this fate, a decision has been reached — the ancient Seal of Eight Divinities that separates Autochthonia from Creation is to be breached and an expedition dispatched to scout the world outside the Maker for possible sources of the Magical Materials.

Amongst the eight nations, Yugash claims itself the fourth largest, with about three million inhabitants in four major cities.

THE PATROPOLIS OF OT

Ot is comprised of three very ring-shaped layers stacked atop one another, each slightly larger than the one below it. Each of these 100-foot-tall rings is connected to those above and below it by elevator tubes of varying sizes, from tiny cars that can fit two people at most to giant trams that can carry hundreds of people or many tons of cargo.

The patropolis is responsible primarily for maintaining several critical junctures of the Machine God's circulatory and resource-pumping system, including the great valves

and high-pressure pumps that regulate the various flows of resources and waste through the system. While this makes Ot enviably wealthy — there is plenty of water and food — it is also extremely hazardous, as a rupture in one of the great veins carrying acid or molten silver through the Machine God's body could easily destroy the city.

Like all Autochthonian cities, the Patropolis of Ot is built around an Alchemical Exalted who, growing vast in power, was linked to the Great Maker. Now, the Exalt provides the Tripartite of Ot with information about the status of the city's critical infrastructure elements, to help clarify the reports of the Meticulous Surgeons and better direct their efforts.

THE UPPER TIER

The largest tier of the city is a vast, flattened tube stretching far in either direction, curving off at the edge of vision. This area, normally dominated by factories, storehouses and low-status residential areas, has been partially converted for use as a staging area for the exploration of Creation.

The Upper Tier now has bunking facilities for the many troops and explorers, as well as special factories to handle incoming shipments of food, jade, slaves and so on. At the beginning of the adventure, these facilities are small and somewhat makeshift. As time goes on, especially if there is significant military resistance, the area becomes increasingly fortified and busy, as processing areas are set up to handle incoming material and prepare it for distribution. As military operations increase in tempo, the Upper Tier also becomes the training ground and base for Crusaders slated to leave, and it is here that their officers attempt to teach young conscripts the rudiments of open-field tactics.

Tram cars transporting material typically don't stop where the passenger transports do, instead heading directly for the storage chambers that serve as warehouses. These chambers are located around the perimeter of the Upper Tier and are lightly guarded by conscripts and members of the Adjudicators. The warehouses contain a vast array of materials stripped from the land above.

THE MIDDLE TIER

The Middle Tier is Ot's seat of government and the location of the headquarters of the various Sodalities and the branches of the Theomachracy as well. Unlike cities in Creation, there are no vast palaces or arenas or plazas. Instead, the gathering places are cramped meeting rooms where important decisions are made by the city's elite, standing shoulder to shoulder in the claustrophobic dark. The Middle Tier is the place where the city's services are most apparent, and there are many cafeterias and public musical exhibitions, as well as distribution centers for new clothes and tools. The Middle Tier has the city's most critical factories located within it as well, where the great pumps are maintained and offered their daily devotions by legions of workers.



THE LOWER TIER

The third tier consists of residential dormitories, which grow increasingly crowded as the Locust Crusade progresses and more and more residential areas are displaced to accommodate the infrastructure of exploration and war. This area is far from the Upper Tier, and the shift change periods are marked by throngs of workers shuffling to and from the great tram cars that take their work groups to their posts on the Upper and Middle Tiers.

THE GATE

The area around the Seal of Eight Divinities is a buffer zone against attack. While the inhabitants of Autochthon aren't sure what exactly lies waiting for them in Creation, they definitely expect hostile animals and spirits and all sorts of unknowable environmental hazards. The area around the seal can be totally isolated from the rest of Autochthon. However, when the Crusaders encounter almost no resistance from the inhabitants of Creation, security becomes quite slack and remains that way until such time as the Autochthonians are reminded of the importance of locking their door.

Passing through the Gate from the outside world leads to a cavernous chamber called the Mouth. The Mouth and the Gate constantly have air pumped into them, to keep any poison gases out. While this is briefly discontinued, it is begun again after the first malaria outbreak in an attempt to keep out mosquitoes and other insects. The walls and ceiling are lined with cabled veins, stapled up to avoid them hanging into the space below. The steel floor itself is firm enough to bear the weight of fully loaded vehicles and is hashed with tram tracks. Those entering the Gate from Creation will immediately notice that, although Ot's head is quite large, it could not possibly accommodate the quarter-mile long tunnel that connects Autochthonia with Creation. The distances traveled to pierce the Seal and reach Creation are not entirely in the dimensions men imagine and involve the strange geometries of Elsewhere as well.

At any given time, the entrance chamber is filled with wagons, supplies, damaged devices, pallets containing stacked crates covered with cloth tarps and odd metallic creatures that pass for Autochthonian wildlife. The worshipers of the Machine God swarm about, fixing what is broken, transporting cartloads of material deeper into the city, tending to their wounded and pronouncing benedictions of safety and goodwill to those preparing to leave the chamber. There are no guards to speak of inside the Mouth, as no Autochthonian truly desires to pass into the Great Beyond, but the number of Crusaders in the chamber makes sneaking about a difficult proposition.

The floor at the rear of the Mouth dips down gradually until it reaches a loading point for cargo trams. People and material are loaded and unloaded onto these to travel to Ot and beyond.

DARING ESCAPES

While the gateway to Creation is well guarded, those defenses are oriented toward keeping the outside world out, not toward imprisoning Autochthonians. While their ant-like lives might seem horrifying to denizens of Creation, the Autochthonians don't really know how to expect or want anything else. At least the first time the players' characters try it, they're likely to find flight from the Great Maker a snap.

BEYOND OT

Ot and the other cities of the nation of Yugash are tiny islands in the uncharted mechanical sea that is the Great Maker. These cities are the few "tamed" areas of Autochthonia, and most settlements are separated by great distances. The occupants of these places have made their presence and obeisance known to the deity, and Autochthon allows them to go about their business, much as a shark allows a pilot fish to swim near it and clean it. The settlements are connected by the tram system, and the great trams run constantly, speeding through the vast, dangerous realm of the Reaches to convey passengers and material safely between each city.

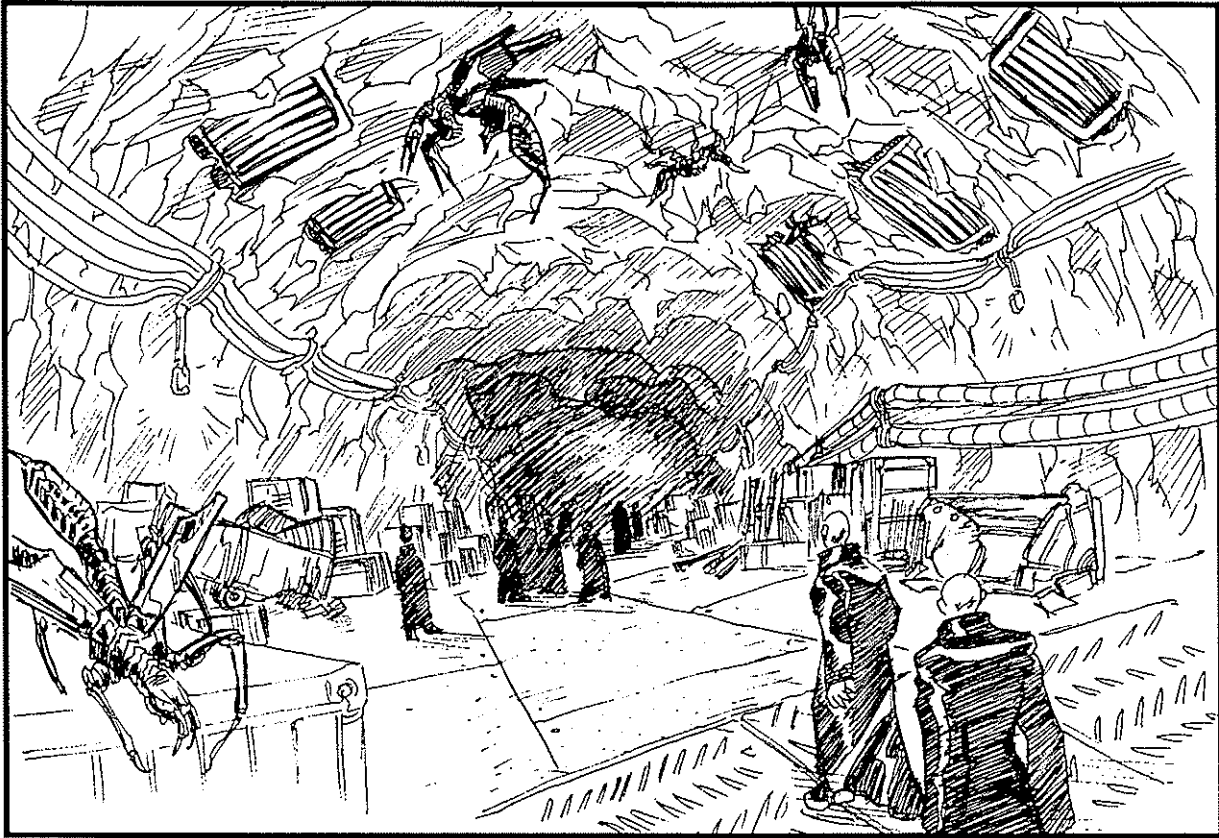
It is possible to travel to another city through the maze of serviceways and access tunnels that are known as the Reaches, but is very difficult and dangerous to attempt. As time passes, Autochthonia moves, shifting slowly and inexorably in its sleep. Consequently, the length of passage through the Reaches between cities differs on a weekly basis. There is rarely light of any kind, and travel is both slow and tedious. An hour journey by tram could take a day or more on foot through the Reaches — or only four hours, if luck were on the traveler's side.

Added to this are the dangers as Autochthon itself attempts to purge intruders. The Great Maker slumbers, and just as its hearts continue to beat and its vast joints shift as it stirs slowly in its sleep, so does its immune system attempt to remove that which it perceives as foreign. All travel in the Reaches is done at the hazard of attack by overzealous elements of its defenses. In these places, only the Alchemical Exalted can walk unmolested.

THE GRAND METROPOLIS OF KADAR

Ot was elected as the place to breach the Void because of the fact that it was isolated and nonessential, yet still large enough to process any resources that were discovered beyond the Seal. The Grand Metropolis of Kadar is Yugash's capital. Nine times the size of Ot, Yugash's second largest city, Kadar serves as the nation's hub and seat of political power.

