

FIREBORN™

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



GAMEMASTER'S HANDBOOK

FIREBORN™

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME

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BORN OF FIRE

He was born ignobly, in an aging hospital, in a decaying neighborhood. His father had gotten back on his battleship eight months earlier and his mother's labor was hard. He came nine days late.

The doctor was worried about his temperature from the beginning—about a degree and a half above normal—so they monitored him closely.

It would be unreasonable to imagine that the fire that raced through the hospital the night he was born had anything to do with the infant John Russell. After a handful of oxygen tanks exploded and the automatic extinguishers malfunctioned, it was a miracle more didn't die—like John's mother did—from the heat and smoke inhalation, trapped in their rooms by curtains of raging flame.

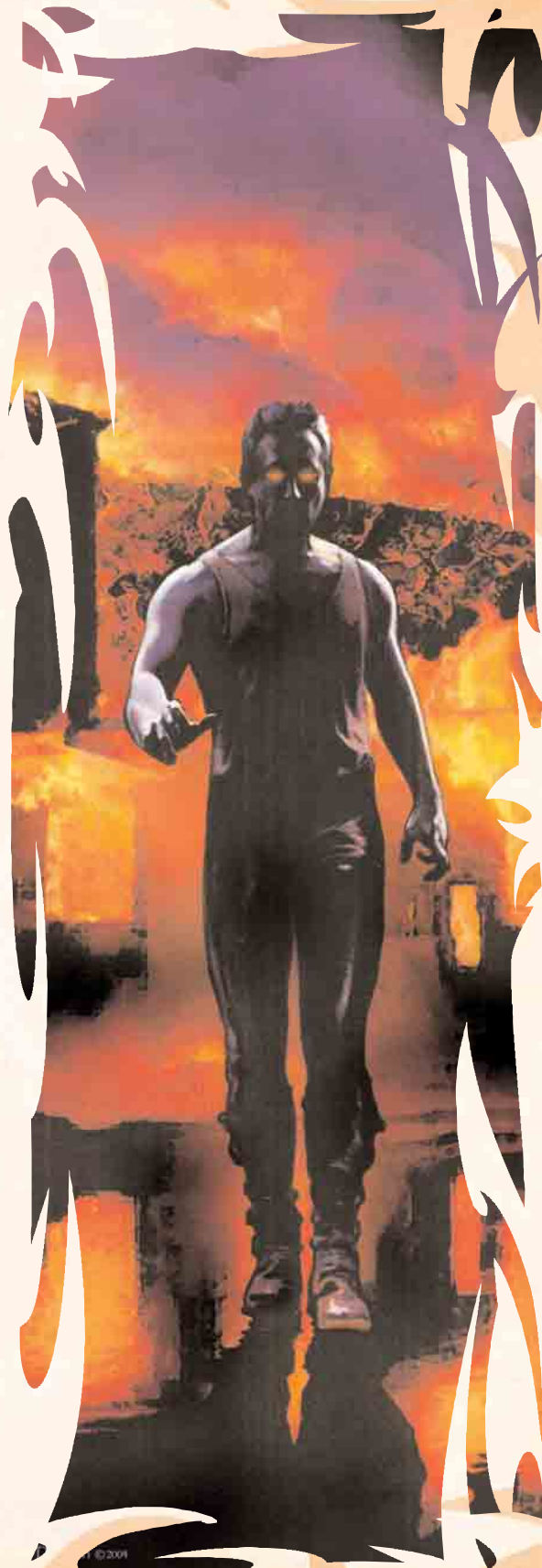
John's adoptive parents, blue collar through and through, knew about the tragedy that had heralded his arrival in the world and claimed his birth mother. Though John was too young to articulate anything about the night terrors that afflicted him as a toddler, they always suspected they had something to do with the hospital conflagration.

It was in fact fire that possessed the boy's sleeping mind, but it didn't have anything to do with the hospital. The horror that woke John every night since he could first remember was a fire a thousand times hotter than the burn of hospital beds and building timbers. It was the fire of the end of the world.

As John grew up, he learned to stop talking about the flames he saw in his nightmares. After a while, when he wasn't afraid of them anymore, the nightmares became dreams. Of flame, and death, but not his. Of power. Eventually they seeped through into his waking musings. A lush, ancient world, treasures piled up for the taking, devoured by heat and hate and lust.

And other images. Giant serpents, all fang and claw and spine. They killed and rampaged, destroyed and commanded, but John wasn't afraid of them in the visions. His waking mind told him they were nasty, brutal, alien. But in the visions, he always looked forward to their coming.

John lost his virginity when he was thirteen, to an older girl whose name he quickly forgot. The event's wet fumbling was eclipsed in his mind by the dream he had that night. As he slept, the torched landscape spread out before him as usual, the flames crowded him everywhere he turned. But for the first time, he realized that the fire was not just a force, a devastating power. It was him. It was his. He could control it at as easily as he controlled his breathing. So he stopped, he held his breath . . . and the flames faded. He saw who he was. What he was. He knew why he wasn't afraid of the beasts of claw and fang, scale and wing. He couldn't be afraid of them . . . not when, in the visions at least, he was one.





WELCOME TO FIREBORN



FIREBORN is a new roleplaying game system in which the players take on the roles of scions, humans in modern London with the souls of immortal dragons. The dragons lived in a mythic age of high fantasy and epic magic, an age that was destroyed by a world-shattering cataclysm. The dragons' spirits slumbered through the ages until the 21st century, when magic began to pool in the world once more. London is ground zero for this mystical resurgence, and the scions have begun to remember who and what they are. As the players experience more and more of their previous lives through dra-

matic flashback scenes to the mythic age, their draconic powers begin to manifest in the modern age as well.

This book is both a GM rules resource and a setting sourcebook. If you're planning on playing in a FIREBORN campaign rather than running one, reading the material herein may make some elements of the game less mysterious and fun for you. If you're a veteran player or are planning on running your own campaign, on the other hand, welcome! You'll find advice on designing and running FIREBORN campaigns and adventures, rules that are necessary to adjudicate the effects of taint and the uses of karmic and enchanted items, setting material for both the mythic and the modern age, and statistics and descriptions of a slew of friends and foes for your players to interact with.

ELEMENTS OF THE STORY

FIREBORN is designed to allow you to run campaigns of all sorts. Players can engage in cinematic action scenes, investigate mysterious conspiracies, become embroiled in narrative self-discovery, seek out high-fantasy adventure, take sides in an epic war, uncover dark realizations about their own pasts, and through it all keep a step ahead of their enemies in a desperate race for knowledge. At the heart of every story, though, are the scions themselves. Each story is ultimately about them: their awakenings to who and what they truly are, their reunification with their broodmates and their continuing discovery of

those bonds with one another through mythic age flashbacks, and eventually about tough decisions by the characters regarding what they're willing to sacrifice for their own, or the world's, best interests.

AWAKENING

By the time he awakened to what he truly was, John spent the hours after school working in the same machine factory as his foster father. It was mind-numbing, body-straining work, sweaty and pitiless, but it





brought a bi-weekly pittance that nevertheless helped his folks keep him clothed and fed.

It was the day after John's new revelation when it happened. He was listening to another verbal spew from his foreman, the greasy bastard that ordered John and his dad around, day after day after godforsaken day. John took his lead from his dad. Stand there and take it, soak in the daily ration of verbal abuse. You don't need to pretend to like it, but you need to deal with it. This time, the night after the vision, the realization, his gut wasn't having it. His insides roiled with impotent anger; his fists clenched, and he could feel a fever building. He felt like he was going to puke, to yell, to kill, and keel over, all at once. He avoided the foreman's eye, because he was afraid of what he'd do if he met it. Instead, he focused his gaze on the drilling press above and behind the bastard's head. The foreman noticed, got in his face, put himself in the way. And what the foreman saw in John's eyes, what John saw as he brought it into the world, was fire.

The factory burned to the ground. The cops never figured anything out. The fire came from nowhere, and spread like a demon. Nobody standing near ground zero of the blast survived, except John, and he pretended to be on break, nowhere nearby, when the cops asked him where he had been. Some ironhide detectives gave him grief for all of 10 seconds, saying they didn't believe him. Then John felt the fever, and saw the fire coming. They must've seen it too, because they backed right the hell down. His mom never said a thing, but she wouldn't look him in the eye anymore. She wouldn't touch him.

Some of the blokes from the factory started to mutter. They weren't sad to lose the bastard that had bossed them around, but the factory was the only work they could get. Now they were hungry. Their families were hungry. The government covered them, barely, but with all the foreigners flocking in, the jobs and the support were getting used up. They were bitter, desperate. There was talk about John, about the blaze. Stories started flying. A few went by his folks' place one night, to "talk" to him. They went home, not a scratch on them, not a word coming out of their mouths. Anyone that talked about going after the Russell kid again, those unlucky pioneers would warn them.

"Stay away. The rags all say that 'strange things' are afoot, 'ya hear? And I tell you, he's strange, he's a thing, and he's 'afoot.' Unless you're crazy, or you got a death-wish, keep away from the Russell boy."

John had burned his connections to everything that he knew, so he pulled the corpse of his old life around him like a blanket against the cold and hunched forward into his new one. This life smelled of ash and blood. With no job, John learned the time-honored arts of delinquency and crime: theft, violence, posturing, fear. Maybe he knew he'd end up in jail. Maybe he didn't care. Regardless, he found more there than he ever could have expected.

REMEMBERING

"John Russell, these are fearful times, and our United Kingdom must stand for law, and for order, or it will stand for nothing at all."

BANG.

The pounding of the judge's gavel was like a gunshot. It was always what ended John's dreams. It always brought him bolting awake.

There were no more dreams of fire and serpents. Each night when they arose, they were snuffed by the gavel as if they were flickering candles.

John languished in prison, and his body and mind putrefied in a house of murderers, thieves, rapists, and drug dealers.

Worthless scum, all of them.

Just like him.

John got a new cell-mate on the third anniversary of his incarceration. He heard the cell door open behind him with a long raaassssp. He clenched the muscles in his shoulders, turned his head ever so slightly to scowl at the intruder. But in a flash, when their eyes met:

A muddy field under a sky red with blood. Mountains as tall as the heavens. Claws clash and magic rages.

Kreyu's maw rends the enemy's leg, Elihu's tail coils around its neck, choking off the spew of poisonous gas that would have erupted from the creature's maw to engulf his broodmates. Revenin leaps in, biting and shredding and blasting fire into the creature's chest, turning its heart to a lump of ash.

The three dragons howl in triumph, their foe fallen, the field theirs.

And John felt his body twist and burn. He retched, once, heaving bile into his mouth; he turned and spit it into the toilet. The new cell-mate, an African man named Claude, stared and shivered visibly.

The guards sensed that something strange had happened. They exchanged glances and wordlessly agreed that nothing would be said about it. Strange times had come to London, and most of them were best ignored.

The cell door clanged shut. Neither man spoke for long minutes. Then, at once, they named one another:

Revenin.

Elihu.

They would only realize later—after they had come to take for granted the bond they shared—that neither of their mouths had moved. Yet, in the instant that they had named one another, their words had been heard in the other's mind. For the first time since the end of the mythic age, the broodmates had found one another.

Claude had had dreams like John's. His started when he was conscripted into one of the revolutionary armies in war-torn Sierra Leone. He was eight years old. The young soldier fired a thousand rounds through his AK-47, butchered a dozen grown men, before most British kids would've graduated from secondary school.





INTRODUCTION

The dreams had gotten to him as he got older. It got harder to tell the visions from reality. Both were violent. Both were bloody. He could control neither. So he decided it was time to control both.

So Claude smuggled himself to London, where he lived on the street and came by food and money the only way he knew how. It had landed him in prison inside two weeks.

John Russell and Claude Chebue became brothers. Each educated the other. John interpreted the subtleties of "civilized" life for Claude, both as a Londoner as a veteran inmate. Claude gave John a conscience. When necessary, he forced it on him. It wasn't an easy match. But even as the pair re-forged their bonds and discovered depths of humanity and camaraderie they hadn't believed possible, they realized that their circle was incomplete.



THE SCIONS



Scions are the heart of FIREBORN. They are the players' avatars within the game world, the heroes in the drama of the unfolding story.

Scions are at once human and more than human. They are born of man and woman, they are made of flesh and blood like their fellows. But their souls are those of dragons of the mythic age. And those souls bring more than just memories, more than just an outlook on life. They bring power. Once awakened, a scion's soul screams for release, kindles into life at the merest breath.

Scions are born unaware of their heritage. Before the return of magic, scions lived out their lives as capable, driven, but ultimately mundane men and women. Because while the souls of dragons are eternal, they require karma to flourish, as a fire needs oxygen to burn. In the absence of karma, the soul of a dragon is only potential, an embryo of flame in an airless hall.

With the coming of the strange times, as the locals of London call it, that all changed. Scions began to remember. And the more they remember, the more of their past lives they recreate, the more supernatural powers they regain.

Newly awakened scions have their own agendas. They may seek power, survival, kinship, or knowledge. But with each passing day, a scion realizes that there is something more. Something beyond himself, and eventually, beyond his brood. Something that spelled their doom countless lifetimes ago. Something that, just like them, grows stronger every day.



SONG OF THE BROOD

Proud Revenin was hatched in a dim antiquity even he could not recall. Humans worshipped him as a god, and rightfully so, in his draconic eye.

Serene Elihu had always been in love with the rightness of things. Mankind's awe of him was as natural as the warmth of the sun or the pull of gravity.

Striving Kreyu was brave and courageous in all things but worship. The youngest of the three, she could not see herself as worthy of divinity.

These three were different in appearance, in perspective, in experiences lived and triumphs achieved.

Yet they were broodmates, and therefore the same. They were bound and devoted to one another more than to any treasure, lover, place, or thing.

THERE YOU ARE

It was the tone an anxious owner would take with a missing kitten, finally found stuck in a tree.

There you are.

The fourteen-year-old girl pronounced the sentence with equal parts reproach, relief, and realization. It was as if this, of course, was the only reasonable place she could have found the objects of her searching. Her life's chronic, subconscious search.

Her name was Allison. She had come to the prison with the Sisters of Mary Magdalene to minister to ungrateful felons. She had lived with the nuns since she had been orphaned as a baby.

She was serving glop to a line of inmates. She was giving them all the same shy, fearful, simple smile. And then she said it. There you are. Looking at John and Claude.

But she hadn't moved her lips. She hadn't broken the smile.

They stared, until someone in line behind them shoved Claude's shoulder. "Move it, blighter."

Allison's face never changed, but they heard the pout in her voice. What, no hello? Then a sense of laughter. Never mind. You move along. I'll be back tonight. She spoke into their minds as the sluggish but inexorable movement of the serving line moved them past her station. Back to set you free.

Allison didn't remember her folks. Didn't remember much of anything from before she had come to live with the Sisters. Ironically, she did remember whole other lifetimes. She always had. And she sensed karma, with the same ease with which she sensed light and dark, hot and cold. She knew how to manipulate it, pulling it in and releasing it, with the same instinct she had for breathing. Men without the benefit of a draconic heart struggled with ancient tomes and forgotten lore. Struggled to breathe even the tiniest spark of karma into their impotent castings. But Allison could manipulate magic with the ease of a spider spinning her web.





HUMANKIND IN THE MYTHIC AGE



Before the apocalypse came, before the great ice age began, before the seas overran Atlantis and the continents were remade, there existed a different world. That mythic age was a world infused with karma, infused with magic, infused with a supernatural power that was present in every sliver of creation.

Men were born ignobly from the dirt of the world. They rose from mud huts to great cities in what seemed, to the dragons, like the blink of a lidless eye. At their height, they forged stone and light and water into a lush realm called Atlantis. Though men and women had always seen the dragons from afar and known them to be creatures of great power, the rise of their civilization put organization to their veneration.

Many of the civilizations of man in the mythic age descended from Atlantis, an empire that co-existed for millennia with its wayward children. There were other mannish cultures, too, risen on

their own in different parts of the world, as well as non-human civilizations populated by fae, titans, strange creatures that walked on two legs but had the shapes of animals, and other bizarre and fantastic beings.

Above and surpassing them all were dragons. Despite their power, however, dragons had a reason for letting humans and the other races exist in peace. The passions and desires of humans produced karma, the dragons' lifeblood, the force that kindled their souls and quickened their bodies. Each dragon interacted with, or ignored, humans in the way he saw fit. Some guarded them, while others challenged, investigated, advised, or commanded them. But all quickly came to realize that humanity's strivings, the manner in which they infused even their everyday places and objects with karma, was a priceless prize. Humanity was a resource, and as dragons are immortal, was one not to be consumed rashly.





And so, outside the gates of the prison, Allison flicked her wrists and muttered syllables of power. One of the prison guards looked right at her—and ignored her completely. She stepped through the main gate in the lee of a late-night delivery of linens and sundries.

Allison flicked her wrists again when she arrived on the cellblock, walking right past the guard who was staring at the clock and waiting for his shift to end.

She stepped to the center of the block. Cells rose on both sides, four levels high, several hundred in all. She passed a few seconds in worry. How to find her two out of all these? Then she cracked a sudden smile.

Marco, she thought, sending a mental laugh as well. In their cell, John and Claude sat up suddenly.

“What the —?” said Claude’s look, but John got it almost immediately.

Polo, he thought back, breaking into a wide smile.

Back outside, Allison brought her hands together, and when they met, she rose off the ground, taking to the air in front of a dozen inmates . . . but remaining unseen by all of them.

Marco. Her smile was irrepressible.

Polo. John jumped up and rushed to the cell door, grabbing the bars in his hands.

Marco. She was getting closer.

Polo! Claude joined John at the door, beginning to understand the game.

Marco. She was almost there.

Polo. John and Claude responded in unison the last time, and Allison alighted on the catwalk outside their cell. She couldn’t conceal herself from them with her beguiling magic, any more than she could conceal the pure joy and relief that radiated from her smile. A smile as wide as the ocean.

Allison put her hand on the lock that kept their cell door closed. The lock that kept their lives closed. She spoke ancient words of power, and it opened.

“Was that French?” John asked in bafflement, forgetting to speak into their minds.

Allison just smiled.

Let’s go.

After thousands of years, after countless lifetimes, their brood was reunited. They stood together for the first time in millennia, free and whole, and watched the sun rise over the ocean.

THE TAINT

While Revenin and Elihu interacted with, protected, guided, or commanded the humans, Kreyu walked among them. For everything else that they are, dragons are also shapechangers, and can adopt the guise of different forms at will. Kreyu experienced the fellowship of a dozen human generations, and during that time came to name humans as friends, companions, lovers—even sons and daughters. Whatever their methods, the dragons became intertwined with humans, and gave them much knowledge, including that of magic.



Revenin often accused Kreyu of forgetting her heritage. Of adopting all of humanity as her brood. But it was Kreyu's connection to humanity that told the brood of taint.

By this time, dragons knew that the living, feeling, and *being* of humans and all other natural organisms generated karma. Their existence itself was a boon to all supernatural creatures. Taint, Kreyu discovered, was a perversion of karma, a corruption of the natural, a tarry aberration. It brought despair to humans and madness to dragons. Some took to destroying the humanity that had once worshipped them, demanding sacrifices of blood and gold, carrying off the sons and daughters of royalty and feasting on their flesh. Others still, to avoid such a fate, withdrew from the lands of men completely, hid in their lairs, surrounded themselves with bulwarks of karmic items to keep the taint at bay. But there was no escape.

Too late, the brood discovered that magic, the direct manipulation of karma into visible and manifest effects, was the greatest source of taint. Supernatural creatures could create magic nearly effortlessly; they needed to exercise some caution, lest they harm themselves with the excess energy magic could generate, but the use of magic itself did not harm the world around them. The same, it seemed, did not hold true for human magicians. The more recklessly men explored magic, the more greedily they sucked at that fountain of knowledge, the more grotesquely taint spread in the world.

The dragons' greatest gift to mankind, that of magic, would be their downfall.

THIS WAS OURS

I've never brought anyone down here before, *Allison thought to them.* I just wanted you to know that, before we went down.

She had gotten used to talking to John and Claude in her mind right away. Her experience with magic had probably paved the way for those mental processes. With her broodmates to talk to, she didn't care if she never spoke out loud again until the day she died.

The three of them stood just inside a centuries-old crypt. They were in Highgate Cemetery, adjacent to the old church where the Sisters made their retreat from the worldly.

Allison put her hand on one of the massive stone sarcophagi, and its lid slid noiselessly to the side. There was no desiccated corpse in the stone box. Instead, John and Claude peered into a rough-hewn hole in the living earth, a shaft leading downward.

Allison climbed up onto the edge of the sarcophagus and spoke some ancient, slurring words that summoned light from nothing. Then she stepped off of her perch and floated effortlessly down into the hole. She looked like she was riding an invisible elevator into the ground. It was the same magic she'd used to ascend to their cell in the prison. John and Claude were starting to be able to tell one incantation from another.



THE END OF AN AGE



Many were the causes of the end of the mythic age, but one thing alone was at its source: taint. The inverse of karma, the opposite of natural rightness. It fed, pulsing, on the weak wills of humankind. It drove dragons into seclusion, or madness; some even embraced it, wallowing in taint's filth and creating kingdoms with themselves as the despotic rulers, demanding tithes of treasure and human sacrifice.

By the time the dragons knew what was corrupting, killing, and ravishing their kin, it had covered much of the world. After an era of grappling with taint, of teasing out its nature, and of opposing its rise, the few remaining dragons came together in a desperate attempt to stop its spread.

They failed.

In the midst of war between man and fae, in the wake of titan raiders sweeping out of the north, and after countless dragons had fallen to madness and murder, a cabal of human sorcerers began a ritual. This ritual spanned whole continents and was powered by the sacrifice of hundreds, maybe thousands of innocent lives. These wizards may have been vile mage-priests, worshippers of the Great Enemy. Or they may simply have been power-mad mortals, reaching for knowledge and abilities beyond their capacity to control. Regardless, the dragons feared the result of that ritual, and attempted to stop them. Again, they failed.

Whether because of the dragons' interference, the Great Enemy's manipulations, or the humans' arrogance, the ritual went awry. The power behind it was such that rather than failing, it ripped apart the karmic weave that embraced the earth, that fused with every living thing upon it. It opened a hole in the ephemeral world of magic, a hole to somewhere else, and through that hole karma and taint alike poured in a raging torrent, leaving this world.

Tied as both forces were to the natural order, their departure had drastic consequences in the physical world. Continents were sundered, and the ocean rose up out of its boundaries, laying low the mighty towers of the kingdoms of man. The titans in their mountain holds were crushed, the fae fled the physical world, and the dragons in their aeries were swept away.

Earth would henceforth be without magic. Millions died, but the remnants of mankind struggled through the age of ice. When they emerged from the caves in which they had hidden, they found a world without karma or taint.

And so it would remain... for a time.





HOARDING



Dragons hoard treasure like hypochondriacs collect symptoms: obsessively. The hoarding impulse appeals to draconic pride and greed, of course, but at the root of their lust for objects lies karma.

Whether an item has monetary value or not, it may have absorbed karma from the beings that created, fought over, bought, sold, gave, received, and possessed it. The more passion and feeling was involved with the object or the events that occurred around it, the more karma it will have absorbed. It is the smell of this essential, life-giving force that makes dragons collect so many items, ranging from the exotic to the mundane, in the hope that they will be able to absorb precious karma from the hoard of possessions.

In the mythic age, dragons accept tribute from those that venerate them, steal treasure from the ruins they plunder, and claim the arms and belongings of those they defeat in battle. They take riches from their supernatural enemies and even seize wealth from other dragons. The greediest wyrms of the mythic age are not above stealing even from their broodmates.

A dragon's hoard might consist of rare, valuable, or beautiful items . . . preferably all of the above. Precious metals, exceptional gems, cunningly crafted jewelry, beautifully executed artworks, and coinage from the realms of humans are all beloved of dragons. Tainted dragons sometimes add even more perverse valuables to their hoards: human slaves, half-digested meals, and grisly trophies rent from the carcasses of fallen foes.

Additionally, dragons are unique in the world in that they not only reincarnate, they also remember their previous lives. The same holds true for scions. But this remembrance does not come easily. In order to truly awaken to his full potential and make use of the power he has gained over the centuries, a dragon must gather the memories of his earlier self. Because the items of a dragon's hoard are so cherished and so often tied to momentous events, his recovery of his hoard in each new lifetime brings the dragon that much closer to remembering all that came before.

In the modern age, scions hoard no less obsessively, and for many of the same reasons, though it takes many scions long years to discover within themselves the true nature and origin of their hoarding drive. While some modern scions are models of industry and capitalism, coming by all of their wealth "honestly," others are driven by their obsession to become thieves of the worst kind, coming near or going past the point of kleptomania in their impulses. In addition to the metals and minerals loved by dragons in ages past, scions have also discovered nouveau treasure, from Swiss watches to German automobiles to Japanese electronics. Even paper represents wealth to dragons in the modern world; they hoard stock certificates, savings bonds, title deeds, and raw currency with the same fervor with which their earlier selves collected gold and gems.

Come on.

John and Claude exchanged a glance, then climbed in after her. The same invisible force cradled them as they descended into the earth.

After a moment, they found themselves on solid ground in a vault that stretched back toward the main church building.

That's the only way in, she babbled in their heads as she hurried down the vault corridor. I sealed off the main entrance, inside the church. No one ever comes down here but me. This is my place. She sounded more and more like a teenager the closer they got to wherever it was they were going, and she walked faster and faster.

"What's the rush?" asked John, out loud.

"Come on," she said back to him, also aloud. She spoke aloud whenever she was impatient. As if she wasn't sure they could hear her in their heads. She rounded a corner and her light bloomed.

John and Claude rounded the corner to find her beaming, almost bouncing in excitement. She looked up at them with a grin wide enough to split her face wide open. These were the only two people in the whole world that could appreciate what she was showing them—her hoard. She searched their faces for approval.

And she found it.

They gaped. There, in the underground vault, was a mix between a flea market and a king's ransom: old antiques and artifacts, stacks of still-in-the-box plasma screen televisions, Italian suits, bearer bonds, and—of course—coins and currency of every denomination and origin.

I collect this stuff, she thought to them.

The way she said it made it sound like she was showing them her stamp collection.

Anyone else would've been struck by just how weird the pile of stuff was. Like a strange cross between a medieval treasure chamber and a mafia warehouse. But John and Claude did not think it strange. Simply compelling. Even awe-inspiring.

Allison picked up a stack of ancient, yellowing paper. These are the deeds to the church, she thought, smiling mischievously. I'm pretty sure no one even knows they're gone.

She put the papers down and picked up a scratched and battered gold watch. I took this off a guy who died in an alley. Some other guys tried to take it from me, but I—her eyes flashed as she mentally relived the struggle—I fought them for it. She shyly handed the watch to Claude.

Moving at random, Allison pulled out the file drawer of an antique oak desk in a niche in the vault wall. The drawer was full to the top with a hundred kinds of coins. Allison pulled out a roll of them; the characters printed on the wrapper were Arabic. I don't know where these are from. She slammed the roll against the edge of a wooden





crate labeled "Apple Computer," whose bill of lading, in a clear plastic pouch, specified that a half-dozen Mac Powerbooks lay undisturbed inside. Middle Eastern coins spilled out of the roll, some falling onto the ground. Allison picked up a few of the freed coins and turned them over in her hand, temporarily mesmerized. "Pretty," she remarked, before tossing them back into the drawer.

Then Allison saw that John and Claude were staring at a small gold statue that sat alone and above the rest of the lucre. It perched on a stone pillar of what could've been ancient Roman origin.

It was clear that the statue described the body of a dragon rampant, its wings outstretched behind it. Or rather, one wing did. Its other one was long since broken off and lost. The same fate had befallen one of its four legs and both of the great horns whose stubs remained on the dragon's head. The gold of the dragon's body was pitted and scratched. Details that had once adorned its surface, describing scales and musculature, had been worn away by the ages. It was no larger than a housecat. Still, for all the wear and deterioration, neither John nor Claude could take their eyes from it.

Allison looked at them, looking at it, for several minutes. The two men stared at the statue without touching it. She remained silent, letting them process their own impressions of the ancient artifact. Finally, Claude turned to his broodsister.

This was ours, he thought to her.

She nodded.

John jerked to look at them. He realized that Claude was right. It had been part of their ancient hoard. Part of a communal wealth held in common by their brood. Part of their lives in the antediluvian days that all three dreamed of.

Allison just continued nodding, her head bobbing up and down, gravely.

And then, suddenly, Allison yawned, long and intensely, like a cat. She stretched her arms above her and rolled her head around. I'm tired, she announced, and climbed up on top of the platform that the high-def plasma screen boxes made in the center of the room. She was asleep almost before she had lain down.

The abrupt slumber seemed somehow natural to John and Claude. Even though their eyes and thoughts were drawn back to the small idol, and the flashes of memory that it was already awakening within them, they couldn't help but yawn themselves. It was as if the accumulated riches crammed into the underground vault were the most potent narcotic imaginable, simultaneously invigorating their spirits and moving their bodies to rest.

The two of them sprawled out on the pile of treasure, like it was the most natural and comfortable bedding they'd ever felt.



THE GREAT ENEMY



The Hopis of the American southwest believe that this planet has passed through several different "worlds." The first, they say, was destroyed by fire. As the fire raged above, their ancestors sought solace in the embrace of the earth, hiding in a subterranean place of safety until the fire passed. The end of the next world was heralded by a "twisting of the wind in the sky, a pulling of the waves across the land, when rivers reversed their flow and nature undid itself." These and other climatic events describe what could have been the symptoms of a shift in the planet's magnetic poles. Once more, the ancestors of the Hopi are said to have retreated to the underworld, living there for the "long wait" (likely whole generations, rather than a matter of weeks or months) until the world had calmed and was safe again. And finally, the third world, the one before our own, was destroyed by a great flood that covered all the land.

This time the Hopi's forefathers sought other means of escape. They say that some of them escaped by sealing themselves into plants and "floating in these hollow reeds upon the ocean." This is likely a metaphor for ship-building, but the tale makes it clear that very few survived the passing of this world. Which brings to bear the question of why they did not attempt to seek safety in the subterranean world that had housed their people so effectively in the previous two times of trouble.

They did not do so because this time, there was already something down there. Something terrible, and ancient, and evil; something that would wait while all the greater races of the mythic age passed away, biding its time in the abysses beneath the earth. They were the Oqalay'ta in the Hopi tongue, or Those Who Dwell Below.



FIGHTING FOES



Together, John, Claude, and Allison began to remember. Then came the day that they remembered fighting one another. John's draconic self, Revenin, had been driven insane by corruption, by taint. It had taken brutal force to restrain him and long weeks of mental communication to restore him.





INTRODUCTION

At that instant, the brood realized something else. If taint existed then, taint existed now. And it could do the same thing today as it did in the mythic age. Corrupt, overwhelm, drive mad. Kill. They agreed to begin hunting down the tainted creatures who had begun to plague the streets of London. Allison was the brains of their enterprise, Claude its conscience, and John its fire.

They weren't sure what, exactly, it was, but they knew one thing for sure: It was big.

The three had gotten word about the attack when one of their contacts at the local precinct passed an envelope under their door in the middle of the night. In exchange for a bit of magical help now and then, the local officers were only too happy to turn the brood on to events around the city—criminal and otherwise—that looked like they might be related to the supernatural.

After packing up their gear into giant duffels, John, Claude, and Allison had made haste across town to the abandoned sewer-works. The police had discovered the maimed bodies of a half-dozen crusties about seven hours earlier. Such attacks were becoming common. The authorities had become practiced in finding them, cleaning them up, and filing them away to be forgotten as quickly as possible.

The place had already been cleaned out. A cordon of police tape played connect-the-dots with the chalk outlines and blood spatters.

As they entered the sewer, the three scions immediately noticed the unmistakable reek—you couldn't smell it, but all three of them thought of it as a scent nonetheless—of taint. They got right to work, the sooner to get out of the unhealthy atmosphere.

The only light in the cavernous building came from the maglites they produced from their duffel bags. They began to search the scene, moving between giant pipes, empty vats, and tangles of rusting machinery.

Claude discovered a gory footprint in the middle of one of the chalk outlines. He crouched over it, playing his light back and forth. It was about two feet long, with seven toes and a giant claw in the heel. In addition to the blood, a measure of pulpy tissue from an unfortunate victim's mashed organs had been smashed into cracks in the rough concrete, left behind when the medics had peeled the corpse up off the ground. When Claude looked up to trace the creature's obvious direction of travel, he saw that Allison had already found the trail of bloody footprints, and that they led to a chasm. A rift in the concrete opened to some dark underground space.

With a motion of her hand and a few muttered words of power, she calmly stepped forward to stand on nothing at all. Then she waved her fingers deftly and spoke a few more words. A soft light appeared below her, illuminating the darkness and casting her shadow on the tangle of beams and catwalks that held up the roof some forty feet above them.

It's huge, Allison thought to her broodmates, seeing that the chasm opened on a natural underground cavern

easily as large or larger than the whole extent of the above-ground sewer-works.

John still thought that the words of power associated with Allison's spells sounded French, but he knew—that is to say, Allison constantly remind him—that the language was far more ancient than anything spoken in Europe.

He was about to crack the predictable joke to lighten the mood, when the ceiling collapsed.

Claude had a pair of Glocks in his hand before the first piece of rubble hit the floor. John's eyes flashed fire and his fingers lengthened into claws as he saw the monstrosity they were looking for riding a chariot of rubble and rebar from the ceiling to the floor. Allison shrieked and dove downward into the chasm, narrowly avoiding the avalanche of iron beams and concrete. She was sealed in.

Allison!? John thought in a flash.

It was amazing the way their thought-link could convey emotion as well as meaning; John could sense Allison breathing hard as she reported back, I'll live.

John was pissed. The tainted bastard had been lying in ambush, just waiting for them to look down into the chasm. He was also more than a little worried, but he'd never admit to that. He and Claude were going to have to fight the thing without Allison's considerable magical talents.

And the mofo was big. About fourteen feet tall with fangs the size of steak knives and claws that hadn't seen a manicure since the first Christmas.

Claude launched himself into the air as the creature advanced on him, somersaulting in an arc that took him over the creature's head and outstretched claws. He passed above his enemy while upside down, and opened up with his hand-cannons as he flew. Both magazines were empty before he landed in a metal vat thirty feet from where he had begun his leap. Unfortunately, the .45 caliber slugs had done sod-all against the monstrosity.

John roared to get the creature's attention, fire erupting from his mouth to surround him in a nimbus glow that would shield him—to some extent—from the creature's attacks. John and his enemy took slow steps toward one another, each taking the other's measure.

Then their eyes met, and in a hundredth of an instant they went from fifteen yards apart to directly on top of each other.

It was a dogfight, the pair snarling and fighting for the top, their bodies twisting in a blur of claws, fangs, and fire.

In the temporary safety of his metal bowl, Claude dug frantically through his duffel bag.

In the melee, blood flowed freely from both combatants' wounds. John twisted his body and managed to wrap his arms around the creature's head; he wrenched its neck unnaturally with a vicious jerk . . .

. . . to no appreciable effect. John felt the creature's skeleton and muscle shifting beneath the surface of its scaly skin to adopt a new shape. Probably an even meaner one.





So John exploded like a napalm strike, a white-hot tear of light engulfing both their bodies. He didn't normally burst with such intensity when his broodmates were near. The heat was too much for them. But he was getting his ass handed to him, and figured that with Allison trapped under about a ton of concrete and Claude—

Where was Claude, anyway?

John suddenly felt sick. Had he immolated his brood brother? But then he heard a familiar voice in his head: Jump clear!

John launched himself through the air, rolling and spinning to escape the creature's grasp, as Claude popped up from inside the metal vat that had protected him from the inferno's eruption. Mounted on his shoulder, Claude bore the biggest damn gun John had ever seen.

No sooner had John leaped than a missile's white trail of smoke stabbed out from Claude's weapon and slammed against the creature's chest, knocking it twenty yards across the chamber. It howled defiance for a split second before it exploded in a burst of fire, acrid flesh, and taint. Claude was already back under cover, but John stood in place, soaking up the explosion's warmth like a lizard on a sunny day.

After the air had cooled to tolerable levels, Claude clambered out of the vat.

You can come out, it's dead, John thought out in Allison's general underground direction. No thanks to

your expertise in French, he added sardonically. He smiled and winked at Claude while awaiting the predictable rejoinder.

Which didn't come.

Allison? Claude thought at her.

Nothing.

Allison! Claude shouted via their mindlink.

Silence.

"Shit," said John and Claude, simultaneously and aloud, as they dug with superhuman strength into the rubble that blocked the hole she had disappeared into.

Kreyu recovered slowly, dim torchlight seeping in through several layers of eyelids. The shadow dragon, with shield-sized scales the color of slate and smoke, stretched her mighty wings and looked about her. Had she blacked out? Perhaps a spell? No time to wonder now. She had been roaming the Seepers' warrens. Her broodmates patrolled the skies above to make sure she would not be sealed in by Seepers' shamans; those mystics had some power over earth, and when they combined their efforts could equal even an abyssal wyrm's talents.

She looked about, curiously. The Seepers. A loathsome, subterranean people who pillaged those who tried to eek out an existence above them. Their desperation made her pity them, but their hate and viciousness to all but their own could not be excused. And taint came with them, wherever they surged up from the deeps. The brood could not abide the existence of such a people.





INTRODUCTION

Then they came. They boiled forth from the caverns below, their shapes only vaguely man-like. She lashed through their front ranks with her razor-sharp tail. Several dove beneath her, stabbing with burning-bright spears at her soft underbelly, but she managed to leap sideways and up, twisting and lashing as she launched through the air, before they could do much damage. Her arc ended high up on a nearby wall, and she clung there with her claws deep in the stone, hurling spells at her foes.

Then she realized . . . there was something else coming. It loomed above the back rank of its minions, an unnatural light from below reflecting off its slick, alien flesh. It was evil where the seepers were only pathetic, it was dangerous where they were only a nuisance, and it was older, far older even than she . . .

Allison's eyes snapped open. She was herself again, and once more in the tunnels near the Thames. Everything had returned to normal, except for the howls of the seepers. They had followed her through the ages, echoing in her mind. Then she realized with alarm that the echoes were not in her mind at all, but rather in the tunnels all around her. They were coming, and if her flashback was accurate, as it usually was, something pretty damn scary was coming with them.

Guys, she thought forcefully to her broodmates, the sound of whose desperate digging was reaching her; You'd better either hurry up and get me out of here, or blow this joint and seal me in with the roaches. Something's coming . . . something way worse than us. If they answered, she couldn't hear them.

FINDING ALLIES

It was no difficult feat for John and Claude to clear away the rubble that blocked them from the underground chamber. Once in, however, they couldn't find any trace of her.

Although they had seen Allison work her spells a thousand times, neither John nor Claude had bothered to learn wizardry themselves. And with no magical way of locating her, and their contacts in the legal precincts of little obvious help, they found themselves as helpless as the cops were in their everyday encounters with the supernatural.

As days turned into weeks, they doggedly persisted. Someone had to be able to help them locate their sister. They paid off hucksters, watched fortune-tellers gibber and moan, visited candle-lit tombs where "demonologists" roared and sprayed pigs' blood on the walls. All to no appreciable effect. It was worse than pointless, and just like Allison had always said: watching humans do magic was like watching someone with no rhythm try to dance.

But through it all, they kept up their momentum. Neither put it in so many words, but both of them knew that giving up would be admitting that Allison was dead.

Finally, they caught a break. It came from a magician who refused to help them.

He was a tattoo-covered guy with dark skin, maybe Pakistani. Short, around five foot three. Went by "Brat." They had been referred by a guy who knew a guy; they didn't even keep track of the web of contacts anymore.

After they told him the story of Allison's disappearance, Brat sat back on his chair, pulled a bucket out from under the table and spat into it. After shoving the bucket back under the table, he said "Sorry, I got nothing for that."

John and Claude grimaced, but nodded.

"At least you didn't waste our time," said Claude, his foreign accent thick. "You are the first gentleman who has said up front that he can't help us."

"Wait, wait," said Brat. "I got nothing, but for a couple pounds, I know this—"

John cut him off. "I gotta be honest with you," he said. "I think we're done trying to get help from the kind of people you'd know."

"People?" asked Brat. He shook his head back and forth emphatically. "No, no, people are no good. Not for the info you blokes need."

"We're in Ireland, you understand."

John and Claude were walking through waist-high grass; there were no man-made structures as far as the eye could see, unless you counted the crumbling field-wall they had passed about two hundred yards back.

"We lost track of Allison in London, but we find ourselves in Ireland."

John was in a pissy mood, but Claude had insisted that, for lack of any better leads, they should at least come out to the place Brat had specified. He had been willing to give them the information on spec. If they didn't like what they found, he didn't get paid. So Claude was inclined to believe that Brat wasn't trying to steer them wrong. Not on purpose, at least.

Then the pair of them crested the hill in question. The grove was just like Brat had described it: a circle of holly hedges surrounding three oak trees. The oaks were the points of a perfect triangle, in the center of which was a single, massive birch. Claude grinned.

"That's it," said John, surprised. Claude was already running toward it.

The hedge was hell. They even had to manifest some dragonhide to get through unscathed. They managed, but their clothes ended up the worse for wear. They made sure to get their duffel through, as well. If what was here wasn't friendly, Claude wanted some weapons on hand other than harsh language. Also, the duffel had their "offering" in it.

Brat had been very clear about what they were supposed to bring: the oldest worked stone they could find. Neither John nor Claude knew from rocks, but they figured that the old-ass pedestal Allison kept the dragon idol on must be pretty ancient.





Wiping the sweat from his brow and looking around, John was unimpressed. Four trees in a hedge-circle. This is low-rent, he thought to Claude in the telepathic equivalent of a whisper. We're gonna get help from a mystic that can't even afford standing stones?

But no sooner had he zipped open the duffel and set the pedestal on the ground than a low groan issued from the earth. It was deeper than any hipster's bass sound system. The ground trembled, and the two scions took wary steps backward. John's eyes began to flame—always his first reaction to the unexpected. Claude ignored John's response, and instead did what Brat had told him to do: focused his karma on the ground in front of the birch. He reached into his inner being, what he thought of as his deepest self, and just . . . gave it.

Then the heath and grass and sod parted to reveal a giant boulder. It was pressing its way from the ground, like a whale surfacing in the sea, like the sun creeping over the horizon. Then more rocks emerged on either side of what they were beginning to see was a gigantic head. The new rocks were fingers. They grasped at the earth, and pushed out two shoulders, two arms, a body . . . all of stone. A giant leg emerged, and caught purchase in the grassy surface of the earth. A minute later, the creature stood before them. It towered about three stories tall, completely made of stone, cracked and weathered and covered with dirt and moss.

The creature's stony eyes passed right over John and Claude to settle on the pillar of ancient stone. It made a deep noise of delight and reached out to pick up what to it was a toothpick-sized column.

"Hey! That's ours!" shouted John.

The creature made a surprised noise. "Hrrrm?" It looked down at them, as if seeing them for the first time.

"But we hope that you will accept it in exchange for a small service," added Claude, shooting John a dirty look.

The creature held the pillar up beneath its stony nose and inhaled deeply. It shivered with what might have been pleasure, and emitted a low noise of satisfaction.

"Thiiis iiis veeery oooooold," said the giant, finally, in a voice that was practically sub-sonic.

"It's yours if you help us find our friend," John said, eager to get to the point.

"Dooone!" said the giant, in what passed for it as a rapid response.

"You'll have to come back to London with us," said Claude warily. "That's where she disappeared."

"Acrooos thee waaaves!? Noo! Nooo! Unnn-dooone!" The great creature yanked the pillar away from his nose, but reluctantly. He clearly coveted the ancient bit of rock.

"She has been taken," said Claude. "By creatures from below. Tainted. She disappeared underground. You seem to have some . . ." he searched for the word, and finally found it, "unique talents. You can help us find her."





MODERN AGE MAGIC

On the fifth of February, in the Year of Our Lord 2001, on the Chinese New Year, magic returned to the world.

It didn't return with a rain of fire or the voice of God thundering in the night. It came back with the buzzing of cell phones, the stirring of faxes, the downloading of pixels.

A ritual. Just like the one that accidentally sent taint and karma alike scurrying out beyond reality and brought the mythic age to a deadly, dramatic end. Spanning the globe, just like the other. Powered by the sacrifice of life, of innocence, of blood and wealth, just like the other. Spawned by greed and power, just like the other.

But whereas the ancient ritual caused the end of an age, the modern ritual gave birth to a new one, plugging the hole through which karma had been draining. The center of the ritual was hidden deep in the catacombs beneath London. And it is there that the karma welled up, inexorably rising like a lake filling a basin. That's when the strange times came.

Creatures started appearing in very clear photos and videotapes, taken by quite reliable witnesses. Spoon-benders, once easily debunked by the likes of Penn & Teller, could suddenly subject their "trickery" to the scientific method. Secret cults, brooding in dusty corners since the Dark Ages, were suddenly able to perform rituals that worked. After centuries of self-delusion, they were as surprised as anyone.

The tendency in London had always been that, the more you believed in the supernatural, the more marginalized you became. Or vice versa. But now those beliefs had payoffs. The outsiders started to assemble an organized understanding of magic. To know how to harness its power. They relearned the spells of the ancients. They invented their own. Some of these mages bent their powers to malevolent ends, while others allied—informally, for the most part—with the righteous authorities of church or state.

Now, all but the most resolute head-in-the-sand ostriches know that *something* weird is going on. The whackos had their usual theories: God is back ("and boy is she pissed"); the government put nano-tech in the water and it got out of hand; aliens; mass hallucination; designer drugs; a new plague. But for the first time in centuries, magic is the explanation chosen by the common man. Things are changing, magic is real, and it's anybody's guess what that means for the world at large.

It was obvious that the creature was torn. It kept gazing longingly at the toothpick-pillar, which it still held in its hand, then glanced uneasily over its shoulder, in what Claude and John imagined must be the direction of the ocean.

"Surely you're no friend of taint," began Claude, but before he could continue:

"NNNOOOOO!" The giant bellowed; the ground shook. "Nooo friennnd of theiirs!"

The giant breathed hard. It looked to John like it was hyperventilating.

"Nooo friennnd of the Thooooose Whoooo Dwwelllll Bellllowww," it added, a bit more calmly. The massive creature slowly began to sit, and after a moment, had completed the ponderous repositioning.

"Telll meee ooof . . . youuur friennnd . . . "

The giant, it turned out, was terrified of water. John and Claude had been forced to redeem a great deal of the treasure in Allison's crypt to hire a large ship with an even-keeled crew. Even then, it was hard to tell who was more nervous on the trip across St. George's Channel to Cardiff: the sailors giving a wide berth to the huge wooden crate that hummed to itself, or the giant inside it that tried to take its mind off the miles of water all around it.

For all the difficulty, though—and all the time it took, nearly seven weeks since they had seen or heard from their missing brood-sister—Claude and John finally found themselves in the underground chamber where she had disappeared, the stone giant half submerged in the stone of the place, sticking up out of the ground from the waist up. He walked through rock as if he was wading in a pool of water.

And the giant began to sniff.

It sniffed the rock of the chamber from top to bottom, and from side to side, sucking in great whiffs of air and dust, sticking its fingers in the smallest crevices they could fit in to coax more rock-smell out from them. Then, suddenly, the giant bellowed. The whole cave shook. Claude was sure the ceiling would collapse. Then the creature crashed his fist into a niche in one of the walls.

Where his stony fist struck, Hell opened up.

The rock crumbled to reveal some kind of portal. It generated a howling, vicious wind, sending dirt, rocks, and trash flying through the cavern. The noise was deafening. Beyond it was a tunnel leading to what seemed like another world, full of flame and light and sound.

Where do you think that goes? John thought to his brood brother.

Claude sent back the mind-speech equivalent of a shrug. I do not know, he elaborated after a moment. But evidence suggests that it is where Allison was taken.

And that was enough for either of them. With the unity of a single mind, John and Claude strode through the portal, toward whatever fate awaited them, in this world or another. As they passed through the gaping maw of stone and wind and magic, John's eyes flashed red with heat and light—for he was Fireborn.



RUNNING A CAMPAIGN



CHAPTER
ONE

THE ROLE OF THE GM

Running a FIREBORN campaign is more challenging than playing a character. Yet it can be just as, and more, rewarding. Unlike the other players, who have only their own characters to worry about, the GM has the responsibility and privilege of controlling the rest of world. Furthermore, the GM rules on what the characters can and cannot do, and the results of their actions. It sounds like a lot to handle, and it can be. But the rewards are many, including the satisfaction of telling a great story, running a fun campaign, making your players happy, and giving everyone tales to tell for years down the road.

The role of the GM can be broken into the following, bite-sized tasks.

DESIGNING CAMPAIGNS AND ADVENTURES

When the players get together for a session of FIREBORN, what do their characters do? Do they hunt brain-eating demons in back alleys? Do they try to stop a plan to assassinate the Prime Minister? Do they infiltrate an occult conspiracy dedicated to world domination? While the players certainly have some influence on the adventure, these questions can ultimately only be answered by the GM.

DESCRIBING THE WORLD

As the GM, you are the players' senses in the world. It's up to you to describe not just what the characters are seeing ("There's a guy on the roof with a rifle, and a car in the street coming right at you") but what the world sounds, smells, tastes, and feels like as well. The more vivid your descriptions of the world, the more excited your players will be to interact with it, and the more easily they will be able to do so.

PLAYING NPCs

From the recurring villain to the old lady next door, a FIREBORN campaign is full of NPCs. It's up to you, as GM, to bring this cast to life. Some of this task is strictly tactical. In combat, for instance, you decide how the characters' enemies and allies attack and defend. But just as often, you'll be roleplaying the NPCs in narrative scenes. The goal is to make them unique, memorable characters, not just sacks of APs waiting to be attacked or looted.

KNOWING THE RULES

Just as your players are counting on you to describe the world, they are trusting you to make sure the world works the way it should. You should be intimately familiar with the rules. After all, as the GM, your rulings are final. If you don't arbitrate fairly and consistently, your players may become frustrated or lose faith in you.

HAVING FUN

The point of the game is to have fun, and the heart of being the GM is to make sure that happens. Be sensitive to your players. If they're bored, speed things up. If they're lost, throw them a clue. If they're frustrated, find out what the problem is and how you can help solve it. Sometimes, helping your players have fun might even mean ignoring the rules or changing your adventure. That's fine, so long as you're still having fun too.

While running a FIREBORN campaign is very similar to running any other RPG, the world and system make the specifics of the campaign

distinct from other games. Between flashbacks, broods, and the mysteries of magical London, designing and running a FIREBORN campaign is as unique as it is challenging.





DESIGNING A CAMPAIGN

The best FIREBORN campaigns are those that are planned out ahead of time. This doesn't mean that you should detail every encounter of every adventure before the players ever come to the table, but you should have a general idea of your campaign's goals, its campaign arcs, and its themes before the first session.

CAMPAIGN GOALS

When presented with a new campaign, the first question many players ask is, "What do our characters *do*?" Part of that answer is up to your and your players' desires. However, there are two goals that are likely to be universal to all FIREBORN campaigns: stop the taint, and remember the past.

STOP THE TAINT

Taint is spreading throughout the modern age in FIREBORN, heralding not only the eventual corruption of humanity, but another death of dragonkind, as well. The war against taint is fought on many fronts: by tooth and claw in the lairs of Those Who Dwell Below, by gently encouraging those who are tempted by taint to resist its seduction, or by systematically destroying the power bases of those who use magic unwisely or have given themselves over to dark masters. The specifics of what manifestation of taint the characters will face at any given time, and how they'll stop it, is determined largely by the campaign arc (see below).

REMEMBER THE PAST

The scions' powers and true identities are locked away, and can only be unlocked by memories of the mythic age. These memories are usually in the form of flashbacks, which give the scions insight to their previous selves, to the dangers of taint, and to the workings of karma. Unlike other goals, which may be accomplished over the course of the campaign, remembering the past is a goal that can never be fully realized. It is an ongoing quest for all scions, and a karmic thread woven through the very fabric of who and what they are.

CAMPAIGN ARCS

The two core goals above can be seen as both survival tactics and destinies for all scions. Eventually, all scions must try to stop the taint and remember the past, or die trying. Campaign arcs determine how the characters can achieve those goals and what obstacles are placed in their way. They give the characters specific

options over the course of each adventure. Do they break into museums to steal magic artifacts? Visit college campuses to recruit fledgling magi into their mystic circle? Or do they stalk the back alleys by the light of the full moon, hunting for creatures whose names have been lost for millennia?

Furthermore, your players may have their own goals for the campaign as a whole or for each campaign arc. Maybe they want to form an underground resistance movement that communicates with its member via a hybrid of magic and technology. Perhaps they want to investigate corrupt governments or corporations and, when necessary, take them down. Before designing your campaign, be sure to discuss it with your players to see if they have goals in mind. If they do, and your campaign doesn't give them a chance to pursue those goals, they are bound to be disappointed.

Below are just a few suggested campaign arcs.

RAW RECRUITS

In this campaign arc, the characters begin their new lives ignorant of their true natures and the magic in the world around them. After a flashback "awakens" them to the truth that the world is not as it seems, they are recruited by a more knowledgeable creature or group that serves as their mentor, patron, and guide.

During this campaign arc, the characters discover and learn to use their new powers against a backdrop of returning magic. Just as they are developing their own abilities and other newly awakened supernatural creatures are adjusting to the modern age, the normal humans of London are likewise discovering a mysterious and awe-inspiring new aspect to reality.

The characters have no real agendas of their own (at least, not at first) but are given instructions to be carried out. The patron's enemies are the characters' enemies. Though they may not realize it immediately, the characters have been recruited into a war they know little about, and are serving as front-line soldiers against an enemy they have never met. The more the characters learn about what's going on in the world, the more independent they are likely to become. In time they will outgrow their patron altogether, and may want to branch off to start a new campaign arc of their own choice.

The raw recruit campaign arc is especially well-suited for new players starting their first FIREBORN campaign. Because their characters are discovering the world as they go, the players don't have to worry about knowing the setting intimately before the campaign begins.

TREASURE HUNTERS

In this campaign arc, the characters track down and "recover" (which often means steal) karmic items, enchanted artifacts, and other treasures. They may be motivated by a mentor or patron (who gives them leads





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on what to find and where), or may be driven by their own greed and desire for power.

The specifics of the treasure the characters seek may vary from one adventure to the next. Maybe they're looking for a set of six enchanted kris daggers hidden during the height of the empire of Atlantis. Or perhaps the treasures are worthless baubles that provide a powerful connection to the past, allowing the scions to relive the most important points of their previous lives. Beyond the searches for smaller treasures, the long-term goal of the campaign might be a quest to find a single, world-shakingly powerful item.

Elements of a treasure hunter campaign arc include lots of travel, research, stealth, and facing down not only the keepers of the treasure (these things are *always* protected), but rival treasure hunters as well.

MONSTER HUNTERS

In monster hunter campaign arcs, the scions work together to find and take down supernatural creatures. While they might stalk the night for altruistic reasons (werewolves are eating people in the forest), they might do it out of greed or lust for power (werewolf blood makes a powerful mystic elixir). They might even just do it for the thrill of it, or because they can gut monsters and leave them in the sewer without worrying about doing jail time for it.

The world of FIREBORN is full of monsters to hunt. Some are tainted creatures slinking through the sewers. Others are vampires, zombies, and similar "traditional" monsters loosed by the rising of magic. Many humans could be viable foes, despite having no supernatural origins: many would question the humanity of evil mages, greedy power-brokers, drug dealers, and rapists, and few would disagree if you called them "monsters." Even fellow scions that have given in to taint must be taken down. Hunting other scions can be a unique experience for the players, for it shows the seductive power of taint. The characters may see dark reflections of themselves in the very beast they are trying to destroy.

Each adventure typically presents the players with a new threat to track down and kill. Common monster-hunting campaign elements include investigating reports of monsters, researching the creature in question, and climactic battles against fearsome foes.

DEFENDERS OF MAN

In the mythic age, some dragons appointed themselves as guardians. They watched over mankind, protecting it from threats both within and without. Today, some reawakened scions continue this tradition. Unlike their earlier incarnations, modern scions have a deeper connection to humanity, and are therefore more concerned with humanity's lot.

In this campaign, the characters are heroes, pure and simple. They defend the weak against those who would

harm or exploit them, and work to improve the lives of those around them. While they probably hunt monsters or seek treasure, they do so only as a means of protecting mankind, not for personal gain or enjoyment.

Characters in a defenders of man campaign arc might operate a private investigation office ("We help the helpless"), work with the police ("Looks like the cops found another body"), or just roam the streets at night looking for people in trouble ("This is MY neighborhood, creep"). Others may be associated with a patron, perhaps a secret society, that can provide them with resources and point them towards problems in need of heroes.

HUNTED

In this campaign arc, the characters must abandon their old lives and take up a new existence on the run. Someone or something is after them, and if they stay in one place too long, those hunting them will find and destroy them.

Conspiracies make good hunters, since they can have agents anywhere. Maybe a secret society has discovered the scions' true natures, and has dedicated all of its resources to their capture. Or perhaps the characters are being chased by a powerful, taint-corrupted enemy left over (or reincarnated) from the mythic age, who is seeking vengeance upon them for some crime they don't even remember.

The hunted campaign arc can often be combined with other archetypes to provide a conveniently serialized format for your campaign. Each adventure is a stop on the characters' ongoing journey. When the adventure has been resolved, the hunters move in once more, and the characters are on the run again.

QUEST FOR TRUTH

There is more to reality than what we see. The truth of the world of FIREBORN is strange, seductive, and terrifying. Because magic is real, there are horrors and wonders beyond imagining if you know where to look.

In this campaign, the characters are dedicated to discovering the world's true nature. They are not content to merely live in a time of magic. Instead, they seek to understand its hidden truths. They seek their place in it. This place is found through the discovery of arcane knowledge, mystic enlightenment, or the wisdom of strange and secretive mentors. It can also be found, of course, through the rediscoveries of the scions' true draconic selves.

For every person who seeks the truth, there are scores who wish to keep it hidden. Knowledge is power, and those with the power want to keep it for themselves. Therefore, characters in this campaign arc are sure to be confronted not only by rival truth-seekers, but by the keepers of the truth who are willing to threaten, lie, and even kill to keep the truth from being discovered.



GUARDIANS OF SECRET KNOWLEDGE

Once the scions find the truth or uncover the secret knowledge they were looking for, they must decide what to do with it. They might use it for their own gain, but at what price? They could bring the knowledge to bear on the war against taint and their enemies, but doing so may be as dangerous as it is powerful. They might even bequeath the information to those that they think can use it the most wisely . . . but first they must ensure that the recipients of the knowledge can be trusted. Or maybe they just sell it off to the highest bidder.

Usually, however, scions in this campaign arc choose to keep the knowledge safe and secret, and decide that they are the best guardians to do so. Since knowledge is generally desired by all the powers of the modern age, whether mystical or mundane, this gives the GM an opportunity to bring many enemies into the picture simultaneously. The scions will have to decide if the secrets they guard are worth facing off against several foes at once . . . or if they are particularly savvy, they may even be able to play those foes against one another.

BUILDING A POWER BASE

In this campaign archetype, the characters pool their powers and resources to establish a solid power base for themselves in order to better accomplish their other goals. This power base might take any number of forms: a street gang, a consulting firm, a mercenary band, or even an occult secret society.

Working with others, the characters can accomplish greater things than they could working alone. However, an established power base makes a much better target than a few scions with a dream and half a plan. The characters' enemies have an easier time finding and attacking them, and the scions often have to spend a lot of time protecting their human allies from harm, rescuing them from hostage situations, or simply bailing their asses out of trouble.

A power base campaign arc typically has more "big picture" elements than other campaign arcs. Depending on the nature and scale of the characters' power base, they may have to deal with budgets, clients, and public perceptions of their operation.



CAMPAIGN THEMES

Your campaign's goal and arcs determine what the characters *do* during the campaign, but the campaign theme suggests what it all *means*. Goals and arcs are obvious and concrete, but theme is subtle. You shouldn't tell your players what the theme is. Let them discover it on their own. If they don't figure it out, that's fine. They don't need to know the theme to play the game. But as GM, your campaign's theme can help guide you as you determine what happens next, and how it all unfolds.

You might be tempted to give your FIREBORN campaign several themes. Resist the temptation. Pick one, and make it your focus. The theme may complement the campaign's goals and arcs, or it might oppose them as an ironic counterpoint. The theme might even change over time; once you feel a theme has exhausted its usefulness, it's time to shake up the campaign with a new one.

Below are just a few examples of themes and suggestions for how to use them in your campaign.

PURITY VS. CORRUPTION

The most obvious way to use this theme is with taint, but corruption comes from many sources—even those considered good. Knowledge can corrupt, and enlightenment corrupts happiness.

WAR

The campaign may take on a militaristic tone, with talk of "battle lines," "casualties," and "collateral damage." Does it glorify war? Condemn it? Or does it explore the complexities of war, wherein terrible things are done for righteous reasons?

INTRIGUE

Straight-up battle is rarely the way to go with this theme. Spying, subterfuge, and lying are much more effective. Secrets are weapons, and revealing them is an act of war.



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HORROR

Reawakening to your draconic identity is terrifying. What you've known to be reality is suddenly stripped away, leaving you with nothing to hold onto. Nightmare creatures you've never dreamed of are real and stalk the streets outside your window. The mysterious, unknown, and threatening nature of the world seeps through the campaign, coloring everything that happens with shades of horror.

IDENTITY VS. APPEARANCE

You are not who you appear to be. This is very true for the scions, but in this campaign, it might be true for everyone. The garbage man is a spy, the spy is a novelist, and the novelist is a drunken occultist with dreams of unholy power.

DRACONIC INSTINCTS VS. HUMAN NATURE

Dragons are fundamentally different from humans. As scions, the players' characters bridge the rift between the two, but may find themselves torn. A campaign with this theme will probably rely on a lot of flashbacks, providing stark contrast between the dragons of the mythic age and the humans of the modern era.

THE FANTASTIC VS. THE MUNDANE

The characters are now part of a magical, dramatic world where anything can happen, and adventure waits around every corner. But they still need to go to work, deal with customers, suck up to their bosses, and put up with annoying friends and relatives. Even if they've left their old lives behind, they still have to live in the mundane world of traffic jams, irritable shopkeepers, and long lines at the airport. At some point, the characters may have to choose between the fantastic and the mundane—or they might have to learn to balance the two.

CHANGE, GROWTH, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Every day, the characters learn something new about the world or about themselves. Every day, they become a little better at being scions. And every day, they become a little more like the dragons they truly are.

MEMORY VS. REALITY

Flashbacks can lie. Dragons are ancient creatures, and their memories are fallible. In this campaign, the players can never truly trust what their characters remember of the mythic age, and may find themselves questing to discover truths within truths.

THE SETTING OF FIREBORN

Modern London is the default setting for FIREBORN campaigns. This ancient city has arisen as the epicenter of a magical awakening, its forgotten pools running over with karma once more. Karma attracts those who seek to use it, both for good and for ill, as well as those who want to taint it. And so London has become the focal point of this magical struggle, with dragons, monsters, and secret societies all competing for their piece of karmic power.

WHY LONDON?

There are many reasons to set your campaign in London. Beyond the obvious (it's the setting detailed in this book), the city has much to offer.

ATMOSPHERE

London is terribly old, yet thoroughly modern. Ancient Roman ruins exist side-by-side with 21st-century office towers, vehicles travel down super-highways and cobbled roads, and each day thousands of people drive over a river as old as mankind. All these elements combine to give London a rather unique atmosphere of the old co-existing with the new. In other words, an atmosphere perfectly suited to a FIREBORN campaign.

In the world of FIREBORN, this goes one step further. That which *seemed* mystical *becomes* mystical. In the scions' London, supernatural creatures and magical places of power have always been there, slumbering beneath its streets and hidden in its walkways and thoroughfares. If karma had pooled somewhere like Albuquerque or Cleveland, there might not be much of a mythic legacy for it to reveal; in London, however, all it takes is the return of karma for reality itself to turn on its head and all manner of living folklore to be revealed.

COSMOPOLITAN

As a major city, London attracts people of all sorts, from all around the world. It has an incredibly diverse population with countless different cultures, subcultures, counter-cultures, cliques, and fringe groups. As a result, strange people acting strangely (like the scions being themselves) rarely earn a second glance. With the return of magic, the strange has become normal, the mystic has become an accepted oddity, and terrible nightmares have become frightening realities. Whereas the small-town police might come out in force to check out a circle of punks chanting over a sword in a back alley, the cops in London have much worse to deal with. That scene becomes nothing more than a footnote in a





tabloid-spread of the bizarre. (“Honey, guess what I saw on the way to work.”) The players aren’t completely immune to public notice (“You just stole my car!”) but for the most part, they are free to adventure.

PRACTICAL

There’s a kernel of truth to the stereotype of the stoic Brit. Londoners in particular are adaptable and flexible. The United Kingdom has gone from being an island of barbarians to the world’s largest empire to a sidekick to the superpowers. If they as a people can adapt to those sweeping changes, they can accept the strange times and do what needs to be done to get through them. There’s no reason to get hysterical; if magic is real, there’s nothing for it but to shoulder on and learn to live with it. Not to mention that the tourists have been stomping around for years trying to find real faerie mounds and King Arthur’s bones, and everyone’s grandmothers are always telling those dusty tales about the wee folk and what signs to make when you pass an old man with a wheelbarrow on a dark country road; now maybe everyone will stop their gobbing and get on with their lives.

LIMITS FOR THE GM

The world may eventually experience changes as magic returns, but if your players don’t leave London and its immediate environs, you don’t have to extrapolate what those changes might be. As karma spreads farther outwards, there may be hotspots of angry spirits in North America, a rise of vampires in Eastern Europe, or a growing cabal of necromancers in Africa, but you don’t have to care. (This isn’t to say that you shouldn’t use them as plot ideas, just that you aren’t *required* to acknowledge them.)

LIMITS FOR THE PLAYERS

So you’re a reawakened immortal dragon with the potential to develop near-godlike powers. What do you do? What do you *want* to do? If the players have the whole world at their disposal, it can be a bit intimidating. Setting the campaign in London gives the players boundaries that can lead to creativity and inspiration; it gives them something to focus on. Furthermore, since players like to know what they’re getting into before acting, it’s a lot easier for them to know London than it is to know the entire world. Facing limitless options (and the possibility of exploring every single one of them) is a bit overwhelming, and players without boundaries could be paralyzed instead of challenged.



KARMA AT LARGE

When your players decide to travel outside of London and its immediate environs, they may notice some strange effects with regard to magic and their powers. After all, karma hasn't reached everywhere.

Excepting ley lines and areas of high mystic power, karma and taint lessen as they radiate out from their focus in the modern age, the Chamber of Sorrows beneath the Tower of London.

Currently, the effects of karma's return extend from London in a rough circle of about a 100-mile radius. Only London itself, the central 20-mile-circle, has full karmic potential. This means that all powers, karma expenditure, superhuman aspect scores, etc., operate normally. Every 20 miles out from the center, however, the karmic potential lessens by one.

Karmic potential is essentially a cap. Within London proper, all powers can be used, even up to rank 5 effects; additionally, all spells can be performed up to rank 5, all superhuman aspect scores exist up to rank 6, and up to 6 karma may be bid on automatic successes (if a base aspect score is that high). In the second ring of karmic potential, however, which begins about 20 miles out from the center of London, karmic potential decreases. Only rank 4 powers and spells can be used, only superhuman aspect scores of 5 or lower are possible, and 5 is the maximum number of karma points that may be bid on automatic successes.

This lessening continues outward in 4 more concentric circles, each approximately 20 miles further out from the previous one, until you reach an area of no karmic potential at all; this is the spot at which no supernatural powers or spells may be used. However, superhuman aspect scores of 1 persist in areas of no karmic potential, and 1 karma may still be bid on automatic successes; anywhere one goes in the world, these minimums remain.

3 SIDEBAR 1-1 3

CATCHING THE FIRST FLIGHT OUT OF HEATHROW

Maybe you're bored with London. Or maybe you don't like the atmosphere, don't care if the locals freak out, and see a campaign without geographic limits as an exciting new challenge. That's fine. If you're willing to do the work, there's no reason you can't move your campaign anywhere you want. Below are a few suggestions for doing just that.

BRAVE NEW CITY

What if magic reawakened not in London, but in Paris? Or New York? Or your hometown? As GM, you can make it happen. But when planning your campaign, you should think about what makes the new setting different from London.

How does the local culture react to magic and weirdness springing up through the cracks? Do the locals ignore it, or do they take up arms against the creatures of the night? Does the local university send out teams of scholars to take readings? Do they call in the Inquisition and start witch trials? Does the government get involved with its secret labs, smoke-filled rooms, and men in black?

Also, consider who the other power players in town might be. While some secret societies are sure to show up wherever the magic is, others might be local. Maybe they've been here for hundreds of years, but now that there's real power to be had, they're not about to share it with scions and outside cabals.

The same thing goes for fae creatures, Those Who Dwell Below, and any other supernatural entities populating your campaign. Some are sure to be common both to London and to your new city, but some monsters are regional, spawned of local fears and legends. And while taint might be as common here as it is in London, it might take on a subtly different form, shaped by those around it. Its corruption may be less or more hidden, may be spiritual, or maybe it can take on a crude intelligence of its own.

Finally, you should establish *why* your city is the new wellspring of karma. What happened here in the mythic age to make it so potent? Or was it something that happened recently, perhaps with a circle of sorcerers, or a cabal of physicists? It might even be caused by the existence of a specific reincarnated entity from the mythic age, or an item lost for millennia, now found and awakened according to the ancient prophecies.

KARMA EXPLOSION

There is magic in London. The farther away from the city you get, the weaker the karma grows, until the world grows as mundane as your parents always told you it was.

In your campaign, maybe this isn't the case.

Maybe magic has broken through again not just in London, but *everywhere*. Around the world, beasts of legend are reawakening, occult societies are swelling with power, and scions are remembering who they truly are. This is no longer a localized event; this is a worldwide phenomenon.

How does the world react? That's up to you. As GM, you must consider how each region deals with a sudden rise in unexplained mayhem. Japan deals with it differently than Russia, and the countries of the Middle East have a very different outlook than those of South America.



Bringing magic back into the world wholesale has vast repercussions. Magic is power. As this power changes hands, it must likewise change the face of war, economics, and politics. Governments may crumble. Nations might fall. Long-subjugated peoples may become stronger than any could have imagined, and new superpowers may be born overnight.

Playing this sort of campaign will feel very different from the default FIREBORN campaign. The scions are no longer unique individuals; every country and major city should have broods of their own, as scions awaken throughout the world. Each brood may choose to fight for a different cause, or all of the Fireborn could unite under a single organization. While this sort of support can be useful, it also means that the existence of the scions will eventually become public knowledge, making them more vulnerable to attack. The world knows *something* is going on, and that the scions are likely part of it. There are no shadows left in which to fight.

A THOUSAND POINTS OF KARMA

In this campaign option, London is but one of hundreds or even thousands of karmic hotspots around the world. These hotspots are very localized, and very spread out, so as scions and others compete for karma, some are eventually forced to leave the current spot and go out in search of another. Of course, that spot might

already be claimed by a rival secret society, a brood of scions, or some local supernatural entity.

A campaign like this would likely be a nomadic one, with the scions constantly on the move from one karmic hotspot to the next and never spending more than an adventure or two in one place. Coming up with new background details for each location is a challenge for the GM, but the reward is a larger sense of travel and adventure.

DESIGNING ADVENTURES

The specifics of your adventures are determined largely by your campaign. For instance, if your campaign designates the characters as new recruits fighting alongside their mentor in his war against a magic-wielding mob boss, an adventure might be making a hit on one of the boss's warehouses. Of course, if your campaign is all about horror investigation, an adventure might have the characters sneaking through a haunted, decrepit tenement building in the middle of the night.

Regardless of the specifics, virtually every adventure will include certain common elements.



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Hook

How do the characters get involved in the adventure? If they have a patron, they might just receive orders they are expected to carry out. Or maybe they get a call from a panicked friend in the middle of the night. Perhaps they are haunted by dreams that warn them of impending danger (though such dreams will no doubt lead to adventures of their own).

Come up with a hook that works for the characters. It doesn't have to be perfect (the players will jump at any chance for adventure) but it should be reasonable. ("A stranger on the street wants me to shoot the Prime Minister? I don't think so.")

CONFLICT

In many ways, this is the heart of the adventure. If the hook determines what the characters are supposed to do, the conflict determines what stands in their way. The obstacle might be active ("The cult of Ra is trying to kill me!") or passive ("The Tablet of Ra is buried beneath four tons of rubble."). It might even be internal, as the characters are faced with moral dilemmas or psychological questions ("Am I a man blessed, or cursed, with draconic powers, or am I a dragon given, or trapped in, a human body?").

Be sure that the conflict is not too great for the characters to handle. If you're throwing enemies at them, make certain the villains' stats don't overpower those of the characters. If it's a puzzle, mystery, or other obstacle, have a solution in mind. While your players are likely to come up with all kinds of outlandish solutions, you should have an ideal direction or two that you're prepared to guide them towards and expand upon.

NPCs

Whether they're nameless mooks, trusted allies, or recurring villains, NPCs serve vital roles in the adventure. They present obstacles and dangers, but also offer information and assistance. More than this, they are people with whom the players' characters can interact; they help bring the world to life for the players.

When designing an adventure, consider who the NPCs will be. Is there an established nemesis or old friend you'd like to use again? Or maybe bring in a minor character the players seemed to like. You could introduce a new character who brings the plot along with him, but might stick around to play the love interest. And of course, there are always the NPCs with no names, no lines, and nothing to contribute to the story but their fists, blades, and guns. These are fodder, and they are a valuable part of any GM's toolkit. Also, consider the stats for the NPCs. While not everyone needs stats, anyone with whom the characters are likely to fight should have them. Named villains should have their own, unique, hand-crafted stats, while "Mook 1, Mook 2, and Mook 3" can share one set of stats.

FLASHBACKS

Flashbacks are what make FIREBORN adventures unique. When you design an adventure, it is essential that you design a flashback or two that is part of that adventure. (You may choose not to include a flashback, of course—it's your game, after all—but this should be a conscious decision to break from the norm.) For more information on flashbacks, see below.

LOCATIONS

Where does your adventure take place? You don't have to map out every spot you think the characters might visit, but you should think about where they will go and what will be there. If the adventure includes research at a university library, consider what the characters might find or who they might talk to. If the climax is a battle on the roof of a burning tower, think about what kind of terrain thresholds will be involved.

Depending on the adventure, you may want to come up with a unique location to feature in your adventure: a castle made of ice, an eccentric's mansion populated with tigers, a foul-smelling tattoo parlor that sells magical trinkets on the side. By cementing the specific details of these locations



in your mind beforehand, you can really bring these places to life during the game.

CONCLUSION

How does your adventure end? While you'll probably never see the end you have envisioned (players are notoriously creative when it comes to ignoring your plot and forging their own), it's important to have one in mind. But it's even more important to have in mind the *consequences* of the adventure.

Adventures don't happen in a vacuum; they happen in a campaign. The consequences of an adventure suggest what rewards and repercussions await the characters later in the campaign. If they kill the occult mob boss, for example, his family will no doubt come gunning for them. If they secure an ancient artifact that was cursing the residents of an apartment building, those residents might offer them a safe place to stay when they need one. If they demonstrate their ability to work independently, their mentor may release them from his care and turn them loose into the world.

Finally, consider what kind of mechanical reward the players are likely to earn during the adventure. How many APs is the adventure worth (for more details on awarding APs, see "Rewards," page 35), and should the characters gain any karmic items along the way?

USING FLASHBACKS

Flashbacks are the soul of FIREBORN. They are a plot device, a resource, and a way for players and GMs alike to steer the direction of the campaign. Flashbacks are powerful, and must be handled with care.

In terms of the story, flashbacks are exactly what they seem: the characters "flash back" to scenes buried in their past, ancient adventures they shared as dragons in the mythic age. These scenes are memories, however, and memories are not always to be trusted.

In game terms, flashbacks are adventures tangential to the campaign. These adventures not only provide the characters with insights into the campaign, but also with the experience to put these insights to good use. And, of course, flashbacks allow characters to regain karma. In other words, flashbacks "power up" the characters, train them to use that power, and then point them toward the most appropriate manner of its application.

In most cases, flashbacks are a planned part of the adventure. You prepare a flashback just as you would an action scene or a narrative scene in the modern age. Each flashback lasts a scene or two, and there are one or two flashbacks per adventure.

Running a flashback is essentially the same as running a short adventure, but there are a few extra consid-

erations such as the purpose, the premise, the backstory, and more. Also, there are differences between running a flashback that you triggered and one that your players triggered. Explanations of the key elements of flashbacks are given below.

PURPOSE

As GM, if you trigger the flashback, you should have a specific goal in mind; a list of likely purposes is available on page 29. Note that the players don't necessarily know the purpose when the flashback begins, or even once it has concluded. Discovering the purpose should be part of the fun, and you should encourage players to figure it out on their own. Regardless of whether they understand what has been accomplished, however, bring the flashback to a close as soon as the purpose has been achieved and any action scenes have been resolved. This isn't to say that you should rush through flashbacks. Flashbacks are fun and exciting, and fulfilling one's purpose should be satisfying, no matter how long that takes. But once that purpose has been fulfilled, you risk boring the players and stalling the campaign if you don't draw it to a close and get on with the campaign. Return the characters to the modern age where they can put the flashback to good use.

Example: Darrell wants to run a basic investigative flashback. His players' scions are tracking down a shadow leech that somehow feeds on peoples' life forces, so he decides that the purpose of the flashback is to inform the players that these creatures are only vulnerable when they return to their corporeal, snail-like shells.

PREMISE

The premise is the plot of the flashback. The premise should always be derived from the purpose. If the purpose of the flashback is to introduce an ancient enemy, the premise might be the characters' first encounter with him, the moment he betrays them, or some climactic showdown with him. If the purpose is to reveal a magical ritual, the premise might be a conversation with a dragon wizard, a raid on an arcane library, or even a scene in which the characters invent the formula.

Example: Darrell wants his players to find the shells of the shadow leeches the hard way: by slogging through underground tunnels until they uncover the creatures' lair. The premise of his flashback, therefore, is that a shadow leech has taken up residence under a city-state watched over by one of the player's dragons, and is eating dozens of loyal citizens each day. The characters have tracked the creature to the sewers, and have just discovered an opening into a cavern beneath the sewers.

TRIGGERING FLASHBACKS

When a flashback is triggered, the current scene is put on hold and a new scene begins. Flashbacks can be triggered by the GM or players using touchstones. A touchstone is a catalyst that leads to a flashback; it is something that reminds the characters of their lives as dragons. It may be something specific like a black lake in Avalon (now Scotland) or a medallion given as a gift from a lover in Atlantis, or it may be more general (any large body of water, any shining metal disc). The same touchstone might trigger several different flashbacks, or it may only trigger one flashback ever. Only the GM knows what memories a touchstone holds.

As GM, you can trigger a flashback at any time. Perhaps a character picks up a sword that reminds him of one he took from a lowland barbarian, or he sees a bird of the same type that he saw the day his brood fought the black wizard of Carthod. Maybe he smells food cooking, and his mind wanders to the burning of Trocea.

Note that touchstones are not absolutely necessary for GMs to trigger flashbacks. They are a narrative device that you may use or ignore as you will. While you might say “The sun glinting off the lake reminds of you something . . . something that happened in a previous life,” you might just as easily skip the lake altogether and jump straight into the flashback: “Suddenly the world tilts around you. You’re in front of a vast, clear lake, and a hunting pack of titans are descending upon you from the hills to the east.”

Players can also attempt to trigger flashbacks, but doing so intentionally requires that they solve a bit of a puzzle. First, they must use established touchstones. If a sword triggered a flashback before, the character might draw the sword again and let his mind wander. Does it matter how he holds the sword? Or perhaps the way the light glints off it? If seeing a bird did the trick last week, he might start scanning the skies for another of the same breed. Whether these attempts to trigger flashbacks work or not is up to you, the GM.

SIDEBAR 1-2

TRANSITIONS

The first part of any flashback is the transition from the modern era to the mythic age. A flashback can be triggered in many different ways (see Sidebar 1–2), but the most common and dramatic method is to use touchstones.

Touchstones are anything that remind the characters of their past lives. You might pick a touchstone before

the session begins or, if you’re feeling creative, you might pull one out of the environment as needed. But remember, if you establish a touchstone now, the players may try to use it later to trigger their own flashbacks.

The simplest way to use a touchstone is to describe it in its modern context, then describe it again in its mythic context, then go on to describe the characters’ new environment. For instance, if you were to use an Altantean medallion the brood recently discovered, you might describe how the fluorescent lights of the subway reflect off its jeweled surface, then grow brighter, because it’s sunlight, not fluorescence, and the characters are on horseback, not on the subway.

***Example:** Darrell’s players are poking around an abandoned apartment building where the shadow leech has been feeding on homeless people. An old pipe has cracked, and is spilling water down the stained wall. Darrell is inspired by the water and decides to use it as a touchstone. “The water bubbles softly out of the pipe and trickles down, splashing softly into a puddle. The puddle is dark. The water is full of sewage. And you realize you’re not in the apartment building anymore.”*

BACKSTORY

Because of the nature of flashbacks, they often start in the middle of things. The characters may find themselves facing a deadly foe atop a burning temple, or standing at the threshold of a vast stone library with an army at their side. Your players will need you to explain where they are, why they are here, and what has led them to this point (“Ah, yes, you remember, this was your first battle with Vorgon.”). You might want to present all this information up front or, to keep the players guessing, you might dole it out over the course of the flashback. (“You’re not sure where you are, but the burning roof is starting to collapse, so you don’t have time to worry about it.”)

***Example:** Darrell decides to take it easy on his players. As the flashback opens, he fills them in on the backstory. “The city of Esrulum is under your protection, but the people are in a panic because something shadowy and demonic has been feasting on their souls for weeks. Hearing the cries of your people, you set out to hunt this demon, and have tracked it to the sewers by following its trail of taint. Now that trail leads to a hole before you, and the hole leads down into darkness.”*

PLAYER CHOICE VS. NARRATIVE POWER

It’s a fine line between guiding the players through a fun, unpredictable narrative sequence and manhandling them into situations they might not appreciate being in. Learn to read your players’ reactions to flashbacks, and



use them appropriately. You may be sure that the group is going to have fun if you thrust them into a scene with very difficult odds in the middle of a mythic age battle, but some players might gripe and grumble about not being given a choice in the matter. If your players are of this sort, use such situations sparingly, and certainly don't attempt them if the players are already frustrated or in bad moods. After all, your goal is to provide a fun roleplaying experience for your players, not use your narrative power to thrust them into impossible fight after impossible fight.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The flashback is over. The purpose has been achieved, the players have what they came for, and it's time to go home. This is essentially the same as transitioning from the present to the mythic age: again, you can use a touchstone to bring them back gently, or you can just "jump" the characters directly into the modern age.

Remember: while the players have spent hours or days of game time adventuring through the mythic age, their characters in the modern age are still where they were a moment ago, lost in their own thoughts. If they were in danger (or about to be in danger) just before the flashback, you might surprise them out of their reverie when that danger strikes.

SAMPLE FLASHBACK PURPOSES

Whether triggered by the GM or the players, most flashbacks will serve one or more of the purposes described below. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and you should feel free to amend, edit, and ignore it as you wish for your campaign.

INVESTIGATION

This is the most common type of flashback. The purpose of an investigation flashback is to give the characters information they need to move forward in the campaign. For example, if the characters are having trouble defeating a slime primordial in the modern age, they may flash back to a mythic age scene in which they killed a gigantic slime primordial by drowning it in salt-water. Armed with the memory of the creature's weakness, they can return to the present to destroy the thing before it kills again.

Aside from an enemy's weakness, the characters may also remember the location of a mystic artifact, the details of an arcane ritual, the true name of an ancient demon, the secret entrance to a hidden temple, or countless other important facts. Entire campaigns can be crafted around investigation flashbacks, as each flashback provides a new piece of the puzzle of the modern day plot.

BACKSTORY

Like investigation, the purpose of a backstory flashback is to give the characters information. However, this isn't key information that moves the plot along. Instead, the purpose provides context to the adventure. By helping the characters understand the background and history of the adventure, the flashback can help them make informed and dramatic decisions.

For example, if the characters are dealing with a child possessed by an evil spirit in the modern age, they might flash back to when one of the character's loved ones was possessed in the mythic age. While the flashback may not specifically tell the characters how to exorcise the spirit, it makes the situation more personal and dramatic. Furthermore, if the characters handled the situation poorly in the past, they have a better idea of what *not* to do during the present.

In a less personal example, the characters may face a wizard using a dangerous and unpredictable style of magic that they faced before in the mythic age. Again, a flashback about this magic may not reveal how to deal with it, but may show the price the wizard and those around him will eventually have to pay. This knowledge doesn't necessarily help the characters take down the mad mage, but it gives them a greater sense of urgency now that they know what's at stake.

DESTINY

The purpose of a destiny flashback is, appropriately, for the characters to fulfill their destinies. There is something they must do, something they must get right, and they will keep on having this flashback until they remember what it is.

This is a recurring flashback. Whenever it's triggered, the characters are returned to the same scene, and the events of the flashback will transpire the same way each time unless the characters do something to change them. The characters should have other flashbacks as well; if the players have to keep playing through the same scene in multiple adventures, they're sure to get sick of it.

Perhaps the characters are faced with the assassination of a king. Each time they revisit the flashback, they may try some new approach to save the king's life. Or perhaps they only *assume* their purpose is to save his life, when in fact they are destined to be the assassins. As they learn more about themselves and their lives through the modern age and other flashbacks, the characters can piece together a new course of action ahead of time, so they know what to do when the flashback returns.

This type of flashback should be used sparingly. It should mean something significant, and when the characters finally discover what they are destined to do, it should be a landmark event, and they should be well rewarded.



CHAPTER ONE: RUNNING A CAMPAIGN

Note that while they keep revisiting the same time and place with this flashback, the characters are not actually changing the past. They are merely changing their *memories* of the past. Whether the king is assassinated or not, the modern age remains the same. The characters cannot change the present by changing how they *remember* the past.

DISTRACTION

While this could be considered a variation of the “pacing” flashback, the purpose of a distraction flashback is to distract your players and buy you some time to think. By their nature, players are frightfully creative, resourceful, and endlessly capable of undermining even the best-planned adventure. When your players throw you for a loop, don’t panic: Just flash back to the mythic age and put them knee-deep in a simple stand-alone adventure. While they hack their way through the monster-infested labyrinth of the mad monk (for example), you can gather your thoughts regarding how to get the adventure back on track when the characters return to the modern age.

ENERGIZING

The purpose of this flashback is to build up karma. While most any flashback will generate karma for the characters, players are likely to trigger an energizing flashback specifically to “power up” before heading into a major conflict in the modern age. These flashbacks should be short, since their purpose is mostly mechanical. Let the players get what they need, then get back to the showdown.

FORESHADOWING

This is like an investigation or backstory flashback, but in reverse. The purpose of a foreshadowing flashback is to provide the characters with information that will be useful later in the adventure. The flashback might introduce a key plot point, an important character, or some other element that is not immediately useful, but is destined to come up later.

In a foreshadowing flashback, the characters might

see a series of mystic sigils that mean nothing at the time, but take on a whole new meaning when spray-painted on the side of a bus in the modern age. Or perhaps the characters meet a traitorous dragon, and remember his treachery as the scion he has become hands them his business card in a crowded London dance club. And if the characters watch a demon plague wipe out a proud city-state in the mythic age, they’ll be sure to recognize the plague’s symptoms when they show up on the homeless who sleep in the Tube stations.

PACING

You can use flashbacks to control the pace of your adventure. You can create tension by building towards a climax in the modern age, then flashing back to the mythic age, leaving your players with a cliff-hanger. On the other hand, if the adventure is slowing down, you can drop in a high-action flashback to stir things up. Nothing takes the tedium out of a low-key investigation like battling a horde of Fomorians on the blood-soaked plains of Avalon.

While the purpose of this type of flashback is to control the pace of the adventure, it should probably have some other effect as well. After all, if you’re pulling your players away from a climactic battle in the modern age, they’re bound to be disappointed if they spend the rest of the evening helping the empress of Xia choose the proper robes for her wedding. If their quiet evening with the empress has some other point (such as convincing her to join them against a tainted dragon nearby) the players will be much more likely to forgive your cliffhanger.

RAMPAGING

Sometimes, the purpose of a flashback is nothing more than to let off steam. Maybe the players want a break from the mundane investigations of the modern era. Maybe they’re tired of being beaten back by goons with machine guns. Maybe they just want to go someplace where no one needs a search warrant, and lawyers haven’t been invented yet. Whatever the reason, the

players want to flash back to a time when life was simple, monsters were obvious, and dragons could rampage with impunity.

You may certainly run a rampaging flashback as a straight-up fantasy power trip; that's what it's there for. But if your players are losing focus of the big picture, you might want to slip in some reminders of their true calling: Maybe someone in the flashback reminds them of a loved one in the modern age, or a situation resembles a situation they are trying to leave behind. These subtle echoes of the present can remind the players that, while rampaging is fun, they have a higher destiny. They have more important work to do.

STOCKPILING

The purpose of a stockpiling flashback is to build up a hidden trove the characters can access in the modern age. The most obvious example would be burying a magic item in the past, so that it can be recovered and used in the modern age. Characters might also find it useful to secret away journals, tomes, mundane items that provide information about the past, and—best of all—karmic and enchanted items.

While these items might be valuable in their own right (ancient relics are always worth a lot to the collector's market), their true value is as touchstones. If the characters can recover, for example, a stone chalice they found in the frozen wastes of Jotunheim, then they might be able to use that chalice in the modern age to trigger flashbacks from that time.