Like Ot, Kadar is laid out in a series of giant, open discs stacked atop one another — only the rings are three times the diameter of Ot's, and there is no central vein-trunk. Kadar totals six tiers in height. Whereas Ot is mostly a working town, Kadar is filled with the kind of politics one would normally only find in the Realm, and those among



the Theomachracy, Sodalities and Olgotary who wish to secure high position for themselves and see that their agendas are carried out congregated in Kadar.

HET

Het is a small city that closed itself off from the rest of Yugash after the central authorities in Kadar announced plans to commit sacrilege and break the Seal of the Eight Divinities. All of the tram line connections with the rest of Yugash have been blocked or severed, and the city can be arrived at only through the Reaches. It is unknown why the authorities in Het chose to sever connections with the outside world. It is generally supposed that they opposed the matter for religious reasons, but it is also possible that they are indignant over the proposal to attack an unknown world and strip it of its population and resources. Regardless of the reason, an explanation will have to wait — the authorities in Kadar are far too concerned with the Locust Crusade to divert resources into mounting an expedition to find and deal with the separatists.

THE REACHES

Beyond the Autochthonians' cities are the Reaches, the desolate, untamed region of their deity. The realm of brass and shadow truly earns its name amongst these dark, twisting corridors, for what little light there is can't be counted upon to provide anything but the most rudimentary amount of illumination. Passages coil about with no apparent purpose or direction, intersecting sporadically with other winding paths. This nightmare maze can arti-

cially inflate the distance traveled by those walking within it by doubling back and snaking around, turning a single mile of actual distance into a perilous 12-mile journey.

Knowing the proper veins to tap for water or food is important to those making extended treks through the Reaches. Even for the Illustrious Conductors of the Consecrated Veins, those who exist to regulate such matters for the Autochthonian populace, the prospect of finding appropriate veins to puncture becomes a difficult one. In the larger passages, the veins are simply out of reach, dangling from ceilings one quarter of a mile above the corridor's surface. Other times, the terrain itself makes any approach a dangerous one, with jets of flame firing intermittently from large vents between the travelers and the veins themselves. Even when reached, an incorrect guess can loose spurting fountains of boiling metal, liquids so cold that they freeze solid anything they touch or gases that prove violently toxic to human beings. Travelers simply can't afford to guess.

Strange organisms of living metal and geometric perfection inhabit these turbulent corridors, bustling about to carry out tasks known only to them. The Autochthonians call these odd creatures the Custodians, for they often perform the same functions necessary to keep Autochthon alive as in any Autochthonian city. From 1 to 12 feet in diameter, the Custodians care for the slumbering deity with mindless precision, keeping the intricacy of its innards operating flawlessly. Their squat bodies and six legs can grip any surface, allowing them to skitter about along ceilings in search of areas that need repair or maintenance.

Autochthonians treat Custodians with wary reverence, for while the creatures work to keep their deity alive, they often consider humans traveling through the Reaches a threat to Autochthon and attempt to obliterate that menace with sharpened blade-claws, whirling gears and torches of thin blue flame. Only the Alchemical Exalted can truly walk amongst the Custodians without fear, for their direct connection to Autochthon allows the creatures to deem the Alchemicals as harmless.

THE FAR REACHES

More dangerous and chaotic are the Far Reaches, the areas completely divorced from the bizarre logic that governs much of the sleeping deity. Those in the highest circles suspect that these areas herald the onset of Autochthon's death and represent what the Autochthonians work to prevent.

Only the greatest of Autochthonian heroes have ever returned from the Far Reaches — and rarely without permanent damage to body or mind. They bring nightmare tales of passages that move, constricting from 300 yards diameter to 3 in mere seconds. Gravity itself swings wildly about, slamming all without a secure grip against surfaces that were walls or a ceiling not long before. Rivers of fire flow through, flames lapping along surfaces until brass drips like molten rain from above.

Worse yet, the Custodians of the Far Reaches actively work to destroy Autochthon rather than maintain it, savaging veins with razor-sharp claws and drilling through passages in an attempt to open a breach beyond the Machine God. These terrifying beasts are prowling geometric terrors, often asymmetrical in ways that hurt the eyes to gaze upon and the mind to comprehend. These mindlessly savage beasts are known as Gremlins and seem intent on collapsing all of Autochthon's delicate systems. They feed from its dark dreams and troubled mechanical nightmares, drawing power from them and amplifying them in their mad quest to unravel the Great Maker.

THE VOID

As the ancient stories say, all beyond Autochthon is Void. Simply put, the Void is an abyss. More accurately, it is the dark nothingness that exists in counterpart to Creation. Amidst this swirling oblivion dangles Autochthon, hiding below the world in avoidance of the Great Curse. Its outer skin is thick enough to resist the great pressures of the Void, but the fear of a breach is always on the minds of the Autochthonians. Tales speak of whole cities that simply vanished when the Void overtook them, but none remember exactly which cities nor the specifics of when and where.

Nevertheless, Autochthonians identify the Void as the sum of all that is wrong and, at times, personify it as an evil god, often taking to blame the Void for all of their ills. The supremely heretical Voidbringer sect, thought to infest all eight nations, is sought out for crimes against god and state. Those caught belonging to the sect have their soulgems removed and are executed in public ceremony, a punishment unheard of before the sect's existence was discovered.

THE GODHEAD

Since the dawn of Autochthonia, many have sought a way to speak directly to Autochthon. The Theomachy's teachings assert that only the worthiest prayers of the most efficient and selfless Autochthonians ever truly reach the Machine God.

The Alchemical Exalted exist as the Great Maker's avatars, but even the greatest Alchemical metropolis (considered by most Autochthonians to be the Gulakian city of Thutot) can't converse directly with the Machine God — they serve entirely as regulatory systems, not extensions of the deity's mind. Those Autochthonians who seek divine wisdom must consult the Godhead.

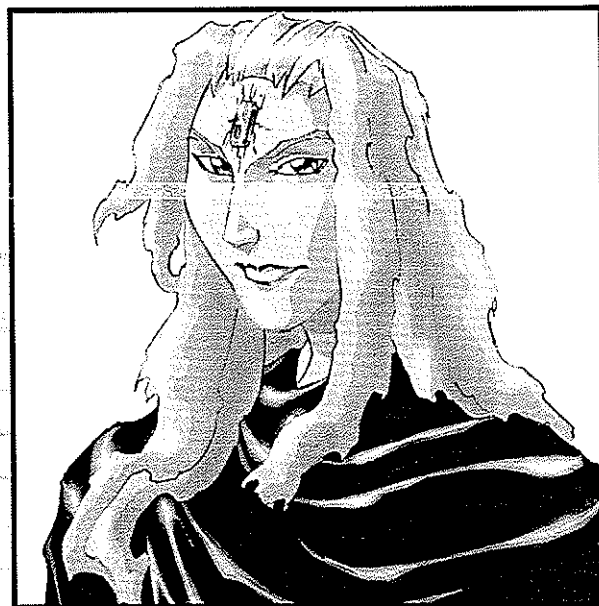
Long rumored to be the center of Autochthon's mind, tales of the Godhead speak of a place where all the great vein-trunks unite in a chamber hundreds of miles across and dozens of miles high. The nation that discovers the Godhead shall surely be blessed by the Great Maker itself and will cull favor with the deity unknown amongst the nations by waking their god and informing it of the dangers that lie within its vast being. Once Autochthon awakens, it can set itself right once more, allowing a second exodus of all nations to the Godhead itself. There, the dominant nation shall rule all of Autochthonia beneficently, with direction from the Great Maker itself tempering its rule.

That's the theory. In practice, the only suggestion of the Godhead's existence come from Autochthonian religious texts and legends passed down through the generations. Nevertheless, the Autochthonian nations have fought bloody wars between themselves over unsubstantiated rumors that one nation is closer to finding the Godhead than the others.

PROMINENT AUTOCHTHONIANS

KEROK, GRAND AUTOCRAT OF YUGASH

Kerok is the individual who proposed opening the Seal of Eight Divinities. To Kerok's perception, this action



is what is necessary — necessary to save his nation and to preserve the Great Maker. A handsome, driven man, very young for his position, Kerok is a religious and nationalistic fanatic in a very understated way. He will do anything, literally anything, to protect his people and his god, including stripping Creation bare.

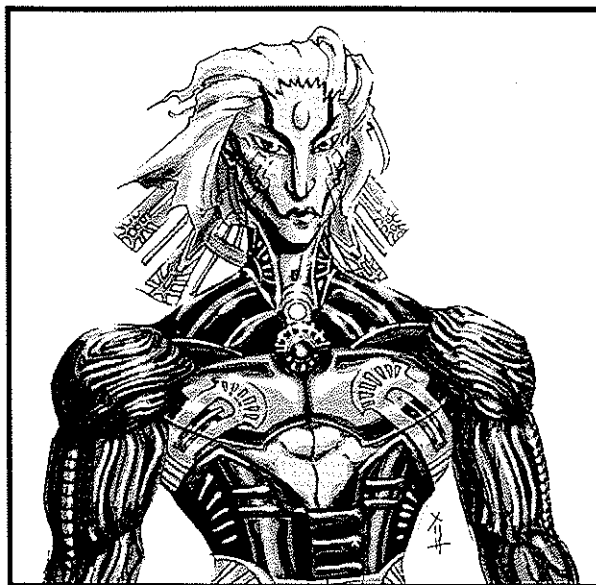
YEVEL, CELEBRANT OF OT

A sincere and pious individual, Yewel heads the Theomachracy of Ot. Yewel is genuinely interested in determining whether inhabitants of Creation have souls or not. Yewel is an intellectual and an idealist, in a very different way than Kerok. As events in the Locust Crusade progress, Yewel's conclusion that the inhabitants of Creation do indeed have souls provokes a religious schism against Kerok's campaign. Exalted characters who become involved can make the schism emerge faster and strengthen its effects.



EXCESSIVELY RIGHTEOUS BLOSSOM, HONORARY LECTOR

Blossom is an Alchemical Exalted of the Moonsilver Caste, who originally served as an Adjudicator in the Olgotary, but retired from his position for reasons his name makes evident. A fervent being, *Blossom* often indulges in rhetorical excess and stands on principle in the face of necessity — dangerous traits for a being that can make legions of men march to their deaths. While he is superb in single combat, *Excessively Righteous Blossom* is unfortunately not a particularly good strategist, and in the Elemental War, that's exactly what his troops did.



MILITARY STRENGTH

There are few career soldiers in Yugash. While there is occasion for conflict, the environment within Autochthonia is too hard and the people too similar for wars of conquest to be common. There are Regulators and Adjudicators with military training, but they are mainly used to suppress uprising and heresies and to defend the cities against hostile mechanicals from the Far Reaches. When large units of troops are needed, they're hastily conscripted from the Populat and the Lumpen and are used to support elite units and Alchemical Exalted.

Autochthonia's armed forces are past masters of skirmish, assault and urban combat, but they have almost no experience in open-field combat because there are neither open fields nor large armies in Autochthonia. Even the largest forces fielded in the Elemental War numbered only a few thousand. In the early phases of the Locust Crusade, this proves to be a terrible liability, as the Autochthonians are totally unequipped to deal with the armies of Creation. However, as time passes, the Autochthonians learn from their mistakes and, eventually, become passable, if not excellent, open-field combatants.

The typical Autochthonian soldier is not much different from a warrior one might find in Creation. The Autochthonians wear reinforced buff jackets and most carry short swords and shields. The spear is little used because most fighting in Autochthonia is done in close quarters. However, Autochthonians do possess a weapon unknown to those who dwell within Creation — the crossbow. These deadly steel-bowed weapons can be fired even by conscripts and are quite effective in close quarters. With their ability to pierce even thick armor, these weapons give the Autochthonians an advantage that almost offsets their total inexperience on the field of battle.



UNIQUE EQUIPMENT

The children of the Machine God produce many specialized and effective tools, most developed to help them survive in the alien and hostile environment of Autochthonia.

CROSSBOW

Autochthonian innovation has produced a variation on the standard bow called the crossbow. This weapon consists of a metal box, often with a grip and simple stock and a flexible spring-steel bowstave crossing the front. It fires short metal arrows, called bolts, that quite readily pierce armor — a critical asset when fighting the Machine God's metallic fauna.

The crossbow's advantages are that the user's Strength is irrelevant. They do a base amount of damage, plus extra successes, regardless of the Attributes of the person firing them. Also, the bolts are armor-piercing, like target arrows. When someone is struck with a crossbow bolt, halve her lethal soak before applying it to the damage.

The disadvantages of crossbows are several. First, they are slow-firing, with a rate of only 1. Second, their range is poor because the bolt is light and energy transmission from string to bolt is inefficient. Third, they are difficult and somewhat expensive to manufacture compared to bows. Finally, the bolts come only in the armor-piercing varieties. The structure of crossbows makes it impossible to fire broadhead or frog crotch bolts.

Crossbows use the Archery Ability but are not compatible with Archery Charms that allow characters to fire more than once per turn. Charms for the rapid fire of crossbows must be developed by characters after they have been exposed to the weapons.

Heavy crossbows, called "siege crossbows," are used by Autochthonian troops in assaults and sieges. These weapons take ten or more turns to reload using a pulley-and-crank reloader but do a phenomenal amount of damage.

ARC PROTECTORS (ARTIFACT •)

There are many things and places in the Machine God that burn or glow so brightly that a human who beheld them directly would have his eyes forever ruined. To combat this, Glorious Luminor savants devised the arc protectors. These square goggles faced with black glass allow the user to see well in normal illumination and also to look directly at electrical arcs or other brilliant displays that would damage an unprotected human's vision. Arc protectors completely shield the wearer from flash-type effects and natural light sources that might blind her but in dim illumination can render the user blind (-1 to -4 dice on Awareness rolls, depending on how poor the light is). The protectors do not guard against magical aura effects that only happen to emit visible auras (such as the Dawn Caste anima power or the aura powers of the Sidereals).

All members of the Locust Crusade are issued arc protectors and are expected to wear them at all times during daylight — a necessary precaution, as none of their eyes are at all adapted to the brilliant light of the sun.

ASSAULT CROSSBOW (ARTIFACT ••)

Incorporating one of the Five Magical Materials into their frames, these enchanted weapons are used by the Alchemical Exalted as the more normal Exalted of Creation use the powerbow. While they fire as quickly as a normal crossbow, these deadly weapons do almost as much damage as a siege crossbow. Assault crossbows are otherwise similar to mortal crossbows — their bolts are armor piercing and cannot be made in broadhead or frog crotch configurations.

AUTOLABE (ARTIFACT • OR ••)

Autochthonia is a vast and complex place to navigate, especially in the Reaches. To allow people to find their way through the maze of accessways and service tunnels, Autochthonian scientists devised the autolabe.

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Resources / Artifact
Crossbow	+1	5L	1	125	••
Siege Crossbow	+0	8L	1/10	250	•••
Assault Crossbow	+3	8L	1	250	••

Name: The name of the weapon.

Accuracy: This value is added to or subtracted from the character's Dexterity + Archery total when rolling for attacks using the weapon.

Damage: The damage the crossbow does. This is not modified by the user's Strength.

Rate: The maximum number of bolts that can be fired from the crossbow in a given turn without the use of Charms. Siege crossbows take 10 turns to reload.

Range: The range interval of the weapon in yards. Ranged weapons can shoot out to their range without penalty. They can fire at up to twice their range with a -2 penalty and can fire at up to three times their range at a -4 penalty.

Resources/Artifact: The minimum Resources the character must have to purchase the item (for the crossbow and siege crossbow) or the Artifact rating of the weapon (for the assault crossbow).

Just as the jade needle in a more conventional compass points to the Elemental Pole of Earth, the gimbaled pointer in an autolabe points back toward a fixed beacon. This beacon must be set when the autolabe is created. Most autolabes are attuned to a beacon at the center of the city in which they're constructed, but those used in exploration come as part of a set with a base unit that all the autolabes are attuned to. Unlike a conventional compass, an autolabe's pointer can point up or down, allowing it to indicate not just the direction but the relative altitude of the beacon.

Some very sophisticated autolabes will memorize every twist and turn of an individual's path after she pushes a button on the autolabe, so that she can retrace her footsteps if she becomes lost. These more sophisticated autolabes are Artifact'••. Autolabes of both types are about the size and shape of a lantern, and many can either be used as light spheres or have some sort of jade-burning internal illumination so that they can be read in the eternal darkness of Autochthonia.

LIGHT SPHERE (ARTIFACT •)

Autochthonia is a vast, dark place, where light is a rare commodity. Large light sources typically use electrical arcs, burning gas flames or glowing crystals to furnish illumination. To provide portable light away from permanent illumination, savants of the Glorious Luminors Sodality have devised the light sphere. These tempered glass and brass cylinders contain a globe where a small disc of jade is put into contact with a specially treated orichalcum catalyst. The catalyst causes the jade to sublime away in an incandescent display. The light is harsh and cold and makes the skin appear sallow and sickly. One coin-sized disc of jade will allow a light sphere to burn for about a week. Toward the end of its life, the jade disc emits a fitful, flickering light and the sphere can often be heard to hum or buzz.

ARTIFICIAL LEATHER

Other than humans and rats, nothing inside Autochthonia has anything remotely resembling a skin. Yet, there are many situations that require a tough flexible substance, from protective garb to flexible sleeves for mechanical joints. For these situations, the Autochthonians utilize an artificial substance they call "leather," which is tapped from the veins of the Great Maker and rolled through great presses to form sheets of tough, flexible black rubbery material. This material has a slick look to it and a slightly sticky texture, and it is used for aprons, armor and countless other applications.

ALCHEMICAL EXALTED

Just as the inhabitants of Creation have champions, so too do the inhabitants of Autochthonia — yet these heroes are as different from the heroes of the sunlit world as the mechanical world of Autochthon is. Forged in the great Alchemical Vats and the God Furnace and given breath by the Great Maker itself, these Exalted are themselves living extensions of the Machine God.

The Alchemical Exalted are built, not born. Over the course of eight months, the Five Sodalities work together to perform a complicated ritual that joins large quantities of the Five Magical Materials with specially machined parts, rare clays and exotic materials to produce a body of roughly human form. Next, the body undergoes an intricate procedure involving the installation of a flawless, many-faceted diamond soulgem, which takes eight days to complete. Once completed, the valves to the Exalt's Essence reservoirs are opened, and for the next eight hours, the Alchemical draws his first reserve of the special self-regenerative broth that powers Alchemical Charms. Finally, an elaborate ritual lasting eight minutes breathes life into the Exalted, which wakes within the Alchemical Vats.

Relatively few Alchemical Exalted exist in comparison to the teeming masses of Autochthonians. Only national Tripartites can approve the creation of Alchemical Exalted, and every faction of the Tripartite is in some way involved with the process. The Olgotary determines the capabilities and purpose of each Alchemical, the Sodalities maintain the secrets of the physical construction process, and the Theomachy performs the ritual that provides the Alchemical with the spark of life. Perfect timing at all stages of its creation is critical, and the massive expense of the investment of exotic materials is enough to tax even a nation's resources. Yet, the process of creating Alchemical Exalted is often undertaken in times of war and strife, and the set-up for the processes is such that it is less expensive to make several such Exalted. As a result, Alchemicals are typically created in groups (called Batches) of three to five. Still, they are scarce — even counting those that have grown so great they form the basis for cities, no more than 1,000 exist during the Age of Sorrow, and Yugash's Alchemical population numbers less than 150.

CLAY SKIN, BRASS BONES, IRON SOUL

Even a superficial examination makes it obvious that Alchemical Exalted are not human. Their skin itself is cold and clammy to the touch, and its tone is typically a light gray, stained slightly with their anima colors. Their Charms are composed of glass and brass and steel, and they bulge from or sometimes even encase whole areas of the body. The Essence reservoir is the core of the Alchemical, positioned where the lungs and heart would be on a human. The reservoir is typically visible through the Alchemical's chest — a crystal shell encased with brass





support strips and filled with boiling fluids. The level of fluid in the Alchemical's Essence reservoir diminishes as the Alchemical spends Peripheral Essence and slowly increases as his Peripheral Essence pool returns.

The diamond soulgems installed within Alchemical Exalted contain a lineage of Autochthonia's most powerful heroes. During the creation process, an Alchemical-to-be forms a synthesis of these personalities, providing the newborn Exalt with a personality and partial memories drawn from the hero of Autochthonian legend. Artificially constructed memories of Autochthonia's present meld seamlessly with the soul's previous recollections, drawing one of Autochthonia's greatest heroes into the modern world. Autochthonia's ancient history varies wildly from the present, for the current stable society took over 5,000 years to produce. Alchemical attitudes diverge from the Autochthonic norm just as wildly as ancient history diverges from the present, and their attitudes often seem alien to modern-day Autochthonians. Yet the Alchemicals' status and critical role in the life of Autochthon cause them to be given immense latitude in their behavior. Thus, the Alchemicals stand forever apart from their society, protectors and champions of their people, yet never truly a part of them.