Resourceful players may use stockpiling flashbacks to retroactively stash items they need in the modern age. For example, if the characters are facing a shapeshifter in the modern age, and need a certain ancient talisman to stop it, they may trigger a flashback to obtain the talisman and put it where their modern selves can find it. When they return to the present, the characters “remember” where they left the talisman.

Of course, just because the characters stockpile some items, there's no guarantee that the cache will remain undisturbed. Over the course of the millennia between

the mythic and modern ages, there's a good chance that grave robbers, archeologists, construction crews, or even the characters' enemies might find the hoard. (Imagine the characters' surprise when they open an ancient cache and find, not the magic swords they'd been looking for, but a centuries-old stone tablet engraved in the Kehebet language with a mocking message from their arch-enemy.) If your players come to rely on stockpiling, this is a good way to shake things up.

PLAYER-TRIGGERED FLASHBACKS

When adjudicating player-triggered flashbacks, here are some things to consider.

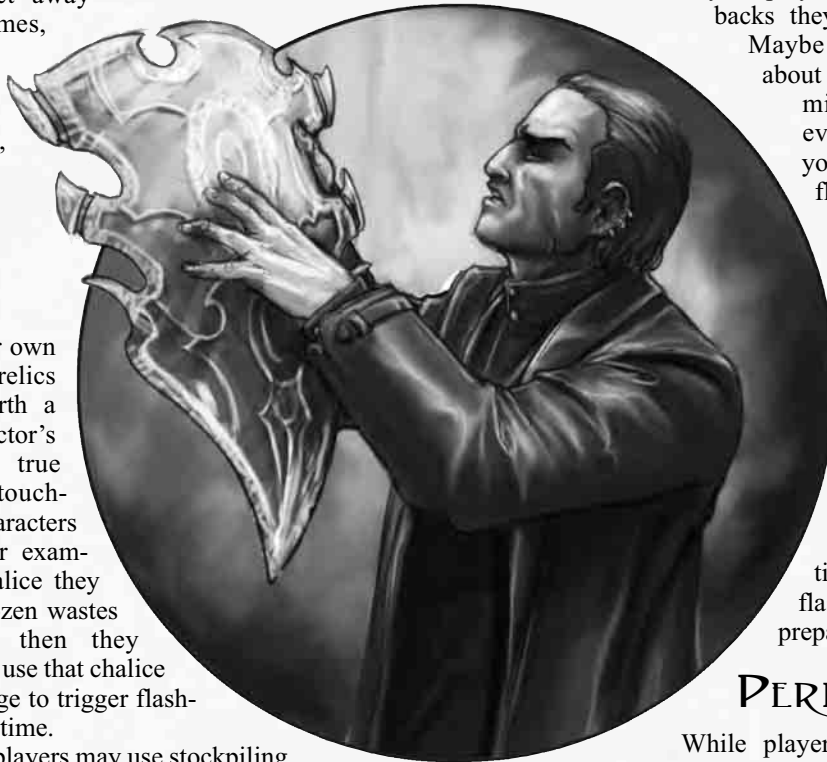
PREPARATION

When preparing an adventure, keep in mind any touchstones your players have and any flashbacks they may try to trigger.

Maybe make some notes about what these flashbacks might entail. Perhaps even consider whether you want to permit the flashbacks or not; after all, if the climax of your adventure involves a high-speed motorcycle / machine gun duel, you might prefer to put the flashback off until the next adventure. Ideally, your players will inform you of their intentions ahead of time so you know their flashback plans and can prepare accordingly.

PERMISSION

While players can try to trigger flashbacks on their own, they still remain subject to the GM's plan. That is, while they can *attempt* to flash back all they want, their attempts will fail unless you want them to succeed. That being said, if the players have a touchstone and a solid purpose, you'd better have a good reason to keep them from flashing back or they're going to be upset. Good reasons include keeping the characters together (if not everyone wants to flash back), maintaining the adventure's pacing (“We're in the middle of a chase scene here!”), and a complete lack of preparation (“You want to do *what?*”). All the same,





in all these cases, you can still let the players trigger the flashback later: when everyone wants to go, when the scene is over, or after you've had time to prepare.

PURPOSE

Your players determine the purpose of the flashbacks they trigger. If they don't tell you directly ("We're going back to that cave to find what was glowing at the bottom of the pit") you should ask them ("Why do you want to go back to the cave?"). As always, the purpose of the flashback is most important, but since the players are choosing the purpose and the flashback, you should follow their lead as to when the purpose has been fulfilled. When they're satisfied that they've done all they want to do, the flashback is over.

TYING FLASHBACKS TOGETHER

Over the course of the campaign, you will run many flashbacks. By default, each flashback is somehow related to the modern age. But how are the flashbacks related to each other? It's possible to run each flashback as an isolated event, with no context outside of the modern age. But it's more thematically satisfying if there is some common, unifying element to some of the flashbacks. When the characters flashback, it might often be to a specific location. That helps you establish setting. If many of your flashbacks take place in the capital city of Atlantis, for example, your players know what the place looks like by the third flashback. You don't have to describe it. You just have to say, "You're in the capital of Atlantis."

Or the common element could be a character. In the case of long-lived creatures like fae, titans, and dragons, she could be a recurring villain or hero. In the case of mortals, perhaps the players deal with the same family line, either as enemies or allies, throughout many different epochs. You needn't explain that you're tying the flashbacks together in this manner to your players. After a couple of flashbacks, they'll see it for themselves, and begin looking for ways to relate it to the campaign. ("Hey, it's that guy again! I bet he's going to betray us!")

Common elements help you establish the settings for your flashbacks. Common elements also suggest touchstones for both you and your players. If King Tahenkhemen sits the throne during a series of your flashbacks, anything that reminds you (or the scions) of his reign might serve as a touchstone. If your flashbacks are linked by conflict or conquest, anything related to war or violence might serve as a touchstone.



OTHER CAMPAIGN ADVICE

FIREBORN is different from other RPGs in several ways. Because of flashbacks, each adventure might have several smaller adventures inside it. Because of the dice system, the characters are versatile and able to adapt to whatever you throw at them, but may require more than the normal specific attention to resource management. And because they play dragons part of the time, the players may begin the campaign with more power than they're used to having right off the bat.

With these differences in mind, here are a few last items to consider while running your FIREBORN campaign.

MYTHIC VS. MODERN

Some players love the mythic age, and only enjoy the game when playing through flashbacks. Others might be bored with the "sword and sorcery stuff" and prefer the cultural conflicts, conspiracy, and kung fu of the modern age. As the GM, it's your job to keep both types of players happy.

If this problem crops up, try to identify what elements of the specific age your player likes, then play up those elements in the other age. If your player loves the respect he gets as a dragon in the mythic age, you can give him a promotion at his job in the modern age. Now he has subordinates and the respect he desires. Of course, if he just loves the awesome power of being a dragon and resents every moment he has to endure as a scion, there's very little you can do without disrupting your campaign. (Maybe you could allow him to have awesome power in some other aspect of modern life, such as great wealth, fantastic contacts, or an endless supply of flashy vehicles . . . but of course, such things should come with a price.)

VERSATILE CHARACTERS

Because of the Dynamic d6 dice pool system, the characters' aspects are not fixed. Keep this in mind as you design your adventures and run each encounter. The fast character, who you expect to be able to dodge the oncoming train, might have devoted all of his resources to shielding his mind. The wily character, who you expect to be able to withstand the mental onslaught but need to be pushed out of the way of the oncoming locomotive, might have made a stance change to enhance his reflexes. Just as the Dynamic d6 system gives the players more options on how to respond to any given situation, it also gives the GM more to consider when designing those situations.

OVERPOWERED CHARACTERS

In the mythic age, the players' dragon characters are terribly powerful. They may be too powerful for their own good: nothing challenges them any more, and they are nearing boredom. What do you do?

Attack the characters' weak spots. Find problems they cannot solve by torching them with flame breath. Investigations are good for this: sure, they can take out the assassins without a problem, but they need to find them first. What about their hoards? A dragon without his hoard can be severely limited, as it represents a major source of his karmic power. And of course, taint is a very obvious way to weaken dragons; it is essentially their kryptonite. Finally, remember that you have complete narrative power in the mythic age. When the flashback begins, the characters can be in chains, already wounded, or otherwise hobbled. Be careful with this, however, for if you use it even twice in a row, the players are sure to resent you for it.

In the modern era, the scions may eventually reach the overpowered stage as well. With firearms and high-tech explosives, they are far less likely to feel invulnerable, but it may happen. One approach to solving this problem is based on the fact that the characters' best defense in the modern age is anonymity. If their enemies know where to find them, they'll need to always be on their guard. Throw some unwanted publicity the scions' way, and they're sure to start acting a little more subtle. By putting them into situations where using their abilities will draw unwanted attention, you can force them to find new, creative ways to solve their problems.





Game Master Mechanics

CHAPTER
TWO

REWARDS

As mentioned in the *Player's Handbook*, players should receive around 1–3 APs per session, with around 8 APs per adventure. An adventure is any story arc, made up of anywhere from one to five sessions of gameplay. An adventure should rarely reward more than 10 APs.

A good rule of thumb is to reward the players with one AP per action scene and one per three narrative scenes. Narrative scenes tend to be played through more quickly than action scenes, but are still important in terms of character development, problem-solving, and evoking mood.

The biggest issue is not how many advancement points to award, but what kind. PCs receive a combination of humanity points and heritage points as rewards, and each is awarded using different criteria. Options for dividing advancement points are presented below.

BY SCENE

The easiest way to divide up humanity and heritage advancement points is to simply grant them to the players based on the scenes; humanity points for modern age scenes, heritage points for flashback scenes. Each adventure should have at least one flashback, with preferably one per session.

The result of this method of reward is that the players improve their skills and edges far more rapidly than their powers. This supports a “low magic” campaign style that is particularly gritty or that envisions the scions as extremely skilled humans with just a taste of supernatural powers. Additionally, this method means that all of the PCs advance with the same ratios of humanity and heritage points.

BY BEHAVIOR

Alternatively, a GM may decide what sort of advancement points a character gains by looking at his attention, behavior, and tendencies. Does he go through a modern age investigation using his police training, or does he use his heightened senses? Does he engage in combat with a pair of pistols blaz-

ing in his hands, or does he pick up a greatsword, cover himself in scales, and go to town? In both examples, the first options demonstrate a reliance on human skills and habits, and so would be rewarded with humanity points; the second options, meanwhile, demonstrate a close connection with and use of draconic traits, powers, and methods, and so would be rewarded with heritage points.

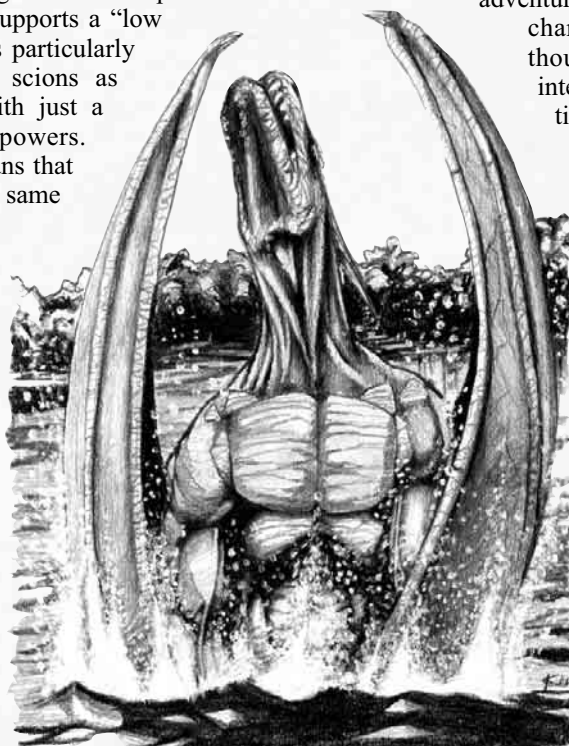
BY DESIRE

Finally, the GM can simply use an intuitive system of rewards based on the individual PC's goals and desires. He records the number of action scenes and narrative scenes, and at the end of the adventure awards an appropriate number of advancement points to each player. The GM can divide up each player's points differently, based on his perception of their desires and focuses during the adventure. A scion might spend an entire session using modern weapons, taking advantage of human contacts, and practicing his modern age skills, but if he does all of that in order to retrieve a hoard item that belonged to his draconic self in the mythic age, the GM might skew his ratio heavily toward heritage points.

PLAYER SUGGESTIONS

For GMs that like to involve their players in determining reward types and campaign direction, there is nothing wrong with consulting the players on what sorts of advancement point distribution they would prefer or think they deserve. The players review the adventure, pointing out the actions their characters performed that they thought were especially cool or interesting, and discuss the motivations and thoughts behind those actions. If the player provides a good argument, the GM awards the PC the advancement points as the player prefers.

Player suggestions can be requested regardless of the advancement point division criteria used. Also, as a side benefit, this kind of interactive reward system gives players and GMs a chance to review and rehash the adventure they just completed, creating a sense of closure for the group and giving each individual a chance to celebrate his favorite moments.





INDIVIDUAL REWARDS

As the GM, you should refrain from giving noticeably disparate numbers of advancement points to different players. Dividing up the APs into humanity and heritage points differently for each character is fine, and indeed creates a more interesting brood development than simply blanket humanity/heritage ratios. However, one of the goals of a FIREBORN campaign is for each player to feel like he is on equal footing with the others. If a player never shows up for sessions, he will inevitably receive fewer APs; so long as a player puts in the effort and contributes to the game, however, even if he's not the best roleplayer in the group or the cleverest tactician, his character should receive the same number of APs as the others. Likewise, even if a player demonstrates exceptional roleplaying and excellent tactics, he should not be rewarded with bonus APs, lest the other players feel shafted. Instead, reward such quality gameplay with bonus dice on well-described actions or bonus karma points regained.

DYING

Death in the modern age is permanent and devastating. The player can reincarnate, certainly, but does so in the form of an infant. It will be a long time before a modern age character that dies can rejoin his brood.

Death in the mythic age, on the other hand, is part and parcel of a FIREBORN campaign. Dying and being reborn is one of the ways that dragons grow and change. When the dragon is reincarnated, he is still the same being, but comes into the world with a clean slate. He gains the opportunity to bring his power and experience to a new perspective.

Of course, that doesn't mean it's easy.

DEATH AND DRAGONS

When a dragon dies in the mythic age, his spirit reforms within 10 years minus his base Air score. When he returns, it is as a lesser dragon, one who has incredible potential but has not yet discovered how to access it. Most reborn dragons do not remember their previous lives at first, and exist more as simple animals than as sentient beings. As the years pass and they regain more of their powers, they also regain memories. Once a dragon remembers who he is, he can begin to search out his broodmates, re-establish his old connections, and regather his hoard.

It is not recommended that this process be played out in flashbacks, except perhaps via narrative flashbacks. One of the strengths of using flashbacks to the players' draconic forms is that they do not change much over time . . . while a player's scion grows and develops and is constantly evolving, his dragon character sheet never needs updating and new powers never need to be

learned. Additionally, while scions in the modern age are fairly fragile and constantly facing creatures that may be greater than they, the mythic age is an opportunity for players to become nigh-invulnerable, incredibly powerful beings. Playing a lesser dragon dilutes that epic feel.

MOVING ON

Because flashbacks can occur at differing intervals throughout the mythic age, leaping forward or backward in time, the dragon who died need not sit out of subsequent flashbacks. The GM can simply plan flashbacks that take place far enough in the future that the dragon has returned, fully aware and empowered, to the brood.

The GM's plotline may require that certain flashbacks be set at rapidly succeeding intervals during the mythic age, however. If this is the case, the GM has a few options.

DELAY THE INEVITABLE

If your modern age plotline does not require that specific flashbacks occur at specific points in an adventure, simply delay the flashback in which the dead dragon would not be able to appear. Play on with the rest of the adventure or campaign, and when the player of that dragon can't make it to a session, shows up late, or what have you, run the flashback then.

FALSE MEMORY

Maybe the scion felt his draconic self die and his broodmates in the modern age remember watching his draconic self die . . . but everyone was wrong. They remembered the events in the mythic age incorrectly, and their broodmate actually survived. The death might have been a metaphor for an emotional or philosophical loss, or maybe it was just that the mortal wound ended up being not so mortal. Regardless, the effects on the scion in the modern age are the same, as it is the *remembrance* of the death, whether accurate or not, that causes the penalties or grants the bonuses described below.

SUPPORTING ROLE

In many cases the pacing and narrative flow of a GM's modern age plotline requires specifically timed flashbacks. When the GM has no choice but to continue with the next flashback, even if it is set in a time too recently after a broodmate's death to include him in the adventure, the player of that dragon can instead take on a supporting role.

A supporting role can be nearly anything, so long as it is agreed upon by the player and the GM. The brood could have human, fae, or titan allies alongside whom they will battle during this flashback; the player of the recently dead dragon could take on the roles of one,



some, or all of these allies. Alternatively, the player could take on the role of more permanent supporting characters, like a broodmate's flock of trained griffons or the human noble that a broodmate is obligated to protect. Finally, the player could assist the GM by taking on the role of foes, giving vital attention to the actions and stance changes of the GM's named characters and helping combat run more smoothly.

EPIC EXCEPTIONS

If a player's dragon dies in the mythic age near a climactic moment in the campaign, exceptions can be made. For instance, say a dragon were to die in a flashback set one month before the end of the mythic age. Regardless of when you run the flashback of the end of the mythic age itself, and regardless of what the brood will be doing at that moment, you'll want each player involved in his full capacity as a dragon.

In cases like this, you may resort to the equivalent of divine intervention or the use of epically powerful enchanted items. For instance, maybe the sheer power of whatever climactic event the brood is taking part in or trying to stop causes the dead dragon to reincarnate and regain his powers almost instantly. Finally, if there's real-world time for the extra sessions to be run before the big finale, the brood could go on an epic quest to restore their lost broodmate to his full power (mythology abounds with treks to the underworld to free or resurrect lost lovers). Finally, the brood could go in search of a mythic ritual or enchanted item whose power, which can only be used once, is to instantly restore a lost dragon to his full power.

THINGS TO DO IN LONDON WHEN YOU'RE DEAD

Whereas dragons see death as part of a natural cycle of growth, it's a much more difficult experience for scions. For humans, death is the end, the greatest fear, and a scion who experiences his own death, albeit in a flashback to the mythic age, is sure to be scarred.

When a dragon dies in a flashback, his scion must make an immediate Air check with a TH equal to the number of mythic age deaths he has experienced so far (including this one). This is one of the few times that a character uses an active aspect, rather than a passive one, in response to an event. The use of Air reflects the fact that the scion's link to his former self has been severed, and that he is actively attempting to keep his soul, and his sanity, whole. A check rather than a test reflects that no level of skill or karma can be used to retain one's

sense of self through the journey of death; one simply has a strong enough will to surmount the experience without harm, or not.

For every success the scion is short of the TH, he suffers a weariness die that cannot be removed normally. Additionally, for each point he is short of the TH, the scion's maximum karma expenditure per turn in any given aspect is lowered by one for the same amount of time. This includes karma spent on automatic successes and karma used to activate legacies. These penalties are reduced by one for each month that passes after the scion's remembrance of his own death.

HEROIC DEATHS

While death can be shocking to a scion, it is not universally something

to be avoided by players. After all, heroic death scenes make for some of the most rewarding gaming sessions. However, awarding APs to scions whose draconic selves die heroically might simply encourage players to purposely throw their characters into deadly situations without much regret.

Therefore, a heroic death in the mythic age should be rewarded, not with APs, but with an increase in the size of the scion's karma pool. While not seeming like a very powerful effect, each point of karma matters during extended combats against powerful foes. There is no other way in the game to increase the maximum size of a character's karma pool, so this effect should not be awarded lightly. Only in the most dramatic of circumstances, like the taking of a mortal blow for a broodmate with the Defend action, the sacrifice of oneself to com-



plete a ritual that saves one's brood, or holding off a pack of foes while one's broodmates escape, should the karma pool increase be awarded.

TAINT

Taint is at once the most insidious, evasive foe of the Fireborn, and the most dangerous. Taint is a corruption of karma, a perverse force that is in some ways the opposite of the karma that it once was. Taint is created when the flow of karma is damaged or overused; the most recognized way to cause this stretching is via the misuse of magic by mortals. The karmic flow becomes weak and poisoned in the area in which it has been misused, and taint fills the gaps where the karma has been pulled too thin. Once taint bubbles to the surface, it tends to create more of itself.

THE EFFECTS OF TAINT

Taint has several effects, each of which impacts creatures differently, as described below.

Taint can create a feeling of heaviness, rage, despair, or fear. The source of these emotions can slither in a person's subconscious for days, weeks, or years, never fully surfacing or revealing itself. A character can experience the effects of taint over and over, and never quite be able to recognize when he comes under its effects.

However taint expresses itself, it is universally negative. This is not to say that some creatures aren't drawn to these feelings. Some, in fact, prefer them. After all, it is tempting to wallow in ignorance, to resort to anger or violence. It is much easier than facing conflicts down the long, hard, slow way: peacefully and rationally.

It is important to note that taint is not created through, nor does it only promote, feelings like anger, hatred, violence, or other unpleasant human emotions and characteristics. Such emotions and the actions that grow from them—distasteful as they may be to some—are not inherently tainted, because they are part of the nature of humans. Taint is above and beside such things. Taint comes from *outside* nature. Even generosity, love, and scrupulous honesty can be manifestations of taint if they arise from taint's perversity.

In the world of FIREBORN, like breeds like. Places where karma is plentiful and strong lead the natural creatures who live there to have pure, genuine, passionate lives—which in turn creates more karma. The supernatural creatures that live in such places are aligned with the natural order, and while they may be dangerous and fearsome, they are also full of the rightness of the world. Tainted areas, on the other hand, pervert the natural processes of those locales. In such places, the unnatural and unwholesome flourish, further corrupting the supernatural beings that exist there, which further increases taint. Tainted areas are the breeding grounds of creatures whose very existence is an affront to the natural order.

PERCEPTIONS

The effect of taint (or karma) on characters' perceptions is purely in the purview of the GM's depiction of the world around them. This gives the GM an unusual amount of power with which to manipulate the PCs. For instance, an area with taint 1 might seem a little stuffy to a character. The GM may describe the NPCs there as being somewhat shift, or may ask the PCs for Senses tests more frequently than normal. Meanwhile, an area

with taint 5 might make a character feel desperate, confused, or terrified. The GM might describe NPCs, and even friends and allies, as menacing and dark. Things could seem to be moving just outside of the character's range of vision, it could seem hard to breathe, or it might be alarmingly easy for a character to get lost.

If these grim, gloomy descriptions were always the case, of course, PCs would quickly catch on to when they were in tainted areas. That's why

the GM can use this descriptive style in tainted areas, or not, at whim. The PCs will never know if the people on the street are looking at them strangely, or if they just *think* they are. Likewise, just because things are dark and brooding doesn't mean an area is tainted . . . that could just be the look and style of the place or people. And of course, the two could be intermixed: places or groups of people that are macabre or melancholy by nature might also be tainted, making them seem even more so. The trick for the PCs will be to figure out when they just have a bad feeling, or when they have a bad feeling for a good reason.

Judicious GMs will be careful with how much descriptive license they take with the PCs' worlds. After

TAINT AND THE DWELLERS

Those Who Dwell Below do not *create* taint. Their relationship to the foul power is just like the relationship of supernatural creatures to karma: Dwellers are *of* taint. But rather than being *supernatural*, Those Who Dwell Below (and lesser creatures of similar persuasion) are *unnatural*. The chicken-and-egg question of taint and the Dwellers—which came first?—is unanswered in both the modern and mythic ages.

SIDEBAR 2-1

all, you are the players' senses in the fictional world that you describe for them. The players should be able to rely on those senses to be accurate, as described by the game mechanics, in most situations.

SPIRIT

The most noticeable in-game effect of taint, put simply, is to make it harder to draw on karma. If karma were envisioned as a liquid, taint would be a viscous substance that muddies its flow. All natural and supernatural creatures are subject to this effect of taint (though of course, since humans rarely draw on karma and have little to begin with, they tend not to notice it). The effects of tainted areas on the spirit are outlined below.

- Karma becomes sluggish and difficult to draw upon. Every point of karma a character wants to spend in a tainted area costs an additional amount of karma equal to the area's taint rating. For example, in an area with taint 3, it would cost 4 karma to generate one automatic success, 12 karma to activate an awakened power that normally costs 3 karma, and so on. A character's normal limitations on maximum amount of karma spent per action, such as his base aspect score or his awakened rank, do not apply to these additional costs. The character may spend as much additional karma as he needs for the desired effect; it is the effect itself that is limited by the normal factors.
- Karma recovery is slowed. Whenever a character would recover karma within the tainted area (not including karma that replenishes after an action scene), the character subtracts the area's taint rating from the number of points of karma he regains.

SELF

Finally, the most powerful effect that taint can have, on the Fireborn at least, is the loss of self entirely. As the creatures on this world that are the most pure of spirit, and the most closely tied to karma, dragons are also the most vulnerable to the negative effects of taint. The taste of this most unnatural energy is anathema to them.

All Fireborn have defensive responses to taint, hardwired into their spirits in a very close approximation of genetic traits. These are called taint responses, and are described in more detail below (see "Taint and the Fireborn," page 42). When acting out these responses, Fireborn can draw on karma normally. These responses are usually useful and healthy actions. Or at least, they would be under normal conditions. As taint pushes the responding dragon or scion further and further into his



taint response, the character's acting out of that response becomes more and more extreme. Eventually, if the taint is strong enough and the character's will weak enough, he may find it impossible to do anything *but* the actions dictated by his taint response.

Since taint eventually leads to pain, starvation, and death, Darwinian principles would suggest that creatures with the most self-destructive taint responses would be weeded out over time. Unfortunately, the supernatural does not follow Darwinian principles, at least not as we understand them. Instead, taint responses insidiously become, not a part of dragons' and scions' genetic codes, but part of their psyches. As he is reincarnated through the centuries, a dragon's taint response carries on with him, becoming more ingrained with each passing lifetime.

Ironically, while taint responses would seem to be there to protect a dragon and help him survive in tainted areas, they are just as much a boon to the furthering of taint itself. After all, the more a taint response affects others, causing fear or violence, the more likely those others are to be forced to draw on their own karma reserves, and the less likely they will be able to nurture karma in the place to remove the taint. This long-term effect of taint responses may bring one to question their origins. Perhaps they were not a natural development after all, but rather a slow, terrible trap that took hundreds of thousands of years to be sprung.

BOUNDARIES OF SPAWNED TAINT

Spell or Ritual Rank	Boundary
1	Trivial: Brooks, hedges, small clearings, game trails, footpaths, doorways, and interior walls. Trivial effects generally should not exceed a 50-ft. radius or line.
2	Minor: Streams, ridgelines, minor ley lines, residential streets, railroad tracks, tree lines, load-bearing walls, and the exterior walls of small structures like houses, stores, and the like. Minor effects generally should not exceed a 500-ft. radius or line.
3	Moderate: Rivers, tall bluffs and cliffs, moderate ley lines, major surface streets, underground public transit tunnels, major sewer lines, and the exterior walls of moderate structures like schools, shopping malls, and the like. Moderate effects generally should not exceed a one-mile radius or line.
4	Major: Major rivers, lakeshores, major ley lines, the acknowledged boundaries of cities and towns, highways and freeways, and the exterior walls of massive structures like sports stadiums, international airports, and skyscrapers. Major effects generally should not exceed a 10-mile radius or line.
5	Profound: Ocean coastlines, the spines of mountain ranges, and the acknowledged borders of counties, states, or small nations. Profound effects generally should not exceed a 100-mile radius or line.

TABLE 2-1



TAINTED AREAS

As karma and taint are opposed to each other, no place can have a karma rating and taint rating simultaneously. If a karmic area becomes tainted, its karma rating must be reduced to zero—at which point the place becomes balanced—before it can begin to accumulate a taint rating. The opposite is also true: A tainted place must be cleansed and brought to a taint rating of 0 before it can be infused with karma.

CREATING TAINT

Taint is not *used* by most creatures, as karma is; rather, it is created or it is endured. Like karma, which can accumulate in items or places, taint can build up in an area, affecting those who visit the locale. The most common method of creating taint is through the misuse of magic, called spawning. The extent of the misuse, and the level of the magic attempted, determine how intense the taint is and how wide it spreads.

Mages learn quickly that gaining too many successes on a Casting test can lead to overkill successes. Overkill successes inflict direct damage to the caster. Spawning taint is far more subtle, and many human mages deny that the process occurs at all.

Taint is spawned when a *human* spellcaster attempts a spell or ritual and achieves *too few* successes on the Casting test. Because magic shapes reality by directly

manipulating karma, the pushing, pulling, and wrenching can cause dramatic damage to the local karmic flow. The extent and rating of the taint spawned by spellcasting is tied to the number of successes by which the caster is short of spell's or ritual's TH each turn, as well as the rank of the spell or ritual being attempted.

Supernatural spellcasters (which include scions, dragons, titans, and fae) do not spawn taint when they achieve too few successes; their link to and control over karma is such that they can gently manipulate it without causing damage.

TAINT RATING

When a non-supernatural spellcaster achieves too few successes on a Casting test, make a note of how many successes he is currently short of the TH. Compare that number to the area's current taint or karma rating. If it is equal to or lower, nothing happens. If it is higher, the taint rating of the area within Trivial range increases by one, or the karma rating within Trivial range decreases by one. Continue in this manner each round until the spell is completed or abandoned. The highest taint rating an area can have is 5.

If the Trivial area in which the spell is being cast already has a taint rating of 5 and the caster is 5 or more successes short of the required TH for the spell or ritual, the taint seeps out into an area within Minor range, causing the taint rating of that area to increase by 1. This process continues upward through the taint ratings and outward through the boundaries, always using the taint rating of the Trivial area in which the spell is being cast to measure whether or not the taint increases or extends farther.

Spells and rituals can only cause this outward-expanding increase in taint up to a range that depends on their rank. Table 2-1 lists the maximum boundaries of taint spawned by each rank of spell or ritual.

Example: A wizard gains one success on his Casting test on the first turn to complete a rank 3 spell (which has a TH of 6); he is five successes short of the TH, and is in a balanced area, so the area around him within a Trivial range gains a taint rating of 1. The next turn he gains two successes, leaving him still three successes short of the TH. The GM compares those three successes with the taint rating of the area, which is 1. The number of successes the wizard was short of the TH is greater than the area's current taint rating, so it increases

to taint 2 on the second turn. On the third turn, the wizard gains another two successes; he is now only one success short of the TH, and the area in which he is casting has taint 2, so he can no longer increase the taint rating of the area, regardless of how much longer the spell takes to cast.

MYSTERY OF TAINT

The fact that taint can be spawned isn't common knowledge to beginning players. Even when it occurs, you should feel free to obscure exactly what happens so as to keep the mystery going a bit longer. For instance, if a human wizard casts a spell at them over several turns, you could tell them that something grim and gray slithers through their minds. They'll probably just assume that it's part of the spell. Later, when they attempt to draw on karma, subject them to the taint effect. If they put two and two together, bully for them. If not, that's one more mystery to keep them coming back to the gaming table.

SIDEBAR 2-2

Example: An occultist is performing a rank 4 ritual in an area that is already at taint 4. On the first interval of the ritual, he and his minions gain two successes (the TH for a rank 4 ritual is 8). They are six successes short of the TH, so the taint rating of the Trivial area around them increases by 1, and is now at taint 5. The taint around them probably won't get any worse, unless they gain zero successes on their next Casting test. If that happens, they will be six successes short of the TH. The GM would compare that number to the area's current taint rating of

5, find that it is greater, and note that the taint rating of the Minor area around them increases by 1.

BOUNDARIES OF TAINT

As with karma, the extent of taint's spread is always described by boundaries ranging from Trivial to Profound, as described in the *FIREBORN Player's Handbook*. The different magnitudes of boundaries and examples of each are repeated for your convenience in Table 2-1.

An area of taint created through spawning is always defined by the nearest reasonable borders to the spawning event, whether those borders are natural, magical, or man-made. Thus, spawning might taint a forest clearing, a magical nexus, or a basement room. It could also taint a small farm field or auditorium if they were uninterrupted by other obvious boundaries. All of this is to say that there is no precise measured quantity of space that's created in all spawning circumstances, and that a spawning incident caused by a rank 1 spell—regardless of taint rating—can as easily affect a closet as a highschool gym. It should be noted that overlapping types of boundaries can be considered in combination as the borders of tainted areas. For example, a ley line that cuts across an underground bunker might define one edge of the border to a spawning event in the bunker. The walls



of the bunker would define three sides of the newly tainted area, while the ley line would be the fourth; in the final analysis, only part of the bunker would be tainted, with the remainder—on the other half of the ley line—unaffected by the spawning. See “Infused Areas” on page 172 of the *Player’s Handbook* for more information about the way natural, magical, and man-made borders define areas of karma and taint.

TAINT AND THE FIREBORN

As mentioned above, all scions (and their previous dragon incarnations) have taint responses that describe how they are likely to react when overtaken by taint. Dragons are particularly susceptible to taint’s negative influences because they are dependent on pure karma for survival. A character’s taint response is described by a verb like flee, suspect, avenge, or consume. Sometimes, characters even have taint responses that seem positive or harmless, like protect, accept, or create. What ties all taint responses together is that a character under the influence of his taint response may carry the behavior of the taint response to completely unnatural extremes. A violent character might murder children. A cowardly character might flee from a group of nuns. A self-sacrificing character might mutilate his own body to demonstrate the extent of his love for a relative or friend.

A character’s taint response is usually dependent on the sire he chose during character creation. However, players will eventually learn which taint responses are associated with which sires; few people really know how they’ll ultimately react when taint finally rears its ugly head, so adventurous players may wish to allow the GM to choose their taint response for them, only discovering what it is when they are actually confronted with taint. GMs given this option by their players should choose appropriate taint responses based on the characters’ personalities, backgrounds, and strengths and weaknesses. A list of the default taint responses for each begotten are presented below.

TAINT RESPONSES

Whenever a scion or dragon enters a tainted area, his taint response kicks in. The character continues to act of his own free will, but sees salvation from the taint in his taint response. The response gives him the ability to draw on karma as normal in the tainted area . . . but only when performing actions that further his taint response. Karma spent to further all other actions suffers the normal taint penalty. Each taint response is named as a verb. When in a tainted area, actions coinciding with

that verb count as fulfilling the character’s taint response.

The benefit of taint responses is obvious and immediate: it allows a Fireborn to spend his precious karma normally, at least on some actions. The drawbacks are a bit less obvious, and are described in detail below.

ACT (BASILISK)

The character feels the need to *do*, regardless of the appropriateness of planning or the wisdom of patience, remaining still, or delaying. Any action taken immediately, without thought to the consequences, is considered part of the taint response.

EMBRACE (BEHEMOTH)

The character needs to consummate his feelings of lust, to give in to the passions of the body. The object of his lust would ideally be the appropriate gender or race, but that is not necessary.

FLEE (CARANOCH)

The character must hide from anything dangerous. At higher levels of taint susceptibility, anything becomes potentially dangerous, even allies, small harmless animals, germs, and the like.

PROTECT (CERNUNNOS)

The character must protect all allies from harm, regardless of harm to himself. At higher levels of taint susceptibility, the identity of the protected beings becomes irrelevant: all living things must be protected, regardless of their own intent to harm the character.

SUSPECT (CHIMERA)

Everyone must be suspected of wrong-doing. Everyone and everything must be questioned. This character’s taint response is a never-ending cycle of paranoia, investigation, and inaccurate conclusions.

ACCEPT (DAMBALA)

While acceptance is a powerful ability, the begotten of Dambala take it to an extreme. All events and creatures must be accepted for who and what they are. There is little reason to strive, as all is as it should be.

AVENGE (HYDRA)

Even the slightest of wrongs must be addressed. Insults to honor, attacks on one’s person, disrespectful glances . . . whether the vengeance is for oneself or on behalf of a cause, comrades, or code of behavior, the begotten of Hydra must avenge.





CONSUME (JORMUNGAND)

The ultimate safety is in consumption; nothing can harm you once it becomes a part of you. Likewise, nothing can harm your friends once they have joined your being. At the higher levels of taint susceptibility, logic unravels, leading the begotten of Jormungand to consume even dangerous poisons and inedible substances if they are nearby.

CONTEMPLATE (LADON)

All will be well when all is understood. Any actions that further consideration and thinking, as well as gathering of knowledge, are considered part of this taint response.

STAND FAST (LEBE)

The solid earth and one's own solid will are all that can be relied upon. The begotten of Lebe will not give up, will not back down, and at higher levels of taint susceptibility will not abandon the spots on which they stand.

COMMAND (MABINOION)

A begotten of Mabinogion knows that she is destined to lead and inspire. All will be well if she directs the others, and leads them to victory or safety. At higher levels of taint susceptibility, this need to command prevents the character from doing anything actively, for she must always be ready to direct others.

SACRIFICE (NAGA)

Only through loss can positive ends be achieved. At lower levels of taint susceptibility, the sacrifice of resources and comrades leads to eventual victory; at higher levels, sacrifice must be made immediately, even if that sacrifice is of the begotten himself.

KILL (NEHEBKAU)

Death is the eventual state of all things, both foes and friends. When all are dead, taint will have nothing more to corrupt.

MAINTAIN (OUROBOROS)

Safety can be found in balance. Taint is an imbalance, and so by maintaining normalcy and preventing change, taint can be held in check. At lower levels of taint susceptibility, the begotten of Ouroboros simply refuse to react drastically in response to changing circumstances, maintaining balance in themselves. At higher levels, every action must be countered; for everything created something must be destroyed; for the benefit of the universe, nothing may change.





CHAPTER TWO: GAME MASTER MECHANICS

CREATE (QUETZLCOATL)

The people look to Quetzlcoatl to create and build, and it is in the celebration of this glorious activity that taint may be held at bay. Whether gathering supplies to build an icon, creating a moment in time that reminds all of the dangers of taint, or giving birth to new life itself, the act of creation holds taint at bay.

PROVE (RYU)

Demonstrating pride, power, and courage keeps taint at bay, but only if others are shown that example. Everything the begotten of Ryu does must prove his abilities and heroism to others.

CONTROL (TIAMAT)

Taint is a loss of control, a loss of self. Only by keeping a rigidly firm control over oneself, one's allies, and surrounding events can taint be held at bay.

REBEL (TYPHON)

The mindset of the status quo cannot handle taint in all its insidious slithering. Only a rebel can catch the underhanded taint at its own game, and only unpredictable acts of disobeying and defying can evade taint's grasp.

SERVE (XIAO)

Only selflessness and service brings one out of oneself enough to hold taint at bay. So long as the begotten of Xiao serves others, he retains strength of purpose.

LIE (ZAHUAK)

Taint has everyone in their grips, whether they admit it or not. The only way to remain safe and unsuspected is to speak untruths, so your allies will not turn on you. If you speak enough lies, even to yourself, perhaps taint will not know who or what it is dealing with, and you can evade its embrace.

POSSESS (ZU)

Taint can be held at bay by karmic items, and one never knows when one will find such a boon. Only by possessing everything around you can you be sure that you have all of the resources you'll need to fight the taint.

TAINT-TEMPTED

When a scion or dragon has been in a tainted area for an extended length of time, the taint may begin affect him more drastically. When one of the Fireborn spends a number of continual hours equal to his base Earth score in a tainted area, he must make a taint test. This is an Earth (Ka) test with a TH equal to twice the area's taint rating. If the character fails the test, he is taint-tempted. Taint-tempted characters are desperately fighting taint to the exclusion of nearly all other activities. They suffer disadvantage penalties on all tests equal to the taint rating of the area, and may not spend karma *at all*. The only way a character can work around the taint temptation is to give in to his taint response. The immediacy with which any action is considered to be giving in to a taint response depends on how much the character failed the taint test by. Whenever a taint-tempted character performs an action, compare the action to Table 2-2. If the character's action fulfills the level of his taint susceptibility, the character may spend karma normally and ignore disadvantage penalties *for that action only*.

TAINT-TRAPPED

A dragon or scion cannot simply accept that he is taint-tempted and move on. For each interval of time equal to the character's base Earth score (in hours) that he remains in the tainted area, the character must make a new taint test, suffering penalties on the test as normal. If the character is already taint-tempted when he makes a taint test, the results of failure are much more dire. This time, the taint test is to avoid becoming taint-trapped. Becoming taint-trapped is a terrible fate, so taint-tempted Fireborn would do well to get out of tainted areas as soon as possible. The TH for this second taint test is the same as it would be for an initial taint test

IMMEDIACY OF TAIN RESPONSE

Failed by	Level	Immediacy of Action
1-3	Minor	Long-term gratification (within an hour)
4-6	Moderate	Eventual gratification (within a few minutes)
7+	Major	Immediate gratification (instantly)

TABLE 2-2



for the current tainted area (twice the area's taint rating). If the character fails this second taint test, he becomes taint-trapped.

Example: *A scion with Earth 3 and Ka 1 enters a taint 3 area where he is in constant danger of ambush. After three hours of stealthy scouting, the GM asks the scion for a taint test. The scion rolls only one success (he needs six); even bidding his maximum karma, he could not succeed. So he becomes taint-tempted. While taint-tempted, the scion's fears come true: he is ambushed. He manages to fend off his foes and flee, but just barely. He ducks into an alley to hide, while his enemies patrol the streets for him. Three hours later, the scion hasn't been able to make a break for it yet, and remains in the tainted area. He must roll to avoid becoming taint-trapped. He is still in a taint 3 area, so the threshold for his test has a TH of twice that: 6. He rolls only one success, though, and so becomes taint-trapped, a state that will persist until he leaves the tainted area.*

Rather than suffering penalties on his actions, the taint-trapped character simply cannot perform any actions other than his taint response. The immediacy of the taint response that the character must act out depends on the number of successes by which the character was short of the TH, as shown on Table 2-2. If the character is controlled by a player, his actions immediately become subject to the GM's approval. The player is free to continue to roll for the character, and suggest what the character's nature would dictate he do, but the GM is the arbiter of what the character actually does. This state persists, as with being taint-tempted, until the character leaves the tainted area.

TAINT-TAKEN: EMBRACING TAIN

A character that is tempted or trapped by taint can choose—if he wishes—to embrace taint rather than strive against it. He becomes taint-taken.

A taint-taken character immediately “exchanges” all of the karma in his karma pool for taint. He may spend taint as if it were karma, following the rules for tainted creatures and taint expenditure as described under the “Tainted” trait on page 2-2. Further, he suffers no disadvantage penalties on tests due to taint, and does not need to worry about increased cost of karma (now taint) expenditures, regardless of whether or not his actions further his taint response.

Indeed, any actions taken specifically in furtherance of the character's taint response receive automatic successes: 1 for an action appropriate for minor taint susceptibility, 2 for actions appropriate for moderate taint susceptibility, and 3 for actions appropriate for major taint susceptibility.

The down side, of course, is that the character becomes an unnatural creature, through and through. His actions become subject to the GM's approval, as with being taint-trapped, and while he retains enough intelligence and wherewithal to perform actions other than his taint response, his eventual goal must always be the furtherance of that response. A taint-taken creature will not willingly leave a tainted area.

A character who has embraced taint remains in that condition permanently unless rescued. Such an individual can be brought out of that state by his broodmates, and no one else.

RESCUING THE TAKEN

Broodmates who would rescue a taint-taken character must first bring the character out of the tainted area (something any taint-taken individual is sure to resist). Then they must bring him to an area with a karma rating. The minimum required karma rating of the area varies based on how long the character has been lost, as shown on Table 2-3. Once the character has been brought to a suitable place, his broodmates must keep him there for a specific interval of time, as shown on Table 2-3, while they detoxify him with reason and empathy.

Once the interval has passed, the broodmates must collectively spend a number of karma points equal to the sum of the lost character's total APs (the more powerful the character, the more powerfully his tainted soul resists being rescued). This high cost can be shared among the brood however the broodmates wish. When the karma has been spent, one of the characters who contributed must make an Air (Ka) test, opposed by the taken character's Earth (Ka) test. If the broodmate wins, the taken character is rescued, and returned to normal. If the taken character wins, he remains taken, and another interval of time must pass, with the requisite detoxification and karma expenditure, before the test can be

RESCUING THE TAKEN

Length of time taken	Karma Rating Required	Interval
A century or more	5	1 year
A decade or more	4+	1 month
A year or more	3+	1 week
A month or more	2+	1 day
A week or more	1+	6 hours

TABLE 2-3

attempted again.

Note that, once returned to a natural state, a character that has been taint-taken—if he is particularly depraved—has the option at any time to reject the rescue and embrace the taint once more. If that happens, the character returns immediately to being taint-taken, and all the karma and time were spent to no avail.

INVOKING TAIN

Despite their hatred of taint, the Fireborn are cursed with a constant awareness of its potential presence. Just as humans can bend and rip the weft and weave of karma by pulling on magic, dragons can cause similar damage simply by drawing on karma . . . that they don't have. That's right—a dragon or scion that has zero karma in his karma pool can draw on an amount of additional karma points equal to his APL each day. When the character reaches within and tries to exceed his usual boundaries, the additional power he needs manifests in spite of his karmic shortage. Doing this is called invoking taint. It is thus named because the supplemental karma the character uses is stretched thin, and taint takes its place. However, unlike with magic, the taint does not affect the world around the character, but rather the character's internal landscape.

Any time a character invokes taint, he becomes that much more susceptible to being taint-tempted and taint-trapped. For each amount of taint evoked with a single action, the character's taint susceptibility rises by that amount. A character's taint susceptibility is added to his TH for all taint tests.

Example: The dragon Valerius has 0 karma, but needs to succeed at an incredibly difficult attack sequence against a foe before he kills one of Valerius' wounded broodmates. After rolling poorly on his attack test, Valerius invokes taint for 3 additional successes on a test. His taint susceptibility is now 3. The next time he makes a taint test, his TH will be twice the area's taint rating plus an additional 3.

As with spawning taint through magic, the effects of invoking taint vary depending on the previous taint rating of the target in question. When spawning taint, the target is an area; when invoking taint, the target is a character. The mechanics used vary slightly, however. Whenever a character invokes taint, the total amount of taint invoked with a single action is compared to the character's current taint susceptibility. If the amount being invoked is higher, the character's previous taint susceptibility is superseded, and becomes equal to the higher amount of taint being invoked. If the amount being invoked is lower, the character's previous taint susceptibility *increases by one* rather than, as in the case of spawning taint, being absorbed by the area's higher previous taint rating.

There is no maximum to a character's taint susceptibility.

Example: The previous example above assumed that Valerius's taint susceptibility was 0. If he was at taint susceptibility 1 when he invoked 3 taint, his taint susceptibility would increase to 3, the higher of the two. If he was at taint susceptibility 4 when he invoked 3 taint, his taint susceptibility would increase by one, to a total of 5.

TAINT TESTS VS. TAIN RESPONSE

It is worth noting that making taint tests are *never* considered a furthering of a taint response. Karma may be spent to gain successes on this test as normal, but keep in mind that it is likely to be more expensive than normal (after all, the character wouldn't be making a taint test if he wasn't in a tainted area). Likewise, if a character is already taint-tempted when making a taint test, he cannot rationalize the taint test as part of his taint response; taint-tempted characters always suffer the tainted area's disadvantage penalties on the test to avoid becoming taint-trapped.

SIDEBAR 2-3

Aside from the limit on the amount of taint that can be invoked per day, the amount of taint invoked per test is also limited, just as karma is, by the aspect the character is using to make the test. For instance, no more karma can be spent to gain automatic successes on any one test than the base aspect score with which the character is testing, regardless of whether that karma comes from the character's karma pool or from invoking taint.

LOWERING TAIN SUSCEPTIBILITY

Taint susceptibility is extremely hard for scions to lower, and even harder for dragons to lower. Each time a scion gains an awakened level, he may make an Air check with a TH of twice his taint susceptibility. For each success gained beyond the TH, the character's taint susceptibility lowers by one.

Dragons, on the other hand, may only lower their taint susceptibility by completely depleting a karmic item, as described on page 50. Scions can use this option as well.

The Oragon's Hoard



CHAPTER
THREE



CHAPTER THREE: THE DRAGON'S HOARD

This chapter contains rules not only for using a dragon's hoard in the mythic age, but also addresses the rules and use of items that might be found there: karmic items and enchanted items. Despite the name of the chapter, karmic and enchanted items are not used by dragons alone, but are also cherished belongings of scions in the modern age.

HOARDS

A dragon's Hoard and available hoard are very similar to scions' Wealth and available wealth, though on a much larger scale. During each flashback in which a dragon's hoard is available, he may lower his available hoard to find exotic, enchanted, or karmic items.

The items in a dragon's hoard reflect, more than anything but the creature's actions, what sort of life it lives. A lair is its home, vault, fortress, and meditation spot, all in one, and its hoard is *always* the focus of the place. Perhaps not physically . . . a dragon that lairs on floating islands in the sky may not have a mound of gold on the largest, central-most island, for instance. However, everything from the way the islands revolve to the plant life that grows on them is a reflection of the hoard's power. Daring and mischievous human adventurers in the mythic age made livings by observing dragons' lairs, watching their comings and goings, puzzling out where their hordes are hidden by the clues they see around them, and of course subsequently raiding them. They called themselves Sayers, possibly as a pun on the terms Soothsayer and Dragonslayer, as well as the fact that others tended to do whatever they said, once they accumulated their desired wealth. Their lives tended to be either ludicrously profitable or piteously short.

Dragons are very particular, and some would say unpredictable, about what objects they include in a hoard. The classic hoard contains items of vast wealth, ancient weaponry, and exotic goods from distant lands. Other dragons are childlike in their hoarding, preferring feathers from beautiful birds, brilliantly colored but worthless gemstones, primitive works of art, and other such keepsakes. What the common person of the mythic age does not realize, and which the scions of the modern day recognize quite rapidly, is that hoards are not about wealth . . . they are about karma. A substantial percentage of any dragon's hoard is likely to be comprised of karmic items.

It is part coincidence and part pride that encourages dragons to collect valuable objects over the everyday. The coincidence factors in when you consider that anything of significant monetary wealth is generally associated with many strong emotions in the human world. A fine work of art is the object of much passion and love from its creator, much desire and awe from its viewers, much pride and greed from those who own it or profit by it, and much envy from those who cannot have it. The same holds true for precious metals, jewelry, pres-

tige items, and powerful weapons, in either age. Certainly, everyday objects like kitchen utensils and rusty old locket can have high karmic residues, but such things require years of slow and gentle investment of karma through loving and peaceful environments. Items in the midst of passion and conflict become imbued with karma much more quickly, and as such are much more common as karmic items.

FINDING EXOTIC OR VALUABLE ITEMS

Dragons may draw on their hoards to find exotic or valuable items with which they may raise armies, bribe other beings, trade information, or simply equip themselves in alternate human forms. A dragon's available hoard for such purposes is rated on a quite higher scale than a scion's available wealth; increase the dragon's purchasing power by a factor of 50 to 100, and you get a rough idea of the sort of wealth dragons have available, should they choose to expend it.

Exotic items have hoard costs that vary depending on the time and place of the flashback; several suits of Atlantean armor would have a hoard cost of 1 during the height of the Atlantean empire (still quite expensive), while they might have a hoard cost of 4 or 5 by the end of the mythic age when the empire had all but collapsed, meaning that they were nearly priceless.

FINDING KARMIC ITEMS

Dragons may also search through their hoards to find karmic items, the uses of which are described below. For each point of available hoard the dragon expends, he gains 3 ranks of karmic items. The karmic ranks may be devoted to one item or may be split among several items.

FINDING ENCHANTED ITEMS

Enchanted items often find their way into dragons' hoards. Each enchanted item has a hoard cost. The item (or similar items, as agreed upon by the GM and the player) may be gained by expending an appropriate number of available hoard points.

KARMIC ITEMS

Any physical object can be a karmic item. It's not a question of what the object is, but rather where it has been and what has been done with it. The item may be something of great wealth that has been vied over, may be a work of art into which the artist's most profound



SAMPLE KARMIC ITEMS

Rank	Example
1	A child's doll; a work of good art; a portrait; a sack of gold coins; an officer's ceremonial dagger that accompanied him on many campaigns, but never spilled blood; a weapon that has been used in anger (or with conscious intent) to spill the blood of a living creature; a cell phone on which minor business deals have been made; mid-priced jewelry; a gold watch handed down from a father to a son.
2	An antique toy; a work of prized art, or good art that is at least 500 years old; a cultural object from an archaeological dig that is at least 2,500 years old; a portrait of a famous or beloved figure; a chest of gold coins; a rod of office for a nation's ambassador; a laptop on which short stories or a novel were typed; a weapon that has been consciously used to kill a human being; a gold watch handed from a father to son, and then passed on to that man's son; the blood of an innocent child; the knucklebone of a saint.
3	A masterpiece, or an exceptional work of art that is at least 1,000 years old; a cultural object from an archaeological dig that is at least 5,000 years old; a self-portrait or portrait of someone loved by the artist; a cell phone on which million-dollar business deals were made; a weapon that has been used to kill several times, in the hands of several different people; a family heirloom that has been in a family for five generations.
4	A masterpiece that is at least 500 years old; a cultural object from the mythic age; a laptop on which a life's work was created; a weapon used to joyfully kill more than a dozen people, and that was subsequently used by the murderer to take his own life; a family heirloom that has been in the family for 10 generations.
5	The battle standard of King Leonidis and his 300 Spartans from Thermopylae; the Holy Grail; Cuchulain's spear; a piece of a dragon's body, preserved since the mythic age.

TABLE 3-1

efforts were poured, or may simply be a mundane thing that was in the presence of great conflict, emotion, or energy.

Karmic items are ranked from 1 to 5. Example items of each rank are listed on Table 3-1. These examples are not intended to suggest that anything that fits that description will be infused with karma; if that were the case, the world would be overflowing with karmic items. Rather, the items listed are examples of things that have been a part of an appropriate experience or

been exposed to the appropriate level of passion in order to possibly become karmic items.

An item's temporary karma rank is drained when its karmic powers are used. If its temporary rank is ever reduced to 0, it ceases to be a karmic item. Karmic items regain temporary karma at a varying rate depending on their original karma rank, as shown on Table 3-2.

ABILITIES OF KARMIC ITEMS

Karmic items provide many benefits, in addition to their everyday uses. Using each of the following powers requires a mental action and causes the item's temporary karma rank to be lowered by one.

REPLENISH KARMA

The replenishment of karma was the primary reason that dragons in the mythic age collected hoards. A dragon at zero karma feels sluggish, weak, and un-alert . . . but more importantly, he may be unable to effectively

REGAINING KARMA

Karma Rank	Karma Refresh Rate
1	1 rank/year
2	1 rank/month
3	1 rank/week
4	1 rank/day
5	1 rank/hour

TABLE 3-2



CHAPTER THREE: THE DRAGON'S HOARD

defend himself against a foe. Karma cannot be *taken* from a hoard item; rather, it is *accepted*. Absorbing the karma from a hoard item is a mental action that, unlike most other conscious actions, uses the passive aspect of Earth. The character makes an Earth (Ka) test. Each success replenishes the character's karma pool by one. Activating this ability reduces the item's temporary karma rank by one.

HEAL

Healing via spells in FIREBORN can be dangerous, and at the least comes with a price for the healer. Natural healing over time, on the other hand, is a painful and tedious process. As valuable as karmic items are to scions and dragons alike, they're no use to either if they're dead. Their ability to heal wounds, then, is incredibly important.

They say that "Health is a blessing that money cannot buy." However, in the case of karmic items, it can be traded for. Just as karma can be replenished by absorption from a karmic item, wound dice can be removed by the pure power of life that a karmic item radiates. In order to harness and use this power, the character makes an Air (Ka) test as a mental action. The character making the test may apply its benefits to himself or to another character that he is in contact with. Each success gained removes one wound die, two weariness dice, or two minor wounds. Activating this ability reduces the item's temporary karma rank by one.

WARD OFF TAINT

Karmic items have a unique ability to ward off taint. Because taint is one of the few things in both the modern and mythic ages that dragons and scions have no defense against, this is one of karmic items' most valued and most often used abilities.

To ward off taint, the possessor of a karmic item need merely spend a mental action. For the rest of the scene, whenever he is in a tainted area, the possessor may act as if the area's taint rank is one lower than it truly is.

This affects all aspects of an area's taint rating, including karma expenditure, disadvantage penalties when taint-trapped, and the TH of taint tests. Activating this ability reduces the item's temporary karma rank by one. Activating this ability multiple times increases the benefit, but reduces the item's temporary karma rank by one each time.

A character can only benefit in this manner from one karmic item at a time, and a karmic item can only be used in this manner if the taint rating of the area is equal to or lower than the karma rank of the karmic item.

REDUCE TAINT SUSCEPTIBILITY

Those who have acquired taint susceptibility to taint can use karmic items to reduce that susceptibility. However, doing so does not merely lower the karmic item's temporary karma rank; it lowers its karma rank permanently, by an amount equal to the amount by which the possessor wishes to reduce his taint susceptibility. Unlike other uses of karmic items, this process takes one hour for each point of taint susceptibility removed.

HARM THE EPHEMERAL

Ephemeral creatures that have not manifested to the sense of touch are notoriously difficult to harm. With a mental action, the possessor of a karmic item may call up

its karmic energy to harm the ephemeral; for the rest of the scene, that item may harm ephemeral opponents as if they had manifested to the sense of touch.

Karmic items that were created to be used as weapons (blades, guns, or staves, for instance, rather than paintings, dolls, or jewelry) are the most effective items for this purpose. They use the statistics for a normal weapon of their type. Karmic items that are not intended for use as weapons are granted appropriate statistics by the GM, and are considered exotic (those wielding them as weapons usually suffer a -2 to attack or defense tests involving the item due to using it untrained).

Each use of this ability lowers an item's temporary karma rank by one.





KARMIC HOARD

This ability does not require an action. Rather, it involves the use of karmic items as part of the dragon's or scion's hoard. For every 5 ranks of karmic items gathered together in one place and designated as part of a hoard, the area surrounding the hoard gains a karma rating of 1. This area extends no farther than Trivial boundaries. The area is considered karmic for all normal purposes, including for regaining karma during rest and for its effect on tainted creatures. This is one of the dragons' main motivations for accumulating treasure, and explains why they often sleep upon their hoards.

Broodmates, whether they are young dragons or newly awakened scions, often pool their karmic items to create hoards of greater karmic ranks. By combining their resources, they ensure that all have a stronger base of operations and access to more karma.

KARMIC ITEMS IN THE MYTHIC AGE

Karmic items cannot be consciously created, which is part of what makes them so valuable. They can only be gained through exploration, conquest, or reward. The manner in which a dragon of the mythic age gains his hoard is a major factor in its identity. Some accept karmic items as rewards for performing missions for a local community or for defending it from supernatural foes. Others take that idea further and become one step removed from tyrants, accepting karmic items as tithes or "protection money." Some of the wisest and most patient of dragons collect karmic items in a more mundane way: by taking on human form and living among them. In the process of working, living, loving, and trading, such dragons accumulate possessions like any other community member. A few seasons of human life every few hundred years can net a dragon a hoard that, while perhaps not dramatic in appearance or power, is all the richer for the dragon's own connections to and memories of it.

Karmic items exude pure karma, similar to a place with a karma rating. A karmic item can be noticed by a dragon in the mythic age with an Earth (Ka) test, or specifically searched for with an Air (Ka) test, both with a TH that varies depending on the item's karma rank (see page 41 of the *Player's Handbook*). The closest a normal human might have to the experience of a dragon sensing a karmic item is that of smelling a warm, delicious, aromatic food whose scent can never be devalued by eating the food or growing bored with it. Each "sniff" of karma is like smelling it for the first time.

KARMIC ITEMS IN THE MODERN AGE

Karmic items in the modern age are a bit harder for scions to pinpoint than for their mythic selves. Some of that difficulty is because of their lack of experience in

actually sensing karma; part of it is the overwhelming amount of sensory input that the mundane world forces on a modern person, making it hard to pick out such esoteric and subtle things as karmic presence. Once a scion has felt the karmic power from a karmic item, however, he becomes as entranced by its "taste" as his dragon self would have been. Imagine your mouth watering every time someone shows you a piece of chocolate, even after you've eaten all you could ever want.

Scions cannot just "notice" karmic items with Earth (Ka) tests; rather, they must actively study an object with an Air (Ka) test.

ENCHANTED ITEMS

The *Player's Handbook* includes several rituals that result in permanently enchanted items. Throughout the ages, both modern and mythic, many more such rituals have been created and forgotten. While the rituals themselves have been hidden beneath the dusts of time or lost to the obscurity of the ages, the resulting items are more readily apparent. Enchanted items are valued by mortal mages and supernatural creatures alike, and therefore often become karmic items, as well.

Enchanted items are presented in the following format:

NAME (HOARD COST)

Description of the item's history, appearance, and purpose.

POWERS

Description of the supernatural effects or abilities granted by the item.

ARIADNE'S THREAD (1)

In the tale of the Minotaur, this magical red twine—supposedly a gift from Ariadne—revealed the way out of the labyrinth on the island of Crete. This tale is undoubtedly a metaphor, as the thread's true origins predate the existence of Crete by several millennia. Sages suggest that godlike beings, similar to the ancient Greeks' three Fates, may have spun several of these threads after the birth of mankind in order to guide its wayward steps. They have been passed from one mythic explorer to another ever since. With Ariadne's thread in hand, a traveler is never lost.

A spool of this thread appears to be a ball of very rough twine, the color of red wine, with two fraying edges dangling from either end. The ball cannot be unraveled: its supply of twine is endless. In every way, the twine appears to be impervious to material damage.





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Strangely, it is also all but intangible. The ball must be held with the most gentle touch, or one's hand passes through it like an illusion. Threads drawn out from it may be wrapped around earthly objects and cut by mortal hands, but are only visible to those who hold another bit of the twine in hand. Ariadne's thread cannot bind anyone or anything. It is useless for all but its intended purpose: to guide heroes in unknown lands.

POWERS

Never Lost: As a mental action, the bearer of a spool of Ariadne's thread can learn the most direct course back to a piece of thread detached from the main spool, so long as he grips a frayed end of Ariadne's thread between his fingers. This detached piece may be tied to an object, left on or under the ground, or given to others to carry. Regardless of distance and intervening barriers, the bearer can pinpoint the piece of thread's precise direction and distance. Only one such spot may be marked by the thread at any one time; each new spot replaces the previous one.

This supernatural connection even imparts knowledge to the carrier, such as whether or not a bus or train will take him near the spot, whether or not he must cross water along the way, and so forth. This extra-sensory knowledge is not always complete, but it's never wrong. The only limitation is that the bearer cannot impart this knowledge via any sort of communication to anyone else. He can only proceed through the motions of getting to the location, whether by walking, buying a plane ticket, or what have you. Whoever takes possession of the spool can follow its magical thread, while those who let go of the ball forget all the specific details they magically gleaned from it.

While the sensed spot is replaced each time a new piece of thread is cut from the spool, the pieces of thread remain behind as ephemeral constructs. These threads can be used to flag locations important to traveling heroes; as noted above, however, such strings are only visible to others with spools of Ariadne's thread. They are otherwise invisible.

BRINGER OF ST. ELMO'S FIRE (2)

Enchanted by a New Orleans ghost-hunter, this simple Zippo-style lighter uses ordinary flints and ordinary fuel to reveal haunting spirits . . . and destroy them. The flame created by this lighter exists simultaneously in both the material world and the spirit realm and reveals ghosts and other spirits in its light as though they were living folk. To spirits, the light appears as a bright flare and is surely magical in nature. Most spirits fear the flame of this lighter, but know that its tiny fire is only dangerous if allowed to spread.

POWERS

Ephemeral Fire: The light cast by the lighter illuminates ghosts and spirits just as well as it does any material object. Also, any fire lit with the bringer of St. Elmo's fire—whether that fire grows to consume a log or a house—burns ephemeral creatures like shades just as easily as it does material creatures and things.

CANDLE OF REMEMBRANCE (2)

A handful of these tall, wide wax candles were created at the request of titan scribes who wished to see the events that led up to the events they recorded in the present. The candles are about a foot high, and almost eight inches in diameter. Etched into the hardened outer skin of each candle are words praising the titan civilization and the enchanter who crafted the candles. Aside from the subtle clues in that celebratory text, nothing on the candles suggests the arcane power with which they've been imbued.

POWERS

Illuminate the Past: A candle of remembrance casts a light through time, allowing those who sit and gaze in the candlelight to view the past. Whatever space the candle illuminates appears as it did hundreds or even thousands of years before. If lit in the halls of a Shiva temple on the island of Elephanta, the spaces within the candlelight may be seen as they were in the mythic age; if the candle is lit in an American house, the candlelight may reveal life in the 19th Century.

None can truly predict the age or era that the candlelight will illuminate. The longer a candle burns, the farther back in time its light seems to reach, but the karmic weight of a place seems to be a larger factor. The most important times in a place's history are drawn to the candlelight like a moth in the night.

Modern witnesses may move freely through the space lit by one of these magical candles, but the images they see are completely intangible and immutable; the people revealed are long dead and wholly unaware of magical onlookers a millennium into their own future. The magical candlelight replaces any illumination present at the time being witnessed, so the ancient world always appears dim, orange, and shadowy—to dispel shadows and light dark nooks, the candle must be carried about. Though the candle shows only images, onlookers may make Air (Ka) tests as if they were Air (Senses) tests. Success at THs appropriate for equivalent Senses tests may reveal traces of sounds or smells that were once intrinsically linked to the place, such as bells in a church or frying butter in a kitchen.

CHACHAPOYAN TALISMAN (2)

The Chachapoyan people dwelled in the high-altitude jungles of South America. In the modern age, the





cliff-side tombs they constructed are a favorite target of looters and explorers: each contains a small cache of mummified warriors or nobles, as well as the precious treasures they owned in life. To reach these precarious places requires expert climbing skill, patience, and balance. The humid jungle mists drift underfoot and obscure the cliffs, provoking a dangerous sense of vertigo in even the heartiest climber.

The Chachapoyans' mythic forbears, however, overcame the fear of heights through constant climbing and years of familiarity with the terrain. This comfort and balance was eventually distilled by mythic age enchanters into three talismans bearing the stylized faces of three great warriors, who wore the talismans until death. Today, the location of only one talisman is known (it's currently in storage in a Peruvian museum); the others are presumed to be hidden away in some undiscovered cliff-tomb or sold off by treasure-hunters. Rumors abound, however, that one of the talismans saw use during the construction of New York skyscrapers in the 1920s.

POWERS

Perfect Balance: While wearing a Chachapoyan talisman, you cannot be knocked prone or be caused to fall by any means. Unless you voluntarily move your feet, they remain supernaturally affixed to the spot you choose. You enjoy the benefits of the Wallcrawler power at rank 5 as long as you wear the talisman.

CLOCK OF FORTUNE (3)

The powers of this unique enchanted item are well-known to occultists throughout the Western world. The tale of its construction is revered by machinists from Dublin to Moscow, but, awkwardly, no one knows exactly where this huge arcane contraption is. The earliest, and theoretically most accurate, information on the clock of fortune is found in a book called *The Compendium of Magical Machines of Europe*, published in Prague in 1732. That text claims the clock was designed by "the oldest Saracen in Spain," probably an immortal of unknown race from the mythic age. While designed in the mythic age, it is not likely that it was created then; as advanced as some of the mythic civilizations became, none but Atlantis ever mastered gears and springs. A Jewish clockmaker obtained detailed sketches and plans for the item in 1660. According to the book, he claimed on his deathbed to have started the clock in Vienna, but to

have begun anew (and "miraculously completed" it) in some other city, which he would not name.

Later accounts suppose that the clock is not an instrument of timekeeping at all, but an elaborate device for the tracking and measuring of karmic power throughout the world. Of course, it was created at a time when there was no karma in the world, so it spent quite a bit of time seeming absolutely pointless.

The clock of fortune, wherever it is, is a brass and steel machine the size of an armored car. It has no discernable front or back, and sports all manner of odd or anachronistic instruments, from a stained-glass clock face to a phonographic speaker cone. Now that karma has returned, it acts as an arcane barometer, a sorcerous seismograph, and an occult oscilloscope. Somewhere, if it's still running, the clock of fortune may be spitting out the magical telemetry necessary to locate the world's most valuable occult artifacts and unawakend scions. It is at once a vital tool in the fight against taint and an immense threat to the young, reincarnated scions of the modern age. Those who know how to read it correctly can also use it to follow ley lines and find increases and decreases in the levels of karma in the world.

POWERS

Karmic Cycle: In effect, the clock of fortune is a karmic refinery, drawing in the karma and taint of a region and releasing it in measured and balanced doses at noon and midnight, when its chime sounds. The area around the clock up to a Moderate range remains perfectly balanced at all times, regardless of karma nurtured or taint spawned. Instead, the imbalances of these energies are stored up in the clock and doled out at regular intervals to those within Moderate range. At noon, everyone within range is blessed with a surge of positive spiritual energy, regaining 2d6 points of karma. A karma pool cannot be brought beyond its maximum in this manner. At midnight, everyone within Moderate range is blasted with a surge of negative spiritual energy; this has no effect on mortals, but increases the taint susceptibility of anyone subject to taint temptation by 2.

Measure of Magic: By making an Air (Ka) test 5, someone studying the clock can use it to find all meas-

MEASURE OF MAGIC TIME RANGES

Extra Successes	Distance in Time
1-2	1 week
3-4	1 month
5-6	1 year
7-8	10 years
9-10	100 years
11-12	1000 years

TABLE 3-3





ures of karma and magic at a distance, whether in space or time. For each success beyond 5, the user can extend his senses by one karmic range category or forward or backward in time, as shown on Table 3–3, but only for the purposes of locating karma. The character may effectively travel outside of his body as if he had Distant Mind 5, but while so traveling does not perceive anything that is not of particular note to karma or magic. In other words, while the user would be able to make Ka tests to sense the amount of a creature's karma, he could not identify the creature visually. Instead, he would simply see him as an aura.

DRAGON FANG (5)

A dragon fang is an ancient dagger, rarely longer than an adult human's forearm, and crafted with a wavy blade, like the slithering body of a snake. The blade might be a shining expanse of flat metal or a rough stretch of etchings and textured steel. Grips are elaborately carved wood or ivory, often ending in stylized dragon heads with inset metal fangs or tongues. A dragon fang is always made with a companion sheath in a matched style; without it, the dragon fang cannot sleep and may become displeased.

The shape and style of dragon fangs influenced the modern kris dagger, a ceremonial Indonesian blade customarily gifted to young men as they come of age. Amidst these modern adaptations, a few priceless drag-

on fangs remain, hidden among their mundane counterparts. A dragon fang contains the wisdom, experience, and ferocity of the scion or dragon who died owning it. Subsequent owners can tap that power to learn, to fight, and to better understand their draconic nature.

A dragon fang is an 8/L weapon that automatically causes a bleed payoff whenever it inflicts wound dice.

POWERS

One With the Dragon: If possessed by any non-humanoid being with a bite attack, the fang transforms to become one of its many teeth. If possessed by any humanoid being, the fang retains the form of the wavy-bladed dagger described above, appropriately sized for the possessor. For shapechangers (like dragons), it can switch back and forth between the two forms as appropriate.

Divine Vessel: A dragon fang's most valued ability to the Fireborn is its power to protect its possessor from the effects of taint. Each sunrise or sunset, the possessor may choose to place his spirit within the dragon fang. While kept safe within, the possessor's spirit is difficult to reach; the possessor must spend extra karma at all times as if he were in a tainted area (of a taint rating of his choice). As a benefit for this substantial drawback, the possessor is immune to the effects of tainted areas that he actually enters, so long as the taint rating of the place is less than or equal to the taint rating chosen when



the possessor's spirit was placed within the dagger. If this is the case, the possessor need never make taint tests, and therefore can never be taint-tempted or taint-trapped. If the possessor enters an area with a higher taint rating than he designated when he placed his spirit within, he still does not need to make taint tests, but he is not immune from the requirement that extra karma be spent for automatic successes; indeed, the effects of the tainted area stack with those caused by the dagger for this purpose.

Example: *Narcissa, an ice drake in the mythic age, chooses to place her spirit within her dragon fang, protecting it from up to taint 3. While her spirit is placed within the dagger, she must spend 3 extra points of karma for each point of karma she would normally spend. She then heads on a scouting mission into the caverns of a subterranean demon, where she enters an area of taint 2. While in that area, she does not need to make taint tests, but still pays extra karma as if she were in an area of taint 3, because her spirit is cut off from her within the dagger.*

Then Narcissa finds the lair of the demon at the heart of the caverns. She rushes in with righteous fury to do battle with the creature, only to realize that it has surrounded itself with an area of taint 4. She's not concerned about becoming taint-tempted or taint-trapped, because her spirit is safe within her dagger; however, because the taint rating of the area is now greater than that which she declared when she placed her spirit in the dagger, the extra expenditure from the two sources stack: she must now spend 7 extra points of karma for each point of karma she would normally spend!

If the spirit was placed within at sunrise, this effect ends at sunset and the dagger may not be used again in this way until the next sunrise; likewise, if the spirit was placed within at sunset, this effect ends at sunrise and the dagger may not be used again in this way until the next sunset.

If a possessor with superhuman aspects dies while his spirit is placed within the fang, his spirit immediately cleaves to the blade. Such a dragon fang is said to be invested. The blade gains all of the possessor's superhuman aspects, though it can never have base aspect scores (i.e., for the uses below, it never rolls dice). If the possessor is one of the Fireborn, the possessor's soul cannot reincarnate as normal until the dragon fang is destroyed.

Unseen Hand: As a mental action, an invested dragon fang's possessor can command it to fight for her, hovering in the air within her reach and attacking and defending on its own. It uses its superhuman aspects on all tests, and has no stance changes. For the purposes of attack sequences, however, it may perform a total number of moves (governed by any skill) up to its superhuman Fire score. For the purposes of defense sequences, it may perform a total number of moves (governed by any skill) up to its superhuman Water score. The possessor may bid karma on these attack and defense actions as if they were her own.

A dragon fang's superhuman aspects temporarily decrease by one each turn, until, when both scores have reached 0, it returns to its possessor's grasp. The possessor can release it again on her turn with another mental action, its superhuman aspect scores restored.

Unheard Wisdom: An invested dragon fang's possessor can ask it to grant her its wisdom. Any time the possessor makes an Air or Earth test, she may gain a number of automatic successes equal to the dragon fang's superhuman Air or Earth score (whichever type of test she is making). Each time this ability is used, the dragon fang's superhuman Air and Earth scores both temporarily decrease by 1. Its lowered Air and Earth scores return at a rate of one point per week.

Sleep: An invested dragon fang must sleep every day, just as a living creature must. For a dragon fang, this means eight hours sheathed in relative quiet, unbothered by mortal business and distractions. Every day an invested dragon fang goes without sleep, there is a 1-in-3 cumulative chance that all of its powers cease functioning for that day. This chance only resets after the fang has received its eight hours of sleep.

DRAGON'S EYE SHIELD (3)

This infamous round shield was carried into 500 years' worth of battles by a series of brave and clever warriors, until it was lost in the fall of Atlantis in the mythic age. Legends claim it was crafted from dragon-scales arranged on a curved dish of bronze. The inside of the shield was polished as smooth as a mirror, and in the center of the shield's face was mounted a dragon's eye. The eye is said to have belonged to the wyrm Lycinathrax, who offered it voluntarily to give the shield its power.

Though the craftsmanship of the shield is better-known than the various warriors who bore it into battle—what armor-smith had a reputation admirable enough to convince Lycinathrax to give up his eye?—the craftsman himself has been forgotten. He, and therefore the shield, is assumed to have been from the region that would become Macedonia, but he could have been Atlantean himself. That the shield's bearers have been forgotten and the shield itself has been lost has spawned a rumor that the shield is cursed, perhaps by its craftsman's betrayal of his own people. Of course, it's not uncommon for tools of warfare to be lost with their warriors, so the shield may simply be sitting beneath the waves of the Mediterranean, waiting to be rediscovered.

The dragon's eye shield is a Medium shield with no skill cap or weariness rating.

POWERS

Purest Lens: With a bit of concentration (a mental action each turn), the bronze inner surface of the dragon's eye shield becomes a lens. Anyone gazing into the metallic sheen sees through the shield with the clarity and scope of a great dragon. The wielder automatically





CHAPTER THREE: THE DRAGON'S HOARD

succeeds at all Ka tests made to measure karma or taint, to view the ephemeral, or to understand the nature of a creature's previous incarnations. Second, while looking through the shield, the wearer is immune to the effects of both Predator's Gaze and Baleful Gaze.

Foulest Defense: By smearing the eyeball of a still-living creature (which may be no smaller than size -1) over the eye in the center of the shield, the wearer can cause some of the eye "donor's" karma to be transferred to the shield. Up to a maximum of 1 point of karma per APL of the eye's donor may be transferred. When participating in karma bids on defense actions, the wearer may use that karma as if it were his own.

Only one eye donor's karma may be transferred to the shield at a time; any new investment of karma into the shield supersedes any karma remaining from a previous eye donor.

ESCAPIST'S CHALK (4)

Accidentally crafted by the priests of Djehotep during their experiments with khemsek, this specialized substance wasn't rediscovered in the modern world until the late 1800's. An unsuccessful Irish illusionist named J. Wallace Pepper purchased the recipe for escapist's chalk from a "traveling Chinaman" while living in Australia. The escapist's chalk (so named by Pepper) was found in the basement of his county Cork home in 1911, and is thought to be the last in the world. If the recipe exists somewhere, it may be locked up in a hidden room accessible only through the proper use of Pepper's trademark magical tool.

Escapist's chalk is used to create temporary openings in stone, brick, and other solid surfaces. Like a cartoonist's trick, the user draws a door or a window on the desired surface. Once a simple representative image is created, it is made real by the magic of the chalk: a man-sized rectangle becomes a wooden door and the circle drawn on one side becomes a doorknob. The drawing need not be complicated. The realized portal always appears sturdy and aged to match its surroundings: drawn windows on the walls of a turn-of-the-century house feature wooden sills and glass panes, for example. The portal created can only be opened once; once closed, it reverts to nothing more than a simple chalk drawing.

Pepper had been able to use the chalk in his home because two ley lines intersected nearby; by the time of his death, however, the ley lines had been accidentally disrupted by major construction efforts by the government. When his executors arrived, they found that the walls and floors of the supposedly crazy old man's home were smeared with drawings of manholes, doors, windows, and fireplaces.

POWERS

Draw Portal: To create a portal, you must make a Craft (Art) test as a full-turn action; the larger the portal, the more successes you need. A window large

enough for an adult human to crawl through requires 2 successes, while a door that an adult can walk through requires 4 successes. Larger or smaller portals are certainly possible. Once the necessary number of successes have been achieved, the drawing becomes completely and temporarily real and functional. A quantity of escapist's chalk is measured by the number of successes remaining in the stick; when it was found, the last known stick had enough chalk for 22 successes of drawn portals.

FIVE-CLAW ARMOR (4)

This magnificent suit of armor was crafted for the dragon Xiao's human form by the transmuters of Tok Noyokuni, a mythic age city-state of Xia that he pledged to protect from the summoned shades of the crazed necromancer Emmao. The five-claw armor is a complete suit of armor made from leather, bronze, and laquered wood. It is somewhat similar in style to the classic Samurai armor of ancient Japan, but has strangely placed straps and oddly formed metal pieces, allowing its wearer to change shape to a limited degree without taking off or damaging the armor (a scion could manifest wings, a tail, and a draconic head, for instance, while wearing the armor).

Mundane historians have been baffled by the suit's design and history since its rediscovery in a mountain tomb in Nepal in 1985. The suit sold at auction that year for more than \$2 million to a Japanese executive, who keeps it in the foyer of his top-floor Tokyo office to this day. Historians, writers, and photographers have been allowed access to it over the years, however, and word of the exquisite suit passed quickly into the occult community.

The armor provides AV 8, and has no skill cap or weariness rating.

POWERS

The Five Claw Weapons: The Five-Claw Armor is imbued with the spirits of five weapons. Each is invisible to the untrained eye, but to those with the ability to see the ephemeral, each appears as a ghostly white image sheathed, slung, or hung from the armor in a traditional manner. Each of the five weapons becomes material when drawn out of the spirit world by the wearer, though only one may be used at a time. The five weapons are a katana, a wakizashi, a dagger, a greatbow and five arrows, and a guan do. If a weapon is dropped, broken, or resheathed, it is lost until the next sunrise; no one but the armor's wearer can use one of the five spirit weapons.

The first weapon after sunrise drawn from the armor into the material world is invested with 5 automatic successes. Each time the weapon is used as part of an action, any number of automatic successes invested in it may be used to add additional successes to the test. When a weapon's final automatic success is used, the





weapon disappears; it has returned to the ephemeral world and cannot be drawn again that day.

The next weapon to be drawn is invested with 4 automatic successes, the one after that with 3 automatic successes, and so on.

Alternatively, a weapon can be drawn while still remaining in the ephemeral realm, allowing it to harm ephemeral creatures who have not manifested to the sense of touch. When used in this manner, the automatic successes the weapon would normally be invested with are not used on attack or defense tests; instead, for each automatic success invested, the weapon may be used against ephemeral creatures only for one test. Once the weapon has been used on a number of tests equal to the number of automatic successes that are invested, it disappears and is lost until the next sunrise.

The armor's pool of automatic successes and any lost weapons refresh with every sunrise.

Fire Within, Fire Without: The wearer of the five-claw armor stages down all burn wounds by 3.

FIGURINE OF THE HUNTER (3)

The figurine of the hunter—no formal name is known for the item—is a small pendant, meant to be worn around the neck by a warrior on the hunt. It's little more than a rough disk with few discernible features, carved from solid amber.

Thought to have been created by the Midob tribesmen of mythic age Ofir, the figurine of the hunter is unusual in that it requires no action on the part of the wearer for its magic to function. Simply wearing the pendant causes the wearer to become, in the eyes of those around him, an inconspicuous being. To gazelles, the hunter appears as a gazelle; to members of an urban police force, the hunter appears as a fellow officer. The hunter's job is to recognize the appearance his prey has projected onto him and do his best not to betray the magic's power with his actions. When in view of many different types of prey, this can be nearly impossible.

POWERS

One of the Tribe: The magic of the figurine causes the pendant wearer to look, feel, sound, and smell to all potential prey as if he were one of them. Only creatures viewing the ephemeral will see the wearer's true shape. Otherwise, perceptive viewers may notice that something is not quite right about the wearer with an Earth (Senses) 6 test; even then, they may not know what is off about the wearer, just that something doesn't seem quite right.

While in a guise, all of the wearer's actions are translated by the pendant's magic into an appropriate counterpart action on the part of his disguise, so the cocking of a shotgun might make the hunter appear as an angry,



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rearing buck. The magic does not, however, turn the hunter into a specific person or creature; he becomes “a police officer,” for example, rather than “Sgt. Murray.” Anything dropped or left behind by the hunter, such as shell casings or footprints, appear as what they truly are. The magic of the pendant doesn’t extend beyond the wearer’s personal space.

This effect only works on creatures of whom the wearer is aware and against whom the wearer wishes harm. If, by the next sunrise or sunset, the wearer does not attempt to kill the prey who have seen him in this guise, the magic will never work against those specific individuals again.

Whatever form the hunter is given, the pendant is visible on his person, whether as a spot of fur in the shape of the disk, or as a tattoo, or as the pendant itself.

FLOATING ZOMBIE BALL (1)

The garishly-named floating zombie ball is a fragile crystal sphere that was found in the modern age by Neil Foster, an illusionist and sleight-of-hand performer in the mid-1900’s. During his run, he used stage tricks to make it appear to float, impressing such notables as the magician Cardini and a young Queen Elizabeth. He claimed that the mysterious spirit within it moved it through the air at his whim. Little did Foster know that the ball was no toy, but a prison: there was in fact a spirit trapped inside, the shade of an angry, taint-taken Kurgan conjurer from the mythic age, trapped there for his crimes against his people.

The sphere was buried with Foster’s wife in the late 1970s, but has since reappeared in London, given as a gift to Alestair Crowley by one of his sycophants. He has since given it to one his lovers, who uses it to ingenious effect against him as a silent, highly mobile spying implement: she attaches a small radio-camera and audio receiver to its surface and directs it through the attic of Crowley’s compound, keeping tabs on his many lovers and his various machinations.

POWERS

Levitation: By holding the sphere in your hand and concentrating on your reflection within it as a mental action, you may cause the sphere to levitate. The sphere can be mentally commanded to move at a speed of 10 feet per turn anywhere within your karmic range, though once out of your visibility you can only guess when mentally commanding it. If you are disturbed or cease concentrating while the ball is levitating, it continues to float, simply ceasing any movement.

Meditate: By staring into your own reflection in the sphere and concentrating on it stillness rather than its motion, you may center yourself. You must make an Air (Will) 1 test to do so, which gives you Clarity 1 for one hour. For each success beyond the first, you may either increase the duration of the effect by one hour or increase the rank in Clarity by 1.

Chilling Essence: Those who can see the ephemeral see something other than simply their own reflections when concentrating on the sphere. They see the screaming face of the shade that is trapped within, begging for release. Anyone who sees the face must make an Earth (Will) test 1 or be surprised and horrified. Those that fail immediately drop the sphere, which shatters, releasing the angry shade (see page 175). The released shade follows and attacks the one who dropped it until that character is dead; the shade is then trapped within Moderate range of the spot that it killed the character, and violently attacks any living creature that comes within range.

If you succeed at the initial Earth (Will) test to avoid dropping the sphere, you never need to make the test again. Instead, once the shade realizes that you can’t be tricked into freeing it, it will offer you power in exchange for karma. From that point on, anytime you are within karmic range of the sphere, you may offer the shade karma as a mental action. For each point of karma given (which is limited each turn by your base Air score), the shade lowers the air temperature within 30 feet of the sphere by 20 degrees Fahrenheit, but only for a split second. The temperature then immediately returns to normal. In addition to potentially quick-freezing organic materials, this also causes anyone within that area to suffer a –1 fading disadvantage penalty per 20 degrees dropped.

If the sphere’s wielder ever gives 6 karma in a single turn, the combination of psychic effort and the rapid temperature drop cause the sphere to shatter, with the same results as if it had been dropped.

LIZARD STICK (4)

This type of enchanted glaive saw considerable use by the smaller giant-kin of the mythic age. The “lizard” in the name is a derogatory reference to dragons. The blade is designed and enchanted to deftly slip through the scales of a dragon’s armor. Once embedded in the dragon’s flesh, a simple flick of the wrist by the wielder can cause tremendous internal damage.

A lizard stick is a 16/H weapon that gives its wielders reach as if he were one size category larger; however, the wielder suffers a –1 disadvantage penalty on attack tests against opponents within his original reach. This penalty may be negated by taking the Weapon Use (elite) edge with this weapon.

POWERS

Sting of the Small: A lizard stick stinks of the blood of the wyrms it has killed over the millenia, and as such any bearer of a lizard stick gains 3 automatic successes when using the Distract, Intimidate, or Taunt action against only scions or dragons. Further, the lizard stick’s mightiest power is the ability to lay low even the largest of dragons. Normally, when an attacker is smaller than his target, the wound dice inflicted by the attack are staged down accordingly. When using a lizard stick





against a dragon, the wielder may deal damage as if he were one size category larger for each successful Press move after the attack, up to a maximum of the dragon's size category. Such Press moves still inflict +2 damage, as normal.

LOYAL HAMMER (3)

Tales of weapons as familiar and dedicated as a well-bred dog are common in a dozen tongues, and no occultist knows for sure where the first loyal hammer was created. Though weapons other than hammers may develop loyalty, loyal hammers are seen as the archetypal icons of the phenomena.

Loyal hammers are never gone for good. Each bonds with a wielder until he or she dies or is surpassed by a more willful warrior. The hammer always, impossibly, finds its way back to its favorite owner, despite oceans, mountains, or monsters. When in the hands of its favorite wielder, the hammer cooperates in combat and pursues success in battle. It is a blessing to be chosen by a loyal hammer.

In play, a character becomes the favorite wielder of a loyal hammer by making a Fire check when he first touches the weapon. If he scores more successes on this check than the current favorite wielder did when she first touched the weapon, he becomes the new favorite. This check is only made during initial contact with the hammer, and so only once per character per incarnation. A loyal hammer favors only one master at a time. If a loyal hammer's current master dies, its Fire check threshold "resets," so nearly anyone can claim it. There are two exceptions to this: first, the one who wishes to claim the hammer must be able to at least gain 1 success on his Fire check, and second, even though the hammer has moved on from its previous master, it hasn't forgotten those that were unworthy of it. If a character has attempted to claim the hammer before and has failed, he may not try again, even when its owner dies.

Loyal hammers are 15/H weapons with a throwing range of 15 ft.

POWERS

Unyielding: Loyal hammers bond with their masters. While its master is conscious, a loyal hammer cannot be taken from its owner by force (or disarmed). Only if the master voluntarily gives up the hammer will it be parted from him. The bearer of a loyal hammer is usually loathe to do so, however, because that means that another may become a favorite wielder.

Cooperation: A loyal hammer works with its wielder in combat, weighting itself and adjusting its position to land the most vicious blows and parry even the swiftest strikes. The hammer grants its master 2 automatic successes on all attack or defense tests in which the hammer is used. Further, a loyal hammer never deals damage to its master or to anyone the master names in the hammer's presence, even on a successful strike. To

protect someone from injury by a loyal hammer, the master must shout something to the effect of "Desist!" every time the hammer is swung at a friendly target.