An Alchemical freshly emerged from the Vats is little more than a roughly humanoid clay creature with vague features, as if carved by a child. However, when the soul fuses with the body, the crude features of the Exalt refine themselves and take a shape appropriate to the soul inhabiting the body — some Alchemicals appear to be perfect humans with inclusions of clay and crystal and glass, while others are monstrosities of labor or warfare whose only similarity to the human form is two arms and two legs. When the soul inhabits the body, hair sprouts from the head. Though this head hair behaves like normal hair, it is the only hair on the Alchemical's body — the Exalt's body is otherwise completely smooth. Likewise, depending on whether the Alchemical sees itself as male or female, appropriate sex characteristics appear. Though they are perfectly functional, reproduction with Alchemical sex organs is impossible. In all cases, the Exalt's eyes are perfectly human, unless they have been replaced with some sort of Charm to enhance their capabilities.

Alchemical Exalted share certain needs with mortals but not all of them. They need not breathe, nor do they need to eat, but if they do not ingest human food regularly, they cannot heal or regain Essence. If they do eat, the waste is eliminated just as if they were normal humans. Damage to the Alchemicals — cracked crystal, slashed skin and smashed Charms — heal just as the wounds of more common sorts of Exalted do, knitting together quickly and without scars.

The death of an Alchemical Exalted is as different from that of a mortal as her life. When lethal or aggravated damage reduces an Alchemical below Incapacitated, her body quickly dissolves into a puddle of melted clay, cracked crystal and hopelessly scorched brass components, with a single soulgem resting amidst the morass.

A MATTER OF SCALE

As the Alchemical Exalted grow in power and capability, meditating and undergoing reconstruction in the Vats, they grow in size. Alchemical Exalted with an Essence rating of 1 to 3 are generally no more than seven feet tall and have a distinctly humanoid appearance. Those with an Essence rating of 4 to 5 are taller and bulkier, sometimes reaching heights of 12 feet. Once the Exalted's Essence reaches 6 or 7, the physical differences are striking. Often reaching heights of up to 30 feet, these Exalted resemble the larger Custodians that scuttle through the Reaches — often their only vaguely humanoid trait is a somewhat human face that resembles an oversized mask, which the Exalt uses to communicate with those around it. These Alchemicals speak of Autochthon's song thrumming at the base of their minds, and they rarely make the effort to speak with the pretense of human feelings.

Alchemical Exalted that achieve 8 or higher Essence become a part of Autochthon, grafting themselves to the core of a city and growing into the structure of the Machine God, joining it's form with their own and their souls with the Primordial's. At this stage, male Alchemicals are called "patropoli," and female Alchemicals "metropoli." At the heart of each of the capital cities of the Eight Nations rest grafted Alchemicals with an Essence of 10 or higher. These great, silent creatures are reported to be the Eight Founders themselves by other Alchemicals who become part of their city, but they have not communicated in millennia, instead enjoying union with the soul of the Great Maker.

POLITICS AND OBLIGATIONS

Each Alchemical is an honorary member of her nation's Tripartite, although she holds no real position. Nevertheless, her recommendations and action weigh heavily upon Tripartite decisions because she is, after all, one of her people's greatest heroes. Alchemical Exalted may roam freely throughout Autochthonia, and their presence is treated with religious reverence by common Autochthonians. Only an Alchemical's national Tripartite can order one to perform a task and expect it to be fulfilled, and rarely has a nation created an Alchemical with no specific duty to carry out. These often-perilous goals are the bread and butter of heroes, after all, and Alchemical Exalted are the incarnate heroes of their people.

The Alchemicals' status allows much latitude in conversation and action, although, in recent years, a small but noticeable fraction of Alchemicals have exhibited negative characteristics, committing terrible crimes against Autochthonia such as fomenting revolution, sabotaging Autochthonian factories and, in one case, attempting the assassination of Tripartite leadership. These Alchemicals were deemed corrupted by the Void and decommissioned, their bodies melted down for scrap and their soulgems irrevocably destroyed.

ALCHEMICALS AS CHARACTERS

Generating an Alchemical Exalted character is quite similar to the creation of a Solar Exalted. However, certain considerations must be made during the character creation process for steps that differ significantly from Solar Exalted creation. Use the following modifications when creating Alchemical characters.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

As with any character, selecting a compelling, exciting concept is key. Remember that Alchemical characters are the incarnations of Autochthonian heroes from long past, so invent a mortal that lived long ago and performed great deeds worthy of note. The Alchemical has flickering memories of the hero's life and bears that hero's general personality but is no more a "reincarnation" than any other Exalt. Also recall that the Autochthonia of the present is unrecognizable from what it used to be, so feel free to concoct whole swaths of Autochthonian history from millennia ago when creating your character.

Each Alchemical Caste coincides with one of the Five Magical Materials — the dominant material used in the Alchemical's construction process determines her caste. Note her caste's anima powers (listed below). Alchemical Exalted as a group have no affinity to a single Magical Material and are, instead, capable of causing the Magical Material associated with their caste to resonate with their animas.

Select Nature as normal.

STEP TWO: CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

Whereas Solar Exalted have Caste and Favored Abilities, Alchemical Exalted have Caste and Favored Attributes. The caste selected in Step One determines the Caste Attributes, as listed below:

Orichalcum: Strength, Intelligence, Manipulation

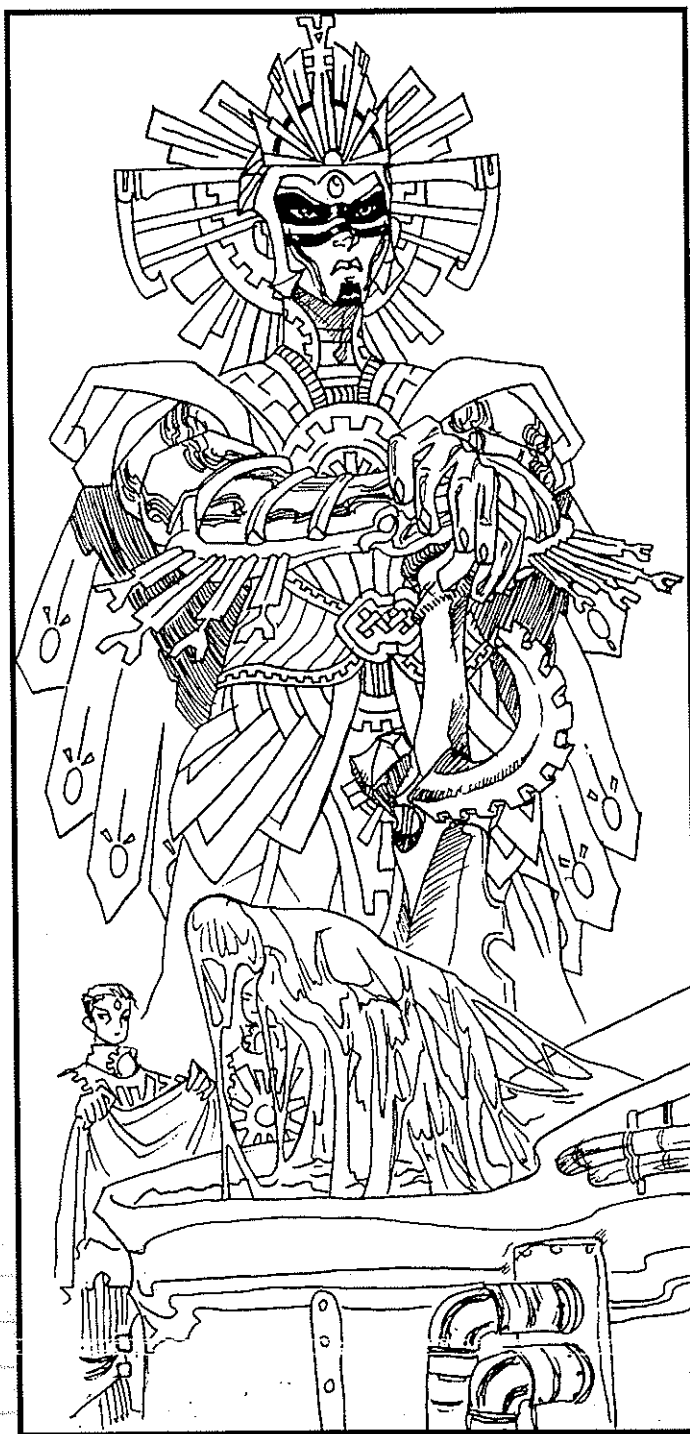
Moonsilver: Stamina, Wits, Charisma

Jade: Dexterity, Intelligence, Appearance

Starmetal: Dexterity, Perception, Manipulation

Soulsteel: Stamina, Wits, Appearance

Alchemicals get one free dot in all their Attributes to start, just like normal characters. The Alchemical's Caste Attributes are her primary Attributes, and she may distribute nine dots among them, but each Caste Attribute must be rated at least ••. The player then chooses three Attributes of the remaining six as Favored, and may distribute six dots among them. Finally, distribute four dots among the remaining three Attributes.



STEP THREE: CHOOSING ABILITIES

Alchemical Exalted have no Caste or Favored Abilities. They receive 23 dots to distribute among the Abilities. Alchemicals purchase specialties as normal.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Alchemicals select Virtues as normal. They do not suffer from any version of the Great Curse and do not need to select a Virtue Flaw. The player then chooses eight

Exalted



Charms, at least four of which must be associated with Caste or Favored Attributes.

Alchemicals receive six dots for Backgrounds but may not initially spend points on Manse unless the Alchemical has access to one on the face of Creation—no true Manses exist within Autochthon, although Alchemical Exalted with an Essence of 8 or higher effectively *become* Manses.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Alchemicals calculate Willpower as normal. Alchemicals start with an Essence of 2. Alchemicals receive 15 bonus points that may be spent at any point of character creation. Alchemical Exalted receive seven health levels as normal, plus an additional -2 box for every dot of Essence.

ADVANCEMENT

Alchemicals use the regular experience table for character advancement. While they increase their Abilities with training just like anyone else, they must return to the Vats to meditate and undergo refitting to increase their Attributes and to buy new Charms. This process requires one week for new Charms, no matter how many the Exalt has installed at once, and one week for each new Attribute dot purchased. Increasing Essence requires a month of refitting for every point of Essence. Alchemical Exalted without access to the Vats cannot increase these Traits, though it is possible that one abroad in Creation with access to a wide range of expensive chemicals and a powerful Manse could make some sort of analog and have a trusted savant make the modifications to her body.