Returning: If a loyal hammer is separated from its master, it supernaturally travels back to his side. Every day, a loyal hammer travels up to 100 miles to do so. Thus, if the wielder is 300 miles away, the hammer appears on the morning of the fourth day. The hammer always appears within reach of its master on the soonest possible day, when he next awakes. It does not actually travel any physical distances, but instead traverses the ephemeral world. The hammer cannot be seen or touched while it travels, and it arrives when no one is looking. Finally, if the hammer is within view, its master can attempt to call it to his hand with a mental action. This requires an Air (Will) test with a TH of 1, plus 1 for every 15 feet between the wielder and the hammer.

POSTER OF SARA BERNHARDT (1)

A batch of these handsome art nouveau theatrical posters designed by Alphonse Mucha in the final years of the 19th century have since been identified as magical objects. Though Mucha has never been suspected as a practitioner of magic, his sudden and uncharacteristic change in style while designing the poster for Sarah Bernhardt's *Gismonda* show in 1894 has led some modern occultists to speculate that he was under the influence of an arcane muse—perhaps Bernhardt herself. The passion with which he designed the posters laid dormant for a century, until magic returned. Then, not unlike the fae or other supernatural creatures that slumbered away the years between the mythic age and the return of magic, they awoke.

Whatever the source of the magic, arcane historians are unable to find links between the individual Bernhardt posters that turn up with magical powers; a rare few are imbued with power, but most are not. Those that are magical defy the passage of time; even when they fade, they soften into alluring, modest hues and sepia-brown contours. Over time, these prints don't degrade, but perfect themselves.

The most precious of the so-called Bernhardt posters are said to move like animated films and make noise like the singing of Sarah Bernhardt, but do so only late in the evenings or in the presence of flirting lovers and eager artists. Just inhabiting the space around them is rumored to make writers drunk as if on absinthe, and to fill one's ears with the chatter of a theater lobby at intermission. For some, this ghostly experience is unnerving, but for others it's an inspiration that is sought out and enjoyed.

POWERS

Two known powers have been discovered in different posters. No one poster has yet been found with both powers.





Beguide: If the Beguile spell is cast within view of the poster and within Trivial range, any re-rolls granted on social tests against the target instead become automatic successes.

Inspire: With periodic looks at the poster, you may keep yourself focused and inspired on creative efforts. Any creature using the Craft skill within view of the poster and within Trivial range may, once per day, make an Air (Will) test. For each success, the craftsman or artist gains +1 bonus die to his next Craft test.

SANDALS OF THE WIND (2)

These sandals were used by Atlantean marines to assist in boarding and landing exercises; the original items were simple sandals with leather straps that wrapped around the calf. Their crafters often included small feathered or membranous wings near the ankles, but these were purely for decoration. Since the return of magic, variations on this useful footwear have begun popping up again in London in the shape of Birkenstocks, Tevas, and the like. Magi sometimes give them to their messengers to jaunt about the skyline, or keep them for quick getaways or pretentious overhead appearances.

POWERS

Step on the Wind: The wearer of these sandals may use a mental action each turn to walk on air, but may use

no positioning moves while in the air other than Stride. The wearer need not use a mental action to remain in the air, but must use one if he wishes to move.

SHIRT OF THE UNTOUCHABLE WARRIOR (2)

In the mythic age, great Kurgan warriors were sometimes honored with clothes made by village craftswomen: shirts woven with quills and beads, jackets stitched together from the hide of handsome stags, cloaks decorated with the fur from fierce bears. Wise women with magical powers imbued the greatest of their reverential clothes with spells and wards to protect their fathers, sons, or husbands in battle (though many legends end with the craftswomen wearing the garment into combat herself to avenge that loved one's treacherous murder).

One particularly renowned honor-garment is called the shirt of the untouchable warrior. Made of snakeskin and hide and cut with a pattern of small round holes, the shirt was said to have made its wearer invisible—sight passed through the holes in the shirt and showed what was on the other side, ignoring the warrior completely. What's more, arrows fired at the shirt's wearer passed harmlessly through the shirt's holes, rather than through the warrior within.

The secrets of this shirt were passed down through the wise women that would one day give birth to the Picts. Though the fabled shirt of the untouchable warrior



has long been lost, others have been made in its style with a fraction of its power. Few, however, survived the relocation and razing of the people who cared for them. Today, fewer than five of these shirts are thought to exist, all in the hands of private collectors. None has ever been sold.

POWERS

Untouched by Sight: The wearer of this garment gains the camouflage trait, as described on page 69 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Untouched by Shafts: The wearer of this garment gains a full success on all defense tests to avoid ranged (non-explosive) attacks against him. This means that every die the wearer would roll as part of a defense test to avoid ranged attacks is automatically considered to come up as a success.

STAFF OF THE SNAKE (2)

Numerous staves from countless cultures may be accurately described as staves of the snake. Many even have similar or identical powers. Each, however, has a unique history, name, and point of origin. The staff which most famously holds the generic title "Staff of the Snake" was that carried by a renegade Kehebite sorcerer called Ahkte, known for his death at the hands of a Maat commander named Khnum, who died himself later that year after being bitten by an asp. What became of Ahkte's staff following his death is unclear, but the Maat may well have taken it back as a trophy and buried it with their beloved commander.

The staff of the snake is a six-foot length of black-lacquered timber, light as driftwood and carved to resemble three twisting serpents ending in three gaping mouths at the top. Two of the snakes have the heads of asps; the third has the head of a king cobra. Each head faces in a different direction. Once, the mouths gripped precious gems, but those have long since been plundered (though with no heretofore discovered effect on the staff's power).

POWERS

Command Serpents: The staff exerts great power over serpentine creatures by amplifying the will of its bearer; in the hands of one of the Fireborn, the staff's power is even more formidable. In anyone's hands but one of the Fireborn, the staff gives its bearer the Green Lord legacy with respect to snakes only. Fireborn who use the staff gain the Green Lord legacy, as well, but with respect to all reptiles.

If the bearer has no ranks in Rapport, he is assumed to have a rank of 1 for the purposes of determining the amount of karma he may spend when using this legacy and the TH of its effects.

Create Serpent: As a mental action requiring an Air (Ka) 2 test, the staff itself can be commanded to transform into a venomous snake. The snake created is a size 0 venomous snake (as described on page 161) that may take on the appearance of either an asp or a king cobra. Regardless of its appearance, it is always six feet long and completely loyal to he who ordered its creation. The creator of the snake is considered to have Group Mind 1 with the snake. Additionally, for each success on the Air (Ka) test to summon it beyond the first, the bearer may increase one of the snake's base aspect scores by 1, one of its skill ranks by 2, or the TH to resist its venom by 1.

If the snake is slain, it vanishes and the staff instantly reappears in the staff-bearer's grasp. Even if the snake is not slain, the staff-bearer may command it to reappear in staff form, in his hand, with a mental action. The staff can be transmuted three times for each journey the sun chariot makes around the world: once while the sun is up and twice while it is down.

TORC OF MIDGARD (3)

The torc of Midgard is a heavy lead band worn around the neck, coated in gold and shaped to resemble a coiled dragon. Forged at the edge of the Western Sea at the end of the mythic age, the torc of Midgard was hand-crafted by a Vansir warrior-poet in preparation for a difficult battle he did not expect to survive but was determined to win. His victory ended up being hollow, however, when the sun set on the mythic age mere days later. Ever since, the torc has been honored and sung about by doomed warriors preparing for fatal battles. "Give me one last gulp of life," ends the song, "so that I might triumph and die."

POWERS

Last Gulp of Life: When the wearer of the torc of Midgard reaches 5 or more wound dice, all wound penalties caused by those wound dice disappear. Each turn thereafter, the wearer's wound penalties increase by one until they reach the wound penalties appropriate for the wearer's wound dice. The wearer of the torc does not reach the **down**, **dying**, or **dead** states at 6, 7, or 8 wound dice as normal; instead, he reaches those states when his wound penalties reach -6, -7, and -8, respectively.

ITEMS IN THE MODERN AGE

Karmic and enchanted items are so powerful that they cannot simply be purchased in the modern age. Such items should instead be the goals of extended adventures or rewards for defeating powerful foes.





Modern London

CHAPTER
FOUR



This chapter outlines London, England some time in our near future, with one major difference from the London of the real world—magic has returned. This ancient city has arisen as the epicenter of a mystic awakening, its forgotten pools run over with karma once more. Karma attracts those who seek to use it, both for good and for ill, as well as those who want to taint it. And so London has become the focal point of this magical struggle, with dragons, monsters, and secret societies all competing for their share of karmic power. This makes modern London the default setting for FIREBORN campaigns.

Here, the GM will discover the truths that lie behind the hints of magic, power, and danger that are presented in the *Player's Handbook*. The material presented in this chapter is intended to provide a cohesive setting in which to set your adventures, but is left intentionally vague at points so that individual GMs can adopt and adapt the material they are interested in. The scions have only just awoken and have yet to make their impact upon the world, so their influence is barely felt in the descriptions that follow—the future is a blank page, and that particular story is for you and your players to write!

THE STRANGE TIMES

In the streets of London, the public make their way warily through the strange new world in which they live. They know that change has stalked unheralded into their city, but are unsure what to do about it. When the strange times first came, countless stories scurried underfoot like mice, peddled by the media and in the rumor mills of the city. In the pubs and offices, a thousand theories took root: they had released mind-influencing drugs to control us; terrorists had contaminated the city's water supplies with deadly chemicals; genetically engineered monsters had escaped their laboratory confinement. For every pseudoscientific idea and conspiracy theory, there was a doomsayer in the tube stations proclaiming that the end of the world was nigh, or that men's sins had released a legion of demons from Hell. But eventually a new word was offered up. It is one that has long since been adopted in everyday conversation by crusties, students, drifters, and anyone else with an open mind. The word was *magic*. It carries with it a sense of discovery and wonder, but more than that, it suggests the dangerous unknown.

People are still struggling to see the truth because they have lived so long without magic that they are blind to its wonder. The government spent countless man-hours trying to determine what was truly happening, and

just as many on how to cover it up, disseminating propaganda to obfuscate and confuse. It was in their best interests to keep the public ignorant, both to maintain a position of power derived from exclusive knowledge, and also to stop the spread of panic. But the people of London weren't long fooled. The general populace now knows that a great storm is coming; some are afraid, and some await it with an almost carnal lust. Barely restrained panic and an uncontrolled longing for power both boil just beneath the surface of the city and threaten to spill into the wider world.

THE HISTORY OF MAGIC

The mythic age ended in a cataclysm that reshaped the earth. The land shook and the seas began to boil, then overflowed. It was followed by a interminable winter, and once the glaciers retreated to the north, the land lay reformed. Oceans filled the hollows left behind by the heaving throes of the earth. Mountains and valleys had been cut by glaciers. In the wake of the howling ice storms, those that had survived the dark millennia emerged cautiously to see what was left of their world. Most of the races that had been dependent on magic, whether for their existence or to maintain their advanced civilizations, had perished or regressed to a primitive form. Countless species of plants and beasts had been exterminated, and only in the lands near the equator had the natural diversity of the earth been maintained. Over the next millennia, humankind struggled slowly back up the ladder of civilization.

In the absence of magic, this age was hard and grim, and men relied upon their natural fecundity and cleverness to establish their great kingdoms and empires. Without the power of karma to fuel them, the ancient rituals and incantations that had survived the cataclysm were gradually forgotten or discarded as meaningless superstition, the products of primitive minds that believed in a world full of spirits rather than atoms and electrons. Technology became the new art for the learned, wealth the new god to be worshipped. If not for the activities of a notable few, the art of magic would have passed entirely from men's knowing.

LEY LINES

However, that is not to say magic was always absent in those dark centuries; it continued to exist along flickering ley lines and even pooled for short periods of time at the nexuses of those lines. This allowed for brief bouts of awakened magic throughout history, but such times were always very localized and incredibly short-lived, the longest never lasting more than a few months. Things awakened then that had been long forgotten but for legend, empowering the spells and magic formulae of wizards and magicians who had jealously guarded the ancient lore. But always, those periods would end, and magic would slumber again. With each successive century, more arcane knowledge was lost or corrupted, until





by the twilight of the 19th century, the true secrets of that art were lost to all but the most esoteric orders.

One of the most dramatic examples of a ley line awakening was in 1666, when London saw a great fire that consumed most of the city. However, the fire on Pudding Street had nothing to do with careless baker Goody and his poorly tended ovens. A dragon named Matorian found his way back from the black unknowing of the void and manifested as an insane, half-formed beast. He killed hundreds before the knights of the Order of St. George eventually trapped and killed the beast in an ancient mausoleum beneath Pudding Street, its death throes igniting the conflagration that destroyed most of the city.

In the period between 1882 to 1945 surges along many ley lines were discovered, and occult societies and magical practitioners sprung up like mushrooms in a darkened cave. Coincidentally, momentous events accompanied this surge, and the world was rent by two great wars. Except for in a few hidden places, the locations of which were killed for and obsessed over by countless seekers of power, the spiritual world continued to slumber. In the latter half of the 20th century, with their rituals and incantations failing even in their sacred places and on the most auspicious of numerological or astrological dates, most of the cults, cabals, and secret societies from the 1880s disbanded.

THE 21ST CENTURY

Magic is change, and change begets magic, and so magic begets itself. Whether fate, humanity, or greed determined the time and place of magic's reawakening, it is impossible to say. At midnight before the 5th of February, 2001, the start of the Chinese Year of the Golden Dragon, a cabal of sorcerers completed a dark and ancient ritual. Its focus was upon the heart of the City of London, but its practitioners were connected by magic and technology with others of their kind throughout the world, performing the most widespread, most populous ritual ever known to man. The ritual's goal was to close the rip in the spiritual realm that had, for so very long, bled magic from the world.

It worked.

THE STATE OF THINGS TODAY

As the strange times tighten their grip on London, everyday people are beginning to react along with government agencies and secret societies. At first, of course, the return of magic was met with ignorance, denial, and disbelief. As evidence of supernatural forces became more widespread and inescapable, however, people reacted the same way modern Westerners face many challenges in life: They went shopping. Londoners raided occult bookstores and quaint shops peddling magical paraphernalia, then tried to teach themselves magic: witchcraft, hoodoo, astrology, and countless other traditions from many cultures. More often than not, of course, these early experiments in self-taught sorcery ended in abject failure and disastrous—often fatal—accidents. After a relatively brief period of chaos and hysteria, people began looking for the experts.

Those who have always believed in magic and struggled to master it have endured throughout the modern age, without any true sign of the validity of their beliefs. Even in an era of reason, science, and industry, many ancient magical traditions survived and evolved; most of these were influenced and inspired by authentic practices originating in the mythic age. Whether via the ceremonial regalia of secret societies or the folk beliefs of indigenous peoples, these traditions preserved arcane lore that would otherwise have been irrevocably lost with the ending of the Fourth Sun.

The practitioners of these traditions had never enjoyed much success prior to February 5th, 2001, and they were often marginalized and even persecuted by mainstream society. As magic blossomed in the world once more, however, even the charlatans who had no true conviction in their craft suddenly found themselves in an unusual position: They were respected, envied, and feared, and for all these reasons, they were much sought-after. They became celebrities, authorities, pillars of their communities, and were often at odds with the government and law enforcement agencies, which had no idea how to deal with them.



Today, there are thousands of practitioners of various magical traditions in London, and many more people who do not practice magic themselves but patronize the goods and services of those who do. Because many legal and liability issues surrounding commercial magic remain unresolved, much of the supernatural trade is conducted in a kind of “gray market” comprised of private practitioners and small shops. In corporate-dominated mainstream commerce, the major book and discount chains have pulled from the shelves all products deemed by company lawyers to have occult content or trappings. Most practitioners and purveyors of the occult are very localized, with ties to a specific community and often a shared ethnic and religious tradition.

Everyday magic in London is, unsurprisingly, concerned almost exclusively with the concerns of everyday life. Hispanic housewives visit their local *bruja* for charms that will make their husbands more attentive and affectionate. African men browse the shop of the Vodun *houngan* on the corner for potions that will make their mistresses more enthusiastic. Native Brits seek enlightenment and empowerment at Masonic lodges and Druidic conclaves. Londoners of all genders and ethnic backgrounds seek much the same things from magic: health, love, wealth, and good fortune. Of course, the return of magic has brought darker things to the streets of London as well, and many people also seek protection and security from the practitioners of magic. As the demand for magical services has increased, some practitioners have even branched out into more specialized fields, and a Londoner can now hire magically skilled bodyguards, private investigators, monster hunters, and prostitutes, to name only a few of the most popular.

Most of the spells cast by local practitioners are very modest in power (rank 1 or rank 2, at most), and they positively drip with casting options and unnecessary regalia specific to the practitioner’s chosen tradition. Most responsible practitioners are aware of the consequences of overcasting; they take their time, stick to spells with which they are very familiar and comfortable, and never delve into arts that are dark, dangerous, or beyond their skills. A few, however, do all of these things and more. Some are merely foolish, while others are driven by an insatiable hunger for knowledge and personal power. Those latter are typically a self-correcting problem, as they rarely survive their own ill-conceived arcane experiments. The title of “sorcerer” is reserved by other practitioners for the most skilled and dangerous of these men and women. Some belong to orders or secret societies, while others pursue their dangerous craft independently. Sorcerers are the most likely practitioners of magic to spawn taint, and therefore are among the most deadly enemies of scions.

On the other hand, magic is not all dark and dangerous. It is, after all, fueled by karma, the force of life and passion. Humanity has always been the most powerful source of karma in the world, and despite Londoners’ fear and uncertainty, the city’s inhabitants live up to that

tradition. The crusties in the punk scene have never been happier, as magic gives their anarchic voices volume. The artists of Soho are surprised when the people depicted in their paintings seem to age with time, and the bums in Kensington Gardens have developed an uncanny rapport with the urban animals that make their homes there.

Humans are not the only sentient beings in London now. Shades of the dead swirl in a maelstrom about London, unseen by mortal eyes, but heard and felt nonetheless. Primordials, manifestations of the elements given life, veer between harmless antics and dangerous brutality. Strange beasts prowl the streets and beautiful fae watch human society from afar.

Amidst all this, the government waits. After all, what can it do? It is too mired in tradition to give over power to those who practice magic, but too concerned with its world image to admit that it needs help. The other nations of the world are just now beginning to believe the tales they’ve heard and the evidence they’ve been shown, and no one can predict how they may react. So the politicians broker for power and attempt to contain the strange tales that leak from their capital, leaving the average citizens to pioneer their city’s return to a dangerous yet powerful age of magic.

THE STRANGE TIMES: AS SEEN BY THE COMMON MAN

In the midst of the return of magic, mundane issues are still a problem for the government, the police, and the common man. The economy is in a slump. The National Health Service is fairly inefficient, and power failures bedevil the Underground as usual. There are still homeless on the streets, still drugs being sold in doorways, and still good people unable to find jobs. The weather, if anything, has only gotten more extreme: on some days the city is so bright and beautiful you feel like you’re on a movie set, while on others black clouds brood in the sky and the wind howls with such ferocity that it is easy to imagine it as a living thing, full of malice and spite.

If there is a saving grace to all this, it is the sense of innocence and possibility that has returned to the City of Contrasts. Along with fear, there is wonder. Along with lust for power, there is hope. As dangerous as the streets can be and as pointless as the government seems to be, it’s hard not to smile when you see an honest-to-god *magic* magic trick at a friend’s party, or when you overhear an animal striking up a conversation with the homeless old bloke you’ve always thought was just another crazy.



THE DREAM OF LONDON

The dream of London is not in the bricks and stones of its buildings, but in the multitudinous diversity of the life on its streets. London has long been all things to all people: ascetics and hedonists, city gents and Cockneys, civil servants and raving clubbers all consider it home. A flagless energy runs in the veins of this city that defies adversity and responds by reinventing itself. In the 21st century, the rushing of that energy has shifted pace, bringing uncertain times but broader possibilities. The synchronicities of magic glitter, half-seen, and their chaotic twinkling is filled with promise, but fear fills the space between these shining points of light, and within its shadows dwell great evil.

The powers of magic have returned to London, the City of Contrasts. The city's streets and ancient halls will be the battleground of forces from the world's dawn. Perhaps this is the final conflict, but it is surely not the first: London has a long history, longer than most guess, which stretches back to the mythic age . . .

LUDD'S DUN

Throughout the mythic age, the Daea and Fomorians battled for supremacy in Avalon. According to Daea legend, the goat-headed Fomorians were spawned from tainted titans who forged blasphemous pacts with unnamed powers in a desperate bid to destroy both the dragons and the fae at the dawn of the age. The Fomorians invaded Avalon after the dragons and titans made a lasting peace, and a bloody war with Queen Maeve and her shining hosts ensued. The Fomorians, of course, tell a different story, claiming they had dwelled in those lands since the age was born, and that the Daea were the ones who invaded and sparked the war.

The center of Daea power on the peninsula was the great city of Tara in western Avalon. The royal seat of the Winter Court, Tara was rooted in the solid earth of a broad hill blanketed in emerald grass. The heart of the city was the great hall that served as Maeve's public palace, but it also boasted dozens of lesser structures and dwellings, many of them built on and within the faerie mounds that would survive into the modern age. Tara was a powerful nexus of ley lines, and many standing stones were placed carefully around the hill to channel and store the magic that flowed into the city's heart from the hinterlands of Avalon. No wall was ever built to protect the city, but the hill was ringed by a chain of high stone guard towers that gave the fae early warning of any approaching giants.

While Tara was the political, magical, and cultural heart of Avalon, the Daea directed their military campaigns from isolated forts scattered all across the penin-

sula. The lords of these forts were warrior-princes of the Daea, and they were oathbound to maintain a battle-worthy army of the fae and to protect the lands in their charge. The Daea forts were generally copies of the hill-forts of the Kurgans, though the fae used stone in their construction more prominently than the humans did. Most of the fae hill-forts were located in the northwestern regions of the peninsula, as this was where the Fomorians were strongest and most numerous. Many others, however, were positioned along Avalon's coasts and major waterways, as the Fomorians were legendary mariners and were fond of launching attacks from the sea deep into the fae heartland. One such fort, built on twin hills on the banks of a great river, was the ancestral seat of the Daea warrior-king Ludd, who was also called Nuada. His outpost was named Ludd's Dun ("dun" being the Daea word for "fort").

Ludd was among the greatest warriors of the Winter Court. He wielded Fragarach, the Sword of Air, one of the Four Hallows of the Daea, with which he could cleave a Fomorian in half with a single blow. At one time, Ludd was a great king and ruled his own court before the sundering of the Blessed Land. He was even the consort of Queen Maeve, but she quickly replaced him when he lost his right arm in battle against the Firbolg. A Daea sorcerer and healer, one of Ludd's brothers, crafted a new arm for him, and thereafter the warrior-king was known as Ludd of the Silver Arm. Girded with the magical arm and the Sword of Air, Ludd's prowess in battle, if anything, was greater than ever. His relationship with the fickle queen remained strained, however, and he withdrew from court, returning to his ancestral home at Ludd's Dun.

Ludd's army was never large by the standards of the Daea, rarely exceeding 1,000 warriors. Ludd much preferred to go into battle alone or leading small bands of his kin and close companions. These companies rarely numbered greater than seven, but such was the might of Ludd and his warriors that they battled whole armies of Fomorians. Following the Exile, the warrior-king was among the first to welcome Daea of the Summer Court into his company. Ludd and his companions would stalk the lands around his fort for months at a time, but their encounters with the Fomorians were surprisingly few: The giants knew the location of Ludd's Dun and knew well enough to avoid it.

Ludd's Dun itself was impressive by the standards of the Kurgan hill-forts it mimicked. It consisted of two walled enclosures that each squatted atop one of the twin hills. Within each enclosure was a rugged stone hall and many lesser structures. The great halls extended into the hills themselves, and the Daea could travel quickly to almost any point in Avalon along the faerie roads that were reached through the subterranean warrens. It was said that Ludd's hall was fashioned from the ancient timbers of Fomorian warships, and its walls were decorated with the great bronze shields of a thousand Fomorian warriors. His chair was carved from a stone menhir that

he carried from his lost court in Elysium. His massive chariot was crafted from the bones of a taint-trapped dragon that he was forced to slay.

When his battles with the Fomorians were inadequate to sate his appetite for war, Ludd indulged in his favorite pastime: hunting the Firbolg. These unwelcome guests were not as overt in their assaults on Avalon as the Fomorians, but were dangerous nonetheless. They were shaped vaguely like men, but much larger and stronger, and their bodies seemed as much plant as animal. They were said to have their own secret ways into and out of Avalon, emerging from and disappearing into solid ground in the blink of an eye; those who made the faerie roads could never find these creatures' paths, however. They simply appeared in the midst of the kingdom's towns or glades as was their wont, took what they wished, and disappeared again, only harming others when they were attacked. They usually seemed interested in karmic or enchanted items, or occasionally in a pet animal. Most of the Winter Court thought of them as primordial of the forest, and while wary of them, let them take what they wished. Queen Maeve considered engaging in hostilities with them to protect her peoples' possessions, but the Fomorians seemed to be a more important threat (and one that she was not powerless to do something about, as she was with the Firbolg). Instead, she invited them to speak with her. Either the alien creatures were all of a like mind, or the leader that came forth to speak with Maeve was well-heeded, for the peace talks were quick and their effect resoundingly successful. The Firbolg promised to remain cloistered in the forests of Avalon, leaving the Daea free to make war on the Fomorians. This suited Maeve and the other Daea just fine, as they found something about the Firbolg so inexplicably unpleasant that it was painful even to remain in their presence for more than a short while. The Firbolg were seen no more, and the Daea let them be.

Ludd was not so accommodating. Several years before the agreement, a Firbolg rose up within one of Ludd's forts and tried to take the Sword of Air. In doing so, it made for its entire race an enemy of Ludd. The

warrior-fae slew the Firbolg and retained his sword, but not before the creature ripped Ludd's right arm from his body. The hero nursed a deep hatred for the Firbolg since that day, and hunted their kind tirelessly thereafter. During one of those hunts, he uncovered a vile secret. Wherever they went, the Firbolg bore large leather sacks, and after killing one in battle, it occurred to Ludd to investigate the contents. Inside, he discovered the skins of countless men and beasts, including the shapes of Daea that were part of Queen Maeve's war councils! Ludd deduced that the Firbolg used them to change their shapes and disguise their appearances. The Firbolg hadn't truly left—they had simply gone into hiding.



Once he discovered the secret of the Firbolg's bags, he believed that he had irrefutable proof of a danger as great as the Fomorians, if far more subtle. Ludd took the captured bag to Tara and entreated Maeve to renew hostilities against the Firbolg. The queen, however, considered the bag little better than hedge magic and argued that no creature who depended on such a ridiculous prop could ever be a real danger to the Daea. The warrior-king returned to Ludd's Dun, defeated once again, and resumed his own private war against the despised Firbolg. During the latter years of the mythic age, Ludd hunted down and slaughtered scores of the powerful creatures. He gained the assistance of two powerful dragons, Lebe and Mabinogion, who agreed with the pas-

sionate Daea that the Firbolg were more of a threat than any suspected. In return, Ludd lent the dragons the use of the ritual chambers in the tunnels beneath his twin forts, both of which were high in karma. One was called the Chamber of Fortune and its opposite was the Chamber of Sorrows. Any ritual performed in both chambers at the same time was said to be increased in power tenfold or more.

As the phenomenon known as taint spread throughout the world of the mythic age, the two dragons came to rely on those chambers more and more. It was there that they secluded themselves when word reached them of a great cabal of sorcerers from the Kurgan lands, from Shem and Qeztlan, and even from the magic-wary

realm of Keheb. They had begun the largest ritual ever attempted by mankind, its practitioners magically joining their power over thousands of miles. The goal of that ritual has been lost to the mists of time; perhaps it was to destroy the race of dragons as a whole, who humanity had begun to fear because of their tainted madness. Perhaps the ritual's purpose was to sunder the island of Atlantis, for certainly that land did not survive its after-effects. Perhaps it was as simple as an attempt by its casters to seize worldly power for themselves, or as complex as an attempt at attaining divinity. Whatever the intent, Lebe and Mabinogion feared the ritual's completion, and began separate but simultaneous counter-rituals in the hills beneath Ludd's Dun.

For years leading up to that point, the rulers of Milesia had coveted the magical lands of Avalon. Theirs was a human kingdom of northwest Erebea, descended from the Kurgan horselords of old. They craved might and dominion just as their Kurgan ancestors had, and made pacts with dark beings in order to achieve their goals. Perhaps led by greed, perhaps under the sway of unknown masters, the kings and sorcerers of Milesia led their people against the fae of Avalon. The southeastern region of Avalon was the first to come under attack, and as Lebe and Mabinogion desperately wove their magic, a great battle between the Milesians and the Daea was joined on the plains above them. It raged for many days, and the death toll to the humans was great.

As if coordinated, however, the Fomorians saw their opening and struck by sea and by land in the north and west. The Daeian forces were stretched thin, and Ludd's Dun was infiltrated. The most powerful of the Milesian sorcerers and the bravest of warriors slaughtered and thundered through the halls, only to fall like wheat before the might of the two dragons they encountered in the fortresses' depths. But the distraction proved enough. Something else slid through the earth and stone into the chambers, something that fouled the very essence of life and magic. When the dragons attempted to resume their rituals, they found that their powers were weakened. And so their counter-ritual did not completely succeed.

But neither did the human ritual that it was meant to stop. The sorcerers' black magic opened a hole in the womb of the earth, and magic began to flow out of the world into the empty spaces beyond. The flow became a flood, and in its wake, disasters both magical and mundane assaulted the earth. The result was the cataclysm that wrought the ending of the mythic age. Mountains were leveled and the seas rushed in. Fire rained from the sky and the earth writhed along faults traced by ley lines swollen with surging magic. Slowly, but with great fury, the world of the Fourth Sun was pulled apart at the seams.

As the world died, Avalon was swallowed in a tide of war and a storm of uncontrolled magic. The Daea battled the Milesians in the south and the Fomorians in the north, and suffered brutal losses on both fronts. The Daea of the Summer Court, ill-suited to war and in des-

perate fear for their survival, forged a secret truce with the Fomorians. The giants granted the Daea and their fae subjects respite from the fighting sufficient for them to retreat from the world. They withdrew into their faerie mounds and crossed over into the paradisiacal otherworld called Tir na n-Og, closing the way behind them and leaving the fae of the Winter Court to fend for themselves. In doing so, the lords of the fae were diminished; Daea no longer, they became the faerie race known in the modern age as the Sidhe, or the Seelie Court.

The Summer Court's betrayal and cowardice very nearly resulted in the utter destruction of the Winter Court. Uncounted Daea and lesser fae perished as the Milesians and the Fomorians burst through the fae defenses and swarmed into the heart of Avalon. As their kingdom burned, the fae of the Winter Court retreated to the only faerie roads that were still open to them. One led to a portal that in the modern age is called Glastonbury Tor. Another was in their capital of Tara. Both led to Annwn, a far less pleasant otherworld than Tir na n-Og. A realm of darkness and the dead. In withdrawing to this place, the fae of the Winter Court diminished, too, and became the Unseelie.

Ludd's Dun was completely destroyed in the magical maelstrom, as was Avalon itself but for a few surviving menhirs, faerie mounds, and other megaliths. In time, men would return to the twin hills on the banks of the great river. The ancient Britons named the place Caer Lud, after a legendary king called Lud, and the name was later corrupted to Caerludein, or Kaerlundein in Welsh. In A.D. 43, Aulus Plautius led four Roman legions in an invasion of Britain, building the Roman town of Londinium on the site. Nearly two millennia later, London sprawls upon those two hills and the lands around them.

LIFE IN MODERN LONDON

Most now admit that a change has arrived. Manifestations of magic have become impossible for the authorities to pass off as the activities of terrorists or as the results of mass hallucinations. There are still mad prophets proclaiming the end of the world; they throng the streets and squares, accosting passersby and shaking their fists at the sky, warning of demons and devils, avenging angels and an angered God. Stalwart conspiracy theorists still tout theories of science gone mad, mutants in the Underground, and governmental conspiracies. To the average Londoner, however, the bizarre has become the merely strange. The impossible has become the conceivable. Magic has returned.

RESIDENTS

With a population of over seven million, London is a bustling metropolis with every facet of life represented within its amorphous urbanization. London has been a cosmopolitan city since at least the 17th century, when it was a haven for Huguenot immigrants escaping persecution in France. Today, it is truly multicultural, with over a third of its population originating from foreign shores. The 1900s saw an influx of thousands from the Caribbean, Europe, and the East, all of whom have played an integral part in defining a city that is unmatched in its multitudinous variety.

Although Londoners have exhibited remarkable adaptability to the constantly changing face of their home, the city's history has always been troubled by the friction of different cultures living cheek by jowl. Now, a change more profound than any before is moving through the city, and Londoners' capacity for adaptation to strange new vistas is being tested to the limit. Already, the pressure of this uncertain future is pushing at society's weak points, and beneath the strain, they are beginning to buckle.

The events of the last decade have strained race relations to their breaking point, as one community looks to another in search of someone to blame for its worries. Gang violence has broken out like a rash across the city, with much of the fighting seeming to be between different racial groups. The old trouble spots like Brixton, infamous for its clashes between the local black community and the police, continue to be a problem; but unlike in previous years, when perceived police brutality sparked off violent protests, these riots appear to be largely motiveless, and antagonism is focused between rival gangs rather than at the police.

There is a hidden element to this simmering violence: a secret war is being fought between the new brokers of power in the modern age. These range from students of magic to evil beings whose very reason for existence is to spread discord and misery like a plague. Battles are waged between ancient cabals of sorcerers and malign spirits made flesh. All of these villains gather their forces beneath banners stained dark with blood. Many of the gangs and criminal fraternities in London unwittingly serve the diabolical plans of insidious masters; others knowingly subscribe to their vile plots, seeing therein the road to wealth and power.

As more of their city's youth are lost to mishap and violence, or simply disappear, the coming of magic has also sparked a unity within race unlike any seen before. The various immigrant neighborhoods, frustrated with the lack of assistance from their governmental representatives, have taken matters into their own hands. Like watches out for like, and someone who a few years ago might have been just another neighbor is now a trusted friend. Shared cultural heritage seems to mean a lot more when the bogeymen of the old country's ghost stories start appearing, and parents are willing to subscribe

FEAR & FAITH

In the last decade, fear has slipped unnoticed into the City of Contrasts. Fear of violence as crime levels surpass historic highs, and gangs wage bloody wars in the poorer districts. Fear of destitution as interest rates soar, and the debts people chalked up against the over-inflated values of their houses come back to haunt them. Fear has also crept into the psyche of Londoners. At first it was an insidious thing, hard to define, but later it coalesced into a tangible presence that now haunts the streets. Rumors are rife of government conspiracies, strange creatures in the sewers, plagues of ghosts, and sinister cults stealing people from the street to sacrifice to the Devil. Even the broadsheet newspapers, bastions of erudite commentary, are full of stories which were once only purveyed by tacky tabloids and sensationalist rags. Murder, horror, and the supernatural are the buzz words of the day, and end-of-the world prophets in the streets and squares have gained a credence they have never known before.

On a positive note, as always happens with a threatened populace, Londoners have begun to rediscover their faith. Not just in a Western, Judeo-Christian sense; certainly, the churches, mosques, and synagogues are enjoying a renaissance, but alternative cults and secret societies have also emerged from the shadows to accommodate a resurgent interest in the occult. Others are finding new faith in themselves. England's disenfranchised youth has flocked to the capital city, as well, hoping to become a part of this odd new experience. Many have lost their meager savings trying to master the ins and outs of London life, and others have lost their meager minds experimenting with magic, drugs, and debauched combinations of the two. Those that survive their first few months in the City of Contrasts, however, emerge with a newfound sense of purpose and strength of identity. For the first time in decades, the nation's youth feels that it has a chance to do something unique in the world, instead of choosing between riding the coattails of the United States and being folded into the European Union. On a smaller scale, even London's poorest immigrants see the strange times as an opportunity. Though they live in the worst parts of town, they are often the least preyed upon by the threats of the times; after all, many of the elders among them still hold the traditions, and remember the words of warding and signs of protection. That valued knowledge is hoarded within each culture, as it is the currency by which those elders will pay for their descendants' futures.

THE DRAGONS REBORN

Into this time of crisis, dragon-kind has awoken from millennial slumber, and the forces of destiny gather about them. Thought to be destroyed by the cataclysm that claimed the mythic age, the dragons have in fact been reborn as humans for millennia, merely slumbering until they could be roused by the return of karma.

The first difficulty these reborn dragons, called scions, must contend with is that they have been reincarnated as humans, with all of the frailties and disadvantages that form brings. However, while they rediscover their heritage and their powers, they can at least move unseen in the heaving metropolis that appears to be the stage for whatever momentous events are to come.

The second difficulty is that they remember little or nothing of their previous lives in the mythic age. From the time they are born, scions know they are different from other men; that somehow they don't mesh with the modern world. For those born before the return of magic, the night of the Chinese New Year was an epiphany. After that night they were completed, and their previous lives seemed like hollow falsehoods. Only then did they awake to the true possibility of their amazing differences from those around them. A scion's dreams are troubled by images of landscapes and creatures that couldn't possibly exist, yet seem so compelling that the dreamer awakes feeling confused and disoriented, empty and alone in the grey modern world. Often triggered by the simplest of things, such flashbacks can also occur in the waking state. These are fre-

quently intense and traumatic, leaving the scion feeling isolated and vulnerable, but they also contain knowledge and understanding, revealing clues to the scion's past. From such dreams power can be gained, but until a scion accepts his true identity as a reincarnated dragon in a human shell, he will remain troubled and tortured by these visions: weaker, rather than stronger, because of them.

In the mythic age, dragons were reborn as part of the natural cycle of things. They came to being in their familiar bodies; the fledgling dragon had to rediscover himself by dreaming atop his precious hoard, absorbing all the memories he had lost through his rebirth, and eventually rejoining his broodmates. Unfortunately, with the continuum of their species broken by long millennia, the scions of the modern age have no hoards to return to. They must take this voyage of remembrance without guidance . . . but perhaps not alone. Many scions feel the call of the brood, their soul-mates through eternity. If they follow the pull of this irresistible force, scions will find fellow lost souls that they can trust, and beside whom they can fight, in the coming storm.

It is critical that the scions learn all they can of their past and of the final days of the mythic age. They must understand themselves before they can discover the nature of the ancient and implacable enemies that have followed them through the ages, and even now gather in the night.

SIDEBAR 4-3

to just about any beliefs if they're told it will keep their children safe. These almost militarized hierarchies of leadership are most represented in South London, where the poor have begun to fight back. The occult manipulators have learned that the youth of South London are no longer easy targets, and it's only a matter of time before the more malevolent forces either back off from that area or strike at the heart of those responsible for the resistance to their overtures: the neighborhood leaders and local elders.

Within this maelstrom of violence and uncertainty, the middle- and upper-class natives of London maintain a veneer of civilization over their crumbling world. With typical British decorum in the face of adversity, people still visit the night spots of the West End and pubs still see a bustling trade. Folk seek out others of their kind for the comfort of numbers and the illusion that all is still right with the world. The truth is, the world will never be the same again. Magic is working a profound

change, breaking all the rules that men have come to believe are sacrosanct in the modern age.

GOVERNMENT

Britain has been a kingdom for nearly two thousand years, and had a parliament—the mother of all parliaments—for at least 800 years. Both monarchy and parliament have been ensconced in London for all that time, but the city that grew around them predates both institutions. The current system is a parliamentary democracy, with the monarch as Head of State. The latter is largely a ceremonial position and the last 400 years has seen a trend of decline in the monarch's executive authority, while parliament has gained power and influence.

THE KING AND QUEEN

The monarchs of Britain have ruled from London for more than a thousand years. The monarch is seen to exercise little real power beyond acting as a ceremonial Head of State—a flawed perception that fails to see the considerable power and influence still wielded by the British monarchy on the national and international stage. The king and queen are the legal heads of the government, the leaders of the Church of England, and the largest landowners in the country. Additionally, as the head of the British Commonwealth, they retain far greater executive powers abroad than at home.

THE PARLIAMENT

The British parliament is made up of a lower chamber (the House of Commons) and an upper chamber (the House of Lords). The Commons consists of several hundred elected members of parliament who represent the people of Britain in their constituencies, and who are usually members of one of the major political parties. The House of Lords, on the other hand, draws its members from the peerage and the clergy. These are non-elected positions, granted by hereditary and clerical rank. The House of Lords serves a judicial as well as a legislative function. From their ranks the so-called Law Lords are drawn, and they form the highest court of the land: the court of appeal, the court of last resort. Ever near the well-springs of power, Freemasonry is rife amongst the Lords, particularly the Law Lords, although such affiliations are kept well hidden.

POLITICAL PARTIES

The three main political parties in Britain are the Conservatives (or Tories), Labour, and the Liberal Democrats. The largest minority party is the ultra-far-right British National Party (BNP), successors to the fascist National Front and a shaming reflection of the low ebb of British politics. Elections are held at least every five years and the party with the majority of votes gains executive control of the government. The leader of the winning party is appointed as Prime Minister, and with a Cabinet of 20 senior ministers makes major policy decisions. The remaining 80 or so ministers oversee the myriad governmental departments and agencies. The second largest party forms His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, their duty being to challenge the executive and present an alternative set of policies. Today, Labour is in power and the Conservatives are in Opposition. The Liberal Democrats continue to be a sideline party, while the BNP has become a viable alternative for the most hopeless and depressed blue-collar workers and anti-immigration "intellectuals" alike. It has slithered like a snake into the bosom of democracy, appealing to the prejudices and bitterness of a population beset with fear and uncertainty.

Dark currents move through the corridors and paneled chambers of Westminster Palace, where knots of civil servants and ministers huddle in whispering groups. Most are helpless regarding magic and the role it is playing in the capital; they are blinded by the political ferment that embroils their lives. However, some realize that they must begin to curry favor and find allies in the supernatural realm, and they seek sorcerers and occultists as associates, rather than the businessmen of previous years. Magic is a word taken quite seriously in private where deals and power are brokered for the advancement of careers and party and, in a few patriotic cases, for the good of the nation.

THE LABOUR PARTY

When "New Labour" won with a landslide majority in 1997, it promised great things—unfortunately, it was quick to disappoint, and soon confirmed itself as a party of big promises, but little substance. The economy is now in tatters and society's ills seem to grow by the day. Despite this, the Labour Party are still in power, largely thanks to a populace disenchanted with politics and a lack of a decent alternative in the opposition.

However, when the Conservatives gained a new, charismatic leader, the situation changed, and it is the commonly held view that Labour will see defeat at the next election. As a result, Labour politicians, and particularly ministers, are preoccupied with staving off defeat. They grasp at any straw proffered and unwittingly open themselves to unscrupulous (even diabolical) advances that could ultimately spell disaster for the politician in question, the party, and perhaps even the government.

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

From 1979 to 1997, the Conservatives (or Tories) held the reigns of government, first under the iron fist of Maggie Thatcher then, later, under the insipid leadership of John Major. This gray-suited, gray-demeanoured politician presided over the party rebellion that ousted the Iron Lady and ultimately led to their defeat by Labour. Since then, the Conservatives have simply been viewed as inadequate for office. That is, until recently, when Alistair Crowley appeared on the scene, claiming to be the thrice great grandson of the infamous occultist of the same name. Crowley brought about a remarkable transformation in the jaded Tory party, and given his ancestry, a number of his critics half-jokingly accused him of using sorcery to achieve his success. Revitalised and invigorated, the Conservatives have proven a formidable Opposition for the government in the last year.

A significant number of Tories are Freemasons of varying rank, and as such are partially aware of the potential benefit to be gained from London's recent changes. However, the myriad layers of Masonic hierarchy are as impenetrable as the fogs that once plagued London's streets, with each layer sowing disinformation and hiding secrets from the others. Those who understand what magic can do have reacted in a number of ways: most see the possibilities for power and pursue it

wholeheartedly, trampling any who get in their way; others are more cautious, and some are just terrified, their fear a beacon to those that exploit weakness and turn it to their advantage. Those Conservatives not embroiled in the Masonic conspiracy are genuinely concerned by the current state of affairs, but are torn between two battles. They can either investigate and deal with the troubles and changes caused by the return of magic, or they can continue to try to lessen the oppressive weight of the social and economic ills that beset the nation, and particularly the capital. These politicians see Crowley as the saviour of their party and the first ray of light for British politics in decades.

For his part, Alestair Crowley keeps his distance from the Freemasons; he doesn't actually spurn them, but neither will he join their ranks. This is a small but growing concern for the party leaders (who are all Freemasons), who idolise their new leader yet also have loyalties to their Masonic brethren. See page 182 for more information on Alestair Crowley, and page 80 for more information on the Freemasons and their schemes.

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

The Liberal Party (or Whigs) was founded in 1859 and wielded considerable power up until the early 1900s; since then it has seen a catastrophic decline. The party attempted to rise from its ashes on a number of occasions, forming political alliances; despite its continued efforts and other failed collaborations, the Liberal-Democrats have failed to win a single election and continues to decline into political obscurity.

Of the three parties, the Liberals are the most naive about the current crisis and are the most likely to promote one of the scientific or social theories postulated to explain Britain's woes, despite all evidence to the contrary. So concerned with their image that they cannot see what the city looks like around them, they forthrightly denounce any talk of monsters or magic.

THE BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY

The BNP was founded in 1982, largely from former members of the ultra-far-right National Front. Since the turn of the millennium, it has risen to a disturbing level of popularity. Immigration remains sensitive as an issue,

and the BNP has been able to gain support in the middle-right and center of the public imagination as more people grow wary of "foreign invaders." The increasing and seemingly unmotivated violence in Brixton (not to mention similar unrest in Manchester, Liverpool, York and a large handful of other cities) has also made the average white citizen more receptive to the BNP's message of fear and hate. The BNP moved from being a poor fringe party to having support equal to and occasionally superseding that of the Lib-Dems.

The BNP retains unofficial links to a number of Neo-Nazi militia groups, such as Combat 18 and the White Wolves, and more recently have flirted with power-mongers and vile entities of a higher order; some of their fringe members have begun making ties with the Brothers of Cernunnos, whose philosophy of racial purity is closely aligned with their own.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

An army of officials, more than 600,000 strong, exists to advise ministers and to implement their decisions. This is the Civil Service, and the advisors are called civil servants. These career politicians wield considerable power, and some would say ultimate power: they control the flow of information that reaches both the ministers and the public. Since the time of Queen Elizabeth I, and probably before, political advisors have influenced the turn of events with a whispered word here and a confidential report there. These faceless figures have manipulated from the shadows, nominally for the good of the country, but always without accountability to the people whose lives they run.

This strange hierarchy is one of the biggest reasons that the government of London has done, essentially, nothing to deal with the return of magic. Its answer to the supernatural is to meet it with the mundane. Its way of dealing with troubling incidents is to treat the symptoms rather than the source, using stricter law enforcement and offering more resources for public programs, where possible . . . but not addressing the heart of the problem. The world is changing around them, yet the ministers and the civil servants around them are too afraid to stick their necks out to see exactly *how* it is changing, and what the best response is. The junior civil

BRITISH CURRENCY

The currency of Britain is the pound sterling (£), divided into 100 pence (p). Coins or "shrapnel" come in denominations of 1p, 2p, 5p, 10p, 20p, 50p, £1 and £2. Notes or "sheets" come in denominations of £5, £10, £20, £50 and £100. Shopkeepers scrutinize the higher value notes, as forgeries are becoming widespread in these hardening economic times.

Like most things, Londoners have a wide range of slang terms for their money, some of which are given here: grand (£1,000); monkey (£500); ton or century (£100); pony (£25); score (£20); tenner (£10); fiver, Lady Godiva or skin diver (£5). Slang for the various coins also abound: beer token or double nugget (£2); quid or nugget (£1); half a bar or spanner (50p); edge pence (20p).

SIDEBAR 4-4



servants, meanwhile, know that their superiors wield considerable power, and they spend much of their energy maneuvering for position and trying to gain favor.

Beyond merely ineptitude and self-interest, a far more ominous issue is at hand in the halls of government. The webs of intrigue and shadows of self-protection are the perfect environment, or perhaps a hunting ground, for a group of disturbing yet vague, difficult-to-describe, never-quite-seen group of gray-clad gentlemen. These unseen manipulators, masters at pulling the strings of those who pull others' strings, are the human forms of an ancient enemy of mankind: Those Who Dwell Below.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Mayor of London struggles to steer London through the rough seas in which it currently flounders; his fellow councilors on the Greater London Authority are pale, nervous men, afraid of the sharks that swim in the political waters and the violence that swirls outside the doors of City Hall in Southwark.

The Lord Mayor of London is chosen by the Liverymen of Common Hall; much of the power in the City therefore lies with these men (women are even now excluded from their exalted ranks). The ubiquitous tentacles of the Freemasons infiltrate the City Corporation, largely via the Liverymen. The Lord Mayor is not a member of the secret fraternity (that position is rarely given to a Freemason for fear of public outcry), but he is often a puppet of the Freemasons' machinations.

CRIME

British criminal justice is based on the maxim that the "accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty." Trials are conducted in open court, with the accused providing his own legal counsel or being provided counsel if he cannot afford it himself. Minor cases are tried by lay magistrates, while more serious ones are presided over by a judge and jury. Despite the overcrowded prisons, judges increasingly impose prison sentences. Better



CRIME & PUNISHMENT



Offenses are either scheduled (associated with terrorism or very serious crimes like rape and murder) without the possibility of bail, or non-scheduled with the possibility of bail depending on the crime. Average court processing times are 32 weeks from remand to committal, 6 weeks from committal to arraignment, and 9 weeks from arraignment to hearing. If found guilty, the plaintiff is sentenced to time in prison according to the crime he committed as indicated in the table below.

Offense	Minimum Tariff
Criminal damage	Fine and community service
Motoring offenses	Fine and community service
Fraud and forgery	9 months
Handling of stolen goods	18 months
Drug offenses	3–6 years
Violence	5 years
Robbery	3–6 years
Sexual offenses	5–10 years
Manslaughter	4–10 years
Murder	11–20 years

There are as of yet no guidelines for supernatural crimes; whenever applicable, the end result of the crime is focused on and any means by which it was accomplished, mundane or magical, are simply regarded as the weapons or tools by which the crime was committed.



SIDEBAR 4-5



to make the prisoners miserable, they think, than keep the maladjusted on the street to bother "normal" people.

On the other hand, many judges are beginning to wonder if psychiatric assistance and rehabilitation is more useful than imprisonment. The Liberal Democrats have proposed a "court psychiatric advisor" for all cases related to violence or the paranormal, but their lack of support in the halls of government has done little to further the bill.

THE PRISON SERVICE

Britain has more than 100,000 individuals incarcerated within 140 prisons, of which seven are located in central London. All were built in the 1800s and have long and sordid histories. Belmarsh is the most secure (category A) and holds the most violent and dangerous convicts; Brixton, Pentonville, Wandsworth and Wormwood Scrubs are high security (category B), and Holloway and Latchmere House are category C institutions. Holloway is the only female-only prison in the Greater London area. It is considered impossible to escape from Belmarsh, and escape from one of the category B prisons would be extremely difficult.

THE POLICE

Law enforcement is carried out by local police forces, which until recently were unarmed and had strict



limits on their powers of arrest and detention. London has several such forces: the City of London Police, the Metropolitan Police, and specialist forces.

The City of London Police is responsible for patrolling the City and falls under the jurisdiction of the City Corporation. It is stationed in Bishopgate, Snow Hill, and Wood Street, and its stationhouses still sport the antiquated blue lamps for which Britain's police stations were once famous. The commissioner of the City of London Police is accountable to the City Corporation. It is thought that he is a high-ranking Freemason, but this rumor may just be a persistent remnant of the 1990s furor, when Freemasonry was discovered to be rife in the police and judiciary.

The Metropolitan Police Service, also known as the Met or more famously as Scotland Yard, polices the Greater London area. Its officers are still called "Bobbies" or "Peelers" after the Met's founder, Robert Peel. The Met is headquartered in New Scotland Yard, located near the Houses of Parliament.

Police officers of all branches are now trained in and equipped with firearms, usually H&K P2000 pistols. The weapons are more to inspire confidence and a feeling of security in the general public than for actual use; the officers have to suffer through monthly seminars instructing them to only draw their guns as a matter of last resort. The number of fatalities associated with police gunfire have remained correspondingly low . . . at least, the number of human fatalities.

General gun ownership is still tightly regulated and a license must be obtained to own a firearm. Citizens who have done jail time are flatly rejected when applying for licenses, and even those who have been fined or brought to court on charges, even if they have been proven innocent, must generally wait several months for their license application to be processed.

FLYING SQUAD OR "SWEENY"

In the gray area between regular police and the military lies the Special Branch. A corollary to the FBI, CIA, and Secret Service in the United States, Special Branch deals with intelligence, security, protection of politicians, embassies, and royalty, and investigation of serious and violent crime. Of the Special Branch's organizations, the most notable in the world of FIREBORN is a legendary task force called the Flying Squad, which has its origins in the interwar years of the 1900s.

Following the Great War, London had experienced a sharp rise in crime, thought to be the result of large numbers of restless, mentally disturbed men returning from the war and facing an uncertain future. The Met responded by forming an experimental group of "thief-takers" with the authority to operate anywhere in London and deal rapidly and efficiently with violent crime. The media of the time dubbed them the Flying Squad. In the parlance of the East End rhyming slang, the Flying Squad became the "Sweeny" (Sweeny Todd, Flying Squad), and the nickname stuck.

Of course, the strange events of London early in that century weren't just social; that period was also the point at which several ley lines surged with arcane energy. These hardened detectives were among the first to come across signs of paranormal or supernatural activity in the modern age; as a result, a secret governmental paranormal division, LN-7, took early steps to infiltrate the unit and minimize the fallout of such findings.

ECONOMY

Things have been better, but things have been worse. Interest rates are rising, and unemployment has been climbing steadily from its 2003 low of 4.4%. At first the troubles were blamed on out-of-work layabouts and gangs supporting a burgeoning black market. Now the cause is anybody's guess: a populace distracted by the very real manifestations of magic in their city, the religious not bothering to work or buy goods because they believe the end of the world is nigh, the government turning away foreign investors for fear that they'll see too much of the strange goings-on in their city? Any and all of these could be at the root of the problem.

That isn't to say there isn't any money left in London; it's just that the divide between the haves and the have-nots has gotten wider. London's West End still sells expensive clothes and fine wines, just less of them, and the East End still sells fabrics and jellied eels. City central has been hit the worst, while South London, already in decline in the early 2000s, is now little more than a heaving slum of the unemployed living on benefits.

CITY TRANSPORT

Public transport within London is inefficient, dirty, and unreliable. London's famous red Routemaster buses are destined for obsolescence, but are still running. The city's taxi fleets are dominated by the famous black Hackney cabs, still the only taxis allowed to ply for hire in London thanks to an old law dating back to 1654. Their drivers are known for their character as much as for their knowledge of the city's sprawl and side streets. Cabs are expensive and they, along with the buses, are often snarled in the tremendous volume of traffic that attempts to traverse the city each day.

Due to the gridlock and traffic queues on the surface, the overburdened Underground is still the most often used means of navigating the city. In the deep tunnels, ominous sounds and screams are often heard, but the commuters standing on the subterranean platforms just shuffle nervously and convince themselves that the noises must be the squealing of brakes and rushing wind as trains move through the darkness. Breakdowns and sudden power failures are common. During these episodes, the overcrowded carriages are thrown into utter darkness and heat, while sweat and fear mingle in a suffocating cloud. When the power returns, the train

rattles upon its way . . . sometimes a few passengers lighter.

Several Underground platforms and stations have fallen into disuse, forgotten over the years due to shifting patterns of commuter travel and restructuring of the streets and buildings on the surface. Down Station and Holborn's platform 6 are examples of such lost and hidden areas. Holborn was used as a bomb-proof headquarters by the government during the World Wars, and never reinstated into the main travel network. Now these secret areas are back in use again, commandeered by clandestine agencies, secret societies, cults, and strange troglodytes. Some of these passageways lead into caverns that are older still, dating back to an age when a different people dwelled on the twin hills beside the Thames.

NIGHTMARES & URBAN LEGENDS

Psychiatrists and therapists have seen a steady trade since 2001, as an odd phenomenon has manifested itself in London. Certain recurrent dreams have been reported which, oddly, appear to be shared by a sizeable portion of the populace. Not all of them are nightmares, but even the dreams are alien enough to noticeably disturb those who report them. Some patients even suffer from uncontrolled waking dreams that can strike in the most inopportune times, whether in the middle of a board meeting or while driving on the freeway. Magic is undoubtedly involved in this mass neurosis, perhaps by stirring parts of the human psyche that have lain dormant since the mythic age.

The most common method of combating this embarrassing and sometimes dangerous incursion on one's psyche are anti-depressants like Prozac and experimental drugs that suppress dreams; both medications keep anxiety at bay, but also even out the dreamers' moods. While certainly preferable to traffic accidents and mass hallucinations, the dulling effects of the drugs seem to have dampened the spirits of the city's population. Whereas a normal response to the return of magic might be curiosity, fear, or passion, a sizeable portion of the populace prefers to hide from the waking and sleeping visions in their flats and houses, sitting in front of the telly and pretending everything is normal.

At least, that's the story in the middle classes. The poor seem harder hit, and have less access to medical or psychiatric aid. Suicide rates are up in the slums, and the mental hospitals and asylums are doing a brisk business. The cause is, undoubtedly, taint. The magi of the lower class are the most desperate for power, and have the most to gain . . . while many of them end up destroying their own minds, they often manage to release substantial amounts of taint into the world before they go. Even the rich instinctively travel to the worst parts of town for their darker rituals, as if they know that magic sometimes

leaves a dark residue. Where wizards gather, a sickly film of terror spreads over the city, seeping through the interstices of reality, figuratively and literally releasing nightmare forms into the physical world. As taint pools, it also brings a less figurative form of horror: its scent has awakened Those Who Dwell Below, allowing them to cast off the last shackles of sleep and emerge from their millennial torpor.

FRIENDS, FOES, AND FACTIONS

In this time of returning magic, old threats have awakened from slumber. Secret societies and cults flourish and even step into the open, as their ancient rituals and spells are empowered for the first time by the strengthening flows of karma. Academic groups, their work once vilified as pseudoscience, are vindicated, gaining new prestige and power. In such times of change, there are always opportunities, as well as those who would exploit them. Some are patient predators who have waited through the centuries, while others are



newly arrived upon the scene. The key to survival in these changing times is the ability to adapt quickly, and there is no shortage of opportunists as the old age gives way to the new.

PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS

Since the events of February 5, 2001, London has experienced numerous paranormal phenomena, from sightings of ghosts in the Tower of London to poltergeist activity in the East End at the sites of anti-Semitic riots of the 1930s. To begin with, most Londoners took these stories in stride; they were no different from the tales told for generations. However, the increasing frequency with which they were reported began to make people take notice. Most dismissed the stories with typical British aplomb, while others became concerned and moved away from these haunted areas; some of London's entrepreneurs, meanwhile, tried to profit from the "psychical hysteria." Thus, London enjoyed a boom industry of psychic mediums, tarot card readers, ghost hunters, paranormal investigators, and gurus teaching the secrets of tantrism and Kabbalah for suitably impressive fees.

There are very few of the tricksters and con men left—when it became all too easy to part the veil into other worlds and gaze upon the terrors of the abyss, most got out of the trade by way of the asylum or the morgue. Those that are left are the genuine article: men and women with spiritual sensitivity or those with newly awakened powers, abilities which had long lain dormant in their ancient blood. These individuals tend to be loners, although a few agencies exist, such as the Paranormal Investigators of Whitechapel. They take on private contracts for people suffering from paranormal interference and, although not widely publicized, work closely with Special Branch in investigating unusual crimes. The largest and best-known of these organizations, however, is the Society for Psychical Research.

SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was the pinnacle of 19th-century interest in applying the discipline of science to psychic and paranormal research. It was especially active up until the outbreak of World War I. Many of the initial group were spiritualists, but there was also a core of professional investigators. The tension between the spiritualists and the investigators grew until many of the former group left the society as early as 1887. It was from the group of disgruntled spiritualists that a young Nathan Obliette recruited many of the members of his fledgling LN-7.

After 1953, the SPR saw a downturn in its popularity. They were lambasted by more credibile scientists,

who made great strides in the fields of biology, chemistry, and physics, and who saw little need for recourse to paranormal or mystical explanations for their observations. Striving for credibility, the SPR attempted to appear more scientific by describing its field of research as the study of anomalous phenomena. It is fair to say that the SPR did little to advance scientific understanding of magic and the paranormal during this period, but it did gather a wealth of information relating to the description and history of anomalous phenomena, filling extensive libraries and archives at its Cambridge and London sites. In this way the SPR survived the remainder of the 20th century on its reputation as an odd but useful repository of the unusual and the bizarre.

When karma began to return to London, the number of reports of paranormal activity increased dramatically, to the point that even the ardent sceptics of the scientific world began to believe there was perhaps more to these incidents than at first appeared. The SPR has since seen an upturn in its fortunes with the securing of several large grants. The benefactors of these sizeable sums are undisclosed, but are rumored to include branches of the government as well as business investors. Requests to access the SPR's comprehensive libraries have also dramatically increased during this period, an activity that has brought considerable wealth to the society, and no doubt been encouraged by the SPR's adherence to a strict "no questions asked" policy. LN-7 is interested in finding out who is accessing the SPR's data and is seriously considering "acquiring" the SPR in order to restrict access to the potentially dangerous material in its archives. Unsurprisingly, the Freemasons and the Gehenna Consortium are also extremely interested in the SPR's libraries, and have made subtle moves through their front organizations to buy them out. So far, neither group has met with any success; The SPR's current president, Lyddia Cole, flatly and openly refuses to entertain any such overtures.

Gaining access to the SPR's library for one week of research has a Cost of 4, and grants 3 automatic successes on Research tests regarding supernatural creatures and phenomena, including spells and rituals.

GANGS AND VIGILANTES

With a few notable exceptions, such as the Kray Twins and the Richardsons, London never used to have much of a gang problem. However, violent gang activity has increased since the turn of the century. The reasons range from long-term unemployment to a feeling of disenfranchisement by youth to an attempt by the magically adept to "claim" mystical turf. Gang members are typically young males, aged between 14 and 33. Most have never worked and few completed their education. They are rough and ready, violent and sadistic; however, fear is the emotion that rules them. These

youths turn to gang life to gain an identity, bring meaning to their lives, and to protect themselves from their enemies. Ironically, by joining a gang they also inherit all of *its* enemies; but at least they don't face them alone. Of course, the economy is not the only force driving the spiraling discontent in London. The influence of karma, already slick with the oily corruption of taint, has pervaded the dreams of the populace, changing them into nightmares. In those who are healthy, balanced, well-fed and with a chance in life, the arrival of karma inspires hope and possibility. Those who are already unstable, depressed, downtrodden, or just psychotic, are far more likely to fixate on the wretched thoughts inspired by taint, which only makes things worse for them. None of these effects are overt, but they insidiously begin to darken the minds and moods of those who dwell in tainted areas. Over time and with a populace of hundreds of thousands, something as small as a nagging feeling begins to have a major impact.

Gangs are also tied to London's black and gray markets, which use the easily-manipulated youths as couriers and hired muscle. Cigarettes, alcohol, occult references and tools, cars, electronics, drugs, firearms, and pornography are all saleable items on London's black market. A disturbing new trend is the selling of slaves for sex, and worse; sorcerers have infiltrated London's gangland, and it has been found to be a fertile recruiting ground for cults as well as a source for their rituals' more diabolical components.

CROSSJACKS

Earlier this year, King's Cross experienced a brutal gang war that culminated in hundreds of dead over a bloody period of three days. At the height of the fighting, the rail stations were closed for fear of passenger safety, causing havoc with an already overburdened public transport system. The police, unable to cope, called in the army to quell the civil unrest. After a brief standoff, the soldiers stormed the area of thickest fighting, only to find it eerily deserted but for the bodies of the slain. The authorities were quick to suppress stories coming out of the war zone, but unsubstantiated rumors claim that the dismembered corpses had to be shipped out in over 200 body bags, and only after a week of piecing the body parts back together could the final death toll be recorded. Within a few weeks, the area was largely back to normal, the Underground station reopened, and businesses trading again. So too were the prostitutes and drug pushers. However, the tone of the area had drastically changed in the wake of the Argyle Square Massacre: no longer were there numerous gangs vying for control of the streets. Rather, one gang seemed to have emerged supreme—the Crossjacks—and they ruled their roost with iron claws.

The leader of the Crossjacks is a murky figure, known only as Bavkakha. Most locals assume that it was the Crossjacks who committed the murders of



Argyle Square, but the authorities have been unable to find a link and have written the Crossjacks off as opportunists who stepped into the power vacuum left in the wake of the gang war. Whatever the truth, the street people are reluctant to talk about the Crossjacks or their sinister leader, and will offer silence, or more likely violence, if either subject is broached.

GUARDIAN ANGELS

In response to rising crime and supernatural predators, and the inability of the police to contain either, a number of individuals have chosen to take the law into their own hands. Most of these vigilantes are ignorant of how to fight or use magic, but they have no choice.

The Guardian Angels are one such group, a vigilante organization that originated in New York in 1979. The London chapter of the Angels was briefly popular in the late 1980s, but had died out by the 1990s. Since then, the organization has seen resurgence under the leadership of Father Thomas O'Brien. The controversial clergyman is an ex-SAS soldier, and now the vicar of Christchurch Spitalfields parish. He revived the Guardian Angels in response to the increasing unlawfulness in his community, and tried hard to stick to the tenets of the Angels' founder, Curtis Sliwa, who advocated weapon-free policing and the empowerment of people to help themselves. However, since founding his

vigilante group, O'Brien has learned that things are not what they seem; he and his followers believe an unholy invasion out of Hell is underway, and have consequently taken a harder approach to tackling the supernatural and mundane crimes of their parish. The ex-soldier has armed his men with contraband hardware gleaned from his military contacts, and the militant vicar has also received aid from a mysterious benefactor that he suspects is from a secret branch of the government. In fact, the man he has encountered is an agent of LN-7 who figures that the city needs all the help it can get.

SECRET SOCIETIES

THE GEHENNA CONSORTIUM

The Gehenna Consortium is a corrupt and dangerous organization that has been focused on one goal since its inception: to propel its members into positions of power. The Consortium was founded by Marcus Sagarius, the bastard son of the Viscount of Rutland, conceived during an ill-advised dalliance with a prostitute in King's Cross. Marcus became involved with mysticism and the occult from an early age, at first with his mother who attended regular séances and crack-pot mystical groups, and later when he became involved with the Illuminates of Thanateros. Marcus first glimpsed the potential of magic within the Illuminates, but quickly became frustrated with the order and left in search of the secrets of true magic. Marcus eventually returned to Britain in the late 1990s. He fell in with the Hellfire Club, where he rose quickly through the ranks until gaining powerful political contacts he would later put to good use. After a major falling out with the head of the cult, Marcus left under a dark cloud, and decided to

form his own cabal; one that would steer clear of the traditional mysticism and spiritualism that had characterized many occult societies since the 1880s. Instead, Marcus's intention was to focus on exploiting magic for nothing more than to make money and accrue power, leaving anything superfluous and spiritual by the wayside. (See page 186 for more information on Marcus Sagarius).

In order to further his goals, Marcus created the Gehenna Consortium. His initial funding was easily managed by threatening his father with blackmail. He recruited like-minded individuals drawn from varied walks of life—businessmen, leaders of the faith, and government officials—each with a vested interest in pursuing wealth and power to assuage their own greed or further the goals of their organizations. Marcus had no true magical powers, however, and used a complex social strata of smoke and mirrors to bring success to his

consortium's members; in return for one political leaders' request for "mystical information," for instance, he would claim that the spirits demanded the razing of a certain derelict building so that they could be free. That property would happen to be the target of some other ambitious Consortium member's real estate schemes, who in return for Marcus's "supernatural intervention" on his behalf would do his best to attain the aforementioned politicians' information. This proceeded for several months, Marcus just barely keeping his flock convinced of his skills.

Even better than Marcus's ability to bluff, wheedle, and improvise, however, was his timing.

The manipulator had promised his followers a major demonstration on the Chinese New Year, the summoning of a wise and ancient being that would guide their economic investments with preternatural insight. He had paid a gang to interrupt the summoning under pretense of work-



ing for an enemy sorcerer, and assumed that this was probably going to be the last straw before the Consortium would fall apart.

But the ritual worked. After contentedly eating the supposed minions who attacked the Consortium (right on cue), the bloated creature bumbled predictions and riddles for several hours before once more fading back to the realm from which it came. After a few days of deciphering and research, each of its cryptic statements were found to have a likely real-world correlation in the business community. Those that based their decisions on the creature's claims found themselves ludicrously successful within just a few weeks.

Because Marcus had been claiming this sort of power all along, his webs of support and connections were well in place for the return of magic. While other occult groups were still reeling from the realization that their spells finally worked, and independent magi were just beginning to gather pupils and followers around them, the Gehenna Consortium was already in full stride. Those who days before had scoffed and belittled the Consortium's efforts were quick to turn around and offer it money, favors, land, and even political weight. As the Consortium's investments continued to pay off, guided by magical insight, its members made a fortune. Within a few years its influence has extended to include illegal activities, particularly those that offer a high return in hard cash or power: drugs, slavery, gun-running, and the like.

To front its illegal operations, the Gehenna Consortium acquired a number of respectable companies, such as Connix Haulage Ltd. based at the Eastway Commercial Centre, in East London. The Connix trucks are perfect for transporting the Consortium's illegal goods. More recently, the Consortium has branched into even more sinister fields. Genesis Ltd. is a biotech company that the Gehenna Consortium recently founded in Innova Park, a high-tech business location built on the demolished Rammey Marsh Dewatering works in Enfield. In addition to its declared research into stem cell regeneration, a secret facility beneath the main laboratories houses experiments that manipulate viruses and human stem cells using magical energy. Recently, Genesis Ltd. has recruited a number of scientists from the SPR and various academic labs, setting them up in senior research positions. LN-7 and the Freemasons have become aware of these appointments (the SPR is of special interest to both organizations), and in researching Genesis Ltd.'s history they have come across a number of anomalies that will shortly lead them to discover the existence of the Gehenna Consortium. Neither group is likely to be very pleased at what they find.

THE GUARDIANS ETERNAL

The Knights Templar were the first, and perhaps most famous, of the monastic military orders formed during the Crusades. Enshrouded by mystery and

accused of esotericism, the order is far older than even the most learned historian suspects. The Templars are the most recent incarnation of an ancient and secret organization called the Guardians Eternal. In the aftermath of the tumultuous cataclysm that ended the mythic age, the surviving sages of Atlantis founded the secret order and charged it with guarding the sacred sites and antediluvian lore of that now forgotten time. They were to safeguard these ancient mysteries and watch over the races of men as they began their long struggle back towards civilization. Down through the centuries, this powerful group moved within the shadows as empires rose and fell, occasionally guiding, but mostly observing the people of those nations. They were invisible in plain sight. They were among the priests of Ptah, the priestesses of Nammu, the Druids of the Celts, and myriad other religions of the ancient Mediterranean region. They were always secretive, always unseen, guiding the paths of those people away from hidden or dangerous knowledge and protecting the ancient legacies and artifacts of Atlantis and the antediluvian world. When the Christian religion began to gain ascendancy, they insinuated themselves into that burgeoning faith too. To this end, in the early 12th century the Guardians founded the Military Order of the Knights Templar.

The Templars were well connected, and quickly gained great influence and wealth. In their pride, however, they overstepped themselves, becoming overtly embroiled in the politics of the time. The Templars' ascendancy did not sit well with certain political figures, and in 1307 the Frankish king, Philippe Le Bel, captured many of the Templars in his kingdom, including their Grand Master, Jacques de Molay. They were forced to admit to heresy under torture, and Pope Clement V commanded that the order be dissolved. The surviving Templars fled their estates and gave up their holdings throughout Europe, in what became known as the Great Dissolution. In London, the knights abandoned Round Temple, the oldest of their chapter houses outside the Holy Land, and fled to Scotland. They found succor in the mist-shrouded lands of the Scots, where King Robert the Bruce had already been excommunicated, and so did not recognize the papal decree against them. The Templars built a new temple there called the Rosslyn Chapel.

It was at Rosslyn that a split occurred within the order. One faction believed that it was their abandonment of the ancient precept of "watchfulness without entanglement" that had led them to their present straits; others, led by Elias Ash, argued that the time for inaction was over. Elias advocated that the order should use its ancient and unrivalled knowledge to guide and influence these cattle they tended. This suggestion was anathema to the original precepts laid down by their ancestors, and a furious row ensued. Soon after, Ash and his followers left Rosslyn and set up a splinter group that returned to England. The Guardians Eternal were no more.

THE FREEMASONS

Ash and his followers had spent a lifetime working beneath the surface of society, and it was a habit that died hard. They created another secret society to further their goals, this one with secrecy and hierarchical fail-safes built into its precepts so that their goals could not be hindered from within.

Their original name was the Companions of the Royal Arch. The title referred to an ancient artifact from the mythic age, an edifice of power called the Cebian Gate. Old even in that distant time, it was said to give mystical authority to the way of life of Atlantis. The companions chose this symbol of past authority to lend credence to their endeavor, and created a seal to give them identity. This seal, called the Jewel of the Royal Arch, is a double triangle, sometimes called the Seal of Solomon, within a circle of gold; beneath, a scroll bears the inscription *Nil nisi clavis deest* (Nothing is wanting but the Key), and on the circle appears the legend *Si tatlia jungere possis sit tibi scire posse* (If thou canst comprehend these things, thou knowest enough).

While these images and symbols remain, the organization itself has changed drastically over the centuries. Their objective was to gain power and influence in order to control and direct “lesser men.” At the time it was formed, with the Church growing ever more powerful, kings and bishops strove to outdo one another in the construction of ever more extravagant buildings for the glory of God. There was consequently great demand for skilled architects and stone masons to oversee these great works. With the Companions’ advanced knowledge and magical lore, it was easy for them to take the lead in the fields of architecture and stone-craft. An unlooked for advantage was that such artisans were one of the few groups of people, outside the aristocracy, who were free to move about the kingdom with relative impunity. During this time, the Freemasons, as the Companions became known, accrued great wealth and influence, and by the 17th century, individuals from the most powerful institutions of the land were members of the Masonic order.

As the Freemasons gained political and ecclesiastical power, they became further divorced from the tenets that had originally defined the Guardians Eternal; indeed, they forgot that name altogether, along with much of the truth of their past and the hidden history of the world. Increasingly, they delved into meaningless mysticism, diluting their true magical knowledge with ritualistic nonsense and charlatanry, until they had forgotten their origins and their purpose; pursuit of political power had become their *raison d’etre*.

The Masonic order is riddled with conspiracy. Its many-layered hierarchy propagates intrigue, and each rank does its utmost to hide its mysteries from the one below, while all the time desperately trying to attain the next level. The Grand Masters of the order insinuate and bluster, claiming to the lower ranks that they hold the true secrets of magic. This is, of course, a sham; their knowledge is only marginally greater than that of their lesser brethren, and it is this ultimate truth that they keep hidden at all costs. While they are magically weak, the political influence that the Free-masons wield is without parallel. Freemasonry goes to the heart of every major institution in the British Isles, with many of the most powerful individuals of the country, particularly high ranking civil servants, belonging to its fraternity. Ironically, now that the Freemasons have all the political power they could ever want, they thirst instead for that which they once possessed: magic. The number one objective of the Grand Masters is to regain the secret knowledge they once had. To this end they have tried, with limited success, to infiltrate the magical secret societies that have revealed themselves in the 21st century. They have

even gained some influence over LN-7, but proceed with cautious guile lest they reveal themselves. They have not yet gained access to the department’s secrets, which are closely guarded by the formidable Thelema.

In the early 21st century, the Freemasons have suffered enormous setbacks. Many of the ancillary secrets of their order have been revealed on the Internet, and the extent to which they have infiltrated the county’s major institutions has come close to being exposed. It suffered under an outcry in the late 1990s when its prevalence





among the police force and judiciary system was discovered. A bill to force existing judges, magistrates, and police chiefs to declare their Masonic interest failed to see the light of day, presumably quashed at the highest level. Shortly after this incident, the Freemasons declared they were becoming an “open” organization to dispel the myths that had surrounded them over the years, and this action went a long way towards deflecting public scrutiny. Of course, this apparent transparency was superficial, and the Freemasons remain a secretive order. On the one hand, at the mundane and governmental level at least, their influence is all-pervading. On the other, its members are mystic lightweights, and those with true skill at magic are more likely to pity than fear these blind, blundering seekers of power.

THE GUARDIANS OF ATHOTH

Following the Great Dissolution, the remaining Guardians Eternal discarded their latest disguise and withdrew from society, using the myth and legends of the Knights Templar as a smokescreen to obfuscate their escape. These men renamed themselves as the Guardians of Athoth and watched through the centuries, a brief moment of time compared to the long years their order had already existed. They saw the degeneration of the Companions of the Royal Arch and the greedy excesses of the Freemasons; they observed, unmoving, as society plunged into dark times, then pulled itself into the Renaissance. Each time their hidden enclaves were threatened, they would fade into the night, always a step ahead of those who would unveil them. In the dawn of the new millennium, the Guardians have gathered in London. They have seen the signs and know that the age draws to a close. They have hidden themselves in their ancient sanctuaries, yet undiscovered, and there they wait, watching from the dark until the time is right to act.

Unfortunately, the definition of the right time is a matter of furious discord between the Guardians, and several believe that the order has failed in its ancient duty. The Guardians’ close brush with disaster in the 14th century has made them overcautious and reluctant to expose themselves again. As a result, they missed the crucial events that led to the blighted healing of the magical realm. They did nothing when other groups, such as the Gehenna Consortium, abused the power of magic for personal gain, and in recent years they have maintained their aloof watchfulness as tainted magic spreads across the city. Even though they are few in number, the Guardians of Athoth are extremely powerful and could make a considerable difference in the coming battle.

The incumbent Grand Master, Charles Alford, is the strongest proponent of the Guardians’ current inaction. He has commanded the order to watch and wait until the great powers of this age reveal themselves. To show their hand now, he cautions, would be to court utter ruin. Others are less patient, and are not convinced by musty

old prophecies written in languages that few can still understand.

The Guardians probably hold the greatest repository of ancient lore to survive the cataclysm. It would have been greater still, but for its gradual erosion over the centuries spent hiding and moving from place to place in order to avoid detection. Sometimes forced to leave behind some artifact or other, the Guardians destroyed many items rather than risk them falling into enemy hands. Time has also diminished their magical aptitude, and although they command a far greater mastery of magic than the unschooled and have life spans perhaps double those of normal humans, they are pale reflections of their antecedents.

THE INVISIBLE BASILICA

In 1888, three men (Dr. William Wynn Westcott, Dr. William Woodman, and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers) founded a magical fraternity in London called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. All three were members of a mystical society known as the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, and all were Freemasons, although they claimed to have left that brotherhood in pursuit of purer spiritual goals. Mathers was most influential in synthesizing the teachings of Freemasonry, theosophy, and medieval grimoire magic into a new type of occultism that focused on magical spirituality. However, most of the order’s teachings were mystical nonsense, the garbled interpretations of ancient texts that themselves were mangled translations of true magical lore. By 1903, the Golden Dawn had ceased to exist, rent by internal feuding and philosophical incompatibilities, its members scattered or reorganised into new groups, such as the Stella Matutina and Alpha et Omega.

Following the order’s collapse, Mathers lived out the rest of his days in Paris in relative obscurity. He reportedly died in 1918 in the Spanish influenza pandemic, but great mystery and confusion surround the exact details of his death, and his final burial place has never been discovered. In truth, Mathers had stumbled upon a terrible secret that claimed his life and set in motion events that would shake the world.

In the journals of Juibert de’Mortain, Mathers found entries pertaining to a hidden stair beneath the Tower of London. Mathers entered the black passage on a cloudy night as the Tower’s ravens took to the air in an unheeded cacophony of warning. There was a basalt cathedral far below called the Chamber of Sorrows in the mythic age, and its name would remain apt in the modern age as well. In the center of the chamber, Mathers saw the emaciated form of a huge and ancient dragon, pierced by many tendrils of gray ectoplasm. Death was heavy in the air, but Mathers somehow knew the beast was still alive. The miracle of the dragon’s survival was a result of the chamber itself, which lay at the heart of a vast network of ley lines whose meager energies were sufficient to keep the ancient creature from fading into death. However, the mystery of the dragon’s presence was





never revealed to Mathers, because something else lived within that chamber. It gazed into Mather's mind and stopped his heart.

As Mathers' soul fluttered against its mortal bonds, it fell into the same trap that had captured the dragon, and his spirit found itself unable to flee. When the magician's light failed, dark things slithered from the shadows to devour his flesh and whisper terrible things to his naked soul. In the next decade, as magic began its decline, Mathers' shade was cosseted by loathsome entities that insinuated themselves into his soul. The beings whispered of a task that must be done—a great work—and the tortured spirit eventually came to believe that these beings meant well, despite their frightful presence. Following the bidding of his new masters, the ghost of Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers slipped from the Tower, past the ravens, and visited old acquaintances. He visited them in their dreams, via correspondence and telephone, and even learned to possess the bodies of the weak-willed to deliver his messages. Those associates who wanted to believe that he was still alive, or the disciples of those he had known, were quick to respond to his urgings. After all, he was armed with knowledge, the lust for which has ever driven men and women of the kind he gathered. Those who would not believe that he remained in human form were shown the truth, and suffered for it, but eventually they too succumbed to the whisperings. So began the long and careful preparations

for the coming millennium, when the stars would be in a particular conjunction, and a ritual could be performed to heal the world. These humble servants of strange powers called themselves the Invisible Basilica of Gnosis. And though they did not know it, they served the greatest evil ever to have burrowed beneath the earth.

After a century of preparation, using a worldwide network of technology and followers, these wizards completed the impossible. They brought karma back into the world.

The dragon in the chamber was sacrificed, along with hundreds of mortal souls, ranging from newborn innocents to the elderly on their deathbeds. All had been carefully assembled for this terrible act; some were scions, slumbering in human form; others were the descendants of kings and heroes of old; many were simply unfortunate mortals who had led pure lives and amassed a strong connection to the karmic world.

With evil intentions and wicked genius, the wound in the metaphysical realm was closed. Karma returned, filling London as if it were a vast reservoir. And as karma flowed once more along the veins of the world, so too did the potential for its opposite: tarry, defiling taint.

MERLIN AND THE DRAGON

The centuries that followed the Roman withdrawal from Britain were dark years. Foreign barbarians invaded from all sides, and infighting of the existing leaders and nobles meant that a warrior was as likely to be killed by his own countrymen as he was by outsiders. In the midst of this chaos, a shining beacon of righteousness arose for a brief time. Led by King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table came to stand for more than just purity and goodness. They stood for an unconquerable hope, one that has danced upon the breath of legend ever since, refusing to be tethered in time or space. Camelot's fair spires were dreamed of and protected by Arthur's advisor, the goodly and wise Merlin. As glorious as those times and its heroes were, they were destined to be defeated from within. The king's wicked half sister, Morgana Le Fey, and her bastard offspring, Mordred, cast a shadow of evil in the kingdom, and the lust of Arthur's queen for one of his knights brewed betrayal.

At least, that is the tale that comes to us in the modern day.

There was no Arthur. The name is a corruption of the Celtic 'Ard-Righ' (High King), a noble-sounding title that was naught but a paper crown for Merlin's puppet. Merlin was no wise man either, but a vile evil, eons old: a Dweller taken human form. It is said that the legendary magician's power was tied to the land; that he had tamed the earth dragon itself and claimed its magic. This was an ironic twist of the truth. The dragon was real enough though, trapped by Those Who Dwell Below in a stygian cathedral beneath earth and stone since the end of the mythic age.

The earth is littered with magical nexi, nodes of power interconnected by ley lines that act like veins and arteries to carry magic through the physical realm. Two such places lie deep beneath London's twin hills, enormous geodes whose walls are encrusted with crystals of pure karma, in which magic once scintillated and glittered. In these chambers two dragons, Lebe and Mabinogion, attempted a counter-ritual to prevent one being performed by a vast and powerful cabal of human wizards, whose workings would accidentally bring about the end of the mythic age. Though the purpose of the ritual is unknown, the Dwellers wanted to see that ritual successful. When they realized what the dragons were attempting, they swarmed like enraged serpents, burrowing through the earth to the punctured geodes. Their pawns, the human hoards of Milesia, had gotten there first and weakened the dragons. The Dwellers found Mabinogion dead, her life sacrificed to the dragons' desperate counter-ritual, and Lebe mortally wounded. They moved in for the kill, trilling in ecstasy at the

dragons' failure, when something went wrong. The Dwellers could feel the hated karma fleeing in a spiral out of the world, but taint was being pulled out of reality along with it.

The humans' ritual had gone awry.

As both the world's karma and the oily rivers of taint hemorrhaged from the world, the Dwellers used the last of their fading power to imprison the mighty Lebe, preventing his life-force from fading from the world. He became a living battery, trapped between life and death, off of which the Dwellers could feed. As the last of magic boiled away, the Dwellers spun cocoons for themselves deep in the earth, scattering throughout the world, but always parasitically tied by faded ley lines to Lebe's wretched spirit.

The magic concentrated by the ley lines was sufficient to sustain both the dragon and the Dwellers, albeit in stasis, even when karma was all but absent in the rest of the world. And so there Lebe lay as the millennia passed, trapped by his greatest foes and denied the release of death and resurrection. The presence of Those Who Dwell Below corrupted the glittering cave, quenching the karmic light of the crystals and casting the geode into malevolent darkness. Taint was thick there, a cloying and stifling corruption that crept along the ley lines like a pernicious infection. When karma surged along the ley lines on which they dwelled it was tainted almost instantly, allowing the Dwellers to emerge from their abyssal holes and torture the helpless dragon in unspeakable ways until the once great and noble creature lay broken, ruined, and insane. By the 4th century A.D., the foul ones had finally learned what they needed to do.

Mustering what power they could, the Dwellers sent one of their own forth to rebuild their foul empire and repair the wound in the spiritual realm so that there would once more be karma for their human pawns to taint. Their intention was to sacrifice Lebe to complete the counter-ritual that he and Mabinogion had attempted at the end of the mythic age. For this purpose, they would require a great sacrifice of human life to bolster the dragon's flickering life-force. The Dark Ages would have been far darker if Merlin and his vile race had succeeded with their wicked plan. Fortunately, the Dwellers were opposed by Morgana Le Fey (once a mighty Daea sorceress, now merely a Sidhe), and she tricked and defeated the wicked mage. Lebe remained in his prison, for Morgana was unable to free him from his ancient bonds: the karma faded from the ley lines and she was fading too. When next she awoke, centuries had passed and she remembered her time as Morgana only in dreams.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

LIBRUM NIGER 7

Librum Niger 7 (LN-7) is the most closely guarded secret in government. It evolved from a small group housed in a cramped room of the Old War Office in Whitehall to a vast organization that occupies several facilities within London and around the world. Only a handful of the nation's most powerful civil servants are aware of its existence; the rest were convinced by Churchill's ruse in 1946, when he publicly denounced the unit and appeared to have it shut down.

LN-7 was the brainchild of Nathan Obliette, a little-known minister who became interested in the paranormal in the late 1890s and was greatly influenced by the SPR. Obliette, a believer in the society's claims, began a long struggle to convince his fellow politicians that there was a need for a psychical research facility within the government. Eventually, his campaigning came to the attention of those who felt Obliette's case had merit—even if only to investigate the activities of the plethora of mystical societies emerging at the time. Based in the Old Admiralty Building under the auspices of the Defense Intelligence Staff, Obliette's team went to work investigating the rising paranormal events of that decade.

However, it wasn't until 1934 that the team gained the information that would change the course of its future. Since 1918, Obliette had been trying in vain to recruit the legendary Alestair Crowley, but the anti-establishment magician would have no dealings with "gray men and lickspittles." In 1934, Crowley was declared bankrupt and suddenly became more receptive to Obliette's overtures. Obliette, now an old man, had done his work well, and his branch had accrued a great wealth of occult lore. Obliette had also become an accomplished expert on magic and the occult and, despite himself, Crowley was impressed; so impressed that he revealed one of his greatest secrets: the location of the Black Book, or Librum Niger. Obliette died at the end of the war, and Crowley followed him into the great beyond two years later. By that time the team had recovered the Librum Niger from its ancient resting place and had begun the long and painstaking process of unravelling its secrets. At that time, the department began calling itself LN-7, a name that referred to the eponymous grimoire and the number of investigators on the team.

Towards the end of the Second World War, LN-7 came under fierce scrutiny by politicians who wanted to know what this covert group was doing with taxpayers' money. Fortunately, Prime Minister Churchill was convinced of the need for the group. The wily old politician made a show of closing the group down, while in reality giving them complete autonomy. Unfortunately, hav-

ing been wiped from the records, LN-7 no longer had a budget or base of operations and was left to fend for itself.

The post-war years were tough for LN-7, which operated as a ghost in the machine. They built a wide-ranging network that allowed them to siphon enough cash from other departments' budgets to continue to operate. By the 1960s, thanks in part to the classic espionage skills of its members, it had acquired a portfolio most multinational conglomerates would envy.

In the 1990s, one of LN-7's mystics predicted something she called a level 1 metaphysical event. While unsure what exactly that would be, the leaders of LN-7 took a gamble and made preparations. Part of these preparations was to form more active units to deal with the inevitable manifestations of magic. These included a crack unit of covert, armed soldiers (called cyphers) fully briefed for the likely manifestations of magic, as well as an experimental corps of magic adepts trained for combat and work in the field (called Thelema). Their success would not be gauged for several years.