ANIMA AND ESSENCE

The Personal Essence pool of Alchemical Exalted is equal to her (Essence x 3) + her Willpower. Her Peripheral Essence pool is equal to her (Essence x 5) + her (Willpower x 3) + her (highest Virtue x 2). An Alchemical Exalted's anima banner display happens at the same level of Peripheral Essence spending as a Solar Exalted. The expression of an Alchemical's anima occurs as a soft glow around the Exalted's body, coupled with the seeming discharge of liquefied or flaking Magical Material from beneath the skin. This bleeds from the Alchemical onto anything it touches, leaving stains upon the world (particularly glowing footprints) that fade over time at the same rate as the animas of the Solar Exalted. (This Essence stain is purely dramatic and does not harm the Exalt or release meaningful amounts of the Materials.) When they become iconic, the Alchemicals' animas appears to be a great abstract mesh of gears and machinery.

Orichalcum: Orichalcum Caste Alchemicals appear to have Charms made of highly polished brass, gold and orichalcum, often with inset windows of crystal. When their Charms are active, they often display bubbling fluids, whirling gears and smoothly sliding brass pistons. An Orichalcum Caste Alchemical can spend 5 motes to add her Essence rating to the damage of all attacks for the scene.

Moonsilver: The Charms of Moonsilver Caste Alchemicals have a techno-organic appearance, often being sculpted into organic shapes. When in use, moonsilver Charms often swell and flow like quicksilver. A Moonsilver Caste Alchemical can spend 5 motes to add his Essence rating to his lethal soak for the scene.

Jade: Jade is the most difficult of the Five Magical Materials to work, and as a result, Jade Charms are often blocky and rough-looking. During use, the naturally slick appearance of the jade and the color of the stone both intensify, until the stone seems to be a solid fluid glowing with colors too intense to represent with mortal pigments. A Jade Caste Alchemical can spend 5 motes to add her Essence rating x 2 to her base Initiative for the scene.

Starmetal: Starmetal is the rarest of the Five Magical Materials, and as a result, the Charms of these Alchemicals are often minimalist, commonly made from conventional materials covered in a spaghetti-like tangle of starmetal wire. The area of skin around the Charm is often covered with square trceries of the Material, to efficiently conduct Essence into the Alchemical's flesh. When in use, these Charms often crackle with power as excess Essence leaps between the starmetal components. A Starmetal Caste Alchemical can spend 5 motes to add his Essence rating ÷ 2, rounded up, to her attack, damage and base initiative rolls for the scene.

Soulsteel: The Charms of a Soulsteel Caste Alchemical appear roughly hammered, with ugly, primitive lines. They are frequently held together with crude-looking rivets and pins, and they are always stained with soot and grease. These Charms often emit soft moans, and when in operation, the moans rise to horrifying shrieks, and the Charms crackle with black and blue lightning. A Soulsteel Caste Alchemical can spend 5 motes to increase the difficulty of all attacks targeted at her by her Essence ÷ 2, rounded up, for the rest of the scene.

Additionally, any Alchemical Exalted can spend 3 motes per die to increase any Caste or Favored Attribute for a number of turns equal to his Essence. The Alchemical can never increase an Attribute to more than double its base rating.

CHARMS GUIDELINES

The Alchemical Exalted Charms function off of Attributes instead of Abilities.

All Charms are physically installed within the Exalted's body. Each Charm lists an additional figure called "Installation Cost" consisting of a certain number of motes. When installed, the Alchemical must pay the cost in committed Essence, deducted from the Personal Essence pool. The total installation cost of all Charms can never exceed the total of the Exalted's Personal Essence pool, limiting the number of Charms that may be purchased. Typically, the first Charm or Charms in a tree costs a fairly significant amount, representing the Essence needed to

accommodate the Charm, while Charms further up the tree cost relatively little, since they're based on preexisting hardware. Any remaining Personal Essence the Alchemical might have can be utilized in the same fashion as other types of Exalted: the suppression of the anima banner.

Alchemical Exalted Charms emphasize utility over a single purpose. Rarely does a Charm carry out a highly specific task. For example, a Charm that provided a spinning drill bit as a forefinger could be used for drilling holes, the rough carving of sculptures, a simple alternative to the chiseling or shaving of material, breaking through a rusted lock and performing surgical operations requiring the penetration of bone. This utility often sacrifices extremely powerful and specialized Charms for those that can serve multiple purposes.

When an Alchemical Exalted utilize a Charm with two listed functions, he must choose which one to activate. Should he desire to trigger both, the Alchemical must pay the Charm's activation cost twice. Also, an Alchemical wishing to activate both functions of a simple Charm must either develop a Combo to do so or activate one power per turn.

Alchemical Charms are modular in design, allowing the Exalted to "swap" one Charm for another. To exchange Charms, the Exalted must go to the Alchemical Vats located in a nation's capital and have the operators remove a Charm. Total removal time is a number of hours equal to the sum of the Minimum Essence score of the Charms to be removed. The Exalted can install any new Charm in place of the removed Charm at no experience cost, as long as she meets all minimum requirements. Total installation time equals the Charm's Minimum Essence + Minimum Attribute score in hours. If the Exalt puts an out-of-caste Charm in an installation port previously occupied by an in-caste Charm, he must pay the two experience point difference on the spot.

SAMPLE ALCHEMICAL CHARMS

STRENGTH

PERSONAL GRAVITY MANIPULATION APPARATUS

Cost: 3 motes

Installation Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Strength: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm allows the Alchemical Exalted to twist gravity in the immediate vicinity, letting him decide where "down" is in relation to himself. This allows the Alchemical to walk or run along any slope as if it were flat ground, including walls and ceilings. The surface that the character stands upon is not strengthened in any way. The down-ness only extends a few feet from the soles of the character's shoes. If the character jumps too high or is pulled far enough away from a surface, he

ALCHEMICALS AND CALLED SHOTS

As listed on page 238 of the Exalted main book, called shots do not do additional damage. This applies to Alchemical Exalted as much as any other characters. Their Essence reservoirs and physically installed Charms are no different than another character's solar plexus or eye. A character who wants to strike a deadly blow to these locations should roll well for attack and damage and then describe the effects however he wants.

will once again have the same "up" and "down" as the rest of the world, quite possibly resulting in serious injury.

The alternate ability of this Charm allows the Exalted to use this Charm to control his own weight, reducing it up to 1/8 of normal. The character's movement speed is increased by 50 percent when he weighs more than half his normal weight and increased by 100 percent when he weighs less than half his normal weight. Obviously, the Exalt will have difficulty running in certain situations, and the Storyteller should call for Dexterity + Athletics rolls if he tries to change directions quickly or run in strong crosswinds. As with all multipurpose Alchemical Charms, the player must state which variation of the Charm he wishes to use before spending Essence.

The Personal Gravitation Apparatus is housed entirely in the lower legs.

PARABOLIC LEAP OVERCHARGER DEVICE

Cost: 2 motes per turn

Installation Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Special

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Strength: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Personal Gravity Manipulation Apparatus

The character further reduces his reliance upon the strictures of gravity by channeling Essence through his lower legs and leaping gracefully through the air, his anima flowing from the base of his feet in a brilliant contrail that colors the air behind him. The character's ascent is slow but steady, allowing him to rise up to Strength x 3 feet per turn and move up to Strength x Essence feet horizontally. The character can perform any action while airborne and can change his direction in mid-air at will. The Parabolic Leap Overcharger Device allows the character to attain a total height of no more than Strength x 15 feet of height from a surface sturdy enough to support his weight. Note that if a character ends the turn in the air, she must activate the Parabolic Leap Overcharger Device Charm again the next turn or fall to the ground. A character can descend any amount of distance safely using the Overcharger Device by activating it for a single turn shortly



before impact, a useful safety device for Alchemicals who spend most of their time working in high, exposed areas.

As an alternate use of this Charm, the character can opt to make a quick "bound," describing a long arc in the span of a single turn, covering a distance up to Strength x Essence feet high and five times that long. Using the Parabolic Overcharger in this manner during successive turns allows the character to "leapfrog," bounding rapidly over terrain. The Exalted can attack on the same turn he activates the Parabolic Overcharger, but gains no special bonuses for it.

The components for the Parabolic Overcharger are installed on the rear of each leg behind the knee.

ECLIPSE CASTE AND ALCHEMICAL CHARMS

Members of the Eclipse Caste are able to learn Alchemical Charms, just as they are able to learn the Charms of all other types of Exalted. However, due to the physical nature of Alchemical Charms, there are certain restrictions.

First, the Eclipse must have access to the Vats and must have the Charm prepared for her and installed in her, just as if she were an Alchemical. Second, they appear exactly as they do when installed in an Alchemical and are just as visible an addition to her body, and, therefore, they will attract the notice of those who see them. Finally, she cannot remove these Charms once they are implanted. They can be changed out for other, potentially less visible Charms, but once the Eclipse Caste Exalted have Alchemical Charms installed, they will always have at least that many such Charms.

DEXTERITY

DYNAMIC REACTION ENHANCEMENT SYSTEM

Cost: 1 mote per +2 Initiative

Installation Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dexterity: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

At times, Alchemical Exalted must react swiftly and with great purpose. This Charm uses Essence to fuel and enhance the Exalt's reactions, slowing the world around her until it seems like everything else is moving in slow motion. For every mote of Essence the Alchemical spends activating this Charm, she may increase her Initiative score by +2 for the turn. The Exalt cannot spend more motes of Essence activating this power than she has points of Dexterity. The Reaction Enhancement System is installed on the Alchemical's spine.

CELERITY ENABLING MODULE

Cost: 5 motes and 1 Willpower

Installation Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant/one scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dexterity: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Dynamic Reaction Enhancement System

Although the Reaction Enhancement System makes the Alchemical's perception-reaction cycle incredibly short, it does nothing to enhance her own speed, and the Exalt can often be trapped in a situation where she has a perfect understanding of the danger and yet is totally unable to react quickly enough to save herself. The Celerity Enabling Module is an addition to the Dynamic Enhancement Reaction System that uses Essence conductors laced throughout the body to supplant the character's own human-like reflexes. Though it is expensive and draining, it allows the Exalt to exhibit tremendous speed.

In its primary use, the Charm generally increases the Exalted's speed. The Exalt gains a number of extra actions for the turn equal to her permanent Essence score. In its secondary use, the Charm enables the Alchemical's body to automatically react to a specific threat without the Exalt even considering it. In this mode, the Exalted chooses one target. For the rest of the scene, she can automatically dodge or parry (her choice on a per-attack basis) all the target's attacks against her at her full dice pool, even ones she cannot perceive.