The current director of LN-7, the eighth since Obliette, is an ex-SAS captain called Philip Miskin. Under Miskin's directorship, LN-7 is facing the biggest challenge of its existence, and he is concerned about the organization's capacity to cope. The Thelema have proven to be a great success—bar those who tried to channel forces beyond their skill and instead ended up increasing the statistic for spontaneous human combustion. Despite their effectiveness, Miskin feels that LN-7 is out-gunned, out-numbered, and out-classed. Of course, he doesn't reveal such concerns to his men. They need all the support they can get when out in the field, facing abominations created by taint and power-mad magicians alike.

LN-7 has a number of other resources at its disposal. While the Thelema and cyphers are dedicated resources, LN-7 has links to almost every other military and secret service, as well as Scotland Yard. LN-7 can field crack troops from the Special Branch, covert operatives from the British Secret Service, and special operations law enforcement officers. If the director were to pull in all his favors, he could also mobilize sizeable forces from any of the military services.

The directors of LN-7 have always faced a moral dilemma: The department is the self-appointed guardian of the nation, protecting it from forces beyond the understanding of the common people, yet it is utterly undemocratic, being neither elected nor answerable to the electorate. Some would say it acts with utter arrogance, making unilateral decisions about what the people and their elected government should know about matters that have far-reaching implications for their lives, and perhaps the future of humankind. Perhaps it was this moral quandary that prompted Alfred Pearson, the sixth director of LN-7, to hand over ultimate control of the department to a group of senior officials in the civil service. Unbeknownst to Pearson, those civil ser-

vants were also high-ranking Freemasons, and he had accidentally handed them LN-7 on a platter. Pearson must have quickly realized his mistake, as he then set about making it almost impossible for the civil servants to access LN-7, except through him. The Freemasons, keen to keep LN-7 within their grasp, and being far too subtle for a direct attack, went along with the director's wishes; they had long played the waiting game. Today, the Freemasons who have inherited their predecessors' connections keep a close eye on LN-7, trying to influence its activities through the director. However, Miskin is suspicious of the Whitehall officials, and although he does not yet realize the involvement of the Freemasons, he wants to keep the civil servants out of his department's affairs. Like Pearson, he is the only person the officials see, and he is frugal with the information he divulges, much to their annoyance.

Operations currently at the top of LN-7's priority list include Project Black Death, which is tasked with locating the source of the Weeping Death pathogen and developing a cure or vaccine for this frightening disease. To this end, LN-7 has enlisted the help of trusted medical researchers from several hospital labs, as well as the Society for Psychical Research, headed up by the infamous Lyddia Cole. Project Ground Zero is another on-going mission, its goal being to discover the identity and location of the individuals or organization that brought about the repair of the metaphysical realm in 2001.

CYPHERS

The official line on cyphers is that they are covert, armed, tactical response military units employed in anti-terrorist activities. However, cyphers are actually members of LN-7, trained to deal with the rising threat of magic and supernatural forces, and any bloke that sees them marching past on the Tube toward a strange green glow knows that it's not likely a suicide bomber they're going after. The men and women that become cyphers are often recruited from within Special Branch or other elite government agencies. They are trained to combat foes of a supernatural origin and those who employ occult forces. Cypher teams are often led by a Thelema adept, who provides magical backup.

THELEMA

The Thelema are magical adepts trained in combat and covert operations techniques. They are LN-7's chief field operatives, and typically work alone when undercover or in pairs when conducting a paranormal investigation. As their missions have become increasingly dangerous, they've lately been given squads of cypher support troops for backup on nearly all investigations.

The Thelema were the idea of Philip Miskin, and their creation was somewhat of a gamble; occurring at a time before magic had returned to the world, it was unknown if their magical training would be a complete waste of time and money. There were a number of fatalities among their ranks before they even entered the field, many of them a result of failing to control magical

energies that were beyond their ability and experience. It has been a steep learning curve since then, particularly against the backdrop of the rising tide of magic and its multitudinous manifestations, but their mastery of the art is now rarely rivaled by modern magicians. The term "thelema" was coined by the infamous Alestair Crowley in the early 1900s. However, in many ways the Thelema of LN-7 are the antitheses of Crowley's beliefs; he defined the word as meaning "free will," and the role of the Thelema as co-conspirators in a plot to control the use of magic (even if that plot is justified by some notion of protecting the common good) is at odds with the tenets of Crowley's philosophy.

DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE STAFF

The Defense Intelligence Staff (DIS) is a key component of British Intelligence. Its headquarters are located in the Old War Office Building on Whitehall, from where it provides intelligence assessments of global defense and strategic warning on threats to the nation. To this end, DIS draws upon classified information provided by the other arms of British Intelligence.

The head of the DIS is a serving three-star military officer who may be drawn from the British Army, Royal Air Force, or Royal Navy. He officially reports to the Chief of the Defense Staff, but also has an unseen peer with whom he consults: the Director of LN-7, who also has offices in the Old War Office Building. LN-7 relies heavily on the DIS as its interface with the other Secret Services and the military.

SIDEBAR 4-7

THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD

As karma pools once more in the world, the creatures of magic have begun to return as well. Primordial spirits of the land, sea, and air coalesce in the city, giving voice to both delight and rage. The fae have also returned, finding the way between worlds opened once more. They are at turns mystified and delighted by this new world, and are among the most beneficial manifestations of magic. Some have been changed by their dark years in the beyond or their desperate attempts at survival in a mundane world, however, and haunt the shad-



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ows of countryside and city alike, perching in the cracks between the real and the imagined. The shades of the dead have been stirred up by the crackling power that races through the ephemeral world, and manifest at their places of death. Other supernatural entities, which have in the past been called demons or angels, have been summoned by those who know the words that call and bind.

BROTHERHOOD OF CERNUNNOS

In the time when Europe was called Erebea and lay cloaked beneath a vast forest, there lived the people of Cernunnos, the Horned God, a dragon of the mythic age. Cernunnos foresaw the end of the mythic age, and imparted to his people a blessing, one that would allow them to fuse their spirits with the physical forms of wild animals. In this way, the dragon hoped his people might endure the bleak future where magic would no longer exist. Cernunnos's people did survive, but his hope had been misplaced: in the terrible years that followed the cataclysm, they degenerated to the level of the animals to which they had been bonded, and turned on each other until only the strongest remained. Of the survivors, the wolf-folk were the most powerful, and they abandoned themselves to the thrill of the hunt. Once they had slaughtered and devoured Cernunnos's other children, they turned on the tribes of men who dwelt in the surrounding lands. Taking a blasphemous form that amalgamated man and beast, the wolf-men found they could couple with humans, continuing their line. Frightening tales of wolf demons living in the northern forests spread throughout the continent, and the people who would become the Frankish and Germanic tribes gave these areas a wide berth.

At the height of their empire, the Roman legions swept through Europe, conquering all who stood before them. When they heard of wolf demons living in the northern forests, they took it as an affront to their namesake. They used the tale as an excuse to slaughter the native peoples, and did not rest until the lands had been cleansed of the "demonic stain." The Romans paid a bloody price, but appeared to be victorious. In truth, the wolf-men hand long-since faded into fairytales and myth.

In the Dark Ages the blood of the wolf awoke in the veins of their descendants. Called by blood and magic, the wolf people gathered in the northern forests, close to their kingdom of old, and spoke of a sound they had heard, calling from the west. In the misty fens of the Ile de Fedrun, they found that their god had been reborn as the greatest of their kind. Cernunnos, punished for his people's sins, had been recast into the form of a wild and violent lycanthrope whose madness knew no bounds. For a century or more, the Brotherhood of Cernunnos unleashed a fury of bloodletting. Eventually their blood grew weak, so that they could no longer assume the wolf form. Cernunnos's mortal remains were lost some-

where beneath the English Channel, and the descendants of the wolf people drifted out into the world, forgetting their violent heritage.

Since the return of karma, the blood of the wolf has awoken once more, and the mortals who carry it listen to a new call. With powers stronger than ever, they gather under the light of the moon to plan a new kingdom, and dream of finding their fallen god.

FAE

In the mythic age, there existed countless creatures born of karma. Their splendid forms thrilled with the flowing of magic, and their varied shapes reflected their truest natures. In essence, they appeared however they envisioned themselves. In the beginning, these creatures were neither intrinsically good nor evil, but capricious; as wild and elemental as the karma that gave them life. As taint spread like a black, malignant cloud through the world, however, the fae found themselves facing a choice: leave this world in hopes that they might one day return, or remain as predators and monsters, becoming hateful, corrupted creatures, the antithesis of the joyous dreams from which they had come.

Individual fae of both types have awoken from their otherworldly existences or their dreamless torpors at intervals throughout the modern age, perhaps resuscitated where mortal blood was spilled upon their desiccated forms or able to find their way back into this world through portals that had been reactivated by renewed flows of karma. During these periods, they bedeviled humankind, spawning new myths of faeries and monsters, agitating a part of the mortal psyche that had long been quiescent but which had never atrophied. These rebirths and awakenings have always been confusing for the fae, to whom the modern world seems strange and unreal, as though part of a dream. Their pasts, when remembered at all, are like the half-remembered voices of sleep. And when the short-lived events that awake them fade away, the fae also ceased to be, passing into nothingness until magic returns.

THE SEELIE

The fae that first left this world, glimpsed only occasionally by lucky travelers, remained terribly beautiful and otherworldly, and became known as the Seelie. Some Seelie could reenter this world in places that still harbored magic, and wielded great power for a time, when men struggled to escape the primitive barbarism into which they had descended. However, by the time the ice retreated, leaving behind a changed landscape, the Seelie fae of the mythic age had passed beyond knowing, or were irrevocably changed.

One enclave of the Seelie hid themselves away in the hills of Ireland, a blessed place where karma never completely fled. They created powerful circles of stones that harnessed and amplified the residual magic of the land, and by this means persisted in isolation through to the





modern day. These people call themselves the Tuatha an'Toghair, meaning The Chosen People, and they claim that they are the last of the true fae, the only descendants (or perhaps reincarnations) of the proud, mercurial spirits that once sang and laughed in the endless forests of a forgotten age. While not evil, neither are these people goodly. They are simply true to their natures, and those natures are to revel in all things beautiful and natural, and to despise the ugly and the unnatural.

THE UNSEELIE

Those who did not escape with the Seelie at the end of the mythic age were not so lucky as their kin. They became known as the Unseelie. Some of them did eventually find their way out of the world to a realm called Annwn, but it was a dark and dread place, and while they kept their forms, they lost any sense of joy in the world. Others remained in this world or wandered from Annwn when given the chance, and learned to survive in a less savory way: by preying on mortals. The fae had always known that there was power in blood, especially that of humans; what the Unseelie discovered was that it was enough to sustain them, despite magic's passing. Human blood was a nourishing, if crude and somewhat paltry, source of karmic sustenance. These creatures became habitual blood drinkers, and were cursed to a blighted and despicable existence. Such monsters became enshrined in mythology and folklore as redcaps, vampires, and other bloodthirsty demons.

The fae have always taken on shapes according to their perceptions of themselves, and those forms are easily influenced by the nuances of karma or taint. The Unseelie who remained in the world or found their way out of Annwn suffered from the lack of karma in the world, and their bodies slowly shriveled and twisted to reflect their torment. Most starved, deprived of both nature's bounty and magic's sustenance. Those became dark, twisted wraiths and tortured spirits, such as the Bean Sidhe (banshees) and the wights that haunt the old places. Those that survived often went insane, driven so by the abhorrent acts they had committed to stay alive.

Thankfully, such creatures were still tied to the feeble flows of karma that occasionally surged along ley lines and places of power. When able, they awoke and haunted the lonely places of the world where karma, ever so faintly, still glittered. In Scotland, tales of the Fírlachóir are still told with dread by the men of the Highlands. Fírlachóir is said to be a black-clad old man who travels the old roads with his black cart, collecting the souls of the dead for his masters. The demonic Ankhral was said to dwell in the terrifying Uaimh na'Fuiltach, the Cave of the Bloodthirsty. In the remote moorlands of Britain, the sluagh stalked travelers in the dark; they were described as hairless, emaciated old men with long wiry limbs and fingers, sharp teeth and claws, and whose prehensile tongues are tipped with a hollow fang for drinking blood.

However, even their merciless predations were insufficient to sustain the Unseelie. The last fragile nimbi of magic, clinging to the world as tenuously as a whisper, faded. Men hastened this dissolution with the rediscovery of civilization and the reclamation of once-sacred areas of wilderness. By the time man began to record his history once more, the spirits, monsters, and faerie folk had faded from the world, dissipated into the ephemeral realm from which they had once been dreamed.

THE KINGDOM OF THE SLUAGH

The sluagh are perhaps the most degenerate of the Unseelie fae; their gray-skinned, misshapen bodies are painful to look at, and they clothe themselves in scraps of cloth that do little to hide their mutated forms. The sluagh dwell in the toxic brownfields of the demolished Thamesmead industrial estate in southeast London. They have gathered about the old Beam Engine House, where a vile primordial being of air has taken up residence in the massive steam powered engines left over from Victorian times. A bloated, corrupt fae called Jutul leads the weak-willed sluagh in dark rites of sacrifice to the demonic spirit in the machine. The sluagh range through the city's sewer system, kidnapping victims and carrying them back to their realm of tunnels beneath the rubble of Thamesmead.

The sluagh have manifested at other times in history, and the Irish believed they were the spirits of dead sin-

ners, come back to haunt the living. In truth, they were once childlike, playful fae who had been starved of their life force and forced to subsist on blood and on the small creatures that crawl beneath the earth. While more pathetic and desperate than maliciously evil, the sluagh are vindictive and spiteful. They are driven by a gnawing hunger so powerful that the scent of blood can send them into a feeding frenzy. It is not known how they reproduce, if indeed they do, but their numbers seem to swell each day, and it cannot be long before their presence in the industrial wasteland is noticed.

THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

For a few heady years, the punk movement of the late 1970s swept the discontented youth of Britain into a maelstrom of self-absorbed, anarchistic rebellion. To paraphrase the singer Johnny Rotten, "anger was an energy." At its height, punk rock was a vibrant, dissonant force that attracted malcontents like rats to a corpse. Punks rejected the music of their time, reviling it as pretentious and commercialized and maligning its artists as the soulless puppets of the music industry and the establishment. Punk rock emphasized simplicity of musical structure, and its lyrics were confrontational, aggressive, and designed to shock. In the seedy clubs and pubs of London, punk bands sprang up in profusion. Legends like The Clash, The Sex Pistols and The Bromley Contingent proved Johnny right: anger was an energy. Nearby, in Highgate Cemetery's moldering tombs, this fulminating rage kindled life within a shriveled heart, long cold.

The punk scene was burning brightly in 1977, the year that an ancient creature walked into the World's End pub. Amongst the sweat and beer, cacophonous music and swirling hormones, this charismatic newcomer looked about in delight. The youth of this man was a trick; he was no youngling mortal, but an immortal Seelie fae, as old as the world. He called himself Joe, and though he bore neither the trappings nor the weaknesses of a traditional vampire, that was what the street people called him. He had little choice but to drink blood, as his Unseelie kin had learned to do, because karma still slumbered; nothing else would sustain him, and he was obviously meant to do something, else he would not have awakened. Karma had not yet returned to the world, but Joe could sense a strange power in the air. The insistent music called to his blood, and he felt a shiver of expectation as a moment of prescience revealed a glimpse of the future; a momentous event was on the horizon.

The fae was not Unseelie, and so not twisted and dark in form. In fact, he was so fetching as to be quickly accepted by the youth of the punk scene. The fact that he liked to bite in bed only made him sexier, in their eyes. But he never killed, at least not intentionally. Like a spoiled child, he used up women and men and left them, drained and sleeping, on their couches, heading back out into the bright sun to experience this strange new world.



Joe could not remain awake for more than a few weeks at a time, and often went back to ground to sleep and wait. As time passed, he became part celebrity, part legend, and the adoring men and women of his entourage began to write him into their wills. Clubs and pubs were dedicated to the ever-youthful bohemian, and bartenders never seemed to feel the need to charge him for his drinks.

In the early years of the third millennium, the raging cries of the antiestablishment punk movement had died to a barely audible whimper. Pierced and tattooed punk rockers were still a common sight on London's streets, but they had ironically become as much a tourist attraction as the bastions of government they profess to hate. The anarchists of old had been gelded, and subsumed by the machine. Then, three years ago, Joe woke once more; as he did so, he tasted karma in the world again. With the interest and awards accrued in his various accounts, Joe decided to inject new life into the dwindling culture by creating his own "kingdom." It would be part landmark, and partly a new home. After all, he was here to stay. He bought World's End and turned it into even more of a landmark cafe, nightclub, eatery, and social venue than ever before; its name may be more prophetic than Joseph knows.

Unbeknownst to him, Joe's feeding on the youth of the London club scene over the decades was not merely a matter of his taking their blood. They received something from him, as well. Whatever happened, it would not reveal itself until the return of karma in 2001. In some, Joe's feeding had quickened the karma within them, awakening long-sleeping powers that had been lost to the human race since the days of Atlantis. In others, it left a hole, a rent in their spirits that taint replaced. The recipients of both effects were quick to come to Joe in search of explanation and guidance.

At first the absent-minded fae was uninterested in taking on such a role, and in fact did not register the existence of his "children" half of the time. But it seemed that the victims of his feeding were not the only ones to have undergone a change. As karma flooded back into London, Joe began to remember his past. He realized that he was once a Daea of the Summer Court of Arcadia, a minor lord of the fae, and a frequent visitor to the island of Atlantis. Upon realizing the nature of his former existence, Joe immediately began to recreate it as best he could.

His manner of doing so reflected, unsurprisingly, the only thing he truly knew in this lifetime: the London music scene. He has become something of a modern day Andy Warhol, making a kingdom for himself and drawing his "children" to his side as his subjects. He half-reverently and half-jokingly calls his minor kingdom

the Velvet Underground. There is little to no organization among the two types of Joe's subjects (the "comely" and the "coarse," as Joe calls them), except that most come from similar walks of life and the same social circle, extended though it may be over several decades of trends and music tastes.

Some of the lucky ones, the comely, style themselves vigilantes and heroes, at least until they get lazy or bored or realize how dangerous and nasty the street can be. The others, the coarse, veer between unpredictable thugs to man-eating monsters, depending on a combination of how much Joe fed on them over the years and their own tendencies toward darkness and violence. Regardless of the composition of the dysfunctional family or Joe's desires for empire-building, the group cannot sustain itself indefinitely. With karma's return, Joe no longer needs to suckle on the blood of young men and women, who have come to relish the high the experience grants even more than the social status that

being part of his entourage brings. Both the comelies and the coarse are beginning to feel angry and rejected, and have begun to act out in dangerous ways. The coarse currently outnumber the comely, simply because their powers tend to be more predatory and they act with more self-interest; early heroism and naivete brought the comelies' numbers down.

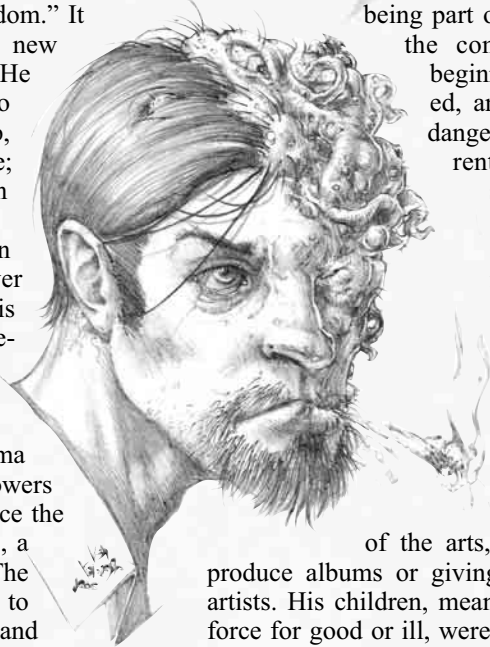
Joe is unsure how to proceed with his power, other than continuing to attract the artistic and the rebellious to his club. He has begun to dally as a patron

of the arts, as well, helping musicians

produce albums or giving studio space to struggling artists. His children, meanwhile, could be an effective force for good or ill, were their creator be interested in choosing a side; even so, the coarse and the comely would be unlikely to work together. Joe himself refuses to engage in talk of battles; any mention of war or an extended fight, even a figurative one, makes him vaguely ill, for reasons he does not understand. In fact, he was pressed into service to help defend Ludd's Dun during the attack of the Milesians, and was trapped beneath the ground there by a human sorcerer. London, and the Highgate Cemetery specifically, eventually built up around his sleeping form, until his ancient body was unearthed with countless others when the Cemetery staff dug up and relocated one of the section's bodies.

THE WILD HUNT

During the autumn and winter months, when the sky is leaden and the wind blows chill, Londoners would do best to stay inside at night and lock their doors. On such nights, when the moon slips in and out of dark clouds





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and shadows gather in the west, the Wild Hunt rides the nighttime sky again.

The Hunt was said to be a spectral host of riders and hounds that swept down from the tops of the trees and terrorized the mortals it crossed. It is present in legends and folktales throughout western and northern Europe, but modern sightings have thus far been limited to the British Isles. The host was always led by a black rider, often headless, and accompanied by huge, black ghostly hounds—the *cwm annwn*, or hell hounds. Sometimes the host was joined by the ghosts of mortal men, and some believed that the Wild Hunt rode out of the underworld to collect the souls of dead sinners. Other reports suggested that the host was indiscriminate in the terror and death it left in its wake, riding down the evil and the innocent alike.

In modern London, the only truth is that the Wild Hunt is unpredictable. It is comprised of the spirits of Unseelie Sidhe, the Daea and their subjects who fled to Annwn at the end of the mythic age and were lost in its shadowed halls for eternity. With the return of magic, the gates of Annwn have opened once more and the Unseelie who were lost are emerging into the world again. The Wild Hunt is a manifestation of the spirits of the lost, spirits who endeavor to draw enough magic to themselves to return to the living world.

The Wild Hunt accomplishes this by drawing karma to itself, leeching magic from the people and places it passes on its nocturnal rides. The first sign of its coming is always the baying of the ghostly fae hounds and perhaps a rustling in the trees above. When a mortal hears these sounds, he would be wise to fall to the ground and cover his ears. Any being—whether natural or supernatural—who hears the Wild Hunt loses 1d6 points of karma; any mortal who sees the Wild Hunt loses 2d6 points of karma; any mortal who comes into physical contact with the host loses 3d6 points of karma. Mortals can never lose more karma than they currently possess, but scions can—with the usual consequences of invoking taint (see page 46). This may account for the Hunt's reputation in myth as a harbinger of ill fortune.

The Wild Hunt also draws karma from karmic areas, but not enough to affect the karma rating of the areas they pass through. The process does have an effect on the Hunt, however. The more karmic areas the host rides through, and the stronger those areas are, the more that benevolent magic is imprinted on the Wild Hunt. On especially fortuitous nights, the Hunt may appear as a shining host that aids and bestows favor on those it passes. Unfortunately, the Wild Hunt can draw magic from tainted places and beings just as easily. On nights when the host becomes swollen with tainted magic, it takes on a fearsome and terrible aspect and leaves death and despair in its wake.

The Wild Hunt is often led by Bran, a Daea prince who was slain at the end of the mythic age. It is said that Bran's head is buried under a hill near London and that Britain shall never die so long as it remains undisturbed.

Many believe that Bran leads the Wild Hunt on its nighttime sojourns in search of his head, and that great fortune would come to any who aided him in recovering it.

THOSE WHO DWELL BELOW

The Great Enemy, the Dwellers, the Oqalay'ta, the Deep Terrors, Siths, Firbolg, Those Who Dwell Below: these are a few of the names for the shapeless, insidious evil that has slithered beneath the earth since mankind's first tentative steps upon it. Just as countless cultures make reference to divine or powerful beings that came from the skies above, there is another nearly universal myth among mankind: that of the ones who live beneath us, of Those Who Dwell Below.

To understand the darkness that is the Dwellers, one must understand the changing of the ages since the world began. The Atlanteans describe the world as going through some sort of transition or change every 25,800 years; coincidence or not, that is also the amount of time that modern astronomers say the earth requires to “wobble” significantly on its axis. The Atlanteans refer to each of these spans of time as a Sun. The passing of one Sun and the beginning of another was thought to have been accompanied by any of several types of cataclysm, whether fire, flood, or something as dramatic and esoteric as the reversal of the earth's magnetic poles. Needless to say, most of the life on earth would have been destroyed by the climactic upheaval these changes caused. But what if one life form survived? A race that would seem utterly alien to the modern definition of life; one that would seem both more primitive and yet more advanced than even dragons, titans, or fae? If anything fits that definition, it would be the morphic, amoebic Dwellers.

In an earlier time, the Dwellers had forms that might have been considered beautiful. They could become whatever they believed themselves to be, and took on shapes both graceful and natural. As one of the Suns ended and a new one began, however, the rigors of the changing world affected them. First the sky was burned away by fire and they were left exposed to the rays of the sun, which tasted acrid on their smooth and thin flesh. Then the world reversed its spin, and it ruptured their very beings. They lost their ability to retain their shapes for long; they began to leak and melt like thawing ice until their once-beautiful forms degraded into alien and almost liquid bodies. Finally they sought safety in the yawning abysses beneath the earth, in an ancient place called Catham. This was a subterranean city built by the Dwellers in preparation for the ending of the first age, when they were yet aware and whole. By this time its halls were barren and its storehouses empty. They gathered there to hide from the stink of the sun and let their tired forms collapse into a natural amoebic state, pooling in a collective mass in the center of their ancient home. They would lie there, helpless, for untold eons, their consciousnesses intermixing.



As the karmic races arose to life in the next Sun, the Dwellers reawakened. They recoiled from the taste of karma, however; they were no longer creatures of light and life. Instead, they favored the soothing, cloying embrace of taint, and pulled on its corruption to become mobile and aware once more. One by one they left the tainted mass of their collective hive, and as they emerged took on the forms of beasts terrible and unique, each one shaped from shards of the dreams and nightmares of the ancient race. These forms were as efficient as they were horrific: they bore tentacles and claws to pull the bulk of the creatures through lightless caverns, countless eyes and orifices to see and prey upon the primitive life that made its homes in the tunnels, and a gray, putrid skin with an unnatural sheen. This oozed a viscous slime that hardened into a defensive carapace when needed, melted back into liquid to assist the creature's squeezing through narrow openings or allow it to cling to cavern walls, or even took on corrosive properties when needed to eat through rock or flesh.

The Dwellers found the new world to be overflowing with karma and light, both of which were baleful to them, and resolved to return it to the primitive, darkened state they remembered. Their early encounters with mankind and with the karmic races were disastrous; primitive humans saw them as demons and monsters and assaulted them with flame, while the mighty dragons and titans united in the early days of the mythic age to drive the aggressive Dwellers back underground. One by one, the parts of that collective entity returned to Catham, dragging some captives with them, and it began to whisper foully to itself of hate and revenge.

It was then that the Dwellers discovered that their forms were not only malleable, but could mimic others' shapes. All that was necessary for any of the individual Dwellers to attain a shape was for that creature to have been brought, living, to Catham, and there immersed in the living lake and fed upon by its many minds. That creature was kept alive, eternally, in a dark form of half-life, constantly aware and in agony and, worst of all, in terrible fear. Never for a moment are those trapped in the lake alleviated of the terror of the Great Enemy. Many folklore tales of doppelgangers, ghosts, and other strange sightings of people where they should not be, hundreds of miles from their homes or years after their deaths, were simply sadistic "tests" by the Dwellers who had captured unfortunate victims and taken on their forms.

This ability to walk unseen among the other races was the Dwellers' greatest weapon. Rather than fight the stronger titans and dragons again, they chose the race of man as their seeds of taint, as the unwitting servants that would complete their plan to make all the world their home. One day they would drown every living creature in the dark lake below, becoming and controlling anyone and anything that they wished. They infiltrated the kingdoms of mankind, using the dragons' gift of magic to breed taint. They offered power from their collective mind to those who would bind themselves to them and

give of their life forces, in return making those mortals powerful but also susceptible to the madness of taint. They were there with the Kurgans when they crossed the plains to Erebea, and they came through the earth to whisper promises to the Qeztlan slaves that were subjugated by the Atlantean imperialists. They took the form of giants and mated with the titans of Jotunheim, creating the powerful, warlike spawn called Fomorians, and they lured broods of dragons into the depths, trapping them with taint and driving them mad.

They hoped that the magi of the mythic age would be foolish enough to continue casting spells beyond their means, spreading taint in ever-increasing boundaries. At

THE DWELLERS IN MYTH

Subterranean creatures exist in many tales and myths, even those stories being created in the modern age today by the crackpots and the outsiders of society. Modern psychologists claim that it's a shared racial memory. Anthropologists suggest that it's something all human cultures latch on to, as the space beneath the earth is necessarily mysterious yet venerated. Both are reasonable ideas . . . and both are wrong.

References to an advanced subterranean race is ubiquitous among human cultures because the Dwellers are, or at least were, also ubiquitous among human cultures. They were the race described by the Christian Bible's *Book of Jubilees* as being banished to the depths of the earth and bound there by angelic servants of God. They were the beings that early Africans, Australians, and Pacific Islanders thought of as their ancestors, coming up from the earth and "making many tribes," then returning to the earth. They were the creatures that Scottish farmers described to 17th century scholar Reverend Kirk in his studies of subterranean and supernatural beings. They were the Agharti of Central Asia, the inspiration for Grendel and his Hell-mother in the first modern written literature of the human race, and their memory persisted even recently in the form of the outlandish Dero of the Shaver conspiracy of the 1960s.

Why would the Dwellers be so seemingly pacifistic? Why would they be seen as a "source people" or as ancient fathers? Throughout the end of the mythic age, knowing that their time was short, these otherworldly beings saved many of mankind, and kept them safe through the long winter in the depths of the earth. Yet they are not a benign race, and bear no love for humankind. They kept humans not as children to be guided or as brothers upon whom to bestow mercy.

They kept them as cattle.

SIDEBAR 4-8

times they even went out of their way to remove dangerous tainted supernatural creatures from the realms of mankind, so that no correlation would be made between spellcasting and the effects of taint on non-human races. These actions spawned the false tales that survive even today in Central Asia, of the “holy people below” who supposedly protected and guided mankind. Religious zealotry and martial religious doctrine were among the heritages they bequeathed to mankind as well, as the more destruction there was of the world’s peaceful cults and religions, the less likely humans would be to nurture karma and repair the taint that had already been caused. They reveled in the tainting of dragons, as their rampages drove humans to greater magical lengths to defend themselves, compounding taint itself.

But the magi were more foolish than even the Dwellers suspected, or more desperate. In the last days of the mythic age, a cabal of sorcerers from the many cultures and kingdoms of man performed a final mighty ritual. Its goal may have been to protect their world from the now-mad dragons and the rampaging titans who had thundered down from the north. Or perhaps it was to steal the life-force, the karma, away from those races of power. Whether the dragons or titans caused the ritual to go awry by interrupting it, or the Dwellers altered the ritual’s effects, or the humans simply reached beyond their own means and lost control, none are left alive to say. Regardless, the ritual ripped a hole through which both karma and taint began to drain in a horrific vortex, causing the cataclysm of fire and flood that ended the mythic age.

Magic, and that which quickened both karmic and tainted races alike, began to fail. As the oceans rose over the land and fire rained from the sky, some humans sought refuge in the mountains or in the magical realms that their sorcerers had prepared for them. Others attempted to wait out the floods and the cataclysms at sea, surviving in huge flotillas of vessels. Eventually those survivors found land and prepared to wait out the long cold winter that would follow, barely living beneath the ice and glaciers. There were fearfully few of them, however. Far more humans survived by a darker means.

The Great Enemy, seeing their end approaching and knowing that in this new world there could be no awakening without the power of humans to bring karma (and therefore taint) to the world, dragged whole peoples down into the deeps with them, sustaining the races through the dark ages of the ice. When the cold had passed and the world was ready for human habitation once more, something flickered in the mindless walls of stone-like, amoebic flesh that sealed off the warrens below from the sun and air above. The collective mind of the Dwellers moved aside the pieces of its body that kept the races of mankind below, and let them climb up into the light once more.

But humanity did not survive those dark centuries without cost. Only the Dwellers know what nightmares

they have planted in the collective human consciousness, what primitive switch they have placed in the minds of mankind that will be thrown at the Great Enemy’s whim, what unknown shapes have been bred beneath the skins of the men and women that walk, intrigued and ambitious, in the world of reawakening magic above.

In the modern age, the noise of technology and media and the demands on Londoners’ attentions have grown steadily over the last century. These distractions have masked the return of a sound unheard for an age. Those Who Dwell Below are stirring once more, this time ascending to full consciousness, and the chthonic sound of their awakening is like the buzzing of angry bees, acting at a subliminal level to invade the dreams of the unbalanced and the desperate. As on the previous occasions that the Dwellers have intervened in the affairs of men, they have infiltrated and established several organizations and cults. The most notable of these is the Invisible Basilica, the vehicle of their return to the world and, accidentally but thankfully, that of the scions as well.

More worrying than the self-important secret societies they sponsor are the Dwellers’ activities as the Grey Gentlemen, vague unnoticed forms that walk among men in their sprawling city. They have infiltrated all strata of London government and business, laying down secret plans and compromising key individuals, subverting them to their cause. The Machiavellian plots they sow will undoubtedly be revealed in time, but for now, their mere presence has cast a shadow of fear across the city whose source can’t be seen. Shared nightmares abound among the populace and those already close to madness leap gleefully over the edge.

TAINT SEEKERS

The term “taint seeker” defines a multitude of unwise individuals. Usually it refers to one who has been touched by taint and gains an unholy lust for more contact with the vile corruption. Sadistic cults, insane sorcerers, drug addicts whose chemical-induced journeys have taken them into dangerous territory, and Thelema agents fallen from the pure path are all examples of those who actively seek out taint to wallow in its viscous evil and allow its corruption to fill their souls and release the beast within.

The Dwellers and other unnatural creatures seek out those who embrace taint, for these are the perfect servants for their cause; namely, to defile the spiritual realm, turning karma into taint. Beyond serving these masters, taint seekers are rarely interconnected; chaos is the state to which they tend, and this disinclines them from structure or organization. Some flirt with taint as the ultimate recreational drug, while others use it to tap dark powers that would otherwise be beyond their reach. Regardless of their desires, all taint seekers must first be bound to a powerful, tainted creature. Such binding comes at the cost of the degradation of one’s health or spirit, but may also have future repercussions that only

the master in the deal knows about. Of course, the longer taint seekers submit to the effects of taint, the harder it is for them to regain control of themselves. Eventually, they devolve into gibbering monsters, insane but dangerously powerful. The line between hedonistic power and self-destruction is a fine one, but strangely alluring to some. A few cross the line and become taint-taken, consumed by taint but no longer affected by the insanity and crippling effects of being tainted-tempted. However, such power comes at the cost of the last vestiges of humanity.

PRIMORDIALS

Primordials are the consciousness of place, the embodiment of the physical and spiritual energies of air, earth, fire, and water. They are raw elemental forces given will. In the modern age, man has both venerated these forces and poisoned them. In London, several greater primordial spirits have endured through the ages, fitfully slumbering while man defiled their physical forms or attempted to placate them through ritual and worship. The return of karma has quickened these entities, calling them back from the abyss of unknowing.

THE DARK ONE

The Thames is the largest river in Britain, and as it draws near the sea, fed by countless rivers and streams, it becomes a tidal estuary. The Celts called this river An Thame, meaning the Dark One, for reasons no longer known. Its banks are home to many villages, towns, and cities; through the centuries, all have polluted the river's water, whether egregiously or not, but among them London has had the most impact. In the absence of karma, the primordial spirit known as the Dark One had lain dormant, unable to counteract the poison that ravaged its physical form. As karma returned, the lesser primordia—fragments of the larger being's form—have begun to awake. Most of these benign beings attempt to cleanse the water, and may befriend those who help them. Children north of London tell their parents of their

“new friends” that live in the river, and the simple fishermen who dare to eat the fish from the Thames seem to have more lucky days than they can remember ever having had before. Young men wander by the river's shores in hopes of meeting one of the elusive, beautiful young girls, dressed in willowy clothes or not at all, who their friends claim to have spotted swimming at the water's edge.

The Dark One itself has been overwhelmed, however, and has lately come to full awareness of the level of sewage, waste, and chemical bile that has been poured into its body. Its consciousness has slipped into the lightless hole known as the Black Deep. From this festering abyss, the elemental sends forth rogue primordia to wreak havoc along the southern stretches of the river, starting at the London docks.

Those who use the river for industrial purposes have reported strange occurrences: dark shapes moving swiftly beneath the water, sudden storms and high waves rising from nowhere, and dangerous vortexes that can suck a small boat under. The river in central London and points south has become a frightening place, cruel and capricious, and many river workers are leaving their jobs in fear for their lives. The official line is that freak weather patterns caused by global warming are responsible for these strange phenomena; the river community isn't convinced.

ERCE

Vaster than even the Dark One, the primordials of the earth are myriad consciousnesses that slumber ponderously within the rock and soil of the land. The

Goddess (as these primordials are often referred to in their collective) is benign to those who respect her body, but terrible in her anger when defiled. In the area now occupied by London, the largest primordial is an entity called Erce. Her name is Saxon, and those fair-haired people worshipped her. So did those who came before them, and they called her by names such as Danae and Dannan. However, since Christianity came to Britain's shores, the old ways have been all but abandoned. Erce is a forgotten name. As she slowly awakens, Erce gives



life to a variety of organisms, ranging from stone guardians in the shape of men to pallid, motile slime clinging to the tunnels of the Underground. These creatures alternately attack, ignore, and assist those who encounter them, seemingly without reason or predictability.

THE UNSEEN HOST

For the first half of the 20th century, London was plagued by pea-soupers, vile smogs that contributed to the deaths of thousands of Londoners each year. The Clean Air Acts of 1956 and 1965 reduced the clouds of soot and smoke, but the pollution is now more insidious: thousands of automobiles clog the city's roads each day, spewing forth sulfur and invisible carbon monoxide, and the city's industries belch poisons of other sorts into the skies. Not unlike the weather itself, the primordial spirits of London's skies are mercurial and unpredictable. They are playful and joyous on clear and healthy days, pulling off pedestrians' hats and making rubbish dance in beautiful spirals; on government-declared "health warning" days, when the elderly are instructed to remain indoors and children are told not to play outside due to the level of air pollution, the spirits are likely to be driven into violent, confused rages at the burning particulates that are thrust into their forms.

At best on such days, angered primordial spirits of air roar through the streets as an unseen host, bringing terrible stench and worsening the already unpleasant weather. At worst, especially at night and in the gray light of dawn, strange fogs coalesce, reminiscent of the pea-soupers of the previous century. These malodorous fumes have a life of their own, and pursue lone pedestrians down alleyways, closing in to choke them to death. Small children, among the few in London to look above the pavement, cower in terror as their innocent eyes see the truth in the clouds: monstrous faces that glower with hate at the inhabitants of the city that have caused them such pain.



SCIONS

The scions of FIREBORN are by necessity central to the modern age of any campaign. There are a number of different ways in which both PC and NPC scions could be incorporated into the setting. Sidebar 4-7 sets out three alternative scenarios for doing so.

SHADES

Shades are the coalesced will of mortal beings that have died; in other words, ghosts. Where the will of such an entity persists, it can shape the flows of karma and manifest in the physical world for good or ill, or for some other, unknowable purpose. As magic builds in the modern age, shades have returned to the physical realm in great numbers; in a city such as London, where great and terrible acts were perpetrated on a daily basis at various times in its history, the shades of the dead have ample reason to remain, tethered by pride, hate, or regret.

THE WEeping DEATH

Some say that karma can awaken even the smallest of natural forces, creating living creatures as the embodiment or manifestation of an ideal. Such may be the case with *Staphylococcus Aureus*; if it is, God help the human race. These magically empowered microbes work a hideous change within those they infect. Coating the host's skeletal structure with a black resin film that is both resilient and con-

tractile, and exuding a toxin that causes the surrounding tissue to rupture, the bacteria transform the host into an ambulatory, suppurating corpse that is resistant to most forms of physical and chemical trauma. The host is given superhuman strength by these chemical effects, and the primitive awareness of the bacterial colony directs it to do one thing only: kill the living.

The first case of the disease occurred not long after the return of magic. It was quickly brought under control by Special Branch, and LN-7 became involved and

SCIONS IN MODERN LONDON

THE FIREBORN AWAKEN

Dispersed, confused, and largely unaware of their true heritage, scions are as yet unknown in the wider world. In London the scions are equally unrevealed, although some of the more astute occult societies may guess at their nature.

Most scions have always felt a strangeness about themselves, a separation between them and other folks. For a few scions, mostly in London and the surrounding area, the reason for this became clear on the eve of the Chinese New Year in 2001; most, however, still have not come to a true understanding of their nature since that time. As karma spreads outward at an ever-increasing rate, more scions awaken. They make their way to London by chance or design, but they are still few in number and vulnerable in a city where menace gathers like a storm.

As the numbers of awakened Fireborn increase, the call of the brood becomes more powerful. An actual brood bonding does not manifest until scions are near (within Trivial range) their broodmates. Most therefore wake to their power alone, while broodmates are in some far-off city. With the song of their blood thrumming in their veins, the fortunate ones gather together, pale and uncertain imitations of the majestic gatherings of old. They gain comfort from one another, a sense of the familiar in a wide and hostile world, but they are few against a tide of darkness and have limited knowledge—if any—of their past, and even less of what the future holds or why they have been reincarnated here and now.

It is likely that the first to discover the scions' existence will be the secret societies and occult organizations that have the greatest understanding of the new supernatural forces moving through their world. There will be groups who regard the scions as a threat to their power, or as a danger to the human race; others will want to manipulate them and take advantage of the potent soul that resides within the scions' relatively weak human shells. The military and LN-7 may hunt the scions. The Gehenna Consortium and Invisible Basilica will mobilize their extensive resources to capture and harness their power. Other groups might seek to ally themselves with, or exploit, the scions.

PROPHECIES OF THE DRAGON

Even those who become aware of the scions are unlikely to know precisely what they are dealing with. The true nature of the scions is not widely known within these hidden circles, and knowledge

of reincarnated dragons is entirely beyond the rest of society's ken.

Several ancient prophecies and obtuse occult texts tell of the return of the Great Ones (this could, of course, equally refer to the dragons or to Those Who Dwell Below). Like most prophecies, they are vague and imprecise, hidden within insane ramblings and esoteric gibberish. As a result, although a number of occult societies and scholars of the arcane are aware that the great beings of the past will return in the modern day, their view of what the beings were and how they will manifest in the modern age is wildly varied. Some believe that the supposed beings are no more than symbolic representations of great power, others that they were literally giant lizards that could breathe fire. Whatever the view, it is one based on superstition and faith rather than knowledge.

The knowledge of what the dragons truly were is known to a very few; the Guardians of Athoth being the notable example. Others have only myth fragments handed down through the long centuries, and their knowledge has unfortunately been corrupted and altered with time. However, there is no doubt that once the truth is revealed, these societies will react with fervor.

SCIONS IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Eventually, scions may awake in greater numbers, and could consolidate their power. The scions might form broods that infiltrate or influence the power structures of the nation, or form powerful (but well known) organizations within the existing government base. If this occurs, scions may even eventually hold positions of great power, and the authorities and various power groups within society would jostle for their favor.

In this stage of a campaign, the scions are as likely to fight corrupted and misguided scions as any other supernatural foe. One scenario might be that a powerful occult group moves quickly to co-opt the fledgling scions. The Children of the Ascendant Flame is a sinister new religious group that believes scions to be the next stage in human evolution; they pursue a doctrine of eugenics frighteningly similar to Hitler's programs. The Children are led by a taint-taken scion whose true masters lurk in the shadows, as they ever have.

effectively quashed rumors of the outbreak before the press got hold of the story. While strange creatures and spells were becoming common knowledge, nobody wanted the riots and panic that the threat of a “zombie horde” was sure to cause, especially in the wake of countless recent films on just that topic. The public was not yet ready, they believed, to see the worst that this new world could create. The body was taken to LN-7’s labs for autopsy and a unit of Thelema was assigned to clean up. The press were given the following statement: “The unfortunate death of a young man, believed to be Michael Daglen, of no fixed abode, at Guy’s Hospital was the consequence of infection by a previously unidentified strain of the flesh-eating bacteria, *Staphylococcus Aureus*. The appropriate authorities are doing all they can to investigate the situation.”

The damage caused to the hospital by the victim, and the firepower required to subdue him, was attributed to a terrorist attack. Although sceptical, the media have met with a wall of silence from the authorities, and witnesses are strangely vague about what they saw. Several other cases have been reported and contained by LN-7 using its cypher units, but the press have the scent now and fear of this new menace has begun to seep into the population at large. The Special Branch, meanwhile, having already made its stance on the issue known and claimed ignorance of any threat to the public at large, is afraid to back down for fear of being eaten alive . . . not by Weeping Death victims, but by the press.

LN-7 managed to trace the source of the Weeping Death to the city’s water supply. Its most important and least glorious task at hand is the constant monitoring, updating, and magical cleansing of the city’s water plants. It has not yet leaked the source of the Weeping Death to the powers that be, for fear that the press would get a hold of it and the public would damage the water works facilities, start caving in wells, or worse. One deranged thelema adept, diagnosed with brain cancer, even deliberately exposed herself to the bacteria in an insane bid for immortality. Fearing similar incidents, it will be a long time before the heads of LN-7 are willing to admit that there’s a way to create the walking dead.

LAY OF THE LAND IN LONDON

From Roman fort to the capital of the biggest empire the world has ever seen, London has always been a place of intermingling cultures, political tension, and a seemingly haphazard mix of architectural styles and chaotic street planning. It encompasses no less than 620

square miles, and is home to over seven million people living on more than 40,000 streets. Unlike most European cities of its age, London has never seen a grand urban remodeling. Even after the Great Fire of 1666 destroyed more than four fifths of the buildings, the city fathers built along the lines of the old medieval settlement. There are few grand sweeping vistas or piazzas. Rather, each street seems to hold some monument or architectural treasure, crowded in amongst buildings of more modest façade. Since 2000, new structures have joined the skyline, like the Millennium Dome—the most expensive tent on earth, and a structure so big that it can be seen from space. Surprisingly, in amongst all these buildings, London is generously provided with open space. This is the legacy of royal hunting grounds that have become public parks and gardens.

GREATER LONDON

Greater London, as the entirety of the metropolis is known, is split into 14 inner boroughs and 19 outer boroughs. Crossing the borough boundaries, London is broadly divided by the points of the compass: West and East, North and South. Such generalizations speak volumes about the area of town, and define both the inhabitants and architecture.

WEST END

The West End contains the main entertainment and shopping areas of the city, and some of the most salubrious addresses in London. To the south it is bordered by St. James’s Park, the Embankment, and Trafalgar Square with its pigeons and crusties. Its northern edge is bordered by the shopping trinity of Oxford, Bond, and Regent’s Street. To the west of the grand swathe of Regent’s Street, Mayfair remains one of the swankiest addresses in London, containing the city’s most luxurious hotels, finest restaurants, and many of the wealthiest residences. Located toward the heart of the city, Covent Garden and Soho spill into one another, a maze of alleyways, courtyards, and side-streets lined with boutiques, cafés, bars, clubs, and theatres. Even in these strange times, this area buzzes by day and night, with people trying to forget the black clouds gathering around them. Leicester Square continues its long history of bawdy entertainment with its cinemas and night-clubs. Coventry Street runs from Leicester Square into Piccadilly with its famous Circus, and farther west, districts such as Knightsbridge, Kensington, and Chelsea are home to those with wealth who have so far weathered the storm.

EAST END

The East End is diametrically opposed to the West End, having a reputation for undesirability and poverty, and justly earning its reputation as “the dark continent beyond Aldgate.” Things haven’t improved any in



recent years. This is the most common home for poor economic migrants. The region has seen its fair share of strife, particularly stemming from poor interracial relations. Large Bengali and Pakistani populations throng in the East End, bringing the colors, sounds, and smells of their cultures to the residential areas and markets of Brick Lane, Columbia Road, and Petticoat Lane. Areas close to the City like Shoreditch, Whitechapel, and Spitalfields saw a brief revival in recent years with a boom in late-night clubs, bars, and restaurants; however, most of them are now on the decline. During the day, the East End displays its working class past for all to see. At night, strange things lurk in the dark shadows of abandoned Victorian warehouses and burnt-out buildings. South of Whitechapel, overlooking the river, the

looming menace of the Tower of London squats upon its hill, as unpopular now as it was when William the Conqueror built it to subdue the inhabitants of London. At its farthest extremity, the East End incorporates Canary Wharf and the Isle of Dogs.

NORTH LONDON

The Euston Road and its snarl of traffic rushing east-west across the city marks the invisible line beyond which North London lies. On its length squat the eponymous Euston and King's Cross/St. Pancras stations, the rail gateways to the rest of the nation. The whole area is seedy and run-down, especially King's Cross, where drugs, prostitution, and gang violence are rife. Attempts

THE WORD ON THE STREET

Throughout this section, you will find sidebars like this one. They are meant to give your players a quick summary of not only what is commonly known about the place being discussed, but also what is heard in whispered rumors on the street.

London is a hard and dangerous place in the 21st century, not least for humans, but also for the scions that have awoken among them. The city of their youth has changed beyond all recognition in the last decade, as have their lives. At first glance, London appears to be the same place, if a bit stranger. But looking in the shadows one can see the cracks—the City of Contrasts has fallen through the looking glass, and life has taken a turn that is as much Brothers’ Grimm as it is Lewis Carroll.

Within the sprawling metropolis, dangers lurk in shadowy alleyways and crumbling Victorian warehouses; these can be dealt with, or avoided. But what sanctuary is there in the daylight, where corruption, both political and supernatural, lies everywhere? Who do you trust in a world suddenly infested by shapechangers and the possessed, where magi work to establish their power and government ministers broker deals with demons?

To a scion, knowledge is the key; the key to survival and the key to solving the puzzle of her modern day incarnation. Perhaps the answer lies hidden in the museums, libraries, private collections, and royal palaces of the city, providing clues to the stories of the past. Or perhaps it is in the people of London, who are a story themselves that is not yet finished being told.

SIDEBAR 4-10

in the late 1990s to inject life back into the area failed when the terminus for the ill-fated Eurostar, which would have connected London with Paris via the Channel Tunnel, never materialized. One of the few redeeming features in this post-industrial wasteland is the state-of-the-art British Library, built on Euston Road as a promise of further renovation to come. That promise was never fulfilled. Beyond the unrelenting squalor of King’s Cross and the blighted charm of Islington lies Camden Town, with its markets and bohemian lifestyle. Once and still the residence of immigrant Irish, Camden has a reputation for hardened drinking and undesirables, but also has the Gaelic spirit for music and the arts; its burgeoning music scene is still thriving in the deepening recession, and its artists have been inspired by recent events. Beyond Camden, Chalk Farm Road carries Camden High Street past the genteel slopes of Primrose Hill onto the social heights of Hampstead town, the vil-

lage of Highgate and Hampstead Heath in between. Hampstead is an oasis for the well-to-do, for artists who make it in Camden, and for minor celebrities. Highgate is famous for its cemetery, which is magical by day and ominous by night. Camden, Hampstead, and Highgate have gained a reputation for the occult in the last few years, with a high level of supernatural activity being reported in the area and several notorious occult organizations making their home there.

SOUTH LONDON

South London is most dramatically demarcated by the Thames on its northern side. It stretches from South City Centre to the Tower Bridge, and includes all points south of them. A fierce rivalry has always existed between north and south in Britain, and London is no exception. North Londoners regard their southern fellows with a certain superiority; they claim that outside the ancient settlements of Southwark, Putney, and Greenwich, there is little of historical interest south of the river. On the other hand, the south Londoners consider themselves less up-tight, and don’t much care what the stropky northerners think; they live life to the fullest, rather than allowing themselves to become slaves to fashion and pretension. South London is a mix of hedonistic night spots and staggering poverty, particularly since the downturn in the economy.

PLACES OF NOTE

The areas below are appropriate settings for your campaign’s narrative and action scenes, or might be chosen by your players as spots they wish to investigate. Each area uses the following format.

NAME

Location: General neighborhood in which the spot is found.

Tube Station: Closest Underground rail stations.

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Summary of the place’s history, as well as mention of any notable historical figures involved with its creation or presence. Also, an overview of the spot’s current appearance and economic or social status.

FORCES AT WORK

This section contains any secret information regarding the area or connections it may have to the supernatural.

THE LONDON UNDERGROUND

Travel within the Big Smoke has always been a nightmare, even with a transport network that is among the most complex and expensive in the world. The fastest way of moving around the city is still the Underground (or Tube, as it's known to the locals). Eleven different subterranean rail lines cross much of the metropolis, although south of the river is patchily covered. The service isn't 24-hour, with the last train just after midnight and the first just before dawn.

Due to the inadequacy of the city's surface transportation systems, the Underground is still as heavily used as it ever was, with hundreds of thousands boarding the Tube cars day. The dreary Victorian tiles, claustrophobic stairs, and crowded escalators echo with the sounds of the trains. It is a picture that, but for the clothes and styles of the people, hasn't changed since the 1800s. However, now people imagine they can hear other things on the subterranean winds. The distinctive smell that comes from tons of dust, derived largely from the shedding of skin, is accompanied by more alien odors. Passengers have glimpsed strange things through the windows in the flickering lights of the hurtling trains, and unexplained breakdowns have become more and more frequent.

It is a well-circulated rumor that there are a number of hidden and lost Underground platforms, the likes of Down Station and platform 6 of Holborn, which were used by government agencies during the World Wars. The rumors suggest that they are back in use, but no one seems to know by whom.

BRITISH LIBRARY

Location: North London

Tube Stations: Euston, King's Cross/St. Pancras

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

The British Library is the national library, and is among the greatest in the world. Spread over 14 floors, five of which lie below ground, the British Library has more than 180 million items in its collection. It houses manuscripts written in most known languages, maps, newspapers and magazines, drawings, prints, music scores, and patents.

FORCES AT WORK

Amongst this stupendous collection are occult and esoteric tomes, such as the *Malleus maleficarum* and the three volumes of the *Demonaltry*. The Society for Psychical Research is known to have a far greater collection on this subject matter, but the British Library is a reasonable starting place and is open to all.

BRITISH MUSEUM

Location: North London

Tube Stations: Tottenham Court Road

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Past iron railings decorated with rampant lions on Great Russell Street, the tall doors of the British Museum's front portico give access to the Great Courtyard. Under a dramatic canopy made up of a latticework of glass panels, the domed Reading Room dominates the center of this space. Inside the Reading Room, once the pride of the British Library (now moved to its new premises at St. Pancras), rows of desks provide space to read the selected volumes still held at the museum. An advanced computer system allows the user to take a virtual tour of the museum, find information on its multitudinous collection, and print images. Four classical porticos lead off the Great Courtyard and into the wings and floors of the museum, which hold several million objects in more than 90 rooms.

Among the bewildering collection of artifacts from ancient times to the modern day are the Rosetta Stone, the contents of the Sumerian "Royal Cemetery" from Ur, and the Greek statues of the Parthenon, known as the Elgin Marbles. The Museum has other premises elsewhere in the city and around the country, including the British Natural History Museum, a country house near Malvern, and catacombs in the Western Mines, near Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire.

FORCES AT WORK

There are rumors that the museum retains hidden facilities in the forgotten Underground stations of Holborn and Aldwych, legacies of the evacuation of artifacts during the First and Second World Wars.

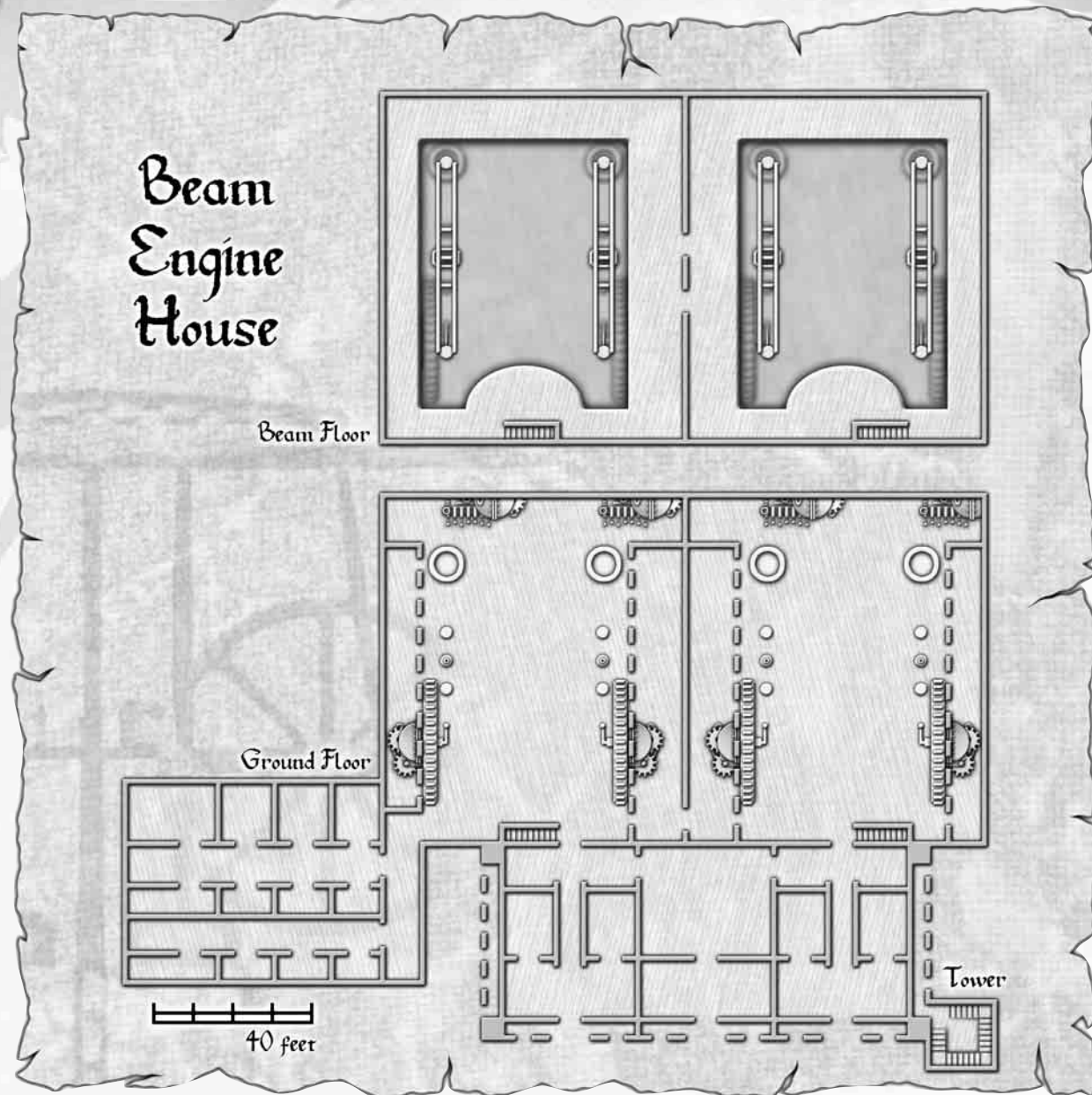
CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE/VICTORIA EMBANKMENT

Location: The City, Westminster

Tube Stations: Embankment

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Supposedly crafted for the Egyptian Pharaoh Thotmes III in 1460 B.C., the obelisk known as Cleopatra's Needle was brought to London from Alexandria to commemorate the British victory over Napoleon. The Needle arrived in England after a horrendous journey by sea in 1878, which legends say was bedeviled by strange occurrences and unnatural weather. Buried beneath Cleopatra's Needle, which stands between the Hungerford and Waterloo bridges upon the



Victoria Embankment, is a time capsule containing artifacts from the late 1800s.

The massive bulk of the Embankment, with its eight-foot-thick granite walls, was built under the direction of Sir Joseph Bazalgette in an amazing feat of engineering during the 1860s. The walls still stalwartly hold back the churning waters of the Thames, protecting both the Circle and District tube line and the labyrinthine expanse of Bazalgette's awesome sewers. The noble plane trees that line this famous thoroughfare between the City and Westminster bow before the wind that howls across the turbulent surface of the river, and beneath the roaring of the air, their creaking sounds eerily like children crying.

CROSSNESS SOUTHERN OUTFALL WORKS

Location: East End
Tube Stations: None

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

By the mid-19th century, the River Thames was choking on the fetid ordure of the millions that lived on its banks, and the city was ravaged by outbreaks of cholera that at their height claimed 2,000 lives per day. In 1858, the stench of the river was so bad that the Prime Minister rushed a bill through that implemented an



ambitious plan for a new sewer system. More than a thousand miles of new sewers, drainage reservoirs, and pumping stations carried the city's effluent to east London, where it was held in storage lagoons before being released into the river on the ebb flow of the tide. In its heyday, huge steam-powered beam engines pumped six tons of raw sewage per stroke through the Outfall Works.

In the 1950s, the old steam engines were abandoned, and waste began to be disposed via a fleet of barges that carried the residual solid waste matter down the Thames estuary and dumped it (four million tons annually) into the aptly named Black Deep. With the advent of the Sludge-Powered Generators at Crossness and Beckton in 1998, the Crossness Southern Outfall Works and the Thamesmead estate in which it was housed was truly forsaken and left to rot.

The Thamesmead area, northwest of Belmarsh prison, was slated for urban renewal, but spiraling governmental debt ensured that this never came about. Nonetheless, the damage was done: compulsory purchases, evictions, and bulldozing had already been carried out, leaving in their wake a desolate landscape of rubble surrounding a toxic brownfield. Seagulls and rats appear to be the only residents now, but amongst the rubble more sinister shapes lurk and prowls.

FORCES AT WORK

A tribe of sluagh have gathered in the Thamesmead area, and dwell in the labyrinth of alleys and tunnels created by the collapsed buildings, their basements, and the creatures' own extended delving. A bloated fae called Jutul rules this kingdom of the warped creatures, sending his minions forth each night to wreak havoc in the slumbering metropolis.

The old Beam Engine House, built in brick with typical Victorian panache, stands like a haunted cathedral at the heart of this apocalyptic vista. Within the decoratively arched Romanesque walls of the Beam Engine House stand four moldering beam engines. Why the Beam Engine House wasn't demolished along with everything else is a mystery, but since the bulldozers and wrecker balls left, a shadowy presence slipped into this dark mausoleum of the steam age. This evil spirit, Vorgga'gtha, has possessed the beam engines, which now thunder and bellow in the night, calling for blood. Jutul and his deformed followers answer the call. They bring Vorgga'gtha blood each month, on the night of a new moon, and worship it as a god. Its metallic body lubricated by blood, and its appetite whetted by souls, the spirit-possessed machine is never sated, and hungers for more.

FLEET STREET

Location: The City

Tube Stations: Temple

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

In the past, the River Fleet was one of London's main waterways, a tidal inlet with busy docks and attendant businesses. When the river became so polluted that its stench was unbearable, it was abandoned and eventually covered over. Now only the name of the street that runs above it gives us a clue to its past. The river still flows below the pavement, but is now part of London's extensive sewers, and through its malodorous waters strange shapes crawl by night, making their way into the heart of the City.

With the river gone, the occupations of the area changed, except for the taverns and inns, brothels and freak shows, which remained behind. Fleet Street is sandwiched by Westminster and the City, the homes of government and finance, respectively. Unsurprisingly, it had become the home of the British Press, whose job it is to comment on both. By the middle of the 20th century, the street was crammed with the offices and print shops of hundreds of periodicals, reporting on everything from the bawdy gossip and rumors of Fleet Street's pubs, to highbrow journalism about the politics of the time. The newspapers' editors became powerful magnates, and it soon became *de rigueur* for crown and government to court the media, seeking to appease or curry favor with the power-bloated editors. The Freemasons, ever on the trail of power, insinuated themselves into the industry and gained invisible control of the nation's great newspapers: the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Times*, whose power to convince and deceive should not be underestimated. The Masons' control of the media was no small contributing factor to their success at remaining hidden through the centuries.

FORCES AT WORK

The British Press is more than a decade gone from Fleet Street. The digital age put paid to the printing press, and the newspapers moved to more efficient premises in Wapping and Canary Wharf. In their wake, international conglomerates and finance houses have moved in. One such is Ziontec Corporation. A holdings company with a number of subsidiary interests that include international finance, telecommunications, and business systems, Ziontec and its subsidiaries are all perfectly legitimate. However, the corporation is completely controlled by the Freemasons (one of the few companies or institutions wholly owned, rather than infiltrated, by these eternal schemers). During recent renovation work, their building's cellars and sub-basements were extended to several secret levels, which contain a number of libraries, sanctums, and summoning



GREY GENTLEMEN

In recent years, stories have been circulating in Fleet Street pubs and private clubs alike of the Grey Gentlemen. In and of themselves these tales don't amount to much; for in truth, little is known of the subject to tell. At the heart of each story is a sense of deep unease, about a group that appears to have infiltrated the city's bastions almost entirely unnoticed. But it is the nature of the Grey Gentlemen themselves that is the focus of most concern. Although never articulated, each tale conveys that there is something ineffably odd about these gray-suited men, who have been reported (but never personally seen, by those telling or listening to the tale) leaving office blocks in Westminster and Smithfield, and standing motionless among the bustling crowds of London's streets. To casual observation, there is nothing extraordinary about these men. They are surely no different from the tens of thousands of similarly attired businessmen that work in the City each day. In fact, it is this very extremity of plainness, their utterly nondescript appearance, that draws the unconscious eye. On closer inspection—a thing that is uncommonly hard to accomplish—one notices a certain indefinable wrongness about them, as though they are not quite comfortable in their skin.

At least that is what the storyteller might say if such concerns could ever be articulated. However, the second commonality of these tales is that the speaker, who only moments before burned with a desperate need to share his sinister tale of conspiracy and intrigue, finds himself frustratingly, inexplicably, with nothing to say. Far from being disappointed or irritated, his listeners invariably fall silent, avoiding each others' eyes for a few moments before continuing with gusto on safer topics like sports teams and the weather.

SIDEBAR 4-II

chambers. Connecting passages to the Tube's network of tunnels were also added. The order has its Grand Temple in this subterranean complex; this is the true heart of their power, as opposed to the sham Freemason's Hall and Grand Temple on Great Queen Street in Covent Garden, which they opened to the public as part of their scheme of overcoming their mysterious reputation.

GREENWICH OBSERVATORY

Location: East End

Tube Stations: None (reached by British Rail mainline stations)

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Home to the Greenwich Meridian (0° longitude) and Greenwich Mean Time, the eponymous town is also associated with the sea. The Royal Naval College stands between the National Maritime Museum and the Thames. Along the riverside moorings are the Cutty Sark, last of the British Empire's tea clippers, and the Gipsy Moth IV, used by Sir Francis Chichester to circumnavigate the globe. Close by to the relics of Britain's sea-faring past is the domed entrance to the eerie Greenwich Footway Tunnel, which leads under the Thames to the Isle of Dogs. The cost to dig the tunnel included the lives of several laborers, and it has always had a haunted and sinister feel; stepping from the stairwell into the poorly lit passage is like entering a dark maw.

A steep walk into Greenwich Park past the National Maritime Museum leads to the Royal Observatory, where in Meridian Court the line between the eastern and western hemispheres lies. The gently rolling hills of the lightly wooded parkland are crisscrossed by numerous pathways and provide spectacular views of the city.

FORCES AT WORK

In recent years, Greenwich Park has been witness to a number of grisly murders, which counters the normally proud and fresh air of the pleasant grounds. Those who believe there is power in the stars have unofficially claimed the place as their own, however, and teams of well-meaning but largely helpless astrologers have begun patrolling the park at night. Northeast of the park lies the decaying mass of the Millennium Dome. Abandoned almost before it was started, the Dome had a troubled birth and was left to rot within a few years of its completion. Now the much vaunted folly hunkers like some spectral mammoth on the banks of the Thames, avoided by the locals and the financiers alike.

HERTFORD HOUSE

Location: Westminster

Tube Stations: Bond Street

DESCRIPTION & HISTORY

Dominating the north side of the tranquilly secluded Manchester Square, the Georgian mansion of Hertford House is home to one of London's more eclectic collected works: the renowned Wallace collection. Famous paintings line the walls, including the likes of Rembrandt's portrait of his son Titus and Halls' *The Laughing Cavalier*, and within the myriad rooms a bewildering mix of fine art, furniture, and medieval armor and weaponry abound. Much of the past lingers there, around artifacts that are perhaps far older than their plaques claim.



HIGHGATE CEMETERY

Location: North London

Tube Stations: Archway

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Highgate Cemetery was a favorite place for burials among the rather morbid Victorians, and abounds with ornate and fanciful gothic tombs. In 1975, the cemetery ceased to be financially viable and the owners closed down the West Cemetery. The East Cemetery continued to operate until 2000, when it too was closed. Now the Cemetery stands forlorn upon its hill, the buildings falling into ruin and the landscape choked with bram-

bles, nettles, and self-sown sycamores. The rusted, pad-locked gates, Gothic arch, and the landscape of crooked, overgrown gravestones beyond are straight from a 19th century horror story, but behind every tale they say there is a kernel of truth.

Within its crypts and tombs, Highgate holds the remains of many famous people, including Karl Marx, Michael Faraday, and William Friese-Greene. Uncounted others lie within its grounds, but not all lie at peace.

FORCES AT WORK

Many shades call Highgate their home and have justifiedly earned the place a reputation for being haunted,

CULT OF THE OCCULT

Once the realm of esoteric scholars and weird but harmless enthusiasts, the occult has become a deadly serious topic. Some of the world's greatest occult societies originated in London in the 1880s, when spiritual theories and magical philosophies bloomed like pale mushrooms in the dark. The 21st century has seen a renaissance in the occult: cabals, cults, and secret societies abound within the city. Some, such as the Kabbalah Centre above the Vidal Sassoon salon on New Bond Street, are undoubtedly fakes purveying phony hope to the gullible rich of Mayfair and Chelsea. On the other side of Piccadilly Circus, the Café de Paris on Coventry Street (once the hedonistic haunt of decadent royalty and their sycophantic cronies) still maintains its exclusive air, but is now frequented by the royalty of the 21st century: minor celebrities and the nouveau riche. Modern-Gothic is the vogue, and these dilettantes play it up for the crowds, posturing as sorcerers and vampires. They wile the night away in a haze of alcohol and chemical stimulants that further their fantasies, but do little for their neurons or their wallets.

For every occult faker, however, there are a dozen that are deadly serious. In Notting Hill, old voodoo practices have seen resurgence in the large Haitian community that has lived there since the 1950s. The benign houngans and mambos (priests and priestesses) and the sinister bokor (sorcerers) beseech the spirits (or Iwa) to protect their people or work dark spells. East and south of Notting Hill, bohemian Camden Town is home to followers of the Wiccan religion. These white witches sell their simple charms and prophetic insights in Camden market, sending their customers upon their way with the simple homily: An it harm none, do what ye will. In the East End, where the skies are darkest, the cults take a more sinister turn. In the old haunts of Jewish sorcerers of Kabbalist and Hassidist tradition, it is rumored that recent murders and disappearances are the result of black magic and evil cults. Some say their rituals have summoned ghoulish beasts, who now crouch among the Victorian sewers and slaver for human blood.

SIDEBAR 4-12

which its Gothic ostentatiousness does little to dispel. Not all of the restless spirits here are tainted or vengeful, however. So long as visitors come in the daytime with the intent to commune with their departed loved ones, they remain unmolested by the more vicious spirits. Some visitors have even reported friendly conversations with spirits as they walked the grounds; whether by design or coincidence, however, a visitor never

seems able to encounter the loved one he has come to pay his respects to. It seems that another spirit or person must always act as an intermediary between the living and their beloved dead, as if to prove that love cannot, after all, conquer all.

HYDE PARK

Location: West End

Tube Stations: Hyde Park Corner, Marble Arch

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Hyde Park covers more than 350 acres of rural landscape. It was once part of the extensive royal hunting grounds that resulted in the preservation of large plots of land from London's inexorable sprawl. It has since become home to walking paths, public plazas, monuments, and memorials. In the last few years, Hyde Park seems to have reverted to its 17th century wildness. During the daylight hours, Hyde Park throngs with tourists, joggers, picnickers, and others seeking a natural retreat from the concrete and steel of modern London. Other denizens, far more ancient and yet recent arrivals in this world, come out to play at night, dancing across the moonkissed grass and frolicking amidst the brooding oaks. These ethereal spirits of the woodland appear as young women untouched by age or sorrow, though their beauty is far too haunting for mortal flesh and blood.

FORCES AT WORK

The nymphs of Hyde Park are primarily of two types: dryads and naiads. The dryads dwell amidst the great oak trees scattered across the park. Each dryad shares an ephemeral bond with one of the trees; some, called hamadryads, actually live within them, melding in and out of their trees as easily as a Londoner might walk through fog. All of them, whether dryads or hamadryads, share the fates of their trees: Should any harm come to a dryad's tree, the same will inevitably befall her as well. The naiads dwell within the great lake of Hyde Park called The Serpentine. They emerge from its crystalline waters at night, moonbeams illuminating the beads of water on their naked skin like a field of radiant stars.

The park has greatly benefited from the presence and attentions of these fae creatures. The trees grow stronger and more full of green vitality; the lake has gained a pristine clarity that makes it shine like a mirror by the light of sun and moon. Flowers blossom where none were planted, and the scents of jasmine and honeysuckle are carried on the soft breezes that caress the park at night. The nymphs themselves have benefited from the attentions of the amorous admirers who gather alone or in small secretive groups to watch and worship, and perhaps to be favored with a kiss or an embrace. Most can-

not even notice the lovely fae, hidden as they are by their powers (see *Unseen*, page 204; for those without the strength of mind to pierce their glamour, there are always glasses enchanted with the Second Sight ritual, which are being sold at a premium to young men and women throughout the city.

Of course, there are darker and more dangerous things that stalk Hyde Park at night. None, however, intrude upon the territory claimed by the nymphs. It is likely that the glamour of the fae is sufficient to protect them, but some who frequent the park at night tell a different story. They speak of a man who dwells in the park and protects the nymphs from harm, though he resorts more often to trickery and deception than martial prowess in defending his charges. In some of these stories, the mysterious figure is not human at all—he is more goat than man. Those who come to watch the dance of the nymphs have begun leaving small gifts of flowers, candy, and liquor at the statue of Peter Pan, and some claim that they have heard the ghostly sounds of the shepherd's pipes drifting on the scented wind.

ISLE OF DOGS

Location: East End

Tube Stations: Canary Wharf, Docklands Light Railway (DLR)

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

During the 19th century this was the site of much industrious enterprise in the guise of the West India Trading Company and the docks to which they brought their goods. The area suffered a decline from the 1960s, only to be regenerated in the 1990s with massive towers of glass and steel, a new business and finance centre for the metropolis. In recent years, Canary Wharf has fallen back into decline, and its offices were being abandoned as fast as they had been built. Today, Canary Wharf and the Isle of Dogs are derelict but for a few businesses tenaciously holding on. West Ferry Print Works is among the only remaining businesses in operation, and the Isle of Dogs is otherwise abandoned—an eerie ghost town of glass and steel that is as grim and depressing in its own way as the post-industrial wastelands elsewhere in Greater London.

FORCES AT WORK

Beneath the underpasses and hanging gardens of Canary Wharf, and among the derelict shells of yuppie apartment blocks and mews housing, strange things skitter between the shadows. Only one species, though, ironically canine, claims lordship of the Isle of Dogs. The Brotherhood of Cernunnos has a chapterhouse there, hidden in the residential streets of Millwall. The howls of these vicious beast men sometimes punctuate the night air, when their bloodlust is high and they have



not yet fed. At these times, the night watchmen who guard the perpetually empty premises of defunct businesses turn up the television and pray for the morning's light. However, they need not fear; the brothers of Cernunnos do not hunt on the Isle of Dogs, not wanting to draw attention to their lair. Instead, they assume human form and use the DLR, which still runs for the benefit of the last surviving businesses and inhabitants of the isle, to access the city. Once within the metropolis, a prodigious hunting ground lies before them, offering as many varied locations as the groaning public transport system opens to bring them. This ability to traverse the city with relative anonymity has made it difficult for the authorities to track them, and the brethren are cautious to leave no trail leading back to their island lair.

The Brotherhood's choice of the Isle of Dogs as a base of operations was not an idle one; in the 1800s a cargo ship from northern France made port in the West India Docks, and was lost shortly thereafter when the ship carrying it sank at berth. The Brotherhood believes that this cargo contained the mummified remains of a corpse found in the marshes of la Grande Briere on the Ile de Fedrun, in northwestern France. The corpse was all that remained of the mortal form of Cernunnos, the brethren's god and a dragon reborn. Posing as a team of archeologists from the University of York, the Brotherhood has been searching for the lost cargo, hav-

ing traced their master to the old West India Docks. They are close to uncovering the vessel, which is almost completely submerged in the mud and silt at the bottom of the dock. When they uncover it, they intend to revive their god and reforge their once glorious empire. What they don't know is that the cargo was dumped overboard by superstitious crewmen who claimed that they heard "slithering and moaning" from within the huge crate. Cernunnos's body actually rests near the Black Deep, just at the southern entrance to the Thames.

If Cernunnos is ever found, he may or may not go along with his followers' plan; when last reincarnated, he was a mad half-beast. Yet, the return of karma for good may bring him in touch with his original self, a noble dragon that was a defender of nature and purity, a being that would look with horror on the actions of his people. This would be a matter of special interest to scions who are the begotten of Cernunnos.

KING'S CROSS

Location: North London

Tube Stations: King's Cross/St. Pancras

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

In the 1820s, Battle Bridge was a squalid shantytown, preyed-upon by highwaymen and dominated by a smallpox hospital and a towering slagheap produced by the local brickworks. The eponymous battle of this place was the conflict at which Queen Boudicca of the Iceni met her end at the hands of Londinium's governor, Suetonius Paulinus, and his Roman legion. Legends claim that Boudicca's body is buried beneath the site where King's Cross Station now stands.

When King's Cross was built, it was the largest railway station the nation had ever seen. It was to be the rail gateway to the north and the east of the country. The area around it was seeded with hotels, restaurants, fine theatres, and coffee houses, all sophisticated establishments in which to while away a few hours prior to boarding the train.

Today, King's Cross has regressed to its early 19th century roots, and is once more a haven for the immoral and the unfortunate. Drug addicts and their pushers, prostitutes and pimps haunt Euston Road, which runs past the front of the station. The back streets of the area are worse: gangs rule in King's Cross, and the last few years have seen a shakeup in the local tribes.

FORCES AT WORK

The Iceni Queen and the Roman commander did not battle here, and any artifacts related to their battle would be potent karmic items. With karma returned once more, perhaps a small residue of the Queen's presence lingers, enough to spark a scion's flashbacks.

Other swirls of power gather about the area in these troubled times. The Crossjacks, under the leadership of

the sinister Bavkakha, have dominated the area since their creation several years ago. Attributed with sorcerous powers, Bavkakha quashed all resistance in a bloody gang-war that culminated in a massacre of the rival gang members in Argyle Square. The raven-crone and her servants now control the flow of drugs, sex, and violence in this derelict quarter (see page 77 for more information on the Crossjacks, and page 183 for further details on the nature of Bavkakha).

MOD MAIN BUILDING

Location: Westminster

Tube Stations: Westminster

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

The MOD Main Building was first proposed in 1909, but was delayed first by the Great War and then by the inter-war depression. Work eventually started in 1938, but the Second World War brought another halt, except for excavation of two underground citadels, which continued until 1942. The old cellars of Whitehall Palace were retained—a concealed door leads from this vault to older catacombs that lay undiscovered during the building work and, hidden still, may contain treasures or lore of great value. By 1951, the north part of the building was ready for the Board of Trade to move in. But all was not as it seemed.

FORCES AT WORK

Above the northern entrance, sculptures by Sir Charles Wheeler depict the incarnations of Earth and Water, and above the south door are matching statues of Fire and Air. These references to the elemental aspects of karma betray the hidden hand of the Freemasons, and the Masonic civil servants who commissioned the building intended it to be their greatest bastion of power. However, in 1964 a requirement for a single large building was created by the merger of the three Service Ministries of the Armed Forces into the Ministry of Defense. The Board of Trade was moved to Victoria and the MOD took occupation of the Main Building (as it was now called). This was a great blow to the Freemasons, whose penetration of the armed forces was relatively weak compared to their dominance of the civilian government.

The Main Building has been refurbished, and LN-7, capitalizing on the increasing influence it has gained in the climate of increasing paranormal activity, recently staked its claim there. The underground citadels were extended to accommodate training and research facilities for LN-7, while libraries and sanctums were created for the thelema. While the Old War Office Building is the administrative headquarters of LN-7, the subterranean fortresses of the Main Building house its operational facilities and research laboratories.

THE OLD WAR OFFICE

Location: Westminster

Tube Stations: Westminster

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Built in the Baroque style in the late 1800s, the Old War Office Building in the east of Whitehall is trapezoid in outline with two fronts: the chief elevation to the west faces Whitehall, and the north faces Whitehall Place. Rows of Ionic columns decorate the façade, and upon the roof a line of sculptured figures symbolize War, Peace, Truth, Justice, Fame, and Victory. Inside, the décor is in the grand Edwardian style, with oak paneling and fine marble fireplaces, hung liberally about with great works of art and fine sculptures.

During the First World War it quickly became apparent that the building was inadequate for its purpose, and as the demand for space grew, government departments spread across the city. With the chaos that such fragmentation brought, it was easy for certain small departments to arise within the War Office, relatively undisturbed and unquestioned. Nathan Obliette's Pschical Research Department was one such.

FORCES AT WORK

The War Office remained the center for the Army's administration until 1964, when much of the former Army Department transferred across Horse Guards Avenue to the MOD Main Building. Considerable reorganization of the Old War Office Building (as it now became known) followed, and in 1979 the building was refurbished. By then, Obliette's department had grown into LN-7, which penetrated all levels of government. LN-7 strongly influenced the refurbishment and commissioned numerous secret meeting rooms and communication facilities to be built in the extensive basements of the building. When the Old War Office Building was reopened in 1992, it became the new headquarters for the Defense Intelligence Staffs and, unofficially, the headquarters of LN-7.

ROUND TEMPLE

Location: The City

Tube Stations: Holborn, Temple

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

At the centre of a maze of streets and alleyways, Round Temple stands surrounded by large buildings that press in on all sides. Modeled on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, this was the principal residence of the Knights Templar after their successes in the Holy Land. An oblong chancel was added in the 13th century, and both structures still stand, largely unchanged since

JACK'S BACK

The appalling East End murders of the 1880s were attributed to the actions of one man, who infamously came to be known as Jack the Ripper. Unlike the story of Sweeny Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street, Jack was quite real, and led the Metropolitan police on a macabre dance through the gas-lit fogs of old London town. The funerary music stopped before the dance did, and the Ripper was never caught. Now, more than a hundred years on, people are whispering that Jack has come back. The streets of Whitechapel are once more stalked by a murderer with an insatiable lust for mutilation and death, and the string of broken and bloodied corpses in London's East End make Jack the Ripper's exploits in the 1880s seem trivial.

The police have concluded that the murders and disappearances of the area must be the work of several individuals, and they have reached such epidemic proportions that those that can have left the area, leaving those who can't trapped by economics and fear. London buzzes with stories and speculation about the killers who stalk the streets of Shoreditch and Mile End, and of a group of vigilantes led by a vicar from Spitalfields who call themselves the Guardian Angels.

It isn't only the perennially poor East End that is suffering murderous attentions; the West End, as well, has been plagued by brutal killings. The verdant expanses of Hyde, St. James', and Green Parks are dark and poorly lit by night. It is there that most of the attacks have taken place, but several have also occurred in the palatial hotels and grand residences of Mayfair and Belgravia. As in the East End, the police are at a loss in these gruesome cases. Whoever the killers are, they are too cunning to leave an easy trail.

SIDEBAR 4-13

that time. The temple's interior is extremely ornate, with beautiful pews and recumbent effigies carved from Purbeck marble, and tortured grotesques grimacing in the spandrels of the blind arcading. An atmosphere of heavy solemnity weighs upon the visitor, imparting a sense of ancient duty and watchful patience that is both unnerving and humbling.

The Knights Templar were forced to flee during the Dissolution of 1312, and their holdings passed to the Knights Hospitaller, who were the new favorites of the Church and the King. The latter order rented out the extensive accommodations to the lawyers of the time, leading to the foundation of the Inns of Court, where every barrister in England must study before being

TROUBLED WATERS

The Thames has long been the focus of London and the lifeblood of her people. Its swirling gray waters have variously provided food, water, transport, trade, and home.

In the troubled years of the early 21st century, parts of the river have become a haunted and frightening place. Fierce storms sweep the river valley, making it all but impossible for most craft to navigate the heaving waters. Deaths associated with the river have increased dramatically over the last decade, with drowning, capsizing, and fatal collisions all up. Those who have spent their life on the river or its banks claim that the Thames has been cursed, a throwback to old superstitions that never truly left the maritime communities. In the riverside pubs and inns of Southwark and Putney, weathered old sailors mutter into their pints of Directors ale, telling stories of the river that chill the blood.

One old mariner, called Cap'n by the regulars of the Old King's Head pub, has been drinking on a tale for months. Cap'n claims he saw dark shapes gliding beneath the water up by Saint Catherine's Docks, eerie creatures that looked like large manta rays; he will swear on his mother's grave (who the landlord will later reveal is alive and well) that these creatures had pale human faces, and that they leered at him as they went past: "Like bloated corpses they was, with puffy skin, but still alive and grinnin' an' starin' at me with their great dead white eyes. Mouthin' things I couldn' hear." At this point Cap'n will usually finish his pint and stare at the table top until someone refills it in the hope of hearing more of his strange tale.

SIDEBAR 4-II

called to the Bar. Many have sought the legendary stores of treasure and knowledge that the Templars supposedly left in hidden chambers beneath their curious temple. If such catacombs exist, they are cunningly hidden; none have been successful in finding them yet.

FORCES AT WORK

Legends claim that, before they fled from Pope Clement V's order of dissolution, the knights hid a vast fortune beneath their somber preceptory. Many have searched in vain for these mythical treasure houses (including the Knights Hospitaller, who inherited their holdings, and the Freemasons, who were once part of their order). The reason they failed is that they were looking in the wrong place. The first and chief house of the Knights Templar was built on the *other* side of Fleet Street, in Chancery Lane. When the more ostentatious Round Temple was built, that original residence was

subsumed by the buildings around it. However, the catacombs were not abandoned, and remain intact to this day. The Guardians of Athoth have returned to their ancient residence, a mere stone's throw from those who unwittingly seek them.

ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Location: The City

Tube Stations: St. Paul's

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

First built by a Saxon king on the site of his ancestors' pagan temple, St. Paul's Cathedral has had a long and tumultuous history. Destroyed several times by fire and war, it was doggedly rebuilt, and in each rebuilding became more magnificent than the time before. This latest incarnation is the vision of engineer Sir Christopher Wren. Topped by an enormous lead-covered dome, St. Paul's remains a dominating presence in the City, despite the rearing tower blocks that crowd in on all sides.

The best place from which to appreciate St. Paul's is beneath the dome, which is decorated by *trompe l'oeil* frescoes and intricate carvings. A series of stairs, beginning in the south aisle, lead to the dome's three galleries. The first of these is the Whispering Gallery, so called because of its acoustic properties—words whispered to the wall on one side of the gallery are distinctly audible one hundred feet away on the other side. The other two galleries, the Stone and Golden Galleries, are external, and provide spectacular views of the city and the dirty ribbon of the Thames lying below.

FORCES AT WORK

In the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's Cathedral, there can sometimes be heard sounds out of time, elusive whispers of the past—or perhaps the future—which might hold secrets for those who can hear. The inside of St. Paul's Cathedral hides other mysteries, some buried for centuries. The crypts, reputedly the largest in Europe, hold more than just the tourist attractions of Wren's, Nelson's, and Wellington's tombs.

The crypts also bear a secret entrance to hidden catacombs that riddle the Ludgate. These are all that remain of the Roman temple of Artemis that once stood upon this site, and even older tunnels that date back to the mythic age. Now, as in the distant past, the upper levels of this necropolis serve as a sanctuary for the Guardians of Athoth.

Wren's epitaph, *si monumentum requiris, circumspice* (If you seek his monument, look around you), obliquely speaks to the presence of the secret passage in St. Paul's crypt. Wren was a member of the Guardians, and ensured that he safeguarded the order's hidden sanctums when he rebuilt the city after the Great Fire. Many of his churches contain secret passages and rooms,

which are now proving invaluable to the Guardians as they need to hide and move about the city unseen.

TOWER OF LONDON AND THE CHAMBER OF SORROWS

Location: The City

Tube Stations: Tower Hill

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

The Tower is an intimidating landmark whose history is steeped in blood. Inside the main castle, called the White Tower by Henry I, there is a huge banqueting hall, as well as apartments, guardrooms, a chapel, basements, and crypts. The underground levels are accessed by a single spiral staircase in the northeastern turret of the White Tower. Of the other towers built within its grounds, the most notorious is the Bloody Tower, where Edward V and Richard Plantagenet were murdered.

Since its construction, the Tower of London has served English kings variously as residence, stronghold, prison, torture chamber, place of execution, royal mint, museum, treasure house, and even menagerie. Henry III had lions and tigers installed in the Lion Tower so that visitors would be greeted by the roaring of beasts. Many famous royal and political prisoners spent their last days in the Tower and spilt their life's blood within its walls, including the Little Princes, Queen Anne Boleyn, and Guy Fawkes. For this reason alone, the Tower has long been associated with ghosts, but even the heinous acts committed within do not account for the evil presence that seems to loom about the place now.

Once open to the public, the Tower of London was recently shut without convincing explanation. The authorities claimed that the millions of tourists that visited each year were damaging this important monument of English heritage, but other areas of similar popularity and fragility were left open. It is not known whether the Crown Jewels, which did reside under considerable guard within the Jewel House, are still there, but many antiquarians bemoan the hiding away of Britain's most famous treasures. This incomparable collection of crowns, orbs, swords, scepters, and other regalia incorporate numerous jewels of great antiquity and historical significance. Edward the Confessor's sapphire, the Black Prince's ruby, the Stars of Africa cut from the Cullinan diamond, and the famous *Koh-i-noor* (Mountain of Light) were all part of this collection. The latter gem has a long and turbulent history, and its legends say that a male who claims it will suffer only misfortune, while a woman who bears it will rule the world.

Outside the Jewel House upon the Tower Green, an unkindness of ravens maintains silent vigil. The ravens have always dwelt on the green slopes where Cornhill descends to the Thames, and an old legend states that the Tower will fall if it ever loses its black sentinels.

FORCES AT WORK

When William the Conqueror built his Tower on the banks of the Thames to intimidate and subdue his English subjects, the ravens had already been guarding a dark secret for millennia. They were placed there by the Guardians of Athoth, sometime after the cataclysm that ended the mythic age. The Guardians knew only that a great evil lurked in there, and were too weak or fearful to deal with it at that time. The ravens and their descendants were enchanted to serve as watchdogs over

SHADES OF THE PAST

The Tower of London has long been reviled by Londoners, ever since it was built in the 11th century as a symbol of Norman rule. In recent times, the foulest of weather seems to squat over the Tower like some eldritch beast of ash and smoke. A decade ago, the tabloids began to run stories on ghost sightings in the many towers of William the Conqueror's ancient fortress, until it seemed like the very gates of Hell had opened beneath the Tower Green to unleash the legions of the dead. Most Londoners discounted these stories as a ploy by the newspapers to pick up flagging sales, but would look askance and perhaps surreptitiously make the sign of the cross when they should happen to glance towards the Tower's glowering presence. However, a few years ago the Tower of London was closed to the general public, a staggering move considering the tourist revenues the Tower attracted. The fortress has remained closed ever since, despite a half-hearted lobby by various historical societies to have such an "important monument of English history open for all to experience and enjoy." The Tower Trust, which runs the Tower on behalf of the Royal Family, have never given a convincing explanation for their extraordinary decision. Ministers asked to intervene soon abandoned the cause, citing unusual circumstances and pleading "mounting workloads in these times of economic uncertainty" as they scuttled back to Westminster.

The Tower of London continues to crouch menacingly upon the riverside flank of Cornhill, permanently swathed in shadows cast by the storm clouds above. Its eerie silence is sinister and unsettling, giving the feeling that some nameless evil watches from the darkened windows of the keep.

The Tower isn't the only place to have been afflicted by spectral attentions and ghostly manifestations. Since the Tower closed, a plague of spirits seems to have visited the city, and any house with the merest suggestion of a haunted past can claim renewed activity of its resident spook.



CHAPTER FOUR: MODERN LONDON

the place and instructed to provide warning if anything stirred within. Unfortunately, by the time the ravens took flight in 1082 and later, in 2001, the Guardians had forgotten how to interpret their loyal creatures' warning. Whether they would have been able to do anything to change the events that followed is perhaps a pointless debate.

As the massive foundations of the Tower were being excavated, a slave was set to dig a well within what would be the Tower's basement. This unfortunate dug through centuries of deposited silt, earth, and rock, and uncovered an entrance to a narrow stair, clearly not crafted by human hands—the alternating smooth and jagged marks remaining from the passage's carving set the viewer's nerves on edge, seeming to hold some secret and hideous meaning. This sinister passage descended to unknown depths, and the terrified slave quickly climbed his ladder to report to Juibert de'Mortain, the Norman overseer of the Tower's construction. Juibert returned with the greatly agitated slave; when he saw the tunnel, he knew that something dark and powerful lay within. A combination of fear and greed motivated him to stab the slave in the back and hurl the man into that stygian maw. None but he would know of the tunnel's existence.

Juibert ordered the hole filled in and selected a new location for the Tower's well; the building work continued. However, once the main walls were underway and the ground floor laid down, Juibert began to dream of the tunnel that only he knew lay below. He could not ferret the whispers from his mind, and so, mad with lack of sleep and lustful of the power he imagined within, Juibert returned over a number of nights. He brought with him a gang of slaves from foreign lands, none of whom spoke the Queen's English, to re-excavate the sinister stair.

By way of a rickety ladder, the Norman lord made his way to the top of the passage that had driven him to murder and had haunted his dreams. With only one slave to bear the lantern, he descended to the Chamber of Sorrows and viewed the horrors that lay within, undisturbed by mortal man since the mythic age. At that moment, the ravens rose into the air with a great cawing and crying, as though the end of the world had come.

No slaves emerged from the tower that night. Juibert surfaced into the gray light of dawn, covered in blood and irrevocably changed. The Norman overseer had stonemasons create a secret entrance to this place, and then murdered them, as well. Although Juibert never returned to the Chamber of Sorrows, he recorded in his journal that he would often stand at the top of the stairs, wringing his hands and listening to the terrible, whispering voices that haunted him for the rest of his short life. In those few years, Juibert committed terrible crimes of murder and mutilation, for which he was beheaded at the Tower when he was eventually caught in 1098. However, his journal went undiscovered, and Juibert's blackest secret went to the grave with him

until, in 1918, Samuel Mathers discovered the journal and followed its clues to the hidden stair. In the black cathedral below, the curious magician met a grisly end and set in motion events that changed the world.

Since 2001, the spirits of the dead have returned in force, swirling in a violent maelstrom about the Tower. Their psychic presence is so vivid with malicious intent that those sensitive to karma feel nauseous upon entering the Tower's grounds. The taint that lies below is not limited to just the cavern, but oozes outward, fluctuating between taint 3 and taint 5 at various times and places within the grounds. Even those blind to the ephemeral world feel uneasy, a problem that led the Tower Trust to close this most famous of London's tourist attractions several years ago. Outside, upon the tower green, seven ravens keep guard—Cedric, Gwyllum, Hardey, Hugin, Munin, Garmin, and Incantatious. These birds have seen a lot of water pass under Tower Bridge, and are possessed of uncanny intelligence. They also have a staggering knowledge of the area and its history, gained both from an ancestral memory and from the sobbing confessions of the spirits whom they guard. If a scion learns the language of the ravens, he might well be surprised at what these birds can tell.

TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Location: West End

Tube Stations: Charing Cross

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

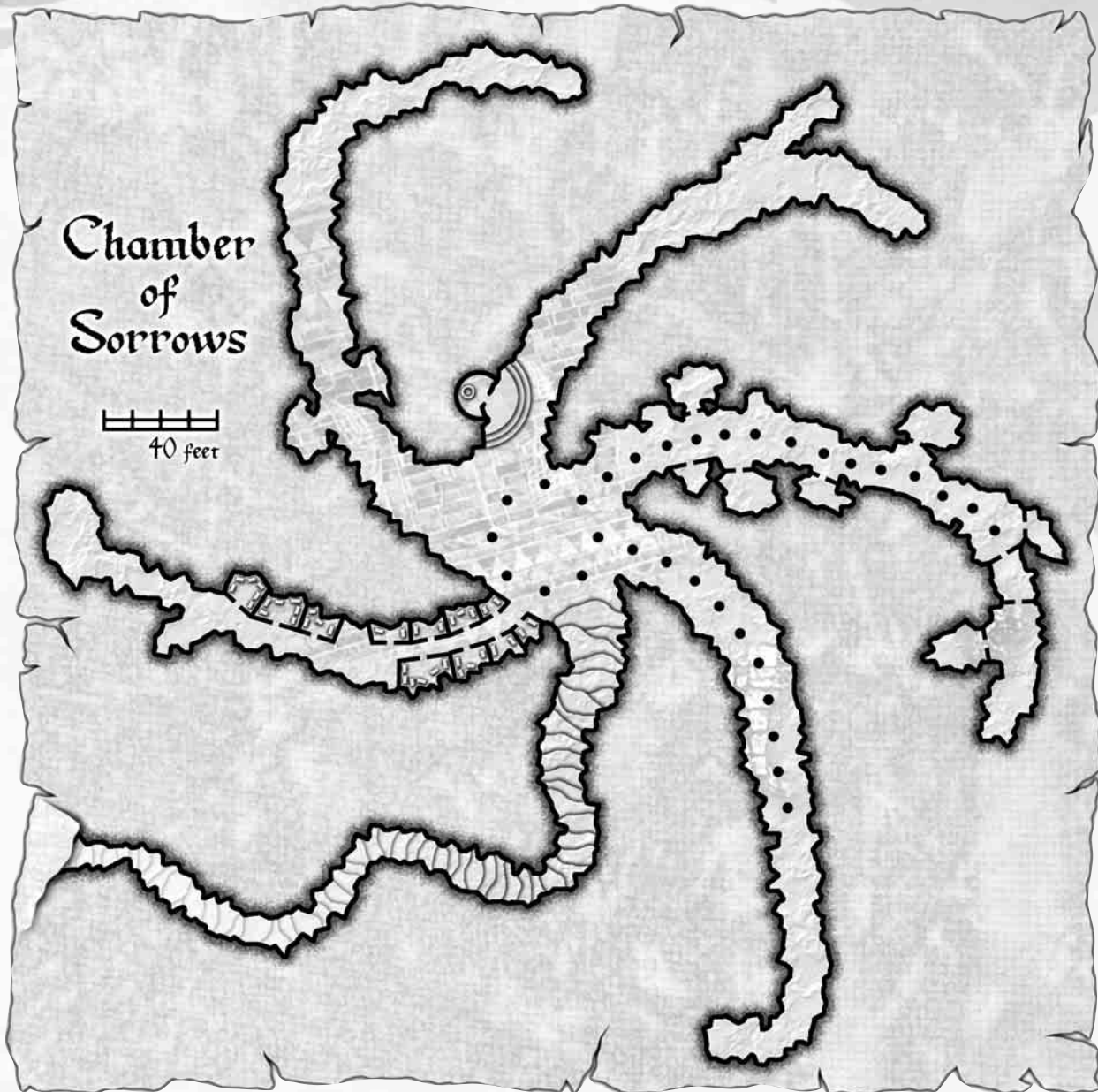
Trafalgar Square has long been the symbolic, if not the precise, heart of London (the geographical center of the city is actually Charing Cross, which lies slightly to the west up the Strand). Surrounded by monolithic buildings of Georgian and Victorian construction, Trafalgar Square provides the only truly sweeping vistas of this chaotically crowded and haphazardly fashioned metropolis. The Square itself is wide and open, with the center space dominated by the towering spire of Nelson's Column. In recent years the Admiral seems to radiate a sense of pride and dignity, as if approving of the reawakening of the city's magic around him. At his feet, two majestic lions guard a fountain that now runs even without power or working plumbing.

Since the royal stables were demolished to make way for the square, the people of London and her dispossessed have gathered in the square to protest, celebrate, and seek refuge. It is the home of countless vagabonds, drifters, and homeless, but its only permanent residents seem to be a flock of tens of thousands of pigeons.

FORCES AT WORK

Two unnamed entities war for dominance of Trafalgar Square. They are twin spirits who have been worshipped upon this site by pagan priests since well





before the time of Christ. Though the people who claimed them as gods are long since gone, the spirits persist. One is a being of community and light, the other a bringer of discord and darkness. While hardly operating at a human level, the two consciousnesses seem to have come to an accord, of sorts: one may exercise its power during the day, the other gains dominance at night. The daytime entity is by far the more benevolent and more subtle of the two. It imbues those that gather in its domain with a sense of freedom and brotherhood. Even the police, sent to enforce the as-of-late draconian loitering laws of the square, give their fellow man the benefit of the doubt and are caught up in the always-spirited debates that take place within the being's protection. A flock of pigeons intermittently roosts on Nelson's shoulders and wheels about the sky above,

tracing arcane symbols for those that know to look.

As the sun sets, however, the square takes on an altogether different aspect. The sower of discord, content to let its twin give false hope during the day, marshals its heralds. The filthy pigeons take on a menacing aspect. The dreamers and debaters pack up their things and head for safer areas, while the violence-prone among the homeless and drug-addicts of London shuffle into the square. They come to Trafalgar to listen to the throaty sounds of the birds, the collective cooing of which seems to hide a barely audible voice. What it tells them, only the slack-jawed followers know.

These weak-willed unfortunates go their way after half of the evening passes, seemingly peacefully. Once distant from the square, however, they coalesce in seemingly instinctive patterns, rejoining like a flock of birds

... AND OBERON AND TITANIA AS THEMSELVES

A new theater company has opened in London in recent months. Operating out of a converted warehouse in the East End, the company calls itself Le Theatre d'Aubouin—The Theater of Oberon. The company has become most well known for its performances of Shakespeare's classics, particularly its ethereal interpretation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Indeed, the company's founders go by Oberon and Titania, and their true identities remain a mystery. Legal records and documents pertaining to the two go back only to the spring of 2001—this despite the abundant wealth that became evident in the restoration of their company and the sumptuousness of their productions.

When King Oberyceum and Queen Tiana led the Summer Court to Tir na n-Og, they diminished and became the fae beings known to legend as the Seelie Sidhe. They abided for a timeless while in that paradisaical otherworld, but the return of magic opened the way for them to return to the land they knew as Avalon. When they emerged into the world once more, the Sidhe had lost much of themselves—including who they were and who they had been. Like the scions, the Sidhe do not remember their old lives. Unlike the scions, the Sidhe do not return to the world in mortal form, and do not have a chance to gain new identities. They simply return, knowing nothing of themselves or the new world around them, as if they have awakened from a timeless dream.

While the Sidhe left much of the knowledge of who there were in the otherworld, their natures were not lost to them. Upon emerging into the world again, the Sidhe set about inventing themselves in the same way the Daea had in the mythic age: by mimicking human culture. While the customs of modern London held little resonance for them, the Sidhe found a new source to inspire them: books. The Sidhe immersed themselves in the written record of human cultures they had inspired but had never known. Eventually, Oberyceum and Tiana discovered the Bard. In Shakespeare, the Sidhe encountered a poet who seemed to know them—certainly better than they knew themselves. His stories spoke to them in a way that modern society could not, and they thrilled at the intrigues, betrayals, and drama that filled the pages of his plays. They began to reinvent themselves in his image and began to rebuild the Summer Court in his honor: Le Theatre d'Aubouin.

Few Londoners, of course, believe that the company is anything more than a talented performance troupe with a charming proclivity for remaining in character. No one has ever heard a member of the company slip from the Elizabethan dialect they affect in all their dealings, and some have noted that there is often a spontaneous poetry in their speech that would be the envy of the Bard himself. Others remark that their stagecraft produces incredible performances that rival or even surpass the special-effects blockbusters of Hollywood. Though a few devoted patrons of the theater have realized that the company is using magic in its productions, only a small but growing fan following believe that they are actually faeries.

With each passing day, Le Theatre d'Aubouin attracts new members to its troupe. With each performance, the Sidhe recover more of themselves, remembering times long past and dangers long forgotten. Perhaps in time they will become strong and bold enough to declare themselves openly, seeking a wider court beyond the throngs of adoring fans who attend their performances. Despite the promise of future glory, dark times await as well: The Unseelie are waking, too, and many of them nurture a deep enmity for the Seelie Court and its long-ago betrayal.

that had scattered, and roam throughout the city, attacking at will. The pigeons follow like a shadow and join the attack, a mass of feathers and beating wings. They strike with filth-encrusted claws and sharp, deformed beaks. The birds have tasted human blood and always want more. The police have yet to connect the brooding, peaceful, almost mindless gatherings in the square after dark with the bloodlust of the “dosser packs” as they have been dubbed.

In one corner of the square, a squat-domed stone building rests. Stained gray by guano and grime, it was once the smallest police station in the world. It is a long time since it was put to this use, and now the ancient wooden door opens into a cramped cell empty but for a shelf, a tiny desk, and a chair. However, there is more to this place than at first meets the eye. Upon a shelf marked “lost property” lie a set of rusting iron scales and a pair of oversized calipers, of the sort used by cartographers. These are ancient symbols of the Freemasonry, and proclaim the proximity of a Masonic lodge. If the Calipers are used to inscribe a circle upon the floor whilst uttering certain archaic phrases, a trapdoor is revealed that gives access to a hidden hall built by the Freemasons. This lodge, little used in the last hundred years and forgotten by the order, may contain secrets and forgotten lore; indeed, it may contain the key to communicating with, and perhaps destroying, the spirits that inhabit the square.

WHITECHAPEL

Location: East End

Tube Stations: Aldgate East, Whitechapel

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

The green fields that once surrounded the church of St. Mary



Whitechapel disappeared beneath the irresistible march of the city by the 17th century. The area quickly became industrialized, attracting the most noisome, malodorous, and dangerous industries away from the financial districts of the City. By Victorian times, the area was wrecked by poverty and crime. Jack the Ripper was one of Whitechapel's most infamous residents, and the theme of murder has continued to this day. George Cornell was shot dead by Ronnie Kray in 1966 at the Blind Beggar pub, and a gang of anarchists led by Peter the Painter traded shots with police and soldiers in 1911.

The depressed nature of the area meant that its rents were always low, and so it attracted a steady stream of immigrants. French Protestant Huguenots fled there to escape persecution in Louis XIV's France during the 18th century. Irish and Germans arrived in the early 19th century, followed by Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe from 1880 to 1914. During this period, the Jewish Kabbalists were sought out by members of the emerging mystical societies and cults of the time. But it was with the textile trade that the Jews prospered, and many moved north. However, some didn't move quickly enough, and as strange things began to happen in the city during the early 1900s, the East Enders turned against these foreign magicians. The Jews suffered terrible persecution and eventually left, only to be replaced a few years later by Indians and Bangladeshis.

In the 21st century, the grim cloud of poverty and crime has returned to the area. Drugs, prostitutes, and gangs are a major problem, and the wide sweep of Commercial Road with its grimy Victorian warehouses is the haunt of curb-crawlers looking for chemical and physical stimulation. Despite an alarming number of murders and disappearances in the area, the nighttime punters do not seem discouraged.

FORCES AT WORK

Magic has returned to Whitechapel, where Kabbalist rabbis once discussed the mysteries of the Sefer Yetzirah. However, instead of the active pursuit of enlightenment and ascension taught by Kabbalism, this magic has a darker cast, wallowing in blood and death. In Whitechapel's alleyways and derelict buildings, lone sorcerers and crazed cults pursue their dark work, unknowingly spreading taint and courting unspeakable evil. One such cult, called the Black Lotus, has taken over a house in Scott Street, which lies at the back of the old Jewish Cemetery. These cultists are self-professed taint seekers, and although little more than hedge wizards and petty conjurers, they have somehow gained access to dangerous incantations that invoke dangerous powers well beyond their control. The "dead things" they have summoned are only loosely tethered by the cultists' will, and run amok in the streets and darkened alleyways at night, seeking to slake their thirst for murder and pain. Emboldened by their success, and spurred on by madness and a sinister fellow who dresses like a

city gent, the cult is planning to enact a far more ambitious ritual: an ancient summoning that will call a great dark one, a vile taint demon, to the physical realm. They even now make plans to enact this ritual and surreptitiously gather the rare and bizarre ingredients necessary for the summoning. (See page 196 for more information on the Cult of the Black Lotus.)

WORLD'S END

Location: West End

Tube Stations: Sloane Square

HISTORY & DESCRIPTION

Once a pub central to the punk scene, the World's End on the King's Road was converted into a more modern cafe and nightclub several years ago. It is renowned for being a rowdy night spot, where the disaffected youth of the 21st century come to mosh to the discordant rhythm of their raucous music. In these odd times, punk rock is seeing a revival, and has reinvented itself with heavy apocalyptic and cyberpunk influences. The World's End is once more the heart of London's punk scene, and its clientele ooze anarchistic belligerence in a pheromone-charged atmosphere that simmers with menace.

The place is owned and run by a young man that the staff and regulars know only as Joe. Tales and rumors cluster about this pale-faced youth like moths to a flame, as do pretty young girls who want to share his bed and the vast fortune he has purportedly made. Joe is infamous for his womanizing, and when he attends his club (as he does most nights) he is attended by a bevy of black-eyed, sultry Goths and punk chicks who hang about the pale-faced youth, glaring at all who come near.

FORCES AT WORK

Joe is a reawakend Seelie fea, and the accidental sire of beautiful and hideous creatures alike. He has drawn these children about him in an attempt to recreate his previous life as a minor Daea noble, but cannot seem to remember what a ruler and his subjects are meant to do. Until he finds a worthy purpose to direct his efforts, therefore, he simply waits and builds his influence in London pop culture. (See page 185 for more information on Joseph Pennington and page 166 for more information on the comely and the coarse.)



ADVENTURE HOOKS

BLACK LISTED

Librum Niger-7 discover the PCs' true natures, and consider them to be dangerous supernatural entities that need to be captured or eliminated. A thelema-led cypher team is sent to recover or neutralize them. The plot thickens when the PCs discover the order for the operation came, not from LN-7 command, but from an unknown source within the Old War Office. Has LN-7 been compromised? The PCs have the opportunity to make beneficial allies or dangerous enemies, depending on how they handle the interactions with the LN-7 unit.

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE

One of the PCs works for a small pizza restaurant as a delivery boy. One night, while delivering a fresh slab of dough and tomato to a wealthy customer on Park Street, the PC almost runs down an unnaturally swift figure dashing out of the subway to Hyde Park. The figure runs off at speed into the night (if pursued, he heads for Marble Arch station and escapes into the tunnels if necessary). The next day, the papers are full of the news of another brutal murder in the park; the *Sun*'s leading headline reads "Mr. Hyde Strikes Again!"

The fleeing figure is a Brother of Cernunos, and the werewolves will attack the pizza restaurant the next night (when the PC is off duty), killing the owner and chef. The restaurant's office is ransacked, and money and personnel records are stolen. The police record it as a botched robbery, and do not notice the theft of the employee records. The PC can expect a visit in the days to come, however . . . no witnesses may be left behind!

ESOTERIC THEFTS

There has been a break-in at Hertford House in Marylebone; oddly, despite there being numerous priceless pieces of art and sculpture in the Wallace Collection, the only things taken were old and rather odd curios of little value. The players may think that the items were karmic items; in fact, the break-in was perpetrated by members of the Black Lotus Cult, and the artifacts are components necessary for the ritual to summon the taint demon, Icarac.

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

The PCs are contacted by a charity worker friend, Claire Summers, who is concerned about the disappearance of a number of the people who frequent her soup kitchen. The police refuse to follow up on her concerns, stating that without evidence of a crime they cannot open an investigation; anyway, they say, homeless people are by their nature transients, and probably just moved on. Claire is convinced that Mick and Colin wouldn't just disappear without saying something. They have always been very friendly with her, helping her care for the other, more unfortunate street folk. When Claire asked around, the homeless community was strangely reluctant to talk about the two men, simply saying "It's best not to know luv . . . Just let it go!" Claire begs the PCs to help her find the missing men, who have been kidnapped by the sluagh and taken through the sewers to the Old Beam Engine House to feed the voracious hunger of their god, Vorgga'gtha.

INSIDER DEALING

The PCs work for LN-7 or the Defence Intelligence Staff (or one of their contacts works in either of these organizations) and it comes to their attention that certain suspect activities are going on within the Old War Office. Someone has been using the DIS's position of power at the center of the British intelligence network to engage in corporate espionage, selling company secrets and financially sensitive information to a third party. This individual (although there might be more than one) has been passing information on to a junior civil servant named Malcom Bigley, who in turn passes it on to an agent of the Gehenna Consortium. This hook can be used to introduce the Gehenna Consortium into a campaign, and might lead from mundane insider dealing to uncovering the supernatural programs Marcus Sagarius and his fellow board members are engaged in.

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

London *Sun* Journalist John Gray disappears, leaving behind the notes and files he has been making on a rather gruesome and bizarre case. The murder of a man in Southwark earlier in the year was witnessed by Michael Farrell (now in Wandsworth's County Lunatic Asylum), who claims a gang of punks surrounded the victim and then transformed into hideous demons before ripping the unfortunate victim—one Daniel Blake—to pieces. John Gray's notes detail his observations of the punk scene in London, and include clippings from newspaper articles detailing similar murders dating back to the 1980s. His most recent notebook seems to be missing. A post-it note underneath his desk bears the words "World's End." The PCs might become involved in this scenario thanks to a tip from police contacts, as a concerned friends, or as colleagues of Mr. Gray.



STITCH IN TIME

Strange resonances lead the party to Cleopatra's Needle and trigger a flashback to the mythic age, when the Needle was the central obelisk of a temple overrun by the thralls of Those Who Dwell Below. A Dweller had taken the form of the High Priest, and when the flashback begins the PCs have infiltrated the temple in human form to investigate.

THE TROUBLE WITH SCIENCE

A junior biology lecturer at University College of London is found dead in his department's laboratory. He has been brutally murdered, probably strangled with a thick cord. His clothes are tattered ruins, and his body is covered in lacerations that appear as though they were inflicted by a scourge. The doors to the laboratory were locked and barricaded from the inside; the only exit could have been the broken window looking out onto the street below, but the laboratory is on the fifth floor. Further investigation reveals that the scientist, Dr. Andrew Waddell, Ph.D., was a member of the Society for Psychical Research. Following up this lead will eventually uncover that Dr. Waddell was under consideration for expulsion after removing a certain tome from the society's Cambridge library without permission.

The foolish young man had been experimenting with powers beyond his control and summoned a dead thing in the lab. Dr. Waddell had intended to summon the supernatural creature and then study its physiology; unfortunately, his wards were badly constructed, and the dead thing killed him. The creature now lurks in the maze of buildings that make up UCL, committing murder by night and hiding in basements and the sewers by day.

WHO DO? YOU DO!

The scions receive a strange summons to a certain address in Camden. It's not the address that is so odd, it's the manner in which it is delivered: the address spells itself out with refrigerator magnets, or is revealed in the scion's spilled tea on the floor. The address is for an ethnic curio shop selling items from Africa and the Caribbean, called Bon Mambo's. The eponymous Bon Mambo Mambo Racine Sans Bout Sa Te La Dagenin is a Bocca sorcerer skilled in Voodoo, who knows the true nature of the scions and seeks to exploit them—dragon parts are so hard to come by nowadays! However, Bon Mambo will at first appear to be the scions' friend, tipping them off to some supernatural event or other, such as the activities of a demonologist in Whitechapel or clues to the nature of a vicious murderer. While trying to be helpful, Bon Mambo will never give a straight answer—it is not in his style or the nature of his craft—always referring to things obliquely or cryptically. Once the scions consider him an ally (and learn to manifest

draconic traits), Bon Mambo will use his supernatural servants and followers amongst the Haitian community to capture them and begin harvesting their body parts.

BEYOND LONDON

Most of the rest of Britain and the outside world thinks that London has gone mad. They can hardly credit even the more rationale stories emerging from the City of Contrasts. However, magic isn't just restricted to the English capital. Like an overflowing cauldron, karma spills out of London and spreads in an ever-expanding and accelerating circle through Britain and into Europe. Already, towns as far as Oxford, Cambridge, and Brighton are beginning to experience strange phenomena similar to those in the capital. Fae reawaken or coalesce where karma flows, and strange loping shapes are sometimes glimpsed by passengers in the Chunnel (the Channel tunnel) from Paris to London. The ferry has become a much more popular mode of travel, as of late.

Across the Channel, Calais and Boulogne-sur-Mer have felt the first stirrings of the supernatural. Spates of odd occurrences that can only be described as paranormal plague the coastline. The dead of World War II shift restlessly in graves that line the coastline near Dunkerque and Calais. A black viscous substance that defies forensic analysis was found befouling the interior of a local boulangerie. The owner was found dead, burnt to a crisp in his lit oven, where he had apparently climbed to escape some unspeakable horror. The citizens of these communities are not ignorant of London's situation, nor of the similarity between the events they are experiencing and those of London during the early 2000s; they continue nervously with their lives, waiting for the inevitable rising tide of strangeness that has engulfed their neighbours across the water.

The inhabitants of Calais and Dunkerque are not the only ones to be canny about the spreading plague of the paranormal. Cabals and secret societies from France, Germany, and farther afield have been watching events in London very closely, and they have placed their agents in the port towns of France and communities of Southeast England. Occult organizations, such as the dichotomous Hexenberg Lodge (struggling to reconcile its Nazi past with its philanthropist aspirations), move carefully in these areas, aware of their rivals and the dark forces that lurk nearby.





Chapter The Age

CHAPTER
FIVE

EPOCHS

To facilitate narrative freedom and give both players and GMs a frame of reference with which to experience the mythic age, various times and cultures of that era are presented in the form of **epochs**. Each epoch focuses on a specific time and place. In addition to the core nation and time period, however, each epoch also offers descriptions of the recent past and near future, including times as distant as thousands of years apart, as well as the political situation presented by neighboring cultures and distant nations of the time.

Four key epochs are presented here. Additional epochs will be included in future supplements; also, keep in mind that the mythic age spans thousands of years and occupies an entire world, so you as the GM have plenty of room to incorporate your own ideas or develop your own epochs.

MAP OF MYTH

Each epoch includes a map of the world as it appeared during that time period. Because the mythic age spanned many thousands of years, of course, it is impossible to plot out every expansion and contraction of a nation's or people's borders. The purpose of the map, therefore, is to give a general idea of scale, proximity, and layout for the GM. If you like, as the GM, you can show this map to the players, or you can keep the geographical layout of the mythic age vague. If the players begin to make their own (possibly flawed) versions of a mythic age map, that only adds to the sense of history and mystery of the mythic age.

ATLANTIS: THE DAWN OF THE FIRST EXODUS

Throughout the mythic age, Atlantis stood as the greatest and most enduring civilization of the mortal world. Its remarkable achievements cultivated the flowering of culture in the neighboring lands of Erebea and Ofir, and in time its influence was felt as far away as Xia and Qeztlan. Its rise and fall would inspire myths and legends that would survive the ending of the age and echo throughout all the lands of the world. In many ways, the story of mankind in the mythic age is the story of Atlantis, and the opening chapters of that story are

written during the period known as the Dawn of the First Exodus.

GEOGRAPHY

Atlantis is a large island landmass in the Inner Sea, roughly 60 miles from the southern coast of Erebea and 90 miles from the northern coast of Ofir. The island's longest extent from east to west is 156 miles and its widest expanse is 95 miles from north to south.

The island and surrounding sea basin are geologically unstable, and Atlantis has been wracked by periodic earthquakes throughout the mythic age. The landmass is essentially one large mountainous slab of limestone, and coastal erosion and seismic activity have left the island riddled with countless caverns, tunnels, and chasms.

The island's rugged spine is formed by four distinct mountain ranges. The Atalus Mountains dominate the central part of the island, with an average elevation of 12,000 feet. The Omoros range, with an average elevation of 8,000 feet, is clustered in the west. The Kalanus Mountains in the south-central part of the island reach an average elevation of 9,000 feet, as do the Heirions in the east. These mountain ranges make much of the island's surface impassable by conventional means, but they also gift Atlantis with high meadows and valleys renowned throughout the world for their fertility.

Atlantis is fed by four major rivers, each having its source in one of the great mountain chains. The priests and sages of Atlantis agree that each of these rivers is, in fact, spring-fed by a single source: a subterranean river that flows through the stony heart of the island and encircles the world. According to Atlantean religion, this mythical river—called Oceanus—is the source of all life and also the gateway to the realms of the gods and the dead.

Atlantis's northern coasts are blessed with broad sandy beaches and natural harbors, while the south is uniformly rugged and forbidding. As a result, the island's major population centers are located in the north. These include the capital city, which shares the name of the island, as well as the mercantile port towns of Atemnion, Anops, Copeus, Elios, and Maraphis. At the time of the First Exodus, in the fourth millennium, the population of the entire island is less than a quarter of a million. The great city of Atlantis is itself home to nearly 100,000 people. At its peak, centuries later, its population will swell to more than 200,000—by far the largest city of the mythic age.

Atlantis's climate is temperate, with plentiful rain during the brief winter months. The spring and fall are warm and sunny, while the long, hot summers endure well into the Eighth or Ninth Moon. Each spring, and again in the fall, the mountain valleys and meadows bloom with hundreds of different species of beautiful wildflowers. The warm weather and short winters also bless farmers with exceptionally long growing seasons, and the fertile soil of the terraced fields produces a



bounty of agricultural products, including citrus, grapes, figs, olives, and many varieties of grains. The island supports light forests and scattered groves of pine, fir, cypress, chestnut, sycamore, and tamarisk. Atlantis is also rich in wildlife, including a wild goat called the kri-kri, a man-size species of eagle with a 20-ft. wingspan, large predatory cats, and countless smaller mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and avians, as well as a multitude of native insects.

HISTORY

The mariners of Atlantis, a brave and romantic lot, describe their island home as an enchantress and seductress. They say that her first settlers were shipwrecked sailors, drawn to her by the heaving of her waves, helpless to her whims as she shivered with anticipation at their arrival. In all likelihood, these sensual stories have a kernel of truth. The unstable geology on and around Atlantis could have made the sea nearby fairly treacherous, and as a large island centrally located between two vast continents, it was a likely spot for frequent shipwrecks. The island nation's ethnically diverse population, as well as its history of maritime expertise, supports this possibility.

The Atlanteans believe that the course of history, just like the motions of the celestial bodies, is governed by cycles. From the dawn of creation and down through the

endless march of years, one world is destroyed and another is born anew. The priests of Atlantis call these cycles "Suns," and they believe that each Sun lasts for 25,800 years. The Atlanteans know their present cycle as the Fourth Sun, and they chart the years of their calendar accordingly. Thus, on the eve of the First Exodus, it is the Year of the Fourth Sun Three Thousand Three Hundred and Eighty-Two, or IV 3382. This reckoning will serve as the human standard for scholarship, records, and trade throughout the mythic age.

The first millennia of the Fourth Sun is lost to pre-history. Atlantean priests and historians claim that the world of the Third Sun was destroyed by fire—and that the Fourth Sun will be destroyed by water and ice. At the dawn of the Fourth Sun, it is said, surviving remnants of humanity began to emerge from the burnt wastelands and relearn the lessons of their ancestors, mastering agriculture and the building of cities. In time, modest—and typically short-lived—civilizations began to emerge along the coasts and river valleys of the Inner Sea region. None of these fledgling cultures developed a written language, but several did learn to build ships capable of sailing the coastlines and shallows of the great sea. Whether by accident or design, settlements began to appear on the fertile island of Atlantis more than two thousand years before the current epoch, in the second millennium of the Fourth Sun.

For centuries, these settlements on Atlantis amount-



ed to little more than chiefdoms. Villages were fashioned of reeds and mud brick along the rivers and coasts, and the scant population survived through fishing and simple agriculture. Food and land were plentiful in these years, and there was remarkably little conflict between the tribes. In time, the villages began to trade with each other, and this trade created surpluses that allowed the population to grow rapidly. Artisan, merchant, and aristocratic classes quickly followed, and the trading towns and ports became the first true cities of the island, and of the known world itself.

THE UNIFICATION OF ATLANTIS

During this period of city-building, a unified culture also began to emerge. The foundation of this culture was a shared religion that revered Hesirus, the Sun-King, and his wife Selera, Goddess of the Moon. A religious caste was born, and because the religion was deeply rooted in the movement of celestial bodies, the priests in turn became the first astronomers and scholars. The Atlantean priests believed that all of the heavens and the earth were the creation of Hesirus, and that to understand the natural world was to draw closer to their deity. From its beginnings, this religion fostered and cultivated learning and science, and this enlightened theology bore the fruits of rapid progress in natural philosophy, engineering, navigation, agriculture, metallurgy, and especially astronomy.

Their religion also inspired the Atlanteans' earliest great works of architecture and engineering, as ziggurats, temples, shrines, and monuments were constructed in Anops, Elios, and religious sites throughout the island. The Atlanteans would not begin their greatest public work, however, until IV 2563. In that year, in the aftermath of a brief war with Erebean sea-raiders called the Trmmali, the high priest of the temple in Anops declared that the people of Atlantis should build a new city, and that it should serve as the capital of a great nation devoted to Hesirus. This city would share the name of the island and would stand as a symbol of the nation's unity and strength until the ending of the Fourth Sun.

More than a hundred thousand laborers lent their sweat and blood to the construction of Atlantis over a span of five decades. Even that monumental effort, however, would not have been sufficient without the magic of Atlantean priests and sorcerers. The city was built on a tall, broad hill overlooking a deep harbor on the northern coast of the island. Wide terraces were cut into the hillside, and stonework canals were dug into the terraces in four concentric circles: the first at the base and the last just below the summit. Secondary canals were built leading from the First Circle—the lowest canal ring—through the area cleared for the future city, and a sophisticated system that combined cisterns, pumps, and locks with bound water spirits transformed the entire construction into a massive, elaborate fountain fed by per-

petually running water.

Atop the hill, the Atlanteans built their greatest monument to their god: a grand pyramid that reached 1,200 feet at its apex and whose four sides faced precisely in the four cardinal directions. Great blocks of limestone, each weighing hundreds of tons, were lifted into place by magic and the labor of men and beasts. Each of these massive blocks were seated no more than a hair's breadth from the surrounding stones, so intent were the priests and engineers that their great work would endure until the end of days. When the initial construction was complete, the limestone blocks were covered with facing stones of polished white granite, so that the great pyramid gleamed under the soft light of Mother Selera and very nearly glowed in the Sun-King's brilliant radiance. The structure was crowned with a statue of a dragon several hundred feet high, carved from stone and layered with precious metals. Finally, a vast well—itsself fed by Oceanus, according to the priests—was tapped, and an intricate network of clay pipes carried water throughout the immense structure, finally cascading in great, manmade waterfalls from the four sides of the pyramid to the Fourth Circle hundreds of feet below. Throughout the mythic age, the mechanism used to accomplish this remarkable waterworks remained a mystery: Some believed that the magic and science of the Atlanteans was equal to the task. Others believed that Oceanus was in fact a great water dragon that encircled the world, and that it had been entreated to aid in the effort.

THE CAPITAL CITY

With the grand pyramid and its canal ring complete, the Atlanteans began building their city around it. A rectangular reflecting pool 900 feet long was built extending from the base of the hill toward the sea, and it was framed by a wide plaza constructed of stone blocks only somewhat smaller than the building stones of the pyramid. At night, the pristine and magically stilled water of the pool was a mirror image of the starry heavens, to which the Atlantean people looked for understanding and foresight. Flanking the pool along the sides of the plaza, the finest sculptors of Atlantis created 365 great stone heads, each representing one of the 365 faces of Hesirus. Each of the incredibly detailed Stone Faces, as they were commonly known, represented one of the possible incarnations of Hesirus, whose true nature would only be known when he was reborn at the end of the Fourth Sun. They ranged from very humanlike images to those of animals and legendary beasts associated with the Sun-King, including the Bull and the Dragon.

As the city grew around the Grand Pyramid and the Place of the Sun, many other architectural wonders were created, but none approached the awe-inspiring majesty and scope of these original monuments. In the fourth century of the fourth millennium of the Fourth Sun, the



INNER SEA REGION, CIRCA IV 3382



city is home to more than 100,000 souls. It boasts three lesser pyramids, 18 ziggurats and step pyramids, more than two dozen palaces and temples, and more than a hundred luxurious gardens and parks. Atlantis requires no walls to secure it from invaders, but each of the four main roads leading into it is guarded by a pair of stone obelisks rising nearly 500 feet into the sky. Most buildings in Atlantis follow the conventions of the older cities of the island. They range from two to four stories; the lower floors are built of stone while the upper stories are

constructed from native timber. Clay tiles are the most common roofing materials, though modest structures in less affluent areas sometimes feature simple reed roofs. The streets of Atlantis are paved in stone, as are the major roads connecting the other cities of the island.

PEOPLE

While the citizens of Atlantis have enjoyed a unified identity since even before the founding of the capital,

the population of the island nation is drawn from a diverse range of ethnic groups. The streets of its cities are filled with ebony Ofirans, pale Erebeans, and every skin tone and coloration in between. By the time of the First Exodus, Atlantean has become the official language, but the tongues of many foreign lands can be heard in the temples, palaces, and bazaars of the cities as well. The Atlantean language is derived from earlier tongues spoken by the first city builders of the Inner Sea region and features a sophisticated syllabic alphabet.

Due to the hot summers and mild winters, fashions in Atlantis tend to be light and comfortable. Men most commonly wear sleeveless tunics and kilts, while women favor thigh- or knee-length robes open in front to the navel. Clothing is usually white and unadorned, though dyed fabrics and gold and silver embroidery are not uncommon among the wealthy and powerful classes. While clothing tends to simplicity, however, jewelry is extremely popular with the people of Atlantis. Most who can afford it wear earrings, bracelets, and torcs of silver and gold, and those who cannot make do with strings of glass or ceramic beads or simple bronze pendants, medallions, and amulets on leather thongs.

SOCIETY

Atlantean society is extremely stratified, but this stratification takes a form unique to the island nation. An Atlantean child's fourth birthday is his Naming Day. On this day, he is taken to the local temple, where a ritualized ceremony is performed by the priests. This ritual is said to reveal the child's immortal soul and identify his purpose in life and role in society. According to the Atlanteans, the nature of a person's soul is determined long before conception or birth and is immutable and eternal. For most, life is a constant struggle, first to understand that nature and then to live in accordance with it. Atlanteans are free from that struggle, as their natures are determined on that day. All

they need do is look to the priests, who chart their roles and the courses of their lives. Thus, the Naming Day ritual identifies those who were born to rule and those who were born to serve, those who were born to build and those who were born to toil, those who were born to a life of war and those who were born to a life of learning.

Many cultures of the mythic age subscribe to a similar notion of a "divine order," but only Atlantis developed the theology and sorcery necessary to cultivate and nourish that order. And while a visitor from the modern age would certainly abhor the absence of personal

choice and freedom in this society, the simple fact is that, to all appearances, the system works. The priests who oversee the rituals could not conceive of manipulating them for personal ends, as only the wisest and least prone to corruption are chosen by that same ritual for the priesthood. Most citizens of Atlantis are truly content with their lots in life, and there has been almost no overt conflict between the classes in more than eight centuries. Of course, this remarkable stability is aided by the fact that would-be dissidents are identified when they are children and placed in roles—particularly the arts—where they can express their views non-violently.

While mobility *between* the classes is almost nonexistent, mobility *within* the classes is entirely open. The priests may declare that it is a certain child's nature to be a laborer, but only the child's ability and ambition will determine whether he tills the fields or becomes a skilled craftsman, such as a blacksmith.

Likewise, the priests will determine that a child is born into the ruling class, but not whether he will be a leader in a small village or a famous senator.

Marriages of alliance are not unheard of in Atlantis, but the institution's openness is atypical of other cultures with similarly rigid social classes. Because bloodline is no guarantee of social station, marriages are rarely motivated by a desire to maintain prestige and



SUN AND MOON



Powered as it is by the flowing cycle of water, and influenced by dragons, it is no surprise that the Atlanteans' perceptions of the gods focus on cycles and rebirth. The most popular metaphor for this theme is that the sun and moon are divine eggs, and that the sky is their womb. At the end of each Sun and the beginning of the next, the myth says, those eggs hatch, revealing the true countenances of Hesirus and Selera. The two emerge full-grown, and immediately cleave to one another. Their mating both destroys the world and remakes it anew. The offspring of these immortal newborn, a new sun and moon, are then left in the sky while the lovers disperse into the world, peopling it with new races and imbuing it with their divine presence. The gods are therefore the world's creators and destroyers, part of it and outside it, and as is common in religious myth, are at once their own parents and their own offspring.

One of the most noticeable results of this metaphor in Atlantean culture is that the gods can be pictured as nearly anything, for none, not even the priests and sages, know the shapes of their true faces or bodies. The religion can therefore support countless sects, each with differing visions of the gods and with different interpretations of their teachings, yet none of which can be declared as false. This creates an amazing amount of diversity and freedom of thought, yet retains unity within the religion as a whole.



SIDEBAR 5-1



ROLE OF THE DRAGONS

As is so often the case, there is a kernel of truth in the sometimes-contradictory myths and legends about dragons in Atlantis. Dragons have been dwelling on Atlantis since the earliest days of the mythic age. It is a powerful nexus of karmic energy and most broods consider it a sacred place. The island acted as a sort of neutral ground, where dragons, titans, fae, and other beings could meet and parley or simply seek refuge and sanctuary without fear of violence from their enemies. The accord that ended the legendary war between dragons and titans in the earliest days of the mythic age was forged on Atlantis.

Because of its ancient and sacred status, many beings—including some dragons—were opposed to human settlement of the island. Due to this same status, however, overt attacks against the early settlements were simply not feasible, and so those dragon broods that sought to nurture human civilization had a dramatic advantage over those who resisted it. Eventually, seeing no other worthwhile alternatives, many opponents of human settlement simply withdrew—to Jotunheim, to Elysium, and to all the corners of the world. A few remained and took their efforts to subvert the human civilization of Atlantis to the shadows.

Nevertheless, early Atlantis was uniquely situated as a place where humans and dragons could interact peacefully and productively to the benefit of both races. It would be a disservice to the ancient Atlanteans to suggest that their greatest achievements were simply gifts by the dragons. It is certainly true that dragons protected and guided the Atlanteans through their most vulnerable and formative years, but what the humans created within that time was a product of their own genius and inspiration.

As the years unfolded and the human population of Atlantis grew, dragons gradually withdrew from their affairs and allowed their civilization to blossom on its own. By the fourth millennium, dragons rarely play an overt role in Atlantis. The Atlanteans most certainly believe that they exist and continue to both revere and fear them, but dragons rarely reveal themselves openly, and play no direct role in the lives of most citizens. Throughout the mythic age, however, Atlantis continues to be the heart of mortal civilization. Dragons are drawn to the streets of its cities, its magical places, and its corridors of power, where they walk among mortals in human form and play their own enigmatic but influential role in the nation's rise and fall.

position. The notion of a “good match”—a union of like souls—is much more deeply valued than any sort of concern over propriety or standard of living. Thanks to the Naming Day tradition, of course, those of similar perceptions and mindsets end up in similar social classes; this means that, despite the lack of taboo associated with them, marriages within classes remain more common than marriages between different classes. After all, the soul of a scribe is more likely to sing with the same voice as another scribe than with that of a shepherd, and two scribes are far more likely to meet and interact.

Regardless of the stations of a married couple, tendencies toward a specific class are not hereditary. For example, a senator might prefer to marry another senator, but their child is as likely to be a laborer as a politician.

CULTURE

The heart and soul of the Atlanteans' culture is their shared religion, which is ruled by Hesirus, the Sun, and his wife Selera, the Moon. Their children are the planets known to the Atlanteans: Numion, Isius, Araea, Naeres, Zetheus, and Caernos (respectively, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). Each of them is thought to be an immortal dragon, their karma shining bright in the heavens as they soar above the world. This connection of dragons to the divine is not surprising; dragons were visiting the island long before the arrival of the first humans.

Much Atlantean ritual, ceremony, and religious doctrine is rooted in the predictable motions of the celestial bodies. These influences are apparent in the Atlantean calendar, their monuments, and in the stories they tell about their origins and their gods. One of the central images of Hesirus and Selera is their role as both ancient and newborn beings (see the “Sun and Moon” sidebar).

Dragons are the other major influence on Atlantean culture, second only to the worship of Hesirus and Selera. According to the Atlanteans, the great serpents are the only beings to have survived from the forgotten ages of the First Sun. Whatever the truth of these stories, when humans took their first tentative steps onto the welcoming shores of Atlantis, they found dragons waiting for them there. Those first interactions are not recorded, but it is clear that the dragons left a lasting impression.

Dragons were likely responsible for both the settlement and protection of Atlantis in its earliest stages. For instance, despite it being such a large, centrally located island, Atlantis in its early days was notoriously difficult to find. Countless seafaring warbands returned from intended raids with reports of dangerous weather and monstrous waves blocking their way. Others who had no intention of traveling to Atlantis at all tell stories of being swept upon its shores by sudden winds and unexplained currents; rather than being warlike, those who were “chosen” to land upon the island were universally



benign, educated, and civilized folk—in other words, excellent additions to a burgeoning, peaceful culture. It is almost as if a group of powerful creatures were hand-picking those who were able to reach the island.

Another consideration is the ease with which Atlantis's famed fleets are able to traverse these "randomly treacherous" waters. If the oceans are as dangerous and unpredictable as attackers say, the island's merchants and explorers should have a difficult time reaching foreign lands and spreading the nation's teachings. Instead, Atlantis's ships and the mariners who helm them have become legends of the mythic age, renowned for their ability to travel great distances with little peril or delay. Not coincidentally, crude maps surviving from this era frequently mark certain regions—including the seas around Atlantis—as associated with or identified with dragons. These symbols seem to designate the preferred routes of the ancient mariners, suggesting that in the early mythic age, "Here be dragons" was a sign of safety and good fortune, rather than the dire warning it would become for the seafarers of the ancient modern age.

Atlantis's oral tradition suggests that dragons remained active in human affairs throughout the prehistoric period of Atlantis's development. The dragons are almost universally described as benefactors, mentors, and guardians, and they are credited with many gifts to the Atlanteans, including map-making, elemental magic, and their knowledge of the planets and stars. As the children of the gods, dragons are also seen as divine messengers sent to Earth to instruct and protect the Sun and Moon's chosen people. Throughout the mythic age, dragons will be portrayed by hundreds of different cultures and peoples as guardians of secret places, and the genesis of this tradition can be found in the dragons' intimate relationship with Atlantis and its people.

There are countercurrents to this tradition in Atlantean myth and legend, however. Dragons are portrayed as beings akin to angels and demons in some stories. Others describe dragons as unfathomable shapeshifters with ancient, inhuman minds and mysterious goals and motivations, alien godlings who are ultimately more concerned with their own inscrutable affairs than with the welfare of humans. In many stories, the dragons' role as guardians of secret knowledge is emphasized: dragons may come bearing gifts, but their most precious treasures—especially magic—are always denied to mortal men. Other tales suggest that dragons are not all of one nature, and that they, like humans, can be good or evil, benefactors or monsters, protectors or destroyers.

LANGUAGE

Despite the Atlanteans' complex language, few citizens other than priests, merchants, and government officials achieve literacy. The vast majority of written manuscripts and records in Atlantis come from those castes,

and are used for primarily practical purposes. The rest of the population, and Atlantean culture as a whole, relies more heavily on a strong oral tradition of record-keeping. Each community on the island (or, in the case of larger cities, each district) gathers together every three days for an event called a saga. Sagas are equal parts storytelling performances, town meetings, social events, and religious rituals. They are both free-form and highly sacred, and play a major role in maintaining cohesion and identity within communities.

TECHNOLOGY

The Atlanteans are a race of poets, musicians, artists, and builders. They believe that even the simplest hand-crafted object is a tribute to Hesirus and should be made as beautiful as it is functional. This aesthetic ideal influences the way a simple tenant farmer cultivates and tends his fields just as it does the way an engineer designs and builds the greatest monuments of Atlantean civilization.

Because the cyclical nature of existence is so central to their religion and worldview, the Atlanteans are very nearly obsessed with the longevity of their creations. They build their great monuments to such exacting standards because they want them to last, not for merely a lifetime, or a century, or a millennium, but for an age. Storytellers and sagabearers hand down their legends and lore to each successive generation, and Atlantean poets become the first of the mythic age to compile and record these songs and tales in written form.

The Atlanteans are justifiably proud of their culture and achievements, but one common thread runs throughout it and inspires a collective sense of urgency: Time is running out. The heavens themselves are like a great clock, ticking down to the day when the wheel will come full circle and the Fourth Sun will die. Something must remain, some record must survive, so that the survivors of that ending will be able to crawl from the ashes and build a new world from the ruins of the one that perished.

The Atlanteans' achievements are many, and even the early phase that culminates in the First Exodus is more advanced and sophisticated than many civilizations that will follow it. The Atlanteans are the first to forge tools, weapons, and ornaments of bronze. By the beginning of the fourth millennium, they have even discovered the secret of working steel with magic, and weapons of Atlantean steel enjoy a deservedly mystical and legendary reputation throughout the mythic age. The buildings of Atlantis's Inner City use running water provided by the same ingenious system of clay pipes and sophisticated plumbing that feeds the great fountains and canals. The best of the Atlantean craftsmen have invented complex mechanical instruments, from delicate clocks to formidable crossbows to winged magical armor that can carry its wearer on the winds. Even before the First Exodus, Atlantean galleys that can sail





the open seas between Ofir and Erebea are commonplace. The science and technology of Atlantis at the time of the First Exodus will be approached by ancient civilizations like Egypt, China, Greece, and Rome in the modern age, but will not be truly rivaled until the Renaissance blossoms in Southern Europe.

POLITICS

On the national level, Atlantis is governed by a kind of quasi-republican oligarchy. The 365-member Senate rules from a palace overlooking the Place of the Sun. Senators are drawn exclusively from the ranks of the ruling class, as determined by the priesthood. Elections are held every seven years, but they are not open to the public. Instead, senators are chosen by citizens of the learned classes, including sages, scholars, philosophers, merchants, military officers, magistrates, and other politicians and civil servants.

Any senator is entitled to propose a new law and present it to the senate. A simple majority is then needed to pass the law. In practice, proposed laws that do not already have the support of a strong coalition within the senate (before they are brought to the floor) are largely ignored. Entrenched power bases of elder senators therefore produce most of the laws that are actually passed, while the younger generation wields little real power and often serves as a loud and radical voice of

dissent and opposition. These maverick senators nevertheless represent a real check on the power of the elders, since they are well placed to move in and fill the vacuum should the electorate ever become dissatisfied with the elders' governance. Moreover, on more than one occasion, a charismatic leader among the junior senators has gained sufficient support to rival or even replace one of the entrenched factions.

In IV 3382, at the dawn of the First Exodus, three powerful factions dominate the Senate. The largest is led by Senator Aloros, an elder statesman of 162 years whose parents were both respected members of the priesthood. This conservative faction is deeply rooted in the principles of tradition, piety, and isolationism. Aloros believes that the Atlanteans have built a perfect cultural and religious utopia, and that the only real threat to the nation is disruption—from both within and without. The senator believes that as long as the people of Atlantis remain true to their god and his divine order, Hesirus will nurture and protect them. These principles resonate strongly with not only the electorate—whose life work is deeply invested in the status quo—but also with members of the other classes, who simply wish to lead their lives in continued peace, prosperity, and security.

The second-largest faction is dominated by a triumvirate of powerful senators, one woman and two men: Etana, Polemo, and Asylus. These three were all born to professional soldiers, and they lead the most aggressive and militaristic of the Senate power bases.

This faction has been successful in dramatically expanding the Atlantean military in recent years, and they believe that Atlantis's destiny is empire. They argue that the island is surrounded on all sides across narrow seas by barbarians, and that true security can only be had through conquest. Madame Etana's fiery public speeches draw enormous crowds to the Place of the Sun. In each such address, she entreats the people of Atlantis to "bring the light of Hesirus to lands shrouded in darkness." Nationalistic fervor grows stronger by the day in the cities, and the faction is steadily gaining popularity with the learned electorate.

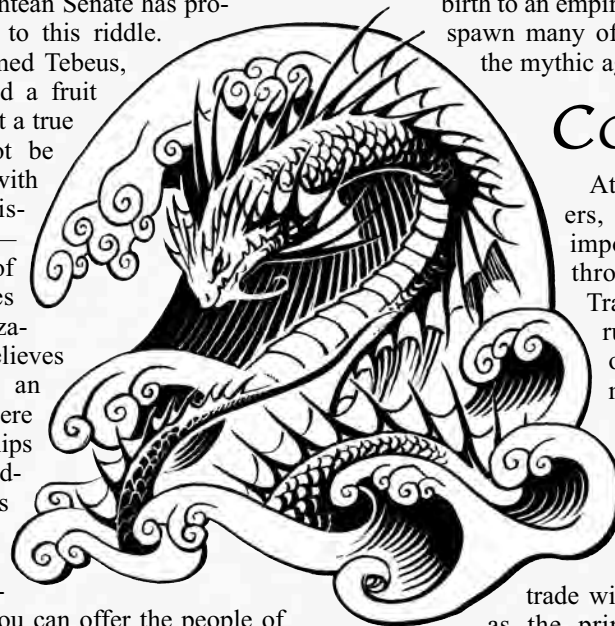
The greatest obstacle to the Imperialists, as they are known, is that there have always been insurmountable limits on the size of Atlantis's military forces. Simply put, no one becomes a soldier in Atlantis unless he possesses the soul of a warrior and is thus appointed to the military on his Naming Day—conscriptors would be a blasphemy against the Atlanteans' most deeply held religious beliefs and a crippling blow to their whole social order. Even those citizens who support the Imperialists' agenda in principle, therefore, often find it problematic in practice. "What empire without armies?" has become a popular slogan of the faction's opponents.

A third faction in the Atlantean Senate has proposed a compelling answer to this riddle. Led by a young senator named Tebeus, the son of a sea-captain and a fruit vendor, this group claims that a true and lasting empire will not be built with legions alone, but with merchants, explorers, magistrates, scholars, and priests—in short, with all the people of Atlantis. Tebeus advocates peaceful expansion, colonization without conquest. He believes that Atlantis will create an empire by "building cities where there are none, by sailing ships into empty harbors, by spreading learning where there is only ignorance, and by creating prosperity where there is poverty." Why must you conquer, Tebeus argues, when you can offer the people of foreign lands the same peace, prosperity, and security that the people of Atlantis have enjoyed for centuries? And why must you conscript unwilling Atlanteans into military service when peaceful expansion will increase the nation's population?

Tebeus is gaining increasing support not only from the Atlantean citizenry, but from the other Senate factions as well. Many of the Imperialists—including the triumvirate—view Tebeus's proposal as a plausible means of achieving their aims without undermining their nation's social order. After all, if only 1% of the population are destined to be soldiers, then the only way

to increase the number of soldiers is to increase the size of the population. Additionally, not all foreigners who are integrated into the Atlantean empire will wish to have their lives' paths chosen for them by the Atlantean priests; those who simply wish to be soldiers, may be soldiers. Etana in particular sees this peaceful expansion as an interim measure that will increase the size of the nation's military population, which will eventually permit Atlantis's expansion into a more aggressive phase. Even the conservatives find the notion of spreading the religious and cultural traditions of Atlantis to other lands uniquely compelling.

A new era of exploration, trade, and colonization is dawning in Atlantis, a period that in future generations will be known as the First Exodus. The shipyards are frantic with new construction, and explorers have already embarked for Erebea and northern Ofir. Almost unnoticed, a new class is forming in Atlantean society as well, one that is drawing enthusiastic members from all walks of life. These Atlanteans are colonists and pioneers, and they include among their numbers farmers, merchants, sailors, soldiers, magistrates, artisans, craftsmen, diplomats, scholars, priests, and even senators. Though few will ever lift a sword, they will in time give birth to an empire, and this empire will in turn spawn many of the greatest civilizations of the mythic age.



COMMERCE

Atlantis was settled by seafarers, and trade has remained important to the island nation throughout its early history.

Trade between the cities and rural areas of Atlantis is vigorous, and a few of the largest merchant companies have opened markets for Atlantean wine, textiles, tools, timber, metals, and other goods in the scattered city-states that huddle along the shores of the Inner Sea. This

trade will intensify and indeed serve as the principal means of Atlantean expansion during the First Exodus.

Commerce within Atlantis is dominated by the cities, and much of that is administered by a sophisticated guild system. Manufactured and finished goods—from textiles and tools to wines and weapons—flow out of the guildhalls into the thriving markets and bazaars, while unfinished goods and raw materials flow into the cities from the collective mines, quarries, and fields in the rural areas. These collectives, called freeholds, are organized much like the guilds: They are administered and managed by communal associations, but the freeholds' workers are in most cases life tenants who can

3 ROLE OF THE FAE 3

At first, the culturally parasitic fae were intrigued by the complex, stratified society produced by the Atlanteans, and came to observe. Later, once they had mimicked the political systems of other societies, the rulers of each holding in their home of Elysium made it a priority to always have a representative in Atlantis to mingle with the senators, seduce the artists, toy with the warriors, and meddle with the wizards. The fae saw Atlantis as both a grand sanctuary, a battleground of wit and intrigue, and an endlessly entertaining topic of discussion. Eventually, in their efforts to imitate the Atlanteans' political system, rulers of the fae would gamble and trade entire holdings simply for the thrill of the game.

This misdirected wheeling and dealing, which the fae referred to as "the lively game," eventually contributed to the sundering of Elysium, the Blessed Lands. Not that the fae succumbed to infighting or civil war; their attention spans for politics, at least among those of the Summer Court, was far too short to inflict any lasting damage or to create any motivated effort toward political change. Indeed, many of the rulers of Elysium's holdings were mere figureheads whose decisions had no bearing on the life within their realms at all. However, distracted by the lively game in Atlantis, the fae failed to see the danger presented by the humans of their own lands: they were reproducing rapidly, and constantly expanding.

Indeed, their games in Atlantis gave the fae reason to celebrate the coming of human migrations into their lands. Jealous of the lack of true sway they held over their fellows, the players of the game, particularly the noble fae called the Daea, were susceptible to the adoration and offerings of the humans who came to worship them as gods. The Daea gave the humans land in Elysium so that their subjects and worshippers could be nearer to them, let them cut down trees so that they might grow more food and raise more children to praise the Daea, and even allowed them to gouge great holes in their mother goddess Danae, the earth, the better to mine metals and stone with which to carve the Daea's likenesses.

And so, though the fae honored Atlantis and reveled in its glory, it nonetheless contributed to Elysium's end.

3 SIDEBAR 5-3 3

sell and profit from the products of their labor as they see fit. Most freehold farmers, for example, choose to sell their produce to the freehold itself, which arranges contracts for eventual sale to the markets in the cities. Some farmers, however, find that they can earn a slight-

ly larger profit by transporting and selling their goods directly. The wagons and stalls of independent freeholders are common sights in the city bazaars and throughout Atlantis's towns and villages on market days.

The Treasury, which is located near the Senate in the city of Atlantis, mints gold and silver coins of various denominations. The most common unit of currency is a small silver coin called the Atlantean mark; an image of the sun is engraved on one face and a stylized, aquatic dragon is on the other. Atlantean coins are of exceptional purity and are accepted throughout the Inner Sea region.

In order to ply a trade in the cities, an Atlantean artisan, craftsman, or tradesman must apply for membership in and be accepted by the appropriate guild. Traditionally, the prospective guildmember is inducted shortly after his Naming Day, when he is still a child. In most guilds, children immediately leave their families and come to the guildhouse to live and begin their training. In this respect, the temples, universities, and military institutions function just like the guilds: They gain their new acolytes, students, and recruits at a very young age. However, a link to the child's family is still very important, requiring the young guildsman to return to his family's home every third month to tell his tale to the local community at one of the sagas. He remains at his home for three days, assisting his parents in their work; in this way, every Atlantean is kept aware of his origins, and while his skills in one world are honed, his connection to another is kept fresh.

Education and training are highly focused and specialized. Most children learn the basic skills of citizenship, including the language, history, and religion of Atlantis. Otherwise, their days are devoted to mastering the skills they will need to practice their trades: Children in the Mason's Guild learn to cut and work stone, children in the temples learn the rituals, ceremonies, and doctrines of their sects, and children in the military learn to wage war. Because of the opportunities this sophisticated system of education offers, most children from small villages and rural areas spend at least some time in the cities, apprenticing with a guild. When they complete their training, they may return to their homes, but they bring their guild allegiances and obligations with them. In this way, the influence of the guilds has spread from the cities throughout Atlantis.

This sophisticated guild system is remarkable in its efficiency. It provides advanced education and training to the people of Atlantis, and, with the exception of public institutions, this education is entirely self-funded by the guilds themselves. If Atlantis's religion is the foundation on which its civilization is built, the guild system serves as the stones and mortar that, in practical terms, bind it together. Despite all the changes that Atlantis undergoes throughout the centuries, the guild system endures in one form or another and ensures that its people remain competent in a diverse range of endeavors. Whether in trade, art, or war, Atlantis is never truly challenged by rival civilizations.



FOREIGN LANDS

Before the First Exodus, Atlantean contact with other lands is largely one-way. There has been some connection with the emerging city-states of the Inner Sea region, such as Amelon and Esrulum in southern Erebea, and Tehut, Nezer, and Samukan in northern Ofir, whether through trade, diplomacy, or rare instances of short-lived war. In general, though, while travelers from many lands visit Atlantis, precious few Atlanteans ever feel the urge to venture beyond the island's shores. While it has not yet developed into outright cultural arrogance, there is a real sense among Atlanteans that theirs is literally an island of civilization surrounded by a vast sea of barbarism and ignorance. In short, most Atlanteans have never had any compelling reason to leave.

This tendency, of course, is about to change dramatically with the dawn of the First Exodus. During this time, explorers and colonists will travel throughout all the lands of the Inner Sea and beyond, planting Atlantean seeds in the fallow fields of emerging civilizations in all corners of the world.

There is also limited contact with the nonhuman civilizations of this time. The ambassadors and lords of the fae courts are not uncommon sights in the palaces of Atlantis. While the fae are nearly as inscrutable as the dragons, they have become intensely interested in

Atlantis by this time. There was significant exchange of lore, art, and arcana between the two peoples in the years leading up to the First Exodus, and commercial and diplomatic contact with the many kingdoms of the fae grows steadily throughout this period. In IV 3256, the state visit of King Oberyceum (who would eventually become the monarch of Arcadia) was both an enduring inspiration to Atlantean poets and artists and a historical confirmation of Atlantis's dominant influence in the mortal world. That visit was the catalyst for the Atlanteans' accord with the fae, in which they promised never to encroach upon the boundaries of Elysium, the Blessed Land of the fae, and likewise promised that Atlantis would ever welcome the fae as guests to its capital city.

Alongside these official contacts, Atlantis—especially the capital—retains its ancient role as a neutral ground for the nonhuman races that populate the world of the mythic age. It is rife with secret intrigues and hidden conflicts of which few Atlanteans are even aware. Dragons walk the streets of the capital in human form, following—or being driven by—the first malignant scent of taint in the world. Princes and ladies of the fae courts play their ancient game of bargains and betrayals in darkened corners of the city, masking their otherworldly presence in glamour. The Dwellers, too, are making their way to Atlantis, lured by the human frailty, mortality, and desperate ambition that create such fertile ground for corruption.



KEHEB: THE REIGN OF THE UNDYING KING

During the height of the First Exodus, one of the first destinations for Atlantean explorers and colonists was the northern coast of Ofir. The endless sands of the Olibian Desert dominated much of this arid and inhospitable region, but by the middle of the fourth millennium of the Fourth Sun, when the First Exodus began in earnest, trading towns such as Tehut and Samukan had been established on the shores of the Inner Sea. Nevertheless, most of northern Ofir was a barren wasteland inhabited by strange creatures and ancient spirits of wind and sun.

The exception was the fertile valley of the River Khem in northeastern Ofir. By the time the Atlanteans began to exert their influence in the region, the natives of this land had already developed agriculture and their largest settlements, such as the river port of Nezer, were evolving into true cities. Still, Keheb had not yet emerged as a unified nation with a single government and identity, and its only political and cultural organiza-

tion were the autonomous villages and towns that were the center of civil life in Keheb. With the arrival of the Atlanteans, that was about to change.

GEOGRAPHY

If not for the life-giving waters of the River Khem, Keheb would be indistinguishable from the surrounding deserts. Each year, in accord with a very reliable natural cycle, the River Khem spills over its banks and floods the valley. The floodwaters deposit silts that transform the arid land of the valley into a fertile paradise ideal for agriculture. This feature has made the Khem Valley one of the most arable lands of the Inner Sea.

The River Khem snakes north through its expansive and verdant river valley, from deep in the heart of Ofir north to the Inner Sea. All life in Keheb flows from the mystical waters of the Khem, and the river has been personified as a nurturing deity in the vast pantheon of Kehebet gods. Indeed, the river seems to have a life of its own, and there are few within Keheb who are not touched in some way by its magic.

The river flows for more than 4,000 miles from the heart of Ofir to the sea. Several stretches along its course, called cataracts, are marked by shallow water, small islets, and plentiful rocks. These stretches make the river nearly unnavigable. From the First Cataract—the one farthest downriver—the river winds clearly but sluggishly some 600 miles to the Khem delta, and thence to the sea.

The northern border of Keheb is sharply defined by the Inner Sea, though its administrative control fades gradually throughout the reed forests and swampland of the Khem delta. To the east and west, Keheb is flanked by the impassable and forbidding eastern and western expanses of the Olibian Desert. In effect, the nation is a long, sometimes winding strip from the Cataracts of the Khem in the far south to the Khem delta on the edge of the Inner Sea. Keheb is thus naturally isolated and well protected from foreign invasion.

Expansive deserts of limestone rock and golden-white sand surround the Khem Valley for miles in every direction. These inhospitable regions are rarely frequented, unless it is by the cat-like Midob merchant-nomads who travel along the Gold Road seeking their fortunes in Nezer and the Keheb cities beyond, such as Tehut and Sebet. The landscape grows rockier as one travels south, and its windswept canyons and gullies are punctuated by rock formations that have been artfully blasted by sand over the course of millennia.

Sandstorms are common in the Olibian Desert. The most powerful storms, which the Kehebet call *tanet kalen*, or “sighs of god,” can last for weeks. Angry winds rage continuously across the sands during such storms; few creatures can withstand their fury. Rain is rare in the heart of the desert, only falling once every few decades. Desert plants bloom in the days following this blessing, casting the dunes and sand flats into a kaleidoscope of bright colors.

HISTORY

Humans have been living in the Khem Valley since the dawn of the mythic age. Scholars among the elder races claim that the valley was settled more than 2,000 years before the first cities were built on the island of Atlantis. Crude paintings on the walls of limestone caves in southern Keheb depict both dragons and titans, and they are often shown battling each other. The first manmade settlements in the river valley were likely seasonal camps used by semi-nomadic tribes that supplemented a predominantly hunter-gatherer lifestyle with seasonal fishing and simple agriculture along the banks of the Khem. The dwellings built by these nomads were often tent rings—simple shelters of animal skins and reeds set in shallow depressions in the earth and surrounded by sandstone.

The first permanent settlements in Keheb were built in the last part of the third millennium, by the reckoning of the Atlantean calendar. These were simple structures of wood, reeds, and mud that nevertheless offered much better durability and protection from sandstorms and other hazards than the tent rings of earlier nomadic settlers. Throughout the latter years of the third millennium and the early years of the fourth, these settlements grew as the ancient Kehebet prospered.

By the time the Atlanteans arrived on the leading edge of the First Exodus, there had already been significant, if limited, contact between Atlantis and Keheb. There were perhaps a dozen autonomous city-states in Keheb at the beginning of this period, and though they were small and modest by Atlantean standards, they had nevertheless developed rudimentary shipbuilding and a functional merchant class. Kehebet merchants made many voyages to Atlantis in those early years, but until the First Exodus, trade had been limited because the Atlanteans themselves rarely traveled to Keheb.

The lack of a unified nation or central government also meant that the Kehebet experienced their share of warfare and turmoil, much of it from within, in the pre-Exodus period. Many of the kings of their various city-states were little more than warlords who gained and maintained power through military might. Violent conflicts between the Kehebet city-states were common, impeding trade and cultural exchange and undermining the emergence of a unified nation. Moreover, many Kehebet kings launched their own brief and spectacularly unsuccessful campaigns against Ofiran nations to the south, including the kingdoms of Kesh, Phunt, and Numebea. Consequently, despite the fact that Keheb had little to fear from foreign invasion, warfare prevented it from emerging as a true nation and legitimate competitor to the growing power of Atlantis.

By IV 3385, in large part due to the impetus of the First Exodus, contact between the Kehebet city-states and Atlantis had intensified. Atlantean merchants brought goods ranging from copper and tin to wine and spices, and returned to their island nation with every-

thing from exotic animals and slaves to textiles, ivory, and gold. Atlantean priests brought the religious traditions of Atlantis to Keheb, and Atlantean pioneers began establishing new settlements along the banks of the River Khem.

Within a century, Keheb had become a *de facto* colony of Atlantis. There were nearly as many people of Atlantean descent living in the region as there were natives, and Atlantean advisors and administrators had quietly transformed into governors and viceroys who served the Atlantean Senate. This gradual political transition was largely peaceful and went almost unnoticed by most of the Kehebet people. They knew only that they were prospering as never before and saw no reason to question the gifts of the growing empire to the north.

Over time, the former kings of the Kehebet city-states became mere figureheads, and the Atlantean imperial governors became the true rulers in name as well as practice. The Atlantean Empire also began taxing the Kehebet people; even this onus was born peacefully, and the relationship of empire-to-colony between the two nations continued for several centuries. Eventually, however, the waves of conflict lapped upon Keheb's shores. By IV 4550, the new military regime of Atlantis was desperate to curry favor from the Atlantean priests and traditionalists so that they would support their war efforts abroad. The catastrophic manner in which they chose to do so was to ban the worship of all deities within the empire but the many faces of Hesirus and Selera.

The Kehebet people could tolerate the imperial governors—for most of them, one ruler was much the same as another, and there was still no unified Kehebet identity to inspire nationalistic fervor. Most could even accept the taxes, since they realized how much they benefited from the trade and civilizing influences of Atlantis. They could not, however, stomach this assault on their religion, and the outcry over this measure eventually spawned a full-scale revolt.

Though seemingly a sudden decision, the outlawing of other religions had been many years in the making. The first Atlanteans had brought their religious traditions with them. Reverence for Hesirus, the sun god, found a natural home among the Kehebet people; the idea of his many incarnations and countless possible faces allowed the natives to form conceptual bridges between each of his aspects and the panoply of gods held sacred by their own ancient, tribal religions. Indeed, as ideas and traditions were exchanged between the scattered city-states of Keheb, the people simply kept adding new deities to their burgeoning pantheon. Hesirus claimed an exalted place among them, but for the Kehebet, he became a descendant of their own sun god, Akheten. For centuries, Kehebet priests and storytellers had been weaving a marvelous theological tapestry in which all of the Kehebet gods were given a place. The Kehebet priests showed much respect and honor to their Atlantean benefactors by incorporating the aspects



of Hesirus into that web of tales, myths, morals, and theologies. There was room, the Kehebet seemed to be suggesting, for both, so long as the relationships between them were mapped out in a complex but mutually-reinforcing mythical doctrine.

After this welcoming of foreign ideas, the Empire's attempt to rip the Kehebet myths out of that tapestry seemed particularly threatening. It was interpreted not just as an insulting restriction but as an attack on the Kehebet cultural identity. Indeed, it was the first time most of the Kehebet people realized that they had a cultural identity. Ironically, in attempting to subjugate the collection of disorganized and often-quarrelling city-states, the Atlanteans turned Keheb into a true nation for the first time.

What followed was a brief colonial war in which the Atlantean governors and administrators were slain or imprisoned and Kehebet rebels seized the institutions of government. The leaders of this revolt were descendants of the ancient aristocracy that had ruled the city-states during the pre-Exodus period. Nezer was the largest and most prosperous city at this time, and during the rebellion, it was led by an aristocratic family that claimed an unbroken lineage to the city-state's first kings. After the rebellion, this family was also in the best position to claim and defend the throne of a new Kehebet nation, and the patriarch of that family, crowned Nebekhet I, became the first king of Keheb. He named Nezer as his capital city.

PEOPLE

The Kehebet people are a racial and ethnic mix, with Ofiran, Olibian, and Atlantean bloodlines. As a rule, they tend to swarthy, brown skin, black hair, and dark eyes. Facial hair among the men is uncommon, though this is more a cultural tradition than a racial characteristic.

With its long, hot summers and mild winters, the climate of Keheb encourages light, airy clothing, usually made from plant fibers. Along with wheat and maize, flax is one of the most important crops in Keheb. It is spun into thread to make durable and comfortable clothing of woven linen. These garments are usually very simple: loincloths or wraps resembling kilts for men and calf-length dresses with straps for women. Both sexes sometimes wear robes as well, and these articles typically show more variation in style. They may cover one or both shoulders, may have long sleeves, short sleeves, or no sleeves at all, and may reach to the knees or to the tops of the feet. Clothing most often keeps its natural, light color, but it is occasionally dyed.

The society of Keheb is organized according to a strict hierarchy, but one based on the privilege of birth rather than any mystical or theosophical foundation, as in Atlantis. The vast majority of Kehebet work the land, either as peasants or as slaves. The wealthy and powerful noble houses—many of them descended from Atlantean colonists—control the reins of government

and commerce, aided by the scribes and administrative classes. The priesthood is responsible for religious life, as well as the working of magic and important ceremonies surrounding such events as birth, death, and marriage. Above all of these, in a class of his own, is the king, revered as an avatar of Akheten.

Keheb boasts an ancient and refined language influenced by Ofiran, Eastern, and Atlantean sources. Written records are extremely important in Kehebet government, administration, and religion, and in this regard, Keheb surpasses Atlantis in its complexity and sophistication. Two forms of writing are common in Keheb, called Kehebet glyph and script. The former is predominant in religious writing and is found everywhere from architectural inscriptions to sacred texts. The latter is essentially a form of shorthand and can be readily translated into glyphic writing.

CULTURE

The Kehebet have inherited many traits from the Atlantean colonists and explorers of the First Exodus, and these influences are apparent throughout their culture. However, these influences have been expressed in very different ways in Keheb, and they have mingled with Ofiran, Olibian, and Eastern influences to create a cultural legacy unlike any other in the mythic age.

Like the Atlanteans, the Kehebet are culturally obsessed with finitude, with the ending of things. Throughout their history, the Atlanteans responded by building grand monuments to their civilization as a whole. In Keheb, on the other hand, the obsession is bound up much more intimately with the mortality of the individual. Why be overly concerned with the eventual ending of the age when one's own death beckons from a much closer horizon? Ironically, whereas little to nothing remained of the Atlanteans' legacy after the mythic age, the Kehebet with their less momentous goals ended up being one of the most direct seeds of modern age civilization.

This collective obsession with mortality permeates Kehebet religion, which is chiefly concerned with preparation for the afterlife. It is also found in their fine art, which is dominated by portraiture—images that grant a form of immortality to those depicted. It is represented in their songs, which tell the stories of specific people, whether shepherds or kings. The obsession with mortality is even ubiquitous in their architecture. Whereas Atlanteans build monuments to their nation as a whole, the Kehebet build monuments to their people as individuals: tombs, palaces, and obelisks all designed to recount the lives and achievements of those who build them. Moreover, these structures are never merely ornamental, as they may be in Atlantis. Every wall and surface is a record-keeping device, typically adorned with portraits and glyphic records of deeds and accomplishments, the better to imprint the builder's impermanent existence in the permanence of stone. Of course,

most Kehebet cannot afford to build great monuments and tombs in their own honor. The stories of the patriarchs of more modest households are inscribed in simple things: pottery, baskets, furniture, and other objects of practical utility.

The Kehebet are enormously fond of parties, games, and other leisure activities. Even peasant households will endeavor to host a banquet for friends and family on occasion, and social status within one's class is often measured by the frequency and relative sumptuousness of such parties. On these occasions, and during religious festivals, drinking to excess is tolerated and even encouraged. Drug use, ranging from blue lotus and mandrake to hashish and opium, is common among the noble and merchant classes.

Cultural attitudes towards sex and nudity are also more open than in other civilizations of this time. Slaves—especially the young women—are often nude or barely clothed, and even highborn women sometimes go partially nude in public or at private galas. Men often frequent bordellos, and dalliances with slaves are expected from both the men and women of the noble and wealthy classes. Nudity and sensuality feature prominently in art ranging from portraiture to dance, and as in many civilizations, the young and healthy are considered more appealing than the old and infirm. The only cultural taboo in this regard is against sex or sexual displays in temples and other sacred places. There is no temple prostitution in Keheb.

For the Kehebet, parties, drinking to excess, drug use, and sex are all celebrations of life. They are a means of fending off death and of enriching the soul in preparation for the afterlife. The Kehebet notion of the afterlife is essentially “contentment.” That is, each person is rewarded in the afterlife according to his nature. The more a man (or woman) enjoys wine, sex, and song in life, therefore, the more he can expect such things in the afterlife. However, to be rewarded with an afterlife



OTHER LANDS



Elsewhere in the world, the Atlanteans' rise to empire was not so peaceful. Starting around IV 4220, Atlantis became embroiled in a series of conflicts with rival powers such as Tethys and rebellious colonies such as Amazonia. In IV 4327, the militaristic imperial faction was able to ride this wave of strife and turmoil to power, disbanding the senate and declaring its leader, the general Porian, emperor. The new imperial government immediately began formalizing the colonial relationship between Keheb and Atlantis, and led to Atlantis's disastrous attempts to conquer and colonize Qeztlan, far across the sea to the west.



SIDEBAR 5-4



INNER SEA REGION, CIRCA IV 4553



at all, a Kehebet must earn it. In this, the Kehebet's notion of a good life closely follows the Atlanteans': One must be successful in whatever role or roles one has chosen or been granted in life. To qualify for an afterlife, a person must be a good father or mother, husband or wife, peasant or priest, warrior or merchant. Life is therefore a balance between the responsibilities that determine one's access to the afterlife and the hedonistic pursuits that determine that afterlife's quality.

The Kehebet religion has been greatly influenced by Atlantean immigrants and missionaries. Many Kehebet deities are related to or in some way inspired by Hesirus, the Atlantean sun god. The supreme deity is Akheten, and like Hesirus, he is the god of the sun. Akheten is variously depicted as a great bull, the sun disk, or a fal-

con-headed dragon. Akheten's status waxes and wanes throughout Kehebet history. During the reign of the Undying God-King, Tahenkhem, the religion of Kehebet is best described as monolatry: worship of one god along with a belief in many, as opposed to the monotheistic belief in one god alone. Belief in Akheten's children did not lapse during this period, but it was considered an affront to Akheten—and his living avatar, Tahenkhem—to place them above him.

Akheten's eldest children are the ancient, pre-Atlantean gods of primordial creation. They are Nen and Nenet, primordial matter and primordial space; Kek and Kekhet, the illimitable and the bound; Het and Hethet, revelation and obscurity; and Anen and Anenhet, the living and the dying. All of these deities are brought forth

from the Sun, before which there was only chaos, and from them all of creation is derived. These gods, with Akheten at their head, were known as the Nine, and from them came four elemental deities from which the world was formed: Sek and Tefnek (fire and water), Keb and Nuk (earth and sky). These four in turn sired a host of lesser deities that served as the intermediaries between mortals and the Nine.

These intermediaries were often depicted as human-animal hybrids. Djehotep gifted mortals with learning, wisdom, magic, writing, arithmetic, astronomy, and alchemy. Hesirus—the name borrowed directly from the Atlanteans—was a god of fertility and the dead. Iskheth, the sister and consort of Hesirus, is the goddess of fertility, life, love, and the moon, and she is often associated with the Atlantean Selera. Hesis, the firstborn of Hesirus and Iskheth, was the god of light, kingship, and victory. Setekh, the Adversary, was the second son of Hesirus and Iskheth, and he was the god of war, violence, and evil.

These are only a few of the most important Kehebet gods. Many others besides claim temples and active priesthoods in Keheb's cities, and countless more are venerated in village shrines and peasant ceremonies. The Kehebet religion is an inclusive one, and rather than outlaw belief in new deities or regional gods, they simply incorporate them into their grand pantheon.

POLITICS

Before the First Exodus, Keheb was a divided land dominated by autonomous villages, towns, and small cities. The leaders of these small city-states often warred with one another, but none of them were able to unite the land into a true nation. In the centuries that followed the First Exodus, Keheb effectively became a colony of Atlantis, with imperial governors and viceroys holding the true power in the city-states. After the Atlantean Empire's ill-advised attempt to formally annex Keheb and impose its own state religion, Keheb broke away from Atlantis and formed a unified, independent nation for the first time. In the centuries that followed, Keheb was ruled by a succession of dynastic kings, the first of whom was Nebekhet I. In IV 4814, however, the priests of Djehotep made a startling discovery that would forever transform Keheb and its rulers.

When the floodwaters of the River Khem recede each year, they leave behind pools that soak into the sand and soil. As these pools evaporate, they deposit a white, crystalline substance called khemsek. In ancient times, the people of Keheb used khemsek for everything from preserving food to cleaning and treating wounds. The Kehebet had always believed the substance contained magical properties, and in IV 4814, the priests of the god Djehotep proved it.

Khemsek is the product of a rare, naturally occurring alchemical process. When the salts and sediments deposited by the river water are heated in the sun and

THE CRIPPLING OF ATLANTIS

In the years after the Kehebet rebellion, Atlantis remained distracted by problems in Erebea and to the west, and made only half-hearted attempts to reconquer Keheb. When the life-extending properties of khemsek were discovered in IV 4814, the proud and desperate leaders of the Atlantean military state gathered their allies and made plans for a new campaign to reconquer Keheb. Most of the dragons who had let their fortunes remain tied to Atlantis over the centuries, disgusted by this petty attempt by the warmongers to gain immortality, finally abandoned their adopted home and negated the accord of peace and protection they had enacted so long ago. This left the island open to assault from without; the vicious Trmmali raiders of the Inner Sea took advantage of the opening, pressing the Atlanteans for the first time on their home island. While they were distracted, Kurgan warlords sacked many of Atlantis's Erebean trading ports. Even the remains of feudal Tethys took advantage of the opening, waylaying the Atlantean ships that passed through their blockades between southwest Erebea and northwest Ofir. Succumbing to pressure from these growing powers, the Atlanteans pulled back the tendrils of their empire, and began to return to their mercantile origins. Eventually, as the dream of conquest died, the military regime of Atlantis was overthrown, and the Senate regained control. It became dependent on trade with Keheb to keep its economy flowing and cultural exchange to keep its citizens content. The nation's only source of independent power became the vestiges of military domination and subjugation of the Qeztlan lands that they had captured during their expansion to the west.

Over the course of the next thousand years, Atlantis would fade into a fragile, shadowy version of its former self, while Keheb would emerge as a great civilization that leaves behind a cultural legacy to inspire the blossoming of civilization in the modern age.

SIDEBAR 5-6

exposed to the desert wind, they are transformed into a potent mixture of earth, water, fire, and air that has remarkable powers of healing and preservation. The priests of Djehotep discovered that with periodic, ritualized applications of khemsek, a person's lifespan could be extended indefinitely. Because this process was expensive and difficult, the treatment was initially restricted to the current king, Takenkhemen, and his immediate family.

THE REMAINS OF KEHEB

While the worship of the intermediaries ceased along with the end of the mythic age, Akheten's eldest children left a legacy well into Keheb's successor civilizations in the modern age, most notably Egypt. Of the deities listed above, only Sek went through a major transformation, becoming a brother of Nuk and avatar of air instead of fire. Sages suggest that the rejection of the fire aspect of the god was in response to Keheb's experience during the cataclysm that ended the mythic age: whereas most nations were swept under by the seas, Keheb alone experienced a rain of fire from the skies. While destroying all that lived beneath it and making the once fertile river valley inhospitable, this hellish barrage spared the structures and legacies of the Kehebet people.

SIDEBAR 5-7

During the next several years, the Kehebet quest for immortality ran into some obstacles. It seemed that the natural alchemical process that created khemsek could only occur in karmic areas. The rituals used to harvest the khemsek, however, invariably drained the karma from these areas, until they eventually became balanced or even tainted. Once it became clear that immortality would necessarily be reserved to the very few, the priesthood decided that only King Tahenkhemmen would receive the life-extending magic of khemsek. In this way, Keheb remained a mortal land but gained an immortal god-king. At the dawn of the sixth millennium, Tahenkhemmen the Undying God-King has ruled over Keheb for almost 500 years.

Tahenkhemmen's rule is absolute. He is served by a host of administrators, scribes, governors, advisers, and priests, but the god-king's word has the weight of divine law. In addition to his unlimited secular power, Tahenkhemmen is revered as a living god and the very personification of Keheb. In effect, what is good for the god-king is good for the land, and vice versa. Fortunately for the people of Keheb, Tahenkhemmen has been, for the most part, a benevolent king. If nothing else, immortality has forced him to take rather a longer view of things than mortal humans, and he recognizes that he must ensure the prosperity of Keheb if he is to enjoy his wealth and power in a hundred years, or five hundred, or a thousand.

The pharaoh's immortality has inspired him to undertake great works that could not ordinarily be completed in the lifetime of a single king. He builds great pyramids—modeled after the one in Atlantis—that serve as tombs for the generations of wives, consorts, and children that he outlives. The construction of a massive irrigation system has been underway for more than a cen-

tury, expanding the fertile oasis of the Khem Valley into the harsh and unforgiving Olibian Desert. Tahenkhemmen abhors war: He does not age, but he can still be killed through violence. He aggressively pursues peace and open trade with the other great human nations of this epoch, including Atlantis, the Ebony Kingdoms, and the nations of Xia.

This immortality coupled with vulnerability has a dark side, as well. Most obviously, the god-king is dependent on khemsek. If the magical treatments were to be interrupted, Tahenkhemmen would begin to age; if they were to stop altogether, he would eventually die. The lands where the richest deposits of khemsek are found have been declared sacred, and only priests are allowed to visit them. These deposits also limit the permitted extent of the nation's irrigation system, as the substance only forms in the desert.