This secondary effect can only be targeted at a single individual at a time. The Charm must be activated again to switch its focus, and the Exalted's ability to defend herself against the first target ends the instant she switches targets. While the Alchemical is reacting to the actions of a single individual, the Celerity Enabling Module is not able to activate its primary function and increase her speed. The Exalt can have either automatic defense or extra actions, not both. The Celerity Enabling Module is visible as implants on the Alchemical's joints.

STAMINA

STRAIN RESISTANT CHASSIS MODIFICATION

Cost: None

Installation Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Stamina: 1

Minimum Essence: Varies

Prerequisite Charms: None

Through the implantation of armored plates, reinforcing struts and redundant parts, the Alchemical is made more resistant to damage. When the Exalt takes this Charm, he may choose to permanently gain either two -1 health levels or three -2 health levels. The choice can be made each time

the Charm is taken and cannot be changed without reinstallation of the Charm. The Alchemical may take this Charm as many times as he has points of permanent Essence.

This Charm is the Alchemical equivalent of Ox-Body Technique. If members of the Eclipse Caste take it, it counts against their Endurance as if they had taken Ox-Body Technique. The Strain Resistant Chassis Modification is obvious when applied to an Exalt — his joints and vitals are clearly armored, and his frame is square and powerful.

MANIPULATION

AUXILIARY ESSENCE STORAGE UNIT

Cost: None

Installation Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Manipulation: 1

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm installs extra Essence reservoirs on an Alchemical, allowing him to use more power at the cost of subtlety. For each time this Charm is taken, the Alchemical gains an additional 10 points of Peripheral Essence. The Exalted cannot take this Charm more times than he has points of permanent Essence or more times than he can afford to pay the Personal Essence for.

THE LOCUST CRUSADE

So begins the invasion of Creation, known to the Autochthonians as the Fivefold Crusade, after their search for the Five Elements. However, the South dubs this invasion the "Locust Crusade" when the Autochthonian practice of stripping cities and regions dry of all resources becomes widely known. No war occurs without purpose, and Yugash's reasons for the Crusade are manifold. The primary goals of the Autochthonians are, in descending order of importance:

THE FIVE MAGICAL MATERIALS

Though the Five Magical Materials flow through Autochthon and sustain its existence, the deity itself doesn't suffer from any lack of these substances. Areas abound deep in the Reaches where the Materials flow through massive veins or are stockpiled in rich motherlodes packed tight just beneath the brass skin of far-flung corridors. Rather, the Autochthonians themselves suffer from the scarcity of these Materials. The Olgotary considers jade's use in the construction and maintenance of the factories essential for their production. The Sodalities use starmetal and moonsilver filters to keep Autochthonia's entire citizenry breathing clean air and drinking clean water. Only the fusion of orichalcum and soulsteel can power the God Furnaces necessary for the tool production crucial to the worship of Autochthon.

For entirely practical reasons, Yugash's Tripartite feels it necessary to accumulate as much of the Five Magical

Materials as possible before it regains contact with the other nations. Yugash's main responsibility is the procurement and refinement of the Materials, and with hardly enough to support Yugash alone, the Tripartite decrees the opening of a Gate to Creation for the acquisition of these vital resources a necessity. None want another war, and some fear that returning to the other nations after more than a decade with very little to trade could result in a conflict the scale of which would dwarf the Elemental War in its ferocity. They regard their foray into Creation as a last desperate attempt to keep their own nation alive and want to waste no time in acquiring as much of the Five Magical Materials as they can.

SLAVES AND SOULS

More than half of Yugash's Populat works three shifts per day out of necessity — too much work must be done throughout the factories just to keep the city going. An influx of the Magical Materials will assuage this need, but the foremen's concern over an increasing number of fatalities caused by overwork has reached the ears of the Olgotary. Once the Autochthonians discover humans exist on the face of Creation, they declare the need for human slaves to work in the factories, thereby easing the stresses on Yugash's Populat.

These "surface slaves" don't undergo the horrifying process used to apportion the soul that the worst of Autochthonia's criminals must endure, as the Theomachy decides that birth outside of Autochthonia is not a high crime. The foremen put most of the slaves to work in the more dangerous jobs that require the fulfillment of tasks to avoid a painful death by accidental vein leaks or explosion of the machine. This cuts down on attempts at resistance, and as time passes, the Olgotary provides allowances to incorporate the more productive surface slaves within their society. They receive a limited version of the benefits enjoyed by the Populat, although the surface dwellers remain segregated from many of the Autochthonians.

Beyond this, the dearth of new souls approaches a near-catastrophic level within Autochthonia. The need for "fresh blood" amongst the recycled and reprocessed Autochthonians grows vital with each passing day. The recent promulgation of stillborn children only underscores the problem. The Theomachy is reluctant to proclaim that humans from Creation have souls and spends much time studying captives of the Crusade for evidence of a soul. Once the Autochthonians encounter Celestial Exalted and their ability to "display their souls at will" by presenting their Caste Mark, the Theomachy decrees that non-Autochthonians do indeed have souls and works out a method of installing soulgems in their prisoners. Hundreds die before the Sodalities discover a safe process of soulgem installation for those from the face of Creation. Afterward, all of those sent to Autochthonia as slaves gain soulgems.

FOOD SUPPLY

The concept of harvested or hunted food is quite alien to Autochthonians. When they discover the benefits of agriculture, the Yugashites desire a source of food





based in Creation. The Lap becomes an obvious target. The Autochthonians don't truly understand the idea of seasons and yearly harvests until the siege of the Lap. Only then do they begin to grasp the concept of leaving villagers to produce food and taxing them after harvest. Before that point, the population of whole towns was taken by the Crusade as slaves, their fields left fallow. Hundreds of villages lie empty along the Crusade's brutal swath.

PERMANENT FOOTHOLD IN CREATION

Once the Autochthonians adapt to Creation and its bounty, Yugash's Tripartite declares that the benefits of Creation outweigh its drawbacks. They seek to permanently colonize Creation, settling for the Southwest as their base of operations. In the long term, they enact decrees allowing non-Autochthonians into their society, creating a new social class between the Populat and the Lumpen called the Outsiders for those who follow the Autochthonian flag upon the surface of Creation but are themselves not allowed entry to Autochthon. As time progresses, the Autochthonians incorporate elements of cultures that they deem beneficial into their cycle of shifts.

THE SUN

Some Autochthonians feel the sun itself is a giant soul that lights the world — or perhaps that it is the Well of Souls itself. Initially, this idea becomes a huge point of debate amongst the Tripartite and, soon, through much of Yugash's Populat. Quietly, Yugash's Tripartite considers a plan inspired by the trek of Autochthonia's eight founders. This plan involves building a massive tower tall enough to reach the sun, where they can either dip once more into the Well of Souls or better yet, capture and secure it for themselves. If the sun proves to be a single giant soul, they hope to halt its daily journey from the East to the West and use it to power Autochthon. Should Yugash capture and successfully hold the Lap, they plan to build this tower atop the head of the Last Suppliant. The most vehement supporters of this plan are the Luminors, who feel their monopoly upon light diminished in Creation and blame the sun for their woes.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE

What follows is a detailed timeline discussing the possible order of events that occur throughout the Locust Crusade. If possible, use the timeline as a guide for how far into their master plan the Autochthonians are when the characters discover them. It is vital to note that the timeline should only proceed as written if the players' characters do nothing to affect the course of events. Exalted characters are a force for change, and they should, with a decent amount of effort, find themselves capable of completely derailing the Locust Crusade.

More importantly, the Storyteller should only use this timeline as much as it suits her needs. As written, the Autochthonians effectively wipe Gem from the face of Creation and capture the Lap for their own uses. If this

completely conflicts with the Storyteller's plans for Gem and the Lap, by all means, change things around!

Have Rankar VII sell out the South by brokering an alliance with *Unhesitatingly Loyal Weapon*, allowing the Autochthonians to use Gem as a base of operations — providing they attack Paragon first. Alter the Realm's response time significantly: Move the Vermilion Legion in to reinforce the Lap before *Unhesitatingly Loyal Weapon's* forces arrive, or send a full three legions to attack Autochthonian holdings in Calan's Loss. Decide the Autochthonians' initial interests lie in the Western Ocean, and have them build fleets of metal-hulled catamarans that terrorize the West with their vast numbers and capability for lightning raids, or simply ignore this adventure and never use the Autochthonians in your game at all. Use the tools provided here to build something that's useful to *you* — after all, that's what Autochthon would want.

The Locust Crusade is separated into three significant stages, with recommendations for the players' characters involvement incorporated into each stage. The duration of the individual phases of each stage lists a rough estimation of the amount of time that passes before the phase ends.

STAGE ONE: EXPLORATION

The initial stage of the Crusade consists of Yugash's first tentative movements about Creation. The Autochthonians spend much of their time examining the strange wonders they discover and exhibit the first signs of their planned encroachment. Unless ordered otherwise by their superiors, Autochthonians tend to avoid conflict with Creation's denizens, be they man or beast. The Yugashites take captives if at all possible, for further study within the safety of Yugash.

At this point in the Crusade, the Autochthonians hardly seem human. The Luminors order all who breach the surface to wear arc protectors and black artificial leather suits, masks and gloves during the daytime to prevent damage from "the Void-spawned light source," as they currently refer to the sun. The resulting costume, complete with heavy black artificial leather backpack, gives the impression of humanoid beetle-men shuffling through the swamp. Even when it's discovered that humans exist beneath the protective uniforms, the Autochthonians' terrible fear of removing their garments during the daytime can give the impression they are lepers, severe burn victims or some sort of walking dead afraid of the light.

Throughout this stage, the only Alchemical Exalted Yugash's Tripartite allows outside of Autochthonia is the *Patropolis of Or*, who volunteers to breach the Void and seek out Creation at the behest of the Tripartite. Only when they deem Creation safe and the connection stable will the Tripartite risk further Alchemicals leaving the body of the Machine God.

FIRST CONTACT

Once the Tripartite breaks the Seal of Eight Divinities, Or's massive head bursts forth from the ground near the center of Calan's Loss in the southeastern portion of the

Font of Mourning. Ot's arrival causes an moderate earthquake that ripples throughout Calan's Loss, and he physically displaces an area approximately 150 yards long by 100 yards wide. Water, trees and dirt explode outward from the sheer force of Ot's sudden appearance. Five of the redwoods that shatter to kindling are connected by rarely traveled rope bridges, one of Refuge's long-unused thoroughfares. None of the three tribes living amongst the trees discover Ot's arrival during this week.