The scarcity of khemsek and its dependence on karma also means that the pharaoh is obsessed with taint. Sorcery is outlawed for all persons except members of the priesthood, and taint-spawning creatures are hunted relentlessly. An elite order of warrior-priests called the Maat is responsible for enforcing these prohibitions and for ensuring that all of the pharaoh's people live karmically ordered and balanced lives. While many of the Maat's duties are clearly positive and beneficial, there are invariably occasions when its soldiers abuse their authority and persecute the innocent. In its zeal to protect the land and its king from taint, the Maat's efforts are sometimes heavy-handed and misguided. For example, dragons are often attacked for their use of magic, despite the fact that they cannot generate taint. Those dragons that lack the bestial aspects of the Kehebet gods (animalistic traits like feathers, fur, and the like) are also often assumed to be demons of some sort, and sometimes attacked out of fear.

COMMERCE

The craftsmen of Keheb were greatly influenced and cultivated by the First Exodus. While the Atlanteans were unrivaled for their thoroughness, grace, and understanding of beauty, the Keheb added to that pristine craftsmanship a sense of abandon and creativity. The materials pre-Exodus craftsmen relied on are still in wide use during the reign of Tahenkhemmen: stone, clay, plant products such as wood and fibers, and animal products such as hides, ivory, and bone. During and after the First Exodus, the working of metal was added: gold and silver were used where available, and copper and tin was imported from Atlantis to make bronze. By the turn of the sixth millennium, Kehebet craftsmen are even using quartzite sand to make glass, and Kehebet merchants export it in great quantities to Atlantis.

Keheb's economy during this epoch is extremely centralized, directed at all times by the king through a large and complex bureaucracy. During the early years of the First Exodus, Atlantean-style guilds began to

emerge, but these were dismantled in favor of centralized administration under the reign of Nebekhet I. The king owns all land and means of production in Keheb—indeed, he *is* Keheb—and he grants the use of these resources to his people. The governmental bureaucracy tells peasant farmers what crops to grow and when, and it tells craftsmen what goods to produce, where to sell them, and where to purchase the raw materials required to create them. The bureaucracy works closely with the priesthood. Diviners are responsible for developing a plan by which the economy of Keheb will be most prosperous, down to the smallest detail, while the bureaucracy is responsible for executing it. The produce of individual farmers and tradesmen are taxed and redistributed according to the plan, but successful households are entitled to keep their surplus and market it however they wish.

Ninety percent or more of the Kehebet people work as peasants and laborers on the great estates of the king, the lesser aristocracy, or the temples. Tradesmen and skilled craftsmen live in the cities, where they work on projects both grand and small as assigned by the bureaucracy. Small factories owned by wealthy merchants and noblemen are common in the cities, including bakeries, breweries, foundries, and carpentry and textile shops. Large mining operations, also owned by these merchants and aristocrats, produce quarried stone for public works and construction and precious metals and gems for the wealthy classes.

Keheb's economy is not an especially efficient one, at least by modern standards, and most of this produce is consumed by the producers themselves. The surplus that is left over after one has provided for his family and paid his taxes can be bartered or sold. Most of this commerce occurs directly between households or in public markets. However, surplus produce is also sold to professional traders, usually the cat-like Midob. These merchants often work for the government and resell purchased goods elsewhere in Keheb or export it to Atlantis, Shem, Sheba, or even southern lands past the desert; of all the residents of Keheb, this nomadic race of feline humanoids is the most adept at desert survival.

FOREIGN LANDS

At the dawn of the sixth millennium, Keheb has rivaled Atlantis as one of the dominant powers in the Inner Sea region. Relations between the two powers have been generally cordial since Keheb broke away from Atlantean rule, and God-King Tahenkhemen has carefully nurtured political and mercantile ties with Atlantis. A virtual armada of merchant ships plies the seas between Keheb and Atlantis, and Kehebet emissaries are as common in the Atlantean Senate as Atlantean ambassadors are in Tahenkhemen's court.

Relations with the ancient kingdoms of southern Ofir are as cordial as they have ever been during this period. The Gold Road has opened trade between Keheb and



the nations of Kesh, Phunt, and Numebea. Precious metals, ivory, slaves, and exotic animals flow north along the Gold Road to the great markets of Nezer, Sebet, Tehut, and Samukan, while wine, beer, spices, and finished goods flow south to the Ebony Kingdoms.

Increased trade and the absence of overt warfare have not resulted in the kind of close political alliance that exists between Keheb and Atlantis, however. Despite Tahenkhem's fervent and often seemingly desperate efforts to forge cordial ties with the Ebony Kingdoms, relations between the nations are often strained. One source of this tension is magic, as sorcery is an ancient and revered practice in Kesh, Phunt, and Numebea. Tahenkhem is concerned that "black magic" will be exported to Keheb, while the proud kings of the south resent the god-king's efforts to impose his self-obsessed religious prohibitions on their people.

Tahenkhem has also opened trade with the Eastern Kingdoms of Asua, including Xia, and to his country's closer neighbors of Shem and Sheba. One of the great works the god-king has undertaken is creating an eastern extension of the Gold Road to these ancient nations, so that it will eventually span thousands of miles from Numebea in central Ofir all the way to the great city of Ur in Shem. This project has been dragging on for decades, being hindered by the periodic wars that plague the Eastern Kingdoms and seemingly endless hordes of nomadic bandits that swarm out of the trackless deserts to waylay both laborers and merchant caravans.

In the north, Keheb's relations with the Erebean nations are typically directed by Atlantis. Keheb trades openly with the free cities of southern Erebea, such as Amelon and Esrulum. The treaties binding Keheb and Atlantis, however, ban all trade with old foes of Atlantis like Tethys and Amazonia. In practice, these treaties do little to curtail some of the more adventurous Midob merchants, who frequently smuggle a variety of goods to and from outlawed ports all along the northern coast of the Inner Sea.

Ironically, despite the fact that humans spawn taint and supernatural creatures do not, Tahenkhem's edicts against unsanctioned magic mean that Keheb has little overt contact with the elder races. As noted previously, many supernatural creatures are hunted down and slain by the Maat. Others, including dragons and fae, are typically unwelcome in Keheb by the beginning of the sixth millenium. The exceptions are those dragons and other supernatural beasts that boast animalistic features, particularly those considered sacred in Keheb: falcons, ibis, dogs, and jackals, specifically. In pre-Exodus Keheb, these creatures were not only welcome, they were often accorded divine status. In the years following the First Exodus, such worship was tempered by the cosmopolitan leanings of the Atlantean influx, and by the time of the Undying God-King, according divinity to any earthly presence other than Tahenkhem is frowned upon. Even in the sixth millennium, however, when Tahenkhem's reign is at its peak, priests will admit

that, though these beast-creatures are not gods themselves, they are likely descended from the gods, and deserve respect accordingly.

ARCADIA: EXILE OF THE SUMMER COURT

In the earliest years of the age the Atlanteans would call the Fourth Sun, a magical empire stretched across Erebea from the southern coasts of the Inner Sea to the emerald islands of the Western Sea. This great kingdom was known to its people as Elysium, the Blessed Land, and would be called Faerie—and a hundred other names, besides—by the humans that would eventually spread across the continent.

More than a thousand years after the rise of Atlantis, Elysium was splintered into two kingdoms by both the fae's own carelessness and unending waves of human migration. This tale is told in more detail in the history of the Kurgan horse-lords, starting on page 144. The land called Avalon or the North Kingdom was confined to northwestern Erebea and the coastal islands of the Western Sea. Its people were determined and earnest, or at least as much as fae can be, and seemed to be a supernatural representation of the melancholy and seriousness of life. That kingdom was ruled by Queen Maeve and her Winter Court. The South Kingdom was the greater in size, at least at first. Named Arcadia by those fae who called it home, the South Kingdom stretched for thousands of miles through primordial forest and included rolling hills, lush valleys, and clear streams and brooks. Its people lived a life of abandon and joy, and were ruled by the Summer Court of King Oberyceum and Queen Tiana. These two nations were the ancient and magical kingdoms of the fae, whose distinct races and species were legion and whose immortal lords were worshipped as gods. Both would cease to be before the ending of the age, and would be remembered only in myth and legend.

GEOGRAPHY

When it split from Avalon, Arcadia sprawled across a broad area of southeastern Erebea. The rich soil and warm climate made the land ideal for agriculture, and it was much envied by the people of the fledgling human tribes that surrounded it; especially grievous to the industrious humans was that so much of the land was "wasted," in that it was densely forested and left to run

wild. By the time of the Exile of the Summer Court, in IV 5004 by the Atlantean calendar, erosion and human axes have whittled away at the edges of Arcadia for centuries, and the tainted soil is already beginning to turn thin and rocky. Still, even in these years, with its magic fading and its glory much diminished, the heart of Arcadia is an untamed and magical place where few mortals ever tread.

While all the lands of the mythic age were magical and strange by modern standards, they must have seemed tame and mundane when compared with Arcadia. Outside the borders of the fae realms geographical features are more or less constant; though mortal kingdoms may rise and fall, and mortal peoples come and go, the land itself changes only slowly. The mountains loom in their appointed places, rivers flow along their accustomed courses, and a traveler can expect to find a town in the same place he left it on his return. Arcadia, however, is a wild and majestic land where change is the only constant and unpredictability is the only safe bet. It is a land where the laws of nature are suppressed and displaced by the shifting and enigmatic whims of fae magic. In Arcadia, a mortal traveler rarely finds a mountain or a town in the same place twice, and someone traveling down a river all day might put in at the same spot from which he departed.

Unsurprisingly, magic is the only way to safely navigate this magical land. This magic comes naturally to the fae and is only a major inconvenience to the many supernatural creatures—including dragons—that dwell in or visit Arcadia. It is completely impossible for most humans. On certain nights, in special places, the veil between the mortal world and Arcadia becomes as thin as an angel's hair and light as a breath, and a determined mortal may cross over into the faerie realm (see the *Traveling in Arcadia* sidebar). Invariably, of course, the mortal quickly becomes lost, or at the very least unable to return to his own world. Legends and myths are rich with the tales of such doomed mortals.

On the eve of the Exile, the borders of Arcadia are defined in the south by the coast of the Inner Sea and in the north by the titanic mountains called the Ouros. The River Bedlam traces the eastern boundary, and it will be remembered in the modern age by many names, including Styx, Lethe, and Sanzu. In the west, the broad Elysian Plain marks the border of Arcadia, if somewhat ambiguously. It is on this border that Arcadia has been most grievously wounded by the relentless expansion of human civilization, which draws nearer to the heart of the South Kingdom with each passing century.

Within these shrinking boundaries, Arcadia is a disordered tangle of ancient forests and moss-shrouded woods, languid rivers and treacherous gorges, flowered meadows and rugged hills. Arcadia is a paradise of eternal summer. Its people never feel the cruel touch of winter or suffer the lash of storms. The sun continues to shine even during the brief, unpredictable showers, filling the sky with the diamond radiance of glittering rain-



drops and casting breathtaking rainbows into the heavens.

The fae, by nature, are not builders, and there are few places in Arcadia that humans would call towns or cities. The Summer Court, the royal seat of the king and queen, is one such place, but even it boasts few permanent structures beyond the white-stone palaces of Oberyceum and Tiana. The rare border towns, which bridge the mortal and fae worlds, are the others. These towns were built and populated by the mortal expatriates living or trapped in Arcadia. The most enduring of these towns is Babylon, whose name the Greeks will give to the ancient city founded on the banks of the Euphrates.

HISTORY

The two kingdoms of the fae are the remains of perhaps the most ancient civilization of the mythic age. The ruling nobility—the Daea—are immortal beings of great power, but they lack any real notion of time or history. While they have many songs and much lore, it is difficult indeed to learn much of time and its passage from the stories of the fae. If asked how old their civilization is, the fae answer simply that it has always been, that once all the world was Elysium.

It is known that at the end of the last age, the titans warred with the first dragons, and their descendants

TRAVELING IN ARCADIA

Simply locating and crossing the borders of Arcadia is challenging for any non-native being. Crossing the boundary requires the expenditure of five karma points. If this karma is not expended, the traveler becomes lost, confused, or simply decides to journey elsewhere. Once within Arcadia, travel is no easier. For every mile that a non-native creature travels within the borders of Arcadia, it must spend one point of karma or become hopelessly lost. Each hour, the lost creature may make an Air (Ka) 5 test to recognize some familiar landmark and regain its bearings. The creature can then spend the karma to continue its travels. If it does not, it immediately becomes lost again.

The wise traveler takes advantage of the faerie paths that crisscross Arcadia. The roads are as various in shape and style as the fae themselves; some appear to be ancient byways of gleaming white cobblestone, while others are nothing more than game paths, and some consist of more fanciful elements, like rocks that must be hopped or a string that must be followed. A non-native creature need only spend one point of karma for every 10 miles traveled while following a faerie path. The faerie paths invariably—if meanderingly—lead to all the most important locations in Arcadia, including the Summer Court.

A common greeting or well-wishing among mortals near fae realms is “May the path find your feet.” As long as a character pays karma to travel, whether on a faerie path or not, he is safe from any harm from the realm’s more dangerous inhabitants. The moment a character steps off of a path, ceases paying karma to travel, or takes any kind of detour other than attempting to reach his destination, he is said to have “lost his way.” Those who have lost their way are rarely heard from again, as more than a few fae enjoy mortals as entertainment, company, or even sustenance.

Erebea is also dotted with faerie rings, mounds, standing stones, and menhirs that were once waypoints on the network of roads that crossed the Blessed Land. These ancient places, regardless of where they are located in the world, can sometimes be used to reach the fairy roads of both Arcadia and Avalon. The karma that a traveler must spend to make such a crossing ranges from one point to 10 points.

For three days before and after Midsummer’s Eve, a traveler who knows where to find it can cross into Babylon, a legendary Arcadian border town, by expending a single point of karma. Each year, the Midsummer festival in Babylon is attended by disaffected and adventurous mortals, as well as many non-native supernatural creatures. Many of these visitors never leave.

SIDEBAR 5-7

were driven into the north, where they built a new kingdom for themselves. It is also known that they found the fae in this place already, and that, weary of war, they forged a peace with the ancient Daea kings and queens. In this way, the far north of Erebea became the Land of the Giants, which would be remembered as Jotunheim in the modern age. Many of the fae split from the Blessed Court and remained in the north, to make new lives for themselves—in peace or in war—with the giant-kin. Centuries later, in the northwestern realm of Avalon, Queen Maeve launched a never-ending war against the warped and twisted offspring of the titans who called themselves Fomorians. This was the first diminishing of the Blessed Land, but it would not be the last.

A thousand years or more after the founding of Jotunheim and its great capital city of Vislund, barbaric tribes of humans began migrating north and west through Erebea in great numbers. Even armed with the cold iron that was poison to the fae, the mortals were no match for the Daea and their faerie hosts, whether in might or magic. Instead, the humans wielded the one weapon that no Daea could stand against: their worship. The mortals embraced the Daea as their gods, and in return, the Daea granted them a place at their side in an earthly paradise. The humans spread out into the lands bestowed upon them by their gods. At this time, there were many courts in the Blessed Land, and each offered its king or queen both a throne and a godhead. The Daea were gods of fertility and the hunt, death and war, light and illusion, air and darkness. Under the care of the godling Daea, the mortals prospered and multiplied. The Daea were so enamored of their adopted worshippers that they did not notice their own diminishing.

As the centuries turned, the humans’ numbers continued to grow. There was seemingly no end to the praise and adoration they would shower upon their gods, but they wanted one thing above all else in return: more land. By the time the Daea realized the trap they had set for themselves, the mortal lands had grown to such an extent that the Blessed Land had been bisected into two realms: Arcadia in the southeast and Avalon in the northwest. In time, it became clear that the Daea’s mortal children would continue to multiply until they had no room left for their gods.

Though it was far too late to reverse the tide, many of the fae began to withdraw from mortal lands. They walked among the mortals less and less, and they became absent gods. Eventually, the humans worshipped them in name only—they completely forgot who their gods had actually been. The fae became noth-



ing more than spirits of field and forest. The humans might still honor and appease them with small tokens, gifts, and rituals—at least in times of plenty. In times of want, as often as not, they cursed the fae as demons and begged other, more ancient gods to destroy them.

By IV 4780, it has become clear to the fae of Arcadia that they have lost everything—both their godheads and their ancient homeland. There is simply no room for them anymore. The borders of the South Kingdom are shrinking with each passing year. They might have fought for their kingdom, but the fae of the Summer Court are not warlike, as a rule. Indeed, the most powerful among them—the Daea—cannot bring themselves to slaughter the mortals who are, after all, still their adopted children, and who still sing praises to their names. King Oberyceum and Queen Tiana have decided there is only one thing the fae of Arcadia can do: They will have to leave.

The king and queen hosted a great tourney of their champions, and even invited some of the mortal, dragon, and titan friends of their faerie court to take part. Those who won the tourney by force of arms, cleverness of wit, or glibness of tongue, would be chosen to act as the heralds for the coming of the fae. These champions would be both scouts and emissaries, searching the world over for a new home for their king and queen. The champions were known as homefinders, and the tales generated by their journeys are many and grand. One by one, however, they returned to Arcadia without success. Decades passed, and the realm grew ever smaller, until the king and queen of the Daea had to admit that their champions had failed.

The results of the quests had been inevitable, and could have been long foreseen by any but the fae. In their cloistered world, concerning themselves with song and dance, with the play of sunlight on water and wind in the trees, they had not realized that there *was* no place left in the world for them. Just as had happened in Erebea, the fledgling race of man had spread like summer grass to any hospitable spot that the fae's champions could find. Many kingdoms offered places in court to the beautiful and otherworldly fae, but did not offer them true lives in those new homes; they would be curiosities, trophies, and desperately fought-over consorts, but nothing more. Some areas remained unpopulated by dint of their being so inhospitable, but the delicate fae could no more live in a barren landscape than a rainbow can exist without water and light.

Having no other option, the proud king and queen of the Summer Court swallowed their pride and beseeched their cousin, the queen of the Winter Court, for her aid. "Welcome us to Avalon," they said, "and we will add our strength to your own and live together as one people again." While the fae of Arcadia had been playing at godhood in the Summerlands, Queen Maeve had been fighting a millennia-long war with the terrible Fomorians. So, while she harbors no great love for the Arcadians, she has agreed to let Oberyceum and Tiana

bring their people and rule with her over Avalon . . . so long as they join her in the war.

IV 5004 is the eve of this Exile. Many of the fae have already departed for Avalon. The king and queen remain in Arcadia. They have nobly declared themselves to be the last to leave; not until all of their people are safe will they abandon their ancestral home. As more fae leave Arcadia with each moonrise, however, the failure of the glamour that protects and hides it from mortals accelerates. The court plans to leave within three summers.

PEOPLE

The natives of Arcadia are called the fae, an ancient and magical folk that have dwelled in the land since the dawn of the world. Like the dragons, the fae are creatures possessed of an intimate bond to the natural world and its magic. Whereas dragons are expressions of the elements, and titans the expression of power, the fae are kin with the less tangible forces of the world: light and shadow, passion and melancholy, the growing and dying and rebirth of the plants and animals of the wild, and so much more. The fae are an incredibly diverse people, comprised of hundreds—perhaps thousands—of distinct races in all forms, sizes, natures, and temperaments.

The lords and ladies of the fae are the Daea. They are tall, slender, and beautiful, but even these fae who are most similar to humans demonstrate striking differences in physical appearance. Coloration ranges from the black of night to the white of new snow, from coppery brown to verdant green, and hair and eye color ranges from black to blonde to a whole spectrum of colors not found among mortal creatures, including silver, gold, and many others besides. The Daea are masters of the magic of enchantment and illusion, which they collectively refer to as glamour, and this magic comes as naturally to them as breathing. While many fae creatures possess some measure of glamour, few are as strong as the Daea, and they have long used it to rule over both fae and mortals.

Other fae races include kelpies, nixies, pixies, redcaps, goblins, pookas, hags, and countless others. While many of these fae creatures can be found throughout the lands of Erebea, others are native to Arcadia, including nymphs, centaurs, satyrs, and dryads. Some of these beings are inextricably bound to Arcadia and have refused the Exile, instead withdrawing to the isolated dells and groves where they have lived since time immemorial. They are doomed to a slow fading, as the magic of Arcadia fades, and only their names and legends will survive into the modern age.

CULTURE

While the Daea play at civilization, the rest of the fae have always been a wild and carefree lot. Most are ageless, and they are extremely difficult to destroy, even by





violence. Many do not need to eat, drink, or sleep to survive. Most live as one with the land—often literally, as is the case with dryads—and they require no shelters or even clothing. The fae love music and beautiful things, but few of them possess what humans would think of as creativity. The fae are timeless beings with inherent natures, and they find any effort to be more or less than they are both difficult and entirely pointless. They have religion—most revere a mother goddess they call Danae—but they have few rites or ceremonies associated with their beliefs. Most seem to feel that the best way to worship is simply to live. Because they are so incredibly diverse, the fae have few, if any, unifying customs or values.

All of this means that the fae possess almost none of the institutions and traditions that comprise the human notion of culture. Most fae, however, make up for this lack through their interactions with mortals. The fae are, by and large, obsessed with humans and their affairs. They spy on humans, seduce them into disastrous and short-lived affairs, abduct their children, and mimic their culture: their art, music, crafts, style of dress, and in the case of the Daea, even their politics. Among the fae, in fact, mimicry seems to substitute for creativity. The greatest fae bards, for example, are those who have traveled most widely among the human lands, learned the most mortal songs and tales, and are able to reproduce them most authentically. This has created something of a contradiction for the fae: On the one hand, they want to maintain their isolation from humans; on the other, they crave and even depend on contact with mortals.

Unfortunately for mortals, the fae also lack any sense of human morality. Or more precisely, a fae that acts according to its nature is thought to be acting rightly, regardless of whether humans would consider that nature good or evil. From a human's perspective, the behavior of most fae seems to fluctuate wildly between the two. What few humans understand is that fae simply lack the unique, individual drives and desires that motivate humans. In this sense, the fae are actually more predictable than humans, if one takes the time to understand their natures.

As in so many things, the Daea are something of an exception. Mimicry of mortals has been raised to its highest art among the Daea, and this has even extended to notions of morality. The Summer Court has adopted many human ethical customs, including notions of the common good, honor, duty, and loyalty. These ideas are valuable to the Daea, of course, because it is difficult to maintain anything but a farcical imitation of a royal court without them.

If the fae can be said to have one true cultural legacy, a shared heritage, it is their magic. The most ubiquitous manifestation of this magic is glamour, which almost all of the fae use to some extent and which pervades Arcadia itself. Glamour is the magic of light and illusion, shadow and deception. Unlike human magic,



glamour does not twist and warp the threads of karma. It gently weaves karma in whatever manner a fae wishes. Fae never need to learn spells or rituals, cannot hurt themselves or cause taint by casting, and can use it far more easily than humans and other beings. The fae use glamour to make themselves invisible, alter their forms, hide their secrets, and deceive the unwary. Glamour is also a magic of charm and enchantment, and the fae can use it to cloud the minds of others, charm and beguile them, and even dominate them.

The one thing that all glamour has in common is that there is nothing real or lasting about it—glamour is as smoke on the wind. To work more physical and lasting magic, the fae must use what they call True Magic. For the fae, True Magic always involves the infusion of the corporeal world with the ephemeral. This means that True Magic is often elemental in nature—a magic of wind and fire, water and earth. It also means that physical objects and substances often figure prominently in fae magic. One substance that is nearly universal in its application is blood. For the fae, there is powerful magic in blood, and it can be used to work magic more powerful still.

Finally, the connection of True Magic to the elements and the cycles of life, death, and rebirth, mean that objects enchanted by the fae are among the most common to have survived from the mythic age. Whereas the magic artifacts of so many other cultures were destroyed in the cataclysm that ended the mythic age, or slowly deteriorated in the absence of magic, the great works of the fae survived.

Among these items are the Four Hallows of the Daea, powerful relics whose legends will survive into the modern age. The Spear of Destiny, wielded by the Daea warrior called Lugh, is said to have claimed the lives of a thousand Fomorians on the battlefields of Avalon. The Sword of Air was crafted for Nuada, an ancient Daea king who ruled before the sundering of Elysium. Dagda's Cup is an endless font of fae magic. The Stone of Destiny reveals the fate of those who touch it, as well as revealing to them their true source of power. The cup and the stone are among the most precious treasures of the Summer Court, while the spear and sword are claimed by the martial Winter Court.

Most of the fae races have their own languages, and all but a few also speak Daeen, a truly ancient language that is rich and earthy, with many sharp vowels and harsh consonants. The Daea also tend to learn the languages of their human neighbors, and so at the time of the Exile most of the Daea possess fluent command of Atlantean, Kehebet, and Tethyn, as well as the languages and dialects of the Kurgan tribes.

POLITICS

The fae have been ruled by the Daea since shortly after their first contact with humans. Oberyceum and Tiana have been the king and queen of Arcadia since the

splintering of Elysium into two realms. Oberyceum and Maeve were two of the strongest monarchs at that time, and they were able to consolidate their rule over the new kingdoms of Arcadia and Avalon, respectively. Fae songs that survive from before that time indicate that the Blessed Land once held many courts and that it had a single, unifying court—a high king—only occasionally. In that age, most of the fae races—whether goblin or pixie, satyr or nymph—had their own kings and queens, though they were usually subservient to the courts of the Daea. By the time of the Exile, most of those ancient royal bloodlines have been lost or forgotten, and few indeed have preserved any real power or influence.

To all appearances, the Summer Court is very similar to the royal courts of many human nations. King Oberyceum and Queen Tiana rule Arcadia absolutely, and they are attended by an aristocratic class of the Daea. The difference, of course, is that while the Summer Court enjoys all the trappings of monarchy, its actual functions are very few. The typical services of human monarchs—protecting and providing for their subjects—are almost completely unnecessary to the fae. Likewise, there is precious little that their subjects can offer that the Daea nobility truly needs. There is no army that requires soldiers and there are no public works that require labor that cannot be more easily produced with magic . . . though of course, such works are by necessity impermanent. Moreover, there is almost no real economic production in Arcadia that could be taxed, even if the Daea had some use for tax revenues.

In short, the Summer Court doesn't really do anything at all. It is entirely ornamental, and this suits the fae just fine. The Daea enjoy their status and the trappings of aristocracy, and most of the common fae enjoy having a king and queen. At times, it is a matter of collective pride for them to have a visible symbol of their people with which to impress their mortal neighbors or the many non-fae supernatural beings with which they share the world. At the very least, the fae derive some vicarious pleasure from the pomp, circumstance, and grandeur of the Summer Court. Most of the common fae can honestly claim to love Oberyceum and Tiana—not because their king and queen have ever really done anything for them, but simply because their beauty, pride, agelessness, and powerful magic are so distinctly fae. Indeed, some of the fae believe that the king and queen are the source of the magic of Arcadia and the fae people and that, if they were ever lost, the fae would soon fade from the world.

While the Summer Court's actual duties are few, it has not always been so. In the past, the Daea have had to protect their subjects and even provide for them. During the brief series of clashes with the giant-kin, many of the Daea took to the battlefield with sword and sorcery on behalf of all the fae people. If wild beasts, dangerous monsters, or rogue mortals ever threatened the fae, the Daea-led host known as the Wild Hunt would run them down and slay them. If those fae who



GREATER EREBEA, CIRCA IV 5004



required sustenance were ever hungry, the Summer King and Queen would feed them. These duties are rare indeed for the Summer Court by the time of the Exile, but they are still very much part of the fabric of life in the Winter Court. Queen Maeve is waging a terrible war against the Fomorians: Her people desperately need her protection, and in return she demands their service to the cause.

COMMERCE

No real economic production occurs in Arcadia, so it is perhaps surprising that it is a realm dominated by commerce. Along with their magic, the bargain is the only enduring cultural institution among the fae, and

negotiation is their preferred form of social interaction. Moreover, the fae believe that there is magic in a bargain, especially one sealed with blood. Indeed, the fae can be bound with a bargain—the magic of their oath compels them to adhere to the letter of the bargain, if not its spirit.

Even though few fae have any real needs that are not satisfied by their own magic or the land itself, anything and everything can be the subject of a bargain. If a mortal becomes lost on the borders of Arcadia, the sprite who discovers him may bargain for his safe return to human lands. The sprite may request a simple gift in return for its aid—a pitcher of milk, perhaps, or a fresh-baked pie. Or the sprite may negotiate for something more costly—a measure of the human's blood or his



firstborn child. The most valuable (and dangerous) terms are for a future favor or service, for when it is called in, the favor will invariably be far more inconvenient—or dangerous—than the bargainer could have anticipated.

The fae are incapable of outright lies—their words are subject to the same magical compulsions that bind their oaths and bargains. However, they delight in twisting interpretations, omitting crucial information, and other subtle and often petty deceptions in all their dealings, especially those with mortals. In a bargain with a human, a pixie might agree to trade a bottle of Elysian wine for a bottle of the human's blood. Once the human has handed over the bottle of his blood, of course, the pixie gives him a bottle of wine the size of a thimble. To the mortals and other creatures who are duped by these one-sided bargains, the fae's little deceptions almost always seem pointless—in the previous example, the wine cost the pixie nothing at all, and there would seem to have been no reason to give the human less than he was obviously expecting. For the fae, however, these opportunities are the only point to making such bargains with humans; it is the amusement and challenge they crave, more often than not, rather than the thing they are bargaining for.

FOREIGN LANDS

At the time of the Exile, Arcadia is very nearly surrounded by human nations. The greatest, of course, is Atlantis, whose influence has spread from its island cradle across the lands of the Inner Sea, from northern Ofir to southern Erebea. At first, Atlantean colonies were limited to the coastal islands of the Inner Sea, but in the last few centuries settlements have begun to appear on the mainland itself, encroaching in places on the borders of Arcadia.

Relations between Atlantis and the Summer Court have not always been cordial. Unlike the more barbaric human tribes that expanded across Erebea, the Atlanteans had their own gods and showed no interest in worshipping the Daea. The Atlanteans respected and admired the magic of the fae, of course, and welcomed the Daea to their courts, but they never considered the fae anything more than interesting supernatural creatures, certainly less mighty than dragons. This was a powerful blow to their pride, especially for the Daea, and yet the Atlanteans had enough to offer that these offenses were soon forgotten. The Daea remained infatuated with mortals, and no mortal civilization was as glorious as Atlantis.

Like all vain creatures, the fae most long for what they cannot have, and so they have always strived for the affection of the Atlanteans. Some have taken it upon themselves to prove their divine status to the people of Atlantis. One, a satyr with Daea blood who styles himself a god of shepherds and fertility, will be remembered in the modern age by many names, including Pan, Puck,

and Robin Goodfellow. Other fae merely thrill at the slightest attention bestowed on them by the elusive mortals. King Oberyceum and Queen Tiana most often fall into this camp. They once delighted in the frequent state visits they make to Atlantis, and years have passed in which they spent more time in the capital city than they did in their own court.

By the time of the fifth millennium, Atlantis's military regime had no use for the fae. The liaisons of the island empire, looking to the future, created many tales of dangerous ocean conditions, unpleasant weather, and other impediments to the fae king and queen's visit to Atlantis. Instead, the surviving Atlantean senators and the merchants, artists, and heroes that opposed the military rulers went to Arcadia. The fae welcomed these grand personages; despite their power, the fae of the Summer Court have little awareness of the outside world. To them, yesterday is the same as 500 years ago, and they can't imagine that the grand island has faded. They readily accepted these ambassadors' lies regarding the state of the Atlantean empire, simply because not believing them would mean that they would have to bear the sadness of seeing Atlantis fall so low.

By the sixth millenium, when Atlantis's military regime ended and the republic had been reinstated, it had become tradition for the fae to remain in their homes and for the Atlanteans to visit them instead. Such visits were grand affairs in Arcadia, and the feasts and formal balls that attend them are often the biggest parties of the seasonal festivals, such as Beltane and Midsummer's Eve. For the sake of the mortals, and so that the fae might hide from their guests the fading power of Arcadia, these occasions are held most often in border towns such as Babylon rather than the Summer Court itself.

The king and queen, and many other Daeen nobles, have also visited Keheb, both before and after it broke away from Atlantis. Like the Summer Court itself, these occasions are purely ceremonial, as the Daea have no true political or economic affairs that would either require or reward diplomacy and statecraft. Keheb does, however, offer regal courts, opulent palaces, and exotic customs, and so the nation is a source of endless amusement and obsession for the Daea of Arcadia. The South Kingdom will be gone within 100 years of king Takenkhemen assuming the throne. Coupled with the great distance between Avalon and Keheb, the immortal god-king's edicts on magic and the supernatural had already greatly diminished official contacts between Keheb and the fae. The fae will not withdraw from Keheb entirely, of course: Takenkhemen's policies have the ironic effect that fae spies, expatriates, and adventurers in Keheb simply use glamour to hide their true natures.



EREBEA: LEGACY OF THE HORSE- LORDS

This epoch reveals the events taking place in central and northern Erebea after Atlantis expanded to the south and west. As the First Exodus peaked and faltered, Atlantis came to claim all of the lands surrounding it except Erebea. The inner regions of that continent, though rich in fertile lands, had been kept separate from the Atlantean empire, first due to an alliance with the fae that claimed it, then by a lack of naval access and by a lack of knowledge. Central and eastern Erebea are viewed as a wild hinterland by the great civilizations of the Inner Sea throughout most of the mythic age. Few southerners ever venture there, and it remains a dark wilderness about which almost nothing is known, even to the scholars of Atlantis.

What is viewed from the outside as a land of darkness and dirt, however, is in fact a fertile area, rich in human culture and possibility. As great cities rise and fall and politicians manipulate armies, a simpler lifestyle persists in Erebea. The Kurgans, a race of nomadic horsemen from the eastern reaches of Erebea and the endless steppes of western and central Asua, act

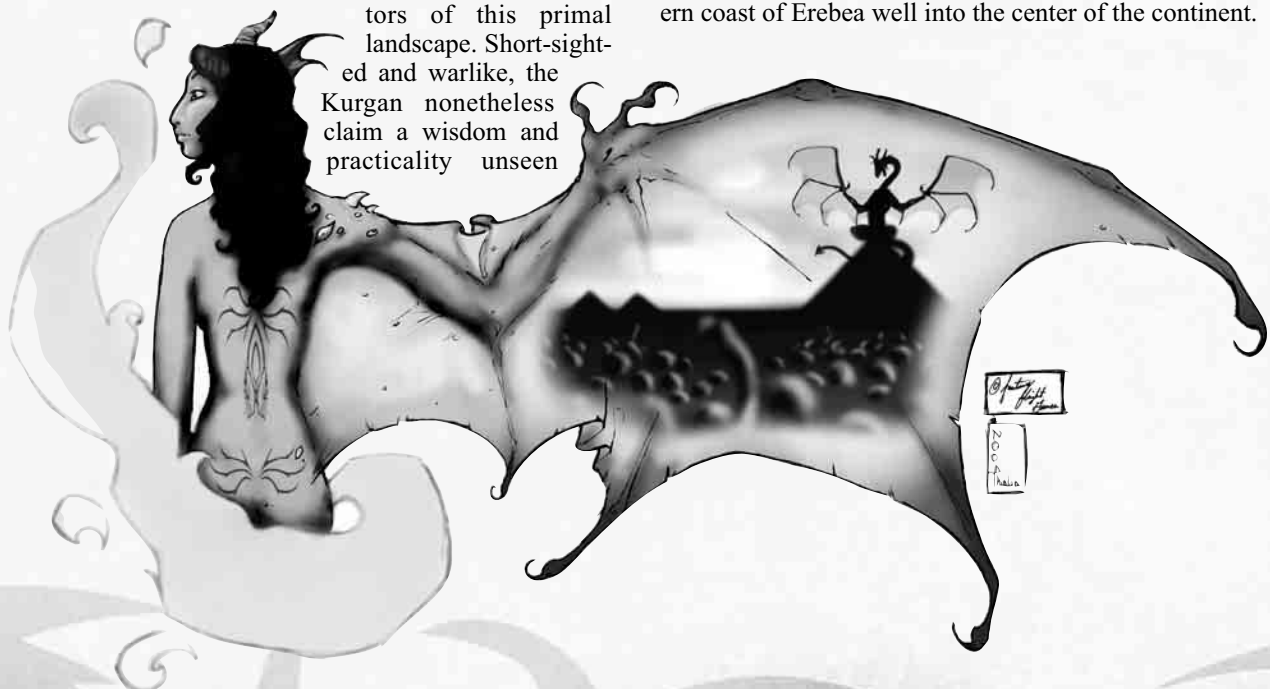
as both conquerors and protectors of this primal landscape. Short-sighted and warlike, the Kurgan nonetheless claim a wisdom and practicality unseen

elsewhere in the mythic age. They are the unintentional bringers of great change in the mythic age. They supplanted a peaceful, matriarchal culture in their first wave of invasion and cultural assimilation. Their second wave caused the sundering of the fae kingdom of Elysium into Arcadia and Avalon. The splintered offshoots of their people established an infamous culture of sea-raiders, distracting the Atlanteans from other, more ominous threats, and their heritage lays the cultural foundation for some of the last human kingdoms of the mythic age, including Phythia, Milesia, and Midgard.

GEOGRAPHY

Within the continent of Erebea and the wide domain of the Kurgans, nearly every geographic feature on the planet is represented in one form or another. Endless grasslands give way to hills and rocks escarpments riddled with tunnels leading into the earth, and rich forests fade into scrub plains and deserts.

The first Kurgans to migrate to Erebea encountered a mosaic of these varied landforms and climates. To the east were the endless steppes of Erebea, manageable land for the Kurgans' horses and herds of livestock, if not fertile. As their population increased and their needs for food and land with it, the Kurgans found that the rest of Erebea had much to offer, as well. The farther west the horse-lords traveled, the richer and more fertile the land became. Eventually they came to central Erebea, a land of green grasses, rolling hills, and good soil. To their west and south were the woods and forests of the Blessed Land of Elysium. To the north were ice-covered tundra and a forbidding range of mountains. Southern Erebea was also mountainous, although more temperate, and ranges of hills and valleys wandered from the southern coast of Erebea well into the center of the continent.





HISTORY

The Kurgans rose to dominance over the vast plains of eastern Erebea and northwestern Asua at about the same time that humans were building the first true cities in ancient Xia. They began to migrate westward into the heartland of Erebea just as the first shipwrecked sailors began to populate the coasts of Atlantis. In numbers, these earliest migrations were almost insignificant: The Kurgan population had not yet reached a sufficient size to put real pressure on their ancestral lands, and the first immigrants were simply small bands of adventurers who journeyed west to win fame and fortune. The interior of Erebea was populated only by the scattered tribes of indigenous hunter-gatherers and primitive agriculturalists that had migrated into the fertile lands of what was then called Elysium, the Blessed Land, at the dawn of the mythic age. These ancient Erebean tribes were generally matriarchal and peaceful, and typically lived in caves and simple, manmade underground dwellings. They had little or no contact with the city-builders in the south, and their way of life had remained unchanged and undisturbed for millennia. They enjoyed peaceful and regular contact with the fae. Indeed, though in later years the fae would never admit to this early example of cultural mimicry, they learned their reverence for the Mother Goddess, whom they called Danae, from these humans.

The Kurgans explored these new lands for a time, perhaps taking wives and siring children, and if they survived they would eventually return to the east. They would leave behind descendants and some traces of their culture—occasionally, even whole settlements. Nevertheless, beyond these small pockets, the Kurgan influence was little felt throughout much of Erebea.

By the fifth millennium, the Kurgans were coming in greater numbers. Small armies of mounted warriors would be followed by whole nomadic tribes of women, children, elders, and vast herds of cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. Initially, the Kurgans expanded north and south, as well as due west. In the north, the Kurgans and titans were no strangers to each other: Indeed, as the giant-kin fled north after their legendary war with the dragons, they had mixed and interbred with the forebears of the ancient Kurgans. The Kurgans as a whole found no welcome in Jotunheim, however, and their brief, bloody wars with the giants pushed them relentlessly south, into the Erebean heartland. Xia and other kingdoms of the East were glad to see the Kurgans go, and built outposts in their wake to keep them from returning. While the Kurgans enthusiastically embraced almost all opportunities for war, these varied forms of resistance from all directions nevertheless served to funnel their migrations into central and western Erebea's soft, inviting underbelly.

In the heart of Erebea, the Kurgans faced little competition. The native Erebean farmers were no match for the Kurgans' powerful horses, iron swords, and recurve

bows. Rather than attempt to resist them, they simply bowed their heads and hoped that the invaders would leave them enough food to last the winter. The craftiest of the subsistence farmers even saw potential in the Kurgans' horses as beasts of burden, and welcomed their new conquerors. For their part, the Kurgans glorified battle against capable enemies, but they generally had no use for the slaughter of helpless farmers. In most cases, as a result, there was little overt warfare between the two peoples. Instead, the Kurgans simply moved in and took over, a kind of bloodless coup of an entire indigenous population.

The Kurgans' other potential source of competition were the fae. At this time, the fae realm of Elysium covered much of Erebea. While the Blessed Land was a nation unto itself, it was not a true, unified kingdom: It was instead ruled by dozens of independent faerie courts that only occasionally paid tribute to a high king. While there were a few skirmishes between the Kurgans and the more warlike of these fae courts, the Kurgans largely undermined any widespread resistance to their migrations by adopting the Daea, the fae nobility, as their gods.

The Kurgans were an ancient people, and many supernatural creatures were known to them. They had never encountered any like the Daea, however. Here were beings that shared their likeness, and yet possessed supernatural powers and immortal life spans of which no Kurgan could boast, or even understand. The Kurgans respected and feared magic, though their own priests and shamans had previously demonstrated no real mastery of it. That changed, however, as the Kurgans began to embrace the Daea as their gods. For the first time, the shamans could call upon a true supernatural agency for aid, one with seemingly unlimited magical power.

By the end of the fifth millennium, the Kurgans had almost entirely supplanted the native population throughout central and western Erebea. They gradually abandoned the strongly nomadic lifestyle of their ancestors, and developed a more sedentary, pastoral culture supplemented in some regions by the simple agriculture they inherited from the native farmers. Some focused on crops, while others retained their connection to horses and livestock. Both sorts of cultures required fertile grasslands, however, which were developed by clearing large swathes of old forest—lands gifted to them by their gods, the Daea.

While they shared a single language and ancestral heritage, however, the Kurgan people were never united into a true nation. Individual tribes remained isolated. Each represented a distinct family or group of families, each had its own unique history, and each worshipped its own local gods and personal mythology. Trade between the tribes was sporadic, and intertribal warfare was common. During this time, many of these scattered tribes evolved into established chiefdoms and its leaders became the warlords and barbarian-kings who would





come to dominate Erebea throughout the later millennia of the mythic age.

PEOPLE

Erebean Kurgans are descended from the nomadic peoples who ruled the eastern steppes since the dawn of the mythic age. They were a large people even before their blood mingled with that of giantkind: Male warriors often approach seven feet in height and weigh more than 300 pounds, and most Kurgan women stand six feet tall or more. The Kurgans are almost universally fair-skinned, though they demonstrate much variation in hair and eye color. Kurgan tribes of northwestern and north-central Erebea tend toward blonde or red hair and blue or green eyes, while the southern tribes feature black or dark brown hair and gray, brown, or nearly black eyes.

Kurgan fashion is above all practical. Woolen clothing is most common, though flax is sometimes used for lighter garments in the southern climes. In the north, fur cloaks and leggings, or fur trimming or lining on woolen garments, are common concessions to the long, cold winters. The Kurgan tribes are the first peoples of the mythic age to wear trousers, as these garments are far more practical for horsemanship than the skirt- or robe-like garments common in Atlantis, Keheb, and elsewhere in the south. Among warriors and horsemen,

trousers made from supple leather are nearly as common as wool and other fabrics. The Kurgans are fond of bright colors, and nearly all of their clothing is woven from dyed thread. Both males and females favor multi-colored garments woven in patterns similar to plaid or tartan, and both genders decorate their bodies with colorful tattoos or body paints.

The Kurgans also enjoy jewelry and other adornments. Gold and silver are both popular with the elite classes, and even the poorest Kurgans fashion simple adornments from bone, antler, wood, and stone. The craftsmanship of an object is valued as much or more than the material from which it is made, however, and most Kurgan jewelry features stylized and highly detailed depictions of animals, especially horses.

CULTURE

The Kurgans have always been a nomadic warrior culture, and this heritage is still much in evidence among the Kurgan tribes that have taken on a sedentary lifestyle in the sixth millennium. Kurgan society is strongly patriarchal and starkly divided among three castes: warriors, priests, and commoners. The warriors are the elite and are generally related by blood, however distant, to the tribal chieftain or king. The priests and shamans are the tribes' liaisons with the spirit world—both the world of the Kurgans' dead ancestors and of

their gods, the Daea. The commoners are almost universally herdsmen and farmers—skilled craftsmanship is typically the purview of the wives of warriors and of members of the warrior caste who are crippled or too old to fight.

The Kurgans' culture is a pastoral one: Most of their physical needs are provided for by great herds of horses and cattle, and to a lesser extent by pigs, sheep, and goats. Agriculture is pursued only to supplement animal husbandry. For example, many Kurgan tribes grow barley with which to make beer. The tribe's land and livestock are owned by individual patriarchs of the warrior-class. These freeman warriors in turn owe their allegiance, a regular tithe, and service in battle to a king. Taxes usually rise or fall with the fortunes of the tribe and usually just serve to ensure that the king remains the strongest and wealthiest patriarch of the warrior-class. Commoners serve at the pleasure of their landlords and are in practice little more than indentured servants. They are nonetheless important and valued assets, as a patriarch's wealth and status are almost completely dependent on the size and prosperity of his herds.

Animals figure prominently in the ancient Kurgan religious practices and mythology. Even mundane animals, especially horses, are accorded a kind of divine status. Goats are considered the heralds and favored of the gods: They are kept near horses—even in battle—to warn of approaching danger, whether storms, predators, or enemy warriors; goats commonly serve as familiars for tribal witches and shamans, who often use goat horns and bones as talismans.

Supernatural beasts, meanwhile, such as griffons and dragons, are both feared and admired. Just as the changing of seasons or the coming of great storms are considered unstoppable forces of nature, so are the mighty beasts of the mythic age considered an aspect of life that one would be a fool to oppose. In their many migrations, the Kurgans learned quickly that they, like the packs of wild horses that the predators of the steppes pursue, are simply another herd. In any crossing, the slow and the weak were picked off by packs of hunting griffons, and the unwary and unwise might suffer the wrath of a dragon in disguise. The Kurgans soon after their migrations were therefore both very proud and very humble; they considered themselves the strongest and wisest of humankind, but realized that they were as nothing next to the supernatural powers of the mythic age. They were quick to take the fight to any other cultures or to hunt mighty beasts, but no Kurgan of Erebea, at least not one of the fifth millennium, could be goaded into foolishly hunting a dragon, challenging a titan, or defying other such natural forces. Refusing such a dare is not cowardice, but wisdom.

Perhaps that sense of their own limitations is why the Kurgans were so awe-inspired by the Daea. An ancient people, the Kurgans were well aware of the existence of many intelligent, powerful supernatural races within the world; never before, however, had they experienced

BOUND KURGANS

The Kurgans are among the most mundane of the human cultures of the mythic age. Their tradition of sorcery teaches that none may cast spells without first binding themselves to a being of power, following rules similar to the bound trait as presented on page 200. In addition to the costs and benefits associated with being bound, Kurgans who wish to gain ranks in the Casting edge must bind themselves to a patron being with an APL equal to or greater than the rank in Casting they wish to acquire. In return for this power, one of the supplicant's base aspect scores is permanently decreased by 1 per rank of the Casting edge gained. However, unlike the normal requirement for being bound, Kurgans may bind themselves to untainted supernatural creatures.

SIDEBAR 5-7

supernatural races that seemed so similar in appearance and needs to humans. Not only that, but the Daea seemed not to fear the monsters that hunt in the night or the creatures that claim prey from above. They easily evaded or destroyed any such beasts who came into their domains . . . domains into which the Kurgans gradually trickled. The best explanation they had for such a phenomenon was that the Daea must be gods.

The Kurgans quickly embraced the Daea whose appearance and magical talents most resonated with the religious traditions of their ancestors. This included those Daea who appeared mostly or partly human, as well as those who could take on the forms of animals. The Daea became the Kurgan gods of fertility and death, celebration and war. Each tribe embraced its own local pantheon of living deities, each with their own names and likenesses, though all were drawn from the same shared source of cultural tradition and heritage. A hundred small gods, some claiming a specific geographic locale and others claiming a portfolio of concepts, have therefore arisen in Erebea, all worshipped in much the same way and honored with many of the same rites and ceremonies with which the Kurgans had always honored their gods. As the tribes emerge as true kingdoms and nations, these local traditions will mature as distinct pantheons veiled in unique mythologies, but they will always, at their heart, display this common heritage and historical origin.

Like many early peoples, the Kurgans view and understand much of the world through the cultural lens of their religion. They believe that their gods are responsible for natural phenomena, such as storms and droughts. They believe that their gods are the source of their fortune and prosperity. And, of course, they believe that the gods gifted them with their lands and entrusted them with dominion over it. For every Kurgan tribe, their land is an earthly paradise: It is neither wholly

KURGAN RITUALS

Among the Milesian tribe of western Erebea, a ritual horse sacrifice is practiced each spring. Five shamans select the strongest stallion from the king's herds. The stallion is freed to wander for a year and is accompanied by 500 warriors who protect the horse and insure that it has no contact with mares. The following year, the horse is returned to the tribe in a three-day ceremony. The stallion spends the final night of this festival with the king's favored wife, after which the horse is ritually suffocated and cut into thirds: one portion for the gods of the warriors, one for the gods of the shamans, and one for the gods of the commoners.

The Phythians, a Kurgan tribe of southwestern Erebea, have become a sea-faring people by the sixth millennium, but horses still figure prominently in their religion. An autumn festival is celebrated by a great horserace. The winning horse is then rested and fed for three weeks, after which it is driven into the sea and forced to swim until it drowns. The distance that it reaches determines the success of the Phythians' fishing, raiding, and shipbuilding for the year to come.

SIDEBAR 5-8



mundane nor wholly spiritual; it straddles the other-world where the gods dwell and the underworld that is the abode of the dead.

Most of the Kurgan cultural institutions and traditions therefore involve honoring or placating their gods, usually through some form of sacrifice. The importance of sacrifice is certainly not unique to the Kurgans in the mythic age, but they take it to a cultural extreme that borders on obsession. This is no great mystery: The Kurgans' earliest dealings with their living gods, the Daea, were deeply influenced by the importance of bargaining in fae culture. From its very beginnings, the Kurgans' fundamental relationship with their deities could best be described as a bargain: "You give me some of what I want, and I'll give you some of what you want."

Kurgan religious ceremonies—and their practice of magic, in general—can therefore be best described as ritualized spiritual negotiation. The shaman, witch, or sorcerer sacrifices something of value and in return asks for some supernatural boon. The greater the desired boon, the greater the sacrifice must be. That the value of sacrifices is most often measured in blood has its roots in the prominent role of blood in Daea magic and mysticism. For the Daea, blood is power, and blood sacrifices are therefore the most empowering gifts they can receive from their mortal children.

The human sacrifices that accompany the burial of kings in some tribes are extremely rare. Captured enemies are sometimes killed in ritual battle, and trophies—preserved hearts and skulls, predominantly—of captured enemies are occasionally used as fetishes or sacrificial vessels in religious or sorcerous ceremonies. On the whole, however, most blood sacrifices are animal sacrifices. The value and power of the sacrifice is dependent on the value of the sacrificial animal, and so the horse sacrifice accompanies the most important ceremonies. A Kurgan tribe might sacrifice a single gelding before embarking on a raid into the lands of a rival. Before taking the field in a major battle against the same tribe, a hundred horses might be sacrificed.

Even after the Kurgan tribes have forgotten the true origins of their gods, bargaining and sacrifice would continue play an important role in their understanding of and dealing with the fae. In the latter part of the mythic age, when the Kurgans have relegated the fae to the status of nature spirits and wee folk, they still leave small offerings of bread, milk, wine, beer, and other valued things to gain the blessings and good fortunes of the fae.

Likewise, sacrifice plays an important role in Kurgan magic. The Kurgans never become great sorcerers and magicians, but they are certainly aware that their gods and the lesser fae are not the only supernatural entities with which they share their world. The Kurgans believe that humans have no power to draw upon and harness supernatural power on their own. Instead, they must wield magical forces through some external supernatural agency. For the Kurgans, sorcery and witchcraft involves contacting a supernatural being—most often a

spirit of some kind—and bargaining for some aid or service. This service may be as simple and benign as blessing some small undertaking with good fortune, divining a coming storm or other danger, or protecting an individual or household. Occasionally, however, these services are of a darker nature, such as cursing or killing an enemy or rival. Most Kurgan tribes frown on this sort of malevolent witchcraft. They believe that the entities with which these bargains are made are too dangerous to bargain with, and that in any case any such bargains inevitably cost the witch—and his tribe—far more than they gain. Many tribes put to death any person suspected of practicing this brand of witchcraft. The bodies of these witches are typically burned, thereby denying them burial and forever barring them from passing over into the land of the dead.

LANGUAGE

All Kurgan tribes share a common language, though distinct regional dialects are commonplace by the early fifth millennium and will continue to disperse and fracture into different tongues throughout the mythic age. The Kurgans by nature are not great linguists, and few have any incentive or opportunity to learn foreign tongues. Amongst Kurgan priests and shamans, the Daea tongue is considered a sacred, secret language, and they have sufficient command of it to perform important magical rituals and religious ceremonies. This language is never taught to the warrior or commoner castes, however. Even among the priestly caste, mastery of the Daeian language diminishes over time; by the latter part of the mythic age, when the Daea themselves have passed into legend and folklore among the horse-lords, Kurgan priests recite the ancient words of these ceremonies with no understanding of what they mean.

The Kurgan language has no written form, and literacy is unknown even among the priests and shamans. Engraved or painted pictographs are used where permanent markers or identifiers are called for, such as on barrow markers, but these vary widely from place to place, tribe to tribe, and even one shaman to another, and do not qualify as even the crudest form of a written language. Knowledge is instead passed on from one generation to the next through an oral tradition that has changed as the Kurgans themselves have changed throughout their migrations.

Kurgan bards are accorded the kind of respect and cultural value of which only an illiterate society is truly capable. The greatest Kurgan bards are granted exclusive service to a king or chief, and while they maintain their lord's favor, they are treated almost as equals of the warriors. Of course, they share some of the same obligations as well: They are often in the frontlines of the king's army when it marches into battle, bolstering the morale and resolve of the king's warriors and striking fear into the hearts of the enemy with rousing songs of the tribe's might and glory.

The role of the bard changes somewhat with the set-

KURGAN ORAL TRADITION

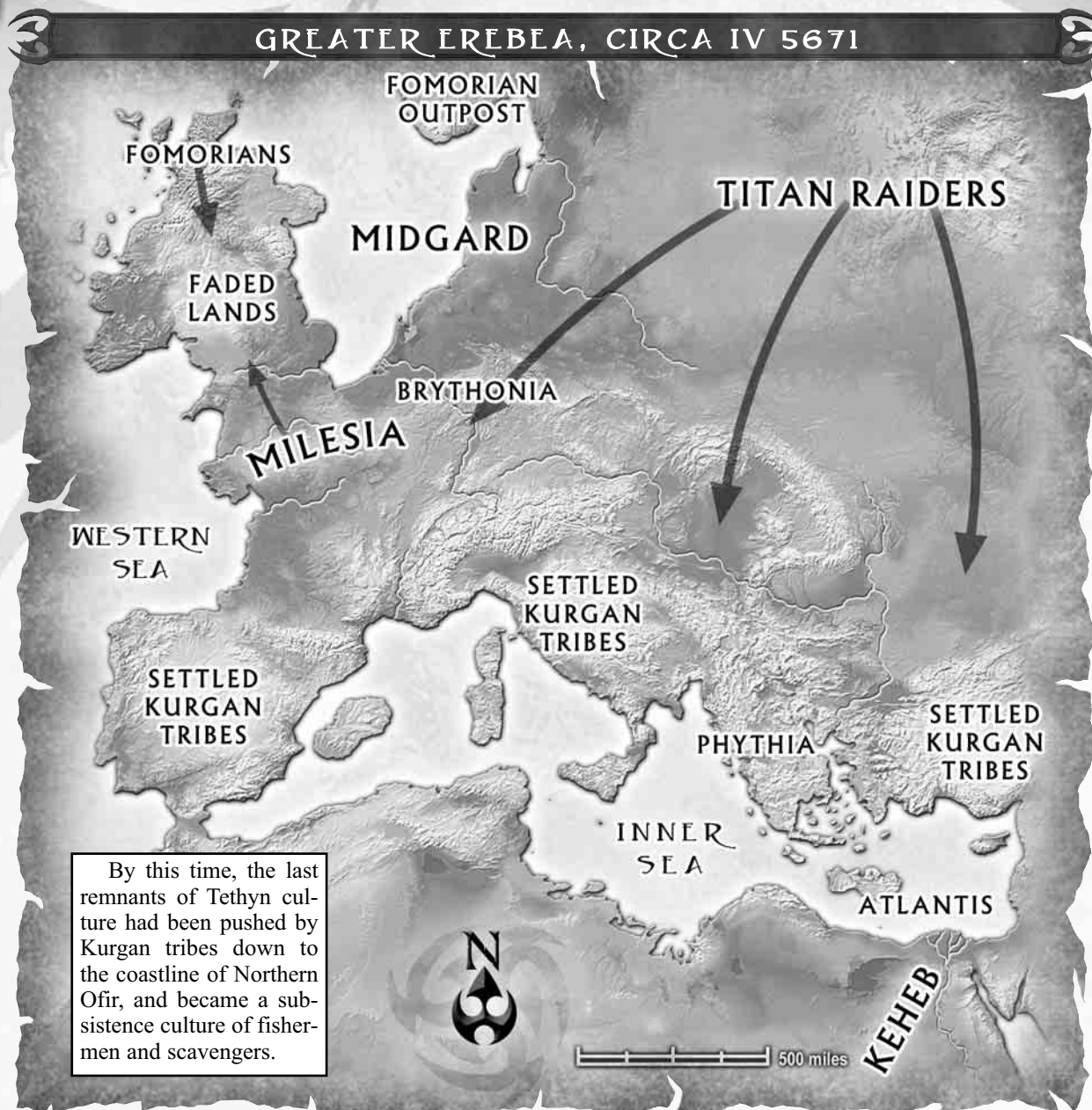
In the centuries of their great migrations and nomadic lifestyle, the Kurgans' most important form of storytelling was a spoken litany performed by the women, usually focusing on their family's ancestry, accomplishments, and, unsurprisingly, the lineage of the horses that their family is responsible for raising. The daughter of every warrior household must know her family's history and accomplishments, and as soon as she is married to a warrior is expected to forget the songs she has learned as a child and learn those of her husband's family instead.

Whereas record-keeping was in the hands of the warriors' wives, these dry recitations of names, battles, and breeding stallions were given life by an uneasy alliance of shamans and bards. The shamans introduced each litany and used sacred chimes to signal events during the wives' telling that reflect divine influence, or to signal that a named ancestor or horse had been given an honored place with the gods.

If the shamans gave each recitation its connection to the world above, the bards gave each recitation a connection to this world. These poets, musicians, and lore-keepers were drawn from the commoner caste—indeed, the bardic profession grants the greatest status and prestige that any Kurgan commoner can aspire to. Bards were the ones that made the litanies entertaining, and that brought life to the wives' rote recitals. They were given leave to interrupt a litany at any point, tying an ancestor's tale to recent events or altering the story as they pleased, allowing the listeners to draw conclusions about the moral to be learned from the tale or about the likely outcome of events occurring in the present. In this way, bards acted as both jesters and instructors, teaching their warrior lords humility but remaining above and beyond the law so they need not fear retribution.

SIDEBAR 5-9

ting of the Kurgans and the passing of the fae. With their gods no longer among them, the Kurgans have begun to idolize them more as concepts. Also, the legacy of the protection of the fae remains: beasts and monsters, long since used to avoiding the fae lands, have retreated into the deepest of wilds or been hunted out of existence altogether. The Kurgans have largely become a settled people, and no longer subject themselves to the dangers of the open wild in their mass migrations. For the first time, they are beginning to realize what it is like to be both their own lords and masters, as they were



before finding the fae lands, and yet safe from the dangers of the world, as they had been since settling in Erebea.

The bards' function, therefore, has changed from humbling warriors and teaching morals to entertaining the now more light-hearted Kurgans, regaling the people with legends of their heroes and their exploits.

The Kurgans' patriarchal warrior culture, once humble by necessity of its existence at the bottom of the food chain in a supernatural world, is now free to celebrate its success and survival. The Kurgans now openly idolize their ancestral heroes, which provides the ideological justification for complete submission to a king and perpetuates the privileged role of the non-productive warrior caste. Moreover, heroes provide the Kurgans with

their tribal identity—they are icons, enduring cultural symbols of the tribe. In recounting the tales of its heroes, both past and present, the bard strengthens the tribe's sense of itself, its past, and its destiny. Many of these tales involve mundane exploits, such as raids and battles, but others portray the encounters of mortal heroes with the supernatural: the sacrifice of a brave warrior who holds off a monster or beast while his tribe escapes, or perhaps the deceiving or outwitting of gods or other supernatural beings, whether by tricking them into a particularly favorable bargain or outright stealing something of special value. The stories of many Kurgan tribes, for example, portray the art of magic or sorcery as a secret gift stolen by a Kurgan hero from a supernatural guardian, often a dragon. These tales, while still



avoiding the idea of outright challenging or overcoming the supernatural, are a strong trend away from the humility and resignation Kurgans once felt about their role in the world. After centuries of being beholden to the fae, the Kurgans are beginning to remember their strength, and will use it, along with the fading of many of the supernatural beings of the mythic age, to establish a vast culture across the entirety of Erebea.

TECHNOLOGY

Much of Kurgan craft is devoted to horsemanship and battle. The Kurgans do not use saddles, but they produce fine leather bridles and riding blankets with stirrup straps. Bridle bits are typically fashioned of bronze, and occasionally iron. Armor ranges from boiled leather to bronze or a sturdy iron ring-mail that they learned to make from the titans. Ornate helms, often conical in shape, are fashioned of bronze and iron, and shields are typically made from sturdy timber bolstered with bronze or iron banding. The most common weapon is the bronze battle-axe, though great warriors and kings often wield iron swords and iron-tipped spears. The Kurgans' powerful recurve bows are fashioned from elk antlers and can be fired from horseback as easily as on foot.

The most common Kurgan settlement is a small village. The Kurgans favor locations near rivers or other watercourses, both for their resources and for ease of transport and travel. These villages are often built on terraces to protect against the flooding of the river in spring. They consist of a huddled collection of rectangular structures built partially underground, with pitched roofs supported by wooden posts. Each dwelling typically features a stone hearth, though it might be located either inside or just outside the structure.

Most Kurgan villages boast no more than 10 or 20 dwellings, though some of the oldest and largest towns have as many as 200 buildings. The dwellings feature semi-subterranean construction for several reasons. First, the Kurgans of this era are not great architects and engineers, and the earth lends structural support and integrity to their modest dwellings. In addition, the partially underground construction makes the buildings easily defensible and protects the Kurgans from the elements. They are even large enough to house a considerable number of livestock during severe storms.

The most important settlements—usually the ancestral seats of tribal kings—are hill-forts that are built on steep river banks and situated to be highly defensible, usually on a promontory or at the juncture of two waterways. Hill-forts are built of heavy stones and surrounded by massive walls 10 feet high or higher, and sometimes guarded by ditches or crude moats as well. The dwellings within these walls are much larger than those in the river villages, and are solidly built on stone foundations. Their walls are constructed from timber or wattle-and-daub, and they typically feature two separate rooms. In addition to dwellings, hill-forts often include

smaller structures and workspaces such as smithies. The largest of the Kurgan hill-forts have facing walls filled in with rubble and crossbeams for stability, topped by timber palisades and flanked by corner towers.

The Kurgan tribes are not city-builders, and their graves will prove to be the only lasting physical monuments to their culture. The Kurgans bury their dead in barrows: earthen mounds pierced by steep shafts leading down into tombs constructed very much like their dwellings. These barrows are topped with stone stelae carved with crude pictographs meant to identify and celebrate their occupants. The barrows of kings and wealthy patriarchs are filled with weapons, armor, objects of fine art and craftsmanship, tools, and other important possessions. They are also often filled with animal sacrifices, including the deceased's most prized horses, which are sacrificed as a gift to the gods to secure a safe and speedy journey to the otherworld. In some cases, the wives of Kurgan kings are even sacrificed and buried with their husbands. The barrows of poor commoners are often unmarked and adorned with only a few modest bone tools; some of the poorest tombs are little more than unmarked earthen pits.

POLITICS

The Kurgans are a simple, hard, and often-brutal people, and their reputation as barbarians in the south is not unwarranted. The tribal king's rule is absolute: There is nothing he cannot demand from his tribe, and indeed, the greater the king, the more demanding he is expected to be. The warrior caste exists to fight and die at the king's pleasure. The priests and shamans are his conduit to the gods and the ephemeral world. The commoners exist to make him rich and strong. Neighboring tribes exist to test him in battle and to provide a convenient source of plunder.

In Kurgan culture, possession is perhaps more than nine-tenths of the law. Whatever women, slaves, animals, and objects a man can take, are his. If a man cannot protect that which he has claimed, they are taken from him. A man's wife is any woman who dwells in his house and is used by him. To sever this *de facto* marriage bond, she must leave his house and escape his usage for a specific period of time, usually five days. If a woman would live in a man's house and not become his wife, she must leave his house and dwell elsewhere for at least five days out of every year.

The same rules generally apply to theft. There is no dishonor or illegality in stealing from another man, so long as that theft does not take place in his house. Indeed, in these cases, the act is not even considered theft. It is, rather, an implied bargain: the stronger man takes what he wants, and in return gives the weaker man his life. A fellow tribesman's house, however, is sacrosanct. If a patriarch catches a thief in his house, he is entitled and even expected to kill him. If something is stolen from a man's house but the thief is not caught in



WOLF-WIVES

Women are often victims of Kurgan notions of personal property and theft. “Marriage” by abduction is a time-honored and sacred tradition among the Kurgans. Warriors are entitled to raid the households of neighboring tribes for brides, as well as the households of commoners from their own tribes. This practice is called “wolf-marriage,” and the women taken in these raids are called “wolf-wives.” The source for this terminology can be traced to the proximity of the Milesian Kurgans to the lands of Cernunnos, a dragon who suffered humans to live among him. Cernunnos often took the form of a giant wolf, and let the Kurgans assist him on his many hunts in the wild. The favored of Cernunnos were said to be able to literally turn themselves into wolves, though the transformation was not always under their control. The Kurgans of Erebea, having become more superstitious and spiritual with the fading of the supernatural from view, often justify an otherwise legally or politically questionable raid by abducting at least one wife along with other bounty, thereby claiming the defense that he “had become a wolf” and therefore could not control his actions.

These abductions, like other raids, are expected to lead to bloodshed, as the prospective wolf-wife’s kinsmen must typically be killed during the abduction. No compensation is owed to the survivors of these murders, so long as the abduction is successful.

Despite the brutality of this practice, there is at least some small consolation in it for the woman: wolf-wives share the glory and renown of their husbands, in some small measure, and many learn to deftly manipulate those who hold them so highly as prizes. Becoming a wolf-wife of a warrior is also the only means by which a woman may become elevated beyond the commoner caste, and is one of the few examples of social mobility among the Kurgans.

SIDEBAR 5-10

the act, the victim of the theft is permitted to enter a suspect’s house to search for stolen goods, but he must go naked and carrying only a ceremonial cauldron symbolizing the stolen property.

The rules for what actions constitute theft are even more lax when they involve the people of another tribe. The herds of a neighboring tribe are certainly fair game, and raids and counter-raids occupy most of the warrior caste’s free time between battles—and commonly precede and cause them. Stealing horses, cattle, and other livestock from the open field is always acceptable, and even expected; raids on the households of neighboring tribes often lead to bloodshed, at least between the par-

ticipating families, if not the tribes as a whole.

The Erebean Kurgans’ raiding tradition means that there is rarely any enduring, peaceful political relationship between their tribes. Truces and even alliances between tribes are commonplace, but they are always prompted by some crisis or other and are therefore always temporary. Once the crisis—most often an attack by a third tribe—has passed, the once-peaceful tribes inevitably begin raiding each others’ herds and settlements again. Due to the custom of wolf-marriage, there is rarely any occasion for marriage alliances that bind two tribes together: Much greater glory is won by taking a wolf-wife than by gaining a wife through fancy words and political wrangling. Likewise, the size and strength of a tribe may increase through war, but this rarely involves anything like true conquest and occupation. Rather, the stronger tribe simply wipes out most of the population of the weaker tribe, with the exception of the wolf-wives and slaves it takes. The conquering tribe’s herds may expand into the lands formerly held by the defeated enemy, and in a generation or two it may even build a new village or hill-fort on the charred remains of the old.

COMMERCE

The Kurgans are pastoralists, and their simple tribal economies are entirely dependent on their livestock, chiefly their horses and cattle. Both animals provide milk, and cattle are also used for meat and hides. Most commoners are herdsmen who tend the livestock owned by the patriarchs of the warrior caste. Many commoners must also engage in small-scale farming, hunting, and gathering to survive, typically because there is not enough of the bounty of the herd left to them once the patriarch has taken his portion. The vast majority of Kurgans live at or just below the subsistence level. Even tribal kings are often one bad winter away from abject poverty and possible starvation.

Raiding typically takes the place of intertribal trade. This is far less efficient than proper trade, of course, as it enriches only one party at the expense of the other. In time, however, the raiding tradition will sow the seeds of its own obsolescence. This process is a simple and inevitable one: The most successful raiders become the largest and strongest tribes. The most attractive targets for raids are the smallest and weakest tribes. Over time, the large, powerful tribes avoid each other and focus their attentions on the small, weak tribes. In the course of centuries, only the largest and most powerful tribes remain. These tribes discover that raiding each other is often costly, even disastrous, and begin trading with each other instead. This process eventually facilitates the rise of the first true Kurgan kingdoms in Erebea. The raiding tradition is nevertheless preserved on a smaller scale, as it continues to be practiced between individual families and clans. It endures in this fashion until the end of the mythic age, by which point Erebea has



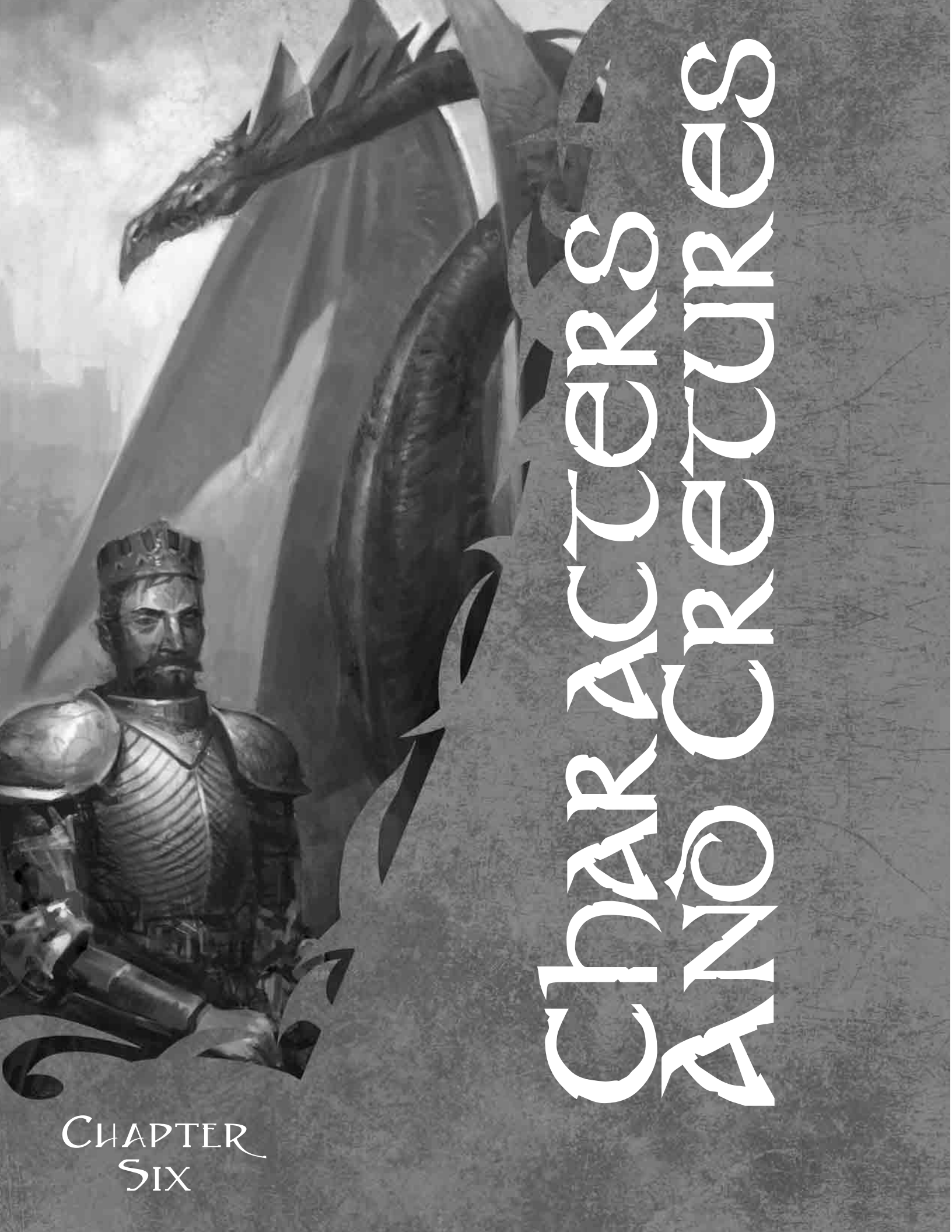
become a sprawling domain of self-important Kurgan chieftans ignoring the petty raids and squabbles of their subjects against one another.

FOREIGN LANDS

Throughout the mythic age, the civilizations of the south view the Kurgan tribes of Erebea as backward, brutish barbarians. The nuance of this perception changes from uncertainty in the beginning of the fourth millennium, to disdain in the fifth millennium, and finally envy, disgust, fear, and regret during the waxing of the Atlantean empire in the sixth millennium. Throughout all these eons, the various incarnations of Kurgan culture neither developed diplomatic skills nor made overtures of interest in foreign trade; they had no use for either.

The only real contact between the Kurgan tribes and the peoples of the Inner Sea in the fifth millennium occurs when one or more of the barbarian-kings grows strong and daring enough to raid the fat, foreign cities that cling to the northern coast of the great sea. These periodic invasions are both rare and extremely short-lived. They nevertheless end in the sacking of more than one of the great city-states of the Inner Sea: Esrulum in IV 4843, the Atlantean colony of Trocea in IV 4891, and several others in the early centuries of the sixth millennium.

There will be no regular trade or cultural exchange between the Kurgan peoples and the Inner Sea civilizations until the rise of the great kingdoms in Erebea, such as Phythia and Milesia, in the sixth millennium. These kingdoms will combine the best traditions of both worlds, the civilized cultural legacy of the Atlantean world and the fierce heritage of the old Kurgan kings, but their glory will be quickly lost in the great storm that heralds the ending of the mythic age.



CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

CHAPTER
SIX



The world of FIREBORN is populated by countless characters and creatures with whom scions and dragons may interact. These range from common animals to the most uncommon mystical creatures. Collectively, any creatures or characters not being controlled by players are called NPCs. They are broken up into five categories in this chapter: animals, characters, creatures, dragons, and humans. Animals are just that: creatures that can be found in the real world. Though, as you will discover, animals can be altered to become mythic creatures with a simple change. The creature section includes many mythic age species, and is where you will find entries for unnamed versions of fae, giants, mystical creatures, and other unlikely organisms. Characters are named NPCs introduced in the setting material earlier in the book, regardless of race and type. Finally, sample dragons and humans are provided in their respective sections.

USING NPCs

As any of your players can attest, playing a full-fledged FIREBORN character effectively in combat can require a good bit of tactical thinking and resource management. If it's a full-time job to run one character, how are you as the GM supposed to run several, up to a dozen or more, at once?

First of all, not all NPCs need to be given the same sort of attention and detail that are given to PCs. Second, by keeping in mind the most common dice configuration for an NPC, you don't necessarily need to have a sheet with dice for every foe. The following information is intended to help you play the NPCs, whether friends or foes, that interact with your players' characters.

NAMED NPCs

Named NPCs are important combatants in a scene. They have two stance changes per turn, usually have a wide array of options for mental and physical actions, and should receive as much attention from you as possible. It is recommended that you record the important statistics of each named NPC that you plan to use in an adventure on a copy of the named NPC sheet, found in the back of this book. The named NPC sheet gives you room to move dice and space to record damage and penalties quickly and easily.

UNNAMED NPCs

Unnamed NPCs are the minions, mooks, and random-encounter bad guys of FIREBORN. The extent of their individuality is their choice of weapon, and more often than not a group of unnamed NPCs have identical game statistics. Unnamed NPCs are there to drain the PCs' resources before the final encounter, to give them a chance to hone their combat skills and feel cool doing it, or to slow the PCs down when they have more important things to worry about. Their unimportance is repre-

sented in game terms by the fact that they only have a single stance change each round. Sure, any no-name thug can taunt and feint and intimidate all he wants, but he's still charcoal when a firebreathing scion opens up on him, so why waste the game time (and your attention as the GM) moving dice around for him? He's there to get in the way and to throw himself at the good guys without regard for his own safety, or to hold them off as long as he can without caring about actually hurting them.

Because unnamed NPCs only have one stance change per turn, their dice are easy to adjudicate. You simply move their dice to a certain configuration for the scene, and leave it at that. To help you do so, each NPC has several preferred stances.

PREFERRED STANCES

A preferred stance is a common arrangement of dice for the NPC, usually moving the most possible dice given the NPC's skill ranks and the sequence he is attempting to perform. Most NPCs have aggressive, neutral, and defensive stances. Some NPCs have only aggressive stances, as reflects their nature; others are more defensive, having no aggressive stance at all.

In the case of unnamed NPCs, you simply choose a preferred stance for the NPC on its turn, each turn, and stick with it. Most unnamed NPCs start out aggressive and then switch to defensive when things turn sour. Named NPCs, on the other hand, use aggressive stances on their turn when attacking, then make a stance change to defensive when they are attacked.

When you use preferred stances, keep in mind that each applies directly to the sequence listed along with it, and might not apply to other similar tests. For instance, a bear has Melee 4 and Quickness 2. Its preferred defensive stance gives it Water 10, but only when using the listed sequence of Block moves. If the bear attempted a sequence of Dodge moves (say, because it was being attacked by something much larger and could not block the attacker's weapons), it would only be able to move 2 dice to its Water pool for a total of 8, because its Quickness ranks only let it move 2 dice.

The basic guidelines for each type of preferred stance are presented below.

—Aggressive: Move maximum dice from Earth and Air to Fire

—Neutral: Move no dice. Neutral animals often use the Interrupt mental action, readying to launch a pre-emptive attack only if they are attacked first.

—Defensive: Move maximum dice from Fire and Air to Water.





NPC FORMATS

Creatures and characters are presented in the following format:

NAME

Era: This lists whether the creature is most commonly found in the mythic or modern age. Creatures that are primarily found in the mythic age can be encountered in the modern age, at the GM's discretion. However, they would almost certainly cause a stir if encountered by an average human in the modern age. Such individuals are usually either holdovers from the mythic age or the results of strange alliances made among supernatural beings.

Some creatures listed as existing primarily in the mythic age are simply anachronisms; the human warrior and sage, for instance, have skills and possessions appropriate for the mythic age, rather than the modern. The GM could certainly use them in the modern age, perhaps to represent humans that practice an older, less technological way of life, but they would not be considered appropriate as average citizens of London.

On the other hand, creatures that are listed as existing in the modern age can *only* exist in 21st-century London, not during flashbacks. It wouldn't make sense to find a London cop in Atlantis, for instance, and Cernunnos's mad lupine form is a result of his tainted rebirth, and is not the form he would have worn in the mythic age.

Race: Races in FIREBORN are roughly divided into animals and beings, and from there divided into the natural or supernatural. For more information, see Sidebar 6-1.

APL: This is an acronym meaning "Advancement Point Level." A creature's APL is its AP total, divided by 10 and rounded to the nearest whole number for the sake of expediency. APL is affected by things like the number of points used to purchase aspects, the number of ranks of powers or edges the creature has, its karma multiplier, etc. APL may be used as a rough guideline to determine the level of challenge that a creature may present to the PCs. A starting scion, for frame of reference, has an APL of 1.

Aspects: The creature's base scores in all four aspects.

Initiative: The number of dice the creature rolls on non-quicken initiative checks.

Health: This is a shorthand of the creature's damage chart, listing the damage thresholds at which it suffers die wounds. The numbers listed here represent effects suffered as follows: (number of minor wounds)m; no effect / minor wound / 1 wound die / 2 wound dice / 3 wound dice / 4 wound dice / 5 wound dice / 6 wound dice.

Size/Reach: The creature's size category and reach. The size (and the reach along with it) can be increased or decreased for variants of the species.

Armor: The creature's total armor value, which is subtracted from any weapon damage suffered. If the creature's armor value is due in part or in whole to worn armor, the armor traits are listed in parentheses after the AV. Otherwise, armor is assumed to be one of the creature's traits.

Karma: The creature's max karma pool, which should be the size of its current karma pool at the beginning of most encounters. If the creature exists in both the modern and mythic age, its karma pool in the modern age is listed first, followed by its karma pool in the mythic age (given in parentheses).

Stride: The length of a creature's stride at the listed size, with its gait in parenthesis (useful for determining its stride if you increase or decrease the creature's size). If the creature has a gait in another form of movement, such as flying, climbing, or swimming, that is listed here as well. Flying and swimming gaits are followed by maneuverability in parentheses.

Weapons: The creature's most commonly used weapons, including all natural weapons, are listed here. Each weapon is listed as follows: Name: (number of weapons of that type) damage/weapon weight. Extra damage, like that gained from the Deft, Brutal, or Weapon Specialist edges, is factored in.

Sequences: If the creature knows any fighting styles, they are listed here. Three sample sequences (usually two preferred attack sequences and one preferred defense sequence) are listed below the sequence header, followed by their payoffs. If the creature does not know any fighting styles, non-fighting style sequences are listed instead, and no payoffs are given; simply calculate damage, including the bonus damage for Press and Power moves, as normal.

Skills: Ranks in each skill.

Spells: Spells known, if any. Spells are divided by rank, and are presented in the following format: Spell (casting options known). Variants of spells are listed separately, as follows: Variant known (base spell)(casting options known).

Edges: Name of edges, followed by the rank in each edge.

Powers: Name of powers, followed by the rank in each power. Some creatures have new powers; these are italicized and described at the end of the chapter. Others have abilities that work similar to existing powers or legacies; these are marked by asterisks and described at the end of the creature entry.

Traits: Traits other than armor, flight, or any other previous entries. New traits are italicized, and are listed at the end of the chapter.

Legacy: If a creature has a legacy or legacy-like ability, it is listed here. Because non-dragons do not have awakened ranks, the amount of karma that may be spent on that legacy each round and the TH to resist the legacy's effects are determined by the creature's APL, instead. A creature's effective awakened rank for these purposes is its APL/2 (round down).



CREATURE NOTES

RACE TYPES

Animals: Animals, whether natural or not, are simple beasts. They have no civilizations, and do not process thoughts on any kind of higher level. Animals may have superhuman aspect scores of 1, and sometimes have powers to represent their superhuman abilities; these are always natural, rather than supernatural, manifestations, and are unaffected by their proximity to sources of karma.

Beings: Beings, on the other hand, are sentient, thinking creatures capable of language, civilization, and culture.

Natural: Natural beings have no superhuman aspects or powers. Natural animals may have up to 1 in a superhuman aspect, and may have powers as appropriate for their race types.

Supernatural: Supernatural creatures are more powerful than natural creatures, having superhuman aspect scores higher than 1, ranks in various powers, and higher karma multipliers.

MYTHIC AND MODERN KARMA

Modern Natural: Natural creatures in the modern age have karma pools equal to their base Earth scores.

Mythic Natural: Humans and animals in the mythic age are more closely connected to the forces of karma that surround them and shape their worlds. Their karma pools are equal to their base Earth scores x3.

Modern Supernatural: Supernatural creatures may have supernatural aspect scores and powers, and some even have legacies. Supernatural creatures in the modern age have karma pools equal to their base Earth scores x3.

Mythic Supernatural Beings: Spirits, titans, and other supernatural beings are not simply connected to karma; they are part of it, and it is part of them. In the mythic age, when karma existed in plenty, this was all the more obvious. Supernatural creatures in the mythic age have karma pools equal to their base Earth scores x5.

Fireborn and Fae: Dragons and their reincarnated forms are both natural and supernatural, modern and mythic. Of all the creatures in the world, they are both the most dependent on karma and the most empowered by it. Dragons in the mythic age therefore have karma pools equal to their base Earth scores x10, while scions in the modern age (or full-fledged dragons in the modern age, like Cernunnos) have karma pools equal to their base Earth scores x5. Fae, which are also very closely tied to karma, follow the same rules.

ANIMALS ASPECTS AND SKILLS

Animals never have wealth scores, and have a very limited skill set. Also, when determining the actions of animals, keep in mind that they operate on a very primitive level. A bird of prey may have a 4 in Air, but that does not mean it is as intelligent as a human with the same base aspect score; rather, the 4 represents keen senses and rapid thought.

Animals' limited sentence means that they are restricted to a specific set of skills:

Athletics, Interaction, Melee, Stamina, Quickness, Senses, Stealth, and Will. They can never improve skills beyond these.

SEQUENCE FORMATS

Fighting style sequences in this section are presented using slightly different formats than those found in the *Player's Handbook*, both to preserve space and to expand flexibility. The following format changes have been implemented:

Additional Damage: "Additional damage +X" has been reduced to simply "Damage +X."

Multiple Limbs: In the *Player's Handbook*, when two kicks, two punches, two foreclaws, etc., are used in the same sequence, they are denoted by "L" for left and "R" for right. Some creatures have far more than two arms and two legs, however. For these tentacled abominations or insect foes, their limbs are numbered "A," "B," and so on.

Replace weapon: Where appropriate, a creature's weapon name replaces the "Fist Strike" or "Weapon Strike" notation for a fighting style sequence. This allows the mostly human-oriented fighting styles presented in the *Player's Handbook* to be used for non-human and differently-armed combatants.

Your players may take advantage of this variation as well, using the Knife Fighter style with other light weapons, replacing kicks with sword swings, etc.

Remove "Fire," "Strike," etc.: Where possible, extra words have been removed after any weapon attack move, leaving only the name of the weapon. The only places the word has been kept are in instances in which the same weapon may be used in different ways. In many Gun Fu sequences, for instance, a pistol is both fired in ranged combat and used to strike in melee combat, so a Pistol attack move is preceded by "Fire" or followed by "Strike."



CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

Wealth: The long-term wealth (and, inferred from it, lifestyle) of the creature or character. Only beings have this entry; animals do not.

After the creature's or character's statistics follows an overview of its habits, history, and/or its role in the world, followed by a description of its appearance, physical traits, and behavior.

VARIANTS

Slight variations on the base norm for the creature.

ANIMALS

Most animals are natural creatures that, in the modern age, exist in the spaces left untouched by man. Others are domesticated companions and beasts of burden. Scions may run into them as servants of supernatural creatures, as guardians, as potential spell ingredients, or simply as wild beasts to be avoided.

In the mythic age, large numbers of animals are more common, given that mankind has not yet spread to every corner of the globe. Animals in the mythic age are hunted for their meat, fur, antlers, and bone, are contested with in competition for food or territory, and are battled in self-defense and for glory. Most "normal" versions of animals exist in the mythic age as they do in the modern, but such tiny creatures are beneath the notice of most dragons. However, any animal listed below can be made into a "giant" version, simply by increasing its size. A size 4 bear might not have supernatural abilities, but would be a terrifying foe nonetheless.

ANIMALS AND MENTAL ACTIONS

Animals usually Default during their mental actions, instead taking the +1 re-roll on their physical actions. Pack alphas and mothers protecting their young, on the other hand, might use the Defend or Distract mental actions; finally, wounded or disadvantaged animals are likely to use the Grit and Steady actions.

ANIMAL PREFERRED STANCES

Animals generally do not add attack moves to defense sequences.

BEAR

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Natural animal

APL: 1

Aspects: Fire 5(1), Water 6(1), Air 1, Earth 3

Initiative: 5

Health: 5m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 3

Karma: 3 (9)

Stride: 30 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Claw (2): 11/M

—Bite: 14/H (ignores armor)

Sequences: None

Agg—F9/W6/A0/E0—Power + Bite + Claw

Neut—F5/W6/A1/E3—Sidestep + Slam + Stride

Def—F1/W10/A1/E3—*Block* sequence

Skills: Athletics 4, Melee 4, Quickness 2, Senses 4, Stamina 5, Stealth 3

Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Brutal 2, Durable, Freight Train, Resilient 2, Strong

Powers: Heightened Senses (scent 3)

Traits: Vicious maw

Bears are hulking beasts of fur and muscle, their powerful paws ending in strong claws. Their lumbering forms belie the speed and agility of these daunting creatures. Black bears are fishers of cold mountain streams and forest pools, generally peaceful unless they feel their food supply or cubs are threatened. In combat, bears use their powerful limbs to batter their opponents, or rend them with their claws and teeth.

BROWN BEAR

APL: 2

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Powers: Add Ferocity 3, Skin of Stone 3

Larger and more aggressive than black bears, brown bears (also known as grizzlies) are extremely ill-tempered and territorial. An angered grizzly will often rear on its hind legs to roar a challenge before attacking, rising to as high as 10 ft. tall.

POLAR BEAR

APL: 2

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Stride: Add Swim 30 ft. (Moderate, mnv 2)

Powers: Add Skin of Stone 3

Traits: Ignores penalties from cold temperatures

Polar bears are particularly agile in water, and are built for cold.

BIRD OF PREY

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Natural animal

APL: 0

Aspects: Fire 5, Water 3, Air 6(1), Earth 1

Initiative: 11

Health: 1m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size: -2 / 1 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 1 (3)

Stride: 5 ft. (Slow), Fly 60 ft. (Speedy, mnv 3)

Weapons:

—Talon (2): 6/L

—Beak: 8/M





Sequences: Archangel

Agg—F10/W3/A1(1)/E1—Dash [Fly] + Dash [Fly] + Power + Talon + Beak: Stun

Neut—F5/W3/A6(1)/E1—Dash [Fly] + Talon + Dash [Fly]: Damage +15

Def—F1/W7/A6(1)/E1—*Dodge* sequence

Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 5, Stamina 2, Quickness 4, Senses 5, Stealth 3, Will 2

Edges: Action Junkie 5, Circumspect 4

Powers: Heightened Senses (sight 5), Swift (Fly 5)

Birds of prey are solitary animals whose real strength comes in the speed of their attacks. They prefer to swoop in and grab their targets, then ascend with the still-living catch in their grasps. Birds of prey are sometimes trained in the modern age as hunting animals; this habit was pioneered by the Phythians in the mythic age.

CANINE

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Natural animal

APL: 0

Aspects: Fire 5, Water 3, Air 1, Earth 3

Initiative: 6

Health: 3m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size/Reach: -1 / 1 ft.

Armor: 1

Karma: 3 (9)

Stride: 30 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Bite: 8/M

Sequences: None

Agg—F9/W3/A0/E0—Dash + Crouch + Jump + Bite: Damage +10, disadvantage (physical) 2, trip

Neut—F5/W3/A1/E3—Bite + Press + Press + Press + Press: Damage +8

Def—F1/W7/A1/E3—*Dodge* sequence

Skills: Athletics 4, Interaction 4, Melee 4, Quickness 4, Senses 4, Stamina 4

Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Defender 2, Skill Specialty (senses: tracking)

Powers: Heightened Senses (hearing 1, scent 4), Swift (Stride 2)

The dog has long been a loyal servant to man, and in the modern age exists in a bewildering array of forms, bred both for practicality and whimsy. When man domesticated the wolf-like ancestors of modern dogs, it was not the first time he had done so. In the mythic age, a species of wild dog roamed the primordial lands and was tamed by the people of that long forgotten time.

In combat, even untrained dogs are effective combatants and instinctively use their weight and powerful jaws to great advantage. When in a pack, dogs work as a coherent unit to exploit openings presented by their harried prey.

FAE HOUND

Race: Supernatural animal

APL: 1/2

Aspects: +3 to Water, Air; add (3) to Water, Air

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 2

Powers: Group Mind 1

The unusual appearance and soul-stirring baying of fae hounds gave rise to racial memories that still persist in the modern day, coloring folklore and myth with tales of faerie dogs and capricious mastiffs that served the fae lords of old. These noble creatures were as large as the grey wolf hounds of Ireland, but more heavily built and with luxurious black hair and gold eyes.

CAT (HUNTING)

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Natural animal

APL: 1

Aspects: Fire 5(1), Water 4(1), Air 5(1), Earth 2

Initiative: 8

Health: 2m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 2 (6)

Stride: 45 ft. (Speedy)

Weapons:

—Foreclaw (2): 8/M

—Hindclaw (2): 12/M (Grab ready requirement)

—Bite 18/H

Sequences: Ravager

Agg—F8(1)/W4(1)/A2(1)/E2—Dash + Jump + Power + Foreclaw: Damage +35

Neut—F5(1)/W4(1)/A5(1)/E2—Crouch + Foreclaw: Damage +15

Def—F1(1)/W9(1)/A5(1)/E2—*Dodge* sequence

Skills: Athletics 5, Melee 3, Stamina 2, Quickness 5, Senses 5, Stealth 5, Will 2

Edges: Action Junkie 5, Aggressive 2 (Athletics, Melee), Stealthy

Powers: Instinct 3

The statistics above represent the most common elements of the great cats, including tigers, lions, and mountain lions. The statistics can be used for smaller or larger cats, and Climb and Swim strides can be added to represent various species.

ELEPHANT

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Natural animal

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 6, Water 4(1), Air 2, Earth 4(1)

Initiative: 6

Health: 9m; <7 / 7+ / 11+ / 15+ / 18+ / 23+ / 27+ / 31+

Size/Reach: 2 / 10 ft.



Armor: 6
Karma: 4 (12)
Stride: 30 ft. (Slow)
Weapons:
 —Trunk: 5/L
 —Kick (2): 11/M
 —Gore: 14/H
Sequences: None
 Agg—F12/W4/A0/E0—Dash + Power + Slam + Press
 Neut—F6/W4/A2/E4—Gore + L Kick + R Kick
 Def—F0/W10/A2/E4—*Block* sequence
Skills: Athletics 6, Interaction 6, Quickness 2, Melee 6, Stamina 6, Senses 4
Edges: Aggressive (Melee), Brutal 2, Durable, Resilient 5, Strong
Powers: Skin of Stone 3
Traits: Articulate limb (trunk)

When left to their own devices, elephants are content to graze upon the grassy rolling hills. They often travel in herds of up to thirty members, traversing the landscape in search of green pastures.

In the mythic age, in a time where massive creatures ruled the lands and the skies, the elephant was a prime hunting resource. While the elephant itself was a peaceful species, the constant plague of aerial predator attacks taught the herds to fight back with ferocious tenacity. That same tenacity was harnessed for use in war, during which mankind used these goliaths to pull siege engines, topple enemy battlements, and even as mounts.

The mythic elephant was much larger than the modern elephants seen in Africa and Asia (size 3). An adult could grow up to 50 ft. in length and often weighed in excesses of 20,000 pounds.

HORSE

Era: Modern or mythic
Race: Natural animal
APL: 1
Aspects: Fire 5, Water 4, Air 1, Earth 2
Initiative: 6
Health: 6m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+
Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.
Armor: 2
Karma: 2 (6)
Stride: 75 ft. (Fast)
Weapons:
 —Kick (2): 8/M
Sequences: None
 Agg—F7/W4/A0/E0—Dash + Power + Slam + Press
 Neut—F5/W4/A1/E1—L Kick + Press + R Kick
 Def—F2/W7/A1/E1—*Dodge* sequence
Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 2, Stamina 6, Quickness 3, Senses 4
Edges: Paranoid, Rapid 2, Resilient 4
Traits: Swift (Land 3)

The horses of the mythic age are much like those in the modern age. They were cherished by the Kurgan tribes, who relied on them for travel and warfare, and eventually came to see them as sacred beasts. Centaurs also felt a kinship to horses, keeping and protecting great familial herds. Horses have spread to nearly every continent, and are commonly used as beasts of burden and mounts.

Horses trained for war may have additional edges that add to their combat effectiveness.

SCORPION



Era: Modern or mythic
Race: Natural animal
APL: 1/2
Aspects: Fire 5, Water 3, Air 1, Earth 1
Initiative: 6
Health: 1m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: —1 / 0 ft.
Armor: 8
Karma: 1 (3)
Stride: 8 ft. (Speedy)
Weapons:
 —Pincer (2): 6/L
 —Stinger: 8/M
Sequences: None
 Agg—F9/W3/A0/E0—Grab + Press + Stinger
 Neut—F5/W3/A1/E1—L Pincer + R Pincer + Press + Press
 Def—F0/W8/A1/E1—*Dodge* sequence



Skills: Athletics 4, Melee 4, Quickness 5, Senses 3, Stamina 4, Stealth 4
Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Durable, Rapid 3, Survivor 1
Traits: Spined, Venomous

Scorpions are well-known as desert pests in the modern age. In the mythic age they could be far more dangerous, including species ranging in size from that of a small dog, with statistics as described above (size -1), to something the size of an elephant (size 2). Their armored exoskeletons are black with sharp, wire-like spiny hair. Large pincers, segmented legs, and a tail ending in a bulbous stinger complete the horrifying, alien appearance of these creatures. Scorpions inhabit arid regions, particular areas of basalt rock, where their black carapaces provide excellent camouflage against the dark volcanic stone.

SHARK

Era: Modern and mythic
Race: Natural animal
APL: 2
Aspects: Fire 6(1), Water 3, Air 2, Earth 1
Initiative: 8
Health: 5m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.
Armor: 2
Karma: 1 (3)
Stride: Swim 50 ft. (Speedy, mnv 3)
Weapons:
 —Bite 12/H
Sequences: Submerged
 Agg—F9/W3/A0/E0—Dash [Swim] + Jump + Power + Bite: Damage +35
 Neut—F6/W3/A2/E1—Dash [Swim] + Bite + Spin (180°) + Dash [Swim]: Damage +15
 Def—F1/W8/A2/E1—Dodge sequence
Skills: Athletics 4, Interaction 2, Melee 3, Stamina 2, Quickness 5, Senses 5 Stealth 5, Will 2
Edges: Action Junkie 4, Aggressive (Melee 1), Aspect Affinity 3 (Fire), Resilient 4
Powers: Aquatic 5, Heightened Senses (smell 5), Instinct 3

One of the oldest animals still alive in the world today, the shark has survived a world with magic and without. Cold-blooded eating machines, sharks show no sympathy or even empathy—as if created purely for the purposes of devouring lesser creatures as they struggle for life. Supreme hunters, sharks can detect a wounded animal from miles away.

While sharks vary in size, shape, and manner, enormous specimens existed in the mythic age, making marine travel impossibly dangerous; even the strongest sea dragon may be given pause when surrounded by a school of them.

SNAKE (COBRA)

Era: Modern or mythic
Race: Natural animal
APL: 1/2
Aspects: Fire 4, Water 3, Air 3, Earth 1
Initiative: 8
Health: 1m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size / Reach: -2 / 0 ft.
Armor: 2
Karma: 1 (3)
Stride: 10 ft. (Speedy)
Weapons:
 —Bite 4/L
Sequences: None
 Agg—F7/W3/A0/E1—Jump + Power + Bite
 Neut—F4/W3/A3/E1—Bite + Press + Press + Press
 Def—F0/W9/A1/E1—Dodge sequence
Skills: Athletics 2, Melee 3, Stamina 2, Quickness 6, Senses 3, Stealth 6
Edges: Aggressive 2 (Melee, Athletics), Dexterous, Rapid 2, Stealthy, Survivor 2
Powers: Heightened Senses (smell 3)
Traits: Heightened Senses (smell), Venomous

The cobra is one of the most feared of the venomous snakes drawn from the many myths and legends that surround the reptile. While it is not the most lethal, it is certainly a deadly adversary. At an average length of six ft., with a tan-brown skin, vicious eyes, forked tongue, and cape-like hood, the cobra is not a creature to dismiss lightly. It is a quick, silent hunter that feeds mainly on small insects, lizards, frogs, and mammals like rats and mice. The cobra possesses a potent venom; one bite is lethal to most prey, and is potentially fatal even to larger creatures like humans. The cobra lives in warm, dry territory where there is an abundant water source and sufficient prey.

The cobra is a powerful figure in ancient myth, its name crossing cultural folklore the world over. While the snake is often associated with its poisonous bite, the cobra also has many ties to the world of magic as well.

The statistics presented for the cobra can be used for other poisonous snakes, as well.

SNAKE (PYTHON)

Era: Modern or mythic
Race: Natural animal
APL: 1/2
Aspects: Fire 4, Water 3, Air 3, Earth 1
Initiative: 7
Health: 1m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: -1 / 0 ft.
Armor: 2
Karma: 1 (3)
Stride: 10 ft. (Moderate); Climb 10 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:





CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

—Bite 3/L

—Tail (Constricting)

Sequences: None

Agg—F8/W3/A0/E0—Bite + Grab + Press + Press

Neut—F4/W3/A3/E1—Sidestep + Bite + Sidestep

Def—F1/W6/A3/E1—*Dodge* sequence

Skills: Athletics 2, Melee 4, Quickness 3, Senses 3, Stamina 2, Stealth 6

Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Resilient 2, Strong, Skill Specialty (Melee: Grab moves), Stealthy

Powers: Heightened Senses (smell 3)

Traits: Constricting tail

Pythons are found throughout the tropics, their color and breed varying greatly from one region to the next. They commonly hunt by moonlight, using heat-sensitive pits that are located in their upper and lower labials to detect their prey. Once ensnared, the hapless victim is slowly crushed or suffocated, then devoured.

Constricting snakes also existed in the mythic age, but such specimens could grow as large as full-grown trees. Their unhinging jaws meant that there was little a mythic age constrictor could not consume, given enough time.

SPIDER

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Natural animal

APL: 1/4

Aspects: Fire 4, Water 4, Air 3, Earth 1

Initiative: 8

Health: 1m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: -4 / 0 ft.

Armor: 2

Karma: 1 (3 mythic)

Stride: 5 ft. (Moderate); Climb 5 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Bite 8/M

Sequences: None

Agg—F6/W4/A1/E1—Power + Bite

Neut—Jump + Bite + Jump

Def—*Dodge* sequence

Skills: Athletics 4, Melee 2, Stamina 2, Quickness 6, Senses 6, Stealth 6

Edges: Action Junkie 3, Aggressive 1 (Melee), Deft 3, Survivor 3

Powers: Wallcrawler 4, *Webspinner* 4

Traits: Venomous

The statistics above could represent any of hundreds of venomous, web-spinning spiders whose tiny size make them harmless to humans. Enlarge such creatures by a factor of 10, however, and they become much more dangerous.

Mythic age spiders, like many other vermin, exist in many sizes. Some giant species are even known to be used as mounts by humanoid races. Their webspinner power is extremely useful in warfare, giving an arachnid

the ability to entangle foes, cut groups off from one another, or even create impromptu structures. What some species of giant spiders view as companions and masters, however, others see only as food.

CREATURES

Anything that cannot be found in the real world, but can be found in the world of FIREBORN, is listed here. This section includes mythical creatures, demonic forces, and even ghosts and primordial spirits. Individuals are not presented here, but that does not mean antagonists and allies drawn from this section cannot be named; some creatures are so powerful that even standard members of their race make for dangerous and important foes.

CREATURES AND MENTAL ACTIONS

Creatures may be either beings or animals. Animals, even supernatural ones, follow the same rules as natural animals from the previous section. Beings are more savvy, and are likely to use whatever mental actions best suit their current circumstances and their skill sets.

CREATURE PREFERRED STANCES

As more powerful combatants, nearly all creatures know at least one fighting style. As with natural animals, creatures that are animals generally do not add attacks to defense sequences; beings, on the other hand, do so whenever possible. Some beings are always aggressive, while others are constantly defensive.

For those creatures that are used as named NPCs, GMs are encouraged to ignore their preferred stances and use the named NPC sheets provided in the back of the book when playing them. This allows the GM to use the creature's full range of dice and stance changes, making the named NPC a more essential part of the action scene.

ANT LION

Era: Mythic

Race: Supernatural animal

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 6(4), Water 3(2), Air 3(1), Earth 3(1)

Initiative: 9

Health: 3m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 8

Taint: 3

Stride: 30 ft. (Moderate), Climb 30 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Leg Stab (6): 6/L

—Bite: 12/H

Sequences: Crushing Mass





Agg—F12(4)/W3(2)/A0(1)/E0(1)—Dash + Jump + Power + Power + Power + Bite: Paralyze
Neut—F6(4)/W3(2)/A3(1)/E3(1)—Leg Stab A + Leg Stab B + Leg Stab C + Leg Stab D + Leg Stab E + Leg Stab F: Normal damage
Def—F1(4)/W8(2)/A3(1)/E3(1)—*Block* sequence
Skills: Athletics 4, Melee 6, Stamina 2, Quickness 5, Senses 2, Stealth 2, Will 6
Edges: Aggressive 2 (Athletics, Melee), Freight Train 2
Powers: Ferocity 3, Instinct 4, Wallcrawler 3
Traits: Tainted

These unlikely creatures are said to be spawned when common ants feed on the blood of a tainted creature. Their bodies immediately grow to the size of a lion, and their head changes to become that of a lion as well, while the ant body remains. Ant lions have an unappeasable hunger which drives them mad with rage. Always hungry, always feeding, the body of the ant lion can only reject the food feasted on by its lion head which, in turn, rejects the food desired by the ant. As a result, these ruthless and mad creatures always die within three days of their spawning.

Highly aggressive, once an ant lion focuses its attention on a target, it will not rest until it consumes it. Their six legs move very quickly and with an ominous, distinct clicking sound. As with natural ants, ant lions have amazing strength for their size (they are treated as size 2 for the purposes of grabs, pushes, and scaling the damage of their attacks).

AUGHISKY

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural being
APL: 2
Aspects: Fire 6(3), Water 4(2), Air 4(1), Earth 3
Initiative: 10
Health: 5m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+
Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.
Armor: 4
Taint: 9
Stride: 65 ft. (Fast); Swim 50 ft. (Speedy)
Weapons:
 —Bite: 10/L
 —Claw (2): 13/M
Sequences: Ravager
Agg—F8(3)/W4(2)/A4(1)/E1—Power + Foreclaw + Ready + Bite: Damage +5, trip
Neut—F6(3)/W4(2)/A4(1)/E3—Power + Power + L Claw + Power + Power + R Claw: Damage +5, dismember extremity
Def—F4(3)/W6(2)/A4(1)/E3(1)—*Dodge* + *Ready* + *Claw*
Skills: Athletics 2, Melee 2, Quickness 2, Senses 4, Stamina 2, Stealth 2, Trickery 4
Edges: Brutal 3, Freight Train, Resilient 2
Powers: Alternate Form 2 (forms: horse, attractive young human male), Aquatic 3, Heightened Senses

(hearing 2), Instinct 2, Mythic Leap 2, Swift (Stride 2)
Traits: Fae, tainted

Aughisky are kelpie that have once tasted blood, and seek to devour rather than merely bedevil their prey. In their true guise, aughisky appear as vaguely equine monsters, their flesh lacerated and covered in suppurating sores. Large fangs fill their over-wide mouths and their eyes are blind, staring orbs of bloodshot white. Their powerful limbs end in sharp talons, which they use to eviscerate their victims. One of an aughisky's alternate forms is that of a lovely horse, indistinguishable from a kelpie or mortal animal. Unlike the kelpie, though, aughisky do not seem to be bound to a particular place and are not found solely near bodies of water.

Cunning in the extreme, aughisky often maintain their ruse for many days, tempting mortals to attempt to ride or capture them. Once an aughisky has been mounted, he will gallop away from the rider's allies at top possible speed, eventually throwing the victim and devouring him. Another trick the aughisky have mastered is to take human form—usually that of a handsome male, with only a slightly damp smell and pond weed in his hair to give the aughisky away. In this guise, the aughisky attempts to woo maidens and lure them to their deaths in a secluded place.

An aughisky's one weakness is the merest glimpse or smell of salt water. Either sends it into a raging frenzy, but also forces it to reveal its true form.

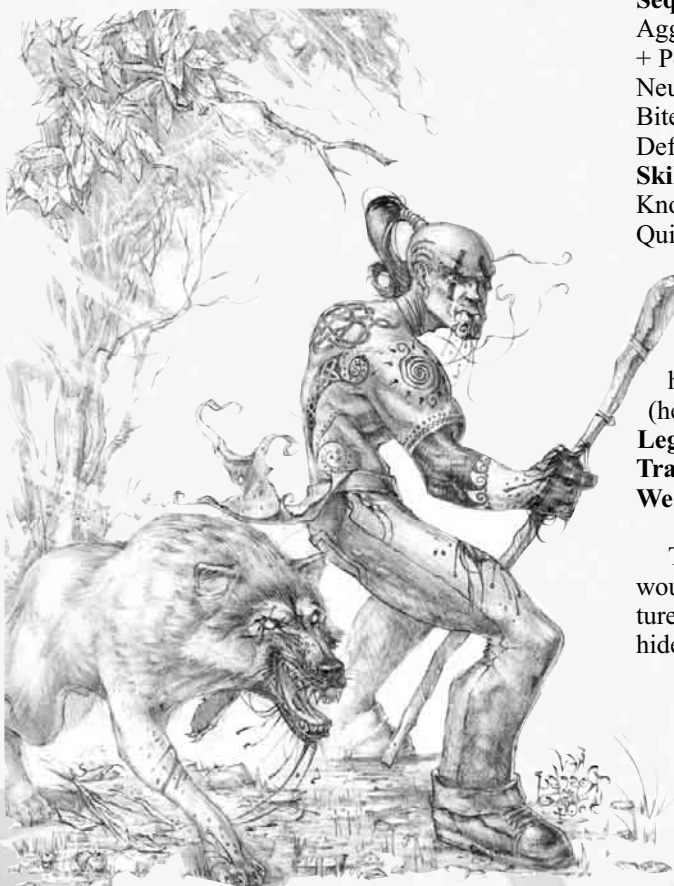
BLACK HOUND

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural animal
APL: 3
Aspects: Fire 5(4), Water 4(2), Air 3, Earth 4
Initiative: 8
Health: 4m; <6 / 6+ / 12+ / 18+ / 24+ / 30+ / 36+ / 42+
Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.
Armor: 2
Taint: 12
Stride: Fast / 40 ft.
Weapons:
 —Bite: 11/M
Sequences: Underhanded
Agg—F10(4)/W4(2)/A0/E2—Power + Power + Power + Power + Bite: Paralyze
Neut—F5(4)/W4(2)/A3/E4—Spin + Bite: Damage +10, push 1
Def—F0(4)/W10(2)/A2/E4—*Dodge* sequence
Skills: Athletics 5, Interaction 2, Melee 5, Quickness 6, Senses 5, Stamina 5, Stealth 4
Edges: Aggressive (Athletics, Melee), Brutal 3
Powers: Ferocity 2, Gaze of the Predator 3, Heightened Senses (hearing 2, scent 3), Instinct 4, Mythic Leap 2, Shadow Spinner 2, Skin of Stone 2
Traits: Fae, tainted, venomous



In the mythic age, the cusith were the faithful hounds of the fae, accompanying their faerie masters on hunts through the primordial forests of the past. They were great creatures, the size of stags, with shiny coats as black as coal and eyes that gleamed like faerie gold. As the mythic age drew to a close and the spread of taint brought corruption to the land, the cusith were transformed into hideous monsters, turning against their former masters and hunting fae and men alike. As the taint infused their forms, the skin fell from their backs, revealing glistening muscles that glowed green with putrefaction. The former warmth of their golden eyes turned a baleful red, burning with the fires of suffering and hate. Their once bewitching voices turned harsh and discordant, and the baying of the cusith became associated only with horror and death.

Roads are often built along ley lines as the laborers create them are subconsciously drawn to the karmic flow thrumming within the earth. It is long these haunted lonely roads that the cusith have been able to return to this world. They seem to appear most often at crossroads and bridges; their presence at these locations, which symbolize movement and transition in the world of men, gave rise to the belief that these baleful beasts guarded the way between the realms of the living and the dead. Terrible tales were once told of demon hounds eating the hearts of men and rounding up women and children to drive them to the fairy mounds of the



Unseelie fae. In old Scotland, it was said that a man who hears their baying three times before returning home is doomed to a horrible end.

In combat, the cusith uses its frightful baying to strike fear into the hearts of its prey; its horrid appearance only deepens their terror, giving the beast an opportunity to attack. The creature's bite is tainted with corruption, and can poison its prey as surely as the most potent venom of a snake.

BROTHER OF CERNUNNOS

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being (tainted)

APL: 2

Aspects: Fire 5(3), Water 5(1), Air 3, Earth 3

Initiative: 8

Health: 3m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft. or 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 4

Taint: 9

Stride: 30 ft. (Speedy) or 40 ft. (Speedy)

Weapons:

—Fist: 3/L

—Kick: 4/M

—Club: 5/M

or

—Bite: 10/M

Sequences: Barroom Brawling, Ravager

Agg—F10(3)/W5(1)/A0/E1—Power + Power + Power + Power + Bite: Paralyze

Neut—F5(3)/W5(1)/A3/E3—Bite + Ready + Ready + Bite: Damage +10

Def—F5(3)/W10(1)/A0/E1—*Dodge + Ready + Bite*

Skills: Athletics 6, Interaction 2, Knowledge: Street 4, Knowledge: London 2, Knowledge: Occult 1, Melee 5, Quickness 5, Ranged 2, Stamina 6, Trickery 1, Senses 5, Stealth 5, Travel 2

Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Brawler, Daunting 3, Rapid 2

Powers: Alternate Form 2 (wolf, wolf/human hybrid), Ferocity 2, Instinct 3, Heightened Senses (hearing 2, scent 3, sight 2), Metabolic Control 3

Legacy: Undying Wyrms*

Traits: Tainted

Wealth: 2

The Brothers of Cernunnos are what most people would call werewolves. They are feral, predatory creatures descended from both wolf and man. They often hide among humans, who are their primary prey, masquerading as men and women. At night, they emerge in the forms of large wolves to gorge themselves on the flesh of their human neighbors.

In their human forms, Brothers appear more or less normal, although they may be hairier than most humans, particularly the males, and typically wear their hair long. Other signs of a Brother are unusually long and pointed incisors, and



sharp, thick nails.

Now that karma has returned to London, the Brothers have gathered to reclaim their dominance. They have organized into a loose tribe of barbaric murderers; by night, they hunt the helpless, while by day, they use their limited research skills and connections to scrounge up weak proof of their history.

A Brother has a prodigious metabolism; its potent blood allows it to heal most wounds with alarming speed. A shallow cut will disappear in minutes, while more severe injuries take only hours to heal. Silver weapons can kill a Brother outright, but otherwise massive trauma, such as that suffered from an explosion, decapitation, or massive hails of gunfire, are necessary to incapacitate or kill the creature.

In addition to heroic stamina, Brothers are possessed of tremendous strength and agility and the heightened senses of their wolf counterparts. A Brother can see well in even the dimmest light, and their senses of smell and hearing are so acute that they can track their prey by scent alone and hear its heartbeat at 100 yards.

* **Undying Wurm:** Brothers of Cernunnos can use their Undying Wurm legacy to heal any wounds but those dealt by silver weapons.

CENTAUR

Era: Mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 2

Aspects: Fire 5(3), Water 4(2), Air 3, Earth 4(1)

Initiative: 8

Health: 4m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 2

Karma: 20

Stride: 65 ft. (Fast)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 8/M

—Quarterstaff: 5/H

—Bow, standard: 6 ~ 100 ft.

Sequences: Rank and File

Agg—F10(3)/W4(2)/A0/E2(1)—Power + Power + Weapon + Press: Damage +10, disarm

Neut—F5(3)/W4(2)/A3/E4(1)—Stride + Weapon + Press: Damage +5, trip

Def—F0(3)/W9(2)/A3/E4(1)—Block + Ready + Kick

Skills: Athletics 5, Interaction 2, Knowledge: Survival 5, Medicine 2, Melee 5, Quickness 4, Ranged 3, Senses 5, Stamina 6, Will 4

Edges: Aggressive 2 (Athletics, Ranged), Aspect Affinity 2 (Water), Defender 4, Survivor 3, Freight Train

Powers: Heightened Senses (scent 3), Mythic Leap 2, Nobility 3, Rapport 4, Swift (Stride 2)

Traits: Fae

Wealth: 1

Centaurs were once among the most carefree of the fae of Arcadia. They relished time spent with the creatures of the forest, lying in pleasant glades, and mimicking songs they heard mortals sing. Their pleasant lives were not to last.

Soon after the split of the fae into north and south, Queen Maeve, ruler of the North Kingdom of the fae, demanded warriors from the South Kingdom for her battle against the Formorians. The rulers of the South Kingdom, loath to alienate their cousin in the north, pledged the centaurs to her armies. Despite their passive natures, after all, the horse-men were the most suited of the fae for war: large, sturdy, fast, and even able to act as mounts for smaller fae. Being winsome and carefree, the king and queen of the south made their declaration, and then resumed their festivities.

Most of the centaurs, however, had different ideas. Determined to continue their free lives, yet unable to remain in Arcadia, vast herds of them ventured into human lands. They could not bear to be ruled by mortals, however, so they slowly dispersed.

Centaurs resemble horses, yet they possess the upper torsos of men. Their skin is a dark chestnut-brown, as are their eyes and the thick hair that grows atop their heads. Many grow curly beards. They have large, horse-like teeth, expressive faces, and deep, throaty voices. Outside of rogue bands of males, individuals rarely interact with one another.

In the epoch of the Exile of the Summer Court, centaurs can be found in three main areas: Arcadia, Avalon, and the large island of Illean, which once fell within the borders of the nation of Tethys. The Arcadian centaurs are those who wandered back to their home, or never left, and have been permitted to stay so long as they act as guards and escorts of those who take the journey north to Avalon. Those in Avalon are the ones who have already acted as guards and escorts, and have now been unwillingly drafted into the war against the giant-spawn. Finally, the centaurs on Illean are called traitors. They roam the plains and hills of that wide island, leading great herds of horses that are their only families. Each one seeks to secure his own equine herd, which he defends with zeal and unmatched ferocity. Upon their coming of age, young hunters from the surviving Tethyn tribes in northern Ofir make a pilgrimage to Illean to barter with the centaurs for steeds. Because these young men are the spiritual descendants of the land, the centaurs are honor-bound to give up any horse that a Tethyn hunter asks for, given a fair price. The horse folk particularly enjoy beer, which is brought in large quantities by savvy horse purchasers.

While most Illean centaurs are peaceful, some rogue horse-men who are unwilling or unable to attract a herd of horses for themselves form small bands. These groups wander Illean and the surrounding Kurgan lands like bandits, raiding the herds of their brothers and stealing what they want from human communities.





THE COARSE

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: As previous self, +1

Aspects: As previous self, plus Fire (2), Water (2)

Initiative: 9

Health: 4m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 8

Taint: 12

Stride: 30 ft. (Fast); Climb 30 ft. (Fast)

Weapons*:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 4/M

or

—Hooked limbs (4): 2–10/L

—Tongue: 1–5/L

—Bite: 1–5/M

Sequences: As previous self

Skills: As previous self

Edges: As previous self

Powers: Alternate Form 1 (insectoid predator), as well as 1 rank in one of the following powers: Gaze of the Predator, Instinct, Mythic Leap, or Wallcrawler

Traits: Tainted

Wealth: As previous self

The coarse are the beautiful-yet-horrific begotten of Joseph Pennington, a Seelie fae who has alternately awoken and slumbered throughout the last several decades. During this time, he has daintily fed on the blood of his lovers; never enough to kill, but apparently enough to cause a change in them. The coarse are the ones who, according to their counterparts the comely, at least, got the short end of the stick.

These creatures wear the bodies of pale, disinterested, and achingly sensual young men and women; indeed, these are what they used to look like, before Joseph transformed them. All have slightly unnatural appearances; some have waxy, almost lifeless alabaster skin, while others bear odd, unnatural ridges that most assume are birth defects or stylish cosmetic surgery. Some decorate their faces with so many studs, piercings, and chains that it is difficult to make out their true features. Whatever their fashion tendencies, their uniqueness only makes them seem more enticing and mysterious in the dark lighting of London's clubs and pubs.

Beneath those thin exteriors, however, lie abominations that enjoy causing pain and fear. The extent of the deformity of one of the coarse's alternate forms varies; the more depraved, selfish, or sadistic one was in life, the more monstrous the insectoid predator beneath her skin. The worst of them become can black chitinous creatures, with extra limbs sprouting from their torsos

and tipped by razor-sharp hooks. The tortured lines of human faces are still present on their heads, but are badly mutated by the sharp angles of the exoskeleton, and dominated by a large, circular maw bordered by twitching, fingerlike tentacles and filled with rows of sharp teeth that glisten with acidic saliva. Bursting from the sockets where human eyes once lay, glittering compound eyes reflect a thousand images.

The more monstrous the predatory form, the more she craves blood. All bear their creator's heritage, a long, cartilaginous, articulate tongue, tipped with a hollow fang with which they may drink blood, spinal fluid, brain matter, and other delectable treats. Only a rare few of the coarse actively hunt and kill humans, and those that do keep their activities a secret . . . for now. The rest are nothing more than boastful thugs and supernaturally empowered snobs, but all of them, whether they admit it to others or not, crave live flesh. The more human of them make do by consuming feeder mice from pet stores, while the more desperate may descend to stealing others' pets or eating their own.

***Traits:** The weapon damage of the coarse in their alternate forms varies, depending on the level of hate and sadism they harbored in their hearts when Joe fed on them. The least embittered and most at peace are at the lowest end of the range, doing 2 damage with their claws and 1 damage with their bites and tongues. Those that were filled with rage and violent tendencies before their encounters with Joe have been given the tools to act out their desires: their claws inflict 10 damage and their bites and tongues inflict 5 damage.

DEAD THING

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 6(3), Water 5, Air 1, Earth 1

Initiative: 7

Health: 1m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 8

Taint: 3

Stride: 25 ft. (Slow)

Weapons:

—Tentacle (6): 8/L

—Bite: 15/M

Sequences: Drunken Monkey, Long Arm, Ravager

Agg—F12(3)/W2/A0/E0—Roll + Power + Tentacle + Jump + Power + Bite: Damage +35

Neut—F6(3)/W5/A1/E1—Tentacle A (I) + Tentacle B (II) + Tentacle C (III) + Tentacle D (I) + Tentacle E (II) + Tentacle F (III)

Def—F0(3)/W11/A1/E1—Block + Ready + Bite + Press + Press + Press

Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Senses 6, Stamina 6

Edges: Aggressive 3 (Athletics, Melee, Quickness), Brutal 3

THE COMELY

Just as the coarse are putrid humans with taint slipping through their veins, the comely are luminous once-human creatures who have become veritable batteries of karma.

Comely retain the same statistics they had before being fed on by Joseph Pennington, with the following changes:

— APL +1

— (2) in Air and Earth

— 1 rank in Rapport, as well as 1 rank in one of the following powers: Clarity, Heightened Senses (sight), Metabolic Control, Mythic Leap, or Nobility

— May purchase additional ranks in either of its two powers through normal advancement

Additionally, something none have yet discovered about the comely is that they are living karmic items; a comely's karmic rank is the same as his APL. If his temporary karmic rank is ever decreased to zero through the use of karmic item abilities, he dies. A comely must either let someone use him for these abilities, or must be unconscious.

SIDEBAR 6-3

Powers: Ferocity 3, Heightened Senses (touch 5), Skin of Stone 2, Wallcrawler 1

Traits: Immune to burn wounds, cold wounds, and electrical wounds, tainted, unliving, venomous

Wealth: NA

A dead thing is a spirit summoned from shadowy netherworlds where gibbering forms writhe in abominable profusion. They might once have been powerful mortals or fae, but their pasts and sense of self have been stripped away in that horrible place. Now they are merely creatures of malice, twisted by self-loathing and hate, their only desire to inflict pain and suffering on those who dwell in the light.

Certain forbidden ancient rituals will summon a dead thing from the netherworlds, and by dark magic clothe their incorporeal forms with a semblance of flesh. Consequently, a dead thing can take a near infinite number of shapes limited only by the sorcerer's imagination, for it is usually they who define its physical guise. The dead things summoned by cultists in London's East End manifest as blind ghoulish figures, emaciated and with gray scabrous skin. Their gangly limbs are uncommonly long and end in digits that taper to boneless tentacles. These sinuous extremities are always in motion, questing for their favorite food, the eyes of mortal, as if consuming them could replace their own missing organs of sight. Their jaws are elongated and strangely articulated, allowing them to open their mouths disturbingly wide to reveal a long red prehensile tongue and black, stubby teeth that glisten with saliva.

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Being dead, these abominations are unaffected by conditions that would kill a living creature, and their sorcerous flesh is hardy and resilient. Their lashing grasping tentacles are extremely strong and covered in sharp, thorny protrusions that lacerate exposed flesh. The dead thing uses its tentacles to strip cloth and flesh from its victim, aiming to spit venomous spittle into the bloody wound.

EFFIGY

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 2

Aspects: Fire 3(3), Water 3(3), Air 0, Earth 4

Initiative: 3

Health: 9m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 4

Taint: 0

Stride: 25 ft. (Sluggish)

Weapons:

—L Fist: 3/L

—R Fist: 9/M

Sequences: Flying Fists, Long Arm

Agg—F5(3)/W3(3)/A0/E2—L Fist + Press + R Fist: Damage +5



Agg—F5(3)/W3(3)/A0/E2—Power + Fist: Push 1, trip
Agg—F5(3)/W3(3)/A0/E2—Power + Power + Fist: Push 2, disarm

Skills: Athletics 2, Melee 2, Quickness 2, Senses 2, Stamina 6

Edges: Resilient 5, Brutal 3, Follow-through 3

Powers: Coldspawn 2, Child of Fire 2, Ferocity 5

Traits: Mindless, tainted, unliving

Wealth: NA

Created by cabalistic sorcerers and necromancers, an effigy is a corpse or collection of human body parts stitched together and animated by binding a spirit or lesser elemental into its rune-scarred flesh. Such creatures are abominations, and the spirits that motivate them are bound in agony, although effigies themselves do not appear to feel pain. Being empowered by sorcery, an effigy's physical form can survive great physical trauma and conditions normally incompatible with life; for instance, they do not breathe, eat, sleep, or drink, and are unaffected by reasonable extremes of temperature. As such, effigies make perfect guardians for a cult or necromancer's lair. However, an effigy can be dismembered or destroyed by physical means, or undone by magic. With its putrefying prison destroyed, the bonded spirit is released and will flee into the ether. However, some spirits and elementals, driven insane by their imprisonment, may attack those who freed them or hunt down the sorcerer responsible for their painful subjugation.

Effigies always use an aggressive stance.

FURY

Era: Mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 4

Aspects: Fire 6(6), Water 2(1), Air 6(1), Earth 4(1)

Initiative: 12

Health: 4m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 10

Karma: 20

Stride: 30 ft. (Speedy)

Weapons*:

—Claw (2): 6/L

—Kick (2): 8/M

—Bite: 8/M

—Glaive: 18/H

—Battleaxe: 24/H

—Bow, Recurve (war arrows): 14 ~ range 100 ft.

Sequences: Eastern Large Style, Lightning Style, Long Arm, Overkill

Agg—F12(6)/W2(1)/A6(1)/E4(1)—Dash + Jump + Roll + Ready + Power + Weapon: Damage +45

Agg—F12(6)/W2(1)/A6(1)/E4(1)—Sidestep + Stride + Weapon Strike + Stride + Sidestep: Bleed

Agg—F12(6)/W2(1)/A6(1)/E4(1)—Spin + Ready + Power + Weapon Strike: Dismember extremity or Stun

Skills: Athletics 6, Ka 6, Knowledge: Law 6, Melee 6,



Quickness 6, Ranged 6, Senses 6, Stamina 6, Will 6
Edges: Aspect Affinity 5 (Fire), Brutal 4, Dauting 4, Ferocity 5, Fluid Fighter 3, Dervish 2, Follow-through 1
Powers: Ferocity 5, Gaze of the Predator 3, Group Mind 1, Heightened Senses 3* (hearing *or* sight *or* smell), Instinct 5, Metabolic Control 2, Mythic Leap 4, Skin of Stone 3, *Undeterred* 5

Furies are a supernatural manifestation of the ideal of vengeance. They manifest in response to passionate desire for the punishment of human wrongdoers and criminals who have, whether through incompetence or corruption of the courts, escaped their cultures' justice. The furies always appear in groups of three that refer to each other as sisters; each is a unique individual, yet all seem to share a common mind and often speak in unison with a seductive, whispering voice.

Furies appear as tall human women, clothed in robes of white. Once their prey has been located, the robes are shed to reveal skin as black as jet, eyes that smolder like burning rubies, and hair that seems to coil and strike like snakes. They fight with an arsenal of claws, blades, polearms, and bows. They are beautiful creatures, albeit in a sinister way, and they are easily offended and driven to rage. Furies exist for one purpose only: to punish and painfully kill the perpetrator of the crime they have been summoned to avenge. They need neither sustenance nor rest, and will not cease their efforts until they, or that creature, have been destroyed.

Heightened Senses*: When the trio of furies manifest, each claims one of the Heightened Senses options as her own.

Weapons*: Each of the furies claims one of the three weapons listed above. Depending on the grievousness of the crime they have been sent to punish, furies may also manifest with powerful enchanted items or karmic items, as appropriate for their prey. For instance, furies sent after a rapacious, hated dragon might bear among them a lizard stick, while those sent after an ephemeral foe would have at least one ritually enchanted weapon to strike the unseen.

GREY GENTLEMEN (THOSE WHO DWELL BELOW)

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 8

Aspects: Fire (6), Water (6), Air (6), Earth (6) (see below)

Initiative: 12 successes (see below)

Health: 10m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2ft. (human form) *or* 1 / 5 ft. (monstrous form)

Armor: 10

Taint: 30

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate) *or* 30 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:



—Fist: 8/L

—Kick: 9/M

or

—Forelimb (4): 10/L

—Pincer (2): 15/M

—Tail: 20/H

Sequences: All

Agg—F(10)/W(5)/A(0)/E(5)—Dash + Sidestep + Jump + Power + Power + Weapon: Death

Neut—F(5)/W(5)/A(5)/E(5)—Dash + Weapon + Kick + Dash: Damage +10

Def—F(0)/W(10)/A(5)/E(5)—Block + Ready + Power + Weapon + Dash: Damage +5, Bleed

Skills: 6 in all

Edges: Brutal 5, Deft 5, Dervish 5, Karmic Release 5, Resilient 5, Survivor 5

Powers: Alternate Form*, Aquatic 5, Clarity 5, Earthstride 5, Group Mind 5, Instinct 5, *Unseen* 5, plus any one at rank 5

Legacy: Mind Tyrant, Shapeshifter

Traits: Tainted

Wealth: 6

To casual observation, there is nothing extraordinary about these men in their grey business suits and bowler hats; they appear, apart from their outmoded hats, no different from the tens of thousands of similarly attired businessmen who work in the city each day. In fact, it is



DWELLER SPECIAL RULES

As some of the most dangerous opponents that dragons or scions will face, Those Who Dwell Below use the following special rules.

ASPECTS

Whereas dragons' and scions' use of frequent stance changes represents their being a pure incarnation of karma and expression of the mercurial nature of the elements, Dwellers are the pure incarnations of taint, powerful and implacable. Dwellers have 6 superhuman ranks in each aspect, and no "normal" base aspect scores. The superhuman ranks replace the base aspect scores for purposes of determining damage thresholds, initiative, etc., and can even be moved as if they were dice. This also means, of course, that they never need to roll dice, something that should intimidate players (when you simply say, "he hits you for 20 damage" without rolling dice, they'll be worried). Because they are assumed to have 6 in all skills, this means that they can have up to 12 automatic successes before bidding taint; quite powerful, indeed.

LEGACIES

Each Dweller not only has a legacy, it has more than one. All Dwellers are master shapeshifters and mind controllers, and each also has another area of expertise, whether it be resistance to damage, power over poison, or the ability to manipulate storms.

FUSING

No one knows what Dweller society looks like. They seem to prefer to travel individually, and their alien minds seem at times dim and animalistic. Yet they work in seamless unison when infiltrating human society. Likewise, Dwellers may fuse themselves to one another to increase their power. Fusing is a full-turn action. One Dweller acts as the base creature; each Dweller that joins the fuse has the following effects. Note that dependent traits are not recalculated; the effects below supersede them:

- +1 automatic success in all aspects (no maximum)
- +1 to each damage threshold (no maximum)
- +1 to size (optional; maximum size 5)

Gains additional powers of new Dweller

Gains any one legacy that the fused Dwellers' fulfill the prerequisites

Any taint the new Dweller had is added to the fused being's taint pool

this very extremity of plainness, their utterly nondescript appearance, that draws the unconscious eye. On closer inspection—a thing that is uncommonly hard to do—one notices a certain indefinable "wrongness" about them, as though they are not quite comfortable in their skin.

The oddness that men and animals sense in the Grey Gentlemen stems from the ugly truth that lurks beneath their unremarkable exteriors. These are the insidious forms in which Those Who Dwell Below have chosen to masquerade in the modern age. The Dweller compresses its form into a close approximation of a man, and then uses its intrinsic alien power to ward the minds of others against its true appearance. However, the Dwellers don't get all the details right; it is these minor inconsistencies that generate the feeling of unease in those who view them.

The Grey Gentlemen use their mental powers to manipulate and control the unsuspecting mortals among whom they walk. They cloud the minds of men, making it difficult for them to remember an encounter with the Dweller in human form, but like a master hypnotist, the Grey Gentleman can leave behind an irresistible compulsion that will further its sinister plans. In other cases, the Grey Gentlemen may totally enslave a human, turning him into a puppet whose strings can be pulled from the black abysses in which the Dwellers lurk.

In its human guise, a Dweller is restricted in its attacks to pummeling with fists and feet and the use of weapons any human might use. However, due to its compressed form, it remains incredibly dense and hard to damage. If the true identity of a Grey Gentleman is exposed, or it finds the need to menace more overtly, it can assume its large gastropod form in a burst of rippling gray flesh and writhing pseudopods and pincers. That form itself is difficult to describe: it is always shifting and seems to ebb and flow into and out of reality itself, as if somewhere in the center of the otherworldly beast is a hole to someplace else, and into which parts of its body are constantly being drawn and reemerging. No two Dwellers have the same monstrous form.

Alternate Form*: Dwellers can assume the form of any creature, even down to details like facial features or clothes worn, that they have dragged down to their subterranean city of Chatham. There, the creature is drowned in the living lake from which all Dwellers spawn, and continues to exist in a terror-filled state, half alive and half dead, for as long as the Dwellers keep his body there. Each time a Dweller takes on that creature's form, a portion of the pitiable creature's mind is mercifully sucked away. Likewise, the creature's sense of identity blurs and fades, which is reflected in the continuing deterioration of detail each time a Dweller assumes the creature's likeness. Given the vagueness of the Grey Gentleman shape that so many Dwellers wear, one can only imagine that the London businessman they kidnapped for that purpose has long since lost all sense of himself.



GRIFFON

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural animal
APL: 4
Aspects: Fire 5(2), Water 5(2), Air 3(1), Earth 3(1)
Initiative: 8
Health: 7m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+
Size: 2 / 10 ft.
Armor: 3
Karma: 9
Stride: 50 ft. (Fast), Fly 90 ft. (Speedy)
Weapons:
 —Foreclaw (2): 12/M
 —Hindclaw (2): 16/M (Grab ready requirement)
 —Beak: 16/H
Fighting Styles: Archangel, Ravager
 Agg—F9(2)/W5(2)/A0(1)/E2(1)—Dash (Fly) + Spin + Power + Foreclaw Strike: Dismember extremity
 Neut—F5(2)/W5(2)/A3(1)/E3(1)—Dash (Fly) + Foreclaw Strike + Dash (Fly): Damage +15
 Def—F1(1)/W9(2)/A3(1)/E3(1)—Dodge sequence
Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 4, Stamina 4, Quickness 4, Senses 4, Stealth 2, Will 6
Edges: Ferocity 4, Follow-through 3, Rapid 1 (flight), Resilient 4, Strong 1
Powers: Heightened Senses (sight 3), Instinct 4, Nobility* (varies), Swift (Fly 2)

The earliest surviving renderings of griffons come to us through history from the ancient Middle East. Noble beasts of legendary power, griffons have the bodies (and ferocity) of the lion and the head and wings (as well as grace and majesty) of the eagle. While there is little evidence to suggest that they are anything more than incredibly effective aerial predators, griffons seem to have a quiet wisdom and nobility about them. They hunt in packs, their crested leader making keening predatory calls to direct the griffons' movements; these cries are also the method by which a griffon uses the Nobility power.

Griffons are nearly as proud as dragons and fae, if in a simpler manner, and are therefore incredibly hard to train as mounts. Even those raised as hatchlings are likely to fly off when given the chance. Those rare griffons that bond to a human rider are paragons of loyalty and determination, however. As the end of the mythic age approached, a Tethyn tale was told of a brave hunter who raised and trained an entire pack of griffons, then led them in an epic aerial hunt against a tainted dragon that had been terrorizing one of the outlying Tethyn islands. The hunter and his pack were never heard from again, but neither did the dragon's rampage ever reach the Tethyn mainland.

***Nobility:** In each pack of griffons, one has a beautiful crest about its head of shining gold. This crested griffon is the pack leader, and only it has ranks in the Nobility power. A crested griffon has 1 rank in the

power for every 3 griffons in its pack. The moment a crested griffon dies or gives up its position, perhaps due to wounds or separation from the pack, a new griffon gains the golden crest and the ranks in Nobility that come with it.

KELPIE

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural animal
APL: 1/2
Aspects: Fire 4(2), Water 5(4), Air 3, Earth 4
Initiative: 7
Health: 8m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+
Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.
Armor: 4
Karma: 12
Stride: 65 ft. (Fast); Swim 65 ft. (Fast)
Weapons:
 —Kick (2): 9/M
 —Bite: 10/M
Sequences: None
 Neut—F4(2)/W5(4)/A3/E4—Bite + L Kick + R Kick + Press
 Def—F0(2)/W9(4)/A3/E4—Block + Ready + Bite + Dash + Dash [Swim]
 Def—F0(2)/W9(4)/A3/E4—Dodge + Dash + Dash [Swim]
Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 4, Quickness 4, Senses 4, Stamina 3, Stealth 2, Trickery 5
Edges: Rapid 4, Resilient 4
Powers: Aquatic 3, Instinct 2, Mythic Leap 2, Swift (Land 2, Swim 2)
Traits: Fae

Kelpies are strange water fae that look exactly like horses. They haunt remote lakes and stretches of rivers. Like many of the fae, the kelpie are mercurial by nature and their motivations are maddeningly obscure to mortal minds. When a tired traveler stops by the body of water where the kelpie dwells, usually seeking rest or a drink, the kelpie appears, peacefully grazing. However, as soon as the traveler mounts the horse, it dives into the water and swims away. Occasionally, a rider drowns as a result of this prank, but more often the target of the joke is only left a bit colder and wet for his trouble. Why the kelpie goes to such lengths and what it gains from such pranks is a mystery.

If attacked, a kelpie is more likely to flee and vanish into the depths of its lake or river than retaliate.

LYRIAL

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural being
APL: 1
Aspects: Fire 4(1), Water 3, Air 6(3), Earth 4
Initiative: 10
Health: 4m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+





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Size: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 20

Stride: 15 ft. (Slow), Fly 30 ft. (Speedy, mnv 2)

Weapons:

—Talons (2): 5/L

—Long Bow: 8 ~ range 300 ft.

Sequences: None

Agg—F5(1)/W3/A5(3)/E4—Power + Power + Release Arrow

Neut—F4(1)/W3/A6(3)/E4—Release Arrow + Ready + Release Arrow

Def—F1(1)/W6/A6(3)/E4—*Dodge* + *Crawl* [Fly] + *Dash* [Fly]

Skills: Athletics 3, Craft: Singing 5, Interaction 4, Knowledge: Survival 2, Melee 1, Quickness 3, Ranged 4, Senses 3, Trickery 6

Edges: Forceful Will 3 (voice), Seductive 5

Powers: Crushing Will 3*, Heightened Sense (sight 2)

Lyrials are beautiful aerial huntresses. They appear to be human women except for the great multi-hued wings that carry them through the air; upon closer inspection, their light gray skin is revealed to be covered with soft, pale feathers that have the consistency of down. Golden claws tip their fingers and bifurcated bird-like feet, and many wear dark green swirling moko (tattoos) on their faces. They tend to dwell in the canopies of forests or on wooded mountain slopes, where they use their heavenly songs to lure potential human mates to their nests. Their lovers are inevitably discarded after a few days or weeks once they have served the obvious purpose; many humans cannot bare the sense of loss and separation from the beauty of the lyrials, and perform suicidally reckless acts in an effort to win back their beloved. More than a few have thrown themselves from cliffs, thinking that their lyrial lover will come to her senses and save them.

Lyrials that become pregnant lay eggs after three months. These eggs must be submerged in clean sand or earth to develop; after three years of this incubation, assuming the egg is not disturbed or damaged, an adult lyrial springs forth full-grown from the egg.

***Crushing Will:** Lyrials' Crushing Will power can only be used via song and its use is limited to the seduction and manipulation of human males.

HARPY

The harpy is seen primarily toward the end of the mythic age, and is thought to be the result of lyrial eggs that have been deposited in tainted ground. They have all of the same abilities as lyrials, but have the tainted trait. Their former beauty gives way to a haggard, flabby female shape, usually covered in grime and reeking of feces, urine, and other distinctly unpleasant smells. Those who fall under a harpy's spell nonetheless see them as the most beautiful creatures they've ever known.

MIDOB

The Midob are nomadic desert wanderers who have found a niche in Keheb as merchants. They have a reputation for traveling where others cannot, or will not, go. In form, the Midob resemble a hybrid of humans and cats. Their humanoid bodies are covered in short, golden fur, and they possess long, expressive tails. Their feet, which are often unadorned, possess broad pad-like toes that allow them to traverse the sands of Keheb's deserts with ease and grace. The most strikingly alien feature, of course, are their cat-like heads, which rest on sturdy yet graceful necks.

The females of the Midob hold most of the authority within these wandering desert tribes. They are the ones who have mastered the art of trade and negotiation. The males perform much of the physical labor, including defending their tribes from outside aggression, as well as taking charge during travel in hostile regions.

Religion among the Midob is tied heavily to reincarnation of the soul. Each spirit begins as a lesser creature, and with each life it lives new lessons are learned. Failure to learn from one's mistakes can lead to a perpetual cycle of spiritual stagnation, but the Midob believe that a soul's ascension is inevitable. The pinnacle of form, of course, is the Midob themselves. Whether this egotism is folly or not is a subject of hot debate in the temples and bazaars of Keheb.

Warriors prefer to use the shamshir, a large, wickedly-curved sword, for defense. Though both genders possess claws, Midob males are reluctant to use them in combat. They feel that using their natural weapons makes them no better than animals, so they keep them covered with claw caps wrought from gold and other precious metals.

MIDOB MATRON

Era: Mythic

Race: Natural being

APL: 1/2

Aspects: Fire 4, Water 3, Air 4, Earth 6

Initiative: 8

Health: 3m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 2

Karma: 18

Stride: 30 ft. (Speedy)

Weapons:

—Foreclaw (2): 6/L

—Hindclaw (2): 6/L

—Bite: 6/M

—Quarterstaff: 5/H

Sequences: Entrapping Defense, Swift

Agg—F6/W3/A2/E6—Dash + Jump + Power + Foreclaw: Damage +35

Neut—F4/W3/A4/E6—Dash + Hindclaw + Dash

Def—F2/W5/A4/E6—Dodge + Ready + Grab: Push 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Casting 2, Interaction 5, Ka 4,





Knowledge: Finances 2, Knowledge: Language (Atlantean) 3, Knowledge: Language (Kehebet) 2, Knowledge: Occult 4, Knowledge: Religion 4, Medicine 5, Melee 2, Quickness 4, Research 2, Stamina 4, Will 4, Travel 2, Trickery 4

Spells: Rank 1—Beguile (C), Counter Weave of the First Order, Sidestep (B); Rank 2—Scrye (E), Second Sight

Edges: Adaptive, Casting 2, Paranoid

Powers: Heightened Senses (sight 2, hearing 4)

Wealth: 2

MIDOB WARRIOR

Era: Mythic

Race: Natural being

APL: 1/2

Aspects: Fire 5, Water 5, Air 4, Earth 2

Initiative: 9

Health: 7m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 2

Karma: 6

Stride: 30 ft. (Speedy)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 4/M

—Foreclaws (2): 5/L

—Hindclaws (2): 7/M

—Bite: 6/M

—Sword, Shamshir: 15/H

—Bow, Recurve: 10 ~ range 200 ft.

Sequences: Eastern Medium Style, Lightning Style, Ravager

Agg—F9/W5/A0/E2—Dash + Jump + Power + Weapon + Kick: Damage +35

Neut—F5/W5/A4/E2—Dash + Weapon + Kick Strike + Dash: Damage +10

Def—F1/W9/A4/E2—*Block + Ready + Kick Strike: Damage +10*

Skills: Athletics 4, Knowledge: Geography 4, Knowledge: Survival 6, Melee 5, Quickness 6, Ranged 4, Senses 4, Stamina 5, Stealth 5, Travel 5

Edges: Action Junkie 3, Dervish 3, Fluid Fighter 1 (Shamshir), Resilient 5

Traits: Heightened Senses (sight, hearing)

Wealth: 1

NOBLE SIDHE

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 4

Aspects: Fire 4, Water 5(2), Air 5(2), Earth 4(2)

Initiative: 9

Health: 4m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 8 (fae chain mail 8/6/0)

Karma: 40

Stride: 25 ft. (Fast)

Weapons:

—Fist: 3/L

—Kick: 4/M

—Rapier: 8/L

Sequences: Luring Blade

—1st Reply (*Weapon Block + Ready + Fist Strike + Sword Strike*): +5 damage

—2nd Reply (*Weapon Block + Ready + Jump + Spin + Kick Strike*): Knockout

—3rd Reply (*Roll + Ready + Ready + Fist Strike + Sword Strike*): +20 damage

Skills: Athletics 4, Casting 4, Interaction 4, Ka 5, Knowledge: Mythic Age History 4, Knowledge: Occult 4, Melee 3, Quickness 5, Senses 4, Stamina 2, Stealth 6, Travel 3, Trickery 4, Will 4

Spells: Rank 1—Beguile, Cat's Eyes, Clarion Call, Counter Weave of the First Order, Radiance; Rank 2—Aegis, The Laborer Abides, Second Sight, Slow the Living; Rank 3—Catcher's Creation

Edges: Animal Affinity, Casting 3, Deft 2, Seductive 2, Weapon Use (Elite: Rapier)

Powers: Alternate Form 2 (choose two forms), Heightened Senses (hearing 1, sight 1, touch 1), Instinct 2, Nobility 2, Shadow Spinner 3, *Unseen* 3

Legacy: Wizard's Bane*

Traits: Fae

Wealth: 5

The noble sidhe are the most regal looking, and consider themselves the most noble, of the fae that survived from the mythic age. Tall and willowy, their smooth-skinned, frail-looking frames belie their supple strength and preternatural speed. At a distance, noble sidhe could easily be mistaken for humans. Upon closer inspection, however, the Daea's supernatural nature is quite apparent: their hair may be any color from a shadowy black to a resplendent silver, often worn loose in a long flowing mane, and their almond-shaped eyes are vibrant lilac or purple. The skin of the noble sidhe is often tinted green or blue, and has the sheen and texture of alabaster, giving them a fragile, otherworldly appearance. The Noble sidhe wear beautiful clothes woven from gossamer fabrics and embroidered in delicate swirling patterns. Their jewelry and weapons are crafted in the same ethereal style, but like their possessors' apparent frailty, any perceived fragility is simply an illusion. Noble sidhe are often encountered mounted on magnificent horses of unblemished white and accompanied by their faerie hounds.

Having awoken in a strange world of concrete and metal, most of the noble sidhe have withdrawn to the parks of London and the surrounding countryside. Yet they cannot venture far afield, as they are bound by the limited presence of karma outside of London's environs. Some, like Oberyceum and Tiana, have instead embraced human culture as they did in the mythic age.





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Regardless of each individual noble sidhe's tendencies, as a whole they are neither ambitious enough nor organized enough to present a unified front. They have begun to gather with one another for the sake of companionship, but are unlikely to be any more effective in the battle against taint than they were in the mythic age. If the survivors from Queen Maeve's Winter Court were to return, they might act as a balancing factor, uniting the fae in a martial endeavor on behalf of humanity, scions, or even themselves. As of yet only their shades in the Wild Hunt have been seen, however, and in that form they cannot be reasoned with.

***Wizard's Bane:** Daea never suffer damage from overkill successes, and so never need to spend karma to decrease that damage. However, they may use the other ability of Wizard's Bane, adding and subtracting successes to and from others' spells and rituals, as normal.

PRIMORDIAL, SLIME

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 4

Aspects: Fire 4(1), Water 6(5), Air 2, Earth 6(2)

Initiative: 7

Health: 11m; <11 / 11+ / 17+ / 23+ / 29+ / 35+ / 41+ / 47+

Size/Reach: 2 / 10 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 9

Stride: 20 ft. (Sluggish); Swim 20 ft. (Sluggish, mnv 6)

Weapons:

—Pseudopod 12/H

Sequences: None

Agg—F10(1)/W6(5)/A0/E2(2)

Skills: Athletics 3, Melee 6, Quickness 2, Senses 5, Stamina 5, Stealth 4



Edges: Aspect Affinity 5 (Water), Fluid Fighter 1 (pseudopod), Resilient 5, Survivor 3

Powers: Heightened Senses (touch 3), *Malleable* 5

Traits: Aquatic, camouflage, primordial, unliving, +1 wound die from cold wounds, burn wounds, and electrical wounds

Primordial spirits of slime are the creations of Erce, the greater spirit that dwells within the rock beneath London's urban sprawl. They are formed from the organic waste and molds that cover the damp tunnels of the Underground, where water from the Thames and its myriad subsidiaries seeps through the brickwork. They resemble monstrous amoeboid protozoa, and creep along the walls of the tunnels beneath that riddle the underside of the city.

The huge primordial spirits of slime form prehensile cilia, pseudopodia of remarkable strength and agility, which the entity uses to propel itself and to grab or attack objects and prey. Slime primordial are particularly vulnerable to fire, cold, and electricity.

The statistics given above are for the largest of the primordial spirits, size 2 creatures. Smaller versions exist, as well.

PRIMORDIAL, WATER

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 4(4), Water 6(2), Air 5, Earth 3

Initiative: 9

Health: 5m; <6 / 6+ / 12+ / 18+ / 24+ / 30+ / 36+ / 42+

Size/Reach: 2 / 10 ft.

Armor: 0

Karma: 9

Stride: Swim 60 ft. (Speedy, mnv 6)

Weapons:

—Minor tendril 6/L

—Major tendril 12/M

Sequences: Submerged, Swift

Agg—F8(4)/W6(2)/A1/E3—Dash + Jump + Power + Major Tendril: Damage +35

Neut—F4(4)/W6(2)/A5/E3—Grab + Press + Dash: Trip, target pulled under

Def—F0(4)/W12(2)/A2/A3—*Block* sequence

Skills: Athletics 4, Melee 6, Quickness 5, Senses 4, Stamina 3, Stealth 6

Edges: Aspect Affinity 5 (Fire), Karmic Release 5

Powers: Aquatic 5, Heightened Senses (touch 4), Instinct 3, *Malleable* 5

Traits: Aquatic, camouflage, primordial, unliving

These once peaceful primordial spirits of the Thames vacillate between playful beings and dangerous predators. They can take the form of clear, beautiful spirals of water or become shroud-like shapes made from bits of discarded rubbish, fish carcasses, weeds and silt, encased in a translucent liquid skin.





More than one person has been found dead in his bathtub as a result of a tainted water spirit, the room coated in oily filth and littered with bits of flotsam and jetsam. These murders have been dubbed the “Bidet Killings” by the sensationalist press, but the authorities are none the wiser as to how the river water and debris got into the victim’s house.

PYREHAWK

Era: Mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 5

Aspects: Fire 6(6), Water 4, Air 6, Earth 3

Initiative: 12

Health: 3m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 2 / 10 ft.

Armor: 10

Taint: 0

Stride: Fly 60 ft. (Speedy, mnv 4).

Weapons:

—Talons: 8/L

—Beak: 14/M

—Wing Buffet: 10/H

Sequences: Archangel

Agg—F12(6)/W4/A0/E3—Dash [Fly] + Spin + Power + Talon: Dismember extremity

Neut—F6(6)/W4/A6/E3—Dash [Fly] + Talon + Dash [Fly]: Damage +15

Def—F0(6)/W10/A6/E3—*Dodge* sequence

Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Senses 6, Stamina 3, Stealth 3, Will 2

Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Follow-Through 2

Powers: Child of Fire*, Group Mind 1, Instinct 1, Heightened Senses (sight 4)

Traits: Mindless, tainted, unliving

The soldiers of Atlantis believed that, after death, only flame could purge and release a soul from its body. They therefore sent their great heroes and warriors to the next life amidst grand pyres. However, if a soul worthy of such a glorious departure was denied cremation, it became greatly troubled; some such shades became susceptible to the honeyed lies of warlocks and necromancers, who offered the proper fiery ritual in exchange for dark services on the part of the spirit.

Many unfortunates trapped in this manner have been made into pyrehawks, carrion birds of fire, ash, and shadow that make powerful servants for suitably heartless mages. Pyrehawks superficially resemble birds of prey, though they are much larger. Their eyes are coals of utter darkness, and their bodies seem to be made of solid fire mingled with dense smoke and coils of living



shadow. Pyrehawks’ wings are like two searing crescents of living flame, while their claws are like obsidian daggers.

Pyrehawks are of low intelligence but great loyalty and ferocity. They have Group Mind 1 with their creator, which allows them to act as spies, messengers, guards, and warriors. The tainted energy that animates them infuses them with terrific vitality, giving the creatures terrifying speed and power in battle.

***Child of Fire:** Pyrehawks are constantly surrounded by lurid flames, as if they had used the Immolate mental action from Child of Fire 3. Additionally, pyrehawks take no damage from burn wounds.

SHADE

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 4(2), Water 3, Air 5(2), Earth 4

Initiative: 9

Health: 4m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+



Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 0
Taint: 4
Stride: Fly 30 ft. (Speedy, mnv 6)
Weapons: As in life
Sequences: As in life
Skills: As in life
Edges: As in life
Powers: Coldspawn 3, Manifest 3
Traits: Ephemeral, tainted, unliving

Shades are the ghostly remnants of mortals that persist in this world following a particularly gruesome or tragic death. These wraiths cling to the physical realm, seeking to settle unfinished business: to avenge their murder, deliver a final message, guard some precious person or thing, or complete a momentous task that was interrupted by their sudden demise. Others are merely confused spirits, to whom death came so quickly that they believe they are still alive. Such haunts drift about their former residences, eternally reenacting the last moments of their lives. These shades may take exception to the living trespassing within their home and respond with prodigious violence, disproportionate to the perceived crime.

Shades manifest in myriad forms: from solid-looking apparitions, clearly resembling the person they were in life, to ghostly figures and nebulous forms that bear no semblance of their mortal shape.

The return of magic has made



it easier for shades to manifest in the physical realm, and the last decade has seen a leap in the number of ghost sightings. The rejuvenation of the spiritual realm also means that these shades can more often *see* the living, leading to increased interaction between mortals and the immortal dead. Shades carry the chill of the grave, which saps warmth and life from mortal flesh (all of their physical attacks inflict cold wounds). Their ephemeral forms make them hard to damage or drive away with physical weapons. Obsessive shades often confuse innocents with those who caused their demise, attacking without thought or reason.

SLUAGH

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 1/2

Aspects: Fire 4, Water 4(1), Air 5(2), Earth 3

Initiative: 9

Health: 3m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: -1 / 1 ft.

Armor: 3

Taint: 9

Stride: 15 ft. (Speedy), Fly 5 ft. (Sluggish, mnv 1)

Weapons:

—Claw (2): 4/L

—Bite (1): 7/M

Sequences: Flying Fists, Underhanded

—Flurry of Blows (L Claw + R Claw + Ready + L Claw): Damage +5

—Sand in the Eye (Crouch + Ready + Fist Strike): Damage +5, disadvantage (mental) 3

—Family Jewel Thief (Power + Grab + Press + Spin): Bleed

Skills: Athletics 3, Knowledge: Street 2, Knowledge: Underground 5, Melee 2, Quickness 5, Senses 5, Stealth 5, Trickery 4

Edges: Dexterous, Skill Specialty (Quickness: dodging kicks and punches), Skill Specialty (Quickness: dodging melee weapons), Skill Specialty (Stealth: moving quietly), Stealthy

Powers: Heightened Senses (scent 2, sight 4), Shadow Spinner 1, Wallcrawler 3

Traits: Fae, tainted

Wealth: 1

DESCRIPTION

The slugh [SLOO-ah] are among the most pathological degenerate descendants of the Unseelie fae; their gray bodies are misshapen and lumpish, and their skin is stretched over painfully protruding bones. At first glance they look like children, but closer inspection reveals a slugh's head to be oversized, full of wrinkles, and crowned by wispy gray or white hair. What seems at first to be a ragged cloak is instead revealed to be a pair of weak feathered wings that seem barely able to keep the creatures aloft. Their large wide eyes are a luminous, putrid green, underneath which are bags of skin, seemingly the

only loose flesh about their bodies. Sluaghs' mouths are large, framed by crimson fish-like lips and containing many small sharp teeth. Their limbs are long, as are their fingers and toes, which end in filthy, sharp claws.

Spiteful and vengeful, the sluagh are jealous of all other creatures, for there are few more pitiful or miserable than they. The Irish believed that the sluagh were the spirits of dead sinners come back to haunt the living. In truth, they are fae. Starved of their life force and forced to subsist on the small creatures that crawl beneath the earth, they have become grotesque parodies of their once graceful forms.

While not intrinsically evil, the sluagh are driven by an endless hunger: they can smell blood from many miles away and, if close at hand, its scent drives them into a feeding frenzy in which they attack as a horde, rending with tooth and claw, all the while muttering timorous whispers or emitting cough-wracked giggles, the only two sounds they have been known to make.

The sluagh tend to live in remote places, favoring warren-like tunnels. With the return of karma to London, they have begun to inhabit the sewers of the city. It is not unusual to find groups of sluagh led by a more powerful Unseelie fae, as these weak-willed beings are easily manipulated and quickly cowed.

TAINT DEMON

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 6

Aspects: Fire 6(3), Water 5(5), Air 5(3), Earth 4(4)

Initiative: 11

Health: 6m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 12

Taint: 20

Stride: 40 ft. (Fast)

Weapons:

—Tendril (6): 12/M

Sequences: Drunken Monkey

Agg—F8(3)/W5(5)/A3(3)/E4(4)—Roll + Power + Tendril + Press + Power + Tendril: Damage +32

Neut—F6(3)/W5(5)/A5(3)/E4(4)—Tendril A (I) + Tendril B (II) + Tendril C (III) + Tendril D (I) + Tendril E (II) + Tendril F (III): Normal damage

Def—F1(3)/W10(5)/A5(3)/E4(4)—Crouch + Ready + Spin + Tendril: Stun

Skills: Athletics 2, Knowledge: Occult 6, Melee 5, Quickness 5, Senses 3, Stamina 2, Stealth 2, Will 4

Edges: Daunting 4, Forceful Will 5, Karmic Restraint 3, Resilient 2, Seductive 5

Powers: Gaze of the Predator 5, Shadow Spinner 5, *Voice of Madness* 5

Traits: Immunity to burn, cold, and electrical wounds, tainted

Legacy: Taint Spawner



Entities of malignant power, taint demons are the physical manifestations of evil and corruption, the base putrefaction of the vibrant energy of karma. The appearance of a taint demon is as varied as the nightmares that have haunted the dreams of men since the beginning of time, and the summoning sorcerer can often influence the visage a taint demon presents. Old texts speak of ill-advised magi summoning demons with black, scaly skin, blood-red fiery eyes, and huge bat wings, which no doubt spawned the classical image of Hell's denizens. However, the taint demons are darkness unbounded, and this is just one aspect of their appearance.

The entity one cult, the Black Lotus, wishes to summon is Icarac, a blasphemous beast of darkness, tentacles, and fear. It appears as a tall robed and hooded figure around which light seems to dim, as though its physical form locally disturbs the laws of physics and light. Beneath the robe, Icarac is composed of a mass of writhing tentacles that vanish into the interstices of reality where they presumably join some terrible central body of unimaginable form. The demon utters a rustling whisper that appears to contain words, but from which no sense can be made; its voice sounds like the rubbing together of disturbing, leathery flesh and its timbre can drive an unshielded mind insane. Icarac seeks nothing less than the corruption of all karma; this is its purpose and, unless constrained by powerful spells, it will feast on the innocent, spreading its oily taint until it is ban-



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ished back to the dark dimension from whence it came, or the world lies reduced to a broiling sea of corruption.

TITAN

In the dawn of the mythic age, when the world was awash in karma and creatures struggled to survive, one race was mightier than all their brethren: the titans. Legend tells that the titans first came to earth in the heart of a great storm that lashed the mountains in its fury, with killing winds and lightning so intense that it turned the night into day. The dragons were the only race that could and did challenge these giants. The titans and the dragons warred in the time before the mythic age, their battles ripping the world asunder. The causes of such battles are long forgotten, and could have been anything from territorial disputes to feuds over the spoils of war against an earlier, mutual foe. After untold centuries, the titans and dragons came to an accord and settled into an uneasy peace. The titans withdrew to their mountain fastnesses, and the dragons returned to the seas, forests, and aeries they called home. The hills, plains, and grasslands in between were to be left as shared hunting grounds, able to be visited by either race, but settled by neither. In the aftermath of the generations of fighting, both dragons and titans were few in number and wary of provoking their enemies' ire, and so many of these hunting grounds were left completely alone. Into this vacuum, spreading over the wide earth that was rich in bounty for planting and hunting, came mankind.

To the fledging race of man, the titans were as gods. Their towering stature and fearsome countenance struck fear and awe into those who saw them; the titans interfered little in the affairs of the lesser races, however, despite their power. While far more visible than dragons, they were also far less interested in mankind.

As karma left the physical realm, the titans, like the dragons and the fae, faded from the world, but their influence on man did not end. Man remembered their great power, praying to their former gods and trying to emulate their art and great wisdom. To those who study the mythic age, it is clear that what the titans left behind helped spark the flourishing of true civilization among early man in the modern age: Writing, architecture, and art can all be

traced to artifacts left behind by the titans.

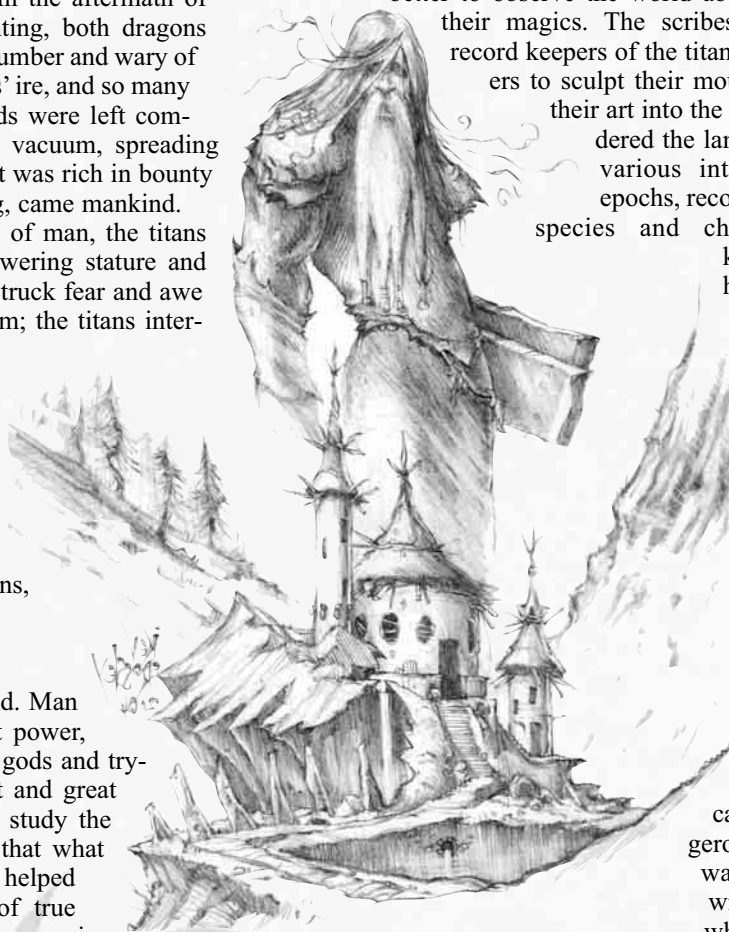
The titans are a massive race, more than 50 ft. tall and weighing over 3,000 pounds. Despite their size, titans are fleet of foot and surprisingly graceful. Their skin, while often fair, is as hard as their mountain homes, allowing them to shrug off blows that would cripple lesser beings. Their hair matches either the pale white of clouds on a summer day or the dark black of glowering storm clouds. Their muscular legs propel them across the peaks, leaping vast chasms with ease. Adding to their majesty is the ever-present lightning that is their birthright, which surges around their bodies.

The titans of the mythic age were divided into castes, the two most common of which were the hunters and the scribes. To the titans, the words "hunter" and "soldier" were interchangeable. There were so few of the giant race that, if one had skill in arms and fleetness of foot, one was expected to perform in either role as necessary. It was the hunters who led the titans and their allies against the dragons, wielding massive swords and matching their heavy armor against the dragons' claws. The scribes were less martial but no less powerful; they relied more on the aspects of Earth and Air, the better to observe the world about them and to weave their magics. The scribes were the artists and

record keepers of the titans. They used their powers to sculpt their mountain homes and build their art into the land. Titan scribes wandered the lands of the mythic age at various intervals throughout the epochs, recording the rise and fall of species and charting the flows of

karma. Their records hold the secrets of the ages, and are highly sought by those who practice magic today.

Titans are rarely encountered alone. A titan hunting party normally includes anywhere from 6–12 titan hunters, a variety of trolls, and other lesser creatures to act as servants and trackers. A traveling scribe is always accompanied by his troll guards and servants. In combat, both castes are extremely dangerous. The titan hunters waded through their foes wielding massive swords, while the scribes use their magic and huge bows to devastating effect.





TITAN HUNTER

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural being
APL: 7
Aspects: Fire 6(5), Water 4(4), Air 4(1), Earth 3
Initiative: 10
Health: 6m; <7 / 7+ / 14+ / 21+ / 28+ / 35+ / 42+ / 49+
Size/Reach: 4 / 20 ft.
Armor: 22 (scale mail 12/3/6)
Karma: 15
Stride: 75 ft. (Fast)
Weapons:
 —Hunting Knife: 6/L
 —Spear, Medium: 10/M
 —Sword, Broad: 15/M
 —Shield, Medium (0/5/3)
Sequences: Overkill, Rank and File
 Agg—F12(5)/W4(4)/A0(1)/E1—Power + Power + Power + Power + Sword: Damage +45 *or* Paralyze
 Neut—F6(5)/W4(4)/A4(1)/E3—Stride + Weapon Strike + Press: Damage +5, trip
 Def—F0(5)/W10(4)/A4(1)/E3—*Block* sequence
Skills: Athletics 6, Knowledge: Geography 6, Knowledge: Survival 6, Melee 6, Quickness 4, Ranged 6, Stamina 6, Will 4, Senses 6
Edges: Action Junkie 5, Follow-through 4, Forcefull Will 3, Glory Hound 2, Instinct 4, Karmic Release 1, Resilient 3
Powers: Heir of the Storm 4, Mythic Leap 3, Nobility 3, Skin of Stone 3
Traits: Giant
Wealth: 3

TITAN SCRIBE

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural being
APL: 6
Aspects: Fire 5(3), Water 4, Air 6(6), Earth 6(4)
Initiative: 11
Health: 6m; <7 / 7+ / 14+ / 21+ / 28+ / 35+ / 42+ / 49+
Size/Reach: 3 / 15 ft.
Armor: 10 (leather 4/5/12)
Karma: 18
Stride: 50 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:
 —Bow, Recurve: 10 ~ Range 200 ft. ~ Reload 1
 —Morningstar: 11/M
Sequences: Eastern Small Style
 Agg—F8(3)/W1/A6(6)/E6(4)—Jump + Morningstar: Damage +15
 Neut—F5(3)/W4/A6(6)/E6(4)—Morningstar (I) + Dash + Kick Strike (II): Damage +10
 Def—F2(3)/W7/A6(6)/E6(4)—*Dodge* + *Ready* + *Kick Strike*: Damage +10
Skills: Athletics 3, Casting 5, Craft: Writing 4, Interaction 4, Knowledge: Mythic Age Cultures 6, Knowledge:

Mythic Age History 6, Knowledge: Geography 5, Melee 3, Quickness 3, Research 5, Senses 5

Spells: Rank 1—Assumption (A), Clarion Call (A), Grasp (A), Radiance (A); Rank 2—Ether-wall (A), Float (A), Magefist (A), Scribe (A); Rank 3—Animate (A), Catcher's Creation (A), Coruscating Bolt (A), Counter Weave of the Third Order, Flight (A); Rank 4—Ephemeral Armor (A), Mimic the Third Order, Paralyze (A)

Edges: Aspect Affinity 5 (Air), Casting 4, Circumspect 3, Deft 4, Karmic Release 3, Thought Savant 5

Powers: Clarity 4, Crushing Will 3, Heir of the Storm 4, Nobility 3, Skin of Stone 3

Traits: Giant

Wealth: 3

TROLL

Era: Mythic
Race: Supernatural being
APL: 5

Aspects: Fire 6(5), Water 5(5), Air 1, Earth 3

Initiative: 7

Health: 7m; <8 / 8+ / 16+ / 24+ / 32+ / 40+ / 48+ / 56+

Size/Reach: 2 / 10 ft.

Armor: 8

Karma: 15

Stride: 30 ft. (Slow)

Weapons:

—Fist 6/L

—Warhammer 15/H

Sequences: Overkill

Agg—F12(5)/W3(5)/A0/E0—Power + Power + Power + Power + Weapon Strike: Damage +45 *or* Paralyze

Neut—F6(5)/W5(5)/A1/E3—Dash + Jump + Warhammer: Additional damage +5, bleed *or* Daze

Def—F0(5)/W11(5)/A1/E3—*Block* sequence

Skills: Melee 6, Athletics 6, Ranged 4, Senses 4, Stamina 4, Will 4, Quickness 3, Trickery 2

Edges: Action Junkie 2, Brutal 3, Follow-Through 3, Freight Train, Resilient 4

Powers: Ferocity 3, Heightened Senses (scent 1), Skin of Stone 3, any one

Traits: Giant, plus any one miscellaneous

Wealth: 2

Trolls range from 12 to 30 ft. in height and weigh anywhere from 600 to 2,500 lbs. They are crudely shaped creatures, with squat, blocky features and misshapen arms and legs.

Trolls are savage, tough, and merciless. They have the cunning of men, the power of titans, and the ferocity of dragons, but with none of the civilized demeanor of any of them. In the battles between dragon and titan, trolls relished their roles as the titans' executors and salvagers. They flocked like carrion crows over the bodies of the dead, finishing those dragons who yet lived and stealing from those titans too weak to defend themselves. The smaller, weaker trolls were easy prey without their titan allies, however, and the vengeance dealt upon them by enraged dragons was horrific to behold.





The hatred of the two species was etched into their souls through countless centuries of murder and vindication.

With the uneasy truce between the titans and the dragons, the trolls were able to spread a bit more freely without fear of being hunted by dragons. In the open plains and virgin forests between the two mighty races' domains, however, they encountered a foe that would eventually be far more dangerous than dragons: the young race of man. Mankind, with his greater numbers and use of metallurgy and magic, decimated the troll tribes. By the end of the mythic age, the creatures were reduced to hiding under bridges and ambushing the unwary in deep forests. While unable to stand up to armies of humans, a single troll was a terrifying opponent, shrugging off sword strikes and sending human warriors flying with sweeping blows.

All trolls share a number of similar characteristics: large size, dense skin, and awesome strength. Beyond these commonalties, however, the race produced a wide variety of forms. Trolls adapt quickly to their environment, "evolving" in a single lifetime in a way that natural races take hundreds of generations to accomplish. For instance, a troll that takes up residence in the forest will slowly gain a dark green skin hue, the better to blend in with his surroundings, while one that lies in wait in a bog gains dark grey skin and, eventually, the ability to breathe underwater.

THE UNSEEN HOST

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 3(3), Water 4, Air 3, Earth 2

Initiative: 8

Health: 2m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 6

Stride: Fly 60 ft. (Speedy, mnv 6)

Weapons:

—Aerial lash 6/L

—Aerial gnash 12/M

Sequences: Swift, Ravager

Agg—F6(3)/W4/A0/E2—Power + Power + Aerial Gnash: Damage +25

Neut—F3(3)/W4/A3/E2—Aerial Gnash + Power + Aerial Lash: Damage +10

Def—F0(3)/W10/A0/E2—Dodge sequence

Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 3, Quickness 6, Senses 4, Stamina 2, Stealth 6, Will 4

Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Aspect Affinity 4 (Fire)

Powers: Instinct 2, Manifest 2, Swift (Fly 3)

Legacy: Poison Wyrn*

Traits: Ephemeral, primordial, unliving

Those with the second sight, those who can see into the spiritual realm and discern the incorporeal forms that dwell there, might see a swirling maelstrom above London's grimy cityscape. Within the raging agitation can be glimpsed half-formed shapes and serpentine forms. This fulminating storm is the Unseen Host, the primordial spirits of air and wind. They are generally harmless, even playful, unless overwhelmed by pollution, taint, or some other event.

When enraged, this collective of spirits swarms into the city below, forming horrible poisonous mists in the shapes of darting, ghostly heads whose gaping maws gnash with insubstantial yet lethal teeth. These masticating clouds engulf lone pedestrians in the early hours, hidden amongst the drifting morning mists. Their victims suffer a terrible fate, devoured by the hungry spirits. When the blood-red mist moves on seeking new victims, only gleaming bones and tattered cloth remain.

***Poison Wurm:** While not the bearers of a true legacy, the unseen host can gather their bodies about foes in the semblance of the Poison Wurm legacy's effects. Expanding into the poison gas cloud is just like manifesting a physical form, except that it does not require the expenditure of karma and the TH to resist the cloud's poisons is equal to the number of unseen host that join in the cloud.

WEeping DEATH ZOMBIE

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 2

Aspects: Fire 4(4), Water 5, Air 0, Earth 0

Initiative: 5

Health: 0m; <10 / 10+ / 20+ / 30+ / 40+ / 50+ / 60+ / 70+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 18

Taint: 0

Stride: 10 ft. (Sluggish)

Weapons:

—Fist: 3/L

—Bite: 6/M

Sequences: None

Agg—F7(4)/W2/A0/E0—Power + Fist + Ready + Fist

Agg—F7(4)/W2/A0/E0—Stride + Dash + Power + Fist

Skills: Athletics 1, Melee 3, Quickness 1, Senses 1, Stamina 6

Edges: None

Powers: Ferocity 5, Skin of Stone 5

Traits: Mindless, tainted, unliving

A terrible transformation is worked upon the bodies of those unfortunates who contract the Weeping Death. Eaten from the inside out, the infecting bacteria destroy the soft tissues of the victim while coating his skeleton in a black resin that is both resilient and contractile. The later stages of the disease are accompanied by epidermal and subdermal hepatoma and hemorrhage, as the bacterial infection penetrates the victim's meninges before



consuming his brain. By the end, which comes within four to five days, the victim is incoherent with pain. Sometime around the 100th hour of contracting the disease, the body is taken control of by the bacterial biomass. From that point on the victim is little more than an ambulatory, suppurating corpse, moaning in agony but powerless to control its own body.

Weeping Death zombies deteriorate at an alarming rate, the bacterial mass feeding first on the brain and nerve system, then on any extraneous organs that are only useful for supporting life, and finally gnawing away at the flesh that protects it. The bacterial resin renders the skeletal substructure incredibly resilient to most forms of physical and chemical trauma. Even after brain death, the zombie continues to function for several days, before the bacteria use up their remaining nutrient supplies and the black skeleton collapses into a lifeless heap. The resin also appears to bestow superhuman strength upon the zombie which is entirely independent of the victim's dissolving muscle mass.

So far there have only been a few isolated cases of the Weeping Death, and LN-7 has been quick to contain and eliminate these unfortunate vehicles of malice. However, the operatives of LN-7 recognize that this disease is perhaps the greatest threat currently faced by the city; it took a full SWAT team using 1,000 rounds of ammunition and a flame thrower to dispatch the raging monster that had been Michael Daglan. LN-7 is only too

aware that they cannot hope to contain this threat in secret if more wide-spread infections occur. The problem, of course, is that as of yet no one knows how the disease spreads. Whether or not Daglan managed to infect any of the SWAT team is unknown.

CHARACTERS

Characters can be nearly any race or type of being. They are named individuals, and either have some role in the modern or mythic setting or can be used as unique combatants or allies. Characters can be human or non-human, natural or supernatural. They are always either a unique being or a member of a race with additional APs beyond the norm.

CHARACTERS AND MENTAL ACTIONS

Characters are more likely than any other creatures to have well-rounded combat abilities in both the mental and physical domains. A character uses whichever mental actions best suit his skills, edges, and powers.

CHARACTER PREFERRED STANCES

Characters should almost always be named antagonists or named allies; therefore, rather than using preferred stances, GMs are encouraged to use the named NPC sheets provided in the back of the book when playing them. This allows the GM to use the creature's full range of dice and stance changes, making the named character a more essential part of the action scene.