The top of Ot's head rises roughly 60 yards from the swamp's surface. His impassive face peers solemnly into the darkness of the Font, and he takes in his surroundings with glowing, golden eyes. After five days, a porthole atop Ot's head irises open, and a single scout emerges. The scout walks along the top of Ot's head, grabbing leaves, branches and small creatures within reach that he stuffs into sacks or blown glass bottles. After acquiring a massive haul, he returns through the porthole. No further activity occurs for two more days.

Total Duration: One week

Hooks: The Circle's travels bring them to the Font of Mourning, whether searching for Calan's grave goods, performing tasks for Gorol's ghost or simply exploring. Either they witness Ot's explosive arrival or stumble across the massive Alchemical's head during their travels.

LIMITED SCOUTING

Small forces of Yugashite scouts explore the area surrounding Ot, venturing no further than five miles away. Most groups consist of one or two Sodalts and eight Lumpen outcasts serving as porters and guards. Few groups return at first, lost to the hazards of the Font, but those who do tell of a damp world with no walls and many dangers. They retrieve many examples of flora and fauna for study.

Later search parties pay particular attention to Refuge, finding travel through the tree-tops to be much quicker and less fatal to their numbers. Here, they first meet human life in the form of Refugerm's tribes, who attack the groups of Autochthonians

they come across. The scouts that escape report hostile encounters with savages who have no soulgems. The Autochthonians manage to capture a few humans and at least one marsh dragon beastman. After Sodality attempts to install soulgems into prisoners result in the captives' painful deaths, the Theomachrats tentatively deem the humans that populate Creation to be soulless beasts.

Total Duration: Three weeks



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THE HORROR OF DISEASE

Autochthonia is a dangerous environment, and it carries the hazards of many forms of illness — smoke, fumes and particulate matter all prey on the health of the inhabitants, as do lice and the other hazards of overcrowding. What Autochthonia does not have is malaria. What it does have, however, is countless places where warm water lies stagnant in the dark — the ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes.

This adventure assumes that the Autochthonian incursion quickly adapts to the situation and that no epidemics occur. It doesn't have to be that way. Their invasion of Creation could expose the Autochthonians to a malaria outbreak or to many other terrible illnesses. It's possible that the Great Contagion still lingers in Creation, now harmless to those whose ancestors survived the scourge but a terrible danger to those who, like the Autochthonians, have never been exposed.

Just because this adventure details a successful invasion doesn't mean that's the only possible outcome. It may be that the characters encounter the head of Ot sticking from the ground as a weedy overgrown monument to human folly, with the city below depopulated by illness. What will the characters do when what at first appear to be ruins more and more obviously comprise a vast mechanical world, now empty save for the Machine God's automata attendants?

Hooks: Traveling through the Font, the characters encounter a team of Yugashite scouts who attempt to capture them for study. Alternatively, the characters may shadow the scouts back to Ot's head. Contacts or allies from Refuge may frantically seek the characters' help in finding the source of the strange invaders from the center of the Font.

ESTABLISH PERIMETER

During this phase, the Autochthonians spread out and secure the area around the Gate. Over the month, they thoroughly invade Refuge and kill or capture most of the populace, who they take back to Autochthonia as slaves and experimental victims. The Autochthonians begin to use less of their protective gear and begin to improve the treetop positions around the Font as vantage points and transitways over the swampy terrain.

Total Duration: One month

Hooks: As above. Characters in the area of the Font will find it hard not to notice the growing Autochthonian presence as they erect their base.

PERMANENTLY OPEN GATE

Once the Tripartite decrees the immediate area safe, it sends out several thousand troops to hold the portal from

the other side. The Autochthonians have no idea what they're doing, and the resulting fortification is a huge earth-and-log bunker covered with more earth and logs on top. The structure is stiflingly hot and slowly sinking into the swamp. From the workshops below come transportation gear modeled after the local wildlife — dragonfly skiffs that skim across the swamp surface on long spindly legs. These vehicles can carry two scouts and supplies for a long patrol or three men in armor. The Autochthonians also suffer their first outbreak of tropical diseases at this time and return to wearing their stifling rubber protective gear.

Total Duration: One month and one week

Hooks: Same as above, but characters anywhere in the vicinity of the fen will have difficulty ignoring the Autochthonians. By the end of this stage, there are Autochthonians ranging almost 200 miles from their base.

STAGE TWO: EXPANSION

After gaining a basic understanding of the way Creation works and the nature of their immediate environment and after conquering their first epidemic, the Autochthonians are ready to accomplish something. Not only do they begin stripping the land around the Gate bare, they begin to deploy resources scouts throughout the region. It is these scouts that first discover the settlements

STRIKING EARLY

Characters who react quickly to the Autochthonian threat will have a substantial advantage over the invaders, particularly if they bring a large military force. The Autochthonians are simply not expecting any meaningful resistance. As far as they're concerned, the world is full of bipedal animals suitable only for simple tasks. Should the players' characters somehow get in and set themselves to breaking things, the Circle could potentially cause enough disruption in the city's essential factories that the entire city is destroyed or severely damaged. This action will kill many thousands at all levels of Ot's social strata and delay the invasion timetable by several months while Ot undergoes repairs or another Alchemical Exalted is prepared. However, if the characters linger too long, the Autochthonian response will be fierce. The Autochthonians have a number of powerful Alchemicals at their disposal, and their troops are crack tight-quarters fighters. While characters may score initial successes, it's quite likely they'll be ejected if they try to remain inside the living god for too long. After such a spoiling attack, the Autochthonians take a much harder, more militaristic stance toward humans from Creation and zealously guard the entrance both within and without.

around Gem. Seeing the possibility of capturing slaves and gems, the Autochthonians attack.

EXTENDED SCOUTING

Mounted on all-terrain versions of the swamp skimmers, two-man scout teams fan out across the region, exploring all the way up through the southwestern mountain chain. Behind them come slaver teams. Disorganized and unprepared for organized conquest, the locals quickly fall to the Autochthonian forces. *Excessively Righteous Blossom* kills the Lunar Exalted Ten Stripes in single combat, but the resistance that Ten Stripes and her brood offer turns the Autochthonians south, where they discover the relatively unprotected city of Gem. It is at this time that the first news of the Autochthonians reaches civilized ears, carried on the lips of refugees fleeing to the Lap from the Southwestern jungles.

Total Duration: Five months

Hooks: The refugees in the Lap are a nine days' wonder, and characters with an interest in the area will surely hear the refugee's stories, probably with many wild exaggerations. Characters friendly with Ten Stripes may be called upon to give her aid or to avenge her death. Characters guarding mines around Gem may have encounters with Autochthonian scout patrols that lead them to search out the origins of the strange black-clad scouts.

FEINT AT SUPPLY SOURCE

A force of 4,000 Autochthonian conscripts commanded by *Excessively Righteous Blossom* approaches Gem and forms battle lines. *Blossom* sends a messenger to deliver his demand of Gem's surrender to the Despot. The Despot's men return the messenger's head with soulgem removed to *Blossom*'s forces, with a message informing him that his men are to be killed and their gems seized. Horrified, *Excessively Righteous Blossom* declares war, but his own poor grasp of tactics and the general unfamiliarity of his conscript army with open-field tactics makes the result of the battle a foregone conclusion. Several hundred Autochthonians are captured and the remaining 1,000 or so survivors flee while *Blossom* covers their escape by single-handedly holding off the army of Gem.

Total Duration: Five months

Hooks: Anyone present in Gem cannot fail to notice, and news soon reaches all ears in the region, though no one really takes it seriously.

ATTACK SUPPLY SOURCE

The year after their defeat, the Autochthonians return with an army of 30,000 men. This time, the army is led by the Alchemical Exalted *Unhesitatingly Loyal Weapon*, accompanied by *Blossom* and five other Alchemicals, including two sorcerers, one a master of the Terrestrial Circle, one a master of the Celestial Circle. Though Rankar has several outcaste Terrestrials and God-Blooded in his forces, they're no match for the Autochthonians. The battle lasts less than an hour.

Total Duration: One year

Hooks: Gem knows the Autochthonians are on the way for almost a month and a half before the disastrous battle. Anyone in the region will know about the brewing war.

CAPTURE PRIMARY SUPPLY SOURCE

Rankar's troops fall back to Gem, but the Autochthonians don't offer a siege. Instead, their sorcerers smash the city's walls, and they assault it directly. In most cases, this would be a terrible idea, but the Autochthonians are desperate to get back into their native environment. The battle in and around the lava tubes is sharp and very much in the favor of the Crusaders.

The Crusaders execute Rankar after they find that the several hundred captives of the last attack had their soulgems pried out. They ship the Despot's stockpile of gems back to Yugash in guarded caravans and send most of Gem's population back in chains as well. All that is left of Gem is a ruin populated by those furtive and clever enough to avoid the Autochthonians' patrols.

Total Duration: Six months

Hooks: A major city is destroyed and its entire population sent across the mountains as slaves. With this hook, you could reel in Moby Dick.

CAPTURE SECONDARY SUPPLY SOURCE

Heady with the recent victory over Gem, *Unhesitatingly Loyal Weapon* and her forces march north along the Diamond Road to the Lap. By the time her men complete the march, they are exhausted, and many are suffering from disease. Also, they have no logistics base because they completely razed Gem. While their sorcerers could possibly destroy the city, they could not take it and hold it. Instead, the Autochthonians encircle it and begin resupplying from the countryside. Unfortunately, they have no idea how a port works, and ships go in and out of the nearby harbor for several months.

Finally, after it becomes clear reinforcements will not be arriving from the Realm, the imperial legion and the local legionaries attempt to sally. They're met by the Alchemicals and a body of 7,000 crack troops, and in a terrible scuffle, a number of Dragon-Blooded are killed and three Alchemical Exalted, including the Terrestrial Circle sorcerer, are destroyed.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Magnate Utono conspires with the local powers that be to betray the Lap and the Scarlet Empire by parleying with *Weapon*. Over the course of three days of meetings, Utono outlines a treaty that transfers control of the Lap to the Autochthonians, but guarantees the safety of its citizens. The forces of the Realm are encircled and disarmed. The troops are sent into slavery in Autochthon and the Dragon-Blooded officers are repatriated to the Realm as a good faith gesture.