ALESTAIR CROWLEY

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 5

Aspects: Fire 2, Water 4, Air 6(5), Earth 5(5)

Initiative: 9

Health: 5m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 0

Karma: 5

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 4/M

—Ceremonial Dagger: 11/L

Sequences: Entrapping Defense, Luring Blade

Skills: Athletics 1, Casting 6, Interaction 5, Knowledge: History 3, Knowledge: Occult 5, Knowledge: Politics 5, Melee 2, Quickness 5, Research 3, Senses 4, Stealth 3, Stamina 2, Travel 2, Trickery 6, Will 5

Spells: Rank 1—Assumption, Beguile (A/B), Cat's





Eyes (A/C), Grasp (A), Radiance (A/B/C), Sidestep; Rank 2—Aegis, Ether-wall, Flash, Float (B), The Laborer Abides (A/R), Second Sight, Scrye (A/B/C/R), Slow the Living (A); Rank 3—Counter Weave of the Third Order, Ward (D); Rank 4—Avatar (A/B/D/R), Mimic the Third Order, Paralyze (B/R); Rank 5—Dominate, Reincarnate (variant ritual)

Edges: Seductive 5, Daunting 3, Deft 5, Forceful Will 3, Thought Savant 3, Network 2 (local government, occult), Rapid 4, Sage, Skill Expertise (Interaction, Research, Trickery)

Powers: Clarity 4, Crushing Will 5, Gaze of the Predator 3

Traits: Bound, tainted

Wealth: 6

The current leader of the Conservative Party, the man called Alestair Crowley claims to be the grandson of the infamous magician of the same name. This, while factually correct, is disturbingly short of the whole truth: the Alestair Crowley of the 21st century is the very same Crowley dubbed “The Wickedest Man in the World” by the 1920s tabloid press. At least, Crowley is the same person in mind and spirit. Crowley died of a heroine overdose in Hastings in 1947, and was cremated in a rather bizarre ceremony that saw his mortal remains spread to the four corners of the earth. Crowley had stipulated in his will that his remains be split between his followers in America, Italy, and France, who would “know what to do with them.” In truth, the broken thing that had died in Hastings was an empty husk, powered by flickering magic to give it a semblance of life, while Crowley’s spirit had already abandoned its mortal shell on a momentous journey.

In 1945, Crowley had succeeded in a magical ritual that had failed on numerous previous occasions. The ritual involved the begetting of a child with the latest in a long line of so-called Scarlet Women who served him as lovers and spiritual guides. As the Allied Forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, Alestair Crowley begot a child with his Alostrael, the elusive “womb of God” he had sought for three decades. At the instant of the child’s inception, Crowley’s body died and his psyche passed into the new life.

The child was born in Oxford, England, but was spirited away on Crowley’s death to the Abbey of Thelema in Sicily. This terrifying child with an adult soul proved too much for its mother, and she committed suicide within a year of arriving in Sicily. As a bound creature, Crowley sacrificed his first body’s health in exchange for supernatural powers and superhuman mental prowess. Insidiously, the crippling price of that binding did not follow to his second body, while its benefits did. Realizing the potential of such an arrangement, Crowley kept his second body in excellent health until just before the abominable ritual was repeated a second time in the 1960s (with great difficulty this time, as karma was only present in the most mystic of places). At that point, he

prostituted its health for even more power, then abandoned it like so much litter.

The new child was a female, but the will of the indomitable magus imposed itself nonetheless, resulting in the androgynous figure that now leads the British Conservative party. The shucked shell of the second Alestair Crowley, incidentally also a female, still lives—in a basic way—spending her days staring vacantly at the wall of a cell in the Palermo lunatic asylum in Sicily.

The third Alestair Crowley seems to be a normal human by all reasonable measures, if somewhat hermaphroditic: intelligent, urbane, energetic, and apparently deeply concerned with the plight of the common man. Under Crowley’s leadership, the Conservatives are performing better than they have for years, and the groundswell of opinion is that they will win the next general election. However, what motivations and plans swirl within that ancient mind, the wickedest man in the world has yet to reveal.

BAVKAKHA

Era: Modern or mythic

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 7

Aspects: Fire 5(3), Water 6(2), Air 5(1), Earth 4

Initiative: 10

Health: 8m; <10 / 10+ / 16+ / 22+ / 28+ / 34+ / 40+ / 46+

Size/Reach: 2 / 10 ft.

Armor: 4

Taint: 20

Stride: 60 ft. (Speedy); fly 60 ft. (Speedy, mnv 6)

Weapons:

—Lesser rake: 10/M

—Greater rake: 20/H

Sequences: Kingsguard, Swift

Skills: Athletics 5, Casting 4, Interaction 6, Knowledge: Military 5, Knowledge: Occult 4, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Ranged 3, Senses 5, Stealth 3, Will 6

Spells: Rank 1—Clarion Call, Grasp (A/B), Shadow (A/B/C/R); Rank 2—Float (A/B), Slow the Living (A/B/C/R); Rank 3—Blind

Edges: Brutal 5, Casting 3, Daunting 5, Dervish 4, Fluid Fighter 3 (greater rake, lesser rake), Follow-through 5, Forceful Will 4, Karmic Release 5, Resilient 4

Powers: Alternate Form 1 (forms: a shadowy flock of crows), Coldspawn 3, Crushing Will 4, Instinct 5, Ferocity 4, Group Mind 5, Shadow Spinner 5, Skin of Stone 4, *Witch’s Countenance* 5

Traits: Tainted

Wealth: 3

In the mythic age, Bavkakha was known as the Badba [Baa-th-a]. She frequented the battlefields of Avalon after the hurly burly was done, where she fulfilled the duty with which Queen Maeve charged her: to dispose of the bodies of the immortal dead so that the land could grow and cover the signs of battle. Badba did





not mind her role as a glorified janitor. In fact, she relished it. She performed her duties in the form of a monstrous, hooded crow, and feasted upon bodies until she was gorged and unable to fly.

Bavkakha is now the self-appointed leader of a gang in the King's Cross area of North London who call themselves the Crossjacks. She is only ever seen by her lieutenants, and even then she receives them in a darkened room, so frightened are they of her visage. The Crossjacks are rightfully terrified of their leader, and will do anything she demands to avoid her wrath. It was Bavkakha who slaughtered the gang's rivals in the Argyle Square massacre, while her followers looked on in mute terror. Those that remained conscious through the ordeal remember only a massive, shadowy form that moved with preternatural speed, rending the hapless gangsters limb from limb in a visceral orgy of blood and screams. When all her enemies lay dead, the black shadow coalesced, and they saw a monstrous crow-woman looming over the bloodied corpses. Her haggard face was etched with the cruelty of a hundred thousand brutal murders, and shadows swarmed about her like living things.

The Bavkakha manifests as either a large cloud of shadow that appears to be formed from hundreds of insubstantial carrion birds, or as a hag of such ugliness and evil appearance that those who view her have nightmares forever after. In either form, the Bavkakha can

lacerate her foes with a supernatural attack that is like the raking of a thousand claws. In hag form, the Bavkakha wields her devastating presence like a weapon to terrify her opponents.

CHARLES ALFORD

Era: Modern

Race: Natural being

APL: 5

Aspects: Fire 3, Water 4, Air 6, Earth 6

Initiative: 9

Health: 6m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 0

Karma: 6

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Sequences: None

Weapons:

Fist: 3/L

Kick: 4/M

Skills: Athletics 3, Casting 6, Craft: Calligraphy 3, Craft: Woodworking 3, Ka 6, Knowledge: Mythology 3, Knowledge: Occult 3, Interaction 4, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Quickness 3, Research 3, Rituals 6, Senses 4, Will 6

Spells: All (see below)

Edges: Aspect Affinity 5 (Fire), Casting 5, Circumspect 5, Forceful Will 4 (gaze), Karmic Restraint 4, Network 5 (high society, international trade, occult, local government, street), Paranoid, Sage, Skill Expertise (Casting), Skill Specialty (Interaction: detecting lies, Knowledge: occult, Research: ancient texts, Will: resisting mental coercion), Thought Savant 3

Traits: Pureblood of Atlantis

Wealth: 5

The enigmatic Lord Alford appears to be a sprightly man in his late fifties; in fact he is almost two centuries old. His flesh and bones are buttressed by sorcery and the ancient blood of his noble Atlantean heritage. Charles Alford is the incumbent Grand Master of the British chapter of the Guardians of Athoth, a troubled man who is feeling his years heavily in these dark times.

Having spent the last 90 years leading the Guardians of Athoth, bearing the weight of responsibility for their sacred charge, Charles Alford is weary of the world and in his heart fears he is not up to the task that now faces him. Still stinging from the Templar debacle of the 14th century, Lord Alford is adamant that the order should not become embroiled in the affairs of men, no matter how unpleasant things get with the return of magic; after all, it's not the first time it's happened. While a number of the other guardians heartily disagree with Alford's intransigent stance, they respect—and fear—the old wizard, who probably knows more about magic than any other living mortal. They keep their council for the moment, knowing that even the Grand Master's Atlantean life-span cannot continue indefinitely.



Charles and the Guardians are among the few who know of the return of dragonkind. Their prophesized return is among the most sacred of secrets they have guarded through the millennia, and is Charles' strongest argument for non-involvement. The prophecy speaks of the return of the Great Powers before the ending of the Age, and Charles believes that it is the sacred duty of the Guardians to be present to lend their aid to the draconic masters during the end game that will bring this about. He fears that if the Guardians were to show their hand too early they could well be destroyed and would have then failed in their ultimate duty.

The Alford family has produced many of the Grand Masters of the Guardians over the last 1,000 years, and since their sanctum at Rosslyn Chapel became too well known due to its association with the Knights Templar, the order's main sanctuary in the North has been based at Blakeley House in Northumberland. Beneath this grand Jacobean manorhouse there are extensive catacombs dating back to the Dark Ages, which contain the Guardians' sanctum, libraries, and storehouses filled with the ancient treasures they are oath-bound to protect. The Alford family is the only shareholder of Allodium Ltd., the company that owns Southampton Buildings in London's Chancery Lane, beneath which lies the oldest British sanctum of the Guardians of Athoth, hidden by cunning stonework and powerful wards. However, Charles Alford spends little time in the dusty and shadowed catacombs beneath Chancery Lane, preferring to reside in his palatial Mayfair townhouse. A wealth of karmic items are contained within its extensive rooms, and Charles's library of occult material is second to none. It is in this large library-study that the Grand Master spends most of his time, reading of the past, deliberating on the future, and stubbornly ignoring the present.

The Grand Master is in many ways a foil to Alestair Crowley. Crowley is the stronger of the two in terms of supernatural abilities, but Alford has a distinct advantage in terms of knowledge. Whereas the first has relied on trickery, extortion, and experimentation to uncover all of his knowledge, Alford has inherited the greatest arcane library in the world. He has access to every known spell and all of their variants, casting options, and rituals. Despite his vast knowledge, however, he remains completely human, having judiciously avoided trading his health for supernatural powers.

JOSEPH PENNINGTON

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 4

Aspects: Fire 5(3), Water 4(2), Air 6(6), Earth 6(1)

Initiative: 11

Health: 6m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 6

Karma: 30

Stride: 30 ft. (Speedy)

Weapons:

—Fist Strike: 8/L

—Kick Strike: 9/M

Sequences: Eastern Small Style, Eastern Medium Style, Eastern Large Style

Skills: Athletics 4, Casting 6, Interaction 6, Knowledge: Ancient Cultures 6, Knowledge: Fae 6, Knowledge: High Society 6, Knowledge: Modern Cultures 6, Knowledge: Music 6, Knowledge: Occult 6, Knowledge: Street 6, Melee 4, Quickness 6, Senses 6, Stamina 4, Stealth 6, Trickery 6, Will 6

Spells: **Rank 1**—Assumption, Beguile (A/B), Cat's Eyes (C), Shadow (A), Static (A); **Rank 2**—Aegis (A/B), Float (A), The Laborer Abides (A), Mimic the First Order, Second Sight, Slow the Living; **Rank 3**—Catcher's Creation, Mimic the Second Order, Wholeness (R)

Edges: Allies 5, Aspect Affinity 5 (Air), Casting 3, Confident, Daunting 5, Deft 5, Forceful Will 5, Karmic Restraint 5, Seductive 5, Survivor 5

Powers: Alternate Form 5 (forms: a raven, a sexy young punk rocker chick, an elderly gentleman, a panther, and a venomous water snake), Clarity 5, Crushing Will 4, Gaze of the Predator 4, Group Mind 3, Heightened Senses (scent 3), Metabolic Control 2, Mythic Leap 5, Shadow Spinner 2, Wallcrawler 1

Legacy: *Release the Beast*

Traits: Articulate tongue, fae

Wealth: 4

Joseph Pennington appears to be a young man in his twenties with pallid but flawless skin. His hair is raven black and eyes a brown so dark that they appear like coal. The well-manicured and groomed image he cultivates sits at odds with his business and the company he keeps—the cyberpunk nightclub called The World's End, frequented by Goths and retro-punks. Though he is responsible for the creation of both the comely and the coarse, he does little to support either. Rather, he demands that they support him, and then promptly forgets about them once their devotion is made certain. He is not evil, but neither is he good; to Joe, each life is as beautiful and fragile as a rose petal, but the loss of one is easily forgotten when there are so many other petals on the flower.

JUTUL

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 5(2), Water 4(2), Air 3(2), Earth 5(2)

Initiative: 8

Health: 8m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 1 / 5 ft.

Armor: 3

Taint: 15

Stride: 20 ft. (Sluggish)





CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

Weapons:

—Arachnid legs (4): 10/M (venomous)

Sequences: Crushing Mass, Overkill

Skills: Athletics 3, Casting 4, Knowledge: Occult 3, Knowledge: Streets 4, Melee 3, Quickness 3, Ranged 3, Senses 3, Stealth 6, Trickery 4, Will 2

Spells: Rank 1—Buzzkill (R only), Grasp (R only), Shadow (R only); Rank 2—Ether-wall (R only), The Laborer Abides (R only), Second Sight (R only), Scrye (R), Slow the Living (R only); Rank 3—Animate (R only), Falsehood (R), Ward

Edges: Allies 5, Animal Affinity, Casting 3, Circumspect 3, Follow-through 2, Forceful Will 4, Resilient 3

Powers: Shadow Spinner 5, Wallcrawler 5, *Webspinner* 5

Traits: Tainted, tenomous

Wealth: 1

The creature that calls himself Jutul cannot remember his past, and would weep bitter tears if he knew how glorious he had once been in the mythic age. In the modern age, Jutul is a bloated abomination: a large spider-like form with a distended abdomen that hangs like an over-ripe fruit from the scaffold of his spindly legs. Sharp, bristling hairs cover his limbs, which end in sharp spikes of hard, serrated bone that drip a viscous venom. Folds of scabrous skin give his abdomen the appearance of a swollen brain, and Jutul's stunted thorax is formed by the upper half of a man with two puny, vestigial arms that hang at his side. His oversized head is patchily crowned by lank, matted hair, which hangs in knotted strands over an ancient face. Jutul's eyes are huge black orbs with a pathetic, child-like innocence to them, at least until the light of cunning malice blooms within their depths.

Jutul spends much of his time in the presence of the evil and voracious Vorgga'gtha, whom he serves as a high priest. In the shadowy recesses of the Thamesmead Beam Engine House, Jutul's horrid form moves unheard beneath the cacophony of the hungry machine that calls for blood and souls. Jutul does all he can to meet his

master's needs, sending his minion sluagh into the city to kidnap the homeless and the unwary. When such items would be useful, he arms them with the objects created by his rituals. The unfortunate victims of the sluagh are brought back for sacrifice. Vorgga'gtha eats their souls (and goes through the motions of eating their bodies), and the sluagh get the leavings. Jutul gets neither food nor wealth from the arrangement . . . he is content with being Vorgga'gtha's puppet, as it allows him the feeling of power over the pathetic sluagh.

Jutul is a master of rituals, but can cast few spells in their non-ritual forms. He therefore feels vulnerable anywhere but his lair, which is layered with years' worth of ritually cast magic defenses. He refuses to leave the Beam Engine House unless absolutely necessary.

If threatened in his lair, Jutul will screech in his rasping voice, calling for the sluagh to come to his aid.

While his minions lay down their pathetic lives, Jutul will scuttle into the shadows or climb into the web of great steel girders above, and then hurl shards of shadow-stuff or heavy objects at intruders from this partially concealed position. If injured (even moderately), the grotesque spider creature will writhe piteously on the ground, pleading for his life. Jutul is utterly despicable and will say and promise anything to save his miserable life. He will, of course, renege on his word as soon as the situation allows.



MARCUS SAGARIUS

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 2, Water 3(3), Air 5, Earth 5(2)

Initiative: 8

Health: 5m; <5 / 5+ / 8+ / 11+ / 14+ / 17+ / 20+ / 23+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 0

Taint: 5

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 4/M

—Derringer: 18 ~ range 100 ft ~ reload 3/6

—Knife, Kris: 10/L

Sequences: Knife Fighter, Luring Blade

Skills: Athletics 3, Casting 4, Interaction 5, Knowledge: Finances 3, Knowledge: Occult 5, Knowledge: Street 2, Melee 3, Quickness 3, Ranged 3, Research 5, Senses 2, Stamina 2, Stealth 3, Tech: Electronics 3



Edges: Allies 3, Casting 3, Confident, Deft 3, Network 5 (black market, criminal, government, international trade, occult), Skill Expertise (Interaction), Skill Specialty (Interaction: veiled threats), Weapon Use (Elite: kris knife)

Powers: Coldspawn 3, Crushing Will 3, Skin of Stone 2

Spells: Rank 1—Beguile, Sidestep; Rank 2—Aegis, Float, Second Sight, Scrye; Rank 3—Coruscating Bolt

Traits: Bound, tainted

Wealth: 4

Marcus has proven to be a canny businessman and cunning manipulator, and as the chairman of the Gehenna Corporation has surpassed all his youthful dreams of wealth and temporal power; yet his soul hungers for more. One day soon a gray-suited gentleman will come knocking on his door, and will whisper sibilantly of dark secrets and grandiose plans. It remains to be seen if Marcus's sense of independence and pride will prevail over his lust for knowledge.

SAMUEL MATHERS

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 4(2), Water 3, Air 4(4), Earth 6

Initiative: 8

Health: 6m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 0

Taint: 30

Stride: Fly 100 ft. (Speedy, mnv 6)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 4/M

Sequences: NA

Skills: Casting 6, Interaction 3, Ka 2, Knowledge: Ancient Cultures 2, Knowledge: Occult 4, Knowledge: Unnatural 4, Melee 3, Quickness 4, Research 6, Senses 3, Stealth 6, Trickery 4, Will 2

Spells: Any rank 1 or rank 2 spell

Edges: Casting 2, Daunting 2, Forceful Will 2 (gaze), Paranoid, Skill Expertise (Knowledge: Ancient Texts), Skill Specialty (Stealth: hiding while still), Stealthy

Powers*: Coldspawn 3, Instinct 3, Manifest 5, Shadow Spinner 5, Swift (Fly 5)

Traits: Ephemeral, tainted

Wealth: 0

Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers led a strange and tumultuous life. He was born in 1854 in Hackney, London. His career in occultism started with the Freemasons, but he later left them and joined the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* (S.R.I.A.), becoming a member of the society's high council within four years. There he met Drs. William Wynn Westcott and William Woodman, with whom he went on to found the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Mathers played a

pivotal role in setting up the order, providing the basis of its teachings by translating and interpreting several ancient occult texts, such as Knorr Von Rosenroth's *Kabalab Denudata* and the enigmatic Cipher Manuscripts.

The Outer Order of the Golden Dawn was officially founded on the first of March, 1888 and was controlled by an Inner Order, of which Mathers, Westcott, and Woodman were the self-appointed Chiefs. The triad was supposedly under the direction of the Secret Chiefs of a hidden Supreme Order, which they claimed was composed of entities from the astral plane.

The Order flourished for a while, and Mathers made great strides in unraveling the magic lore that had lain amidst otherwise meaningless esoterica for centuries. From 1897, the Golden Dawn saw increasing division that led to its eventual collapse in 1903. Mathers and his wife, Moina, were in Paris during this period, where they had founded the Athathoor Temple of the Golden Dawn. Though Mathers became increasingly concerned about the developments in London, his work in Paris prevented his return. In 1899 he made an attempt to regain control, sending the outre Alestair Crowley as his emissary to take over the Second Order in London; unfortunately the ploy was foiled by a leadership coup, and Mathers became estranged from the London chapter.

In the years that followed, Mathers continued his research, which culminated in the discovery of the black stair beneath the Tower of London and the terrible revelation that claimed his life. When her husband disappeared, Moina knew he wouldn't return and falsified his death certificate, claiming he had been a victim of the Spanish influenza pandemic that killed more than 22 million people worldwide.

Since meeting his horrible fate in the clutches of the gibbering entities that dwelt in the sytgian cathedral beneath Cornhill, Mathers has persisted as a shade: a tortured and broken spirit whose ghostly visage clearly shows the deep lines of horror etched into his face during the last moments of his life; Mathers' eyes are missing, and bloody marks stand brightly on his pallid face.

However, death was not the end for the unfortunate magus: denied eternal rest by the horror of his demise and the tangled lines of karmic energy that permeated the cathedral's space, Mathers' spirit persisted and was tortured and tricked into founding the Invisible Basilica of Gnosis. The troubled spirit led the cult of misguided sorcerers for over 80 years, until 2001 when their ritual was complete.

Since then, Mathers has let go of the last threads of reason connecting him to sanity and has descended into irretrievable madness and grief. The magus's ghost haunts the black recesses of that dark cathedral, where other even more unwholesome things gibber and swell. Mathers's ghost is lost, but if someone were brave enough to attempt bringing him back from the abyss, perhaps they could gain important information about the Dwellers' plans, strengths, and weaknesses.



***Powers:** As a shade given power by the Dwellers, Samuel has several special powers. First, he can access the communal power of the Dwellers in the city of London, and from that group consciousness (or group nightmare, as the case may be) access any rank 1 or rank 2 spell (including casting options and variants) that he wishes. Second, he can use any of the Shadow Spinner powers each turn without spending a mental or physical action.

VOROGGA'GTHA

Era: Modern

Race: Supernatural being

APL: 3

Aspects: Fire 5(2), Water 3(2), Air 5(4), Earth 5

Initiative: 10

Health: 5m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size/Reach: 3 / NA

Armor: 10

Taint: 50

Stride: NA

Weapons: NA

Sequences: NA

Skills: Interaction 6, Knowledge: Occult 3, Quickness 5, Ranged 5, Trickery 4, Senses 5

Edges: Aspect Affinity 5 (Air)

Powers: Child of Fire 5, Clarity 5, Crushing Will 5, Heightened Senses (scent 5)

Traits: Tainted, unliving

Legacy: Mind Tyrant

Vorgga'gtha is coalesced evil, a tainted form from the black abyss, long absent from the world. When he was summoned by a foolish sorcerer who meddled with forces beyond his control, Vorgga'gtha wasted no time in consuming the audacious mortal's flesh. So quickly was this deed done that for a pain-wracked second the conjurer's soul stood naked but for the gleaming cage of his bones, screaming soundlessly in unimaginable agony. Vorgga'gtha watched with relish, then consumed the soul as well.

Now Vorgga'gtha was released and free to roam, but such little deaths were more trouble than they were worth, and the vile spirit missed the adoration and fear of old. When it came upon the obsequious Jutul and his skulking minions, it found a high priest and terrified petitioners. It seeped into the rusty hulks of the great beam engines that had once propelled London's sewage into the water treatment plants. From within its new shell, Vorgga'gtha demanded blood and souls in a terrifying voice that was accompanied by the frightful hissing and groaning of those monstrous pistons. Jutul and the sluagh were quick to comply with their new god's wishes, and soon a steady stream of human sacrifices was flowing through the industrial wasteland of Thamesmead and into the Beamhouse to appease its voracious lust.



But it is not enough. Even though blood oils the great pistons of the beam engines, and bones, flesh, and sinew crunch beneath their weight, Vorgga'gtha grows restless—it wants more, and more, and more.

Being ephemeral, Vorgga'gtha has no power to affect the world physically, and the beam engines are unsuitable as weapons except against those who are placed beneath the thundering weight of their pistons. It has forgotten how to extricate itself from the metal machinery of the engine, and so cannot roam. However, the spirit's monstrous will is more than weapon enough, and with the force of will alone, Vorgga'gtha can conjure flames fueled by hate to burn and consume. It can also dominate men's minds (as well as those of lesser supernatural creatures), enslaving them and even reshaping their flesh to better suit its purposes. If attacked in its cathedral fastness, Vorgga'gtha will let its minion slough and the abominable Jutul deal with the intruders while it looks on with glee. If it appears the intruders are winning, Vorgga'gtha will join the fray, bringing all its supernatural might to bear.

While Vorgga'gtha itself is ephemeral, and would therefore normally be difficult to damage, it has permanently possessed the beam engine. The statistics given above (particularly the health and armor) represent the beam engine's integrity and AV. Luckily, Vorgga'gtha has forgotten how to exist without the rusting shell . . . destroy the machine, and you will destroy the ghost within it.

DRAGONS

Dragons receive their own section in this chapter because they are such powerful beings. A dragon other than the players should be encountered rarely in the mythic age, and almost never in the modern age. Even when such encounters do occur, they are likely to be roleplaying encounters more than combat. Occasionally, however, you will want to pit the players against one of their own, or give them a powerful ally against an especially difficult foe; for these occasions, as well as to give you an example of what your players' dragons may look like, sample dragons are presented below.

DRAGONS AND MENTAL ACTIONS

Dragons' mental actions are as powerful, and in some cases more powerful, than anything they can do physically. Unless using quickened initiative, dragons always make full use of their mental actions.

DRAGON PREFERRED STANCES

Dragons always have two stance changes per turn, and should always be played using the named NPC sheets provided in the back of the book.

THE BROKEN ORACLE

Era: Mythic

Race: Forest Serpent Dragon

APL: 10

Aspects: Fire 5(2), Water 5(3), Air 5(5), Earth 5(5)

Initiative: 10

Health: 5m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 4 / 20 ft.

Armor: 6

Karma: 50

Stride: 60 ft. (Moderate), Fly 60 ft. (Moderate, mnv 3);
Swim 75 ft. (Fast, mnv 5)

Weapons:

—Foreclaw: 6/L

—Hindclaw: 9/M

—Bite: 9/M

—Gore: 12/M

—Constricting tail

Sequences: Eastern Medium Style, Swift

Skills: Athletics 6, Casting 3, Interaction 6, Ka 4, Knowledge: Ancient Cultures 6, Knowledge: Geography 3, Knowledge: Law 3, Knowledge: Occult 6, Medicine 4, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Senses 4, Stamina 6, Stealth 5, Trickery 4, Will 6

Spells: Rank 2—Second Sight (A/R), Scrye (A/B/C/D/E/F/R); Rank 3—Animate (C/D/R), Falsehood (R), Ward (A/B/D/R); Rank 4—History (A/B/C/D/E/F/R); Rank 5—Counter Order of the Fifth Weave, Eclipse, Reincarnate (A/R)

Edges: Casting 5, Follow-Through 5, Forceful Will (voice) 5, Karmic Restraint 5, Thought Savant 5, Trivia
Powers: Alternate Form 5 (forms: a blind, crippled man, a crow, a blond child, a trout, a tabby cat), Ferocity 5, Gaze of the Predator 5, Group Mind 5, Heightened Senses 5 (Scent 1, Sound 2, Touch 2), Nobility 5, Rapport 5

Legacy: Undying Serpent

Traits: Camouflage, constricting tail, horned

Hoard: 2

This dragon spends most of his time in the guise of a crippled, blind man (although that blindness isn't much of a detriment, given his Heightened Senses powers). Known as the Broken Oracle, he makes his home in a mountain cave easily accessible by a broad and winding path. None suspect his true nature, which is just as he wishes it. Human kings claim that he has the gift of foresight and is an infinite font of wisdom; the latter is true, but the former is simply a manifestation of his great knowledge and his skill at reading people. Though he acts harmless, the Broken Oracle uses his prophecies and advice to guide humanity's destiny—a destiny that the oracle patiently, subtly steers humankind toward.





CERNUNNOS

Era: Modern

Race: Dire Beast Dragon

APL: 10

Aspects: Fire 6(6), Water 6(4), Air 5(3), Earth 5(4)

Initiative: 11

Health: 5m; <6 / 6+ / 12+ / 18+ / 24+ / 30+ / 36+ / 42+

Size/Reach: 4 / 20 ft.

Armor: 12

Taint: 50

Stride: 90 ft. (Speedy), Swim 90 ft. (Speedy, mnv 5)

Weapons:

—Foreclaw: 12/M

—Hindclaw: 18/M (Grab ready requirement)

—Bite: 18/H (ignores armor)

—Gore: 21/H

—Tail: 18/M

Sequences: Overkill, Ravager, Swift

Skills: Athletics 6, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Senses 6, Stamina 6, Stealth 6, Will 6

Edges: Aggressive 3 (Athletics, Melee, Quickness), Aspect Affinity 5 (Fire), Resilient 4, Weapon Specialist 5 (claws: 5 automatic successes per scene)

Powers: Ferocity 5, Heightened Senses (hearing 3, scent 5), Instinct 5, Metabolic Control 5, Mighty Leap 5

Legacy: Undying Serpent

Traits: Razored tail, spined, tainted, vicious maw

Hoard*: 0

In the mythic age, Cernunnos was among the mightiest of dragons. The noble but ferocious creature was associated with all that was natural, whether good or ill. He lived in an arboreal wilderness, where he suffered a tribe of brave warrior-hunters to live in his domain. These men worshipped him as a god, emulating his life of feasting, passion, and the hunt.

For a brief time in the early days of the modern age, Cernunnos himself returned to the world. The death toll of a great battle above the dragon's burial place caused nearby ley lines to surge with taint; he arose as a raging beast, a huge chimera of serpent, wolf, and stag. His wolf-children called him the Horned One, and together they cut a bloody swath of slaughter in the dark, forested reaches of Europe.

Eventually, Cernunnos was slain, either by a heroic adversary or simply by the waning tide of karma. His mortal form was cast into the peat bogs where he met his end, and as the power of his magic faded altogether, his people's blood cooled and they eventually forgot their bloody past, living once more as humans.

In the 19th century, Cernunnos's body was exhumed and transported to London by archaeologists studying Dark Age settlements in northwestern France. Unfortunately, the ship carrying Cernunnos's corpse sank just outside the entrance to the Thames, and the poor scholars could not afford to have it raised. The Horned God's remains have lain undisturbed for two hundred years in the English Channel, and now the people of his blood have come looking for him once more. It is not known whether the spirit of the ancient dragon can be restored to his monstrous form, or if it has already moved on to other planes of existence, but his followers believe they can resurrect their god and reforge a bloody empire to drown their new island home in blood.

***Hoard:** In order for Cernunnos to be restored to life, his hoard must be added to just as if he were a scion. As soon as his followers have collected enough items to grant him hoard 1, he will return to life; however, his awakened rank, rather than being 5, will be equal to his hoard rank.

DAELRIVOTH

Era: Mythic

Race: Fire Beast Dragon

APL: 10

Aspects: Fire 6(6), Water 5(5), Air 5(2), Earth 4(2)

Initiative: 11

Health: 4m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 4 / 20 ft.

Armor: 8

Karma: 40

Stride: 90 ft. (Fast); Fly 60 ft. (Moderate, mnv 3)

Weapons:

—Foreclaw: 17/M

—Hindclaw: 23/M (Grab ready requirement)

—Bite: 23/H (ignores armor)

—Tail: 23/H (size +1 on Sweep attacks)

Sequences: Archangel, Crushing Mass, Ravager, Swift
Skills: Athletics 6, Craft: Masonry 1, Interaction 3, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Ranged 3, Stamina 6, Stealth 6, Trickery 6, Will 6

Edges: Action Junkie 4, Aggressive 2 (Athletics, Melee), Brutal 5, Daunting 3, Rapid 1 (flight)

Powers: Alternate Form 2 (forms: a burly red-haired human, mountain lion), Child of Fire 5, Ferocity 4, Group Mind 1, Heightened Senses (hearing 1), Instinct 3, Shadow Spinner 1

Legacy: Fire Wym

Traits: Sweeping tail, vicious maw

Hoard: 3

Daelrivoth is ferocious and cunning. His scales are dark orange and glisten with ruddy red highlights. He embraces his fiery heritage, making his lair in an active volcano.

This fierce dragon is violent and aggressive, and he enjoys forcing humans to pay him tribute. At various times throughout his existence Daelrivoth has been a tyrant, a terror, a ravager, and a murderer. Many cities lie in slag, victims of his searing breath. Others live in fear of his coming, for he demands riches to add to his hoard and sacrifices to appease his depraved hunger.

Few are mighty enough to oppose Daelrivoth alone, but his enemies are many and his allies few. Still, despite his ferocity, Daelrivoth is a survivor, and knows when to flee. He has a personal hatred of the dragon Mevistuss, and the two clash often throughout the mythic age. Mevistuss uses his myriad disguises to evade Daelrivoth's eyes, and many humans secretly hope that Mevistuss can defeat the fire wym. Daelrivoth has killed his nemesis several times, but as is the way with dragons, Mevistuss simply returns in a reincarnated form.

MEVISTUSS

Era: Mythic

Race: Exotic Drake Dragon

APL: 10

Aspects: Fire 5(4), Water 5(3), Air 5(4), Earth 5(4)

Initiative: 10

Health: 5m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 4 / 20 ft.

Armor: 4

Karma: 50

Stride: 60 ft./75 ft. on all fours (Moderate); Fly 75 ft. (Fast, mnv 5)

Weapons:

—Foreclaw: 9/L

—Hindclaw: 9/L

—Bite: 12/M

—Tail (articulate)

—Sword, Kiem (2 or 3): 8/M

Sequences: Eastern Small Style, Eastern Medium Style, Eastern Large Style

Skills: Athletics 6, Casting 4, Interaction 6, Ka 3, Knowledge: Ancient Cultures 3, Knowledge: Mythology 3, Knowledge: Occult 3, Knowledge: Science 3, Medicine 3, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Ranged 6, Senses 6, Stamina 1, Stealth 6, Trickery 6, Will 6

Spells: Rank 2—Aegis (B), Ether-wall (C/D); Great Leap (A); Scrye (A/E); Rank 3—Animate; Blind (C/D); Catcher's Creation (A/D); Rank 4—Avatar; Ephemeral Armor (B/R); Warp the Unwilling

Edges: Casting 4, Deft 5, Dervish 1, Fluid Fighter 3 (kiem sword, foreclaw), Weapon Use (Elite) (kiem sword), Weapon Specialist 5 (kiem sword: +3 damage and 2 automatic successes per scene)

Powers: Alternate Form 4 (forms: a slight, black-skinned young man, a kindly old woman, a beautiful young Asian woman, a dove), Clarity 1, Shadow Spinner 5, Group Mind 1, Heightened Senses (Sight 1), Instinct 2, Rapport 3, Wallcrawling 1

Legacy: Shapeshifter

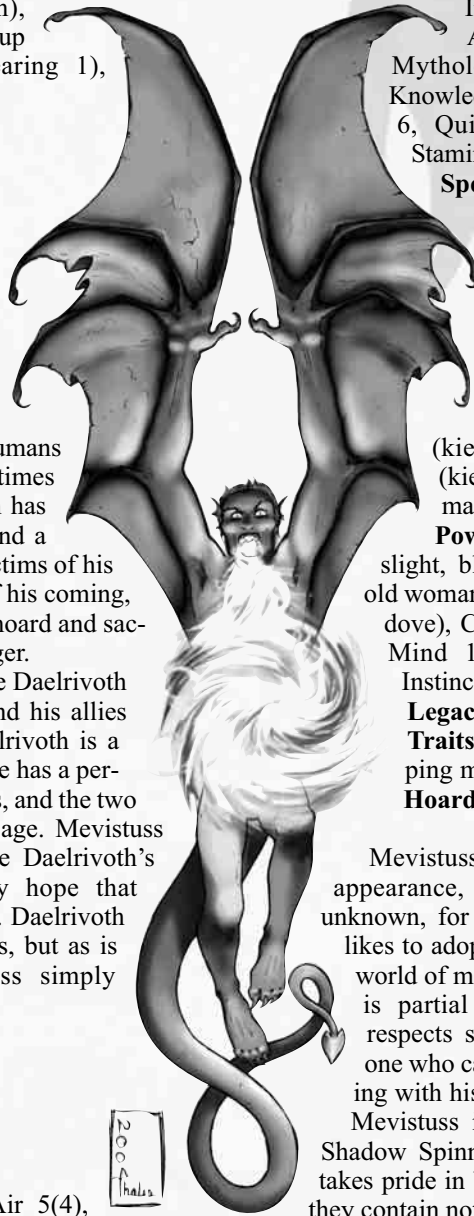
Traits: Articulate tail, camouflage, gripping maw

Hoard: 5

Mevistuss' true nature is a mystery. His appearance, his name, even his gender are unknown, for he can take any form. Indeed, he likes to adopt human guise and pass among the world of men. He has a fondness for humanity, is partial to sushi and egg noodles, and respects skilled swordsmen (especially anyone who can give him a good fight while dueling with his paired kiem swords).

Mevistuss is sneaky and canny. He uses his Shadow Spinner power to its utmost effect and takes pride in breaking into secure places, even if they contain nothing that he wants. He often wields shadow blades in dragon form, bearing them as if they were human-style swords.

Mevistuss and Daelrivoth cross paths often. Daelrivoth despises the shapeshifter, and Mevistuss thinks it great fun to pester and thwart the great bully. Daelrivoth considers himself to have the upper hand, for he has killed Mevistuss several times. Mevistuss' goal is not to kill, however, but to goad. Each time he encour-





CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

ters Daelrivoth, he frustrates and antagonizes him a bit more. Eventually, he knows that he will have the leverage he needs to trick Daelrivoth into a supernatural trap that he has been devising. When that happens, Mevistuss' goal will have been realized: Daelrivoth will be imprisoned, not killed, forever. For a creature that reincarnates eternally, being forever entrapped in the same body, helpless and alone, is a fate far worse than death.

NEMESTES

Era: Mythic
Race: Ice Drake Dragon
APL: 8
Aspects: Fire 5(4), Water 5(4), Air 5(3), Earth 5(4)
Initiative: 10
Health: 5m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+
Size/Reach: 4 / 20 ft.
Armor: 10
Karma: 50
Stride: 60 ft./75 ft. on all fours (Moderate); Fly 75 ft. (Fast, mnv 2)
Weapons:
 —Foreclaw (2): 9/L
 —Hindclaw (2): 9/L
 —Bite: 12/M
 —Tail: 12/L
Sequences: Archangel, Eastern Large Style, *Whiptail*
Skills: Athletics 6, Casting 4, Interaction 3, Ka 3, Knowledge: Ancient Cultures 3, Knowledge: Art 3, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Research 6, Senses 6, Stamina 6, Stealth 1, Tech: Mechanics 3, Travel 3, Trickery 3, Will 3
Spells: Rank 1—Beguile, Buzzkill, Sidestep; Rank 2—Counter Weave of the Second Order, Second Sight
Edges: Action Junkie 3, Casting 2, Follow-Through 1
Powers: Coldspawn 4, Distant Mind 3, Group Mind 2, Heightened Senses (scent 1, sight 1), Instinct 1, Wallcrawling 1
Legacy: Teleporter
Traits: Camouflage, gripping maw, razored tail
Hoard: 2

Nemestes is a recently reborn dragon out to see the world. New places, new cultures, and new beings fascinate him. He is fond of humans, as they create the most beautiful works of architecture and perform the most interesting tasks. He tries to avoid frightening them when he lands near their cities and towns; his charming demeanor and relative naivete put them at ease.

Though he prefers to avoid combat, Nemestes can hold his own in a fight. He likes to test himself against opponents, but teleports away if the battle looks grim. He does not care for the company of other dragons, having yet to encounter his broodmates, and spends most of his time alone, soaring to new locales and revisiting old favorites.

SHAVARAL

Era: Mythic
Race: Spirit Serpent Dragon
APL: 8
Aspects: Fire 3(2), Water 3(2), Air 6(6), Earth 5(5)
Initiative: 9
Health: 5m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 4 / 20 ft.
Armor: 2
Karma: 50
Stride: 60 ft. (Moderate); Fly 60 ft. (Moderate, mnv 6); Swim 75 ft. (Fast, mnv 5)
Weapons:
 —Foreclaw (2): 6/L
 —Hindclaw (2): 9/M
 —Bite: 9/M
 —Gore: 12/M
 —Tail (articulate)
Sequences: Submerged, Swift
Skills: Athletics 3, Casting 6, Craft: Calligraphy 3, Craft: Woodworking 3, Ka 6, Knowledge: Mythology 3, Knowledge: Occult 3, Interaction 4, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Quickness 3, Research 3, Senses 4, Will 6
Spells: Rank 3—Coruscating Bolt (A), Counter Weave of the Third Order; Rank 4—History, Paralyze; Rank 5—Dominate (B/C)
Edges: Casting 5, Forceful Will (gaze) 2, Karmic Restraint 4, Thought Savant 3, Trivia
Powers: Alternate Form 1 (form: a dolphin), Clarity 3, Distant Mind 5, Group Mind 1, Heightened Senses (hearing 1), Heir of Lightning 4, Nobility 2
Legacy: Ghost Walker
Traits: Articulate Tail, Horned
Hoard: 3

Shavaral, a slight dragon with pale blue scales, lives to explore, learn, and play. He avoids bloodshed whenever possible, using spells and stealth to confound his enemies. Despite his pacifist tendencies, however, Shavaral is more than willing to unleash his wrath on any who threaten his broodmates. He uses his Distant Mind power to aid them and, if they believe in a cause, willingly fights on their behalf.

Shavaral's two favorite topics are human culture and marine life. He knows a bit of everything about the first, and enjoys regaling friends with trivia, songs, and stories from the human cultures he has visited or heard of. He takes the form of a dolphin for his oceanic travels, and his dragon companions occasionally join him in similar forms. Shavaral is open and friendly, and those he has allowed into his heart have found him a loyal companion.



VRINTHA KLAHN

Era: Mythic**Race:** Noble Beast Dragon**APL:** 6**Aspects:** Fire 5(4), Water 6(6), Air 3(1), Earth 5(3)**Initiative:** 8**Health:** 6m; <6 / 6+ / 12+ / 18+ / 24+ / 30+ / 36+ / 42+**Size/Reach:** 4/20 ft.**Armor:** 8**Karma:** 50**Stride:** 90 ft. (Speedy); Fly 45 ft. (Slow, mnv 4)**Weapons:**

—Foreclaw: 12/M

—Hindclaw: 18/M (Grab ready requirement)

—Bite: 18/H

—Gore: 21/H

—Tail: 18/H (+1 size for Sweep attacks)

Sequences: Overkill, Ravager**Skills:** Athletics 6, Casting 2, Ka 6, Interaction 6, Knowledge: Architecture 3, Knowledge: Music 3, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Senses 6, Stamina 6, Trickery 3, Will 6**Spells:** Rank 2—Second Sight, Slow the Living**Edges:** Action Junkie 3, Aggressive 2 (Athletics, Melee), Casting 2, Resilient 1**Powers:** Alternate Form 1 (forms: large eagle), Ferocity 3, Group Mind 1, Heightened Senses (all at 4), Instinct 2, Nobility 4**Legacy:** Aegis Bearer**Traits:** Horned skull, sweeping tail**Hoard:** 3

Vrintha Klahn is a guardian dragon who has dedicated herself to the protection of a ruling family of Atlantis. Vrintha Klahn sees humans as weak, foolish, and insufferable, but honor binds her to her charge. Her mindset makes her life one of constant irritation. Extremely arrogant, Vrintha Klahn is rude to all humans aside from those she is sworn to protect. Those she treats with amused respect, for she believes them to be one of the only voices of wisdom in the entire bloated Atlantean empire.

Despite herself, Vrintha Klahn has come to have an appreciation for human music. She is particularly fond of the harp and other stringed instruments. She knows that her draconic powers are growing, and she is tempted to grant herself a human form so that she too may command the heavenly strings. The thought of adopting the shape of the same beings that are so abhorrent to her repels her, and this struggle occupies her constantly.

Despite her feelings of superiority, Vrintha Klahn performs her job well. The family she guards is wealthy and powerful, and it has made many enemies in Atlantis and the nearby regions. Vrintha Klahn's presence is enough to dissuade most would-be attackers, but those who think they can bypass her find her a canny adversary.



Though she is not very good at them, Vrintha Klahn is fond of riddles. They help take her mind off her situation. She fancies herself a quick thinker, and proudly (but incorrectly) believes she can outwit any human.

HUMANS

Finally, the creatures that have more effect on karma and taint than any other in the world: humankind. Humans run the gamut from selfish to noble, from evil to heroic. The humans presented below are basic archetypes, built using the same backgrounds as the players' scions. These types may be advanced, just like other creatures, to make more memorable allies or more dangerous foes.

HUMAN MENTAL ACTIONS

Although humans are less powerful than many of the creatures presented earlier, they are universally sentient and flexible beings. Humans always take advantage of mental actions; it is one of their few advantages over the mindless or brutish foes they may face.



HUMAN PREFERRED STANCES

The humans presented below will often be extras in your game, and are almost never named. Therefore, though they may be able to use mental actions, they rarely have the stance changes available to do so very effectively. Unfortunately for the human race, it is at the bottom of the food chain in Fireborn, whether in the modern or mythic age.

DOSSER (POSSESSED)

Era: Modern
Race: Natural being
APL: 0
Aspects: Fire 4, Water 3, Air 0, Earth 0
Initiative: 4
Health: 0m; < 3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 1 (Padded clothing 1/5/0)
Karma: 0
Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Club: 5/M
Sequences: Street Fighting
 Agg—F7/W0/A0/E0—Gut Shot (Power + Club Strike):

Disadvantage (physical) 3
 Agg—F7/W0/A0/E0—Groin Shot (Power + Kick Strike): Disadvantage (mental) 3
 Agg—F7/W0/A0/E0—Head Butt (Power + Slam): Knockout
Skills: Athletics 3, Melee 3, Quickness 3, Senses 2, Stamina 2, Stealth 4
Edges: Aggressive 1 (Melee), Brawler, Survivor 1
Traits: Mindless, tainted
Wealth: 1

Beggars have been a part of city life since ancient times, and the situation is no different in modern day London. It is difficult to determine the population of homeless people in the metropolis, although the figure is estimated at a staggering 15,000 or more. The housed citizens of Britain have numerous derogatory names for those who dwell on the streets and beg for a living: bag lady, dosser, crustie. In recent years the street people have suffered the worst deprivations of the malign entities that have crept into the world of men, and their murder or disappearance goes largely unnoticed or uncommented upon. Without families to demand an investigation, the police do little more than bag the body (or what's left of it) and chalk up another statistic. The rest of the homeless hunker down in their cardboard boxes and threadbare blankets, hoping it won't be them to be taken next.

Trafalgar square has long been a haven for rough sleepers, and despite countless by-laws forbidding them, they congregate there at night, filling the doorways and arches and spilling out into the square. When the spirit Y'aggom possessed the flock of pigeons that habitually dwelt in Trafalgar Square, it had found a collection of creatures that admirably reflected its nature of filth and ugliness. With the malodorous birds under its control, it was only a small matter to extend its possession to the weak minded humans who slept in its precincts. They were men and women who had fallen on hard times, and their harsh environment and ever-worsening health left them vulnerable to the insane whisperings of the dark spirit.

Possessed dossers are mindless thralls of Y'aggom, driven to acts of violence by the malicious spirit. Moving as shifting mobs through the city's night, they set upon lone walkers or small groups of revelers, overwhelming them in a moaning cacophony reminiscent of the cheesiest zombie film taken a dark turn into reality. Fists, boots, and booze bottles are their weapons, and like zombies they pay no heed to their injuries, driven as they are by Y'aggom's blood lust until their mortal shells can bear no more.

If somehow removed from the mob and taken to a secure place where there is food, warmth, and medical care, a possessed dosser will eventually awaken from his dark nightmare. He will have no memory of the past months, except for a shadowy fear that haunts his waking dreams and fills his nights with terror. Most of these unfortunates end up in an asylum, committing suicide,

or back on the streets, where Y'aggom eventually claims them back into its fold.

AMBASSADOR

Era: Mythic
Race: Human
APL: 0
Aspects: Fire 3, Water 3, Air 5, Earth 5
Initiative: 8
Health: 5m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 0
Karma: 15
Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Sword, Long: 10/M
Sequences: Rank and File
 Agg—F6/W3/A2/E5—Power + Sword + Press: Damage +15
 Neut—F3/W3/A5/E5—Sword + Press): Push 1
 Def—F3/W3/A8/E2—Block sequence
Skills: Interaction 6, Knowledge: High Society 4, Knowledge: Law 4, Melee 3, Quickness 2, Research 4, Senses 2, Stamina 4, Stealth 2, Travel 3, Trickery 4, Will 6
Edges: Forceful Will 2 (voice), Network 2 (International Trade, Local Government)
Wealth: 5

BERSERKER

Era: Mythic
Race: Human
APL: 1/2
Aspects: Fire 5, Water 5, Air 3, Earth 3
Initiative: 8
Health: 3m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 4 (leather 4/5/12)
Karma: 9
Stride: 25 ft. (Fast)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Sword, Great: 19/H
Sequences: Overkill
 Agg—F10/W5/A0/E1—Power + Sword + Power + Kick: Damage +20
 Agg—F9/W5/A0/E2—Spin + Ready + Power + Sword: Dismember extremity or Stun
 Agg—F9/W5/A0/E2—Power + Sword + Press): Damage +15
Skills: Athletics 4, Knowledge: Survival 2, Melee 5, Quickness 4, Ranged 4, Senses 2, Stamina 5, Stealth 2, Trickery 2, Will 3
Edges: Brutal 3, Follow-Through 1, Rapid 1
Wealth: 2

COP

Era: Modern
Race: Natural being
APL: 1/2
Aspects: Fire 3, Water 3, Air 4, Earth 3
Initiative: 7
Health: 3m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 10 (Kevlar vest 10/4/3)
Karma: 3
Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Police baton: 5/M
 —Glock 22: 22 ~ range 100 ft. ~ reload 1/3
Sequences: Entrapping Defense, Street Fighting
 Agg—F6/W3/A1/E3—Power + Slam: Knockout
 Neut—F3/W3/A4/E3—Baton + Slam + Fist Strike: Push 1
 Def—F3/W4/A3/E3—Crouch + Ready + Grab: Trip
Skills: Athletics 3, Interaction 4, Knowledge: Forensics 2, Knowledge: Police Procedure 4, Knowledge: London 3, Melee 3, Quickness 1, Ranged 3, Senses 4, Travel 3
Edges: Network 2 (criminal, police), Paranoid
Wealth: 2



CRAFTSMAN

Era: Mythic
Race: Natural being
APL: 0
Aspects: Fire 4, Water 3, Air 5, Earth 4
Initiative: 9
Health: 4m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 0
Karma: 12
Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Dagger: 6/L
Skills: Athletics 2, Craft 6 (choose one), Craft 5 (choose one) 5, Craft 4 (choose one), Interaction 2, Knowledge 2 (choose one), Quickness 2, Stamina 4, Tech 2 (mechanics), Travel 3, Trickery 2, Will 4
Edges: Network 1 (local commerce), Skill Expertise (Craft), Though Savant 1
Wealth: 2

HEDGE WIZARD

Era: Mythic
Race: Natural being
APL: 1/2
Aspects: Fire 3, Water 3, Air 5, Earth 3
Initiative: 8
Health: 3m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 0
Karma: 9
Stride: 20 ft. (land)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Knife, Kris: 7/L
Sequences: None
 Neut—F3/W3/A5/E3
Skills: Casting 4, Ka 4, Knowledge: History 2, Knowledge: Occult 6, Research 4, Stamina 4, Trickery 3, Will 6
Edges: Casting 3
Spells: Rank 1—Buzzkill (A), Counter Weave of the First Order, Radiance; Rank 2—Aegis, Magefist (B/C); Rank 3—Coruscating Bolt
Wealth: 3

MODERN MAGES

The study of magic is almost as old as mankind itself; since the beginning of mankind's history, it has studied the art on its own and learned it at the feet of wiser supernatural races. Those mentors faded away with the end of karma, however, and have yet to reassert themselves as guides along the treacherous path of magic. Mystical lore has become corrupted and dangerous, its secrets to be uncovered and fought over by small, powerful groups. Modern mages might be members of an insane cabal, dabbling in dark forces they barely understand, quickly becoming wild-eyed and broken from the terrifying truths they have witnessed. Others might be suave business leaders, wearing expensive suits and sitting on the boards of international finance houses; their magic is subtle and powerful, but deeply insidious. Still others are grim-faced secret agents, struggling to use their knowledge to hold back the rising tide of chaos that threatens to engulf the city.

The following descriptions present mages from different power groups and organizations in London that illustrate the varied paths a practitioner of magic might follow.

BLACK LOTUS CULTIST

Era: Modern
Race: Natural being
APL: 1
Aspects: Fire 4, Water 3, Air 3(2), Earth 1
Initiative: 7
Health: 3m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: None
Taint: 1
Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Dagger: 6/L
 —Browning PRO-40
 Pistol: 23 ~ range 200 ft. ~ reload 1/4
Sequences: Flying Fists
 Agg—F6/W3/A1(2)/E1—
 Dagger + Fist + Ready +
 Dagger: Damage +5





Neut—F4/W4/A3(2)/E1—Dagger + Fist: Damage +5

Def—F4/W5/A0(2)/E1—Dodge sequence

Skills: Casting 3, Ka 1, Melee 2, Quickness 2, Ranged 1, Stamina 2, Knowledge: London 3, Knowledge: Occult 4, Knowledge: Street 2, Stealth 3, Travel 2, Trickery 3, Will 2

Spells: Rank 1—Assumption, Grasp, Shadow (A/C); Rank 2—Aegis, Float, Mimic the First Order, Scrye (A/D)

Edges: Casting 2, Skill Expertise (Casting)

Powers: Any one (rank 2)

Traits: Bound, Tainted

The Black Lotus is a cult of taint seekers who have holed up in the East End of London in a derelict Edwardian house on a street of similar buildings. Its windows are boarded up and the garden is overgrown with weeds. Inside, a terrible stench pervades the air; the walls and floor have been daubed with excrement, and the rotting carcasses of animals hang by wires from the ornately molded ceiling roses. A sense of terrible menace gathers in this house, waiting to pounce.

The cult was founded by John Miles, a taxi driver from Hackney who was given a strange old book by one of his fares (whom he vaguely described later as “a city gent in a old-fashioned grey getup”). The men and women Miles gathered to his cult were all amateur occultists, and since opening the sinister tome they have entered a world of insanity. The cultists have given themselves over entirely to taint and wickedness. They can hardly string coherent sentences together, and their eyes reflect the madness that eats them from inside. They spend most of their time in the house on Scott Street, venturing out only to get provisions or pursue some aspect of their occult activities. They tend to move under the cover of night, tossing in nightmare-ridden sleep during the day.

The cultists of the Black Lotus are filthy and stink of urine and feces. Their clothes are stained and badly crumpled and their hair is matted and infested with lice. People cross the road to avoid them, moving quickly away while muttering and covering their noses. The cultists are petty magicians, and their powers of magic are generally weak and rather ineffectual. However, with the aid of the evil book and visits from a certain “bloke all in grey,” they have succeeded in summoning some formidable supernatural entities, which now lurk in the shadows of the derelict houses on Scott Street. Although they can barely control the dead things they have summoned, Miles and his insane cult intend to attempt an even more ambitious ritual: to summon a Taint Demon, a vile entity known as Icarac.

FREEMASON

Era: Modern

Race: Natural being

APL: 0

Aspects: Fire 2, Water 3, Air 4, Earth 4

Initiative: 6

Health: 4m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 4

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 4/M

—Derringer: 18 ~ range 100 ft. ~ reload 3/6

Sequences: None

Agg—F3/W3/A3/E4

Neut—F2/W3/A4/E4

Def—F0/W5/A4/E4

Skills: Interaction 4, Knowledge: Finances 2, Knowledge: London 2, Knowledge: Occult 2, Knowledge: Society 4, Melee 1, Quickness 2, Ranged 2, Stamina 4, Will 2, Trickery 5

Spells: Rank 1—Beguile (B); Buzzkill; Static

Edges: Casting 1, Network 4 (criminal, Freemasons, local government, police), Windfall 3.

Wealth: 4

Freemasons appear no different than normal individuals and may be drawn, in principal, from any walk of life. However, the upper echelons of the order tend to be members of the upper class and aristocracy, and the lower ranks tend to draw their membership from the middle classes. There are three principal ranks (or degrees) of freemasonry: the First Degree of the Entered Apprentice; the Second Degree of Fellowcraft; and the Third Degree of the Master Mason. Beyond the third degree there are 30 others of esoteric significance, and the 33rd and final degree of Freemasonry is known as the Arch Degree.

Only master masons are considered sufficiently enlightened to be allowed access to the order’s limited magical lore. Each esoteric echelon beyond the Third Degree jealously guards its knowledge from the ranks below, wrapping the meager number of true magical incantations in pompous ritual and ceremony, so as to appear that their knowledge of the mysteries is far greater than it actually is. While political power obsesses the lower ranks, pursuit of magical power is the grail for the upper ranks of the Masons. The statistics above represent a Third Degree Master Mason.

FREEMASON VARIANTS

First Degree: –2 to each Knowledge skill, –2 to Wealth, no Casting edge or spell knowledge.

Second Degree: –1 to each Knowledge skill, –1 to Wealth, no Casting edge or spell knowledge.





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Third Degree and higher: +1 AP per degree, with a maximum of edge rank of Casting 1 until the 16th Degree and Casting 2 until the 32nd Degree; only the Arch Degree may have Casting 3.

GUARDIAN OF ATHOTH

Era: Modern

Race: Natural being

APL: 1

Aspects: Fire 4, Water 6, Air 5, Earth 6

Initiative: 8

Health: 6m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 18

Stride: 25 ft. (Fast)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 8/L

—Kick (2): 9/M

—Short Sword: 13/L

Sequences: Eastern Small Style, Entrapping Defense, Kingsguard

Agg—F7/W6/A2/E6—**Dash + Jump + Power +**

Sword: Damage +35

Neut—F4/W6/A5/E6—**Dash + Kick + Sword: Damage +10**

Def—F4/W11/A0/E6—**Sword Block + Ready +**

Sidestep + Sword: Damage +5, disarm

Skills: Athletics 3, Casting 4, Interaction 3, Knowledge:

Ancient Cultures 6, Knowledge: History 6, Knowledge:

Occult 5, Melee 3, Quickness 5, Research 4, Senses 6,

Stealth 2, Stamina 3, Trickery 4, Will 4

Spells: Rank 1—All (A); Rank 2—All (A); Rank 3—

Coruscating Bolt (A), Counter Weave of the Third

Order, Ward (A/B/C/D); Rank 4—Avatar (A), History

Edges: Adaptive, Aspect Affinity 5 (Fire), Casting 4,

Defender 4, Deft 5, Karmic Release 3, Network 2

(Seelie fae, occult), Sage (Knowledge: Ancient

Cultures—Atlantis), Skill Expertise (Casting), Trivia

Traits: Pureblood of Atlantis

Wealth: 3

The Guardians of Athoth are the last true descendants of the Atlanteans, and they tend to share the racial characteristics of that race, including higher karma pools and higher base aspect scores than modern man. The guardians are long lived, having perhaps twice the lifespan of normal humans. They have existed among the rest of humanity since the end of the mythic age, with only a few brief sojourns into their world, such as when they called themselves the Knights Templar. In the modern age, the Guardians move among normal humans, unseen and unsuspected. Their sacred trust is still the same as it was when laid down by the elders of Atlantis: to protect the secret lore of Atlantean magic and to watch over humanity, keeping it from destroying itself again by harnessing magic it cannot control.

Guardians of Athoth have quite a bit of magical lore and are accomplished sorcerers, but only use that power responsibly; they would sooner die than create taint, knowing the part it played in the end of their forebearers' culture. Their nearly superhuman skills are also bent towards constant martial training, as much for the sake of discipline and tradition as for combat.

The Guardians fall into two camps. One cautions against getting involved with human society, and advocates a policy of separatism and aloof guardianship of the magic treasures of the mythic age. The other argues that the Guardians should use their knowledge to aid their fellow men in their time of need. It is more likely that the latter type of Guardian will be encountered outside their secret sanctuaries.

THELEMA ADEPT

Era: Modern

Race: Natural being

APL: 2

Aspects: Fire 4, Water 4, Air 5, Earth 5

Initiative: 8

Health: 6m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 4 (combat bodysuit 4/5/0)

Karma: 5

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L

—Kick (2): 4/M

—H&K USP Tactical Pistol: 26 ~ range 100 ft. ~ reload 2/4

Sequences: Eastern Small Style, Gun Fu

Agg—F8/W4/A1/E5—**Dash + Jump + Power + Kick: Damage +35**

Neut—F4/W4/A5/E5—**Fire Pistol (I) + Ready + Power + Pistol Strike (II): Disadvantage (mental) 2**

Def—F4/W8/A1/E5—**Roll + Ready + Fire Pistol: Damage +10**

Skills: Athletics 4, Interaction 2, Knowledge: Military

2, Knowledge: Mythology 4, Knowledge: Occult 4,

Melee 2, Quickness 4, Ranged 4, Research 3, Senses 4,

Stealth 4, Travel 3, Trickery 3, Will 4

Spells: Rank 1—Cat's Eyes (A); Clarion Call (A/B);

Counter Weave of the First Order; Grasp (B); Radiance

(A/B); Sidestep (A/B); Rank 2—Aegis Detritus (Aegis),

Flash (B/C), Great Leap, Magefist (B/C), Second Sight

Edges: Action Junkie 2, Allies 2, Casting 2,

Circumspect 4, Forceful Will 4, Resilient 2, Survivor 3,

Thought Savant 2

Wealth: 3

The Thelema are those men and women of LN-7 who have been selected for their magical aptitude and trusted with the department's most carefully guarded secrets: the arcane lore derived from the *Librum Niger* and other texts of its ilk. Thelema adepts are typically drawn from





the various Special Forces (SAS, military intelligence, etc.) and have a strong background in covert and military operations. After being selected to join the Thelema, they spend a number of years under the tutelage of the department's most senior adepts before being allowed into the field. However, with the rapidly rising tide of "anomalous" phenomena, Thelema adepts are being released earlier and earlier into the theater of war, often unprepared for the forces they will have to face. It is a testament to LN-7's selection process and the resilient characters of the adepts that while inexperienced, most remain true to their cause; many are the instances in which a Thelema adept could take advantage of magic's power for her own gain, but none do. Their mission of protecting the civilians in and around London from the "anomalies" is too important. Likewise, the training process creates quite good leaders, survivors, and multi-purpose commandos; most simple soldiers would crack in the face of the dark creatures that the Thelema deal with, and not many practitioners of the occult have the discipline and combat savvy that the adepts display.

POLITICIAN

Era: Modern
Race: Natural being
APL: 0
Aspects: Fire 2, Water 2, Air 5, Earth 4
Initiative: 8
Health: 4m; <2 / 2+ / 4+ / 6+ / 8+ / 10+ / 12+ / 14+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 0
Karma: 4
Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
Skills: Interaction 4, Knowledge: Politics 5, Knowledge: London 4, Melee 1, Quickness 2, Research 2, Senses 2, Trickery 3, Will 3
Edges: Confident, Skill Specialty (Will: resisting intimidation), Skill Specialty (Trickery: fast-talking), Skill Specialty (Trickery: veiled threats)
Wealth: 4

SAILOR

Era: Mythic
Race: Natural being
APL: 0
Aspects: Fire 4, Water 5, Air 3, Earth 4
Initiative: 7
Health: 6m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 0
Karma: 12
Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)
Weapons:

—Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Bottle [whole]: 4/L
 —Bottle [broken]: 5/L
 —Club: 5/M
Sequences: Barroom Brawling, Streetfighting
 Agg—F8/W5/A0/E3—Spin + Bottle [whole]: Knockout
 Neut—F4/W4/A3/E4—Power + Club: Disadvantage (physical) 3
 Def—F4/W9/A0/E3—Spin + Ready + Fist: Damage +5, disadvantage (mental) 2
Skills: Athletics 6, Craft: Carpentry 3, Interaction 2, Knowledge: Geography 4, Melee 4, Quickness 4, Ranged 3, Senses 5, Stamina 5, Travel 5, Trickery 2, Will 2
Edges: Allies 2 (crewmates), Resilient 2, Vehicle Use (elite: choose one sailing vessel)
Wealth: 1

SCOUNDREL

Era: Mythic
Race: Natural being
APL: 0
Aspects: Fire 2, Water 3, Air 5, Earth 5
Initiative: 7
Health: 5m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 0
Karma: 9
Stride: 30 ft. (Speedy)
Weapons:
 —Fist (2): 3/L
 —Kick (2): 4/M
 —Dagger: 6/L
Sequences: Underhanded
 Agg—F4/W3/A3/E5—Spin + Dagger: Damage +10, push 1
 Neut—F2/W3/A5/E5—Power + Kick: Disadvantage (mental) 3
 Def—F2/W7/A1/E5—*Dodge* sequence
Skills: Knowledge: Street 4, Knowledge (choose one), Interaction 4, Melee 2, Quickness 4, Senses 4, Stealth 3, Trickery 4
Edges: Network 1 (criminal)
Wealth: 2

SOLDIER (CYPHER)

Era: Modern
Race: Natural being
APL: 1
Aspects: Fire 5, Water 5, Air 4, Earth 4
Initiative: 10
Health: 4m; <5 / 5+ / 10+ / 15+ / 20+ / 25+ / 30+ / 35+
Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.
Armor: 10 (Kevlar vest 10/4/3)
Karma: 4





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Gait/Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

- Fist (2): 5/L
- Kick (2): 8/M
- Knife, Survival: 9/L ~ range 10 ft.
- H&K USP Tactical Pistol: 26 ~ range 100 ft. ~ reload 2/4
- H&K UMP9 Submachine Gun (burst): 26 ~ range 500 ft. ~ reload 1/4

Sequences: Eastern Small Style, Gun Fu, Knife Fighter, Lightning Style

Agg—F11/W5/A2/E2—Dash + Jump + Fire Pistol + Ready + Pistol Strike: Damage +25

Neut—F5/W5/A5/E5—Power + Pistol Strike: Knockout

Def—F5/W11/A2/E2—Roll + Ready + Fire Pistol: Damage +10

Skills: Athletics 6, Knowledge: Law 2, Knowledge: London 2, Knowledge: Occult 2, Knowledge: Survival 4, Melee 6, Quickness 6, Ranged 6, Senses 4, Stamina 4, Stealth 4, Tech: Electronics 2, Tech: Mechanics 2, Travel 4

Edges: Action Junkie 2, Brutal 2, Deft 2, Weapon Specialist 4 (H&K USP: 2 automatic successes on initiative, +2 damage), Weapon Specialist 4 (H&K UMP9: 2 automatic successes on initiative, +2 damage)

Wealth: 3

THUG

Era: Modern

Race: Natural being

APL: 0

Aspects: Fire 4, Water 3, Air 2, Earth 2

Initiative: 6

Health: 2m; <3 / 3+ / 6+ / 9+ / 12+ / 15+ / 18+ / 21+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: None

Karma: 2

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

- Fist (2): 3/L
- Kick (2): 4/M
- Chain: 6/M or Browning PRO-40 Pistol: 23 ~ range 200 ft. ~ reload 1/4

Sequences: Flying Fists, Barroom Brawling, Street Fighting

Agg—F8/W0/A1/E2—L Fist + R Fist + Ready + L Fist: Damage +5

Neut—F4/W3/A2/E2 —Power + Fist: Disadvantage (physical) 3

Def—F1/W6/A2/E2 —Spin + Ready + Fist: Damage +5, disadvantage (mental) 2

Skills: Athletics 3, Knowledge: London 1, Knowledge: Street 2, Melee 4, Quickness 3 or Ranged 3, Senses 2, Stamina 3

Edges: Action Junkie 1, Aggressive 1 (Melee or Ranged), Daunting 1

Wealth: 2

WARRIOR

Era: Mythic

Race: Natural being

APL: 1/2

Aspects: Fire 5, Water 4, Air 2, Earth 2

Initiative: 8

Health: 4m; <4 / 4+ / 8+ / 12+ / 16+ / 20+ / 24+ / 28+

Size/Reach: 0 / 2 ft.

Armor: 8 (chain mail 8/4/3)

Karma: 12

Stride: 20 ft. (Moderate)

Weapons:

- Fist (2): 3/L
- Kick (2): 4/M
- Sword, Broad: 12/M
- Pike: 15/L
- Shield, heavy: 0/4/1

Sequences: Long Arm, Rank and File

Agg—F11/W2/A0/E0—Power + Pike + Press: Damage +15

Neut—F5/W4/A2/E2—Power + Power + Pike: Push 2, disarm

Def—F3/W10/A0/E0—Block sequence

Skills: Athletics 4, Knowledge: Survival 2, Melee 6, Quickness 4, Ranged 4, Senses 2, Stamina 2, Travel 2, Will 3

Edges: Fluid Fighter 2 (broadsword, pike), Glory Hound 1, Resilient 2, Weapon Specialist 2 (broadsword: 2 automatic successes per scene)

Wealth: 2

TRAITS

RACE TRAITS

Some of the traits below are race traits. Race traits narrow a creature's race down further than the usual natural/supernatural or animal/being, and usually provides a special ability. Even if a special ability is not given, a creature's race trait may affect how it responds to certain spells, enchanted items, or other in-game effects.

BOUND

The bound are the damned of FIREBORN. They are natural beings who, with full awareness of the consequences of their actions, gave themselves over to a powerful, inhuman being. Their reward for what amounts to selling their souls is the opportunity to gain powers and superhuman aspects scores.

In order to become bound, you must seek out a willing patron, usually a powerful tainted creature. You become a supplicant to that creature. In game terms, your patron must fulfill the following criteria: it must have the tainted trait, and it must have a minimum APL that varies with the benefit you wish to gain.



BINDING COSTS AND BENEFITS

Patron APL	Benefit	Cost
3	Increase karma multiplier by 1	The damage thresholds at which you suffer wound dice decrease by 1
6	One aspect gains a superhuman rank	One base aspect score permanently decreases by 1
9	Gain access to a power	Increase your taint susceptibility by 1
12	Gain legacy*	Become tainted*

*When a bound being becomes tainted, his taint susceptibility remains an important factor; however, instead of being affected negatively by taint and positively by karma, the character is affected negatively by karma and positively by taint. His taint response becomes a karma response, and his taint susceptibility becomes karma susceptibility instead. A bound character that chooses this cost and benefit is irreversibly tainted, and cannot be rescued.

Bound creatures may never gain more than one legacy in this way. Additionally, a creature must consciously choose to become tainted in order to gain a legacy. A bound creature that becomes tainted due to his taint susceptibility, for instance, does not gain a legacy, and cannot gain a legacy until he is rescued from his tainted status.

TABLE 6-3

Once a potential patron has been found, the supplicant must perform a ritual with a preparation, Gather Magic, and Cast TH equal to the minimum APL, and components as determined by the GM. Becoming bound always comes with a price. The first price is that you open yourself up to all of the rules for taint as if you were a scion or dragon, including the possibility of becoming taint-tempted or taint-trapped. You also immediately gain a taint response.

To gain any benefits from being bound, you must suffer further hardships. Each new benefit requires another ritual with the appropriate THs and different components. If the ritual is successful, the supplicant gains a benefit and suffers a cost. Example costs and benefits are listed in Sidebar 6-3. There is no limit on the number of times a benefit may be gained or a cost paid.

DRAGON

Dragon is a race trait. Dragons are among the most powerful beings in the mythic age, and those few that exist in the modern age only exist as a result of the most powerful of sorceries or can only manifest in horrific, twisted, weaker forms.

Dragons are among the most in-touch with the karma of the world, being nearly pure manifestations of karma and the forces of the elements. All dragons have a x10 karma multiplier. On the other hand, dragons, along with fae, are quite susceptible to taint, and suffer effects from it as described in Chapter Two.

Scions are considered both humans and dragons.

EPHEMERAL

Ephemeral creatures are not consistently part of our normal reality. They ebb and flow with the currents of karma and taint. Most of the time, an ephemeral creature is unseen, unheard, and unfelt. It is, in fact, completely separate from the physical world. It can pass through walls, is completely invisible, and is immune to harm. On the other hand, it cannot feel, see, or touch anything in the physical world, either. It is completely disconnected. The only way an ephemeral creature can change this state is to use the Manifest power.

Non-manifested ephemeral creatures may be viewed by those using the Second Sight spell, or their presence may be noted by making a Ka test with a TH equal to 10 minus the creature's APL (minimum 1).

FAE

Fae is a race trait. The fae are a varied race of vaguely humanoid form and wildly divergent stature, ranging from thumb-sized manikins with iridescent insect wings to tall, man-like creatures with willowy frames and skin the color of the sea. Like dragons, the souls of the fae have nearly pure connections to the karma that is their lifeblood, giving them a x10 karma multiplier in the mythic age and a x5 karma multiplier in the modern age. Whereas dragons are given form and life by the elemental forces of nature, however, fae have connections with less dramatic, more abstract principles. Fae claim kinship with the cycles of nature, with green growing things and the spirits of animals, and with powerful emotions like joy and melancholy.



CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

The fae are by disposition wild and mercurial; their minds and motivations often seem alien to other races. In some cases, members of the fae appear to be little more than animals, driven by instinct and base desires. The tiny, insect-like grichs are an example of this type of fae, and can often be found basking in areas of great natural beauty where karma pools in abundance. Others verge on monstrous forms, their wiry fur and gnarled fingernails belying soft-hearted intentions. The most human-like of all are the Daea, who profess to be the nobles of their race and dwell in a complex, stratified society, known as the Faerie Courts. In the modern age, the Daea have become shadows of their former selves, known as the Seelie Sidhe.

GIANT

Giant is a race trait. Giants are large humanoids. They are renowned for being hardy creatures; giants heal wound dice as if they were weariness dice (one for every hour of sleep or three hours of waking rest).

HUMAN

Human is a race trait. Humans are as we know them in the real world today. In FIREBORN, however, they have a unique ability: they generate karma more rapidly and easily than any other creature in the world, natural or supernatural. Any karma used by humans during an action scene immediately replenishes at the end of that scene.

Scions are considered both humans and dragons.

MINDLESS

Mindless creatures may not take mental actions, including the Default action, and have no karma to bid on automatic successes. On the other hand, they cannot be affected by any mental actions that use Trickery, Will, or Interaction, including Distract, Feint, Intimidate, or Taunt. They are also immune to any effects that target the mind or require Earth (Will) tests, such as Crushing Will, Gaze of the Predator, Mind Tyrant, and many spells.

PRIMORDIAL

The primordial spirits of the world have always been mercurial in temperament, veering from helpful to harmful in the blink of an eye. In the modern age, they have become even moreso, driven at times into rage and madness by the pollution of the elements that comprise them.

Primordial spirits have three general attitudes: aggressive, neutral, and playful. Aggressive primordials attack anything that moves, doing so without restraint or mercy. Neutral primordials go about their business, neither pursuing nor fleeing from other creatures; if

attacked, they will reciprocate. Playful primordials actively seek out mortals and other creatures to befriend, entertain, follow, or investigate. A playful primordial seems to have unending curiosity and a limitless capacity for joy . . . at least, until its mood changes.

All primordial creatures are extremely vulnerable to the influence of karma and taint. Whenever in a tainted area, a primordial creature acts aggressively toward all living creatures. Whenever in a karmic area, a primordial creature acts playfully towards all living creatures.

When in a balanced area, primordials become much less predictable. Their base state is neutral in such areas. However, environmental factors like light and darkness, heat and cold, and even sound and silence can greatly impact their attitudes. When a primordial is used in a scene, the GM selects (or rolls randomly for) one of the following environmental effects, and assigns the aggressive and playful attitudes to one extreme or the other. Whenever the environmental effect in question changes, the primordial's attitude changes as well.

- 1 Heat vs. Cold
- 2 Light vs. Darkness
- 3 Pollution vs. Clean Environment
- 4 Sound vs. Silence
- 5 Wilderness Setting vs. Urban Setting
- 6 Motion vs. Stillness

PUREBLOOD OF ATLANTIS

The pureblood of Atlantis have their forefathers' long life spans and connection to karma; while otherwise identical to other humans, purebloods of Atlantis have double the normal human life span and have karma multipliers of x3.

TAINTED

Tainted creatures have given themselves over to karma's insidious opposite. When a creature becomes tainted, its karma pool becomes a taint pool, instead. Such creatures are unaffected by tainted areas, but react to karmic areas as if they were tainted areas of equal rank.

Taint is used by tainted creatures in almost exactly the same way that karma is used by untainted creatures. Such creatures have taint and spend taint points in the same way that most other creatures have karma and spend karma points, following the normal rules for amount of taint available, size of taint pools, and amount of taint that may be spent on any test. Just as tainted areas adversely affect natural and supernatural creatures, karmic areas adversely affect unnatural creatures, as listed below.

- Taint becomes sluggish and difficult to draw upon. Every point of taint a character wants to spend in a karmic area costs an additional amount of taint equal to the area's karmic rating. For example, in an area with karma 3, it





would cost 4 taint to generate one additional success, 12 taint to activate an awakened power that normally costs 3 taint, and so on. A character's normal limitations on maximum amount of taint spent per action, such as his base aspect score or his awakened rank, do not apply to these additional costs. The character may spend as much additional taint as he needs for the desired effect; it is the effect itself that is limited by the normal factors.

- Taint recovery is slowed. Whenever a character would recover taint within the karmic area (not including taint that replenishes after an action scene), the character subtracts the area's karmic rating from the number of points of taint he regains.

VENOMOUS

One of the creature's natural weapons (claws, bite, stinger, etc.) injects or is coated in debilitating poison. Any venomous attack that connects injects toxins into the victim's bloodstream. On the attacker's next turn, the victim must make a Water (Stamina) test with a TH equal to the attacker's base Fire score. The TH increases by one for each size the attacker is larger, and decreases by one for each size the attacker is smaller. If the victim fails the test, he suffers a -1 weariness penalty per success by which he failed the test. Each turn thereafter, the victim must make another test to resist the poison, to a maximum number of turns equal to the number of wound dice caused by the attack. If the victim reaches a -6 weariness penalty from poison, his vital organs are paralyzed by the toxins, and he begins to suffocate as if drowning. Weariness penalties from poison are recovered from just like weariness dice.

VENOM AND SIZE

The TH for creatures' venom may vary by species; for each change in TH, the APV of the creature raises or lowers by 5. Additionally, the TH of venom is affected by size relative to the victim. For each size category the target is smaller than the venomous creature, the TH increases by 1; for each size category the target is larger than the creature, the TH decreases by 1.

UNLIVING

Unliving creatures are not subject to any gross trauma except dismemberment, cannot be stunned, dazed, or knocked out, and never suffer weariness dice. Unliving creatures are often mindless.

NEW POWERS

MALLEABLE

A malleable creature can alter its shape reflexively in order to fit through passages or spaces that would normally be too small for its bulk. It cannot otherwise alter its form into a specific shape, though its body may constantly shift and ooze regardless of its intentions.

MECHANICS

You gain the Squeeze mental action. For the rest of the turn, some or all of your body may move through a closed-in space as if you were a smaller size. For each rank you have in this power, you may fit through a space up to two size categories smaller than you. If more than half of your body is in the smaller space, you are considered to be that space's size when determining the results of physical moves or actions. If half or less of your body is in the smaller space, you are considered to be your normal size when determining the results of physical moves or actions.

MANIFEST

Manifest is a power only available to ephemeral creatures. The use of this power is one of the only ways that an ephemeral creature can connect to and interact with the physical world.

MECHANICS

Rank 1: You gain the Manifest full-turn action. Choose one of the following senses: sight, sound, or touch. You may use the Manifest action to bring that aspect of yourself into contact with the physical world; sight allows you to see the physical world, as well as allowing non-ephemeral creatures to see you. Sound allows you to hear sounds in the physical world, as well as allowing non-ephemeral creatures to hear you. Finally, touch allows you to move and affect things in the physical world, while also allowing non-ephemeral creatures to touch and affect (and damage) you.

You may also use the Manifest action to remove that sense from the physical world.

Rank 2: Choose an additional sense to be able to manifest. You may still only manifest one sense per turn.

Rank 3: You may manifest two senses on the same turn.

Rank 4: Choose an additional sense to be able to manifest. You may still only manifest two senses per turn.

Rank 5: You may manifest all three senses on the same turn.





CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

SPAWN

While taint is an insidious evil and a constant threat to dragons and scions, its creation can usually be predicted and prevented. After all, the only way taint can be created is through the miscasting of magic by natural beings . . . isn't it?

Creatures with the Spawn power can create taint without manipulating human sorcerers to do it for them. They exude taint as if it were sweat or waste material, and they revel in the malignant darkness that ebbs from their own bodies.

MECHANICS

You may spawn taint even if you are not a natural creature, and you may do so without casting spells. Whenever you regain taint through any normal means other than resting in a tainted area (gaining full successes on a test, delivering the killing blow to a foe, etc.) and your taint pool is already full, you may channel that "extra" taint into the world around you. For every 10 points of taint beyond your maximum taint pool size that you channel into your surroundings, the taint rank of a Trivial area around you increases by 1, up to a maximum taint rating equal to your rank in the Spawn power. Channeling the taint requires a full day of uninterrupted concentration.

For each rank you have in the Spawn power beyond 1, you may spawn taint out to the next greater boundary (Trivial, Minor, Moderate, and so on). Doing so doubles the cost of the extra taint that must be channeled for each increase in the area's taint rating, as well as doubling the amount of time that must be spent in uninterrupted concentration: 20 points of taint and 2 days at Minor range, 40 points and 4 days at Moderate range, 80 points and 8 days at Major range, and a maximum of 160 points of extra taint and 16 days of concentration at Profound range.

In order to spawn taint out to a greater boundary, the area within the next smallest rank of boundaries must already be at taint 5.

A creature must be tainted in order to have ranks in the Spawn power.

SWIFT

The creature can cover ground amazingly rapidly; when it moves, it's as if you're watching film on fast-forward. For each rank a creature has in this power, its Stride (or Fly Stride, or Climb Stride or Swim Stride) increases as if it were one size category larger.

UNDETERRED

An undeterred creature's entire existence is predicated on finding one concrete item or individual, and either protecting, destroying, returning, or performing some other specified task with that thing. By nature, such

creatures are generally short-lived . . . as soon as their task is accomplished, they cease to exist. Other creatures may temporarily gain this power as a result of an oath or ritual; while their lives may continue as normal after the fulfillment of the task, this power disappears immediately.

MECHANICS

You can unerringly locate the object of your task, regardless of any concealment or disguise, so long as it is within a karmic range equal to your rank in this power. Additionally, while you can be stopped by force or physical impediments, you cannot be dissuaded by reason or emotion. You are immune to any attempt at mental control (any effect requiring an Earth (Will) test) that would force you to stop pursuing your goal, so long as the rank of the source of the effect does not exceed your rank in the Undeterred power. Finally, you have an unearthly level of resolve and stamina: for as long as you continue to pursue your goal, you are considered to have the Undying Serpent legacy, and may spend an amount of karma on that legacy each turn equal to 5 + your rank in the Undeterred power.

UNSEEN

The ability to remain unseen is among the most useful powers. An enchantment surrounds an unseen creature at all times, making it difficult for natural beings to sense them in any way. Animals can see, smell, or hear the unseen clearly, however, a fact that has permeated many fairy tales and folk stories in which dogs howl and cats arch their backs and spit at unseen prowlers in the night.

MECHANICS

Unseen leave no tracks and cannot be recorded by any media, whether photographic or digital.

Rank 1: Natural beings simply do not see you. They may notice something or someone, but their minds are befuddled by this power to make them think that it is an object, someone that should be there normally, or just their imaginations. The effects of your actions, like objects that are moved or doors that are opened, seem to happen of their own accord.

Natural animals can still sense your presence, and supernatural creatures can notice you by making an Earth (Ka) test 2 the first time they have a chance to notice you in a scene. Creatures that succeed at this test do not need to test again for the rest of the scene.

If a supernatural creature does not notice you, he may attempt to spot you each turn by making an Air (Ka) test 2 as a mental action.

Rank 2: Natural animals cannot smell you, and the TH for supernatural creatures to detect you increases to 4.

Rank 3: Natural animals cannot hear you, and the TH for supernatural creatures to detect you increases to 6.

Rank 4: Natural animals cannot see you or detect you





in any way, and the TH for supernatural creatures to detect you increases to 8.

Rank 5: The TH for supernatural creatures to detect you increases to 10.

VOICE OF MADNESS

Your otherworldly mutterings or harsh shrieks are abhorrent to the minds of natural and unnatural creatures alike.

MECHANICS

You gain the Maddening Voice mental action, which is governed by Will. In order to use the voice, your target must be able to hear you. Targets that wear earplugs, cover their ears, or use some other sound-dampening device gain 2 bonus dice on their tests to resist this power.

When using this power as a mass attack, you may target a number of victims within hearing distance equal to your rank in this power. Multiple uses of this power on a target are not cumulative; if a target suffers from a Maddening Voice effect while already suffering from the effects of a Maddening Voice, the higher of the two takes precedence.

Rank 1: You may use the Maddening Voice action against one target, with an Air (Will) test opposed by the target's Earth (Will). For each net success you achieve, your target suffers a -1 disadvantage (mental) penalty.

Rank 2: As rank 1, but the penalty lasts for one hour per rank you have in this power.

Rank 3: As rank 2, but you may instead daze opponents for a number of turns equal to your net successes on the opposed test.

Rank 4: As rank 3, but you may instead daze opponents for a number of hours equal to your net successes on the opposed test.

Rank 5: As rank 3, but you may instead daze opponents for a number of days equal to your net successes on the opposed test.

Because this power requires your victim to clearly hear you, you suffer the same threshold modifiers on your Air (Will) test from noisy circumstances that you would on Senses tests (see *Player's Handbook*, page 44).

WEBSPINNER

Whether through unnatural organs or supernatural training, a creature with the webspinner power can create multipurpose webs with which to trap and entangle his enemies.

MECHANICS

Each day, you can produce up to 200 ft. of webbing per rank you have in this power. Webbing lasts for 1 month per rank you have in this power before becoming fragile and disintegrating. The size of a strand depends

on your size; the strands produced by a size 0 creature are 3" thick, while those produced by a -4 size creature are nearly invisible. Regardless of the size, a strand has integrity equal to the character's rank in this power, and may be cut through as normal (including staging wounds up and down for size).

Web strands may be adhesive or non-adhesive. If a strand is adhesive, it makes a Grab test against anything that touches it, using a number of dice equal to the character's rank in this power. For each additional strand a character is touching, the web's Grab test includes one bonus die. The Grab tests are affected by size, as normal.

Web strands can also be launched at targets as if they were bolas. The webspinner is assumed to have Weapon Use (Exotic: webs) for this purpose. Instead of suffering a fading physical disadvantage penalty for each net success of the attacker, however, targets suffer a physical disadvantage penalty for each net success of the attacker (not fading). Additionally, the physical disadvantage penalty caused by the web strands increase by 1 for rank the attacker has in this power.

WITCH'S COUNTENANCE

Your appearance plagues the nightmares of those who see you.

MECHANICS

The first time a character within Trivial range sees you, he must make an Earth (Senses) test to determine how good a look he gets at your horrific visage. Because this power requires your victim to clearly see you, he suffers normal threshold modifiers on this initial Senses test from poor lighting and other circumstances (see *Player's Handbook*, page 44). The number of successes he gains becomes the TH for his Earth (Will) test to avoid the following effects.

Rank 1: For each success the target is short of the TH, he suffers a -1 disadvantage (mental) penalty.

Rank 2: As rank 1, but the penalty lasts for one hour per rank you have in this power.

Rank 3: As rank 2, but you may instead designate that the victim be dazed for a number of turns equal to the successes he was short of the Earth (Will) test.

Rank 4: As rank 3, but a victim is instead dazed for a number of hours equal to the successes he was short of the Earth (Will) test.

Rank 5: As rank 3, but a victim is instead dazed for a number of days equal to the successes he was short of the Earth (Will) test.



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Karma	Stride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Wound Effects		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
none	mw	-1	-2
		-3	-4
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Skill Notes

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TM

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Phys Skills

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Skill Notes

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FIREBORN™

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME

GAMEMASTER'S HANDBOOK

Magic has awoken in modern London, drawing both supernatural beings and mortal men there to vie for power and knowledge. Some of the combatants in that conflict are older than mankind itself, and their heritages stretch back to a mythic age of vast empires, mighty creatures, and powerful magic. You are the players' guide to both worlds.

In FIREBORN, the players are legendary dragons from a lost mythic age, reborn in modern times in human form. As the Game Master, you have the tools to show them a modern London that has been remade by magic or a mythic age the likes of which they've never imagined. You may lead the characters on a journey of self-discovery, pit them against vile foes, confront them with intriguing mysteries, or send them screaming into the depths of their worst nightmares. The heroes of the past have awoken to carry on the fight, and the world is yours to bring them. Will the scions usher in a new age of magic and light, or will mankind's arrogance bring the world to ruin by fire and flood, as it did at the end of the mythic age?

- The modern age is set in a London to which magic has returned. It is a world of uneasy mystery, incredible depth, and countless possibilities. The players may engage in high-action combat, guns blazing and claws flashing, beneath the streets of the city; or they may become desperate investigators up against overwhelming odds and ancient evil.
- The mythic age spans thousands of years in which the human race grew, thrived, and finally fell to their own misuse of magic. Epochs, detailed accounts of specific times and locations, allow you to use the setting material to create a cohesive history or to branch off into the unrecorded times and cultures of the mythic age.
- Contains advice on how to use FIREBORN's unique flashback play style and how to run campaigns exactly the way you envision them.
- Includes dozens of characters and creatures presented to be used as friends or foes in your FIREBORN campaign.

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