Total Duration: Nine months

Hooks: See above. Anyone with a presence or interest in the region cannot fail to notice this phase, and by the end of the siege of the Lap, anyone in Creation with access to news of the outside world has heard about it.





STAGE THREE: CONSOLIDATION

At the end of their campaign, the Autochthonians have a secure logistical base outside of the Gate, and they have accidentally deprived their enemies of a critical asset. Yet, the Autochthonians' situation is unstable, several of their most valuable assets are lost, their army is exhausted and down to half its original number, and their neighbors are alerted to the Yugashite threat.

SECURE REGION

The Autochthonians establish roads and caravan routes across their new conquests and garrison the ruins of Gem, even trying halfheartedly to resettle it. This settlement, New Kadar, is the first Autochthonian toehold on Creation — colonization is attempted there because the tubes and tunnels remind the Autochthonians of home. It is a troubled settlement, plagued by civil unrest and administrative disorganization.

The Autochthonian holdings to the north come under heavy attack by the Realm and practically every major government in the South.

Total Duration: Two years

Hooks: The constant war is a great source of hooks and not necessarily just for adventures connected directly with the campaign. Politically inclined Solar Exalted may try to make alliances with the Autochthonians, while opportunistic ones may raid the many convoys and caravans taking resources to and from the fighting. Enemies of the Realm

will find it an excellent time to negotiate truces, while those allied with the Realm will certainly be called upon to provide auxiliary troops to round out the imperial legions.

INSINUATION

Assuming they survive the initial assaults by their foes and force some sort of negotiated peace, the Autochthonians must then truly consolidate their position, establishing trade and diplomatic ties with their neighbors, snapping up border states or pressuring them into acting as buffer regions and trying to rebuild the war-ravaged economy of the region.

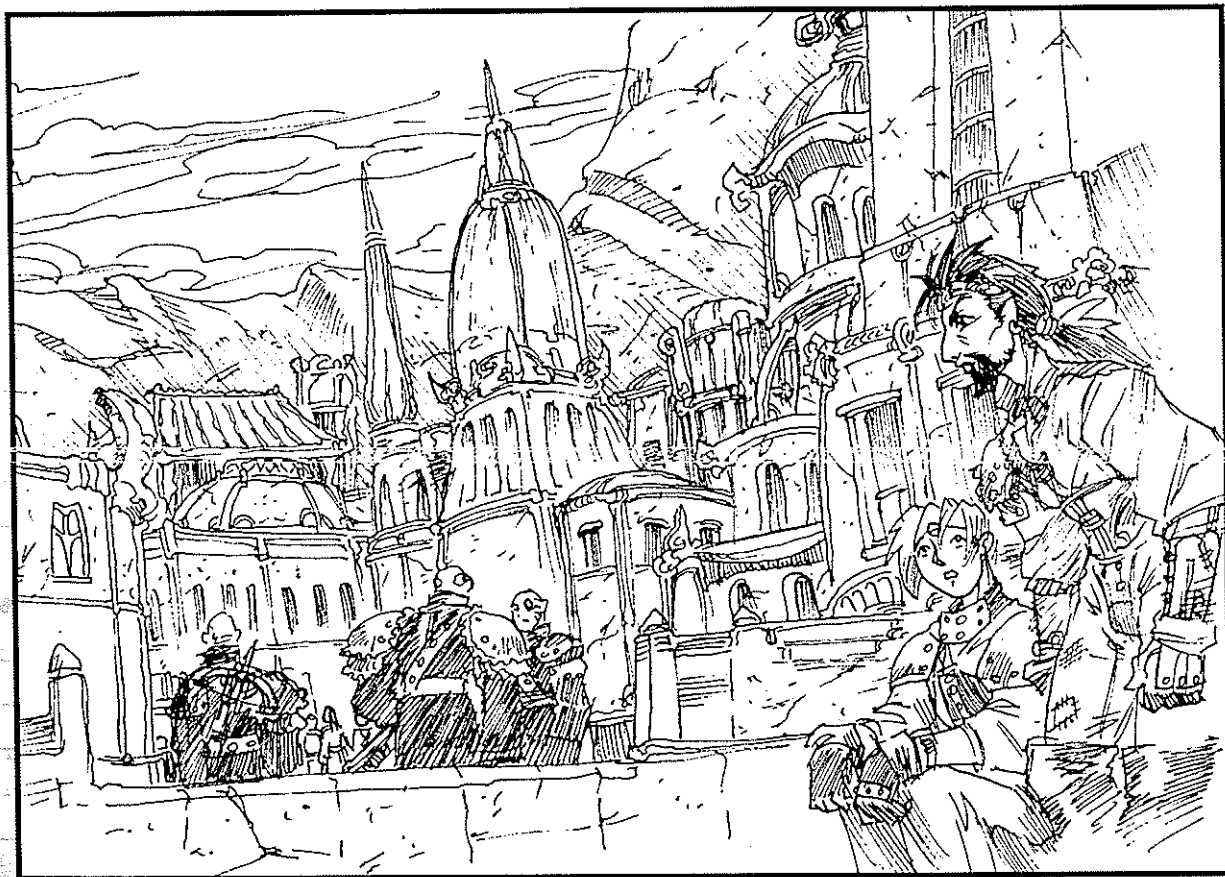
Total Duration: One year

Hooks: As fighting subsides, the hooks are unlimited. Characters may attempt to negotiate trade deals or economic treaties. They may hire on as consultants and advisors or act as spies for either side. Characters who were away from their homeland when it was invaded and occupied may be going home to wage a guerilla war against the Autochthonian armies, and those that have given themselves over to the Autochthonian cause will be acting as ambassadors to the world. Also, characters may travel to Autochthon as part of an embassy, or they may attempt to sneak in to spy on the servants of the Machine God.

REGIONAL REACTIONS

THE SOUTH

Because the initial force sent to attack Gem is much smaller than the second, the news of the full Autochthonian



assault on Gem isn't known throughout the South until the city-state has already fallen. The Despot's scarcity of regional allies works against him, preventing him from calling in aid. Strange threats that overwhelm remote cities are hardly rare events, and the fall of Gem goes mostly unnoticed. It's only when the Lap comes under attack that the major powers of the region begin to respond.

THE REALM

Initial response from the Blessed Isle is nearly nonexistent. Tales of unknown armies marching through the Southwest are dismissed as rumor from the frontiers, and in any case, the Autochthonians are hardly threatening at the beginning of their campaign. Any true concern disappears when the Sidereal advisors to the Immaculates initially denounce the rumors as baseless lies, for their techniques of divination don't factor strange invaders from the South as a threat to the Realm or its tributaries.

Only after Gem falls do Sidereal predictions become noticeably askew, and the assault on the Lap throws them completely awry. The Immaculate interrogation of captured Autochthonians brought to the Blessed Isle convinces the Dynasts that the children of the Machine God are a legitimate threat, one that has somehow evaded the notice of the Sidereals. It could be that interference from Autochthon itself is obstructing the Sidereal's divinations, or it could be that, since most of the events are taking place outside Creation, the Sidereals simply cannot predict the situation.

Whatever the case, after careful revision of their prognostications, the Bronze faction becomes extremely alarmed, believing incorrectly that the Autochthonians are being manipulated by their sleeping god into attacking Creation. While the legions are soon sent to the Southwest, it isn't soon enough to save the Lap, and imperial forces, troubled as always by political infighting, are forced to operate from a shoestring logistical base in the distant city of Paragon.

THE FAIR FOLK

The Fair Folk quickly discover their distaste for Autochthonians — those that sup upon the invaders' souls describe the experience as "unpleasant" and "stale." Only the most desperate Fair Folk seek Autochthonians for sustenance once this becomes widely known. Most Fair Folk heartily approve of the discord sowed by the Locust Crusade, and Fair Folk activity throughout the South increases threefold as the months progress, with the Fair Ones preying on anyone — Autochthonian or Creation-dweller alike — who falls into their grasp.

THE DEAD

Initially, the Deathlords and their minions pay little heed to the small number of humans trickling into the Underworld from the Swamp of Bitter Tears. The area is as wild in the land of the dead as it is in the land of the living, and it is only when war begins in the Southwest that the lords of the Underworld take notice.

When the concept of soulgems becomes apparent, some of the region's Deathlords quickly grow interested. The capability of directly harvesting souls from a large populace intrigues them, and they spare nothing to uncover this technology of souls. Once they understand the reliance upon Autochthon itself for the process, they make concerted efforts to establish a foothold in the realm of brass and shadow.

AUTOCHTHONIA

Autochthonia's static, strictly regimented society is changed by its exposure to Creation. Some servants of the Machine God — even some Alchemical Exalted — flee Autochthonian rule for life amongst the wonders of Creation. Other Autochthonians become increasingly convinced that opening the Gate was a terrible idea and wish to cut their losses and reclose the Seal, taking the modest spoils they've already found and cutting their losses. The preeminence of the Theomachy and the Glorious Luminors is threatened by the vast size of Creation and the presence of a permanent light source there. In addition, the Autochthonians' surprising success makes them cocky and a little too self-satisfied. Though they've overthrown two weak nations, it takes them a long time to shore up their position, and counterattacks by the legions of the Realm, the armies of the Perfect and the Delzahn Horde and other regional forces will pose a real challenge to Autochthonian efforts.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

AUTOCHTHONIAN SUCCESS

If the players' characters do nothing, the Autochthonians will take the Lap and Gem. Pressure from the Realm and the Dynasty's ally the Perfect of Paragon keeps the Crusaders of the Machine God from expanding further but cannot dislodge them from their holdings. Over time, the Autochthonians come to comprehend life on the surface of Creation.

After they regain communication with the rest of the nations of Autochthon, the nation of Yugash uses its expanded resources to become one of the most powerful players in Autochthonian politics. This involves a number of religious wars, and it is fortunate that their enemies cannot communicate, as the armies of Yugash are often pressed from several sides.

AUTOCHTHONIAN FAILURE

Any number of things can halt the Autochthonian campaign of expansion. Serious failure of their second effort to take Gem is very likely to convince the Autochthonians that warfare on the surface of Creation is much more difficult than they thought it was. Likewise, failure of their attack on the Lap will cost them resources they can't really afford to lose and stunt their expansionistic desires. Still, the only way that the Autochthonian war machine will be stopped for good is an attack on the Gate that results in serious damage to Yugash as a nation — either the total destruction of the Patropolis of Or or meaningful damage to Yugash as a whole. Unless the Gate is closed and the inhabitants of Autochthon convinced that Creation is far more hostile than the belly of their sleeping god, they will return, just as surely as the spring turns to summer or the fall to winter.



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